

A JOURNEY TO HEALING: CONVERSATIONS OF WOMEN SURVIVORS
OF SEXUAL ABUSE

by

RIANDA GUNTER

submitted in part fulfilment of the requirements for
the degree of

MASTER OF THEOLOGY

in the subject

PRACTICAL THEOLOGY – WITH SPECIALISATION IN PASTORAL THERAPY

at the

UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH AFRICA

SUPERVISOR: DR E KOTZE

JOINT SUPERVISOR: PROF H J C PIETERSE

NOVEMBER 2001



0001947372

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER ONE: EPISTEMOLOGICAL AND THEOLOGICAL CONTEXT OF THIS STUDY

PREFACE	
1.1	INTRODUCTION 1
1.2	WHAT INSPIRED THIS STUDY?..... 1
1.3	EPISTEMOLOGY 3
1.4	POST-MODERN DISCOURSE..... 6
1.5	SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION DISCOURSE..... 8
1.5.1	<i>LANGUAGE AS VEHICLE OF SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION</i> 9
1.5.2	<i>KNOWLEDGE/POWER AND RESISTANCE AS MEANS TO SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION</i> 11
1.6	POST-MODERN THEOLOGY 12
1.6.1	<i>PRACTICAL THEOLOGY</i> 13
1.6.2	<i>PASTORAL THERAPY</i> 16
1.7	FEMINIST THEOLOGY 17
1.8	RESEARCH PERSPECTIVES 18
1.9	ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS..... 20
1.10	LEGITIMACY OF THE STUDY 21
1.11	RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND AIMS GUIDING THIS STUDY 21
1.12	CHAPTER OUTLINE..... 22

CHAPTER TWO: SEXUAL VIOLENCE - FEMINISM AND NARRATIVE THERAPY

1.1	VIEWS REGARDING SEXUAL VIOLENCE..... 23
1.2	INCIDENCE OF SEXUAL VIOLENCE..... 25
1.3	PERSPECTIVES ON THE EFFECTS OF SEXUAL VIOLENCE 27
1.4	FEMINISM..... 31
1.4.1	<i>THE CONSTRUCTION OF AGENCY</i> 32
1.5	NARRATIVE THERAPY WITH SURVIVORS OF CHILDHOOD SEXUAL ABUSE 34
1.5.1	<i>DURRANT KOWALSKI AND WHITE'S MODEL</i> 35
1.5.2	<i>DIXONS GROUP THERAPY</i> 38
1.6	THIS STUDY: A JOURNEY TO HEALING 39

CHAPTER THREE: THE JOURNEY - A PROCESS

1.1	INTRODUCTION	40
1.2	THE MATRIX OF THIS GROUP CONVERSATIONS	41
1.3	INVITING PARTICIPANTS	42
1.4	STRUCTURE AND BOUNDARIES OF THE GROUP	43
1.5	GOALS FOR THE GROUP CONVERSATIONS	45
1.6	INTRODUCTION OF PARTICIPANTS	46
1.7	CO-WEAVING TO HEALING: WOMEN IN CONVERSATIONS	48
1.7.1	<i>THE FIRST GROUP MEETING: REFLECTIONS THROUGH A NARRATIVE LETTER</i>	49
1.7.2	<i>MY REFLECTIONS ON THE FIRST GROUP MEETING</i>	58
1.8	THEMES DISCUSSED DURING THE FOLLOWING GROUP MEETING	
1.8.1	<i>SETTING THE AGENDA</i>	60

CHAPTER FOUR: CONVERSATIONS ON RECURRENT THEMES -REFLECTIONS ON GROUP MEETINGS - ALTERNATIVE STORIES AND YET ANOTHER STORY

1.1	INTRODUCTION	71
1.2	CHILDHOOD SEXUAL ABUSE AND SUBSTANCE ABUSE.....	71
1.3	RELIGION AND SPIRITUALITY IN THE LIVES OF THE WOMEN IN THE GROUP 72	
1.4	GENDERED UNDERSTANDING OF CHILDHOOD SEXUAL ABUSE	77
1.5	INFORMING CHILDREN ABOUT SEXUAL ABUSE	80
1.6	REFLECTIONS ON GROUP MEETINGS	83
1.6.1	<i>BEGINNING OF A CELEBRATION: THE SECOND GROUP MEETING</i>	83
1.6.2	<i>REFLECTIONS ON MUTUAL CARE: THE THIRD GROUP MEETING</i>	84
1.6.3	<i>CONSULTING YOUR CONSULTANTS: THE FOURTH GROUP MEETING</i>	85
1.6.4	<i>REFLECTIONS ON SAYING HULLO, SAYING GOODBYE: THE FIFTH GROUP MEETING</i> 86	
1.6.5	<i>WHAT MIGHT BE HELPFUL TO OTHERS?: THE SIXTH GROUP MEETING</i>	87
1.7	THE ALTERNATIVE STORIES: VOICES OF THE PARTICIPANTS	89
1.7.1	<i>CAT</i>	89
1.7.2	<i>BUBBLES</i>	90
1.7.3	<i>TWINKLES</i>	91
1.7.4	<i>CHRISTA</i>	91
1.7.5	<i>FREEDOM</i>	92
1.8	YET ANOTHER STORY.....	92

1.8.1	<i>THE VICTIM SUPPORT CENTRE</i>	93
1.8.2	<i>GETTING NEW CONVERSATIONS GOING</i>	94
1.9	REFLECTION ON A NEW STORY	98
1.10	CONCLUSION.....	99

**CHAPTER FIVE: REFLECTING ON CONVERSATIONS OF WOMAN SURVIVORS
OF SEXUAL ABUSE**

1.1	INTRODUCTION	100
1.2	REFLECTION ON FEMINIST THEOLOGY PRAXIS.....	100
1.3	REFLECTIONS ON THE RESEARCH	102
1.4	ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS.....	105
1.5	LEGITIMACY OF THIS STUDY	107
1.6	IMPLICATION AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PRACTICAL THEOLOGY AND PASTORAL THERAPY	108
1.7	SMALL STEPS OF THIS STUDY	110
1.8	AN ONGOING ENDING.....	111

BIBLIOGRAPHY.....

APPENDIX 1

APPENDIX 2

ABSTRACT

A journey to healing is a story of women survivors of sexual abuse. Through narrative pastoral conversations a group or community of concern was formed that witnessed how these women managed to move by re-telling from problem-saturated dominant life-stories to rich alternative stories of survival. Post-modern practical theology formed the epistemological backdrop of this study with the focus on taking a prophetically, ethical and political stance.

The group deconstructed patriarchal knowledge that has been dominant in constructing understanding of women. Deconstruction led to the centralising of previously subjugated knowledge about themselves and made multiple identities and preferred realities possible. Feminist theology's liberating spirit contributed to this participatory action research where women moved from *being* right to *doing* right. The monthly celebration teas hosted by the group were instrumental in the healing of other women who have experienced sexual violation.

KEY WORDS: Pastoral narrative group conversations, post-modern practical theology, survivors of childhood sexual abuse, social construction, feminist theology, participatory action research.

PREFACE

Power in its ideal form is the energy of life itself as it is organised into the relational web that includes us all. This primal relational power is distorted through human sin by individuals and societies into abuse of power and is the cause of much human suffering. Through resistance to the abuse of power and the work of God/s love in Jesus Christ, the human spirit is made resilient. We search for the resilient hope of the human spirit, which can resist abuse and create new communities for the restoration of communion and freedom of self, others and God.

(Poling 1991:33)

CHAPTER ONE: EPISTEMOLOGICAL AND THEOLOGICAL CONTEXT OF THIS STUDY

1.1 INTRODUCTION

Epistemology is concerned with how people know what they know and the methods they use to obtain what they know (Burr1995: 184). For this study I opted for a social construction discourse within a broader post-modern discourse as my preferred philosophy of knowledge.

The challenge of the research project was to deconstruct the bodies of knowledge on child sexual abuse in such a way as to reconstruct preferred knowledge of the women participants while weaving knowledge from feminist and practical theology into the reflexive dialogues. Gergen and Gergen (1991:76-95) described multiple reflexive dialogues as a research methodology to facilitate such a process.

In this chapter I explain my inspiration for this study and elaborate on the philosophical perspectives that directed the research and therapeutic journey of women survivors of sexual violence. Post-modern discourse will be discussed. Social construction discourse will follow; it will include language and power/knowledge aspects with focus on theology. Research perspectives, ethical considerations, research questions and aims of the study will be explored. This chapter will conclude with a chapter-outline of the dissertation.

1.2 WHAT INSPIRED THIS STUDY?

Issues of sexual molestation and abuse have always touched me deeply. During 1990 parents and their children who have been sexually abused, consulted me as a social worker working for a church. The effects of the pain I experienced when listening to the stories of these children led me to develop a preventative puppet show dealing with sexual molestation and abuse.

The puppet show included a short information session for parents on how to empower their children regarding sexual molestation. Pre-school and play group teachers took

responsibility to assure that a prevention programme became an annual topic for pre-schoolers in Witbank. Teachers would introduce the topic with relevant pictures that the children could colour in before the puppet show. New admissions for therapy regularly followed after each puppet show. Subsequently I learned that survivors of sexual abuse were challenged in each new life phase to make sense of what happened and how they chose to position themselves in this regard.

Since 1999 I have been an employee assistant programme therapist in Witbank. In the period from January 1999 to November 2000 I saw four hundred and ten new admissions. Ninety of these new admissions were survivors of childhood sexual abuse. Eighty were women and ten were men. They reported that the childhood trauma of sexual abuse contributed to restricted stories and beliefs about themselves and their abilities.

The individual therapeutic conversations opened up inquiry and brought forth rich, inspiring stories of survivors of sexual abuse. I asked consent to use some of these experiences in conversations with other people and enquired if they would care to act as consultants for others with similar experiences. These individual resiliencies were causing a ripple effect in conversations with other people that consulted me.

I wondered what the effect of sharing these stories in groups would be. Would it contribute to the "healing journey" as we often referred to it in our conversations? I wondered if the resilience of each of these women combined might have an impact on society. Influences from feminism, contributions of writers such as, Foucault, Poling, White, Freedman and Combs and the ethical, prophetic and political focus of practical theology, evoked an urge for a better understanding and liberating action.

The idea of getting together, a group to share experiences of healing for research purposes was acceptable to most. A group of six women (including me) started a series of eight planned meetings, sharing stories and knowledge on healing after sexual abuse. We agreed that the meetings would be videotaped and that we would use narrative letters to double-check and enquire about new meaning created in the group. We could not have anticipated the paths and places that our journey would lead to. We agreed that the destiny of the journey was not of paramount importance,

but rather the reporting of an ongoing process – of women joined in conversation against sexual violence.

Following Blume (1990) I refer to women who experienced childhood sexual abuse as “survivors”. The word choice of survivor is with the very specific purpose, to highlight this study’s perception of women that have experienced sexual violence as children as follows.

Survivor implies resourcefulness, resilience, competency, strengths and worthiness, while victim focuses on damage, deficit, and passive helplessness. Brown as quoted in Rossetti (1990:84) mentions that women have a choice to emerge as survivors “with new strength, new understanding, and new compassion”. Women with resourcefulness, resilience, competency, strengths and worthiness inspired this study.

1.3 EPISTEMOLOGY

From a social construction perspective, language is viewed as the carrier of meaning that is used to constitute our world, beliefs and self (McLean 1997:13). Language comes about through an ongoing interactive process that includes meaning and beliefs from the past, present and future.

For the purpose of this journey it is crucial to indicate possibility of meaning when using certain terminology. I will indicate possibility of meaning for different concepts or terminology that I will use during the course of this journey. Concepts I would like to discuss include the following terms: modernism, discourse, deconstruction and reality.

The term *modernism* indicates a period when the focus of investigation shifted from religion to scientific knowledge where an objective reality was waiting to be discovered (Van Niekerk 1999:12-13). From this point of view modernism commonly accepted descriptions of reality as objective truth claims once these truths were “discovered” through empirical research. These truths were not to be doubted since they were scientifically verified. Empirical science came to hold a powerful position as the foundation of truth and reality.

I use *discourse* in the context Nightingale and Cromby (1999:226) refer to the term. They describe discourse, the manifestation of discourses as well as the dual understanding of the concept as:

a set of images, written texts, beliefs, metaphors (and anything else that can be read for meaning) that shape, inform or construct a particular practice or phenomenon. Within contemporary social constructionism there are two broad understanding of the term: (a) that discourses are 'practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak' (Michel Foucault), in other words, that discourses create or determine the nature of reality; and (b) that discourses are social and cultural resources that people can draw upon to warrant or explain their activities and the activities of others.

(Nightingale & Cromby 1999:226)

Indications of the dual understanding of the concept will be found throughout this journey. Women are constructed by gender discourses to be submissive while men's activities of dominance tend to be explained and accepted by social and cultural resources that uphold patriarchy, like some churches and schools.

Michel Foucault (McHoul & Grace 1993:26-31) thinks of discourses in terms of relatively well-bound bodies of social knowledge, implying interaction between disciplines like science, psychology, theology and institutions of social control such as schools, churches, hospitals and others. Taking into account historical time limits that determine what will fit in bodies of social knowledge at what time.

In an encounter with discourses the term *deconstruction* becomes applicable. Referring to the work of Jacques Derrida, Sampson (1989:7) states that Derrida "wanted to undo the tradition that dominated the Western thought and formed the roots of understanding" to open possibility for new meaning.

Wolfreys, (1998: 59) citing Derrida in an attempt to describe what deconstruction could be, gives the following explanation:

Deconstruction, if such a thing exists, imagines, make possible the imagination of, not the unanswerable question, but the question as answer, as the movement which 'inscribes contradiction,' and which disorganises, 'historically,' 'practically,' textually, the opposition or the difference between opposing terms.

(Derrida quoted in Wolfreys1998: 59)

Binary oppositions that apply to childhood sexual abuse might be the following, powerful – powerless; good – bad; right – wrong; respect – disrespect; gratitude – ingratitude and oppression – autonomy. Deconstruction aims to overturn the privileged positioning of one of the binary oppositions to open space for new meaning.

Dominant discourses on patriarchy and an unequal distribution of power are displayed in various institutions and disciplines in society. Fathers seem to have the power to violate their children sexually and to keep them from breaking the silence. Bosses seem to demand sexual favours from their employees because of their superior power position. The power inequalities intensify the effects of these violations. People with less power are prone to take the blame and guilt on themselves constructing themselves as “bad”. It is easy to understand how the privileged possibilities in binary oppositions become applicable in the circumstances mentioned. Dominant discourses of being powerful, good, right, respectable, need to be deconstructed for the positioning of new realities.

Deconstructing the effects of sexual violence on women implied looking at situations in a different way than commonly accepted. In this study it opened space for the preferred realities of survivors to be storied as well as alternatives for living after abuse to be discussed and developed within the group discussions.

The question of how *reality* is viewed is important. I subscribe to the view Freedman and Combs (1996:22) hold of reality. They argue that there are no essential truths. Realities are socially constructed, through language and are organised and maintained through stories. There are countless possible realities, which cannot be described in terms of right or wrong but in terms of the richness of difference and multiplicity. Reality can mean different things to different people at different times and places. The realities of selfhood or subjectivity entail countless possibilities.

Burr (1995: 185) describes subjectivity as a term that social constructionists use to refer to personhood or selfhood underwriting its multiple possibilities. Davies (1991:43) writes: “Subjectivity is constituted through those discourses in which a

person is being positioned at any point in time, both through their own and others acts of speaking/writing.” Agency in feminist post-structuralist terms sees a person as having no fundamental essence (Davies 1991:46), while structuralism views agency or personhood as being an inner core of essential traits that explain the surface manifestations or behaviour (White 1997:223). Viewed from a feminist post-structuralist perspective the subjectivity or agency of survivors of childhood sexual abuse is positioned by the patriarchal discourses that are dominant in our society.

1.4 POST-MODERN DISCOURSE

Post-modern discourse offers a new perspective on our social world and our understanding of it. Post-modern discourse opens room for different possibilities and experiences as part of reality. I use a post-modern discourse as an umbrella concept in the discussion of the epistemology of this study.

Frolo and Schneider (quoted in Nightingale & Cromby 1999:207), voice the concern of a post-modern view of truth.

Is it the whole truth? It's a slice of the truth, a morsel, a reflection – it's a piece of the pie, certainly not the whole enchilada – and now that I'm thinking about it I don't think I could tell the whole truth about anything. That's a pretty heavy burden because we will all just see the world through this little distorted piece of coke bottle. Is there such a thing as objective truth? I wonder. Don't you?

(Frolo & Schneider quoted in Nightingale & Cromby 1999:207)

Herholdt (1998: 459) notes that post-modernity developed as a product of, and criticism against modernism's claim of ontological truths that govern our world and being. It criticises the concept “experts” and points out that individual experiences and stories have been silenced by scientific knowledge claims of ontological truth.

In a modernist or positivist paradigm, survivors of sexual violence could have been viewed as objects under objective surveillance. Objective truths are gathered through surveillance to identify pathology within the survivor, describing behaviour as abnormalities that the survivor displays. From such a stance the role of experts will be to diagnose and to treat the “patient” by means of “expert” knowledge.

I consulted “survivors” of sexual violence rather than “experts”, about their knowledge (language, power), the real effects (meaning) of the violence as well as shared power before and during the research procedure. The telling and the re-telling of the stories of sexual violence become the re-storying process in which therapy becomes research. “With multiplicity comes flexibility. Further, by removing the ideal of ‘the single truth’ we opened the door to wide-ranging participation in the dialogues of science” (Gergen 1999:239). Herholdt (1998:459) states that the post-modern discourse of constructionism has the conviction that “truth is neither objective nor subjective, but relational”.

In group conversations we participated in the dialogues of science where truth became relational and where truth came to offer multiplicity and diversity.

The multiplicity and diversity of the truth were voiced in stories. Hoffman (1992:12) argues that stories become knowledge, being socially arrived at, that changes and renews itself in each moment of interaction. As stories were told and retold new helpful truths became available.

In my preference for this approach I am not necessarily arguing *against* various schools of therapy (or research methodologies) but against their truth claims as Gergen (1992:5) indicates. A post-modern discourse accepts continual possibilities of truths and social construction is the process to arrive at the continual possibilities of truths. In this regard Kotzé and Kotzé (1997:40) argue:

Postmodern discourses are all deconstructive in that they seek to distance us from and make us sceptical about beliefs concerning truths, knowledge, power, the self, and language that are often taken for granted within and serve as legitimisation for contemporary Western culture.

(Kotzé & Kotzé 1997:40)

Within social construction new possibilities of truth becomes available in the process of meaning making.

1.5 SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION DISCOURSE

Kotzé and Kotzé (1997:28-29) prefer to use “discourse” when they talk about social construction instead of “theory”. According to them the term discourse highlights post-modern ideas to create space “for the unfixed and open idea of a social construction epistemology”.

Burr (1995:5-7) highlights the following qualities of social construction that link up with Gergen’s (1985) prerequisites for social constructionist thinking as well as Nightingale and Cromby’s (1999:207-223) ideas. The following qualities are important:

- Anti-essentialism, which means the opposing of structuralism and moving towards continual possibilities.
- Anti-realism, acknowledging no ultimate truths, truth is manipulated by lenses that are used.
- Language provides a framework for meaning and is a precondition for thought.
- A focus on process and dynamics of social interaction.
- Explanations of social phenomena are found in the spontaneous interactive process that takes place between people.
- Language is an active tool for construction of selfhood and culture.

Social construction discourse refers to the understanding of knowledge itself, with “elucidating the processes by which people come to describe, explain, or otherwise account for the world in which they live” (Gergen 1985: 3).

In his book *Invitation to social construction* Gergen (1999:234-235) notes that the disillusionment with the artificial basis of truth should not bring one to give up but rather to open up oneself to the enormous potentials of human relationship.

What is the role that language plays in the potential of human relation to knowledge power and agency? Language determines what can be possible and serves as a vehicle of social construction towards knowledge, power and agency.

1.5.1 LANGUAGE AS VEHICLE OF SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION

Language determines what can be known and what can be said to picture the world. “It is through words that we communicate what we take to be true...– if they can not picture the world as it is – then how can we communicate the truth?”(Gergen 1999:20).

Language makes possible what we can perceive context co-determine meaning, the same words in different situations will enable alternative meaning. Another aspect to keep in mind is that every individual listener conceptualises his/her own meaning that seems compatible with the words and context, but that may not be what the other person (the speaker) intends to convey. Individual construction of meaning may influence social construction of agency, knowledge and power.

Botha (1998:70) refers to different meanings that can be arrived at while using the same words as the untrustworthiness of language in post-modern terms. He confirms his statement by using Dills argument that language might conceal more than that it reveals.

Discourses are constraints or enablers of language and provide what would be concealed and what would be revealed (McHoul & Grace 1993:30). Different meanings have been revealed or concealed in different historical time frames. Discourses determine the rules or boundaries for language, what can be said, written or thought at a given period in a specific society (McHoul & Grace 1993:30-31). Through discourses language does things and brings about effects in interaction: it constructs, deconstructs, enriches and changes.

For a survivor of childhood sexual abuse “ways of putting things” are determined by dominant discourses. When adults, as more powerful people, indicated that they should keep quiet about sexual abuse, children would obey, believing that adults would know best. The feeling that something was not right at the time might be turned against themselves to make them feel that they were naughty or guilty. Our understandings of reality are socially constructed through language and are determined by dominant discourses.

Gergen (1999:63) notes on social construction that these “ways of putting things” open new doors to new ways of life in language. He quotes Rorty (Gergen 1999:62):

We must appreciate the power of redescribing, the power of language to make new and different things possible and important – an appreciation which becomes possible only when one’s aim becomes an expanding repertoire of alternative description rather than The One Right Description.

(Rorty quoted by Gergen 1999:62)

Feminists believe that language is loaded with a strong agenda. Language has the power to include or to exclude women. Isherwood and McEwan argue that language shows women how others – mainly men – speak women’s ways of being and how they are perceived in their cultures into existence:

This for many of us is the first step to anger. It enables us to break the silence. The strength women find in networks is precisely because they can break many silences within themselves by speaking with others within themselves.... We have seen how our history has been shaped by the words of others and now we must begin to shape our own history with our words.

(Isherwood & McEwan 1993:106)

By breaking the silence within group conversations women are positioned to be sceptical about words that shape them and their position in culture. Women are positioned to embark on the one-way route of awareness that will enable them to begin to shape their own history. In our group conversations reflexive actions take place to inquire about various discourses that disposition the agency of survivors of childhood sexual abuse towards shaping their own lives.

On reflexivity Gergen (1992:79) states that the aim for reflexivity is to “realise more fully the linguistic implications of preferred positions, and to invite the expression of alternative voices or perspectives into one’s activities.” Language within reflexive conversations can become a useful vehicle towards the social construction of alternative realities.

In a post positivist paradigm we are aware of “connections among meaning, power and language” (Hare-Mustin & Marecek 1988:461). The “connections among power”

and equal knowledge as well as resistance will be discussed as means of social construction to shape lives.

1.5.2 KNOWLEDGE/POWER AND RESISTANCE AS MEANS TO SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION.

Foucault (White 1990:21-22) regards power and knowledge as inseparable and uses the terms together, either as power/knowledge or knowledge/power. He argues that the seventeenth century was dependent on the techniques of power to sustain “disciplines” of life, labour and language. In the modern age, power was dependent on the construction of knowledge that had truth status. Knowledge with truth status became the power that constructed and disciplined the individual and life. Foucault writes in this regard “...it was the taking charge of life, more than the threat of death, that gave power its access even to the body” (McHoul & Grace 1993:61).

Bentham’s panopticon, as described by Foucault (White 1990:24), is an example how surveillance became a form of disciplining the self and how power got access to the body. People became guardians of themselves through normalising judgement, perpetually evaluating their own behaviour and engaging in forging themselves as “docile bodies”. Foucault claims that the ever-present “gaze” of society has become the primary mechanism of social control. White (1990:24) adds that men are more often instruments of the normalising gaze, where women are more often the subjects. White’s statement concurs with the statement of Isherwood and McEwan (1993:106) that acknowledges that male dominance has the privilege of normalising, controlling or shaping culture. Women on the other side of the binary opposition are the subjects that are shaped and obliged to conform to the normality that were shaped for them.

Foucault states that we must cease to describe power in negative terms – “in fact, power produces; it produces reality; it produces domains of objects and rituals of truth” (McHoul & Grace 1993:640). Foucault suggests that resistance must be carried out in local struggles against the many forms of power exercised spontaneously in social relations (Sawicki 1991:23). He proposes an “insurrection of subjugated knowledges”, the opening up of historical knowledge of struggles, to be used for resistance against power that threatens equality in social relations. Local, regional

knowledges of people experiencing marginalisation – although these knowledges are classified as low ranking or insufficient by modern society – are vehicles to resistance (Sawicki 1991:26). Foucault warns against the official recognition of resistance that could lead to captivity, caught up in networks of controlling power relations once again (McNay 1992:130).

The practical implications of these statements are respected in the resistance perspectives of this study – we are adamant to stay women in conversation on the struggle against childhood sexual abuse. We do not want to become caught in power struggle networks that want to compete for winning the prize being dominance. This does not mean that we would not resist inequality by means of our local knowledges or awareness of dominant knowledges and its agenda of controlling and constructing.

The relation between power, knowledge and resistance is a powerful feature in the dynamics of social construction and will be described in chapters three and four.

Postmodern theology as chosen epistemology of this study will hence be elaborated on.

1.6 POST-MODERN THEOLOGY

Post-modern theology intends to invite emotion as an important part of experience and meaning in people's lives (Herholdt 1998:468). As such participants are viewed as co-authors of the stories of their lives. As Christians we view our life stories within the bigger story of God's inviting love (Gerkin 1997:112).

Rossouw's (1993:894-906) article, *Theology in a post-modern culture: Ten challenges*, describes the post-modern theological epistemology that inspired this study:

Critical reflection on and distancing from modernist rationality towards discourse for a broader rationality; - involvement in moral discourse to invite ethical responsibility; - a spirituality of wholeness that provide a bigger picture where different dimensions find their place and meaning; - personal narratives is experienced with in bigger

biblical narratives; - the role that socialization, culture, ideology, beliefs, power, emotions, dispositions, et cetera play in behaviour is acknowledged; - a style of communication which involves the experiences and expectations of its members; - moving from 'What do we believe?' to 'Who are we?'; - concern for those who have been marginalized, inviting values of liberation theology; - moving from being right to doing right; - a personal but not private or exclusive spirituality; - respect for religious pluralism.

These challenges lead us from theory to praxis as they describe living ethically and politically while inviting us to a lived religion or what we can call practical theology.

1.6.1 PRACTICAL THEOLOGY

A post-modern approach to practical theology may be able to open new possibilities for pastoral care. Theology becomes practical when moving from an intellectual framework towards meaning and action, by asking questions never asked before in a modernist paradigm – questions like: What discourses are at the foundations of sexual violence? Who is benefiting from the dominant discourses? What is keeping power imbalances in place? How can inequality contribute to the social construction of negative self-agency? What is the role of the church in dominant discourses? How does suffering fit in with the bigger story of God's omnipotence and the story of our lives?

When we think of the suffering of God and the theology of the cross, might this be the framework of a new paradigm where God's omnipotent presence and power is interpreted as vulnerable faithfulness and overwhelming pathos (Louw 2000:25). Louw argues that the cross of Christ becomes the "sole authentic locus" of the human paradoxical knowledge of God. The story of God in this implication is that His "strength (omnipotence) is revealed in apparent weakness, and his wisdom in folly"(Louw 2000:26). It is Louw's (2000:26) conviction that this dual understanding of God's omnipotence and presence can be applicable to approach problems of crime, violence and conflict applicable to contemporary theology. Graham's (1996:173) ideas that the whole of creation is redeemed by the Lord's actions of self-giving love and vulnerability acknowledge the paradoxical knowledge of God omnipotence and

presence. The opening up of multiple and rich understanding of God's presence in suffering is the task of practical theology. Poling (1991:152) assembles Biblical examples of Jesus presence. I want to quote them as an illustration of the presence and justice of Jesus.

Jesus addressed the issues of sexual violence by talking about abuse of power. He scolded the disciples who tried to enhance their power in the coming kingdom (Matt. 20:20ff.). He was merciful toward women 'caught in adultery' (John 8: 3ff.) and inclusive of women in his ministry. He encouraged the prophetic tradition of favouring 'the least of these' (Matt. 25:40,45). He confronted the religious leaders of his day with their hypocrisy and abuse of power (Matt. 23: 13ff.).

(Poling 1991:152)

As a description of practical theology Gerkin (1991:19) argues "both the particularity of the situation at hand and the horizon of meaning contained in the Christian story become open to re-assessment, re-evaluation and re-interpretation". This description renders practical theology as a process in the midst of the necessity of action (Gerkin 1986:60). The focus is to be relevant through context dependency. Living religion implies that the needs of people should be addressed according to the demands of the situation at hand. Practices of empowerment, equality and justice needs to be at the heart of Christian ministry (Graham 1996:173). This study is an example of addressing the need of people – women that experienced sexual violence in childhood – according to the demand of the situation at hand. Chapters three and four will describe the process of lived religion where needs are addressed within the context of modernist influence and patriarchy.

I used a post-modern approach to practical theology to challenge the effects of childhood sexual abuse and to introduce "re-assessment, re-evaluation and re-interpretation" (Gerkin 1991:19). Post-modern practical theology is ethical, prophetic, political and contextually orientated (Du Toit 1997:941; Cochrane, De Gruchy & Petersen 1991:8; Ackerman 1996:35; Bosch 1991:426-432). An ethical orientation refers to the respectful consideration of all people in different circumstances. Ethical considerations bring forth questions like: For whom will this decision be good? Who will benefit and what will the consequence be for others? It implies constant consideration of the effects of one's actions and decisions. A prophetic orientation points to viewing situations in a different way than commonly accepted by most people or institutions. The purpose of being prophetic is to invite

rich new possibilities in assumedly fixed situations. An example of prophetic discourse might be the challenging of patriarchy as an accepted form of oppression. Political orientation implies devotedness towards changing action in circumstances that affect people negatively. When these three orientations are applied to circumstances that are experienced by a specific marginalised group of people, awareness development can bring about difference. Examples of oppression addressed as result of taking into account the experiences of people in a marginalised context could be the development of a liberation theology as well as a feminist theology with its liberating purpose.

Graham (1996:114) offers an explanation for the interchange between prophetic, ethic, and political orientations applied within a specific context. She proposes that practice will be restored to the centre of theological formulation as the source and the arbiter of theological orthodoxy.

All values, sources and norms are understood as validated and generated in purposeful action (praxis) toward liberation. Demands to establish forms of ministry which respond to the social context of pastoral need, and which pursue social and political transformation as well as individual care, therefore feature as a third possible source of reconstructed pastoral values and objectives.

(Graham 1996:114)

This study represents the establishment of a form of ministry that responds to the social context – women that have been violated sexually in childhood years – and pursue political transformation – the right to take a stand against sexual abuse and break the silence – as well as individual care that include individual healing.

The contextual approaches in theology as well as social construction both inform the epistemology of this study. The group members and I respond to the social context in two ways: (a) contextual, by joining in a conversational group and (b) through social construction, by critiquing dominant knowledges that construct women who were sexually violated. Our religious experiences or spirituality were found to be inseparable from our ways of thinking, talking and acting and formed an integral part of this study towards purposeful liberating action.

I agree with Pieterse (1996:60-61) that practical theology and pastoral therapy should embrace the following qualities:

- To create a plurality and non-essentialist understanding of subjectivity.
- To provide tools to deconstruct and expose the inherent oppressive nature of dominant discourses in society, which serve to entrench existing relations of inequality.
- Own a quiet confidence to embrace ambiguity, difference, contradictions, and open-ended futures and uncertainty reflexivity.
- Creating opportunities for subjecting ones practice to scrutiny and critique.
- To be more susceptible to being playful, along with being committed to serious action.

These qualities enhance the ethical, prophetic and political orientation of post-modern practical theology.

1.6.2 PASTORAL THERAPY

Botha (1999:148) describes the long and complex history of pastoral therapy. I refrain from giving a historical overview and instead focus on a feminist perspective of pastoral therapy.

From a feminist perspective Cozad Neuger (1993:186) argues that two philosophical / theological questions are directing the development of approaches to people in need – “the values that guide human behaviour, and the meaning of living”. Feminist pastoral therapy tends to stand on the side of the oppressed, linking individual needs to community needs. This corresponds with the key notion of feminism, namely “the personal is political” as well as with themes of our theological heritage (Cozad Neuger 1993:186).

One’s own sense of salvation was made manifested in a commitment to God’s creation. Prophetic voices responded out of their own faith to the injustices of the time, which touched both the spiritual health of the prophets and that of their community.

(Cozad Neuger 1993: 186-187)

Appelt's (1999:16) views add to the above-mentioned feminist perspectives for pastoral therapy. Appelt states that "the pastoral nature in therapy thus lies in the therapist's relationship with God" and that "the client will co-determine if religious experiences and spirituality is mentioned".

1.7 FEMINIST THEOLOGY

While experiences of woman are the focus of this study, feminist and liberation theology perspectives are guiding our way of thinking and acting. The theologies propose an understanding of the context and to deal with the issues in the specific context, but also to bring hope to people, that they will be set free and that the problem will not just be critiqued. This is what Cochrane and De Gruchy (1991:56) call a prophetic dimension of practical theology.

Feminist theology is directly related to the context where people experience marginalisation or oppression. Graham (1996:156) notes that positioning of people and situations at hand have always occupied feminist thinkers. The marginalised people this study focuses on, are survivors of childhood sexual abuse. The context includes patriarchy as a tool for oppression, prescribed silence interfering with healing, a sexualised society and gender roles. Ackermann (1996:39) quotes Foucault in this regard: "The problem is not of changing people's consciousness or what's in their heads; but the political, economical, and institutional regime of the production of truth." Ackermann (1996:33-49) reclaims and reformulates feminist theology to "feminist theology of praxis" which includes voices of women, marginalised and oppressed people in reflection as well as liberating action. She explains a feminist theology of praxis to be understood as critical and committed, constructive and collaborative as well as accountable in reflecting on struggle and hope for the mending of creation through stories and experiences of women, marginalised and oppressed people.

A feminist theological perspective believes that "the mending of creation rests on transforming our relationships with ourselves, with one another, with God and with our environment through actions for justice and freedom. Liberating praxis

determines the reality of our concern with nurturing good relationships and testing the healing use of human agency” (Ackermann 1996:47).

Feminist theology can be described as both contextual and without social or political neutrality. As a liberation theology feminist theology “also identifies the experiences and interests of those on the ‘underside’ as the most authentic perspectives against which praxis, or value directed transformation, is to be judged” (Graham 1996:137).

Bosch’s (1991:432-442) ideas on liberation theology resonate with the experiences women who have been sexually violated as children. His ideas and their experiences and hope are expressed in the following words:

- no powerful system or person is going to resolve the injustice, people need to take their destiny in to their own hands and liberate themselves,
- God’s preferential option for the poor and oppressed is encouraging and revitalising,
- the enemy of humanity can be a structure of human power which exploit and violate the powerless,
- faith in the great renewal of history and culture as exemplified by Christ’s death, resurrection, and ascension,
- confidence that nothing need to remain the way it is.

From an ethical perspective it is important to pay attention to Bosch’s (1991:428) warning about the danger of the absolutism of contextualism. It is important to take care that dominant attitudes towards pro-contextuality do not become yet another structure of power with potential to oppress.

1.8 RESEARCH PERSPECTIVES

In this study I adopt a qualitative participatory approach that renders the participation of all involved as important. The stories of women who have experienced childhood sexual abuse become the territory of lived religion in this practical theological study.

Qualitative research has multi-paradigmatic focus. It is many things at the same time on account that it can be used in different disciplines, fields and for different subject matters (Van Dyk 2000:16).

This qualitative research project is intended to describe the meaning and process that each individual finds helpful in the journey to healing. There is ample proof in literature that women experience group sessions as healing experiences – isolation is broken, support is experienced, new skills are tried out and group participants can laugh and cry their way to healing (Laidlaw & Malmo 1990:63). The elements of healing as described above, heralds something of a narrative approach of co-researching possibilities by means of conversations.

Clandinin and Connelly (1991:259) mention in this regard the deliberate storying and re-storying of one's life to be a fundamental method of personal and social growth. I view myself as an interdependent participant in the meaning generating process (Botha 1998:82). Heshusius (1994:15-16) calls this a "participatory mode of consciousness". It requires attitude of profound openness, receptivity, respect and enchantment in the co-research process.

Ackermann's (1996:34) challenge proposed for feminist theology of praxis was taken up in the group sessions. Goals were set to be "critical, committed, constructive, collaborative and accountable" when we would reflect on the stories and experiences of women's struggle and hope. This study embraces a contextual approach by inquiring into local knowledge and contributing discourses.

I discovered that feminist research was driven by the participants – group members – rather than by their method (Reinharz 1992:240). During the sixth group session, the group voiced a need to become a pro-active support for other women who have experienced sexual violence. This need changed our research goals. I will discuss the goals in chapter four.

The participants of the healing group chose to engage themselves in new unplanned action through offering support to women who have experienced sexual violation. Alternative monthly group meetings were facilitated to support other women.

Through this action qualitative feminist research became participatory action research.

Foucault's (Spargo 1999:69) statement describes what happened in the group meetings when the women were willing to go beyond the limits historical analysis ascribed to them.

The critical ontology of ourselves has to be considered, not certainly as a theory, doctrine, nor as a permanent body of knowledge that is accumulating: it has to be conceived as an attitude, an ethos, philosophical life in which the critique of what we are is at one and the same time the historical analysis of the limits that are imposed on us and an experiment with the possibility of going beyond them.

(Spargo 1999:69)

We were particularly interested in the limits that society imposed on our being and the possibility of going beyond these limits. One of the ways of going beyond the limits was to create a space and time for women to voice their experiences of resisting sexual violence. This led to the unforeseen inclusion of other role-players like other survivors, the media and the Victim Support Centre.

Morrow and Smith (1995:32) describe how participants used emotional-focused solutions over problem-focused strategies to cope after sexual abuse. The reasoning behind these strategies seems to be social positioning of women and children; their physical size; undependable resources and –a context of denial and secrecy. In this participatory research women chose to use both strategies for coping – emotional-focused solutions by sharing, telling and experimenting with what worked for them, and also problem-focused to solutions linked to resources to create support and a voice for other survivors. We will enquire into the meaning that both focuses brought forth in the lives of participants.

1.9 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

This study aims to be ethical in that we (all the participants) will constantly examine the effect of our choices on our selves, others and the community (Freedman & Combs 1996:35).

Stringer (1999:10) indicates that community-based action research is always enacted through an explicit set of social values. He describes the following characteristics as part of the inquiry process – “democratic, equitable, liberating and life enhancing”. This study aspired to embody these characteristics as our set of social values to enhance ethical accountability.

Participants were be asked to edit the study and as co-constructors they have alter or add what they perceived as important. Constant reflection on the research process and the experience of the participants will take place.

1.10 LEGITIMACY OF THE STUDY

As we used a post-modern approach to science, a quotation of the aboriginal social worker, Watson describes the legitimacy of this study: “If you come to help me, you are wasting your time. But if you’ve come because your liberation is bound up with mine, then let us work together”(Stringer 1999:193). The legitimacy of the study ties in with the ethical considerations of the research process. The experiences of the participants will account for legitimacy.

1.11 RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND AIMS GUIDING THIS STUDY

The underlying research question is:

How can narrative pastoral group therapy assist survivors of sexual abuse on the road to recovery?

The aims of this study are:

- To offer this study as a small step towards resistance against sexual violence.
- To stand up and challenge the normalising judgmental gaze or ideology silencing survivors of sexual violence after violation.
- To break the silence after childhood sexual abuse by conversing in a group about strengths and preferred realities of women who experienced sexual violence in childhood years.
- To create space to develop what Foucault (1980) calls “local, popular or indigenous knowledge” about sexual violence. The experienced knowledge of woman survivors and victors of sexual abuse.

- To make visible subjugated knowledge by means of “rediscovering the history of struggle and conflict”.
- White (1990:24-26) argues that survivors can develop an effective criticism of the dominant knowledge surrounding sexual violence when there is adequate space where these subjugated knowledges can be performed or voiced.

I want this study to be viewed as a meaningful exercise in lived religion in two ways:

1. A validation of women’s stories of abuse.
2. Mutual care as an aspect of lived religion to be put to practice by the creation of a group setting.

The creation of a group setting provided multiple possibilities within the social constructionist approach where narrative means could be used to therapeutic ends (White 1990). The group setting also provided the possibility of increased human recourses (Stringer 1999:40). The first group became a resource for other women that might have similar needs. The diversity of the group members’ experiences and the telling and re-telling of their stories within an audience provided the possibility of a journey towards healing.

1.12 CHAPTER OUTLINE

The outline of the dissertation will be as follows. In chapter two I will discuss theory of sexual violence. Attention will be given to approaches and the incidence and effects of sexual violence. The knowledges of women in healing conversations against violence will unfold in chapter three. In chapter four the alternative stories of women after childhood sexual abuse and action inspired by challenging dominant discourses, will be told. I will conclude with possibilities for further studies after an inquiry about the strengths and limitations of this study.

CHAPTER TWO: SEXUAL VIOLENCE – FEMINISM AND –NARRATIVE THERAPY

1.1 VIEWS REGARDING SEXUAL VIOLENCE

When reflecting on the different views regarding sexual violence, research shows that this kind of violence has left a haunting legacy for human beings (Bricker-Jenkins 1991:64). Approaches to think about or treat sexual violence vary according to different historical time frames. Poling (1991:12) suggests that the breakdown of cohesive local communities, increasing isolation of many individuals and families, sexualization of the culture and greater tolerance for violent behaviour contribute to the increase in incidences and reporting of sexual violence in society. According to Poling (1991:12) some scholars suggest that violence against women and children is a symbolic and significant aspect of Western culture: “Through sexual violence, sanctioned forms of social control of woman and other marginal groups are being expressed.” When taking into account society’s patriarchal dominance and the taboo status of discussing sexual abuse, this topic becomes a political issue. Sexual violence is a social problem of power relations between groups referring to difference of social status, age and gender (Bell 1993:4).

The earliest documented reference to sexual abuse is found in the Bible and the Koran. In these documents the focus was on incest and adultery, both deserving corporal punishment (Van Niekerk 1999:35).

The modern age came up with numerous definitions regarding child sexual abuse, many of which incorporated severe limitations and shortcomings. Modern definitions are known for their focus on given facts. These include the age of the child when the violence started, the type of sexual events or acts that occurred, the age difference between child and victimiser and the context in which the violence took place. Sanderson (1995:14) mentions two limitations of these definitions: firstly the absence of acknowledgement of children’s emotional dependency and need for protection by adults and secondly the definition’s limits as to what might be included as sexual abuse. Non-touching behaviour as well as physical contact behaviour, excluding

sexual penetration, is not featuring in definitions as possibilities of sexual violence against children. Kelly (1988:19) quotes the following definition of child sexual abuse as most widely used among professionals: “The involvement of developmentally immature children and adolescents in sexual actions, which they can not fully comprehend, to which they can not give informed consent, and which violate the taboos of social roles.”

McLeod and Saraga (1988:20) note feminist’s disagreement with definitions of child sexual abuse and incest since the early 1970’s. Feminists used three key elements to describe sexual abuse: the betrayal of trust and responsibility, the abuse of power and the inability of children to consent. These three elements suggest responsibility on the perpetrator’s side and include experience of the survivor.

The Sexual Offences Law, 1957 (Act No. 23 of 1957) Section 14 (1-3) describes rape, sodomy, incest, indecent assault, public indecency and statutory offences as forms of child sexual abuse and crimes against children under the age of eighteen. Defining specific acts as child sexual abuse shows how the statutory system can be biased because of the meaning ascribed to words or concepts. Only women and girls can be raped because rape implies penetration. Men and boys are indecently assaulted or sodomized. We might ask how the different social meanings ascribed to these acts could contribute to effects experienced by survivors. Does rape entertain ideas on women being sinful and bad – the Eve trap – and does indecent assault focus on the innocence of the victim? (Isherwood & McEwan 1993:37).

The following definition of Kamsler (1990:10) focuses on the responsibility and misuse of power of the perpetrator exploiting a child for sexual gratification:

Child sexual assault is a sexual act imposed on a young person or child by another person (usually male). The ability to engage a child in a sexual relationship is based on the all-powerful and dominant position of the adult (older adolescent) or offender, which is in sharp contrast with the child’s age, dependency, and powerlessness. Authority and power enable the perpetrator to coerce the child into sexual compliance.

(Kamsler 1990:10)

The aspects I want to include for the purpose of understanding child sexual abuse in the context of this study will be: The dominant power abuse of an older person or adolescent to create a sexual experience or encounter, in relation with a child. In doing so, I will take into account society's narratives about sex, gender and power; how these narratives influence abuse and what their effects would be on self-agency after being on the receiving end of sexual abuse.

Within the context of social construction the effects of dominant narratives can be critiqued as a form of resistance that will open space for new meaning contributing to preferred self-agency. Questioning dominant narratives about sex, gender, power and violence and exposing their effects might be an invitation to responsibility for every member of society (Jenkins 1990:13). The foremost questions in this regard are: Who is benefiting when sexual behaviour is confused with love, caring, education of children or adult rights; who is violated when coercion is mistaken to be informed consent or when children and adult roles are confused and who is going to take responsibility for what? (Jenkins 1990:156).

This brings me to the question, how often does child sexual abuse occur and whether the incidence would justify the relevance of the study?

1.2 INCIDENCE OF SEXUAL VIOLENCE

Literature suggests different but alarming figures indicating the incidence of sexual violence around the world. In my work experience one in four adults that enter into consultation experienced sexual violence as children. Briere and Zaidi (1989:1602) suggest that nearly seventy percent of women seeking services from mental health clinicians in the USA are survivors of childhood sexual abuse.

At a SEVTO (Theology Faculty University of Pretoria) workshop journalist and survivor of rape, Charlene Smith (2000), gave an indication of some occurrences of sexual violence in South Africa. She stated that one in three girls and one in five to seven boys experienced a sexual encounter before age eighteen; that a woman is raped every sixty seconds in South Africa and, regarding domestic violence, that a woman dies at the hands of her partner every six days in South Africa.

It is not clear if the increased incidences reported to the South African Police Services (SAPS) show an increase in child sexual abuse or whether it indicates that sexual abuse is being more widely reported. When we take into account reported figures for abuse and compare these to figures derived from research projects, it is clear that the majority of sexual abuse is protected by silence.

		Jan-Dec 1996	Jan-Dec 1997	Jan-Dec 1998	Jan-Dec 1999
Rape and attempted rape	0-17yrs	19926	21450	19881	9692
	Adults	30555	30709	29399	14327
Indecent Assault	0-17yrs	3292	3121	3034	1819
	Adults	1928	1932	1817	999
Incest	0-17yrs	212	201	139	81
	Adults	69	54	40	18
Total		55982	57467	54310	26736

(The Crime Intelligence Centre, SAPS 2000)

The statistics suggest more than 40% of rape cases are inflicted against children and 60% against adults while children are more prone to indecent assaults 60% than adults 40%. Take into consideration that “rape” may more frequently refer to female survivors and “indecent assault” to male survivors. One wonders if power imbalances influence these figures? Less men than women become victims and although children should be the least ones to fall prey, boys and girls are likely to be violated. Incest figures are the lowest although this crime might be the highest in incidence and yet remains unreported.

The Crime Intelligence Information Centre reports a big gap between prosecutions and convictions – in the 1995/1996-period, only 5216 of the 9872 cases prosecuted, resulted in convictions.

The effects of sexual abuse and sexual violence are further highlighted in SAPS statistics (2000): As many as 26% of offences took place at the survivor's residence; 63% of survivors knew the offender by name while a further 12% knew the offender by sight. Kotzé (2000:2) indicates that up to 80% of the perpetrators is known to children who are sexually violated.

The pandemic incidence of sexual violence and its closeness to home is veiled in silence. Discourses in society contribute to the silence through double meaning. Perpetrators might deny accountability because they believe society will condemn them and that no one will forgive them. Perpetrators are also conscious of the power in balances that are tolerated by society that make it possible to violate people with less power. Survivors of sexual violence cannot disclose what happened they fear that they would be considered guilty; they dare not tell. All these factors can be seen as contributing factors to the effects of sexual violence.

1.3 PERSPECTIVES ON THE EFFECTS OF SEXUAL VIOLENCE

There are different perspectives regarding the effects of sexual abuse on the person who was on the receiving end. The different perspectives of the effects would have an influence on the focus of therapy. I would prefer a perspective that takes into account that effects are the result of the context that enhances and sustains those effects through power and knowledge.

Literature on the effects of sexual abuse is mainly concerned with the effect, for example the location of trauma according to the post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) model (Wolfsdorf & Zlotnick 2001:169-181; Sanderson 1995:84; Bricker-Jenkins, Hooyman & Gottlieb 1991:70-72; Rossetti 1990:85; Cameron 2000: 108-113).

Criteria for PTSD according to Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, 4th edition (DSM IV 1994:424-425) include some of the following:

1. Re-experiencing of the trauma in the form of flashbacks and intrusive thoughts about the events.
2. Persistent avoidance of reminders of the trauma, e.g. suppression of memories or numbing of general responsiveness (not present before the trauma) e.g. emotional detachment.
3. Increased arousal (not present before the trauma) as indicated by at least two of the following:
 - Difficulty falling or staying asleep;
 - Irritability or outbursts of anger;
 - Difficulty concentrating;
 - Hyper vigilance;
 - Exaggerated startle response;
 - Physiologic reactivity upon exposure to events that symbolise or resemble an aspect of the trauma event.

The condition is labelled *acute* if it lasts less than three months, *chronic* if it continues longer, and *delayed* if it occurs more than six months after the traumatic event.

Adult survivors of sexual abuse or violence during childhood may display various after-effects of the trauma. The intensity of effects may vary depending on influential variables like:

- How old was the child when the sexual abuse started?
- How frequently did the abuse occur?
- How long did the sexual violence go on?
- What was the intensity of the acts that the child experienced?
- How did the child experience the traumatic events?
- What were the outcomes at disclosure?
- How available were recourses?
- How did the cultural values that prescribed the child's lived world look like?
- What was the child's perception of spirituality?
- What role did the perpetrator play in the child's life?
- Is the abuser still part of the child's life?

(Morrow & Smith 1995:28; Van Niekerk 1999: 60-69).

Brown (1990:90) divides individual adult effects of childhood sexual abuse into four affected areas. Brown refers to these areas as “symptoms of child sexual abuse”. I prefer “effects” as “effects” do not indicate pathologies but consequences of child sexual abuse and attempts to cope with the effects of abuse.

1. Personal-relational effects

- Lack of responsiveness
- Suppression of memory concerning childhood events
- Suicidal thoughts and /or gestures
- Self mutilation that might include cutting, burning, and maiming oneself
- Rigid or controlling behaviour
- Depression and/or anxiety
- Low self-esteem, inability to trust other

2. Physical effects

- Alcohol/drug abuse or addiction
- Sexual effects e.g. frigidity or sexual addiction
- Eating problems e.g. obesity, anorexia, bulimia
- Gastrointestinal problems e.g. abdominal pains, appetite problems, constipation
- Skeletal muscle tension e.g. headaches, back pains, chest pains, tension in legs and arms
- Troubled sleeping

3. Social effects

- Isolation and withdrawal
- Delinquent or anti-social behaviour
- Homicidal impulses or actions
- Sexually acting out e.g. promiscuity
- Compulsive achieving
- Workholism

4. Spiritual effects

- Inability to pray
- Irrational fear of God

- Sense of impending punishment by God for unknown reasons.
- Inability to relate to the “masculinity” of God (in females abused by males).
- Lack of direction for spiritual journey, feeling lost or hopeless.

Women who were sexually violated as children may experience a number of these effects, keeping in mind that effects experienced by women are individual and no one can explain them better than the person living them.

Although there are comparisons in effects of PTSD and women who have been sexually molested as children, it is necessary to highlight the differences between the two. Childhood sexual abuse differs from other PTS events in the following ways. The abuse always occurs in childhood developmental years. Children are usually alone and opposite a more mature or powerful person in sexual abuse. The betrayal and secrecy after sexual abuse constitute room for misconception that might not be discussed for years to come. Children knew and trusted the person that betrayed and sexually abused them in most of the events. Silence often brings about ongoing contact with the abuser. Sexual abuse can go on for years and usually last much longer than a traumatic incident. Stigmatisation and shame is communicated to children about the experience that they might incorporate within their self-perception. It seems that the effects of traumatic incidents and those of childhood sexual abuse as a traumatic incident might differ in that the secondary trauma contribute to trauma living after the abuse. Finkelhor and Browne’s (1985:530-541) perspective suggests that the circularity in trauma dynamics becomes in it self a new traumagenic experience. The four trauma causing factors are:

- Traumagenic sexualization that can result in confusion of identity, norms, sex and love and aversion to sex or intimacy.
- Betrayal that might later become associated with grief, depression, mistrust, anger and hostility.
- Powerlessness that might lead to anxiety, fear and a lowered sense of efficiency and feelings of helplessness.
- Stigmatisation resulting in guilt and shame, a lowered self-esteem and perceptions of being different from others and stereotyped as damaged goods.

Cameron (2000:5), a survivor of child sexual violence, survey researcher and professor, notes that during the 1980's respected authors helped to establish public recognition of child sexual abuse as a serious problem with long lasting consequences. In contrast, around 1990 some authors viewed survivors of child sexual abuse as attention seeking, self-pitying, whiny and egocentric. Television and radio talk shows were featuring survivors who were emotional exhibitionists. She comments on seventy-five research participants, most of them not being self-pitying but after breaking the silence they really wanted to be heard. The effects of childhood sexual abuse left them with profound grief and many losses to deal with.

It becomes clear that the effects of child sexual abuse might push women to the margins of society. These effects serve to confirm dominant narratives of patriarchy, violence and authoritarianism all over again which will in turn continue to give momentum to the vicious circle of child sexual abuse and its effects.

1.4 FEMINISM

Although I have positioned feminism as a guide for this study I want to add a feminist perspective of ending sexual oppression. I agree with Watkins (2000:33) that an eradication of the underlying cultural bases and causes of sexism and other forms of group oppression must be the focus of feminist struggle. This broad focus is needed to take into account different needs of different groups as well as individual needs within different groups.

For the purpose of re-thinking sexuality "sexual freedom" is an important and relevant issue for feminist politics (Watkins 2000:148-149). Though "sexual freedom" could imply something exiting and pleasurable, this notion was not able to deconstruct the power relations between men and women in the sexual sphere.

Watkins (200:150-158) mentions the following dominant sexual norms that prescribe and influence sexuality and contribute to sexual shame, repression, guilt, dominance, conquest and exploitation:

- Privileged active sexual expression over sexual desire implying to act sexually is deemed normal and natural while not to act sexually is deemed unnatural and abnormal..
- Men are socialised to act sexually; women not to act sexually or to simply react to male sexual advances.
- Young men are coerced to act sexually to prove “masculinity” or “heterosexuality”.
- Young women are coerced to respond to such advances to prove their “femininity” or willingness to be heterosexual objects.
- Heterosexuality as the only norm opposing compulsory heterosexuality.
- Society’s obsession with sexuality as natural and normal.

These accepted norms maintain gender equality and male dominance in society.

Pease (1997:9-10), in his book *Men and sexual politics – towards a profeminist practice*, believes that the process of cultural change is the key to men stop being violent. He attributes violence to men’s power and privileged positioning by means of cultural discourses.

Where would cultural change start from a feminist perspective – perhaps within the construction of agency?

1.4.1 THE CONSTRUCTION OF AGENCY

Subjectivity or agency is generally understood in English as the speaking active person but includes the idea of passive objects of experiments. Davies (1991:47) includes the French dual meaning of subjectivity, namely individuality and self-awareness. This includes subjects as “dynamic and multiple, always positioned in relation to particular discourses and practices and produced by these” (Davies 1991:47).

Although I want to focus on post-structuralist views of agency, I cannot start with post-structuralism because agency is a process caught up in modernist discourse struggling to go beyond what is prescribed by dominant discourse. Foucault’s

argument that the “self is constructed as the subject and object of discourse at a particular historical conjuncture” (Parker 1989:63), opens up questions about the effect of discourses on selfhood or agency.

Women who have experienced sexual abuse in childhood are confronted with discourses that coerce them to:

- expect account for errors (even if it was not their errors),
- label themselves as bad in spiritual terms,
- accept e.g. patriarchy and submissiveness as good. The effects on selfhood might be an experience of powerlessness, betrayal, stigmatisation, shame, fear, low self-validation and confusion.

These effects, being part of the accepted dominant knowledge, make invisible rich descriptions or alternative knowledge and resilience. Corruption of self-agency take place as dominant knowledge convinces survivors of hopelessness and position them within thin descriptions governing their existence.

In a post-structuralist analysis of agency, choices are understood as forced because dominant discourses leave no other options. Davies (1991:44) mentions Benson’s ideas although Benson does not hold much hope for the effect of this process:

That by seeing how agency is constituted, marginal members of society can cease blaming themselves for not being agentic and can challenge the dominant discourses that constitute them as non-agentic through such processes as consciousness raising in which they can develop a critical awareness of ‘normative domains’.

(Davies 1991:44)

Davies (1991:46) notes that post-structuralist theory shows how agency is basically illusory. However, she notes that the speaking/writing subject opens up another possibility for self-agency:

The speaking/writing subject can move within and between discourses, can see precisely how they subject her, can use the terms of one discourse to counteract, modify, refuse or go beyond the other, both in terms of her own experienced subjectivity and in the way she which she chooses to speak in relation to the subjectivities of others.

(Davies 1991:46)

I view this possibility as the foundation of resistance against dominant discourses that position agency and, contrary to Benson, have hope for new possibilities of agency.

Our group meetings provided the time and space to move between discourses that impacted on the positioning of agency. As we discovered ourselves in Foucauldian terms as being docile bodies in the grip of truth claims, our resistance, courage and hope raised (McHoul & Grace 1993:44). By means of meaning generating interaction each group member contributed to the positioning of the others by challenging grand narratives in power positions (McHoul & Grace 1993:57-65). These combined actions created possibilities for a multiple selfhood that could evolve in a recursive ethical process. Parker (1989:67) mentions Harre and Foucault's affirmation of the reality of multiplicity or different social selves against perceptions of "true" or "normal" selves.

In his book *The saturated self* Gergen (1991:6,7) confirms above mentioned ideas and takes on the modern concept of the self by challenging the individual's concept of him-/herself.

Social saturation furnishes us with the multiplicity of incoherent and unrelated languages of the self. For everything we 'know to be true' about ourselves, other voices within respond with doubt and even derision.

(Gergen 1991:6,7)

With the bidding goodbye of the essential self, the realisation that the concept of self is only possible through relationships, starts to dawn. As Gergen (1991:170) remarks, "autobiography, emotions, and morality ... become possessions of relationships."

Narrative therapy provides the framework or ideas to challenge individuals' concepts of themselves within a group setting of relationships.

1.5 NARRATIVE THERAPY WITH SURVIVORS OF CHILDHOOD SEXUAL ABUSE

Narratives refer to life stories with a decidedly reflexive venture that locates the individual within moral and personal context towards meaning in life (Russel

1999:341). Foucault (1981:98) holds the vision that counsellors carry preconceived notions of the self into counselling but also offer a process in which they help the individual to create, or reinvent their very identity. Gergen (1999:122) quotes Flax to emphasise his views of multiple forms of identity “In this disrupted moment, the ability to tolerate and the will to encourage fluid and multiple forms of subjectivity is an imperative and fully ethical position.” Gergen holds the view that our understanding of ourselves as a “relational self” is only in infancy (1999:138). The “relational identity” view will pose challenges to include relations with the non social-world in our meaning making. Through self-reflexivity the relational identity holds the promise of polyvocality and the co-creation of new worlds and identities (Gergen 1999:162). Gergen views on identity excited me. When narrative therapy is combined with Gergens ideas on identity it enables people to re-story their lives in new more liveable ways (1999:172).

Narrative therapy provides an opportunity for the survivors of sexual abuse to identify what is important to them, what they believe and how they want to describe themselves through knowledge derived from alternative descriptions of their life stories.

1.5.1 DURRANT KOWALSKI AND WHITE’S MODEL

I use a description by Durrant and Kowalski (1990) to elaborate on narrative therapy with people who experienced sexual violation. This discussion will include the main principles for therapy, a framework for therapy, externalising the problem, moving from a dominant to an alternative story and building a new view of the self with a future orientation. The discussion would proceed in this order.

1.5.1.1 THINKING ABOUT THE THERAPEUTIC CONTEXT

Durrant and Kowalski (1990:67) proposed a schema for thinking about therapeutic approaches based on the work of Epston and influenced by White’s ideas about people’s self-description. This reminds us about the distinction in views between a modern and post-modern paradigm. It was indicated in chapter one that this study opted for a post-modern epistemology. The two therapeutic approaches are:

1. Therapy that promotes a self-perception as “victim”.
 - In this model the therapist is viewed as the expert that has special knowledge regarding sexual abuse to which a client needs to submit.
 - The client is viewed as damaged or broken by the abuse.
 - It is a deficit model that seeks to “fix” the client.
 - Insight into dynamics of abuse is viewed as the key goal of treatment.
 - This model expects a cathartic or corrective experience that is viewed as the key necessary to produce change.

2. Therapy that enhances a self-perception as “competent person” on the other continuum holds the following views.
 - The client is viewed as expert in her/his own life and has the ability to determine what is best for her/him. The therapist respects this.
 - Clients are viewed as oppressed by and struggling with the effects of the abuse.
 - This is a resource model that seeks to build on the strengths and resources of client.
 - The goal of treatment is that the client would view him-/herself as competent and as having control over the influence of the effects of the abuse.
 - The best corrective experience is perceived as that the client is getting on with his/her life in a way that best suits him/her and change will be promoted by experiencing these choices that work.

1.5.1.2 MAIN PRINCIPALS FOR THERAPY WITH THE EFFECTS OF SEXUAL ABUSE

Durrant and Kowalski (1990:73) indicate the following principals as guiding their narrative work with survivors experiencing effects of sexual abuse.

1. Sexual abuse does not inevitably lead to emotional or psychological problems. In spite of having experienced something quite painful and confusing, people who have been abused have many strengths and resources they can use to confront difficulties.

2. It is more helpful to consider “what keeps this problem alive in this person’s life and what keeps it from being resolved?” There is a focus on contextual and/or cultural restraints rather than on what caused this problem.
3. One of the main effects of sexual abuse is the assault it makes on a person’s self-perception. As abuse can blind people from noticing their strengths and capabilities, they develop an “abuse-dominated” view of themselves and their interaction with others.
4. People inadvertently notice and place greater emphasis on “facts” that support the abuse-dominated description of themselves, others, relationships and situations. This is called the dominant story.
5. Complex problems such as sexual abuse don’t necessarily require complex solutions.
6. Every abuse-dominated pattern includes examples of exceptions that serve as hints towards new stories. These are called alternative stories.
7. The difficulties need to be addressed in a way the client perceives as helpful to him-/herself or his/her situation.
8. The goal is that the client makes sense of the experience or abuse situation in ways that free him/her to live a satisfying life of his/her choice.
9. The person needs to see him-/herself through a lens of competence, of being in control, with self-acceptance and absence of guilt.
10. It is not necessary to discuss the details of the abuse in order to diminish the effects of sexual abuse. Clients are the best judges on whether and when, it might be helpful to discuss the abuse explicitly. They can be consulted on their needs in this regard.

1.5.1.3 A FRAMEWORK FOR THERAPY

The framework of a narrative approach is focused on new meaning being created in conversations through social construction. Durrant and Kowalski (1990: 83) agree with De Shazer and consider it important that the “clients determine what we talk about” while “therapists determine how we talk about it”. Therapists might be helpful to co-explore different realities.

1.5.1.4 EXTERNALISING THE PROBLEM

White's (Durrant & Kuwalski 1990:87-88) intention with externalising the problem is to objectify the problem (in this study the effects of abuse) by what he calls "relative influencing questioning. These questions about the influence of the problem in a person's life can lead to questions that enables the person to form a new non-problem saturated perspective of his/her live story.

1.5.1.5 MOVING FROM A DOMINANT TO AN ALTERNATIVE STORY

By identifying exceptions to abuse-dominated behaviour and experiences, the dominant story can be re-storied into an alternative story. An example of a question that might facilitate this could be: Can you think of a time when the guilt and shame were exerting their strength but when you were able to prevent them from overtaking you? How did you do that? (Durrant & Kowalski 1990: 90)

1.5.1.6 BUILDING A NEW VIEW OF THE SELF WITH A FUTURE ORIENTATION

Deconstruction of the dominant story will open possibilities for "unique outcomes" as White suggests. "These questions invite people to speculate more directly on implications of their discoveries for their views of self and for their view of others view of them" (Durrant & Kowalski 1990: 95). An example of such a question would be: What does your concurrence of guilt and shame tell you about your self? What does that imply for your future? Who would be least surprise about your victory over the problem?

1.5.2 DIXONS GROUP THERAPY

Dixon (2000) uses narrative therapy in a dual group setting for women to "co-weave" towards healing after experiencing violence. She uses group letters and documents to help reflect on the questions asked to both individuals and the whole group. The dominant story of abuse is deconstructed and counterplot stories are revealed, built upon and extended (Dixon 2000:132). The participant's journaling and letters are

used for more re-membering – acknowledgement of influencing membership conversations. A reflecting team is created by bringing the members of the two groups together. The purpose is to create another audience of success and for the groups to become consultants to each other (Dixon 2000:150).

1.6 THIS STUDY: A JOURNEY TO HEALING

Chapter three will describe how a pastoral narrative therapy perspective forms the basis for a journey to healing after childhood sexual abuse. Although the narrative ideas of Durrant, White, Kuwalski and Dixon; practical theologians; feminists; social constructionists and many others are adopted into the process of this study, it portrays its own individual qualities too.

CHAPTER THREE: THE JOURNEY - A PROCESS Silence

And yet, there must be freedom – if we are to speak
and Yes, there must be power – if we are to be heard.
And when we have both
(freedom and power)
let us not be misunderstood.

Sengupta cited by Buckenham (1999: 129)

1.1 INTRODUCTION

In this chapter I describe how we developed the idea of group meetings, how we derived the goals and opportunities during group conversations as well as the invitation procedure and the structure for the group discussions that we co-created. I introduce the women participants and describe the unfolding group conversations.

During individual sessions with women consulting me, I wondered how group conversations might be used to invite the witnessing (Weingarten 2000) of the richness of women survivors' stories. Individual stories of survival are usually considered confidential and private and cannot be witnessed by other survivors if these stories remain within individual sessions.

I began an inquiry to find out if women were susceptible to group discussions on childhood sexual molestation. Eighty percent of the women who were sexually abused and consulted me were positive about group conversations. They thought that they might benefit from such conversations.

I realised that women who enter therapy might prefer to break the silence regarding childhood sexual abuse in a confidential, one on one conversation. We started off within a safe, non-threatening environment to deal with the intense emotions brought on by the trauma. After the initial individual therapy the participants perceived themselves in a different relation to what happened to them and they became ready to enter a group setting.

I used narrative letters (Epston 1994) to the group to highlight the process of co-weaving towards healing. The first narrative letter to the group served as a portrait of the first meeting. It conveys information on the research process, what happened in the groups and gives a description of the research participants as they view themselves.

The second group meeting touched on important issues that affect the participants lives but more importantly, how they dealt with these issues.

The third group meeting demonstrated the development of mutual care amongst the participants, the development of a community of concern (Madigan & Epston 1995:257) as well as sharing and redistributing of knowledge.

The focus of the fourth meeting was on issues of power and control in the participants' lives. The energy that the women experienced from these sessions created the possibility of a new direction. Reflections on the "new direction" will be included in the next chapter. The participants wanted to show their solidarity with other survivors of sexual violence. This story will be told in chapter four.

Snippets of the group conversations and excerpts of narrative letters are used to enrich the telling of this journey. I also reflect on my own experiences during the discussion of the process. My guides in re-telling the story of women in conversation on childhood sexual abuse are ethics of care, personal responsibility and open dialogue with the participants (Denzin & Lincoln 1994:102). I took personal responsibility to be conscious of the ethics of care by constantly checking with the participants if their stories were retold in the way they preferred. Open dialogue enhanced the opportunity for all to make recommendations and changes as well as to recheck ethical experiences.

1.2 THE MATRIX OF THIS GROUP CONVERSATIONS

A number of contributing factors gave birth to the group conversations, my own story of taking a stand against childhood sexual abuse since 1989 being one. I became aware that cultural stories do contribute to the perpetuation of childhood sexual

abuse. During the eighties, society did not provide enough space for conversations on childhood sexual abuse. This situation restricted resources to assist survivors of sexual violence as it was considered a taboo topic. Survivors of childhood sexual abuse were silenced into secrecy and experienced themselves as marginalised and as victims of oppressive social and religious discourses.

The resilience of the women who participated in the research was in contrast with what society coerced them to believe about themselves.

Women survivors of sexual abuse who enter therapy are aware of not being at peace with their lives, they experience confusion, guilt and self-blame, they believe that there is something terribly wrong with them. The richness of women's stories became visible to the group members and me when we created space for different knowledges that surpassed dominant narratives (White & Epston 1990) in accordance with patriarchy

(Isherwood & McEwan 1993:37-50).

The rich "local knowledge" or personal understanding of each of the group members touched me. Some of them brought books, poems or literature to share in the group (White 1990:26). Others brought spiritual messages or quotes from Scripture. Above all they were prepared to share their helpful insider or local knowledge. Even though they did not know one another, a community of concern and care developed amongst them.

1.3 INVITING PARTICIPANTS

I discussed the possibility of group conversations with individual counselees. I formally invited the women to the first group meeting. Ten women who consulted me during the period March to July 2000 were invited to join the group.

The invitation contained a touching reflection of a survivor who wanted to take part in the group conversations:

Today I view autumn, the leaves falling. I know when the leaves drop, become dry and disappear, that winter will appear – ugly, icy and devastating. It seems that it is going to stay like this forever and ever. But when it is at its worst, when you gasp, “I can’t take this cold any longer, I can’t ... I won’t!” then suddenly, unexpectedly, new flowers and leaves appear. It will be spring! In retrospect I realise the need for autumn in my life – to shed all the bad things – to make room for the new day ... a spring day, a flower day filled with the splendour of colour and fragrance.

(Fransie 2000)

In the reflection the writer associates different seasons with her experience of dealing with difficulties in her life. The spring speaks of hope; bad times will not prevail forever. Winter is compared with emotional pain, isolation and coldness; autumn’s falling leaves represent the shedding of pain, fear and guilt as a necessary process to make room for fresh, new flowers in spring, suggesting¹ the composition of a new preferred way of being. The writing coincided with our first group meeting in August 2000 - a time to prepare for the spring season.

Five of the ten women who were invited indicated that they would join the journey. The other five women’s circumstances prevented them from attending, though they valued the idea of group meetings. After the first meeting we all agreed not to open the group for new members to enter. We urged one another not to leave the group. The experience of the first session was meaningful and included the sharing of sensitive information we entrusted to one another.

1.4 STRUCTURE AND BOUNDARIES OF THE GROUP

The structure of the group was negotiated in the first session. As facilitator I needed the group’s permission to videotape the sessions. I obtained permission to include my supervisor as clinician and to share the process and the writing of narrative letters

¹ Vandag sien ek die herfs, al die blare wat val alles lyk pragtig van al die kleur blare, bruin, geel, groen. Maar dan weet ek as alles afval droog word en verdwyn dan is die winter lelik ysig en verwoestend Dan voel dit asof dit vir altyd en ewig so gaan bly. Maar net wanneer dit erg voel, net wanneer jy voel “ ek kan nie meer die koue verdra nie, ek kan....., ek wil nie”. Dan een dag skielik kom daar weer nuwe blommetjies en blare. Dan is dit lente! So besef ek dan daar moet n herfs aan breek in my lewe, sodat al die ou en lelike goed in my lewe kan plek maak vir n nuwe dag..... n Lente dag, n blomme dag vol pragtige reuke en kleure. (vergunning Fransie)

with her. I obtained informed consent to use the information for the purposes of this research dissertation.

We agreed to meet fortnightly on Saturdays for eight sessions of two hours each. The first venue was at the offices of the Centre for Human Development. All participants agreed that a more informal setting was needed as some women were bringing along their children. One of the group members invited us to her home for our second meeting. Afterwards we met at my house.

During the first session, each participant had the opportunity to voice her expectations of confidentiality and respect for one another. A commitment to one another and to the group was deemed important. All agreed to be transparent about their experiences in the group as to prevent or clarify possible misunderstandings. It was defined clearly by the group that each participant had a choice as to what to disclose or not to disclose. We decided that matters arising from narrative letters after each meeting would guide our next session. However, we would always allow participants to introduce new and pressing issues.

We regarded participants' needs as a priority. We agreed on a structure and a code of ethics that would allow for constant re-assessment and re-negotiation. We shared the expectation that our discussions would be able to address our needs.

As facilitator and co-participant, I needed to reflect on my dual role within the group. Sanderson (1995:193) suggests that the ideal would be two therapists facilitating group sessions. I soon realised the validity of this argument as the intensity of some of the narratives became so overwhelming that some issues would be neglected with only one facilitator available. I did not manage to find a suitable co-therapist and decided to continue as planned. Recordings and narrative letters were discussed with my study leader. I regarded our conversations on the group discussions as both meaningful and helpful.

As facilitator I assumed the role of being interested and "not knowing" (Anderson & Goolishian 1992). The value of a not knowing position was the eventual

deconstruction of “therapy” and the opening-up for the knowledge and experiences of the women in the group. The not knowing position was discussed in Chapter 2.

My interest was for indications of a different understanding within the group that might speak of resistance and resilience, their alternative stories (White & Epston 1990) in other words. As facilitator it was my aim to enter conversations in an ethical, prophetically and political way (Graham 1996:136-137). Within ethical boundaries I constantly inquired about “own choices and realities” and “who were benefiting from what” in a respectful way. The prophetic role I adopted led me to an inquiry into dominant discourses informing ways of being for survivors of childhood sexual abuse. These taken for granted discourses were viewed in different ways to explore alternative meanings and to evaluate their helpfulness in the women’s lives. My role took on a political dimension when we began to speak out about unique outcomes. These unique outcomes or alternative stories challenged women not to keep quiet after sexual abuse but to take a stand against the violation by means of working towards healing and liberation.

1.5 GOALS FOR THE GROUP CONVERSATIONS

There are a number of possibilities for survivors of childhood sexual abuse to converse in groups. In our individual consultations the participants indicated their expectations of the group conversations as being:

1. supportive towards each other’s experiences of the effects of childhood sexual abuse;
2. encouraging to take a stand against that which constructs guilt and shame in their lives;
3. adductive through consulting each other on what works, how it works and how it was going to be helpful towards healing;
4. constructive towards healing with respect for different expectations and thoughts on what healing should entail.

We stated these four expectations voiced by the individual participants as the goals guiding the group discussions.

Sanderson (1995:189-190) describes the following advantages of groups conversing about healing after childhood sexual abuse. These advantages resonate with the goals the group identified. These also became true for our group discussion:

- Mutual support and understanding: reducing isolation, alienation, secrecy, shame and stigma.
- Generating relief that their experiences are not bizarre or unique, fostering a sense of belonging.
- Validation of survivors' experiences.
- Encourage survivors not to think of themselves as abnormal or bad.
- Encourage them not to feel responsible for what happened.
- Create a safe environment to explore important issues like intimacy, trust and honesty.
- Provide positive feedback that can foster alternative life stories.
- Confrontation of taken for granted truths that undermine dominant, problem saturated stories.
- A variety of positive role models to choose from might become available as group members get to know each other.
- Encouragement and borrowing strategies that were helpful for others in different stages of healing.
- Hope and optimism towards healing.

As I have indicated in Chapter 1, Sanderson (1995:49) uses Finkelhor's four preconditions model of treating child sexual abuse. Although we challenged the effects of childhood sexual abuse from a narrative perspective, the "advantages" stated by Sanderson compliment the goals set for the group meetings.

The group members evaluated these goals and contributed to further reflections in Chapter 5.

1.6 INTRODUCTION OF PARTICIPANTS

Each participant chose a pseudonym for the purpose of the dissertation. It took careful thinking because they wanted the name to convey something about themselves. They wanted me to introduce them as follows:

Cat views herself as a lion and had fun in choosing this name. She is thirty-two, has been married for ten years and has three children. She has a full-time job that she enjoys.

Christa chose her name because she always liked the name since childhood. As a little girl she gave her dolls the name Christa. She is twenty-eight and single. She holds meaningful relationships with her parents and friends, is an employee at a big company and during our group sessions, started planning to work abroad.

Bubbles' name reflects her spontaneous nature and catching enthusiasm. She is thirty-two and in her second marriage. She is a mother of four children. She has a full-time day job.

Twinkles is twenty-six. Her nickname at school was Twinkles, referring to her fairy-like slender figure and her spontaneous laughter. She has been married for seven years and is the mother of three children. Her role as mother is very important to her. She works at her parents' business in Witbank.

Freedom is nineteen years old. Her choice of a name was inspired by comments of the other group members. They witnessed her considering various names until she decided on "Freedom". She was looking for a job while studying at the time. She had a positive relationship with her mother.

The one thing they all shared were that they all were sexually violated during childhood by someone they knew well and who was supposed to be trustworthy. The perpetrators included a brother, a brother-in-law, a nephew, an uncle and family friends. The duration of the sexual abuse varied from three isolated incidents in childhood years to continual abuse that went on for nearly ten years. In two of the survivors' lives there were only one perpetrator involved while the other three women were violated by more than one perpetrator in their childhood years.

The abuse stories were the dominant stories of their lives and during the group discussions we spent time and space listening to the abuse stories.

1.7 CO-WEAVING TO HEALING: WOMEN IN CONVERSATIONS

The first narrative letter sent to the group after our first meeting, serves as an introduction of the group members' perceptions of themselves to the reader. During the first session we explored the dominant and alternative stories. Practices to do so are found within the narrative literature (White 1990:1-35). Durrant and White (1990) describe narrative therapy with women, whom have been sexually abused. The effect of childhood sexual abuse in Kamsler's (1990:19) words is viewed as being the "consequence of the operation of restraining beliefs and assumptions about themselves and their world".

The group's purpose was to contest these problem saturated descriptions by double descriptions that would assist the participants to locate alternative stories about themselves in the group conversations (Durrant & White 1990:20-23). In Chapter 2, I described the therapeutic stance of narrative therapy in more detail.

Through the narrative letter the conversations were extended with the focus of opening up new possibilities (Epston 1994:32-38). The letter also served as a summary of the session and contributed to the group cohesion. Many of the themes we touched on during the first meeting were elaborated on in other meetings. In writing the letters, I used the practice of asking both landscape of action and landscape of identity questions (White 1995:27; Morgan 2000:60-63). Examples of landscape of action and landscape of identity questions used are: What were the steps leading to your decision to love yourself? What do you think that says about your own choices for yourself and your future? I experienced this practice to be of importance especially since the participants were developing their preferred identities outside of the dominant stories of abuse and oppressive patriarchy.

Burstow (1992:17) mentions that women move towards "seeing through" oppressive, prescriptive and silencing ideas and practices. They become progressively aware of myths, propaganda and institutions and intentions to construct them as subordinates to violence. She claims that "seeing through" myths that describe women as inferior as well as challenging the role of institutions to keep this taken for granted truths

operational, coupled with analysis of these operations, to be truly powerful to resist patriarchy. The stories told in the first group meeting held many examples that confirm Burstow's views. In the group sessions we heard of the coalition between guilt and silence and how it corresponded with the expectations of patriarchy. Women are constructed by society's dominant perceptions to be the originators of sexual sin; therefore they are viewed as the guilty and need to keep quiet about sexual violations. These perspectives enhance the unequal distribution of power as accepted and prescribed by patriarchy. When women start challenging the social structures that uphold certain beliefs, they become open for new local truths resisting the unfair distribution of power through patriarchy. This would allow for rich alternative stories with in preferred realities and knowledge for survivors of childhood sexual abuse.

1.7.1 THE FIRST GROUP MEETING: REFLECTIONS THROUGH A NARRATIVE LETTER

After the session I drafted this letter and each participant received a letter before the next session (Dixon 2000:120). Some of the letters took time to compile because I wanted to address every participant and listened to the tapes more than once to make sure I did not miss something important.

The meeting started with an invitation to the participants to introduce themselves and a suggestion that they could use metaphors of plants or animals that they wanted to identify with. I started of by introducing myself as identifying with a baobab tree. As a baobab tree I want to be hardy and resistant in harsh conditions (problems). I desire to bear fruit even in difficult circumstances like this tree. After this initial suggestion the participants introduced the other issues on the agenda. The agenda was set by the participants. The therapeutic relations I held with each participant prior to the group meetings might have influenced level of discussions.

The first narrative letter read as follows:

Dear Freedom, Bubbles, Christa, Twinkles and Cat.

As agreed, I write this letter to you as a summary of our session. This can also be a way of checking if I heard and understood what each of you meant. Please feel free to make notes if you want to change or add something.

I was overwhelmed by your openness to share your experiences with one another. I experienced how each person's wisdom contributed to the others, or was it just me who was taught so much? Perhaps you want to call it something else than wisdom? Was there something that touched each of you especially during our first meeting?

[Participants were asked to introduce themselves by using a metaphor and they came up with the following]

Freedom, you said that you could identify with a dolphin because you wanted to be as free and carefree as a dolphin. Twinkles and Bubbles, you commented that you could identify with Freedom, in such a way that you could see yourselves in her when you were her age.

Twinkles and Bubbles described the words you spoke, Freedom, as strength and expressed a longing to come across as mysterious and quiet as you do. I wondered if you were talking to yourself inside or were you thinking about a lot of things while the group continued conversing? Might it be that you experience an openness to be yourself in the atmosphere of the group? Freedom, you indicated that you agreed with the following ideas:

- That you need to love and accept yourself to stand up to the voices that want to convince you that you are not good enough.
- Those guilt feelings after childhood sexual abuse didn't want to leave you alone. Would you like to say more about what guilt is doing to you?

You agreed with Bubbles that sexual intimacy (after being sexually abused as a young adult) became like an act of acceptance to you. Do you experience this way of perceiving yourself to be on your side or on the side of abuse?

Everyone was excited about your job opportunity to work at the Victim Support Centre. We would love to hear if you would like to share with us something about your work in future. I wondered if your work to support victims of violent crime like rape might strengthen us all, as we know that we can trust the person who renders a service to the women? Do you know what it is that the group saw in you that convinced them that they could trust you?

Bubbles, you described yourself as a waterfall with an appearance of tranquillity but underneath “it is bubbling like a drain”. The other participants interrupted and added other metaphors like bubbly, whirlpool, or “forever producing fresh water like a fountain”. Bubbles you said that you

- know your strength to take on a lot, and sometimes the whole world,
- experience yourself as active, with a lot of energy,
- know that you have a good sense of humour,
- are spontaneous and bubbly and
- that you don't “show” yourself easily and that was the point you tried to convey with the drain metaphor.

Have you always been aware of your strength to cope in difficult times? Does it work for you to hide what you feel, or would you prefer to show what you feel at some times? What did you think when the others refused to accept your description of yourself as a drain? Does it reveal something of the potential that they saw in you? Is it something that you want to notice or acknowledge about yourself at this stage or not yet?

The book you are reading at the moment sounds very interesting. The idea of changing your ways of thinking to protect and build up yourself sounds fascinating. Which strategies and/or techniques did you choose for yourself that worked for you? Are you developing your own ideas about this?

You told us that it took time but that you are viewing lovemaking and sex as two separate things in your marriage. You can indulge in lovemaking but you can go without sex. I would like to understand your distinction between the two better as well as your ways of experiencing how it works for you? You mention that sex tricked you previously into believing that it entailed acceptance when you were a young adult. Did I understand it correctly or would you like to explain it again?

On guilt feelings, you said: "Sometimes it still manages to steer me to a place where I wonder, why did I go back to where the molestation took place?" You made it clear that you know guilt feelings as a "cunning enemy that I need to put in its place".

Bubbles you declared that your belief in the Lord Jesus Christ is your anchor in life. For you, He is the light that conquers all darkness. You hinted that while a survivor of child sexual abuse experiences darkness, the "guilty person seems to live in freedom". The unfairness of the situation became even clearer through your description. You refuse to favour the negative above the positive. How do you do it practically? Could it be a conscious action? Do you do it step by step? Do you do it every day or just sometimes? Should one be tough to do this? Do you have an idea what the history of this decision is?

Twinkles you described yourself as a whirlwind "forever on the go". You said that other people in your life might agree and added that a whirlwind wants to take over and sometimes destroys where it goes. You want to identify with what you know about yourself. You know that you are

- Friendly
- Spontaneous
- Soft-hearted and easily touched by the need of others
- You love chatting to people and especially children
- A happy person.

You see yourself in a soft orange rose. Humorously reminding us about the thorns in your life, which are your “temper and being easily offended”. You received a lot of reaction from the other women confirming those thorns in their lives as well.

Twinkles, you said that you know that the molestation (that happened as a child) was not your fault. You asked: “How could it have been?” I wondered a lot about how you acquired this knowledge or insight? Could it be something that you worked out for yourself or did you get it from someone else? You are sad that your husband knows that you were sexually molested as a child. You experience that it (his knowledge of this) does not stand on your side. Dominance and adult sex takes your thoughts back to the sexual molestation when you were a child. Sometimes you manage to escape these thoughts but if you are not busy, idleness teams up with these thoughts tormenting you.

You believe that sex can work for you if your husband treats you with respect and love. I wonder if he knows how love and respect stand on the side of your relationship?

Twinkles, you adore your children. Sometimes you wonder if what happened to you might influence your relationship with your daughter because you experience distance in this relationship at stages. I wondered what the others experienced in their relationships with their daughters or mothers? Would you like to talk about this some more?

It is your aspiration to take every day as it comes and to make the best of it. You believe that you should create your own reality everyday and that it should work for you. I wondered if these are some of the challenges that keep you busy everyday? How often do you manage to think about life in this way? Is it helpful to think of life in this way?

You inspired me through this way of thinking that realities have multiple possibilities created according to the needs of the situation and not dictated by prescribed ways of being.

Cat, you described yourself as a lion, referring to a lion's pride, strength, peace and poise that you want to identify with. Your "colours" correspond lovely with those of a lioness, eyes being yellowish-brown and hair reddish-brown. You choose to see yourself:

- To be strong and peaceful.
- To like and accept yourself – you mentioned that this choice saved you from the claws of anorexia at a previous stage.
- You choose to be victorious over depression and emotional pain.
- You describe yourself and want to be described as a positive person.
- Like a lion you want to be congruent with what you feel and don't want to pretend to be something that you are not.

I wondered if you would mind to share with us how you managed to love and accept yourself unconditionally? Could it be something that someone near to you taught you? Could it be something that one must attempt to do – bit by bit like eating, slowly ... or must one allow it to flow over you like soft waves? We would love to hear how this love and acceptance of yourself work for you and how you use it in your life?

Cat, you told us that you also know the road of struggling against the loud voice of guilt. That it always wants to come back with the unfair question: "Why did you return (to the place of the abuse)? You also know the road of putting the voice of guilt in a place that worked for

you. Would you tell us about your – can we call it your special – “recipe”? Do you regard it as something private?

You told us that anorexia wanted you to entertain ideas that men should be seduced and belittled in order to pay for the humiliation you experienced. You mentioned that anorexia kept quiet about the harm that it would bring to your own body. Did anorexia try to turn you against your own body eventually?

You stated that self acceptance was your key to stop thoughts of sexual molestation to dominate your life, to creep up uninvited claiming to be a third party in your adult sexual life. You agreed that sexual molestation could leave one cold towards sex, but that you chose for it not to be like that. Would you describe this as a victory? If you do, how do you manage to do so? It seems that sexual molestation tends not to be unfair only when it happened but also when it creeps up uninvited claiming to be a third party in your adult sexual life?

Cat, you consider your role as mother as very important. You told us that you deny distance a space between you and your daughters. You teach them that men are rubbish in order to protect them. We would love to hear more about disciplining distance and how it works for you and your daughters? Does it work for your daughters to view men as rubbish?

You describe your victories as “experiencing the clouds moving away before the sun”, the bright moments of finding something new that works for you. Are there other areas in your life that you still want to fit into this experience?

Christa, you said that one needs to like oneself like a lion and Cat does that. You wanted to identify with three animals. The first and eagle wanting to be strong and free with nothing to hold you back, but also like a tortoise, steadfast doing things securely at its own pace. You want

to be like an elephant too, you want to be strong when facing peril and want people to look up to you with respect. Christa, you concluded that you also want to be like a rose without thorns, soft and beautiful.

You told us how sexual molestation touched you but also about your victory over the effects of sexual violence. Guilt tortured you for the biggest part of your life as a child. Guilt used the hiding you got from your mother after the sexual molestation (because your mother were worried when she couldn't find you and didn't know that you went to the park) as the right to exist and thrive in your life. Your sister's words, "Mother will never forgive you" were twisted to strengthen guilt and shame. It used misunderstanding between you and your mother to create further confusion.

Later you understood that the hiding you got was because your mother wanted to punish you because she was worried about you. Your sister's words were a reflection on your mother's concern about your safety. You managed to push away guilt when you were able to see through this conspiracy. Yet another attempt was launched to declare you guilty. This time when a male Christian counsellor wanted you to "confess your sin of childhood sexual molestation".

Did it take a lot of courage to walk up to him to tell him that you would not accept his conspiracy with guilt to blame you? Do you think that you have shown guilt a thing or two when you were not intimidated by a person in a powerful position and used your voice instead to resist and correct him? Do you think that other women did also benefit from this action of yours? Thinking back, what aspect of yourself did you hold onto when you resisted guilt, especially when one takes into account that guilt had a lot of power for such a long time?

Christa you said that you needed to resolve your own hurt to be able to help others. Would you call this wisdom, self-knowledge or something

else? I wondered where you got it from and if it had always been there?
Could it be something that enables you to move forward?

You told us that “too much food” wants to govern your life at this stage. It convinces you that it can protect you from being a sex symbol by being overweight. Does “too much food” claim to be your protector against hurt too? Do you think this is a false promise or do you think it holds some truth?

It was inspiring to hear that your relationship with someone special leads you to believe that you are beautiful and more than a sex symbol. Although mistrust was a force to reckon with, you counteracted the effects of mistrust. Where and how do you carry this knowledge of you being beautiful? Could it be like something you carry inside you, glowing from the knowledge that you are special and beautiful? Do you think it is visible to other people?

When reviewing our first conversations, I was deeply touched by three things:

1. The multitude of wisdom and knowledge living and developing in each one of you.
2. The arrogance of childhood sexual molestation wanting to dish up lies as truth in many possible ways.
3. Your stories of challenging these uncontested truths.

Would it be in order if we speak more about the resistance of hindering accepted truths at our next meeting?

Our next meeting will be at Christa’s house. I am looking forward to see you soon.

Kind regards
Rianda.

Bubbles and Cat gave written feedback on their letters while the others gave verbal feedback at the next group meetings. The feedback would be included under the heading *recurrent themes interwoven with the women's alternative stories*. This letter is an example of the six letters I wrote, one after each session. However, only snippets of the other letters will be included and woven into the discussions.

1.7.2 MY REFLECTIONS ON THE FIRST GROUP MEETING

I was overwhelmed by the openness and honesty of the women at our first group meeting.

Following the narrative approach, I believe that women have the ability to heal themselves through the telling and re-telling of their stories (White 1990:13). Narrative therapy helps with the re-authoring of these stories by uncovering neglected strengths, actions and thoughts that are oppressed by the dominant story (Kecskemeti 1997:3). Dominant stories are those stories saturated with guilt, shame and helplessness. I saw it as my role to inquire about the women's healing journey. What worked for them? How did it work and for whom did it work? How did they manage to take agency of their lives? These landscape of action and landscape of identity questions were used to focus on alternative stories that would contribute to healing and creating their preferred realities.

Some of the alternative stories told and supported during the first session, were about Cat's self acceptance and the role it played in her life as well as the stand that Christa took against power, religion and patriarchy when she confronted the prominent male Christian counsellor.

I used externalising conversations both in the group meeting and narrative letters. According to Madigan (1997:54-55) externalising conversations are becoming "linguistically radicalised within the discourses of the community". The purpose of externalising conversations is to create space to challenge dominant narratives that intensify the effects of childhood sexual abuse. Guilt was often referred to as a character with power. The externalisation and personification of guilt opened space to

challenge beliefs that supported guilt but also to resist guilt in a process of “knowing one’s enemy”, as a way of disempowering guilt.

I experienced elements of secondary traumatisation (White 1995:85) listening to the effects of the dominant stories of sexual abuse. I was terrified that the women would experience the same emotional impact as a result of the information they shared. I was aware of the unfairness of the effects of childhood sexual abuse co-constructed by dominant restraining beliefs. The intertwining of unfairness, emotional pain, restraining conceptions and strength of these women touched me deeply.

I discussed my fear of traumatisation with my supervisor. We devised ways of assuring that participants were safe and ways in which I could view and address my own distress. I realised that the amount and nature of the narratives were more than I was used to handle. Watching the video, writing down everything that was said and compiling the narrative letters afterwards brought perspective. I agree with Epston (1994:38) who said reviewing the interview and writing narrative letters on what happened will help to bring perspective. I realised that the dominant story took up space in the conversation and that it would help me should I acknowledge the effects of the problem saturated story on the participants’ lives (Dixon 2000:125&130).

I made a point to inquire about the group members’ experiences after the first meeting. I thought of Jauregui’s (1993:45) description of therapy as a hammer that treated everything as a nail. I didn’t want anyone to experience further trauma due to the re-telling of the dominant stories. I felt responsible for inviting them into a setting where they could converse about previous trauma and the effects on their lives. If these discussions resulted in secondary trauma, it might be viewed as yet another power game because they trusted me. They could experience being betrayed once again.

However, in their feedback the women did not report re-traumatisation and experienced our conversations as positive and helpful. In retrospect I wonder why I was afraid to tell them about my fear of re-traumatisation? Perhaps I was caught up in my own understanding of how a therapist should always be capable of dealing with everything. Without realising, they taught me that they truly accepted me as a member worthy of their support.

THEMES DISCUSSED DURING THE FOLLOWING GROUP MEETING

1.7.3 SETTING THE AGENDA

The second meeting at Christa's place was characterised by much laughter, celebration, caring and moving towards expressing the self one would prefer to be. We were treated with delicatessen and the aroma of filtered coffee filled the air. Cat was not able to attend the meeting, as she was ill. Later we discovered that she had typhus fever.

Tinkles remarked that Bubbles inspired her to re-think her understanding of sex and lovemaking. She described herself as "totally changed" in this regard. These changes affected and enriched both her and her husband's lives. This brought mutual joy to the group and inspired all of us.

In a very informal atmosphere we conversed about aspects that touched women's lives after childhood sexual abuse. The themes we identified during the second session were recurrent issues that consistently re-surfaced in our next four conversations. I include here excerpts of the conversations, questions we struggled with as well as vignettes from the letters that followed the conversations.

The recurrent themes centred on the local knowledge and struggles of the women. The themes were divided and the first four themes are discussed in Chapter 3 and the following four themes in Chapter 4. The themes addressed in Chapter 3 are: Sex and lovemaking; Where do men stand on the issue of abuse; Women-women relationships and Re-victimisation. Childhood sexual abuse and substance abuse; Religion/spirituality in the lives of women; Men's understanding of childhood sexual abuse and Informing our children about sexual abuse, will be discussed in Chapter 4.

1.7.3.1 SEX AND LOVEMAKING

Social constructionist feminists hold the belief that sexuality is socially constructed and argue that power "does not simply prohibit certain sexual activities and shape social representations of sexuality. More than this power is implicated in the 'doing'

of sex, such that both heterosex and sex between two people of the same gender is constructed of eroticized power differences” (Kitzinger 1994:194).

The group debated a possible distinction between sex and lovemaking. Their struggle to draw a distinction and a clear boundary related directly to the experience of childhood sexual abuse. Some of the participants struggled to distance themselves from the traumatic experience during lovemaking between two adults within a secure relationship. The group grappled with issues such as a woman’s body, the pleasure of experiencing lovemaking and permission for lovemaking. These issues were questioned and doubted by the childhood experience.

Twinkles decided to work towards transforming her thinking about sexual intimacy with her husband. We have witnessed through the other members’ experiences and testimonies that this was possible. Twinkles chose to gradually separate her adult lovemaking from the violation of childhood sexual abuse. Bubbles and Christa were delighted about this development because they had to travel along the same road. However, they needed to hear Twinkles’ definite confirmation that it was what she wanted for herself; how she benefited from the decision and the steps she took. They wanted her to feel safe and free enough to explore and enjoy lovemaking. This stood in direct opposition to her understanding of sex, where she experienced herself as an object to be “used for someone else’s pleasure”.

Freedom experienced confusion between sex and lovemaking because both symbolised emotional pain to her. She was reluctant to discuss this issue. The other women respected her silence but wondered if she would meet a soul mate someday, that this perspective might change?

Bubbles had no problem discussing lovemaking. I thought she was stretching our understanding of the subject in a way that was accepted by all.

The group discussed sex and lovemaking and became open to share their own understandings. They thought that having been sexually abused had an over-emphasised voice in the constructions of their own sexuality.

I included questions regarding this topic in the second, fourth and sixth of my reflective letters to the group. They were:

- How do you distinguish between love and sex, Bubbles?
- When was the first time that you have noticed there was a difference between lovemaking and sex for you?
- Who taught you to embrace lovemaking? Was it your choice? How did it work for you?
- Freedom, what happened to you when the other women thought that a soulmate might alter your views of lovemaking and sex containing only emotional pain?
- Cat, Twinkles, Christa and Bubbles, would you care to share how your own views and experiences changed over time?

Bubbles thought that lovemaking should be something spontaneous and that it was all about two people communicating love in meaningful ways by touching, caressing and caring for each other. Bubbles told us that her way of distinguishing between love and sex was to look at attitudes during foreplay. If foreplay contained communicating love in different ways, it would be lovemaking to her. She said, "I won't settle for sex" and "communication about sex is crucial in my marriage. You must really try it, I can recommend it."

Communication about the subject invited Twinkles to embrace her own sexuality. Cat and Christa mentioned that freeing oneself from guilt and shame was part of the journey to invite freedom into their sexual lives. Cat told us that she chose to invite elements of fun into her intimate life.

1.7.3.2 WHERE DO MEN STAND ON THE ISSUE OF ABUSE?

The next theme was where men stood on the issue of abuse. This question portrayed the distrust, anger and pain the women experienced as children who were sexually abused. The question ties in with the issue raised by feminists regarding incest, three of the participants were sexually abused by family members. Bell (1993:3) argues that incest and sexual abuse need to be understood within a society where men exercise power over women in a sexualised way. She says: "Given the power dynamics of male dominant society and the understanding of sexuality which we live

out, incestuous abuse is in a sense unsurprising. Incest reveals the gender power dynamics of the society in which we exist” (Bell 1993:3). Feminists regard incest as a political matter within the institution of the family based on gender dominance (Gelinas 1988:25). French (1994:33) thinks that the only way for men not to stand on the side of abuse, is to admit that they are not in control of everything and that they do not need to be in control and to dominate other human beings.

Poling (1991:91) states that the “abuse of power is made possible by institutions and ideologies that distort human experience according to some structure of dominance. Those who are privileged have the social sanction and the resources to abuse and deprive others.” Poling (1991:31) describes social injustice and the abuse of power as evil on account that it destroys individuals as well as the web of relationships on which all life depends.

The research group spoke about equality as the counteract for power and dominance. During our fourth meeting I introduced the equality circle (Dixon 2000) (appendix one). The equality circle highlights eight areas of equality that need to be in tact to be non-violent:

- Non-threatening behaviour that supposes acting and talking in ways that a woman can feel safe and comfortable to express herself.
- Respect, implying listening, non-judgementally, being emotionally affirming and understanding, plus valuing opinions.
- Trust and support that include supporting her goals for life, respecting her right to her own feelings, friends, activities and opinions.
- Honesty and accountability, accepting responsibility for oneself, acknowledging past use of violence, admitting being wrong, communicating openly and truthfully.
- Responsible parenting by sharing of responsibilities, being a positive, non-violent role model for children.
- Shared responsibility that leads to agreeing on a fair distribution of work and making family decisions together.
- Economic partnership that enables a couple to make decisions on money issues together by making sure both partners benefit from financial arrangements.

- Negotiation and fairness seeking mutually satisfying resolutions to conflict, accepting change and being willing to compromise.

Twinkles experiences equality in the sharing of parental responsibilities and in the fair distribution of home chores. She values negotiating and fairness and non-threatening behaviour when her husband is angry. She expects respect for her opinions, trust and support. Her understanding of her husband's behaviour when angry is that he was thoroughly coached by the patriarchal culture to treat women in a dominant, oppressive way. Twinkles concluded "that was the way his father was brought up and the way he was lead to believe is the only right way". We wondered if he would be able to move towards alternatives? We were thinking of what Twinkles had told us in our second meeting – how her husband sometimes acknowledged her need for time to rest. He would volunteer to look after the children some afternoons. As she indicated, there was some equality in their relationship at times. However, she added: "I must always fight for my rights." We discussed alternatives that might be helpful; to open up a conversation on equality that would give her husband an opportunity to voice his views. Twinkles decided to handle the situation by moving slowly towards resisting inequalities herself. She saw this as part of her autonomy and strength. I was to trust her autonomy and abilities. I respected her courage and we agreed to keep the door open for when she needed to discuss alternatives

Other questions posed in the narrative letters were:

- How did it happen that the stories of care, sensitivity and gentleness of men are overshadowed by the stories of abuse by men sometimes?
- Does this perception of caring men stand on your side or not?
- I wondered if you viewed this perception of men as sensitive, gentle and caring as unusual?

The privileged position of men constructed through culture and approved by Christian religion, interpretation and practice, could open the opportunity for men to become abusive. Though women experienced men to be patriarchal, conforming to prescribed dominant male roles in culture, they knew some men to be just and sensitive to woman's experiences.

They spoke out on the ambivalence they experienced towards men at some times. During the fifth session, the participants discussed the relationships that some of them experienced with their fathers. Cat, Bubbles and Twinkles enjoyed special relations with their fathers that were enriching their lives and perceptions of men. Freedom does not have a spontaneous relationship with her father. However, she knows that he care for her through small things he does for her or the jokes they sometimes share. Christa had ambivalence about a relationship with a special male friend. She said that she wanted to hold on to the relationship even though it “might not work out”. She considered the values he taught her to recognise in herself and to take a stand against abuses as meaningful. In Chapter 4 I will reflect on Christa’s alternative story.

The women were constantly moving between the possibility to trust men and to be suspicious of men’s acceptance of violence or insensitive behaviour that would open possibility for abuse. The perpetrators who abused the women in the group were all in positions and roles of trustworthiness and power.

It took some discussion and good debating within the group for the women to acknowledge their experiences that not all men stood on the side of abuse. Examples of caring and loving partners or family members surfaced as “living proof” that some men were on the side of non-violation of people. They settled with the understanding that they would always be careful around men but that they wanted to judge situations individually. They reflected that their perceptions of “men on the side of abuse” had changed over time. It seemed that distrust were much stronger in the past than at present.

Bubbles thought that experiences of childhood sexual abuse might blind some women to notice the good that some men do.

The questions kept rolling in the more we spoke; the more we had to make meaning and challenge our own ideas. We realised that there were multitudes of questions with countless possible answers and that there were no right answers. Only some answers that made some sense to some individuals.

Bubbles expressed her hope that men’s groups would develop where men could re-examine their lives. She wanted them to become aware of the inequalities that kept

patriarchy in power. I am aware of different Christian congregations in Witbank that link up to host camps for men where men are invited to become more aware of their unearned advantages that might lead to practices of dominance. Invitations to these camps are published in the local paper.

1.7.3.3 WOMAN-WOMAN RELATIONSHIPS

Another theme that entered the discussion had to do with woman-woman relationships or lesbian relationships. The question that came up during some of the discussions was, does a female partner sound more acceptable than a male partner after childhood sexual abuse?

During the discussion it became clear that the women saw this as an option. Some considered this as a solution because this option seemed to stand less on the side of abuse. Freedom and Bubbles had explored this option before. Because of their experience of sexual violation by men they initially opted to relate to women and not to men. In the end they decided to keep options open for male partners. I wondered about the role homophobia played.

I asked them whether patriarchy had a “stronghold” on them. Stuart (1996:118) states that Christian theology:

has articulated and sanctified heterosexism as it has patriarchy. The very existence of women who have intimate sexual relations with women shakes the foundation upon which patriarchy is built. Lesbians are living proof that heterosexuality is not as ‘natural’ or universal as its proponents claim ... sex is not primarily about reproduction but about passion, delight, mutuality and justice.

(Stuart 1996:118)

Freedom and Bubbles both commented that religion and their understanding of their own life stories and perception of God’s story for their lives, influenced them to choose against a lesbian life style. They believed that the Bible refuted a lesbian live style. Bubbles felt sure that the Lord Jesus didn’t want her to be a lesbian. Freedom knew expressed that she experienced guilt feelings after she was involved in a lesbian relationship.

Bunch (in Isherwood & McEwan 1993:118) argues that the term "lesbian" should be used in a broader sense of "any woman who centres herself, her energies and her political, social and economic concerns around women". Heyward (cited by Isherwood & McEwan 1993:118-119) states that patriarchy is threatened by lesbianism and therefore feared by a male dominant society. The patriarchal norms being threatened are "the nuclear family, the economic order, the gender of God, gender appropriate roles in work and at home, the norm of procreation, the sanctity of marriage and the acceptance of dominant-submissive relationships that are prevalent in all aspects of society".

Regarding sisterhood or the special bonds amongst women, there were common agreements amongst the members that women are able to understand each other better than men are able to do. This contributed to the care and understanding that developed amongst the participants. This understanding was amplified by shared experiences of childhood sexual abuse. These factors enhanced the group cohesion. We wanted to acknowledge women's unique meaning attributed to what happened to them as well as the rich diversity it brought to the local helpful knowledge that they spoke into existence.

I wondered whether the participants were positive about the group consisting only of female survivors of sexual abuse. They affirmed this. However, they acknowledged the needs of men who had been sexually abused but were not sure if they would have been comfortable with males in the group. Twinkles and Freedom were sure that the group should remain female, for females. Cat, Bubbles and Christa were more open to discuss possibilities of male influence in our groups. Twinkles expressed her longing for the availability of growth orientated groups for men.

In the group we were free to share and show our caring for each other as women. This was something that enhanced the quality of our group conversations. Transparency about our feelings and yet being challenged by opposing views, built a sense of trust and security

1.7.3.4 RE-VICTIMISATION

Re-victimisation in this context refers to women not being able to challenge abusive relationships. Trauma is repeated when they experience physical or verbal violence, believing that they deserve it (Sanderson 1995:62; Cameron 2000:141). Salter (1995: 234) poses another possible view. She argues that re-victimisations are sometimes not re-enactments of trauma but methods of distraction to help the survivor cope. She writes, “a current crisis may occupy the mind and heart so completely that it anchors the survivor in the present, and thus preventing drifting in the past”(Salter1995: 235).

We discussed the possibility of re-victimisation as a side effect of childhood sexual abuse. What would the possibility be of re-victimisation after sexual abuse? The participants acknowledged that the effects of hurtful and unfair words could construct a helpless and sad individual. They knew that they did not deserve and should not accept any abuse coming from anybody, but this was easier said than done. Hurtful and unfair words and behaviour might even be more powerful after experiencing childhood sexual abuse. Accepted truth claims about women who had experienced sexual abuse, corrupted the ways in which women think about themselves. It seemed that ideas that women were guilty, dirty and bad after they had been sexually violated, teamed up with hurtful and unfair words and behaviour to cause emotional pain and construct powerless identities.

We humoured, bitterly, about the fact that there were a lot more words describing “bad women” than “bad men”. Isherwood and McEwan (1993:94) quoted Hartland stating that Standard English has over 200 words to describe promiscuous women and only 20 words to describe promiscuous men. When we take into account that through language we are spoken into existence, we can spot our predisposition easily – it is much more likely for a woman to be called promiscuous or sexually bad than for a man. This is but one indication of how discourses have the power to turn women against themselves to accept re-victimisation in a physical or verbal form.

The following questions were asked in the reflective letters:

- Cat, Christa, Twinkles and Bubbles, I wondered how you saw your resistance to re-victimisation? Would you describe it as winning in a tender but strong way? How would you like to view your actions against re-victimisation?
- It sounds very strong to me, would you want to describe it in different words?
- How long have you known this wisdom to stand against re-victimisation?
- Does it work every time? Or do you need new wisdom every time?
- What does one need to escape re-victimisation ?
- Can women use this wisdom to prevent their live stories from being written by other people or situations outside their control?
- Perhaps you have different ideas or plans to share with us?

Bubbles, Christa, Cat and Twinkles taught us strategies on shutting out hurtful and unfair words as a way of resisting re-victimisation. They reminded us that the shutting out of hurtful and unfair words an actions were not an easy task. The decision not to take these words to heart and prevent them from teaming up with discourses arguing that “women are bad”, requires a lot of self-acceptance. Cat described it as “practicing self-acceptance in every situation and resisting beliefs that made me experience inferiority, helped me to shut out hurtful words or actions. I don’t take them to heart because they are someone else’s views that I do not agree with”. Her advice was to resist re-victimisation by embracing self-acceptance. Bubbles resisted re-victimisation by keeping quiet with a purpose. She experienced that to be a powerful way of getting her message across that she experienced the situation or words as unfair or abusive. That worked for her in her close relationships because her ability to speak her mind was wellknown to people close to her.

Christa’s decision to confront the Christian counsellor was resisting re-victimisation in action. Twinkles told us that she developed a fighting spirit to protect herself after she had been sexually abused. She thought that it might have played a role, strengthening her not to permit guilt in her live. She reported that a strong will not to be dominated developed as she was violated. She was able to take a stand against fear and wouldn’t allow it to infiltrate her life even if she experienced re-victimisation. Her whole being opposed subjugation.

In the reflective letter I wrote: “The endurance of emotional pain in relationships with men are perhaps on different levels, but very well known to all of you. Do I understand correctly, or do you want to attribute a different meaning? What intrigued me was your motion of standing up after pain. Could this be something we need to discuss, celebrate and explain to each other or rather keep it private?”

Narrative therapists developed the practice of “consulting your consultants” (White & Epsen 1992). This became part of the group’s practice as we reached out to other women survivors. The group discussions gathered momentum and towards the end of the research project, I asked the participants whether they would act as consultants for other survivors of childhood sexual abuse. Everyone wanted to contribute. I got the impression that they felt privileged to contribute to other people’s lives with their own local knowledge. To me this was participatory and lived religion.

During the “support” group meetings with other women survivors of sexual abuse, the research participants wanted to share their knowledge and strengths towards new understandings of healing. The participants’ motion of standing up after pain will be reflected on in more detail in their alternative stories in Chapter 4.

The next chapter will discuss the recurrent themes throughout the six sessions. That will be followed by a focus on the participants alternative stories as well as reflections on the six group sessions. The beginning of yet another story will conclude the next chapter.

CHAPTER FOUR: CONVERSATIONS ON RECURRENT THEMES - REFLECTIONS ON GROUP MEETINGS - ALTERNATIVE STORIES AND YET ANOTHER STORY

1.1 INTRODUCTION

In this chapter I will continue with the recurrent themes that were raised in the group conversations. I will note the knowledges of the participants on each particular theme. These knowledges are the combined knowledges we used on our journey as threads to weave together a story of healing. I will use the participants' voices to reflect on their alternative stories or stories contributing to healing. I will also offer my own reflection on each session. This chapter concludes with the beginning of a new story – a new challenge.

1.2 CHILDHOOD SEXUAL ABUSE AND SUBSTANCE ABUSE

In one of our conversations the possible correlation between childhood sexual abuse and substance abuse in later years was raised as a theme for discussion. Bubbles and Freedom thought that alcohol and drugs might be an escape from the “battlefield of thoughts where shame guilt and helplessness were contesting to rule”. Bubbles was quite sure that substance abuse would become yet another oppressor and dictator should one grant it the opportunity. Cat, Christa and Twinkles thought that substance abuse would only bring temporary relief and that one might pay very dearly in the long run.

Our thoughts on the possible correlation between childhood sexual abuse and substance abuse in later years correspond with Trotter Hunter's (1995:98-135) ideas on the subject. She states: “Whereas some addicts use chemicals to get high, the victims of early childhood abuse use them to get by.” Salter (1995:241) agrees with this perception, arguing that although nothing good can be said about substance addiction, few patients turn down painkillers after surgery. If one were forced to

choose between several days of physical pain after surgery or possibly decades of psychological pain after sexual abuse, few would argue that surgery is more traumatic. In this sense the adult survivor of childhood sexual abuse is doing nothing different from the patient who had surgery, taking chemical relief.

We shared in the group our understandings of substance abuse after childhood sexual abuse. Cat, Christa and Twinkles enjoyed alcohol socially. Bubbles didn't like alcohol because she had too many negative experiences of people close to her drinking too much. Freedom experienced that substance abuse could bring temporary relief – and more shame and guilt afterwards. Freedom's views were closely linked to the bigger story of God for her life. This bigger story, corresponding with her own story of accepting and caring for herself in a better way, helped her to take a stand against the short-term relief alcohol would be able to provide. It has been a story of struggle but also of claiming evidence of victory. Freedom acknowledged that it became easier to recognise victories in her own life. Her religious talk became a way of addressing injustices, a way of doing hope with other people (Weingarten 2000:389-402).

1.3 RELIGION AND SPIRITUALITY IN THE LIVES OF THE WOMEN IN THE GROUP

Religion as an integral part of the participants' lives, featured constantly in the group conversations. The group discussed their personal relationships with Jesus Christ and how this relation encouraged them in times of emotional pain. However, they experienced the opposite from the church. This led to a discussion on the role the church could play after childhood sexual abuse. We used "church" as an umbrella-term to refer to the roles of pastors, the clergy and the congregation towards women who were affected by sexual issues. I was particularly intrigued by the way the women described the unacceptable attitude of the church in the healing process after childhood sexual abuse.

The church might find the local knowledges of these women helpful to become more relevant by acknowledging experiences of Christian women at grassroots level.

Poling (1996:133) argues that we need to develop critical tools for exposing religious doctrines that mask religious evil

We must challenge the church's theology when so-called pro-family attitudes and politics increase violence towards women and children. We must engage the whole church in a critical discussion of how our theology puts children, women, and lesbian and gay men in jeopardy of rape and violence.

(Poling 1996:133)

Poling (1996:128-129) quotes a definition of patriarchy by Rich that indicates how difficult it is to take a stand against oppression through the so-called pro-family attitude of patriarchy. Rich's definition reflects on patriarchy as power of the fathers situated in familial-social, ideological and political systems. This power permeates everything through force, pressure, rituals, traditions or law.

Whatever my status or situation, my derived economic class, or my sexual preference, I live under the power of the fathers, and I have access only to so much of privilege or influence as the patriarchy is willing to accede to me, and only for so long as I will pay the price for male approval.

(Rich quoted by Poling 1996:128-129)

The group decided to share something of the richness of their own experiences by bearing witness to stories that could contribute to healing and quality in their lives.

The group felt that the metaphor of an oasis in a desert resonated with their personal relationship and experience of the love of Jesus Christ in relation to the effects of childhood sexual abuse. The participants said they found it helpful to talk to Jesus Christ about their emotional pain and found that His understanding made the pain more bearable. They regarded their relationships with God comforting and reassuring.

Bubbles believes Jesus Christ to be the rock of her existence. She views Him as the source of her strength and courage. She says that she lives by the steadfast hope that He will make all things beautiful in His time. She experiences Jesus Christ as standing against pain by showing her what to do and by giving her strength to cope in difficult circumstances. Her surviving through troubled times bears evidence of this hope. Bubbles is convinced that the living Word in her heart enables her to stay

positive and to manage in difficult situations. She is adamant that her being positive in difficult circumstances changes both her and the situation in ways that work for her. She longs for a time when her church would be able to advocate healing for women.

In our group discussion Bubbles suggested that cell-groups in a congregation might be more accommodating to women who experienced sexual abuse. Her expectation would be that cell-groups would act as one body, healing, helping and supporting each other like we do in our group.

The focus of our group was not to accept violations but to stand up and take responsibility for healing in a group setting. In this respect we were following Brown's remark (quoted by Poling 1996:147) "that we must replace the emphasis on righteous suffering with a commitment to truth and justice". Brown argues that it was not the suffering of Jesus that was redemptive but rather that torture and crucifixion could not shake his commitment to truth and justice (Poling 1996:147).

When we discussed the role of the church, we became aware that churches hardly ever were equipped to deal with healing after sexual molestation. All the women except Freedom believed that the church was a total inappropriate place for healing after childhood sexual abuse.

Christa had a first hand experience of being blamed for the sexual abuse by a prominent Christian councillor. As she told her story, the rest of the group identified with her experiences of rejection, belittlement and victimisation by the church. Christa agreed that it took a lot of courage to confront the male Christian counsellor who had a prominent position in a charismatic church. We thought she did something remarkable on behalf of all women who experienced sexual abuse when she confronted the counsellor who expected of her to repent for her sins after being sexually molested. However, this incident estranged her from the church. She found it difficult to attend church services after the experience but felt a personal closeness towards the caring love of the Lord Jesus whom she experienced to be her aid in need. Her experience resonates with what Elliot Griffith (1995:123-137) describes as "conversations with a personal God".

Twinkles remarked that it was “unthinkable that the church could be able to fulfil the role as resource for healing after sexual abuse”, even in cell-groups. She thought it was “just too far-fetched even to hope for”. She came to appreciate and accept the care giving of individual Christians she came to know and trust.

Cat thought that the church should change their attitudes to become more open and accessible for people who have been sexually violated. She agreed with Twinkles that the church was not approachable on the account of sexual violence. Her personal relationship with Jesus Christ provided her the care and comfort she needed.

Freedom was quiet during the discussion. I obtained her permission to write down her experience of this issue as it differed from the others but she didn't voice her opinion during the group conversations. She experienced care and support from a young minister and his wife in times of deep emotional distress after childhood sexual abuse. This experience might fit with the group's understanding that not the church but individual Christians were able to stand on the side of healing as they believed Christ would have done.

In the group's view, the church – as both being part of and supporting a patriarchal system – disqualified itself as a meaningful role player in healing after sexual violence. According to the women in the group the church was not prepared to speak about sex in any other context than as “taboo subject”, as sinful or from a patriarchal perspective. In line with Brown's (quoted by Rosetti 1990:90) comment that survivors of childhood sexual abuse tend to move away from the church, the women in the group “gave up on the church as an institution to facilitate healing after sexual abuse”.

The group's experience of the church as institution was in direct opposition to what they understood Jesus Christ would want from the church. They thought that the Lord would rather have taken the side of women who were sexually abused than the side of oppressive patriarchy. They found solace in Poling's (1991:33) remark that one of the challenges for modern theology was “clearing away the distortions that would make Jesus into one who sanctions abuse of power”.

Since biblical times religious communities have overlooked the effects of sexual violations on women – the rape of Tamar (II Samuel 13) serving as an example (Poling 1991:156-158). Against this background Cochrane, De Gruchy and Petersen (1991:81-83) propose the re-definition of spirituality in practical theology as a “spirituality of empowerment and hope” that becomes personal towards “a genuine contribution from within the faith towards the healing of human brokenness in all its forms, personal and public”. Feminist theologians would agree to this view and would address this issue by exposing the bias of Christian history, patriarchy and misogyny to reclaim women’s stories (Isherwood & McEwan 1993:88).

In our group conversations we tried to reclaim our stories of a personal relationship with God, albeit outside the institutionalised church.

However, after these discussions the group felt that their understanding could be a valuable contribution and a challenge to the church to review its position on sexual abuse. The women in the group were thinking in terms of a “remedy”.

The damage has been done to us in history but the reign of healing is within the self. The remedy is not to turn back but to become in a healing environment, the self, and to become the healing environment.

(Daly 1987:338)

In an attempt to stimulate the group towards “becoming the healing environment” I posed some questions in a narrative letter to them. My aim was to reflect on our conversations and to invite practical suggestions that could be helpful to “re-define spirituality” as a “spirituality of empowerment and hope”. Moreover, I hoped that this letter could serve in some way as a challenge to the church to make “a genuine contribution from within the faith towards the healing of human brokenness in all its forms, personal and public” (Cochrane, De Gruchy & Petersen 1991:81-83).

The questions were:

- Would you care to write a letter to your local church and focus their attention on the role you think patriarchy has played in relation to healing considering the way

Jesus intended it to be and the way it was experienced by survivors of childhood sexual abuse?

- Do you think the support you experience from each other might be an example to the church towards the development of caring for survivors of sexual violence? Do you think you could relay these experiences to your local church?
- I was wondering how we could invite the responsibility of the church to acknowledge power inequalities as one of the aspects contributing to sexual abuse?
- Do you think that breaking the silence about childhood sexual abuse in the church might reduce the risk for childhood sexual abuse?

The participants were not interested to take part in “transforming” the church. Instead, they opted for taking care of those who suffered on account of sexual abuse. The group members offered a list of questions they found helpful to open conversations on guilt and forgiveness:

- Where was GOD when I suffered?
- Why didn't God protect me?
- What is my story within the bigger story of God for my life?
- How does God see women?
- What is God's position on male dominance and the abuse of power?
- Does God stand on the side of the oppressed?

However, in a different and unexpected way these questions and those posed in the narrative letter were turned into action. It might be referred to as living spirituality and religion outside the church or living religion through taking responsibility.

1.4 GENDERED UNDERSTANDING OF CHILDHOOD SEXUAL ABUSE

The women were wondering whether their partners and men in general could be able to understand what childhood sexual abuse does to a woman? They speculated that men who have experienced sexual abuse themselves and men whose daughters were violated might have a better comprehension of the effects of sexual abuse on women. They thought when the experience of the trauma was too far removed from a person,

that it was difficult to comprehend the effects of the trauma. Sometimes cultural discourses might force men not to acknowledge painful aspects to protect what they believe to be male conduct.

The further exploration of this knowledge brought forth the following questions in the reflective narrative letter:

- Can women break the silence on childhood sexual abuse without becoming more vulnerable at the hand of men after breaking the silence?
- How can one achieve safety from humiliation of men after breaking the silence?
- Do you think it will invite more people to take a stand against abuse if women could share their pain after childhood sexual abuse?

Christa told us that her significant other was furious and wanted to take revenge after he heard that she was sexually abused as a child. Although she experienced validation of her pain by this proposed action, she didn't think that revenge would ease her pain. This proposed action also caused a deviation from the road of co-experiencing pain.

Twinkles felt that her husband's knowledge that she had been sexually abused as a child did not stand on her side. He was not able to acknowledge her pain but found refuge in blaming. This caused her to experience vulnerability and revictimisation after the disclosure to her husband. It seemed to her that gender inequalities won again when he blamed her for being untrustworthy. Twinkles knew that these accusations were totally unfair. She believed that her husband was unable to face the pain that she endured. She expressed her hope that support groups for men would be developed where they could get into conversations that might help them to realise that there were different options to the ones they were taught by their fathers – that men should not show emotion and that they should always be right and in control.

Cat and Bubbles experienced relief and a sense of protection from their husbands' reaction after they broke the silence and told them individually about the abuse. The silence was broken early in their relationships and they thought that it contributed to emotional closeness in their marriages. They found it encouraging knowing their husbands stood on their side against abuse.

As a group we were upset realising the power patriarchy had to prevent some men to validate and affirm the effects that women suffer after sexual abuse. We felt patriarchy was preventing men to accompany their partners on their healing journeys because of the emotional cost involved in such a journey. We feared that these uneasy silences might allow perpetrators to continue their criminal behaviour without taking responsibility for their crimes. Moreover, we became aware of “dominant constructions of masculinity” (Pease 1997:74) that would restrict men “from looking at our (their) own behaviours and how (they) relate ... to the women in (their) lives”. These “dominant constructions of masculinity” could prevent men to take co-responsibility for the emotional pain women suffered after sexual violence and oppression in general.

Because some men view women as less important, they do not question their own behaviour and accept violence as appropriate and accepted male behaviour. We felt that patriarchy was subjugating women’s experiences at the cost of men’s way of being.

Pease (1997:1-14) makes a much needed contribution to masculinity and gender justice by telling his story of “becoming pro-feminist” and how it works in his own life. He highlights the role that men’s support groups can play in standing against gender injustice and patriarchy by “learning from the experiences of others, and thoroughly thinking through the consequences of our thoughts and actions while responding to each other and the world with open hearts” (Pease 1997:33). This study and Peace’s work have in common that both resist gender inequalities and want to expose dominant discourses about manhood that foster unethical behaviour. By exposing dominant discourse about manhood, men are invited to responsibility and to have choices regarding the consequences of dominance. It has been my experience that men suffer from the consequences of dominance and that they are eager to explore new ways of being (McLean 1996:11-28).

This conversations regarding our partners’ understanding of sexual abuse brought us to question our children’s understanding of sexual abuse. We chose to explore this important topic and to discuss possibilities of what worked for our families.

1.5 INFORMING CHILDREN ABOUT SEXUAL ABUSE

I asked to the group whether our children needed to know about sexual molestation and what we should tell them about the experiences of sexual violation that we had experienced. We were conscious of our own situation, realising that we were afraid to break the silence. We were contemplating the space that silence created for the flourishing of thin conclusions and damaging stories about our own lives and identities. How could we protect our children and teach them that the subtle enforcement of silence could turn them too into the prey of harmful deception?

Since we considered our relationships with our children, as precious, this issue was quite important to us and subsequently took up much time during our conversations. Freedom was the only one who did not have children. However, we valued her testimony of the special relationship she had with her mother. She told us how they grew closer by facing the consequences of her sexual molestation together.

I formulated a few questions after the conversation and posed these in a narrative letter to the group:

- Do you think it could be possible to teach your children to break the silence about sexual abuse when society does not provide structures or systems to support people who do break the silence?
- What do you think will happen to society and patriarchy's expectations when women could manage to teach their children to break the silence?
- What do you think could be done to protect children from taking guilt and shame upon themselves after sexual abuse?
- What do you think men's responsibility should be in regard to protecting children against sexual abuse?

Tinkles was reluctant to speak to her six-year-old daughter about sexual abuse, both in general and of her own sexual abuse. The notion that her daughter's innocence might be affected, bothered her. Her own experience of the negative consequences when she shared painful sexual violations with her husband, kept her ambivalent towards sharing this with her daughter.

The other women in the group thought that telling and speaking about sexual abuse to children was the right thing to do. They thought that children could be protected and that guilt and shame could be prevented if children were told that sexual crimes existed as other crimes did. By speaking to children about sexual abuse children would know that the topic was open for discussion and that they would be listened to whenever they wanted to talk. The women thought that shame and powerlessness would not be able to prosper if sexual abuse was declared and acted upon. The lies women believed about themselves would have had less impact if the silence could be broken and the situation could be put in the right perspective from the beginning. The group agreed that children should know that it was adults' responsibility to protect them from sexual harm. Children should feel confident that when they were sexually molested, they would not be seen as the "wrongdoers" but that a crime was committed against them.

Cat believed that her openness about sexual molestation joined up with her love and availability for her children. She thought that conversations about sexual violation and the sharing of her experience would stand on her side in protecting her children from violations similar to what she experienced. Cat declared that it was her goal to teach her children to be honest with themselves and to love and accept themselves as she did herself.

Freedom's mother disclosed to her that she was also sexually abused as a child. This helped Freedom to understand her mother's behaviour. Previously she interpreted her mother's behaviour as rejection. Freedom and her mother spoke regularly about the effects that sexual abuse wanted to have on her lives. They discovered alternative stories and choices that helped them both to experience a quality relationship with each other. Their choices have been for the safety of listening and caring with respect for individuality.

None of the participants' parents prepared them for sexuality or conversed with them on the subject. They experienced that as a shortcoming and wanted to rectify that in their own roles as parents. They wanted to grapple with issues of sexuality with their children. This they believed would open doors to helpful new meaning making. We

acknowledged how unfamiliar these ideas were to society and to ourselves. Our group meetings could be viewed as opportunities to try out new ways of being women and parents while living in the presence of God (Coram Deo) (Deist 1996).

The women in the group came to an understanding that their different life stages and uniqueness proposed different challenges on the theme of informing children about sexual abuse. We learned that our own perceptions about our own sexuality were imposed by dominant discourses. Some of these ideas were

- that we were described as objects,
- that sex was a language of love,
- that we were good when we sacrificed our own needs,
- that we were bad when we acknowledged our sexuality.

Sometimes we got lost between what we wanted to be and what was expected of us. This confusion contributed to our ambivalence about what we should tell our children. As Fine and Macpherson (1994:221) put it: “We found that women of all ages, according to this literature, are allegedly scripted to be ‘good women’, and that they have, in compliance, smothered their passions, appetites and outrage.”

Feminist theology encourages what Clague (1996:124) calls a “humanizing theology of sexuality” where women can explore possibilities of their unique experiences by moving beyond the boundaries set by a male dominated interpretations.

Mainstream definitions of sexuality traditionally demonstrate a preoccupation with genital activity. However, contemporary theologians tend to employ more comprehensive definitions, emphasising an all-embracing nature of sexuality valuing the bodiliness in contrast with the asceticism of the past (Webster 1996:214). The latter view contributes to greater moral agency and taking “responsibility through ethical decision-making” (Webster 1996:214) as well as “overcoming patriarchal social structures and building sexual justice” (Webster 1996:215).

I was left wondering how the women’s ideas about their own bodiliness, sexuality as well as sexual abuse would take different directions when mainstream definitions as

well as societal restrictions could be halted. I thought that might introduce a fresh interpretation by means of women's experience.

Pro-feminist James Nelson (quoted by Webster 1996:215) describes how a theology of sexuality has moved to become a sexual theology. A theology of sexuality can be defined as a tradition of thinking of what Scripture says about sexuality and how sexuality can be expressed. However, in sexual theology the emphasis shifts to how our experiences as sexual beings inform us how to read and interpret Scripture, tradition and attempts to live out the meaning of the gospel. Re-claiming your own sexuality sharing the experiences with others on the same journey while experimenting with different forms of prayer, rituals and holistic spirituality.

Murphy (1996:185) says that feminist theology does not fear lust in the same way that patriarchy does. Feminist theology encourages the joyful and mutual expression of lust through sexual relationships.

I will now proceed to reflect on the individual group meetings as the space where local knowledge were spoken into existence.

1.6 REFLECTIONS ON GROUP MEETINGS

I find it nessecary to reflect on each group session since each one had a character of its own that contributed to the healing journey. Reflections on the meetings will also clarify some of my intentions, perceptions and after thoughts that enhanced the narrative pastoral character of this journey.

1.6.1 BEGINNING OF A CELEBRATION: THE SECOND GROUP MEETING

A celebration atmosphere was borne in the second group meeting, an atmosphere that touched everyone to be totally free to explore options of agency. The atmosphere provided space to re-claim lost childhood experiences if it was needed. Freedom played a big role in inviting us all to be part of the fun. She hid some of the favourite treats that Christa made, pretending to keep it for herself. She filmed some close-up

shots of us on and we had fun watching these dreadful shots on video. Somehow these lighthearted and fulfilled moments remained part of our future group meetings.

In the second group meeting I made sure to stay in the “not knowing” position and not to introduce topics but rather to listen to what the participants brought into the conversation. When the nine conversation topics of our group meetings were put on paper, it sounded like theory, a new kind of theory rich in description and personal experience. Theory that resisted accepted truth claims that constructed people as docile bodies, as Foucault described it (White 1990:240). Gergen’s (1999:115) words described what happened in the group from a social construction view: “Through reflexive inquiry on our ways of constructing the world, and the practices which these sustain, we open doors to emancipation, enrichment, and cultural transformation.” This reflexive inquiry moved us “critically and collectively, from pain to passion to power, prying open the ideologies of individualism, privacy and loyalty which had sequestered our personal stories” (Fine & Macpherson 1994:243).

In retrospect I realised that my prior therapeutic relations with the participants influenced our group sessions in the following two ways. The participants did not experienced the need to discuss the dominant stories in full detail and in-depth group discussions were featuring from the beginning of our first meeting because of the existing relations and trust.

1.6.2 REFLECTIONS ON MUTUAL CARE: THE THIRD GROUP MEETING

The third group meeting focused on exchanging knowledge that “worked”. The meeting was packed with practical information that worked for each one in her own life in an atmosphere of acceptance and care.

I was touched by the mutual care that I experienced that afternoon. I was reminded of the term “communities of concern” that Madigan and Epston (1995:257) used to describe groups of people who were struggling with the same kind of problems, sharing their experiences. We experienced a community of concern where ideas and knowledges were shared and new options were co-constructed.

In her research with women who experienced sexual violence, Draucker (1999:18-28) asked the advice of thirty-three women – all were sexually violated – on their needs for therapy. They indicated that support, validation, kindness and empowerment were the most important factors in therapy to assist them to facilitate their own healing powers. Support, validation, kindness, and empowerment were what we experienced from each other in that group meeting. Alternative stories were facilitated in those particular surroundings.

1.6.3 CONSULTING YOUR CONSULTANTS: THE FOURTH GROUP MEETING

Our fourth group meeting was living proof of “consulting your consultants” (Epston & White 1995:277). The participants negotiated their passage from “novice to veteran, from client to consultant”, they were able to “take recourse to liberating alternative and special knowledge that they have resurrected and generated...” (Epston & White 1995:280). They shared their knowledge regarding their experiences of sexual abuse with each other in full realisation that there were countless possibilities for realities (Freedman & Combs 1996:22-27). At the basis of the “liberating alternative and special knowledge that they have resurrected and generated” were questions to one another: “Did it work?” and “Was it fair to ourselves and to others?”

White and Epston (1990:26) state, “this local knowledge might not only serve the interests of its membership but become an effective criticism of the dominant knowledge”. The narrative group meetings created an audience for the survival stories, with the result that each participant’s authority increased through the knowledge that they became aware of in their own lives. “They became less dependent on “expert knowledge” that might have forced them into being a patient and use their own knowledge towards writing their preferred life stories” (Epston & White 1995:312).

1.6.4 REFLECTIONS ON SAYING HULLO, SAYING GOODBYE: THE FIFTH GROUP MEETING

Our fifth meeting reflected something of the “saying hullo and saying goodbye” metaphor used by White (1988:29-36). By “saying hullo” to a new goal and to stand beside other women who had suffered, brought them to “saying goodbye” to the pain in their own lives.

Right from the beginning of this meeting it became clear that the women wanted to reach out to others in need.

Cat said: “I do not want to talk about my own pain anymore. I want to make a difference for others.”

Bubbles said: “I want to do my bit for other women.”

Twinkles thought that women “should learn that they were more powerful than their circumstances”.

Freedom was already involved at the Victim Support Centre and Community Police Reserves supporting victims of crime at that stage.

Christa had undergone eye surgery and could not attend this meeting. When we discussed the shift that took place within the group afterwards with her, she was delighted and fully agreed to commit herself as far as her own plans would allow her. She was planning to work abroad in 2001.

We discussed possibilities to reach out to other women in need. As we knew the Victim Support Centre, we decided to start conversations with them. We needed to know if they thought it might be helpful if we could arrange a monthly gathering for women who were sexually violated.

We knew that Charlene Smith, a journalist who was raped, arranged monthly survivor lunches for women who were sexually violated. At a conference where I met her, she

referred to these lunches as “celebration lunches”. She agreed to support us if we needed her help.

Ideas on a new community of concern were starting to develop. This was in accordance with Epston and White’s (1995:294) statement: “This work concerns itself with generating communities of concern rather than therapists veneration.” Without formal anticipation, energy was generated to go beyond healing towards touching other women’s lives.

1.6.5 WHAT MIGHT BE HELPFUL TO OTHERS?: THE SIXTH GROUP MEETING

Our sixth group meeting was a champagne breakfast. Our topic of discussion was ideas on what might be helpful to others. Christa was still out of action and Freedom had an important shooting practice with the Police Reservists that she couldn’t miss therefore they could not attend this meeting.

Bubbles shared some of her life-experiences with us. One of her sayings encapsulated her take on life: “You know Bubbles, she always get the better of problems.”

In the narrative letter I reflected on her knowledge and abilities:

- Do you find it helpful to remember all the ways you have used to “get the better of problems”?
- Would you want to share this problem solving identity of yours with other women?
- Does it mean something to you when you teach your children not to run away from problems but to face them?
- May we ask how you teach your children to solve problems?
- Do you think it is something you decide to do or does it happen spontaneously?

Twinkles spoke of her handling of differences in her relationships. In the narrative letter I used the following questions to open up space for the possibility of alternative meaning:

- Do you think there are ways to converse about differences without resulting in distancing people?
- Do you think that showing respect when talking about differences might be helpful?
- Do you think there are any other preconditions before one can speak about differences?
- Is it necessary for people to have equal power when they get into conversations about differences?
- Do you have an idea where the perception comes from that everybody should think the same?
- I wonder what knowledge we might be able to assemble in the group to teach our children about the differences that work for both parties?

Cat spoke about the cunningness of problems that tried to convince people that there was no hope to get better. We thought that the problem of rape might fall into the category of problems that wanted to convince women that they would not be able to heal. In the narrative group letter the following questions were posed to open up conversations that could lead to new meaning making.

- Do you think that there might be a respectful way to convey to women that they have choices on how to deal with such a trauma such as rape?
- What are the messages that convince men that they are weaker than their sexual desires?
- How do you consider men being “slaves of their desires” in the face of an HIV risk?
- Do you think women should be concerned about the risk of HIV-infection if they suspect their husbands of promiscuity? Do you think women should demand an HIV-test from their (promiscuous) husbands?
- What could we tell our sons on this issue?
- Do you think it is necessary to talk about men’s sexual needs and HIV?
- Do you think we should start talking to our husbands and sons about women being raped? How do you think should we approach this issue?

In the sixth group meeting the sense of celebration, created a context for worthiness and punctuated the competence and worth of the participants (Adams-Wescott & Isenbart 1990:59).

The heading of this section “What might be helpful for others”, made me think of a description of practical theology as “that disciplined, reflective theological activity which seeks to relate the faith of the Christian community to its life, mission and social practice” (Cochrane, De Gruchy & Petersen 1991:3). Although most of the women didn’t find the church helpful, they considered themselves as part of the Christians faith community and tried to relate their faith to their lived worlds and to social practice.

These reflections would be incomplete if I did not ponder the alternative stories that the participants found meaningful at this time in their lives.

1.7 THE ALTERNATIVE STORIES: VOICES OF THE PARTICIPANTS

Who can help us to hear the alternative stories better than the participants themselves? The participants’ ideas on their healing and strengths will be reflected individually. These reflections are inspiring stories of resilience and hope. The richness and diversity of the stories of the women correspond with feminist descriptions of women’s experience as “theoretical articulations of ‘difference’ and ‘multiplicity’” (Frankenberg 1993:10).

1.7.1 CAT

Cat wrote in her response to the narrative letters that her first step to healing was to realise that no one was going to rescue her. When she realised that she was on her own, she took responsibility. Taking responsibility entailed for her to face the unfairness of what happened to her. That was very painful. Focusing on the unfairness of sexual abuse stood on her side against guilt and shame.

She needed to work towards acknowledging her own abilities in order to get distance from the dominant story of guilt, of not being good enough and of not being worthy

of anything but to die. That enabled her to declare in writing: “I have choices. I choose to be positive to turn away from self-destruction – anorexia and suicide – and to begin to understand the strengths that I have.”

She wrote: “Experiencing the birth of my children brought new light to the darkness I lived in for years. My children’s innocence and completeness led me to re-experience hope and to belief in the almightiness of my Creator God. Through my children I reclaim my lost childhood by having loads of fun with them. The feedback that I get from them encourages me to experiment with what might be good for them. I think that my self-acceptance allows me to enjoy such closeness with my children.” It became clear from her response that her three primary school aged children adored her very much.

During our group conversation she acknowledged her chosen ability to love herself and to enjoy her roles as a great victory that enabled her to celebrate life. She experienced herself as unique and knew what worked for her. She decided to ascribe her premature sexual awakening to the acts of an “abnormal perpetrator” and to embrace the beauty and fulfilment that she and her husband shared in adult intimacy.

1.7.2 BUBBLES

Bubbles wrote: “I think my strength to handle problems come from my childhood years. My father was a single parent and I was taught by life’s challenges to survive in all circumstances.” Her advice to the group was to try out a number of options until one manages to get through a difficult situation.

“The group sessions became like a sanctuary for me. It became a place where I could be who I was and express what I felt, as I desired. The group time was two hours of relaxation to me.” She told us that she enjoyed her “way of being” in the group.

Bubbles also created other spaces where she could live out her strength and spontaneity. She joined a basketball club and enjoyed it thoroughly to play and relate to her team-mates. She enjoyed the exhilaration of strength and joy in every match.

She wrote: "I used the metaphor of a drain in the first meeting not to degrade myself but to point to the unblocking of my life that created bubbles like a drain when it is unblocked." She saw herself as creative, constantly moving towards options that would work better for her.

1.7.3 TWINKLES

Twinkles reported that what she found really helpful was "the deconstruction of normality" and the claiming of her own "normality" or reality according to her preferences. She found it helpful because it freed her from prescribed behaviour and helped her towards ethical individuality. The phrase "what is your normality?" became a favourite refrain in our conversations.

Twinkles was sure that her family was aware of her strength. She took her strength from her mother as a chosen role model. Neither of them would allow life to run them down. There were many proofs of this "fighting spirit" in both their lives. From her father Twinkles took her soft-heartedness and being prepared to reach out when somebody experienced a need.

1.7.4 CHRISTA

Christa reported that her strength was in her holding onto her relationship with the Jesus Christ. The idea that she was not worthy of love was still haunting her at times. This idea teamed up with thin evidence of broken relationships to intensify its power of convincing her of her unworthiness to be loved. She acknowledged that people found it easy to relate to her and that she experienced quality relations with her family and friends. This evidence took a stand against the powerful and unfair voices of not being worthy of love and broken relations in her life.

Christa acknowledged that her wit, warmth and generous character endeared her in every group member's heart. She also acknowledged her strength to have confronted the male pastoral therapist and her ability to cope in difficult circumstances.

1.7.5 FREEDOM

Freedom's relationship with her mother was really strengthened and enriched during the last year. Her job at the Victim Support Centre, to assist women who became victims to violence or rape, developed into service as a Community Police Reservist. We admired her for her service and ability to assist others.

Religion played a big role in her life. At one stage Freedom felt that feelings of guilt had the power to get her to a point where she wanted to give up living. Yet, her story contained evidence of strength and courage. She was able to stand up against guilt once she realised guilt was her enemy. She developed the saying: "I am cool." That was an expression of her self-acceptance.

1.8 YET ANOTHER STORY

As feminist research is driven by the participants rather than by a method (Reinharz 1992:213), a new story was born. It can be described as a new journey; a journey unknown to all involved. We had Burstow's (1992:19) words of encouragement on this journey: "If woman's vision – all women's vision – is the guide to concrete resistance, woman-woman relating is at once an act of resistance and the space in which woman's vision and action flourishes."

The women in the group realised that powerlessness was not the consequence of their own personal inadequacy. They needed to be active in the instigation of change in their relationships and community. The group was adamant that they wanted to "stand in" for survivors of sexual violence. They wanted other women to be given the time and safety to find their own voices and to explore their thoughts and feelings on sexual violence.

Our immediate plan was to link up with the Victim Support Centre. For this reason I include a brief introduction of the Victim Support Centre, the work they do as well as their impact in the Witbank-area.

1.8.1 THE VICTIM SUPPORT CENTRE

The Victim Support Centre (VS Centre) was established in Witbank in 1997. It is run by volunteers and is situated at the local Community Police Centre. Freedom is one of the volunteers working at the Centre. I know the co-ordinator and some of the volunteers.

Four years ago I was involved with arranging training for the volunteers, locating a venue and assisting volunteers in counselling survivors. The goal of the Centre is to assist victims of rape, violence and crime in Witbank.

The *Witbank News* (2001:9) published statistics of victims passing through the centre between June 26, 1997 and June 20, 2001

	ADULTS	CHILDREN
Rape	371	266
Rape / Assault:	148	37
Attempted/suspected rape:	4	67
Attempted rape/assault :	2	
Sodomy:		15
Assault:	32	38
Abuse:	1	60
Abuse/Assault:	6	

The Centre has helped a total of 1531 people.

The statistics indicated that more than 500 women were assisted in the past four years. Although we are, and always will be deeply touched by the statistics of children who suffer on account of violence, we decided to be available to all but to focus on woman as victims of sexual violence.

Twinkles accompanied me as representative of the group to discuss the group's need to stand on the side of other women who have experienced sexual violation. The chairperson of the VS Centre was positive and accommodating. She believed that a

great need would be served if the monthly meetings for survivors could get off the ground. The group of volunteers has been worried that support might run out and that silence might set in once victims left the Centre. Getting new conversations going was our next aim.

1.8.2 GETTING NEW CONVERSATIONS GOING

With the consent of the participants the following articles were placed in the local newspaper. Our aim was to get new conversations going and to provide a space where survivors of sexual violence could break the silence.

1.8.2.1 INVITATION TO A CONVERSATION ON SEXUAL VIOLENCE

The first invitation that was published focused on awareness of sexual violence as an uneasy topic. We touched on the many unspoken and unvoiced questions that surrounded sexual violence. The article read as follow:

Sexual violence is a problem as old as human existence, documented in the Bible and the Koran.

Is it necessary to speak about sexual violence or abuse? How many people's lives are touched by this crime? Why does it happen? In what ways are people affected and why? Who should take responsibility for what? We want to open conversations on these questions and many more concerning sexual violence.

It is known that one in four girls and one in nine boys would have experienced sexual violence by the age of eighteen. A woman is raped every sixty seconds in South Africa. Every six days a woman would die by the hand of a man. Perhaps it is time to reflect in as many ways as possible on this issue to invite responsibility. It is our view that if secrecy should be enforced there would be no accountability.

Women are resilient and have managed for ages to take small steps to heal. These stories often pass unnoticed. Do you think it is necessary to open up a space and time to tell or celebrate some of these stories?

The week following we placed an invitation to our first meeting, stating the purpose of gathering and what to expect. The invitation read as follows:

You are invited to a “saying hullo”-tea for survivors of sexual violence. Every one who has been violated by sexual abuse or violence in any way would be welcome. The purpose of the getting-together would be to share strength, to take a stand against sexual violence and celebrate life. The idea of taking hands after the trauma of sexual violence was born when a group of women experienced the benefits of getting together after they were touched by sexual violence. They want to host monthly celebration teas where women can share their strengths. The program will include a short talk on “Being a survivor with a sense of victory” by Rianda Gunter, an E A P Therapist in Witbank; a discussion of future guest-speakers and topics according to expectations and an informal “saying hullo”-time and tea.

Date: August 4, 2001

Time: 10h00 Venue: Victim Support Centre at the Witbank Community Police Station. Contact number: 6555 001

1.8.2.2 “SAYING HULLO”-TEA

Two women responded telephonically to our invitation. One young African woman turned up for the “saying hullo”-tea.

We introduced ourselves highlighting that all of us had been violated by sexual violation in one way or another. Our guest gave her consent that I could use her name and ideas for this dissertation.

Brenda told us that she came to the meeting to talk about her pain and wanted to experience understanding from other women who knew about the road that she needed to walk. She felt isolated. She thought the subject of her rape was a taboo topic and could not be addressed in any of her relationships. Her mother would cry when she tried to speak about what happened. The people at church thought she was filthy. She wondered if men could be forced to respect women and to realise that women had their own minds.

The women conversed on the subject that men saw women's bodies as objects of pleasure. Our guest thought it was something unique to African men. Cat and Twinkles assured her that it was true of their culture that women were viewed as sex objects. We realised that women and children irrespective of age or looks got raped. Power was a common factor in rape incidences.

Twinkles spoke her mind on the abuse of power and how we as women should not allow our culture or men to be dominant, to invade us by guilt and shame. She thought that we should stand against oppression.

Brenda affirmed the strengths that she recognised as part of being a woman: "Families without mothers don't survive, I think women are more powerful than men."

Cat and Twinkles acknowledged Brenda's strength in reacting on the invitation in the local paper to come to the meeting.

Cat shared her story. "Guilt got to me in the form of anorexia, I wanted to punish and kill myself after I had been sexually molested as a child. Guilt is a cunning enemy. I can declare that I am healed and will always be on the journey to create the reality that works for me."

Our guest introduced spirituality early in our discussion. She said she was a Sunday school teacher but that she did not feel free to talk about what happened and her pain to the people at her church. I took the opportunity to share the story of Tamar and Amnon according to Poling (1991:156-157). We shared this story in our previous

meetings. It left us once more with the realisation that the only difference that we would have access to, was the difference that we could create in ourselves and towards our own choices for reality.

The meeting was concluded planning the next meeting. Twinkles was appointed as our public relations officer. She would arrange for invitations in the local paper. Cat would design flyers and distribute them. Brenda offered to help distributing flyers. The date for our next tea was scheduled for September eight, at the same time and place.

We exchanged contact numbers and proposed that we would be available if Brenda needed to talk to someone about the effects of sexual violence.

1.8.2.3 WHAT IS IN A WORD?

“What is in a word” was the title of the second invitation to the survivor gathering. Several people responded. Seven women turned up for the meeting. The invitation read as follows:

Language has the ability to construct people and to make possible what can be known. Words loaded with meaning have the power to include or exclude. Perhaps we can argue that language has an agenda.

Did you know that the English language has over 200 words to describe promiscuous women, but only 20 words to describe promiscuous men? Might language be reflecting on society’s attitudes towards women, suggesting that they are more likely to be blamed for promiscuity? Can childhood sexual abuse and rape be included as the promiscuity of females? That sounds absurd, doesn’t it?

Sadly that is what happens in the mind of a child or woman who has been sexually violated. They blame themselves and might live with the acceptance that they are shameful and bad after they have experienced

sexual violation. The absence of focus on power imbalances in our living worlds contributes to women's experiences.

Monthly conversational teas on this topic are held at the Victim Support Centre at the Community Police Centre. Women will have a chance to converse on healing after sexual violation.

Next meeting date: 8 September 2001

Time: 10h00 –12h00

Contact number: 6555 001

1.9 REFLECTION ON A NEW STORY

This group of seven resilient women shared their knowledge of living after childhood sexual abuse with us. As part of the acknowledgement of the alternative stories and the lenses that were used to recognise alternative stories, a new story began. The women experienced compassion for others that had to walk the same routes they had to journey. They reached out to other women, becoming resources themselves.

Isherwood and McEwan (1993:83) refer to these stories as: "Weaving the webs of non-violent transformation. Feminism is a justice issue. One way in which Christian women have networked is through imagining and creating new models for church." Isherwood and McEwan (1993: 84) see networking as a method for questioning authority and developing new ideas beyond hierarchical structures to fit into the context of feminist theology aspiring for equality and justice. What they name the "political pattern" resonates with what happened in our group – "Simply meeting, being together, informing others of what is happening, supporting each other, has triggered a feeling of solidarity which leads to action, publicity and eventually change" (Isherwood and McEwan 1993:84). As Christian women we are feeling a solidarity that leads to action and to speaking publicly on the "taboo topic" of the sexual violation of women. We do not know if it will bring change to society but it is bringing change within ourselves.

We were excited about the change that constantly occurred in our selves. The women realised that the world was not going to change and that we would always have the “challenges of problems” as Bubbles viewed “trouble”. They realised that their identities were separate from problems. This way of externalising problems opened new possibilities to handle difficulties (Morgan 2000:17).

1.10 CONCLUSION

White (1995:36) refers to the narrative approach as “perhaps a worldview ... an epistemology, a philosophy, a personal commitment, a politics, an ethics, a practice, a life and so on”. Healing after childhood sexual abuse became a way of living, a political journey for life. Although the focus might shift from individual pain to challenging factors that perpetuate this kind of pain for others; the journey will go on.

CHAPTER FIVE : REFLECTING ON CONVERSATIONS OF SURVIVORS OF CHILDHOOD SEXUAL ABUSE

1.1 INTRODUCTION

In this chapter I reflect on the research perspectives and research question posed in chapter one. Along the journey new questions were posed and new possibilities opened up and are still opening up. As McTaggart (1997:27) puts it, “action research is the way in which groups of people can organize the conditions under which they can learn from their own experience and make this experience accessible to others”.

Participatory action research focuses on ownership and responsibility as part of a process that implies “responsible agency in the production of knowledge and improvement of practice” (McTaggart 1997:28). The process of research becomes a continuous and challenging journey. On this research journey I have encountered possible implications and guidelines for both practical theology and pastoral therapy. Responsible agency in the production of knowledge and improvement of practice served as a guiding light in identifying some guidelines.

1.2 REFLECTION ON FEMINIST THEOLOGY PRAXIS

The focus of this feminist research was to reflect on the stories and experiences of women who were sexually violated in childhood years. An inquiry was made into their local knowledges to establish what each participant found helpful on their individual journeys to healing.

As a group we challenged the dominant narratives that wanted to silence the stories of the participants through guilt and shame. The group showed a commitment towards each other and to women’s liberation by participating in group discussions that managed to break the wall of silence that isolated them for so long; validating each person’s story, by bringing it into the open as well as by exploring the ways each participant has devised to resist the grip of abuse. The group meetings were constructive in so far alternative resistance stories were highlighted through re-telling

in the group discussions. The participants became people who “lived their religion” as an example to women outside the group who were also sexually abused.

The group meetings were collaborative ventures that every one took part in. Collaboration and co-responsibility were shown by their lively participation in group conversations as well as in reaching out and taking responsibility for the care of other women. They showed mutual care and commitment by bringing refreshments, phoning, visiting and supporting each other as well as later preparing invitation posters and arrange articles in the local paper. They became co-responsible for the healing journeys of the participants and for the success of future ventures.

Ackermann’s (1996:34) challenge that feminist theology praxis should be “critical, committed, constructive, collaborative and accountable” was taken seriously. This became evident in the action the women participants took as well as in their critique of taken for granted truths that determined the life stories of survivors. Their actions towards each other opened doors for new preferred realities that were more acceptable to live by.

Reinharz (1992:240) states that feminist research is driven by the participants rather than by method. This seemed to ring true in this research. Initially I took initiative in the planning of the research by scheduling the narrative pastoral group meetings. The agenda of the meetings was designed to create space where women could validate their experiences, knowledges and strengths collaboratively.

A new story of resistance and of healing began when the participants said goodbye to the emphasis on their own struggle and moved to embrace a focus on other women’s struggles.

I was particularly interested in the limitations that dominant discourses in society put on women after childhood sexual abuse (Buckenham 1999:85-87 & chapter three) and the possibility of moving beyond these limitations. I could never have imagined that the participants would confront dominant discourses by creating an alternative formal space where other women in the community could break silence on sexual abuse.

1.3 REFLECTIONS ON THE RESEARCH

In chapter two I gave an overview of available statistics on the incidence of sexual violence and literature revealing the personal-relational, physical, social and spiritual effects of sexual violations. It became clear that the incidences of sexual abuse and violence in South Africa were taking on pandemic proportions.

The social construction approach I used in this study assisted me to include questioning dominant narratives about sex, gender, power and violence by discussing the effects on women. The women experienced different effects of sexual abuse that developed after the acute trauma of sexual violation. One of these effects was intensive secondary trauma brought on by the inability to speak out and to acknowledge the need to heal and be protected after the initial trauma of childhood sexual abuse.

Dominant and accepted cultural discourses of patriarchy; inequality in relationships and how gender was perceived were perpetuating the tolerance of the crime of sexual violence. Survivors' perceptions of themselves and their agency were negatively influenced by these cultural discourses and resulted in thin conclusions opposing the rich descriptions of their life-stories (Morgan 2000:15).

According to Gergen (quoted by Dixon 1999:39) narrative therapy facilitates "transformative dialogue in which new understandings are negotiated together with a new set of premises about meaning". In our narrative pastoral conversations we witnessed both the transformative qualities of dialogue and the development of new and rich descriptions. Not only did our new understandings influence our present ways of meaning making and healing – we also realised it could be helpful in future.

In retrospect I realised that I have been involved in "taking a stand" against sexual abuse since I started my first occupation as a social worker in the service of the church. This story is told in chapter one. In this particular narrative journey I had the opportunity to take part in in what Heshusius (1994:14-15) calls a participatory mode of consciousness.

Participatory consciousness is the awareness of a deeper level of kinship between the knower and the known. An inner desire to let go of perceived boundaries that constitute 'self' – and that construct the perception of distance between self and other – must be present before a participatory mode of consciousness can be present. It requires an attitude of profound openness and receptivity.

(Heshusius 1994:16).

The relationship we experienced in the group reflected a participatory mode of consciousness. This mode of consciousness was also extended to the women of our local community who joined the monthly meetings (see the second part of chapter four).

I was constantly reflecting (Gergen 1999:63) on individual, group and my own experiences. That led me to making meaning of my own situation. The group members all knew that my life was also influenced by sexual abuse in my childhood. In my attempts to decentre myself as researcher and therapist, I never elaborated on that experience since my recollection of it was very vague and I thought of it as perhaps less significant. I now realise that it was significant enough to keep me part of a struggle that was part of my own liberation and would continue to be. I shared my development in this regard with the group at our first survivors' tea. The value of research as an attempt to "clarify our vision and improve our decisions" (Reinharz 1992:195) became something I experienced first-hand in our conversations where I was an insider to some experiences the women had.

The rich descriptions of the women's survival stories needed an audience bigger than what I could provide in individual narrative therapy. The idea of starting a narrative pastoral discussion group for women who survived childhood sexual abuse, originated from individual sessions with the participants.

Chapter three traces the process from inviting the participants, introducing the participants, reflections of the first group meeting by means of a narrative letter as well as the discussion of recurring themes that started developing in the second group meeting. Chapter four includes further themes identified by the group as well as

reflections on the group meetings and the beginning of a new story of support for other women.

Post-modern practical theology, the discourse of social construction as well as a narrative pastoral approach formed the backdrop for this study. Above all it was a narrative pastoral approach that “creates the space for those seeking help to choose to make God’s transformative power in their lives more visible” (Van Dyk 2000:33) that served as a basis for this study. As participants of this study, we experienced that our life stories could be testimonies of God’s transformative power towards life in abundance after abuse.

Both as participant and as co-researcher this study moved me from “being right” to “doing right” (Rossouw 1993:903). My aim became more and more not to *know* what was right for others, but to *ask* what would be right for them. It became inevitable to apply core values and meanings rooted in the primary texts of the Christian narrative tradition to issues of justice and the ethics of relations in every day life (Gerkin 1991:15). Doing justice in a feminist context was to restore more dignity and uniqueness of the qualities of knowing, loving and relating to life (McBride 1996(a):115). To this end I tried to emphasise equality and respect for diversity in our group meetings as values rooted in the Christian narrative tradition.

The research process as outlined above, already indicates a possible answer to the research question of how narrative pastoral group therapy could assist the survivors of childhood sexual abuse on the road to healing and recovery. The narrative pastoral group conversations made it possible for the participants to deconstruct problem-saturated dominant stories; to name injustice and to empower themselves. In feminist liberation theology (Heyward 1996:52) empowerment is seen as the relational process through which persons experience their liberating power to survive as well as to “affect others creatively and make a positive difference”. The group meetings facilitated a relational process where strengths were celebrated and local knowledges were distributed that contributed to each participant’s quality of life. The group members often referred to the process as an irreversible positive difference

acknowledging that they would not be able to return to their previous ways of journeying.

Alternative stories of the participants' preferred realities and identities were co-authored (White 1997:3). I gave testimony to the individual alternative stories in chapter four under the name of each participant. These alternative stories had a new goal in common, namely to move away from focusing on individual healing towards healing for other women who have experienced sexual violation. Chapter four bears witness to the process of lived religion that opened space for alternative stories. The compassion we experienced through listening to the telling and re-telling of life-stories grew into the development of a community of care. We became caregivers to each other and to the community around us.

1.4 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Within a post-modern theological epistemology, ethical considerations became an integral part of this study.

Being ethical during this study required ongoing negotiation between all the participants. These negotiations included taking into consideration the effects their preferred realities had on their families. Although we have invited participants' families to become involved in conversations, they did not make use of the offer. However, as our group meetings are to continue even after the completion of this research study, the invitation still stands.

I became aware how the changes brought on in my own ways of thinking needed ongoing conversations with other women as well as with my own family to keep our relationships meaningful and transparent. Being aware of an ethical responsibility once a topic has been raised and the consequences on different relationships, I introduced the idea of care for participants' family members. Our families and in particular our male partners were affected by our group discussions as well as by the personal changes we experienced. We considered options such as individual and group consultations for male partners with a male therapist that could bring men together in support of each other and to care for their female partners. We also

considered a get-together for our partners. I offered my services in what ever way the group felt they could make use of me. My intention was to accommodate the needs family members might have flowing from the women's involvement in the narrative pastoral group conversations.

For the purpose of this study I adopted the characteristics Stringer (1999:10) proposes for participatory action research. I tried to convey a "...democratic, equitable, liberating and life enhancing" message. I reminded myself constantly of these characteristics. The participants' feedback and reflections might prove whether I had been successful in my attempts. The "liberating" and "life enhancing" characteristics might be reflected in the alternative stories of the participants as well as in the ongoing action of hosting survivor teas every month. These ongoing activities created new opportunities to validate one another's growth and served as an invitation to richer descriptions of women's life-stories.

The group members were involved in the process of writing the research report. As the chapters unfolded and changed they received copies for their comments. They experienced the reading and involvement in the crafting of the chapters as motivation towards our new goal of standing beside survivors of rape in our community. Freedom commented this was a "cool story, the story of our lives". Christa reflected and helped with editing the grammar. Bubbles helped with choosing pseudonyms for the purpose of the dissertation. Their participation in the writing affirmed their role as co-owners of the report as well as the new project. I valued their diligence and enthusiasm. They understood their involvement in co-writing the research report as part of the ethical responsibility they felt towards themselves and women in similar situations. I thought their comments and remarks contributed to the texture to this study.

Twinkles arranged for publicity, articles and invitations to the meetings in the local paper. Cat designed flyers that informed women about our meetings. The participants supported one another by keeping close contact in between group meetings. This spontaneous support developed into a growing network of women that consciously decided to be there for one another.

My intention to maintain an ethical awareness in both the group meetings and in the research report, was aimed at opening space for marginalised voices and for the participants to be able to decide for themselves what options they thought would suit them best (Freedman & Combs 1996:265). Moreover, an ethical awareness benefited me as therapist in the sense that I could clearly define my own position within the of group meetings as well as in the report. In this context ethics signalled a shift from dominant narratives, a shift that made it possible to consider “both the local, interpersonal moment-by-moment effects of our stands and practices and the ripples that those effects send into the world at large” (Freedman & Combs 1996:265).

In our group conversations ethical transparency prevailed and had the ripple effect of respect for difference. This ethical position opened up the group to survivors of rape. In his description of narrative research Gergen (1999:97) mentions that this type of research has a more empathic orientation. Narrative research is an attempt “to give voice to the unheard and marginalized in society, to generate understanding through sharing first-hand experience”(Gergen 1999:97).

1.5 LEGITIMACY OF THIS STUDY

“If you come to help me, you are wasting your time. But if you’ve come because your liberation is bound up with mine, then let’s work together.”(Watson quoted by Stringer 1999:193)

Watson’s remark conveys the legitimacy of this study as even more relevant and alive after our experiences of joint liberation as well as our extending of that joint liberation to other woman who have experienced sexual violation. As participants we are joined in our liberation with other women who have experienced sexual violence. The legitimacy of the study is confirmed by the pandemic incidence of sexual violation as well as the willingness of women to take a stand within lived religion against sexual violation.

1.6 IMPLICATION AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PRACTICAL THEOLOGY AND PASTORAL THERAPY

During the course of this study or journey, the intended goals shifted from the personal to the political. Perhaps it was not that much of a shift since the personal always is political when we accept the challenge to act as agents for the mending of creation (Ackermann 1996:48).

Graham (1996:173) argues the personal being the political is nowhere more applicable than when applied to Christian pastoral care. Women-centred pastoral care makes visible women's personal circumstances and pastoral needs. Moreover it indicates that individual problems point in the direction of social discourses of health, illness and in the case of this research, injustices and abuse. A feminist pastoral theology will therefore aspire to "the practice of empowerment, inclusion and justice at the heart of Christian ministry and vocation" (Graham 1996:173).

The narrative pastoral group conversations enhanced personal choices for individual empowerment. This led to political action of standing in solidarity with other women who needed empowerment in the process of being agents for the mending of creation. This action emphasises social transformation in practical theology.

Our conversations included critical reflection on the role of the church towards women that experienced sexual violation. Initially the group members did not think that the congregation or pastor could be involved in support and care after a woman has experienced sexual abuse. They were afraid of being labelled as bad were church role players to learn that they were sexually abused as children. Christa's negative experience with a charismatic Christian counsellor supported this view. The church, pastor and congregation were viewed to stand on the side of patriarchy that privileged male views of women as guilty and more often as bad when sexuality was concerned.

The church seemed to be challenged to help to restore women's sexuality. Isherwood and McEwan (1993:215) quote Nelson who argues the necessity to move from 'theology of sexuality' to 'sexual theology'. This might be a suggestion to move towards restoring woman's sexuality.

A theology of (or about) sexuality tends to argue in a one-directional way: What do scripture and tradition say about our sexuality and how it ought to be expressed? We need to ask also (after the manner of various liberation theologies): What does our experience as human sexual beings tell us about how we read the scripture, interpret the tradition, and attempt to live out the meaning of the gospel? The movement must be in both directions, not only in one.

(Nelson quoted by Isherwood & McEwan 1993:215)

When women as sexual beings read Scripture, they might get an understanding that they can celebrate their sexuality. When they interpret dominant tradition about women's sexuality they are bound to experience humiliation and accusations of being permissive should they intend to celebrate their sexuality. The acceptance of different rules for women than for men regarding sexuality in our society is proof of the inequality patriarchy sustains. Can the church challenge patriarchy? Buckenham (1999:29) holds the view that sexual crimes against women is backed up by the patriarchal system of beliefs and that this system yet is to be challenged by men.

Cochrane, De Gruchy and Petersen (1991:90) introduces a prophetic dimension to the church when they say that "critical reflection on the church leads directly to a discussion of how one can change and transform it to become a prophetic agent of transformation". The church has accepted violence against women for millennia as normal. Only recently the church started to confront, grapple with and stopped to accept violence against women as "attitudes in the heart of people" (Buckenham 1999:12).

As a recommendation we suggest that these critical and mutual transforming conversations be extended and on-going, involving more and diverse role players. The group members are willing to share their experiences with interested people. We support Fortune's task list for clergy when a victim reports for help as quoted by Buckenham (1999:112): listen and believe; assess danger; make appropriate referrals and work co-operatively with other helpers and finally, address pastoral concerns.

The local knowledges of the group members and the way these issues were woven into pastoral narrative conversations are portrayed in chapters three and four. We are

committed to play a role in raising awareness that will contribute towards small steps in resisting inequality that can result in sexual violence. We experience the joy of reclaiming our love and respect for ourselves. We are moving from a faith marked by hurt guilt and blame to a faith of healing. We can highly recommend this as a planned activity for women in congregations. Pastors can contribute by deconstructing dominant patriarchal discourses in their sermons and by inviting congregations to take co-responsibility for sexual violence. Pastors can break the silence and acknowledge the occurrence of sexual violence by distributing resource information that might be helpful to women who experienced violation. The words of Buckenham (1999:119) summarise our recommendations in a practical way.

In summary, then in the Christian faith community, compassion and the gospel call us: First, to be in solidarity with those struggling for justice in relationship and society, by listening, affirming and ethic of dignity, saying no to violence and holding perpetrators responsible for their actions. Second, we are called to travel, or accompany, marvel, affirm and celebrate the journey toward affirmation of sacredness. We can applaud and support the life of someone who is throwing off chains of fear and shame, and who is drinking the healing water of love, justice, self-acceptance and honouring of the image of God inside.

(Buckenham 1999:119)

1.7 SMALL STEPS OF THIS STUDY

An integral part of participatory action research is to reflect critically on the process all the time (McTaggart 1997:40-41). Watching the group session videos as well as the writing of the narrative letters enabled me to reflect critically. Feedback on the narrative letters contributed to the critical reflection and ethical awareness. It became a constant occupation to assume a not knowing position, a position of humbleness. I was constantly challenged to deconstruct modernist ideas I found in myself and not to give in to dominant narratives threatening to take control of the group process.

This study might be viewed as one of the small steps of resistance against sexual violence. It might be seen as the beginning of another journey to resist inequalities that lead to violation. I hope that this study will open up opportunities for many unheard voices and unspoken stories to be disclosed. I wish that many women could find healing in this way.

Although I spoke individually to two church leaders, the conversations were not broadened to the ministers' fraternal or local congregations. One of the ministers of the Dutch Reformed Church indicated that he would appreciate it if he could learn from the experience of survivors of childhood sexual abuse. He thought that this knowledge could be used in preaching on violence in families. Brenda, one of the women in the extended group invited us to support her in her congregation by speaking on healing after sexual violation. She invited us because the members of the congregation where she worshipped thought that sexual violation was limited to African culture.

These suggestions might be challenging possibilities to explore in future.

1.8 AN ONGOING ENDING

Pieterse (1996:60) comments on the open-ended and alert character of post-modern research. This resonates with the ongoing journey and accountability of this project.

...the contradictory, ambiguous, conflictual, risky, insecure, peripheral and creative dimensions of everyday life. In short, it allows space for my humanity and simultaneously injects a restlessness into any moment of contentment, because any configuration of people, environment and resources usually excludes or marginalizes someone's voice and/or identity. In this perpetual alertness for who or what is being marginalized, a certain capacity evolves to develop an agenda which seeks to tie different types of margins together, without yielding to the incentive to simply become another or different center of power, in the Foucauldian sense of how a power/knowledge nexus operates.

(Pieterse 1996:60)

With the balance being set by these words, the journey goes on. "Motivated by a quest to improve and understand the world by changing it and learning how to improve it from the effects of the changes made" (McTaggart 1997:39). This challenging way of living provides us opportunities to constantly invite and embrace change in situations that are formally viewed as set and untouchable. This research is in no way set and untouchable. It is open-ended. There is so much to learn, so much to inquire about, so much change and so much to embrace.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Abdurhaman, F 2001. Gender and madness: A postmodern discourse. Ma C Psyc dissertation, University of South Africa, Pretoria.
- Ackermann, D 1996. Engaging freedom: A contextual feminist theology of praxis. *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa* 94, 32-49.
- Act no 23 of 1957. The sexual offences law. Pretoria: State Press.
- Adams-Westcott, J & Isenbart, D 1990. Using rituals to empower family members who have experienced child sexual abuse, in Durrant & White 1990:37-65.
- Anderson, H D 1995. Collaborative language systems: Toward a postmodern therapy, in Mikesell, R H, Lussterman, D & McDaniel, S H (eds), *Integrating family therapy: Handbook of family psychology and systems theory*, 27-44. Washington: American Psychological Association.
- Anderson, H D & Goolishian, H 1992. The client is the expert: A not knowing approach to therapy, in McNamee, S & Gergen, K J (eds), *Therapy as social construction*, 25-39. London: Sage.
- Appelt, I 1999. Deconstruction and "resilience": Alternative ways of living after trauma. MTh dissertation, University of South Africa, Pretoria.
- Bell, V 1993. *Interrogation incest, feminism, Foucault and the law*. London: Routledge.
- Blume, E S 1990. *Secret survivors: Uncovering incest and its after-effects in women*. New York: Wiley.
- Bosch, D J 1991. *Transforming mission: Paradigm shifts in theology of mission*. New York: Orbis.
- Botha, A 1998. Pastoral therapy and extra-marital affairs: A narrative approach. DTh thesis, University of South Africa, Pretoria.
- Briere, J S & Zaidi, L V 1989. Sexual abuse histories and sequela in female psychiatric emergency room patients. *American Journal of Psychiatry* 146, 1602-1606.
- Brown, M 1990. From victim to survivor: The treatment of adults who have been sexually abused as children, in Rossetti, S J, *Slayer of the soul: Child sexual abuse and the Catholic Church*, 83-98. Mystic: Twenty-Third Publications.

- Buckenham, K (ed) 1999. *Violence against women: A resource manual for the church in South Africa*. Pietermaritzburg: PACSA.
- Burr, V 1995. *An introduction to social construction*. London: Routledge.
- Cameron, C 2000. *Resolving childhood trauma: A long-term study of abuse survivors*. London: Sage.
- Cheston, S E 1993. Counseling adult survivors of childhood sexual abuse, in Wicks, R J & Parsons, R D (eds), *Clinical handbook of pastoral counseling*, vol 2, 447-198. New Jersey: Paulist Press
- Clague, J 1996. Love, in Isherwood & McEwan 1996: 122-124.
- Clandinin, D J & Connelly, F M 1991. Narrative and story in practice and research, in Schon, D A (ed), *Case studies in and on educational practice*, 258-279. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Cochrane, J R, De Gruchy, J W & Petersen, R 1991. *In word and in deed: Towards a practical theology of social transformation*. Pietermaritzburg: Cluster.
- Cozard Neuger, C 1993. A feminist perspective on pastoral counseling with women, in Wicks, R J & Parsons, R D (eds), *Clinical handbook of pastoral counseling*, vol 2, 185-207. New Jersey: Paulist Press.
- Crime Information Analysis Center 1999. *Crimes against children: Annual report*. Pretoria: South African Police Service.
- Crime Information Analysis Center 1999(b). *The incidence of serious crime*. January to December 1998. Pretoria: South African Police Service.
- Crime Information Analysis Center. 2000. *Crimes per adults and children as victim*. Pretoria: South African Police Service.
- Daly, M 1987. *Gyn/Ecology: The metaethics of radical feminism*. London: The Women's Press.
- Davies, B 1991. The concept of agency: A feminist poststructuralist analysis. *Social Analysis* 30, 42-53.
- Davis, K, Leijenaar, M & Oldersma, J (eds) 1991. *The gender of power*. London: Sage.
- Deist, F 1996. *Coram Deo*. Kaapstad: Lux Verbi.
- Denzin, N K & Lincoln, Y S 1994. *Handbook of qualitative research*. London. Sage.

- Dixon, G 1999. Narrative, journaling, therapy and abuse: Co-searching some women's lives. PhD thesis, University of Otago, Dunedin.
- Draucker, C B 1999. The psychotherapeutic needs of women who have been sexually assaulted. *Perspectives in Psychiatric Care* 35 (1), 18-28.
- DSM-IV, 1994. *Diagnostic and statistical manual of mental disorders*. Washington: American Psychiatric Association.
- Durrant, M & Kowalski, K 1990. Overcoming the effects of sexual abuse: Developing a self-perception of competence, in Durrant & White 1990:65-109.
- Durrant, M J & White, C 1990. *Ideas for therapy with sexual abuse*. Adelaide: Dulwich Center Publications.
- Du Toit, C W 1997. The end of truth. *Hervormde Teologiese Studies* 53(4), 939-955.
- Elliot Griffith, M 1995. Opening therapy to conversations with a personal God, in Weingarten, K (ed), *Cultural resistance: Challenging beliefs about men, women, and therapy*, 123-137. New York: Harrington Park Press.
- Epston, D 1994. Extending the conversation. *Family Therapy Networker* 18 (6), 31-37.
- Epston, D, White, M & Ben, 1995. Consulting your consultants. A means to the co-construction of alternative knowledge, in Friedman, S (ed), *The reflecting team in action: Collaborative practice in family therapy*, 277-311. New York: Guilford.
- Fine, M & Macpherson, P 1994. Over dinner: Femininism and adolescent female bodies, in Radtke & Stam 1994: 219-246.
- Finkelhor, D & Browne, A 1986. Initial and long-term effects: A conceptual framework in sexual abuse, in Finkelhor, D et al (eds), *A source book on child sexual abuse*, 180-198. Beverly Hills: Sage.
- Fortune, M M 1996. Rape, in Isherwood & McEwan 1996:195-197.
- Foucault, M 1981. *The history of sexuality: An introduction*. Harmondsworth: Penguin.
- Frankenberg, R (ed) 1993. *The social construction of whiteness: White women, race matters*. London: Routledge.
- Fransie, 2000. *Autumn*. August. Witbank. (Unpublished poem used with permission of client.)
- Freedman, J & Combs, G 1996. *Narrative therapy: The social construction of preferred realities*. New York: Norton.

- French, M 1994. Power/sex, in Radtke & Stam 1994: 15-35.
- Gelinas, D J 1988. Family therapy: Characteristic family constellation and basic therapeutic stance, in Sgroi, S M (ed), *Vulnerable populations*, Vol 1, *Evaluation and treatment of sexually abused children and adult survivors*, 313-323. Lexington, MA: Lexington.
- Gergen, K J 1985. The social construction movement in modern psychology. *American Psychologist* 40 (3), 266-275.
- Gergen, K J 1991. *The saturated self: Dilemmas of identity in contemporary life*. New York: Basic Books.
- Gergen, K J 1994. *Realities and relationships: Soundings in social construction*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Gergen, K J 1999. *Invitation to social construction*. London: Sage.
- Gerkin, C V 1986. *Widening the horizons: Pastoral responses to fragmented society*. Philadelphia: Westminster.
- Gerkin, C V 1991. *Prophetic pastoral practice: A Christian vision of life together*. Nashville: Abingdon.
- Gitterman, A & Shulman, L 1986. *Mutual aid groups and the life cycle*. Illinois: Peacock Publishers.
- Gordon, C (ed) 1980. *Power/ knowledge: Selected interviews and other writings 1972-1977 by Michel Foucault*. New York: Routledge.
- Graham, E L 1996. *Transforming practice: Pastoral Theology in an age of uncertainty*. London: Mowbray.
- Graham, E L 1996. Pastoral theology, in Isherwood & McEwan 1996:171-173.
- Hall, T A 1995. Spiritual effects of childhood sexual abuse in adult Christian women. *Journal of Psychology and Theology* 23(2), 129-134.
- Hare-Mustin, R T & Marecek, J 1988. The meaning of difference: Gender theory, postmodernism, and psychology. *American Psychologist* 43(6), 455-464.
- Herholdt, M D 1998. Postmodern theology, in Maimela, S & Konig, A (eds), *Initiation into theology*, 215-228. Pretoria: Van Schaik.
- Hesthusius, L 1994. Freeing ourselves from objectivity: Managing subjectivity or turning towards a participatory mode of consciousness. *Educational Researcher* 23(3), 15-22.
- Hoffman, L 1992. A reflexive stance for family therapy, in McNamee, S & Gergen, K J (eds), *Therapy as social construction*, 7-24. London. Sage.

- Hunter, M (ed) 1995. *Adult survivors of sexual abuse: Treatment innovations*. London: Sage.
- Isherwood, L & McEwan, D 1993. *Introducing feminist theology*. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press.
- Isherwood, L & McEwan, D (eds) 1996. *An A to Z of feminist theology*. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press.
- Jauregui, A 1993. Response to: Toward collaboration & accountability (Lobovits, D & Freedman, J C). *Dulwich Center Newsletter* 3 & 4, 45-46.
- Jenkins, A 1990. *Invitations to responsibility: The therapeutic engagement of men who are violent and abusive*. Adelaide: Dulwich Center Publications.
- Kamsler, A 1990. Her-Story in the making: Therapy with women who were sexually abused in childhood, in Durrant & White 1990: 9-36.
- Kane, D, Cheston, S & Greer, J 1993. Perceptions of God by survivors of childhood sexual abuse: An exploratory study in an under-researched area. *Journal of Psychology and Theology* 21 (3), 228-237.
- Kecskemeti, M 1997. A handbook of temper: A collection of stories and tricks for outsmarting temper, anger, tantrum, trouble and the likes. Wellington: unpublished paper.
- Kelly, L 1998. What is in a name?: Defining child sexual abuse. *Feminist Review* 28, 22-36.
- Kitzinger, C 1994. Problematizing pleasure: Radical feminist deconstruction of sexuality and power, in Radtke & Stam 1994:194-209.
- Kogan, S M & Gale, J E 1997. Decentering therapy: Textual analysis of a narrative therapy session. *Family Process* 36(2), 101-126.
- Kotze, E & Kotze, D J 1997. Social construction as a postmodern discourse: An epistemology for conversational therapeutic practice. *Acta Theologica* 17 (1), 27-50.
- Laidlaw, T A & Malmo, C 1990. *Healing voices*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Landman, C 2000. Poststructuralist feminism and the deconstruction of religious discourses. DTh paper presented at workshop at the Institute for Therapeutic Development, Pretoria.
- Louw, D J [s a]. *God and our human quest for meaning in suffering*. Stellenbosch: University of Stellenbosch.

- Madigan, S 1996. The politics of identity: Considering community discourse in the externalizing of internalised problem discourses. *Journal of Systemic Therapies* 15, 47-61.
- Madigan, S & Epston, D 1995. From "spy-chiatric gaze" to communities of concern: From professional monologue to dialogue, in Friedman, S (ed), *The reflecting team in action: Collaborative practice in family therapy*, 257-276. New York: Guilford.
- McBride, M 1996 (a). Justice, in Isherwood & McEwan 1996: 113-115.
- McHoul, A & Grace, W 1993. *A Foucault primer: Discourse, power and the subject*. New York: New York University Press.
- McLeod, M S & Soraga, E 1998. Challenge the orthodoxy: Towards a feminist theory and practice. *Feminist Review* 28, 15-35.
- McLean, B A 1997. Co-constructing narratives: A postmodern approach to counseling. MTh, University of Otago, Dunedin.
- McLean, C 1996. The politics of mens pain, in McLean, C, Carey, M & White, C (eds), *Men's way of being*, 11-28. Colorado: Westview Press.
- McNay, L 1992. *Foucault and feminism: Power gender and the self*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- McTaggart, R (ed) 1997. *Participatory action research*. Albany: State University of New York Press.
- Monk, G et al (eds) 1997. *Narrative therapy in practice: The archaeology of hope*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Morgan, A 2000. *What is narrative therapy? An easy-to-read introduction*. Adelaide: Dulwich Center Publications.
- Morrow, S L & Smith, M 1995. Constructions of survival and coping by women who have survived child sexual abuse. *Journal of Counseling Psychology* 42 (1), 24-33.
- Munro, C 1989. White and the cybernetic therapies: News of a difference. *Australian & New Zealand Journal of Family Therapy* 8(4), 183-192.
- Murphy, A 1996 (b). Lust, in Isherwood & McEwan 1996: 185-187.
- Nightingale, D J & Cromby, J (eds) 1999. *Social construction psychology: A critical analysis of theory and practice*. Buckingham: Biddles Limited.

- Okley, A 1986. Interviewing women: A contradiction in terms, in Roberts, H (ed), *Doing feminist research*, 30-61. London. Routledge.
- Palmer, N 1991. Feminist practice with survivors of sexual trauma and incest, in Bricker-Jenkins, M, Hooyman, N R & Gottlieb, N (eds), *Feminist social work practice in clinical settings*, 63-89. California: Sage.
- Pease, B 1997. *Men & sexual politics: Towards a profeminist practice*. Adelaide: Dulwich Courtier Publications.
- Pieterse, E 1996. Reflections on postmodernism and faith in a South African context. *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa* 94, 50-64.
- Pieterse, H 1993. *Praktiese Teologie as kommunikatiewe handelings teorie*. Pretoria: RGN-Uitgewers.
- Poling, J N 1991. *The abuse of power: A theological problem*. Nashville: Abingdon Press.
- Poling, J N 1996. *Deliver us from evil: Resisting racial and gender oppression*. Minneapolis: Fortress.
- Radtke, H L & Stam, H J (eds) 1994. *Power/gender: Social relations in theory and practice*. London: Sage.
- Reinharz, S 1992. *Feminist methods in social research*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Rossouw, G J 1993. Theology in a postmodern culture: Ten challenges. *Hervormde Teologiese Studies* 49 (4): 894-907.
- Russell, J 1999. Counselling and the social construction of the self. *British Journal of Guidance and Counselling* 27 (3), 339-352.
- Salter, A C 1995. *Transforming trauma*. London: Sage.
- Sanderson, C 1995. *Counselling adult survivors of child sexual abuse*. London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers.
- Sawicki, J 1991. *Disciplining Foucault: Feminism, power and the body*. New York: Routledge.
- Shotter, J & Gergen, K J (eds) 1989. *Texts of identity*. London: Sage.
- Shumway, D R 1992. *Michel Foucault*. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press.
- Smith, C 2000. Comments made at Theology Faculty University of Pretoria. Workshop, 29 May 2000. Pretoria.
- Sowetan* 21 Sept 1999. Child sex exploitation grows. p9.
- Spargo, T 1999. *Foucault and queer theory: Post-modern encounters*. Cambridge: Icon Books.
- Stringer, E T 1999. *Action research*. London: Sage.
- Steier, F (ed) 1991. *Research and reflexivity*. London: Sage.

- Stockton, K B 1992. Bodies of God: Poststructural feminist return to the fold of spiritual materialism. *Boundary 2*. 19(2), 113-149.
- Stoppard, J M 2000. *Understanding depression: Feminist social constructionist approaches*. London: Routledge.
- Townley, B 1994. *Reframing human resource management: Power, ethics and the subject at work*. London: Sage.
- Van Dyk, A M 2000. The voices of women and young people who experienced domestic violence. MTh dissertation, University of South Africa, Pretoria.
- Van Niekerk, R L 1999. The double bind between individual and social constructions in female survivors of sexual abuse: A qualitative study. MA dissertation, Rand Afrikaans University, Johannesburg.
- Watkins, G 2000. *Feminist theory: From margin to center*. Cambridge: South End Press.
- Weedon, C 1987. *Feminist practice and poststructuralist theory*. Stanford: Blackwell.
- Weingarten, K 2000. Witnessing, wonder and hope. *Family Process* 39(4), 389-402.
- White, M 1988. Saying hullo again: The incorporation of the lost relationship in resolution of grief. *Dulwich Center Newsletter* 3, 7-11.
- White, M 1990. *Narrative means to therapeutic ends*. New York: Norton.
- White, M 1991. Deconstruction and therapy. *Dulwich Center Newsletter* 3, 21-40.
- White, M 1995. *Re-authoring lives: Interviews and essays*. Adelaide: Dulwich Center.
- White, M 1997. *Narratives of therapists' lives*. Adelaide: Dulwich Center.
- White, M & Epston, D 1990. *Narrative means to therapeutic ends*. New York: Norton.
- Witbank News* 29 June 2001. Support necessary for victims. p 9.
- Wolfreys, J 1998. *Deconstruction Derrida*. New York: St Martin's Press.
- Wolfsdorf, B A & Zlotnick, C 2001. Affect management in group therapy for women with post-traumatic stress disorder and histories of sexual abuse. *Journal of Clinical Psychology* 57 (2), 169-181.

APPENDEX: 1

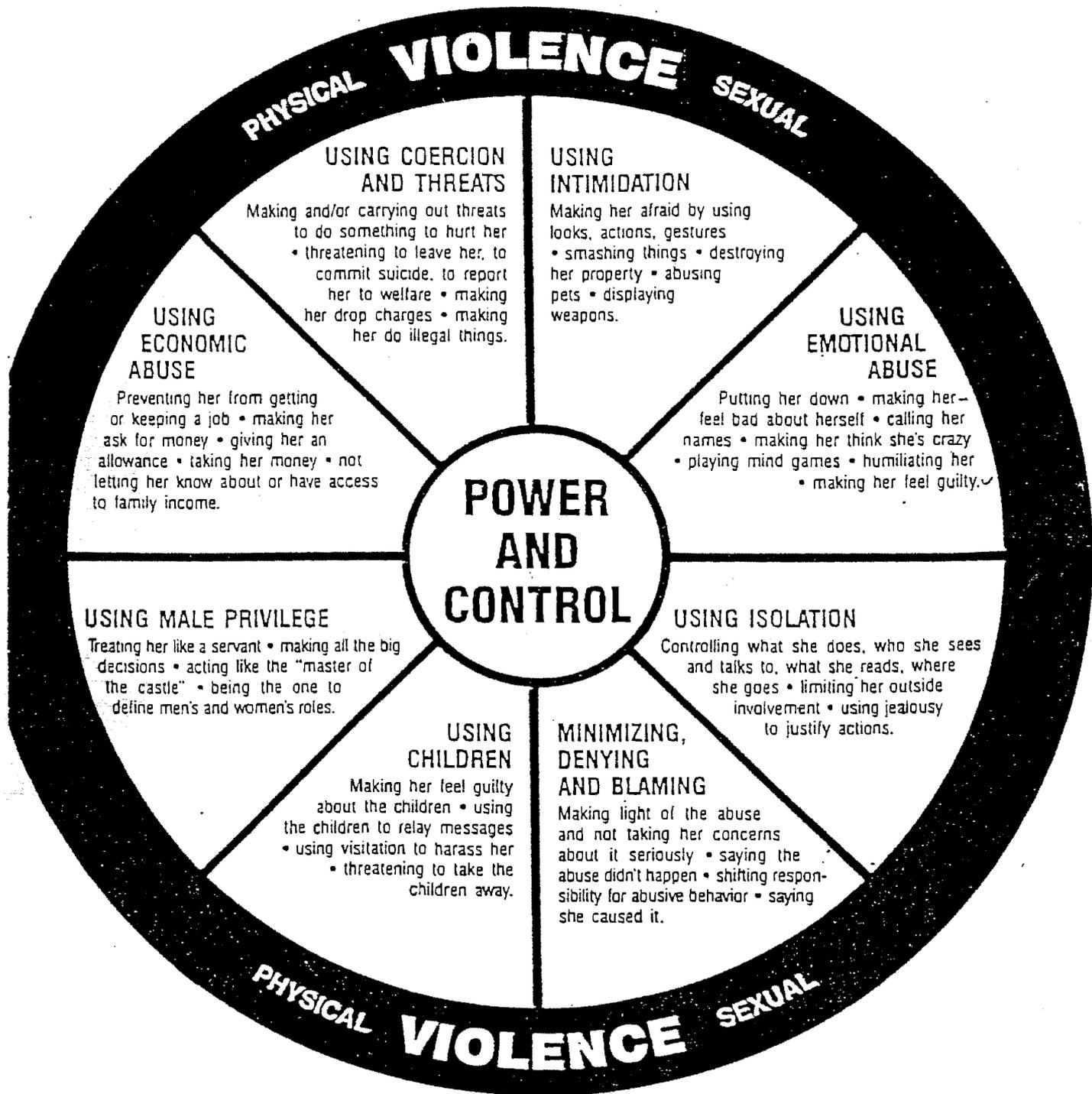


Figure 2. *Power and Control Wheel* (1980). Used with permission of Domestic Abuse Intervention Project 206 West Forth St. Duluth Minnesota 55806

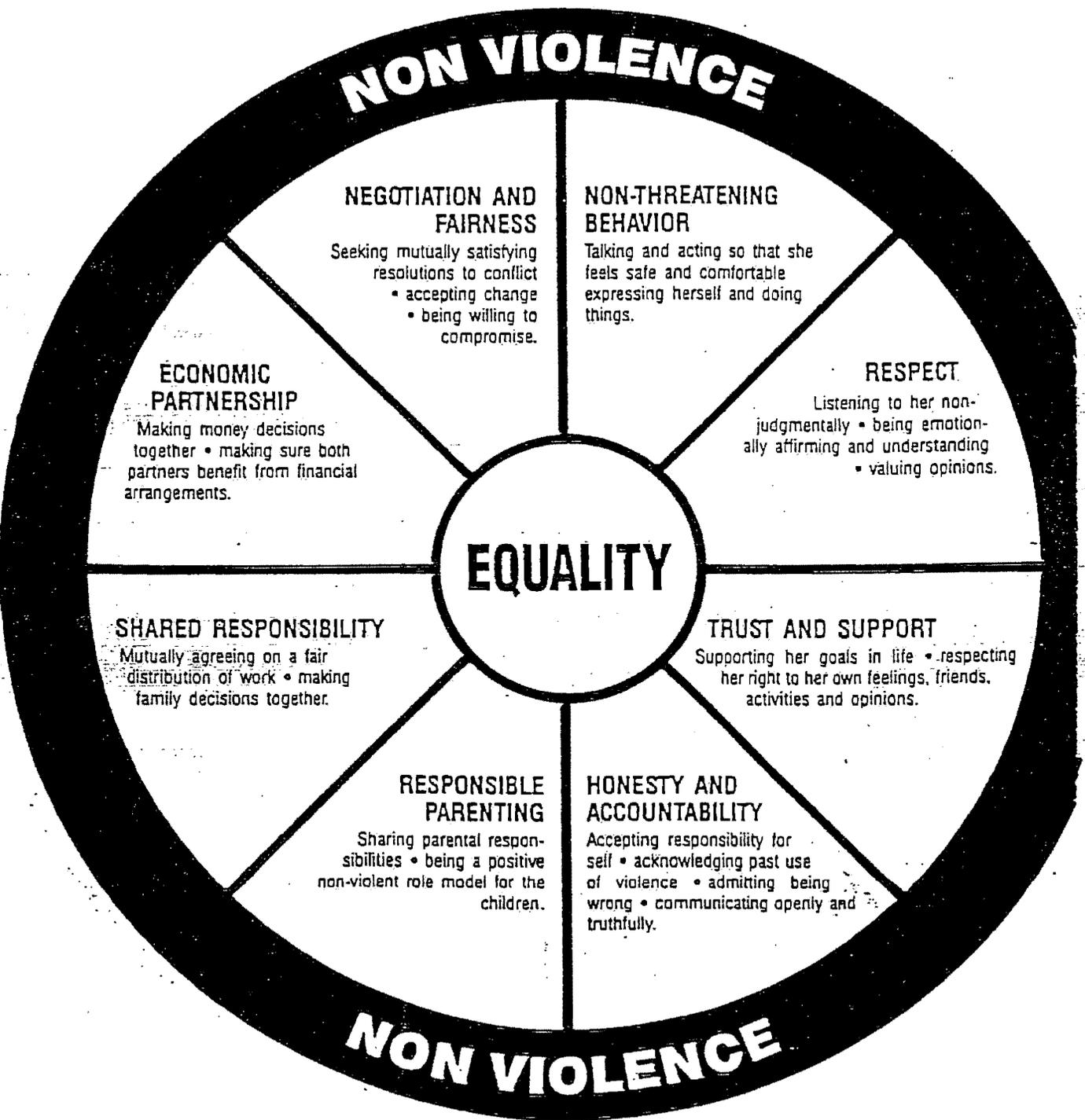


Figure 3. *Equality Wheel* (1980). Used with permission of Domestic Abuse Intervention Project 206 West Forth St. Duluth Minnesota 55806

APPENDIX: 2

ABUSED

Survivor

