

**NARRATIVE PASTORAL THERAPY: BEING AN INDIAN PASTORAL  
THERAPIST TO WHITE COUNSELLEES**

**by**

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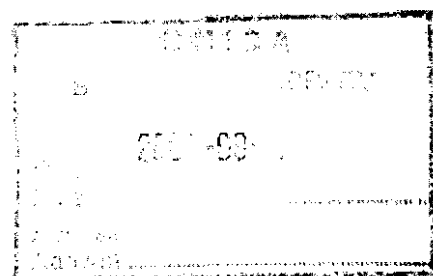
## ABSTRACT

For over four decades, segregation, as the master narrative in South Africa, favoured the development of whites as mental health workers and empowered them to research and write about the lives of people of colour, thus becoming the experts on their lives. In this project I do something in reverse by being an Indian pastoral therapist to white counsellees. The project describes a postmodern narrative approach and social construction epistemology and the application of these towards culturally sensitive and respectful ways of doing pastoral therapy. Important feedback from white counsellees on race, culture and spirituality enabled me to reflect on culturally sensitive ways of doing pastoral therapy in a multicultural post Apartheid South Africa. A narrative perspective also provided me with a voice to tell my own story in a way that was healing to me.

### Key Terms

Narrative approach; social constructionism; postmodern; cultural sensitivity; practical theology; pastoral therapy; therapist of colour; difference; deconstruction; cross-cultural.

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## **CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION**

Stories are habitations. We live in and through stories. They conjure worlds. We do not know the world other than as story world. Stories inform life. They hold us together and keep us apart. We inhabit the great stories of our culture. We live through stories. **We are *lived* by the stories of our race and place.**

(Howard 1991:192)

For God's sake, open the universe a little more

(DiNicola 1997:14)

### **1.1 BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY**

When I enrolled for the Masters in Practical Theology, I was required to do fifty hours of counselling outside my study context, so I wrote letters to some of the Indian pastors to do my therapy practicals in their churches. To my disappointment not one of them responded positively. I then wrote to two Indian ministers who had been appointed in White churches, but they too did not respond. My reflection on this was that perhaps the pastors saw me as a threat because none of them has a Masters degree. Most of the pastors in the Indian township in Benoni seem to be self-called pastors without much formal qualifications. Or perhaps they saw me as not belonging to their doctrinal way of thinking. I then went to a Methodist church in a historically affluent White suburb and applied to do my practicals there. I was informed that the church does counselling and was about to set up a full-time Pastoral Care Centre to be headed by a full-time Pastor for counselling. I was delighted when I was accepted to do my practicals there.

Doing counselling in a historically White Pastoral Care Centre entailed a new form of cross - cultural

counselling. Subject to correction, I assert that cross cultural counselling in South Africa, and in church contexts has been performed by White therapists/counsellors on people of colour. Texts I have read on cross cultural counselling (Maver & Retief 1988; Hickson & Christie 1989; Mason & Rubenstein 1989; Seedat & Nell 1990; Ivey et al, 1997; Kotze 1994) provide helpful guides for doing cross cultural counselling. Yet all these works instruct mainly White therapists and counsellors on how to do therapy with cultures other than White. While I can glean from the authors useful knowledge for cross cultural counselling with blacks in South Africa, my research problem was that of being an Indian pastoral therapist to White counselees. I do not have literature from Seedat (1990), an Indian academic psychologist, for example, to guide me on how to counsel Whites. So I decided to use the therapeutic relationship between me and White counselees to reflect on what I would experience with them and how they would experience me as an Indian pastoral therapist in order to develop culturally sensitive and respectful ways of doing narrative pastoral therapy.

Following Lee (1993), I believe that being an Indian pastoral therapist to White counselees falls under the category of doing research on sensitive topics. Lee (1993:4) writes that

Research may have a sensitive character for situational reasons or because it is located within a particular socio-political context and that sensitive topics present problems because research into them involves potential costs to those involved in the research, including on occasion, the researcher. Sensitive research thus poses an 'intrusive threat' dealing with areas which are private, stressful or sacred.

For example, when I mentioned the topic to a senior minister in the church, he had mixed feelings about it and perceived it as being racist and non-narrative. Yet he was generous in allowing me to proceed with it. Such a project was warranted on the grounds that I did not know of any research done whereby a professionally trained person of colour did pastoral therapy with White counselees in a historically White church context. As a person of colour, I accept the view cited by Scheurich (1997:119), of DuBois, a widely respected Afro-American intellectual, that I have a 'double consciousness'. By this is meant that "people of colour grow up learning to look at themselves not



through their own eyes nor through the eyes of their own race but through the eyes of Whites" (Scheurich 1997:121). Scheurich writes further that people of colour have a "racialised consciousness" while Whites experience themselves as non-racialised individuals because they are governed by individualism. Individualism, he argues, hides the inequities in our social structures, especially racial inequities.

Scheurich and Young (1997:121) argue that Western academic research suffers from 'epistemological racism'. By this the authors mean that all the currently legitimised epistemologies (both positivism and post-positivism) arise exclusively out of the social history of the dominant White race. These legitimised epistemologies exclude those of other races and have negative results for people of colour in general. In the main these racial epistemologies have distorted the lives of other groups. These distortions have been institutionalised as 'truths' and have become the basis of societal and institutional racism. What is important for me is that these distortions are enculturated into people of colour and results in "painful struggles of accepting and rejecting internalised negative and disabling self-conceptions" (Scheurich 1997:142). The problem for scholars of colour is that they have to become competent in epistemologies which are the social construction of the dominant White culture and which has been hostile to their own race and culture. With my own 'double consciousness', my own culture occupies a marginalised place and I have also privileged the epistemologies of the dominant group. It was crucial for me to find an alternate epistemology within mainstream Western culture, which could help me to understand both myself and White counselees. I found this in a postmodern narrative social construction epistemology (White 1995). This empowered me to be wide-awake in this project and to be able to deconstruct both my counselees and my ways of seeing and doing. I needed to become aware of my own political and cultural biases as a historically oppressed person and to transform my practices alongside that of White counselees in the therapeutic relationship. Such a project became necessary in a post-Apartheid South Africa, viz., to move away from racial polarisation and strive towards culturally sensitive ways of approaching other races in the interest of national reconciliation.

As this project was conducted within a Pastoral Care Centre, it was important for me to take note of traditional practices of Pastoral Therapy. Doherty (1991:39) has pointed out that "like the best psychotherapy theories of the day, early family therapy theories tried to transcend the particularities of race, culture, ethnicity and gender in favour of a broad and universally human mode of thinking". This has led to the 'abstraction of man from his specific culture'. A traditional approach to pastoral therapy seems to espouse the methodology of logical positivism in which objectivity, certitude and the absolute authority of the bible is cherished (Crabb 1997:33, 111). In this approach to pastoral therapy, the therapist is regarded as the expert on the Bible and by implication, the expert in diagnosing the spiritual illness of a counsellee.

In employing a postmodern narrative pastoral approach I attempted to move away from the superiority of the therapist. However, as a historically oppressed person, I experienced an inferior status vis a vis Whites. I needed to learn to reclaim my equality of being, while not taking on the role of the expert. A postmodern approach changes the formerly hierarchical relationship to one of equality in which there is free and equal conduct between me and counsellees (Anderson & Goolishian 1992:29). A narrative perspective with its emphasis on the storied nature of human life (Howard 1991:190) assisted me to explore the presenting problems of White counsellees within their own ethnocentric cultures. For example, a Portuguese man married to an English woman might be seen as a White in South Africa. Yet it was important for me to facilitate a deconstruction of their own personal cultures so that they might become culturally sensitive to each others ways of seeing and being. As a pastoral therapist I saw my deconstructive role (Sampson 1989:7) as that of being critical of cultural discourses that were hindering them from preferred ways of being.

## **1.2 PROBLEM STATEMENT**

The question that arose from what I have presented as background to this study, was:

How can I as an Indian pastoral therapist use a narrative approach to pastoral therapy in working with White counsellees in culturally sensitive and respectful ways?

### 1.3 RESEARCH AIMS

Attending to culturally sensitive ways of doing therapy was of primary importance within the present socio-cultural transition that South Africa is going through. As an Indian pastoral therapist in training, the project's central aim was to assist me in becoming sensitive to both sameness and difference (Kotze 1994:109) between White counsellees, in contrast to taken for granted views amongst historically oppressed people of colour that Whites are the same, just as Indians are perceived to be the same in this country. Mostly Whites present themselves for therapy while very few people of colour present themselves for therapy. Yet on therapy done with people of colour it is mostly Whites who have written about it. Thus another aim was to write about doing pastoral therapy with Whites in a small way. In the context of the church this project becomes significant as missionary work has been done by Whites on people of colour. White churches and ministers have done things for Christians of colour. In this project I found myself doing something for White counsellees in a pastoral care context. Most importantly, when doing pastoral therapy across race and culture, the quest for finding respectful ways of doing pastoral therapy became a challenging and innovative one for me.

Another important aim was to tell my own story alongside the stories of White counsellees. Through a journalistic approach (Dixon 1999:58; Haarhoff 1998:129), I was able to tell the story of my loss and pain under Apartheid and attempt to embrace new ways of seeing and doing through a postmodern narrative perspective.

I found a narrative approach and social construction perspective helpful to explore with White counsellees how they have constructed their personal lives and deconstruction enabled me to open up space for counsellees to become culturally and gender-sensitive to each other.

## 1.4 METHODOLOGY

This project was guided by a postmodern social construction epistemology and narrative perspective to pastoral therapy.

Polkinghorne (1992:149) provided a helpful way to understand the difference between modernism and postmodernism while Lowe (1991:43) highlights the importance of discourse sensitivity for understanding difference. Other writers (Wylie 1994; Lyddon 1998) articulate the development of a critical sense of agency in the therapeutic situation. A reflexive sense of agency is achieved through use of deconstruction (Wolfreys 1998; Sampson 1989). While postmodernism de-centres the humanist subject and puts it in its social place (Neimeyer 1998:141), it does not reject human agency (Wylie 1994:47). In fact it assumes that human agency lies behind the constitution of the self and its role in critically examining the world with a view to transforming it (Lyddon 1998:215). This is especially important for me in playing a deconstructive role as a pastoral therapist (Sampson 1989:7). A narrative perspective (White 1995; Zimmerman & Dickerson 1996; Neal et al 1999) was important to allow the stories of clients to unfold while a social constructionist epistemology (Kotze 1997) helped me to seek understanding and to collaborate with counselees towards preferred ways of being. The above is discussed in more detail in the next chapter.

Narrative pastoral therapy falls in the domain of Practical Theology. Heitink (1999:120) defines Practical Theology as a theological theory of action which focuses on communicative action in the service of the gospel. Practical Theology is concerned with transformation, not only of people, but also of society as a whole and this gives it a political dimension. Communicative action has to do with the actualisation and maintenance of the relationship between God and humanity, and humanity and God (Heitink 1999:129). Practical Theology focuses on mediative action as the direct object of study. Mediative action intentionally uses different kinds of action strategies. Action is an intervention and is directed towards change (Heitink 1999:149). Heitink bases his approach to Practical Theology on the hermeneutical, strategic and empirical traditions of social science. The hermeneutical aims at intersubjective understanding; the strategic on how to facilitate change and

the empirical argues that actions are situational in time and space and have a unique context. The strategic approach lends itself to an action research approach to Practical Theology, which is not aimed at direct change but towards opening up issues so as to make more choices available to counselees.

I found Heitink's approach still to be influenced by modernism and opted for Practical Theology as a theological theory of communicative acts (Wolfaardt 1993:29-33). This approach avoids a technical rationalist approach to problem solving (praxeology) and also does not allow Practical Theology to lapse into being a political theological theory. I shall elaborate on this in the next chapter.

## **1.5 Research approach**

### **1.5.1 General description and motivation of the research approach**

This research falls under the domain of qualitative action research. According to Maykut and Morehouse (1994:121), qualitative research focuses on understanding and meaning events have for actors. It focuses on the words of actors and their interpretations. People create, understand, explain, defend, and hide their world with words. However I shall not be looking for patterns among White participants as is done in qualitative research. I am interested in meaning and how words hide the world of participants so that I may deconstruct (Sampson 1989:7) words that hide and invite participants to transform their perspectives and practices.

Transformation of both counselees and my practices requires action research. According to Kelly, "... action research involves the study of a social situation with a view to improving the quality of action within it" (Kelly 1988:138). I opted for the approach of Jennings and Graham (1996:175) who formulate a postmodern approach to action research which is not limited to the resolution of problems but to "struggle without end or resolution, indeed to deconstruct, construct and reconstruct meanings in making sense of the world". This approach shifts the emphasis from who has power to

how power produces practices, techniques and procedures and to help both therapist and counselees to reflect on how they have come to see and understand themselves. The authors draw helpful implications from postmodern theory for action research. I found the following relevant for my project:

critical action research should be concerned with deconstructing authoritative voices  
- those who speak for and on behalf of others;

both the critical action researcher and the postmodernist often share and examine 'narrative' as a useful form of discourse. These narratives help to communicate meanings, project a voice, provide multiple perspectives and can provide future possibilities;

By applying a deconstruction method, action research can examine the data/text from the observation phase in the reflection moment by seeing that text as a contested terrain.

(Jennings & Graham 1996:178)

A narrative approach is helpful in an action research context as it processes the 'narrative unity' of persons. Connely and Clandinin (1987:131) write that narrative unity is " the union in a particular person in a particular place and time of all that the person has been and undergone in the past and in the past of the tradition which helped to shape the person". I followed an open approach and was keen to learn from White counselees on how to collaborate with them in a culturally sensitive way towards preferred ways of being.

The research approach was collaborative (Gergen 1991:86) in which counselees were not seen as objects to be manipulated as in quantitative research (Schumacher & McMillan 1993), but as participants who were respected for their own local knowledges and human agency (Neal et al 1999:

369). For me a collaborative practice follows an intersubjective approach as put forward by phenomenology. My approach was to decentre myself and use a not knowing approach (Anderson & Goolishian 1992) in which the client is regarded as the expert on his/her life.

Following Jones (1990), I took a self-reflexive approach by positioning myself in the text of my research. For Jones "...self-reflexivity is a political and not just an epistemological issue" (Jones 1990:7). This encouraged me to deconstruct my own voice, which is located in a particular racial, cultural, and geographical space in the South African landscape. Drawing on Glenda Dixon (1999:58), I used a narrative journalistic approach by writing in the first person. This enabled me to reflect on both 'inner and outer events' in a personal way. Dixon writes about women finding a voice through a journalistic approach and that a journal serves as an 'act of self assertion'. I agree with her that "the social construction thread of journaling is that it is a form of narrative as well as a form of research, a way to tell our own story, a way to learn who we have been, who we are, and who we are becoming. We literally become teachers and researchers in our own lives, empowering ourselves in the process" (Dixon 1999:59). As a person of colour my voice had been suppressed by an oppressive Apartheid system. Writing in the first person was a useful way of exploring the theories, beliefs and values that guide my social practices.

Haarhoff (1998) writes that a narrative therapy is useful in research for writing as healing. "In South Africa marginalised people are beginning...to replace the **master narrative** (my emphasis) with spaces for their own imagination. We cannot change what happened but we can change the way we interpret it" (Haarhoff 1998:128). Haarhoff asserts further that in South Africa we live in a world in which there is no longer any dominant narrative. "For too long authoritarians, politicians, dominees, teachers and parents have told groups and individuals what their story is" (Haarhoff 1998:129). This opened up space for me to reflect on issues as I experienced them and to work through them in a way that was healing for me as well.

## 1.6 Research procedures

The Institute for Therapeutic Development provided me with a letter requesting permission from churches for me to do practicals in narrative pastoral therapy. I was accepted by a Methodist Church in Benoni. After a year of learning to do narrative pastoral therapy, the idea of being an Indian narrative pastoral therapist to White counsellees was generated as a research project. The Pastor for counselling thought it acceptable for me to include whomever I was counselling in the project as I was doing my internship towards the research project. But, as a narrative approach is a respectful approach, I invited White counsellees as participants for my research topic. Most of them were happy to be participants. Counsellees were provided with an information sheet (see Appendix) containing the aims of the project, and those who took part signed consent.

I had done a fair amount of reading in postmodern epistemology and theology, narrative approaches to therapy and in Practical Theology. For pastoral therapeutic conversations I had to read more specifically on issues that arose in the conversations themselves. Readings around narrative, culture and gender were important in situating problems within cultural discourses. As a beginner in theological studies, important readings in theology helped me to start moving from a position of certainty to one of curiosity. This complemented a narrative perspective which also draws on a postmodern 'not knowing approach' in doing therapy.

In the interviews I did not work with a tight structure. Tight structure is characteristic of modernistic interviewing approaches. I followed Scheurich (1997:73) who reasons that postmodern interviewing is characterised by an 'indeterminate ambiguity'.

Interview interaction is fundamentally indeterminate - the complex play of conscious and unconscious thoughts, feelings, fears, desires, and needs on the part of the interviewer and interviewee cannot be captured and categorised. There is no stable 'reality' or 'meaning' that can be represented. Postmodern interview interaction allows



for the uncontrollable **play of power** (my emphasis) within the interaction.

(Scheurich 1997:73-74)

Scheurich (1997:47) cites Farran, a feminist writer, who says that "data collection is data construction". For me this implies that data analysis is also a social construction. Following a postmodern social relativist epistemology, emergent data from interview interactions were analysed and interpreted in view of the central aim of the project which was to find culturally sensitive and respectful ways of doing pastoral therapy, while giving expression to my own voice as an Indian pastoral therapist.

Through my supervisor I learned the importance of accountability to participants and others in the research project. I provided White counsellees with summaries of therapeutic conversations regularly for checking my understanding of their situation. Letters were written when necessary to extend the conversation (Epston 1994) and this often became the basis for new conversations. I often got stuck on how to take the conversations forward. I asked and received permission from participants to take their problems to supervision meetings that were held for the pastoral therapists. Doing this made me responsive to multiple perspectives that were helpful to my counsellees and to me. When interviews were conducted by the Pastor for counselling as feedback on issues such as race, culture and spirituality, I gave the transcripts to participants to check for trustworthiness (Maykut & Morehouse 1994:145) and included further comments from them in the project. The transcripts were also given to the Pastor for Counselling for checking and to state her impressions on important issues in the conversations. Her comments were also included in the project to expand the sense of accountability.

### **1.6.1 Participants**

After a year of learning to do pastoral therapy with several White counsellees, I found myself ready to invite new counsellees as participants in my research project. The project included five participants who were referred to me by the Pastor for counselling. Counsellees were not selected according to any social status criteria but for the fact that they were all White. As a matter of interest, I mention that four were males between thirty to forty - five years of age and one couple, both around thirty years of age. I worked with three Englishmen, and two couples, one comprising of an Afrikaans male and English woman, and the other a Portuguese man married to an English woman. In relation to race and age, younger Whites tend to be more tolerant than older White people towards people of colour. However, in situations of couple therapy with males and females, Afrikaner and Portuguese males tend to be defensive when their values are questioned in front of their spouses. This was my experience with similar couples in my first year of learning to do pastoral therapy.

Two men came for counselling to save their marriages. Another intercultural couple wanted marriage counselling over cultural and gender differences. A man in a wheelchair was referred to me for a problem with depression and another man came for a spiritual perspective.

### **1.6.2 Counselling setting**

Pastoral therapy took place in counselling rooms at the Pastoral Care Centre of a Methodist Church in Benoni.

### **1.6.3 Counselling approach**

Unlike traditional practices of pastoral therapy in which the therapist is the expert, I incorporated a postmodern approach, which was collaborative (Anderson & Goolishian 1992). I tried to decentre myself and work with the idea that counsellees were the experts on their lives. It was also important

for me to help counselees transform practices (Graham 1997:126) through deconstructing language (Wolfreys 1998:9). In narrative therapy this is known as externalisation of the problem (White 1995; Zimmerman & Dickerson 1996:364).

### **1.7 A personal story: where I am coming from**

I enrolled for the Masters in Narrative pastoral therapy for personal growth and to do community service. I felt that I had become stuck in my approach to human relations and needed a more liberating perspective. I had been trained in education and worked with students only at a cognitive level. I longed to do work of a more holistic nature that took into account the affective, psychological and spiritual dimensions of human beings. The training I received in education was from a liberal university, which privileged analytical and logical thinking. This became the way I approached knowledge and human beings. If students and humans I associated with did not speak in a logical way, I would become impatient towards them. There is value in analytical thinking in that it is used to explore and develop new concepts and to organise documents. Modern society highly regards logical, mathematical, and scientific thinking. When I was exposed to postmodern perspectives, I soon learned to embrace a both/and approach (Biever et al 1998:185; Sampson 1989:16) to human thinking. Howard (1991:189) does a commendable critique of rationality which is the foundation for analytical thinking. In exploring whether humans are innately rational and logical, Howard says that

... psychological research continually turns up ways in which humans are imperfectly logical...or logical thinkers with limited capacities...[T]here are numerous instances of rationality and irrationality in human thought and action. That rationality and irrationality persist, in spite of our culture's diligent efforts to teach rational modes of thinking, suggests that rational thought represents a singular achievement for individuals, even if we might be naturally disposed to think rationally.

(Howard 1991:189)

Other forms of thinking such as the moral, political and religious exist alongside the rational and this suggests a pluralistic stance toward thinking about social life. Howard goes further and articulates a countertheme to Enlightenment rationality. The Romantic view holds that

ideas and practices have their foundation in neither logic nor empirical science, that ideas and practices fall beyond the scope of deductive and inductive reason, that ideas and practices are neither rational but rather *nonrational*.

(Howard 1991:191)

This to me is a wonderful deconstruction of Western rationality into which I have been socially constructed. It opens up space for Howard to conceptualise that logic and rationality represent one type of story, and scientific theories represent refined stories or metaphors that explain complex causal processes in the world. However, these stories are limited when it comes to a consideration of issues of meaning in human lives. Scientific stories lack the rich resources of nonscientific perspectives such as philosophy, literature and religion. This pluralistic approach defends the co-equality of different frames of understanding. I am in agreement with the countertheme that

The concept of nonrationality, the idea of the "arbitrary", frees some portion of man's mind from the universal dictates of logic and science, permitting diversity while leaving man free to choose among irreconcilable presuppositions, schemes of classification, and ideas of worth.

(Howard 1991:191-192)

I found this perspective quite liberating and in keeping with a postmodern epistemology which speak about the unpredictability of human behaviour in different contexts. I understood for myself that rationality, as a singular achievement could become the enemy of curiosity. This opened up space

for me to accept the contradictory nature of human beings and to be open to experience surprises in the therapeutic context.

Below is an overview of the chapters in this dissertation, which describe the application of postmodern ideas in the therapeutic situation.

Chapter 2 contains discussions on a postmodern social construction epistemology, differences in Indian Hindu and mainstream Western culture, and a practical theological approach as a basis for narrative pastoral therapy.

Chapter 3 is about five conversational stories with White counselees viz.:

- (i) A culture of tough love: wheelchair man ends up in the streets.
- (ii) A White man's struggle for self-reliance: "spoiled without responsibility".
- (iii) A son's spiritual dilemma: "mother's paradigm shift".
- (iv) A bickering intercultural couple: going round in circles
- (v) Imprisoned by marriage vows: with a bit of work this marriage can work

Chapter 4 reflects on feedback on race, culture, spirituality and respectful ways of doing pastoral therapy.

Chapter 5 reflects on the empowering aspects of the project and how a postmodern narrative perspective enabled me to be a pastoral therapist to White counselee.

## **CHAPTER 2: EPISTEMOLOGICAL AND PRACTICAL THEOLOGICAL POSITIONING OF THE RESEARCH PROJECT**

In this section I shall discuss issues that are important for conducting the study. The important issues for me are epistemology; a theology of grace and values; therapy across cultures; and a narrative approach in relation to Practical Theology and pastoral therapy.

### **2.1 Introduction**

This project is about being an Indian pastoral therapist to White counsellees in a historically White Pastoral Care Centre. In the context of South Africa the words "Indian" and "White" are particularly politically loaded. Under Apartheid life was seen from a one way view under the dominant White regime. Society was socially engineered towards segregation and Black and Indian cultures were defined from a one way White perspective which perceived people of colour as "cultural infants" (Rose & Tunmer 1975:128). But, however Whites were classifying and defining me under Apartheid, as an oppressed person, I also constructed my own views of Whites in South Africa. These views serve as my bias and shall inform personal reflections on conversations with White counsellees. Because of segregation, I did not get to really know Whites in South Africa. I only experienced them superficially, as authorities in the form of ministers in church, bosses in the workplace, and lecturers at university. This project helped me to get an inside view into the lives of some Whites in a church context.

### **2.2 Epistemological issues**

Context is an important word in this study. It brings up the debate about universal versus contextual approaches to acquiring knowledge. I would like to locate myself in a postmodern social construction epistemology as my theoretical perspective for engaging in narrative pastoral therapy.

Polkinghorne (1992) provides a helpful way to understand the difference between modernism and postmodernism. Modernism recognises the transient and contingent nature of knowledge but sees this as obstacles to be overcome in search of the eternal and immutable. In contrast to this, postmodernism accepts totally fragmentation, discontinuity and the chaotic. Postmodernism accepts the

sanctification of the diverse and reality is not integrated but a disunited, fragmented accumulation of disparate elements and events. Modernism attends to regularities whereas postmodernism focuses on differences and uniqueness. Social knowledge is to be concerned with local and specific occurrences and not with the search for universal context-free laws. The argument against general laws is that social reality is not a static system that underlies the flux of experience, but is itself a process of continuous change.

(Polkinghorne 1992:149)

Roger Lowe (1991) characterises postmodernism as an intellectual movement that takes an attitude of uncertainty, studied doubt and reflexivity. He writes that postmodernism favours social construction in favour of universal scientific truth, understands language as constituting reality rather than representing it. In contrast with humanism which places the self at the centre of meaning, in postmodernism

the 'self' loses its privileged position as the central creator of meaning; it is constituted through pre-existing discourses and social processes, and is thus 'de-centred'. The locus is moved from *mind* to *text* and *difference* is emphasised over *identity*.

(Lowe 1991:43)

Lowe (1991:44) explains that de-differentiation is favoured above the differentiation of modernism. Differentiation breaks up experience into either - or dualities such as the personal, the family, the political etc., and which are assumed to be inherently different and autonomous. De - differentiation collapses some of these fields into others such as the personal and the political. For me this is important in being an Indian narrative pastoral therapist to White counsellees, as my encounter with White counsellees cannot ignore the political pre-assumptions, which shall inform the therapeutic conversations.

A very important feature of postmodern social constructionism is that it is discourse-sensitive.

Discourse refers to the process of conversation and refutes the view that language reflects reality. Meanings are not pre-given but constituted within 'conversational action' itself. In shifting the focus from language to discourse, a postmodern epistemology *historicises and politicises* the study of language use through emphasising the historical specificity of what is said and what remains unsaid. In this line of work, discourses...refer to the *systematic and institutionalised ways of speaking/writing* or otherwise making sense through the use of language.

(Lowe 1991:45)

Jennings and Graham (1996: 172) cite five key features of postmodern discourse which I set out below:

- . Discourses are ideological in that they involve a set of values and viewpoints about people in their relationship to the distribution of social goods (money, power, and status) in society.
- . Discourses are resistant to self-analysis and define what counts as acceptable criticism, which of course is constituted by another discourse.
- . Discourses are defined positions in relation to other, ultimately opposing discourses.
- . Discourses value concepts and viewpoints at the expense of others, hence marginalising



viewpoints and values central to other discourses.

Discourses are related to power relations and hierarchical structure in society; that is control and exercise of certain discourses can lead to the acquisition of social goods in society.

Returning to language, Kotze and Kotze (1997:31-33) explain that language is more than just a way of connecting between people. People exist in language. Thus language is a dynamic social operation and not a simple linguistic activity. Meaning and understanding come about in language; they do not exist prior to the utterance of language. But understanding does not mean that one person completely understands the other person. Through dialogue one can understand only what it is that the other is saying in a particular context. Language produces meaning.

I agree with the point that language constitutes reality and that life is experienced within language. Of more importance is that language constitutes meaning in a discourse which is a systematic and institutionalised way of speaking or writing. Thus a postmodern social construction approach focuses on discourse rather than language per se.

While discourse analysis is useful to explore the social constructedness of a person's value system, it does not go far enough to actually disrupt a counsellor's values in the therapeutic situation. It seems descriptive. Graham (1996:109) makes a cryptic point that "to be constituted within language is not to be determined by it". To raise questions about values and beliefs, I need to turn to deconstruction.

My use of deconstruction is mainly guided by Wolfreys (1998:9) that "deconstruction...is nothing more or less than good reading as such" (my emphasis). An important point made by Wolfreys about deconstruction is that "it does not take things apart, it is not an operation, it only reveals how things are put together" (Wolfreys 1998:9). For Wolfreys, deconstruction involves taking responsibility for the act of reading rather than seeking to avoid that responsibility in the name of some institutionally approved method of interpretation. Good reading never avoids responsibility. What is important is also to encounter each text on its own terms. I like Wolfrey's approach to

deconstruction as it is modest. It entails an abandonment of a particular desire for mastery over the text. The author provides a powerful analogy to 'good reading' through the image of a dredging machine at work.

As the teeth of a dredging machine scrape a sea-bed, so, while random particles are picked up, something is dropped, something remains, and something cannot be scooped in the first place. This suggests that no act of reading can ever attain mastery over the object of its inquiry. It cannot do so for at least two reasons: (i) what reading 'picks up' cannot wholly be determined ahead of the event of the textual encounter, and (ii) whatever the reading does gather up, there is always that which remains, which is the remains of reading, the excess or supplement beyond the act of reading.

(Wolfe 1998:17)

Sampson (1989:7) also provides a helpful account of deconstruction, which he applies, to the bourgeois Western individual. For him to deconstruct is to undo, not to destroy. It is to place a term under erasure which means "employing the familiar and commonly known in order to deconstruct the familiar and commonly known. Thus, we must use the terms that we believe to be inaccurate and inappropriate, under erasure, in order to reveal their status as useful, necessary and wrong" (Sampson 1989:7). Sampson also explains 'différance' as an important concept. It stands for difference and deferral.

Sampson uses the concept of 'différance' to argue that the mainstream Western conception of a person as an ontologically aware and integrated being is false. This conception presents one with a fully non-centred and non-centrable representation of personhood. The illusion of the ego as master in its own household, seeking to integrate the competing demands it faces and being successful to the extent that it achieves a unified wholeness, has its parallels in theories of governance and of authority in the Western world. This implies the self as multidimensional rather than integrated. 'Différance' is also employed to deconstruct the mainstream Western logic of identity of either/or.

An either/or approach defines a person as having one core identity and sets it against others. In promoting contrasting opposition to others, the Western either/or approach threatens the very person who is thus described.

(Sampson1989:15)

By contrast Sampson understands 'difference' to argue for a logic of both/and. He draws on Bateson's 'ecosystem' to show that

the unit of natural survival is neither the individual nor the society but the ecosystem. This system comprises both organism and environment and that any organism that destroys its environment manages to destroy itself. By thinking in terms of either/or, one creates the very conditions that oppose entities that are in fact members of the same system. It is only by thinking in terms of a logic of both/and can one see that the matter is not one of opposition but only of differences; and as we know, differences do not inhere in the entity, but rather describe the relations among the parts of system.

(Sampson1989:16)

I deduce that this provides an important insight for doing pastoral therapy with White counsellors, namely that counsellors who would "seek to oppose and enslave others can only suffer in kind, for those others are elements of the subject's own personhood" (Sampson 1989:16). The implications for my project is discussed later when I bring in the views of Augsburger (1986) on mainstream Indian and Western cultures.

While postmodernism de-centres the humanist subject and puts it in its social place (Neimeyer 1998), it does not reject human agency (Lyddon, 1998; Wylie 1994). In fact it assumes that human

agency lies behind the constitution of the self and its role in critically examining the world with a view to transforming it. This is especially important for me in playing a deconstructing role as a pastoral therapist (Peterson 1989:28), viz. to enhance a critical or reflexive sense of agency that undermines the kingdom of self and establishes the kingdom of God.

A postmodern social construction position is complemented by a social relativist epistemology as articulated by Scheurich (1997:32). The crux of this position is that epistemology or truth games are located in shifting and diverse historical human practices in which politics and power become central epistemological issues. Our ways of knowing are inherently culture - bound and thus socially and historically conditioned and are open to challenge and change. A postmodern relativist epistemology locates where the struggle for truth or knowledge occurs. Scheurich writes that

Truth is social, historical, and therefore, a political struggle. Truth is not power - free; it is power laden. Discourse and politics, knowledge and power are...part of an indissoluble couplet. Power and knowledge directly imply one another...in the sense that the social relativist epistemology uncovers the truth - power relationship, it is radical rather than conservative: to politicise (knowledge production) means not to bring politics in where there was none, but to make overt how power permeates the construction and legitimization of knowledges.

(Scheurich1997:34)

What is important about the above approach is that each epistemology is a **political enactment** (my emphasis) in which a researcher cannot remove himself or herself in pursual of neutrality. Scheurich writes that "...the enactment of an epistemology can no longer be found on picking the best epistemology in terms of which one brings the researcher closer to some sort of foundational truth or in terms of what coheres most closely to some postfoundational standard of criterion. It is now based on which epistemology best expresses the politics of the researcher (Scheurich 1997:49-50).

I find Scheurich's idea that "our ways of knowing are inherently culture - bound " quite relevant for this project. I agree that the search for truth is a political struggle as it is pursued in relation to others. In addition to seeing Whites through the eyes of an oppressed person, my own Indian culture and political culture is quite different to mainstream Western culture. I come from a Hindu background and the discussions below do not include Indians of Islamic conviction. Thus the term Indian is limited to those Indian groups who are practising Hindus. Augsburger (1986) is helpful in describing the differences in mainstream Western and Indian cultures. As I shall be working with families as well, the discussion below focuses on family culture.

### 2.3 Differences in family culture

In this section I am dependent on Western writers available to me for descriptions on Indian and Western cultures. I must point out that these writers tend to be totalizing in their descriptions and do not take note of differences in Western and Indian cultures. For example, Italians, Portuguese and Afrikaners, though part of Western capitalism, have closely knit family structures compared to Americans and English people. Some Indian cultures have more rigid family structures than others. Hindu families tend to be more relaxed than Muslim families. However, not having postmodern texts on Western and Indian cultures, I shall use some Western authors as a guide.

In Indian Hindu society the individual is part of a complex hierarchically ordered family structure throughout the course of life. Augsburger elaborates that

The psychological model of man **emphasises human dependence** (my emphasis) and vulnerability to feelings of estrangement and helplessness. Hinduism sees the core of life as anxiety and suffering and promotes a "therapeutic model" of social organisation in that it attempts to alleviate suffering by addressing itself to deep needs for connection and relationship to other human beings in an enduring and trustworthy fashion for ongoing mentorship, guidance, and help in getting through

life.

(Augsburger 1986:187)

In contrast to the above, for mainstream Western approaches to family relations, the basic unit of analysis is the individual.

The family is understood essentially as a contractual social group, composed archetypically of two adults, each with a self- defined identity, who have entered into a relationship that involves the procreation of other persons who are viewed as individuals from birth and actively **invited to individuate** (my emphasis) as rapidly as the developing cognitive structures allow.

(Augsburger 1986:187)

Critical theorists challenge the idea of the Western bourgeois person as a relatively autonomous self-contained and distinctive universe. This is a fictitious character as reality is quite different. Critical theorists argue that

there is an essential *interpenetration*....of society and the individual that warrants our approaching with skepticism any view that makes the individual a transcendent entity. We do not begin with two independent entities, individual and society, that are otherwise formed and defined apart from one another and that interact as though each were external to the other. Rather, society constitutes and inhabits the very core of whatever passes for personhood: each is interpenetrated by its other.

(Sampson 1989:4)

Augsburger writes further that

The traditional Indian family functions as a closed family system with a non-permeable boundary. It is characterised by many significant transactions within the family, but few personal transactions outside the family. The individual self is derived from the family self...Socialisation in the joint family gives little importance to "I, me, and mine" and much to "we, us and our"...The ideal of maturity is continuous and **satisfying dependency relationships** (my emphasis) throughout life. Western families tend to be open systems with permeable boundaries. Individuals within the family have clearly defined ego boundaries and carry out transactions with the outside world on their own initiative and in pursuit of their own interests.

(Augsburger 1986:189)

Jenkins (1990) also provides a useful description of mainstream Western cultural values that function within a capitalist political economy.

Western industrialised society is highly competitive and hierarchical in nature. The ideology and practice of individualism or individual achievement is favoured above co-operation and interdependence. Individual self-esteem is based on a "lust for status and power and the deification of these concepts". A capitalist system promotes an acquisitive consciousness in which accumulation of goods is primary, including ownership of property. Within this system control over other people and the environment is sought. The capitalist social order promotes hierarchical relations of superiors and subordinates. Superiors are entitled to privilege, respect and deference. There is a practice of ownership of subordinates and the exercise of power for the fulfilment of individual needs. Gaining the competitive edge involves being 'aggressive' and exploiting the 'weaknesses' of others. The world is conceptualised as a place where individuals are either winners or losers. Lust for status promotes

competitive values at the expense of co-operative relationship values such as empathy, respect, nurturance, trust, sensitivity, altruism, and equity. Success is pursued at the expense of responsibility for the welfare of others. These values are enshrined in Western political, economic, familial and education systems.

(Jenkins 1990:33 - 34)

Jenkins description of capitalism seems to be totalizing. As the capitalist system does not exist in reality, it sounds more like a description of laissez - faire capitalism. Nevertheless, I shall work with his description as a guide.

### 2.3.1 Gender roles

As I shall be counselling both men and women I think it necessary to make a brief statement on gender roles in Indian and Western societies. I find the views of Augsburg (1986) insightful on this issue and quote him at length:

The daily lives of most women in Western and non-Western countries vary not in kind but in degree. In some countries there are statutes barring sex discrimination, or legislation on equal rights, yet everywhere stereotypical views based on traditional norms and historic patriarchal values prevail. The movement from feudal to modern societies has been partial even for the most modern. A society is modern when it is successful in removing social and structural constraints and in establishing appropriate compensatory mechanisms so that all individuals, regardless of their categorical membership such as age, sex, race, religion, origin, or social class, can have equal access to a wide range of options in all sectors. By such definition, no society has achieved the justice envisioned by modernity.

(Augsburger 1986:216)



Thus both Western and non -Western societies, with the exclusion of matriarchial societies, have evolved male dominated social institutions based on male-oriented values up to this day. Societies are patriarchal in which sex roles are stereotyped. A woman's role in the division of labour is based on natural difference. She is said to be biologically suited to nurturing roles. Her identity is attained through her relationship with men and women achieve their highest fulfilment as wives or mothers. Women are also said to be childlike and need the protection of a male. Commenting on the religious approach to gender relations, Augsburger makes an informative point that

virtually all religions have been cited as establishing, certifying, and regulating male superiority, dominance, or privilege....The major world religions have, in practice, agreed on the subordination of women. Judaism saw woman as instrumental and largely responsible for the fall of man, a view perpetuated by Christianity and Islam. The Hindu *Laws of Manu* established inferiority and dependence for Indian women.

(Augsburger 1986:216-217)

Jenkins (1990) adds to the views on traditional gender roles in mainstream Western society.

Males display an exaggerated sense of entitlement and status in relation to females and children; an avoidance of social-emotional responsibilities; a reliance on others (especially females) to face social-emotional responsibilities; avoidance of intimacy and nurturance; the need to be tough, rational and competitive in the social and economic world. A woman is portrayed as a caregiver who must alleviate the emotional burdens of others; has to work hard to keep the family calm, prevent stress, disharmony and conflict. She has to walk on egg shells around the family and protect them from the pressures of day to day living.

(Jenkins 1990:39)

Jenkins also discusses male approaches to sexuality in mainstream Western cultures.

There is the practice of male sexual entitlement and ownership of the partner's body. The female partner should be available and is expected to provide for the male's sexual needs. Men seem to think that they must have sex at a certain frequency otherwise they may become less virile. The woman must also be younger, smaller, innocent, naive, deferring, inexperienced, virginal, and will not challenge the man's authority...This traditional recipe for a female sexual partner seems more a recipe for a child than one for an adult female.

(Jenkins 1990:41)

My experience of Indian men tells me that Jenkin's description above is also true of most Indian men. This concurs with Augsburg's view which I accept that the "oppression of women is inextricably bound up with the world system of exploitation" (Augsburger 1986:224).

I also differ from most Whites in my critical approach to capitalist values of competition and accumulation of wealth. I have grown up under a form of racial capitalism in which I was politically oppressed and economically exploited. I embraced a form of Christian communalism which promotes sharing and caring, and a non - interest in competition and acquisition of material things. My early formative influence in Christian communalism is informed by the practice of the early church, namely, "And all who believed were together and had all things in common; and they sold their possessions and goods and distributed them to all, as any had need" (Acts 2:45-46). As I do not live in a commune, I do not practice this on the same scale, but I do take on a fair amount of responsibility towards my extended family and towards Black families.

The above are the pre-understandings which go with me when I shall engage in narrative pastoral counselling with White counselees. I do not aim to test if they are true of all Whites, but I shall consider each counselling situation as a context with its own particular dynamics. Following the

constructivist approach of Maturana (1985) and a social construction perspective (Kotze 1997), I shall try to enter the individual and social observing systems of counselees, and hope to understand them from within their contexts. At the same time I shall try to be sensitive to differences between White individuals even within the same ethnic culture (Kotze 1994:109). This I think would be in keeping with a postmodern epistemology. However, I shall also concern myself with the ethical task of transforming values, which is discussed a little later.

#### **2.4 My approach to White counselees as a historically oppressed person: A Theology of Grace**

Like an onion, the history of my oppression is multi - layered. In India my grandparents suffered under the caste system. People were born into social positions in the Hindu hierarchy and this was hereditary. The British brought them as indentured sugar cane plantation labourers to South Africa. Indians in South Africa brought their culture with them and practised their own forms of ethnic prejudice. After a while Indians could buy their freedom for one British pound. My father worked as a farm labourer for a White farmer then moved to Johannesburg to become a waiter under the Apartheid system. Indians were required to have permits to work in the Transvaal. Quite often my father's permit expired and he would be "deported" back to Natal. This meant the loss of his job and economic woes for his large family of ten children. By stealth he would find his way back to Transvaal and work again as a waiter until he was caught by Apartheid police and sent back to Natal. And so his life as a waiter in Transvaal was one of trying to outwit the police so that he could bring money for his family once a month. While he was away, we survived on very little that we could find in the veldt and making credit with shopkeepers. I managed to rise from the ashes of suffering and obtained a Masters in Education at the age of thirty-five. But this education became meaningless for many years when my life was shattered by an Afrikaner who led to the breakdown of my marriage and to divorce.

Through all the suffering that I have worked through as an oppressed person, I learned not to be bitter towards White people. Recently I have discovered a theology of grace as articulated by Augsburg (1986:140). Augsburg prefaces his theology of grace with a discussion on shame and

guilt. He writes that shame and guilt is avoided in mainstream Western culture. A rejection of shame by Western thinkers and writers is rooted in a faith commitment to individual moral autonomy. And the reason for viewing shame in a negative light in Western thought " suggests a cultural bias, a bias that is a direct descendent of Enlightenment thought and the individualism, privatism, rationalism, and egocentrism it has offered us" (Augsburger 1986:115). I provide two examples to illustrate this from my personal experience. At a workshop at the Institute for Therapeutic Development (ITD) in April 1998, a political discussion arose as to whether Whites should apologise for Apartheid publicly. One White therapist was upset with the idea and defended herself that she did not treat blacks badly and therefore she felt she was not guilty and she was wrongly being made a victim (see Swan 1998). A second experience was when I was requested by the head of the Pastoral Care Centre where I am doing counselling, to go for personal counselling to a minister in the church. As I had been accepted as a pastoral therapist in the Pastoral Care Centre, the Pastor felt that personal counselling would help me to get a perspective on my life. I made myself vulnerable and narrated how an Afrikaner man led to the breakdown of my marriage and my struggle to come to terms with it. The minister is Afrikaans himself but leans more to the English, as his membership is seventy percent English speaking. He did not seem to empathise with me. He seemed more disturbed that I struggled with the problem for four years and did not get on with my marriage. After six sessions with him there seemed to be no regret shown for what I suffered nor did he say he was sorry for what Whites had done to oppress and exploit people of colour. When I hear a woman tell a painful story of abuse at the hands of her husband, I feel it necessary to apologise for men's ways of being that are disrespectful towards women. This is the practice of Michael White (1995) when he has conversations about accountability in relation to mens' oppression of women.

Augsburger (1986:140) discusses that grace represents a new reality as found in the New Testament. Grace is divine acceptance proceeding from the Father's steadfast love for humankind. Grace heals brokenness and draws people from evil towards the good. Grace is unconditional love that bestows worth on humans inspite of what they have done. For me grace entails a theology of hope, of reconciliation between perpetrator and victim, between oppressor and oppressed as I work towards forgiveness and acceptance. I concur with Augsburger when he says that

grace is the acceptance and affirmation of the person before and independent of any action a person can take in the world.....All therapeutic intervention into human pain is grounded in grace. The caring of the counsellor for the counsellee offers unconditional positive regard.

(Augsburger 1986:140-141)

I would not like a theology of grace to be misunderstood as an arrogant spiritual position. I am also working through my own prejudices on race, gender and sexual orientation. The point for this position is that the pain of oppressed people is so deep that it takes a long time to come to terms with it. And yet most White Christians are still condescending towards people of colour and defensive of themselves by denying complicity in the oppression of people of colour. As an Indian pastoral therapist, I embody a concern for White counsellees that transcends the boundaries of my own culture and as an oppressed person. However, a theology of grace is insufficient. If White counsellees are to be helped to become unstuck in their life stories, I also need to address the values that inform their practices. This is where a theology of values becomes necessary.

## **2.5 My approach to White counsellees as a narrative pastoral therapist: A Theology of Values**

Social practices are underpinned by values which are ways of seeing, thinking and being. In line with a social construction epistemology, Augsburger (1986:170) writes that “value is thoroughly relational in character and that there is no such thing as value in or of itself; value exists only in the context of relations between and amongst beings”. He also provides useful information about cultural values being concerned with these central needs:

1. Economic goods, which realize the economic value, called *utility*.
2. Ideological goods, which realize the theoretical value, called *truth*.
3. Political goods, which realize the power value called *dominance* or *governance*.

4. Solidarity goods, which realize the social value called *fidelity* or *loyalty*.
5. Ethical goods, which realize the ethical value called *morality*.
6. Aesthetic goods, which realize the aesthetic value called *beauty*.
7. Religious goods, which realize faith values called the *sacred* or the *holy*.

(Augsburger 1986:171)

While Augsburger simply states the values above, Ian Parker (1989) and White and Epston (1990) provide an insightful discussion on how persons are transformed into ideological subjects in Western society with the modernization of society in the nineteenth century. This is done by a rediscussion of Foucault's reflections on Jeremy Bentham's Panopticon. The Panopticon was a model of a prison system. In the Panopticon a central guard tower is encircled by cells which are backlit so as to render visible the activities of the inhabitants. The prisoners do not see the observer but believe that they are being observed. The Panopticon was seen to symbolise a system of cultural surveillance, a normalizing gaze, vis a vis which people construct their different identities. What underpins a person's identity is a set of values which guides social practice. Under modernity, "each man is his own panopticon, an external monitor of himself and others ... " (Parker 1989:66).

Augsburger (1986:170) discusses 'self-reliance' as a core value of American people. Self-reliance derives from its continental parent value that is individualism. There is a fear of dependence. American self-reliance is about achievement, success, individual personality, and freedom. In its imperialistic form, self-reliance is also about racism, group superiority and acquisitiveness.

The authors above show clearly how well persons are transformed into ideological subjects. However, this position is criticized as not allowing for creative agency. Drawing on critical theorists, the feminist theologian, Graham (1996:149) argues that discourses of power and knowledge render notions of the self nothing but a passive and coerced captive of those discourses' foreclosure of undifferentiated subjectivity. A critical theory of intersubjective communication recognizes the fragmented and alienated condition of the self, but insists upon

the subversive potential of autonomous and purposeful human agency.

The pastoral therapist, Augsburger, also goes on to argue that self-reliance is a myth.

We humans are interdependent upon our fellow human beings intellectually, emotionally, socially, economically, and technologically. We may have differing degrees of awareness of our need for others, but only in denial can one say that he or she needs no one. Yet the goal of adjustment, and the process of psychotherapy in American culture, is largely to eliminate dependency and inculcate self-reliance.

(Augsburger 1986:155)

In defence of Foucault, Kotze and Kotze (1997:39) write that

one should not assume a massive and primal condition of domination with "dominators" on one side and "dominated" on the other, but a multiform production of relations of power and resistance. Because power is seen as relational, **resistance exists in the same place as power** (my emphasis), is multiple and can be integrated in multiform strategies.

I find the above arguments quite persuasive and useful for pastoral therapy. People present themselves for therapy mostly because they have become stuck in their stories. The narrative therapists, Neal et al (1999:363-364) believe that power is tacitly involved in most, if not all problems, and challenge the negative effects these cultural influences have on persons' identities. Following Neal et al (1999:301), I was keen to learn how to address the links among culture, power, and relationships and to seek out the healthy tissue which serve as antibodies to restory a person's life (Wylie 1994:43).

I am also impressed with the work of a feminist theologian, Elaine Graham (1997) on transforming

practices. She raises a critical question for postmodern pastoral care: "In the face of the collapse of the 'grand narrative' of modernity, what values may now inform purposeful Christian action and vision?" (Graham 1997:2). In line with a social construction epistemology, Graham writes that values are no longer axiomatic and founded upon the grand narrative of historical certainty; rather, they are contingent and provisional. Pastoral care, under which pastoral therapy falls, is a moral activity and a call to participate in justice. Pastoral counselling must be founded on a context of moral meanings that is, in fact, the province of Practical Theology. Care cannot be exercised outside normative ethical understandings (Graham 1997:86).

Values are embedded in practices. Graham sees practice as the process by which social relations are generated. She provides a working definition of practice:

we might characterize practice as purposeful activity performed by embodied persons in time and space as both the subjects of agency and the objects of history. **Practice is also the bearer of implicit values and norms within which certain configurations of privilege and subordination are enshrined** (my emphasis). Forms of practice, be they medical, therapeutic, scientific, literary- or even...religious - create and police the boundaries of dominance and subordination, power and powerlessness, upon which any given social order may be constructed. Practice is constitutive of a way of life, both individual and collective, personal and structural.

(Graham 1997:110)

Graham suggests that for pastoral care as a theological practice the central norm by which it should be judged authentic is that of liberation which entails the promotion of full humanity. She is critical of a patriarchal approach to pastoral theology and says that traditional practices are "obscured by androcentric practices and institutions" (Graham 1997:125). She states strongly that:

Theology must take its share of responsibility for reinforcing male domination and



women's acquiescence in such relationships; so a pastoral response requires the issuing of a challenge to patriarchal prescriptions and the development of more positive images of women. Pastoral practice thus becomes proactive, seeking to change the ideological and material conditions, which cause such hurts, refusing to adopt a model of containment or conformity.

(Graham 1997:126)

I agree with Graham that as a liberatory practice, pastoral care and pastoral therapy should be defined by its capacity to transform the world and that pastoral care is understood as synonymous with emancipatory praxis. A further criticism of contemporary or modernistic pastoral care by Graham is that it seems to be individualistic and apolitical and fails to act against the underlying dynamics of injustice. The author advocates that

in contrast to the therapeutic model of twentieth-century Western pastoral care, which liberationists characterize as privatized, elitist and individualistic, pastoral practice as liberation takes place in the public, political domain....Salvation embraces the entire inhabited universe, not merely disembodied souls; nor is the Gospel a consolation in the next world for social injustices in this one.

(Graham 1997:136)

Following a postmodern social construction epistemology, I believe that pastoral therapy as a prophetic deconstructive practice also engages with 'texts of terror' (McFelin 2000:76) towards re-visioning and reinterpretation of metaphors. This involves the re-reading of cultural practices in a way that reopens texts, established patterns, and received authorities. Rather than merely recovering and revising the past, such practices recreate and rewrite it. This is in keeping with many deconstructionist strategies that seek to exploit the hidden and marginal meanings and characters upon which a coherent and unitary surface text is contingent. Religious knowledge is also regarded

as provisional as it is the product of historical and social constructions. Thus they are seen as flexible to incorporate new experiences and perspectives. "Good reading" involves sensitivity and a little more than empathy. Augsburger (1986) has written about interpathy in his work on pastoral therapy across cultures. He makes the following distinction between empathy and interpathy:

In empathy, the process of "feeling with" the other is focussed on the imagination, by which one is transposed into another, in self-conscious awareness of another's consciousness. My experience is the frame, your pain the picture. In interpathy, the process of knowing and "feeling with" requires that one temporarily believe what the other believes, see as the other sees, value what the other values. Your experience becomes both frame and picture.

(Augsburger 1986:31)

I realize from the above that even if I engage in interpathy with White counselees, I can never understand them completely. As I draw out their stories through language, they will only open some doors to me while others remain shut. And even from those doors that are opened, I shall read some things and miss others, as in the case of the dredging machine that is able to scoop up some material and even drop some of it. However, there are some doors that are even shut for a counsellee in that he/she is unaware of certain things about himself or herself. This is where I hope to play an illuminating role as a narrative pastoral therapist. It has been a happy moment for me in the past when a White counsellee said that he did not see something in this way before.

## 2.6 An overview of therapy across cultures

As this project is about pastoral therapy across cultures, I shall briefly say something about this. All I wish to do here is provide a summary of the universalist approach to cross cultural therapy and the contextualist approach. I wish to locate myself in a contextualist approach that is compatible with a social constructionist and narrative perspective.

Seedat and Nell (1990) write that according to pragmatists, the assumption of universality is grounded in the belief that there is only one humanity and therefore only one psychology. Universalists believe that humans are universal in their suffering and confusion in the human psyche. And that a therapist who is able to empathize with clients on the human rather than on the cultural level will be able to identify and share experiences in spite of differences in cultural or racial background. Universalists thus believe in the continuity of human experience and this is echoed by the postulate "We are all much more simply human than otherwise" (Hickson & Christie 1989:162). The universalist approach to counselling leads to the description of a counsellor who subscribes to this approach as the "culturally encapsulated counsellor" who relies on a technique - oriented truth. Such a therapist may fail to "understand" clients properly.

Augsburger (1986) provides some strong criticisms against the culturally encapsulated counsellor. He writes that cultural encapsulation is motivated by the desire to reduce the complexity of the world and simplify its confusing and contradictory variety. There is a disregard for cultural variation among counselees. There is also a counselling focus on the individual, a preference for examining internal dynamics and the culturally encapsulated counselor has dogmatized technique-oriented definitions of counselling and therapy.

Hickson and Christie (1989:163) go on to state that a more current conception is that the doctrine of colour blindness in the therapeutic situation should be replaced by an appreciation of the dynamics of an individual's life as it relates to a cultural context. Because all individuals are born in a cultural context, cultural sensitivity is currently considered a prerequisite to professional competence. The authors discuss that instead of ignoring cultural variables a common concern now is to be sensitive enough to recognize, appreciate and respect similarities and differences in clients of diverse cultures (van der Hooft 1989). A culturally experienced and effective therapist creates as well as carries culture. Therapists are a product of their own culture, class, language and experience and should be aware of their own 'cultural baggage'. Counsellors who follow a universalist approach are unaware that they respond according to their own conditioned values, assumptions, and may be engaging in

a form of cultural oppression (Hickson & Christie 1989:164). A postmodern approach should celebrate diversity, not only tolerate it.

Cross cultural therapists have also been criticized as tending to have a middle class orientation in seeking some degree of openness and self disclosure on the part of the client, but not from the therapist. Other criticisms pointed out are that clients should speak standard English and there tends to be an emphasis on cause and effect relationships and an emphasis on the individual. While cross cultural therapy is an advance on the universalist approach, it still appears to suffer from the effects of modernism by focussing on cause and effect and does not escape operating within an individualistic paradigm. Ivey et al (1980:136) also add that traditional psychotherapy (Rogerian, psychodynamic, cognitive-behavioural theory) focussed on the individual, with minimal attention to contextual issues. They write further that:

not all client issues are internal. The rational emotive behaviour therapy and the cognitive - behavioural ... (i.e., It is not things but what I think of things that is most important) face a major challenge here....[E]xternal reality at times may be far more important than internal cognitive structures, unconscious processes or even empathic conditions. For example racism, sexism and discrimination are external conditions that cannot be dealt with solely by internal cognitive change.

(Ivey et al 1980:142)

My own impression is that cross cultural therapy can be commended for moving towards cultural sensitivity. However a kind of modernism still prevails in that the therapist still comes across as the only expert in the therapeutic situation. It is these shortcomings that lead me to favour a narrative perspective to pastoral therapy.

## 2.7 A narrative approach to pastoral therapy

Why narrative? As a postmodern approach, a narrative perspective refuses the grand narrative of modernity. It recognizes the proliferation of stories and focuses on specific stories. Stories are constitutive of human identity. Graham (1997:115) writes that narrative forms the central motif by which identity, individual and corporate, is formed; and the pastor, working out of a community of faith to address specific human need, is called to employ narrative and interpretative techniques in order to help form and nurture fundamental identity, meaning and purpose. For Graham, Christian moral practice is grounded in the narrative particularity of the faith-community. What is important as well is that in pastoral care a narrative approach places the emphasis on the life of the Christian community and not the activity or characteristics of the pastor as the bearer and agent of moral action (Graham 1997:116).

Augsburger (1986:262-263) also has something to say about narrative as metaphor. Metaphors and stories suggest how we should perceive ourselves, our peers, our world. Stories, the preferred way of thinking of most humans, provide narrative connections and explanations that provide coherent meaning for our lives. In therapy or growth, people change only when the essential metaphors that direct their emotional, relational, and moral life come to awareness and are reframed or replaced by new, more inclusive, or more liberating metaphors. Our stories shape our life, and only new stories or old stories renewed can reshape our living.

Doan (1997:130), another proponent of narrative therapy argues that it advocates a shift from action to meaning and a decreased urgency to control and manipulate counselees in the name of helping. Postmodernism does not look for a uni-verse of meaning but recognizes that humans always live in a multi-verse. Thus reality is made up of many stories and not a single story as is espoused by modernism. The critical aspect of postmodernism does not accept all accounts as equally valid as radical constructivism holds. Postmodernism critiques some accounts as not being respectful of difference, gender, ethnicity, race or religion.

Doan argues that narrative therapy is to postmodernism what psychoanalysis was to modernism. Challenging the idea based on the unconscious that humans are irrational, narrative suggests that people are communities of selves, and that each person contains a multitude of voices with varying points of view. Narrative therapists are comfortable with social construction discourse which prefers "stories that are based on a person's lived experience - that is, his or her own voice, perception and experiences - rather than on some domain of 'expert knowledge'. Stories based on lived experience allow for the experience of personal agency" (Doan 1997:130).

Narrative therapy takes an interest in accounts that honour and respect the community of voices inherent in each individual and how these accounts can be respected within a particular system. And the purpose is to help individuals with stories that have gone awry or outlived their usefulness and families in which stories are in collision. They recognize the connection between all stories (Doan 1997:131). I think this is different from practices of cross cultural therapy that work within a systems approach in which an exploration of the storied nature of life is absent. Doan elaborates that a narrative perspective is interested in deconstructing stories that dominate, marginalise, subjugate, objectify, and exclude people and in encouraging people to become their authors while recognizing the social nature of human life. A central move away from the modernist practice of locating a problem within a person (the internalizing approach), is the interest in externalization of the problem.

### **2.7.1 Externalization of the problem**

While externalization helps the person in therapy to take responsibility to curb the influence of the problem, it also helps people escape the dominating influences of oppressive domains of knowledge. Neal et al (1999:361) state that narrative therapy unmask the operation of power through the practice of externalizing conversations. Zimmerman and Dickerson (1996) take the position that an externalizing conversation is a deconstructive practice. It challenges the truth of problems as existing in persons and sees the problem in cultural discourses or meaning systems. McLeod (1997) would also regard externalization in narrative therapy as a deconstructive practice when he writes that

A narrative perspective inevitably takes therapy in the direction...as 'moving out' into

the stories of culture rather than 'moving in' to individual personal experience: the therapeutic journey as an outer journey into the language and symbols of a particular culture.

(McLeod 1997:27)

Wylie (1994:47) suggests that externalization helps a counsellee to build a better sense of personal agency. Narrative therapy is not about people discovering their true selves, but about opening up possibilities for people to become other than whom they are. Externalization nurtures an expanded sense of individual selfhood to people who have been "denied agency for their own lives, but told that they are unworthy of having it - so they become nonpersons to themselves" (:47). For me the practice of externalization connects narrative therapy with a social construction epistemology with its critical role of human agency. Lyddon (1998:215) argues for a viable reconciliation between social constructionism and agentic constructivist perspectives. He rejects the extreme social construction claim that the self is a merely socially constructed fiction with no author beneath its culturally coded messages and presents an argument 'for keeping the "constructor in constructivism"...while at the same time acknowledging the social dimension of the self' (: 215).

### **2.7.2 Cultural sensitivity**

What is especially attractive about the narrative perspective for my project on being an Indian pastoral therapist to White counsellees, is that it is eminently respectful of culture (see Neal et al 1999; McLeod 1997). As a postmodern perspective, narrative celebrates the plurality and diversity of cultures. The obvious difference between race and ethnic groups has not been celebrated positively in South Africa under Apartheid. In fact race and ethnicity was part of a programme of social engineering of divide and rule amongst South Africans in order to serve the interests of the ruling group. In a post Apartheid South Africa, a narrative approach in pastoral therapy may be used to validate and affirm counselees from different races and ethnic groups. In a conversation with my supervisor, he pointed out that even people within the same ethnic group have different personal cultures and that a narrative perspective is sensitive to this as well. I find this point most attractive

as it helps me to avoid stereotyping people. This point is made well by Elmarie Kotze (1994:109) who, in articulating a meaning-specific approach to cultural sensitivity writes that

Even though a specific culture may be described in terms of culture specific practices, this does not ensure that each group or member of the culture constructs the same meaning when referring to the identical cultural practices. In this sense culture, and the meanings attached to cultural practices are always group-or person-specific.

A narrative perspective thus helps to deconstruct prejudices of race and ethnic groups and opens up space for a pastoral therapist to become aware of individual dynamics and differences within each culture. In working with White counselees, I find a narrative approach helpful in identifying the dominant ethno-cultural story in their own lives and to map the influence of this in their own lives. In a section above I sketched broad differences in Western and non -Western cultures. Kotze (1994) cautions against using nouns in labelling culture. This results in a description of culture as a static phenomenon. She prefers the use of verbs and adverbs to describe culture. Why?

If cultures are described using verbs and adverbs, the dynamic and relativistic nature is reflected in the way we language about culture. In this sense *Western culturing* or *Sotho culturing* may be used. The concept *culturing* embraces the idea of change, movement and diversity within different cultures and their interrelatedness.

(Kotze 1994:109)

### **2.7.3 Power and expertise**

As a culturally sensitive approach, a narrative perspective is sensitive to power relations between therapist and counselees. Firstly as therapist, I see myself as a microcosm of the unequal power-relationships in South African society. As a historically oppressed person of colour, my life was shaped by less political and socio - economic power than Whites. For too long they have been my



masters and senior trustees (Rose & Tunmer 1975) and I need to reclaim my equality as a human being with them. Even in a post-Apartheid society, though I am now legally equal to Whites, I do not feel equal because attitudes take a long time to change. At work I do not feel equal to my White Christian colleagues as they are condescending towards me. On the other hand, I have more power than White counsellors by virtue of being their pastoral therapist. As a postmodern approach, a narrative approach moves away from the position of the therapist as the only expert.

Is a narrative pastoral therapist an expert in any area? From the writings of White and Epston (1990) and Friedman and Combs 1996), I deduce that the therapist is an expert in postmodern epistemology, the process of storying, on discourses, the process of deconstruction and the linguistic processes of therapy. However, the therapist does not know beforehand what the content of a person's story is nor what is the subjugating discourse. It is helpful for narrative pastoral therapists to draw on other postmodern therapists such as Anderson and Goolishian (1992:26-28) who articulate a "not knowing" stance in which the "client is the expert". According to these authors, a narrative therapist uses a "not knowing " approach because she is searching for the 'not yet said' through conversational discourse. The authors say further that a "not knowing" position requires the therapist to have a **genuine curiosity** (my emphasis) for the client's story. A story is allowed to unfold by avoidance of interpretations and prior assumptions. The therapist allows the client to remain the expert on her life by privileging her explanation of the problem. And narrative therapists, by staying with a process of externalization, attend to their own prejudices, and through conversational discourse remain open to the meaning of the client's story.

In this way understanding becomes a dialogue between client and therapist, with both sides of the relationship mutually affecting each other's meaning. In this sense the therapeutic endeavor can be considered collaborative.

(Anderson & Goolishian 1992:29)

## 2.8 Practical Theology and narrative pastoral therapy

The postmodern theology, which informs my pastoral therapy, is one that discards notions of God as fixed and immutable. With Graham (1996:195), I adopt a model of God as a dynamic entity, experienced in relationship and alterity, changing as creation changes. A quotation expresses this view quite succinctly:

I suggest that we start by holding our God lightly, letting her go and evolve rather than guarding a tight-fisted faith. This way we can be more flexible in our worldview, shifting as we must with new knowledge and insight. If our God/ess is not big, elastic and embracing enough to make the change then I wonder what we mean by the divine.

(Graham 1997:195)

Graham argues further that a postmodern theology is a public theology, which is available to public and secular scrutiny. Her theological tradition is viewed as

alive and organic, to be reappropriated in the pursuit of praxis. The role of tradition is to be indicative, but not definitive...Theology is an experimental and hypothetical discourse, seeking to reorder and reinterpret the past in all its plurality. We should think of our 'truth claims' as the product of embodied thinking not as eternally or universally valid thought.

(Graham 1997:198-199)

In the therapeutic situation an implication from the above is for me to take seriously the personal

relationship that a counsellor has with God on its own terms. This means taking seriously flexibility, contextuality and plurality. But where the relationship has become painful, I shall explore the effects that personal beliefs have and try to open up possibilities for a counsellor to evolve a more loving relationship with a personal God.

Narrative pastoral therapy falls in the domain of Practical Theology. Heitink (1999:120) defines Practical Theology as a “theological theory of action that focuses on communicative action in the service of the gospel”. As a theory of action it is dependent for its methodology on the social sciences. Practical Theology is concerned with transformation, not only of people, but also of society as a whole and this gives it a political dimension. Communicative action has to do with the actualization and maintenance of the relationship between God and humanity, and humanity and God (Heitink 1999:129). Practical Theology focuses on mediative action as the direct object of its inquiry. Mediative action intentionally uses different kinds of action strategies. Action is an intervention...and is directed towards change (Heitink 1999:149). Heitink bases his approach to Practical Theology on the hermeneutical, strategic and empirical traditions of social science. The hermeneutical aims at intersubjective understanding; the strategic on how to facilitate change and the empirical argues that actions are situational in time and space and have a unique context. The strategic approach lends itself to an action approach to Practical Theology. Here I shift from Heitink’s position of intervention that is directed towards change to one that is informed by Jennings and Graham (1996:175) which is not limited to the resolution of problems but to continuous struggle, “...indeed to deconstruct and reconstruct meanings in making sense of the world”.

Heitink’s hermeneutical approach seems to be limited to a historical critical tradition which focuses on historical textual analysis. I would like to position myself in a postmodern hermeneutical approach as suggested by Herholdt (1998). For Herholdt, postmodern hermeneutics produces the insight of the bible as a narrative tradition in which value free knowledge is not possible as in the historical - critical approach. Herholdt (1998) puts the emphasis on “reader response” which means that

The text does not refer the reader to a meaning behind the text that needs to be understood (such as the original intention of the author), but rather to **an explanation of the author's way of being in the world**" (my emphasis). A narrative hermeneutical approach makes use of metaphors in which there is openness towards new clarity of a text, towards flexibility and new insights. This hermeneutic is concerned with organic understanding of a human as text.

(Herholdt 1998:456)

What I find useful as well is the point that "whereas premodernism reveres the corporately shared beliefs, postmodern hermeneutics is radically suspicious and does not hesitate to "deconstruct" it (Herholdt 1998:465). For me this fits in well with a social construction discourse and deconstruction as "good reading" of a human as text (Wolfreys 1997:9).

I would like to move away from Heitink's position of Practical Theology as communicative action in service of the gospel. His view of action is still located within a modernistic problem-solving approach, and "the gospel" sounds like a grand narrative. Christ's gospel is practised in many different ways throughout the world. I would like to shift to the idea of Practical Theology as a theological theory of communicative acts. Here I am dependent on the critical appropriation of this approach by Wolfaardt (1993:29). Communicative acts takes into account intentional action by subjects; historically and societally determined systems of symbols and signs; the communal world of reciprocal actions; biographical backgrounds; reflexive actions of participants which assist the review of internalised orientations and societal processes; mutually renewed existential possibilities and acceptance of one another as free subjects in solidarity (Wolfaardt 1993:30). Communicative acts also focuses on the faith acts of church members **outside** (my emphasis) the church framework. An important aspect of this approach is that "...the other is not merely recognised but also actively defended against humiliation and destruction" (Wolfaardt 1993:32). Practical Theology as a theological theory of communicative acts exerts a renewing, liberating and therapeutic influence on a specific situation through an approximation of an ideal intersubjective communication which

focuses on peace, justice, freedom and salvation. For purposes of good science, Wolfaardt explains that communicative acts must also be tested for validity, not just for their usefulness (Wolfaardt 1993:33). This helps Practical Theology from lapsing into praxeology, which has to do with technical solutions to problems.

The above conception of Practical Theology as a theological theory of communicative acts makes good sense for my project. While I express the pain of my own loss as a person of colour, the theory helps me to be self-reflexive as well. In a post-Apartheid South Africa, Whites are also experiencing a lot of stress and strain. Robbery and theft, the humiliation of rape and displacement in the world of work through affirmative action are impacting heavily on their lives. In this regard, as a narrative pastoral therapist, there is need for me to play a role in standing with White counsellees against personal oppression and violation of their dignity by people of colour, and to evolve relationships of hope with people of colour.

As a pastoral therapist I am expected to connect the story of a counsellee with the greater story of God. Melissa Griffith (1995:127) provides a helpful approach in doing collaborative pastoral therapy. I understand pastoral therapy as a form of discourse. Griffith reiterates that discourse is basically a political activity. As a postmodern perspective, narrative therapists believe that two stories are being told in the therapeutic situation, that of the therapist and the counsellee (see Neal et al 1999; McLeod 1997). These stories are made from many voices competing for space. If a pastoral therapist takes the position of certainty or the expert as in traditional approaches (see McLeod 1997; Crabb 1998), then he or she oppresses and constrains clients to tell their story as they experience it. Griffith also argues for a just therapeutic approach (see Waldergrave 1990) in which clients may tell their stories as they experience them without the pastoral therapist being prescriptive, that is, God - talk is spoken of only in a certain way. Griffith offers cautions against four certainties which I have chosen to guide me in my approach to spiritual issues that may come up for discussion. The cautions are as follows:

Certainty 1: I know what God is like for you because I know your religious denomination;

Certainty 2: I know what God is like for you because I know what your language about God means

Certainty 3: I know what God is like for you because your image of God is a reflection of your early attachment figures;

Certainty 4: I know what God is like and you need to know God as I do.

(Griffith 1998:127-134)

Griffith advocates that therapists move from certainty to curiosity, to co-create rather than to impose. Thus in connecting a counsellees's story with the greater story of God, a pastoral therapist does well to **"co-create an evolving story with God that is uniquely a person's own"** (:137). I also accept her point that a therapist should be open to the possibilities of surprise. She illustrates this with the meaning given by Israelites to the name of God - Yahweh. Yahweh means: I am who I am, and I will be who I will be. This meaning captures movement and mystery and has led Jewish tradition to say **"The Holy's other name is surprise"** (Griffith 1995:137).

Coming from a historically conservative evangelical and biblical background, I shall encounter my own surprises, and hope to learn respectful ways of doing narrative pastoral therapy by being able to open certainties to the refreshing breezes of curiosity and wonder in which multiple realities can coexist and relationships can evolve (Griffith 1995:127).

To conclude this section, I would like to draw the issues together that are important for my project. Firstly, I am not able to approach pastoral therapy with White counsellees from a universalist perspective as **"we are lived by our race and place"**. Thus I approach counsellees in a culturally sensitive way, being aware of the differences between their cultural practices and my own. However, with respect to gender, it seems that there is a lot of sameness between my culture and that of

Whites. I have to be awake that this sameness does not cloud me from noticing other gender practices that may contribute to an alternate story. Secondly, while working with a theology of grace, I do not consider this to be an arrogant spiritual position but one that helps me to connect with White counselees through the embracing love of Christ. Thirdly, while Christ is multi-faceted, he was not all embracing and challenged the injustices of his day, even using a whip to cast out profiteers in the temple. Thus my pastoral therapy is informed by a theology of values. Fourthly, a theology of values is addressed through externalization as a form of deconstruction in narrative therapy. Externalization shall assist me to be discourse sensitive, respectful and to enhance a sense of critical agency in counselees. Lastly, I see my pastoral task as connecting the story of counselees with the greater story of God in a respectful way that undermines the kingdom of self and promotes the kingdom of God.

The next chapter contains five therapeutic stories in which I attempted to apply postmodern ideas towards being an Indian narrative pastoral therapist to White counselees.

## **CHAPTER 3: CONVERSATIONAL STORIES**

### **3.1 INTRODUCTION**

In the conversations that follow, two stories are being told. The one is the story of White counselees with me as a narrative pastoral therapist. In the conversations I attempt to apply a postmodern approach to pastoral therapy. As this was my first experience in doing narrative pastoral therapy, I make no claims to portray that what I did was narrative. The discussions below are a retelling (White 1995) of what I experienced in the therapeutic conversations. I tell of my struggles to apply a postmodern approach of externalizing conversations and a not knowing approach. As I am a newcomer to pastoral therapy, I am not able to boast of having solved the problems of counselees. Instead, I did not see myself as a problem solver. I simply describe the processes. Sometimes I took a step forward, sometimes a step backward, and at other times I got stuck. The second story is that of being a historically oppressed person vis a vis White counselees. I reveal my experiences of race, sexuality and values about money and material things in relation to Whites. As a newcomer to theological studies, I found it important to tell of how theological authors helped me in the formation of my own spirituality and how to approach White counselees as a historically oppressed person of colour. In writing about my own experiences, I made myself vulnerable. A narrative approach provided me with an opportunity to tell my experiences for the first time, and I attempted to do this as a self-reflexive healing exercise, and also in the hope that I may be understood and accepted.

### **3.2     *A culture of tough love: wheelchair man ends up in the streets***

Alan Ladd was referred to me through the Pastoral Care Center by Mother Stern from an Anglican Church. Alan's referral made for an interesting experience in inter-church collaboration and understanding of a tough approach to caring among White church caregivers.



The point that immediately struck me was why was a man in a wheelchair coming to a job seekers programme. The arrangement was that after I had a therapeutic conversation with Alan, he would attend a job seekers meeting thereafter. In Hindu culture a man in a wheelchair is considered to be a sick person. He would live with a relative and be cared for by the family. Augsburg (1986:187) and DiNicola (1997:194) have explored the dependency relationship in Indian and other non-Western cultures, especially within families. I have a brother who became paralysed in 1987 after being hit on the head with a hammer by an assailant. Since then he has not worked and lived with family. My brothers, sisters and I have taken care of him over the years. I found out that none of Alan's family was prepared to care for him. I was shocked to learn that he did not even know where his ex-wife and ten-year-old daughter lived. Alan had attempted suicide. "I planned to close down my life" was how he put it. When he was released from hospital after a year, he was paralyzed and had to use a wheelchair. He had nowhere to go. He remembered that he used to go to the Anglican Church when he was young, so he telephoned the church from Pretoria and that is how he ended up in the care of Mother Stern. She found a temporary place for him at a place called The Haven and paid for his lodging.

Alan mentioned that he was struggling emotionally. As a male he had been "the hunter gatherer" but now he was in a wheelchair after a failed suicide attempt which left him paralysed. Stephen told me that he was suffering from depression. I asked him what was depression doing to his life. He responded that depression was affecting his self-esteem. He had been a provider and always had money. Now he was dependent on others and is not self-reliant. Depression was making him feel useless. He had no money and felt that he was considering begging but he really did not want to do this. I enquired whether he was getting a disability grant and he said that pride would not allow him to do that. He found it humiliating. I asked Alan if there were times when he was able to stand against depression. He said he was learning to identify depressions' signs and thought of bible verses and to be thankful for Mother Stern and friends like Mr Steel who cared for him. He now saw me as another friend.

Alan latched on to externalizing depression immediately without even being taught about the concept. I spent two years learning about externalization (see White 1995; Zimmerman & Dickerson 1997) and still struggle to do it in the therapeutic relationship. I mentioned to Alan that I thought he would make a good therapist and could still be a caregiver while he was in a wheelchair. He smiled and his eyes were bright as this was affirming of him.

During the week I received a call from the Pastor for counselling and another from Mother Stern. Mother Stern cautioned the pastor that Alan was “manipulative”. I received a call from the Pastor for counselling informing me about Alan and was asked to attend a meeting on developing a policy on Alan. Mother Steel also telephoned to tell me that Alan was “manipulative”. I expressed keenness to attend the meeting. I wanted to know more about how Whites gave care to a man in a wheelchair who was said to be “manipulative”.

When I met Alan for the second time, before the meeting with Mother Stern, I did not let the caution about him being “manipulative” prejudice me. I used a “not knowing approach” as developed by Anderson and Goolishian (1992:25). I was still concerned about how depression was influencing him. Here I chose to follow Griffith (1995:123) by making the therapy space open enough for the most significant conversations to be heard and understood. If I took the allegation of manipulation seriously and stopped the counselling until after the meeting, my censoring would be a form of professional oppression. It would amount to what Griffith calls a “modernistic certainty that oppresses and constrains opportunities to the story as the client experiences it” (Griffith 1995:123). My own experiences about racial oppression had sensitized me to be respectful towards people who were disadvantaged in other ways, even if they were White. I also give money to poor Whites who take care of my car in a parking lot.

I was not comfortable that mother Stern, the Pastor for counselling, and Mr Steel agreed to have a policy on how to give care to Alan. I thought of Jesus who was reprimanded by the Pharisees for healing a cripple man on the Sabbath. Jesus response was that God did not desire sacrifice but mercy. By sacrifice, I understand rules and rituals which are oppressive to the disadvantaged. For me policy

was going to be a way of prescribing how I was to give care to Alan.

The section that follows is a reflection on the meeting I attended at an Anglican Church that was chaired by Mother Stern. As Alan had been told to leave the place that he was temporarily lodging at, and no one in the Pastoral Care Center knew his whereabouts, he was unavailable for me to get his permission to reflect on our conversations. I thought it ethical to speak to Mother Stern. She had played a leading role in assisting Alan towards a better life. I obtained permission from Mother Stern to reflect on notes that I had taken in the meeting. I met with her and gave her my summary of the meeting. She was happy with it and signed consent for me to reflect on it as part of my research project.

The meeting on the 5 June 2000 provided insight into the cultural values of White Christian caregivers who held positions of authority.

In the meeting Mother Stern asked different people what care they were giving to Alan. About six caregivers mentioned how they had been helping Alan. After an hour it was concluded that Alan was being manipulative and a policy was formulated on him. The policy was that only a counsellor from the Anglican Church should see Alan; that one person should handle money and provisions given to him. The group agreed that Mother Stern should go to Alan at The Haven and tell him that the church was prepared to help on condition that he does not manipulate people.

The meeting about Alan was held without his permission or knowledge. I was reminded of what happened to me at Wits University when I was a Master's student in Education. An Indian student friend informed me that our White lecturer photocopied my research proposal for the students of the following year and used it as an example of a poor proposal. The professor did this without my knowledge and I was deeply hurt. Later I became a junior colleague of the professor but I never had the courage to speak to him about this. I just quietly resented him. This raises the issue of ethics. I believe that Alan should have been part of the meeting to explain the charge of manipulation against him. In fact there was no charge. Judgement had already been handed down by Mother Stern and

when this was communicated to Mr Steel and the Pastor for counselling, they accepted that Alan was a manipulative man. This approach reminded me of the psychiatrist Bernie Siegel (1988:14) who experienced unhappiness in his early practice. He said:

All this time I'd been dealing in cases, charts, diseases, remedies, staff, and prognoses, instead of people. I'd thought of my patients merely as machines I had to repair.

The tough approach of church caregivers towards Alan was similar to that of doctors in a medical ward. He was diagnosed as manipulative and the cure would be tough measures of discipline towards him.

I left the meeting with a deep awareness of mainstream Western cultural values (see Augsburg 1986; DiNicola 1997). All of the Whites in the meeting took a tough approach towards Alan. The aim of the caregivers was to assist Alan towards self-reliance and independence. Care - giving was to be a temporary measure, to enable him to acquire some skills to get a job. One participant even mentioned that he would benefit from the newly gazetted Employers' Equity Act which legislated employment of disabled employees as well. I think members in my family would have taken a much softer approach and let Alan off; that care giving would not be temporary but long term. It made me think of my youngest brother who is paralyzed from a violent attack on him. He is able to do things for himself but has not been able to go back to work as a tool machinist because he is paralyzed in one hand and foot. For the last five years I took over from my sister who moved to Durban as his caregiver. I favour a balance between self - reliance and communalism. I admire the Protestant work ethic of Western Christians and struggle to emulate it and would like to get somewhere near there. But the practice of rugged individualism (Carsons 1996:47) even among Western Christians can leave an individual alienated and disconnected (Crabb 1996:127) and without an emotional support base. For example, most White people spend their old age in old age homes. Most Indians do not put their old parents in old age homes but take care of them. The old parent is often disabled with illness, yet plays a central part in the family's decision making processes.

After the meeting about Alan, I was now unsure as to how to continue counseling him. Even though I had been telephoned about his “manipulation”, I still went into the second therapeutic conversation with him with a not-knowing approach. I now had a fair amount of information about him. If all the information about Alan was true, it seemed that in an indirect way, that the White caregivers were also my community of support. While they were prepared to help Alan towards self-reliance, they were not prepared that I should be manipulated in any way. No one questioned my expertise as an Indian pastoral therapist. The concern was that no caregiver should be manipulated. I felt warm inside me about this, that in spite of Mother Stern's tough approach towards Alan, the concern within which motivated her to help him was genuine.

For the third appointment, I met Alan alone in the winter cold outside the Pastoral Care Center. He was smoking and looked sick. He immediately told me he was unwell. Mother Stern had confronted him about ‘manipulation’ and other things said about him in the meeting. He said Mother Stern had harped on the discrepancy between his story about his divorce to Mr Steel and the one told to me. Alan was quite disturbed about this as he thought everything was confidential. He said that when he came to me “depression was at arm's length but now it was close to his face again”. I marvelled at how he externalized ‘depression’ and at the same time I felt ashamed that I had enquired about the discrepancy with regard to his divorce. I asked him about this and he responded that as his counsellor he told me the truth. He did not have to tell others the truth, as most people were just curious and not helpful. This sounded like a manipulative approach. He also mentioned that Mr Steel had confronted him about selling the groceries he had bought for him and stopped giving him money. Alan expressed that he was afraid that I would also be upset with him and reject him as well. I assured him I was not upset with him and that I would continue to be his friend. When mother Stern confronted him, he had told her that I had given him money to buy a telephone card. I informed Alan that I did not tell anyone about giving him money. I had kept that confidential when all the other caregivers informed Mother Stern what they had given to him. He touched my shoulder and relaxed. He said he now had a problem with the Anglican Church. He preferred me to be his counsellor and said that he received better care at the Methodist Church since Mr Steel is also helping him through job

seekers to prepare for work. Here it seemed that Alan was playing off the two church denominations. I asked him what he would do as Mother Stern wanted his care centralized at the Anglican Church. His response was: "What can I do? I have no choice. I don't like it. Mother Stern doesn't realise that I can't live on oxygen".

When we parted I pondered on how to work with Alan. A theology of grace (Augsburger 1986) influenced me to accept his explanations without questioning them even though I heard other things about him. Was Alan exploiting people? Here I needed to be guided by a theology of values (Augsburger 1986; Graham 1997) so that I do not neglect exploring his value system.

The next day I received a telephone call from Mother Stern informing me that Alan and another man were told to leave The Haven because of misbehavior with regard to alcohol. When I met mother Stern personally again, I asked her if this was a decision made from tough love. With moist eyes, she said that it was not easy to take such a decision, but it had become necessary. If Alan changed for the better she would be prepared to assist him again.

A week later, I met Alan in a park nearby my flat. He admitted he had made a big mistake. He was cold and said he might catch pneumonia or get knocked over by a car while crossing the road in his wheelchair. I asked him if what he was doing is indicative of the "death wish" (Siegel 1988) within him. He said it was so and that he was being self - destructive. I said I had marveled at his sharp mind and that I had learned from him. He responded: "I am foolish. I cannot understand why I am doing this to myself". He asked me for five rands for coffee, which I gave to him. I said I would look for him at the garage that night and bring some food for him.

I went through a dilemma about Alan. I found it difficult to take Alan into my flat. Why? Because I need space and privacy to unstress and do my work as well. Having him in my flat would place a huge burden on my resources - mental, physical and financial. If I had the money to spare I would pay for his accommodation somewhere but I did not have extra money. And I wondered: Are my practices not underpinned by the value of Western private individualism? My conclusion was that

I try to follow a both/and approach (see Biever et al 1998:185). I have learned to take what is useful for me in both Western and Indian cultures with a strong bias of being on the side of the poor and the oppressed among all races. I help as much as I can, yet I need to come back to my own space (a one - bedroom flat) to reflect on issues, and to recover from events without people being around me.

Alan is now a White hobo in the streets. I wondered how the church people felt about a White person behaving like this. Was it embarrassing to them as the people of civilization? I needed to find a sensible explanation for all this. Meighan (1986) describes that a structural functionalist perspective follows an approach in which the social moral order has to be maintained. Someone who breaks the harmony of the moral order is considered deviant and has to be re - socialized or evicted, even if he is a deviant in a wheel chair. This was the meaning that I gave to the process so that I could be respectful of the cultural practices that I had observed. The church caregivers took the position that they were unable to collaborate with Alan any further and I had to be culturally sensitive to that. The White church care-givers had applied a theology of values towards Alan that was consistent with their preferred ethical ways of being. I agree that it was important to address the issue of manipulation with Alan, but circumstances changed so fast that I did not have an opportunity to work with the issue in an evolving way with him.

### 3.3 *A White man's struggle for self-reliance: "spoiled without responsibility"*

Hansie and Kathy were the third White couple to see me for pastoral counselling. One of the first things I asked the couple was if it was acceptable to them that I was an Indian person. The reason for this was that this was the first time that a person of colour was doing pastoral therapy with White persons in this church context. Hansie said he had no problem with it as he had Indian clients as well and Kathy felt comfortable that I was a Christian and to her that made us equal in the eyes of God.

As Whites had classified themselves as the superior race in South Africa (Rose & Tunmer 1975:127), I did not feel equal to Hansie and Kathy even though Apartheid had legally come to an end on 27 April 1994. Hansie and Kathy are in their early thirties and I had just turned fifty. Yet I am still apprehensive of the White Other even when they are younger than I am. So I found it important for me to inform them that I was a lecturer in Education and that I was studying towards a Masters degree in narrative pastoral therapy. I wanted them to see me as someone who was informed rather than as a person of colour who was taking a chance at counselling them. But the couple seemed comfortable with me even if I did not disclose my professional training. They were looking for help and saw me as a pastoral therapist. My own values about degrees are that I love to learn and I acquire knowledge in order to serve. My family does not even know what qualifications I have acquired. I say this as it pains me to inform White counsellees that I am somewhat competent to counsel, but because of my poor self image vis a vis White people, I find myself mentioning my qualifications. The couple were pleased that I was reasonably qualified and this gave me a sense of empowerment.

Right from the beginning I used a version of Michael White's approach to counselling couples which I learned at the Michael White workshop (1998) at the Institute for Therapeutic Development. I asked the couple to imagine that they were strangers and to listen to each other without interrupting.



Kathy spoke first and her opening words was that Hansie is a "compulsive liar". I was stunned by her opening move. She had not noticed that Hansie was a liar during their seven years of cohabitation but only after five years of marriage. Almost immediately I thought of how the National Party had deceived the White electorate for over forty years. The White electorate had believed that things would be rosy for them but when the African National Party (ANC) and the Communist Party were unbanned, the majority of Whites had not been prepared for a government which included the ANC and communists. Hence the slaying of communist Chris Hani who was a hero of the black majority before the 1994 elections. Thus many Whites have been traumatized by the dishonesty of the National Party leaders. The evidence that Kathy presented indicated that Hansie had been deceiving her all along. He had deceived her that he would be receiving commission after his salary, which was quite low. Trusting him she would spend a substantial part of her salary on him but he did not produce the commission when she needed it. As a result the family lost a home, a car and appliances such as the television and fridge. The children were deprived. She felt so betrayed that she had separated from him. She needed space to heal and rented two small back rooms from a White woman for herself and their two children.

In Indian marriages, when a wife expresses unhappiness, her mother usually tries to keep her quiet and her mother-in-law tends to be protective of her son. Separation or divorce is hardly the practice of married Indian women. By separating from Hansie, Kathy as a Western woman, showed that she was different from most Indian women. She took steps to remedy the situation through separation. The generosity on her part was that she was prepared to get back with her husband as soon as he showed signs of being a responsible man. I have learned about sensitivity to cultural difference (see Kotze 1994:109) and a little about feminist theology (Graham 1997:126), and I respected Kathy for the stance she took towards a preferred way of being.

Hansie was desperate to have Kathy and the children back home. He accepted the separation as a temporary measure. In response to Kathy's description of him as a 'compulsive liar', he said that lying was his problem and that the problem was *inside* him. As both husband and wife so openly confided their problem to me, I felt accepted by them as an Indian pastoral therapist. How was I to

approach Hansie? He was the first Afrikaner man that I counselled. The two men before him were English. The English had directly oppressed Indians through colonial oppression in India. In South Africa they had been the oppressors of Afrikaners and thereafter they simply benefited politically and economically against the background of Apartheid. I experienced Afrikaners face to face as bosses in the workplace and experienced pain and humiliation when I was racially insulted and shouted at by them. But in the therapeutic situation I was in a position of power (Neal et al 1997). As a pastoral therapist my task was to help Hansie and I was guided by a theology of grace (Augsburger 1986). Although Hansie symbolically represented a system that had oppressed me from birth, I felt no bitterness within me towards him. He was tall, handsome, and well built. Yet he looked depressed and nervous. His position was that he loved Kathy and did not want to lose his family and appealed to me to help him with his problem. A theology of grace helped me to see Hansie as one of many who are stuck in the human condition of our lives and my approach towards him was one of genuine concern.

The dominant story of Hansie's life was *dependency*. *Dependency* got him to lie and deceive Kathy. A White man who was financially dependent on his wife represented an aberration of the central Western value of self-reliance that Jenkins (1990), Sampson (1989), and Augsburger (1986) articulate so well. My ideal picture of a White man was someone who was financially and socially independent (see DiNicola 1997). But counselling brought me face to face with a man who seemed quite emotionally dependent on his wife. And I felt pity for him. Why? Because I was a survivor inside me. I had come through a life of poverty, neglect and abuse. And here I was being a pastoral therapist to a man who had been protected by Apartheid, yet did not seize the opportunity to become financially self-sufficient. I connected with him through our common human condition, that despite him being politically advantaged, he had become stuck in his personal life.

Hansie saw 'compulsive lying' as residing within him and wanted me to help him. And Kathy added that when they did attend church she felt she was taking the devil into church. I told stories from the Bible to soften Kathy's judgmental blows on Hansie. I realized later that I was being seduced into the role of the spiritual expert (Griffith 1995) and that I was not allowing a thick description of the

story to unfold. I also became aware later that in the therapeutic situation I had been unaware that I might be protecting a man who had caused a lot of pain to Kathy. I had to externalize Hansie's problem in order to avoid taking sides and so that he could take responsibility to stand against the problem. What made things complex was that Hansie was also going for psychotherapy and this kind of therapy seemed to be pathologising of problems and located a problem inside a person (see McLeod 1997). From the way Hansie and Kathy spoke about compulsive lying, I understood how a traditional Western psychotherapeutic practice had become limiting to White persons who received such therapy. Kathy saw lying as Hansie's internal problem and that he should seek help to get it out of him. Kathy stood for high moral standards of "honesty and no lies". She complained that Hansie did not disclose what he was earning and she wondered what he did with his money. Kathy's values on honesty concurred with mine. Being aware of this, I still tried to approach Hansie's problem in an ethical way by not being judgmental, but rather exploring the effects of the problem on his life and marriage. The point about Hansie not telling Kathy how much he earned is an acceptable cultural practice in the Hindu culture that I come from. A woman usually does not ask of her husband how much he earns. She accepts what he gives to her to manage the house. As a Christian woman, Kathy stood for togetherness and sharing. I admired these spiritual values in her, as they had become my values as well. My practices were different from most Indian men in that I had been quite transparent with my wife on money matters. But Hansie was a dilemma to me. He displayed strong emotional dependency on Kathy but a kind of private individualism when it came to money matters. The latter seemed more in keeping with Western cultural practices of privacy (Augsburger 1986) but not the former.

Hansie's genogram (Halevy 1998) suggested that he had been spoiled by his parents. His father had been self - employed and had bought his son a BMW as a birthday present for his eighteenth birthday. Dependency seemed to be a dominant theme in Hansie's life story. Kathy also informed me later that he had been dependent on his parents until they passed away. But his father did not have good business acumen and did not leave any substantial inheritance for the family. Hansie wished to continue a life of "high material standards". His mother had taken a loan for him for some business adventure but this had failed. After his parents death he had no financial backing. But in

his marriage to Kathy he tried to spoil his stepdaughter by buying her a television for her room. He could not keep up the payments and the television ended up in the pawnshop. I recognize this act as an example of caring or sharing, but Hansie explained that he was busy with "delusions of grandeur". I latched onto this and externalized "grandeur" with him. He came to perceive that the problem was not "compulsive lying" but "grandeur". "Grandeur" enlisted compulsive lying as its main assistant. How did "grandeur" enter his life? Jenkins (1990) and Carson (1996) explain well how the identities of Western people are constructed in a capitalist society. The values of competition, acquisition of goods, accumulation of wealth and private property leads to an individualistic material identity. The central focus is on money and material happiness. Hansie's aim for high material standards led to lying as he did not want to be seen as a failure. The irony of Hansie's life was that although he had been privileged by a system of racial capitalism in South Africa, he had been unable to use the system to advance himself financially. Eventually we got to a point where we renamed the problem (White 1995). Hansie perceived that the main problem of his life was "spoiled without responsibility". As the only son, his parents had spoiled him but had not taught him how to manage money in a responsible way. And he used his mind to call the counterplot "responsibility". We collaborated and worked out a plan of responsibility that he would begin in order to restore a relationship of trust with Kathy. But in the meantime Kathy was struggling and no one came to her assistance. I shared how many Indian people live in extended families and share things with each other and asked them what they thought of this. Kathy said that she and Hansie lived in a multiracial flat and that she had often noticed how Blacks and Indians often shared food with their neighbours and this impressed her. She then mentioned something quite striking, that Whites concealed it from other Whites when they struggled financially and that "the idea of sharing was missing". Hansie added that if he won a million rands he would not want others to know. He would want to keep the money for himself as this is part of the "selfishness of White culture". These statements confirm the culture of individualism and privacy articulated by Augsburger (1986) and Jenkins (1990).

Hansie's mother had lost a small farm holding after his father's death and ended up in an old age home. She starved herself and became anorexic and died from lupus cancer that had corroded her internal organs. I found the neglect of his mother disturbing. This mother had been so good to her

children, yet they let her go to an old age home where she suffered and died so painfully. Hansie and his sisters had benefited from her generously when she shared her husband's small policies that he had left behind. Yet I tried to understand Hansie. Dependency kept him from standing on his own feet and he had not learned how to be a caregiver. It was quite different for me. I saw to my parent's needs until they died. No one taught me to do this, yet I knew what my duties were to my parents when they got old. When my wife packed up and left me, I did not take another woman in. My parents were living in Lenasia and I in Benoni, some seventy-five kilometers away. They were surviving on their monthly pensions from the government that was about four hundred and fifty rands each. When my youngest brother who was living with them became unemployed, I took them into my rented flat and cared for them. This came very naturally to me and I wished that Hansie and his sisters could have given care to their mother in her suffering. This practice seems to be a dominant practice amongst Whites. However, there are exceptions where White children do care for their parents. Yet it seems that the ideology of individualism is powerful in mainstream Western culture, so powerful that individuals are unable to recognize the myth of independence (DiNicola 1997; Sampson 1989; Augsburger 1986) which tends towards alienation and loneliness.

Kathy had been unhappy for Hansie to continue working in black housing projects and wanted him to look for another line of work. She felt that there was a lot of dishonesty going on in these housing projects. But Hansie was defensive. He said he would like to have a curriculum vitae done and to submit it elsewhere but expressed that Affirmative Action was a problem for him in the new South Africa. He felt that it worked against Whites. He was not against the practice as he felt it was right for blacks to benefit from it, but he had to be realistic. I realized how traumatic things must be for young Whites in the New South Africa. Whites had benefited tremendously from the Apartheid regime. But it seemed to me that the majority of Afrikaners were not well off. They worked in the civil and public service as clerks. The African National Congress led government was rationalizing the public and civil service and thousands of Whites were being retrenched. When Hansie informed me that he had never drawn up a curriculum vitae, I offered to type one up for him. He was thankful for this offer and said he would bring me his details. My offer to type Hansie's curriculum vitae brought to mind a point made by Muller (1998:331) that "Narrative therapy assumes that individuals

have to take responsibility for their own lives. Caregivers must realize that it is not appropriate to take an obligation for other people's lives". I felt I could not relate to the second part of Muller's statement. It fits neatly into a mainstream Western culture of private individualism (see Jenkins 1990; McLeod 1997). I felt that it was not asking much for a pastoral therapist to do something helpful for a person in therapy. I remember how one of my supervisors at ITD had helped a young woman counselled by pastoral therapists in training towards finding work, and how ITD students of which I was one, brought clothes and shoes for the homeless children who were being sheltered at the Itumeleng Centre in Sunnyside, Pretoria and who came graciously to ITD to be counselled by trainee pastoral therapists. This kind of compassionate caring within White culture represented an alternate postmodern practice of collaboration within the dominant practice of rugged individualism (Carson 1996:47).

As a postmodern practice, narrative therapy uses externalization of a problem to deconstruct issues. This brings an ethical dimension into narrative therapy whereby the person in therapy is rendered able to take responsibility against the influence of the problem on his life (Morgan 2000). However, for me this does not exclude the pastoral therapist from being helpful where she or he is able to do so. Larry Crabb, an American Christian psychologist gives an example in his book *Connecting* (1997). He thought he had helped a counsellee move away from depression and suicide because of an insight he had provided in his practicing room. Three years later he met the counsellee for coffee and asked him what he remembered that had helped the most. Without hesitation the counsellee replied:

It was that half hour you sat on the grass with me and just chatted. He was warmly smiling.

I was indignant. Don't you recall that life-changing insight I came up with in the tenth session of therapy?

Uh, no, I don't. Can you refresh me?

(Crabb 1997:43)

Hansie and Kathy had been concerned about their spiritual lives and requested me to give them input on this as well. Kathy mentioned that their four-year-old son liked to pray at bedtime but that their thirteen-year-old daughter felt she was too grown up for this. To me this seemed to be true of most White and Indian teenagers. They just grew out of going to church. In this I saw some sameness in modern culture (see Augsburg 1986; Kotze 1994). Kathy mentioned a sermon that one of the ministers had preached on spiritual change. He told a story of a nervous bride to be who reminded herself of the procedure to be followed when she entered the church. She had to walk down the aisle, then stand at the altar and sing the opening hymn. She strung three words together as Aisle, Altar, Hymn that the minister humorously translated as "I'll alter him". He then advised the church members not to try to alter their partners but to just love them and they will change. Kathy felt in the case of Hansie, she could not agree with the minister's advice, that "Hansie was a liar and dishonest and needed to change". I was also at the service when this minister gave the advice and in my mind I was uncomfortable with the advice. The advice of the minister may be in keeping with a Theology of Grace but neglects a Theology of Values (Augsburger 1986) which for me is about deconstructing and transforming ethical practices. Especially so when we live in a world that is still dominated by androcentric values (Graham 1997:126). I take it that the intention of the minister was good. However, in the context of much spouse abuse in South Africa, his message did not fit for Kathy and marginalised her experience of reality. Although this minister is the only one who befriended me as a fellow student, I was hesitant to deconstruct the story with him. I had tried to suggest something after a sermon to one of the other White ministers, but I found him to be defensive. So I decided to keep quiet and not rock the boat, as it might appear that I was trying to be smart as a person of colour.

With Hansie, the cultural interaction between us centered around my two sons. I shared with him the relationship I have with them. As Hansie was spoiled by his father and also tried to spoil his children and ended up not paying important accounts, he would ask me what would I do if I were him. Would I not want to give the best to my sons? I shared how I provided for my sons without

spoiling them so that they could learn to be responsible. It was these discussions that led him to perceive that his father had spoiled him without teaching him responsibility, and thus he renamed his preferred story as “responsibility”. It seems to me that in Hansie’s family there was a practice of dependency relationships and this made it difficult for him to move towards self-reliance. In contrast to this, as an Indian man, I had become self-reliant as my parents died penniless, and I wished to teach my sons responsibility. The irony was that Hansie, as a White person, came to a perception of responsibility through my account of my relationship with my two sons.

Hansie began to allow responsibility to be his preferred way of being. He became more transparent to Kathy about financial issues although he was still struggling to make ends meet. After three months he persuaded Kathy to go back to him, as he seemed to show progress towards financial co-responsibility.



### 3.4 *A son's spiritual dilemma: "Mother's paradigm shift"*

Rob Roy came to me for pastoral therapy after he was unable to secure an appointment with minister Weaver. Rob said to me that he really wanted to see minister Weaver. He asked me about my spirituality, and if I was "born again". He said that he was concerned that "some counsellors are not spiritual". He also asked about my counselling experience and what kind of counselling I did. Rob is from a Pentecostal church that is critical of Protestants for not being born again of the Holy Spirit. I responded that I came from an evangelical background and was not very experienced in pastoral therapy and that I would be using a narrative approach. This line of questioning my credentials reminds me of the way in which Neal et al (1999:362) begin a therapy session. The therapist allows the counsellor to interview him/her. This helps the therapist to deconstruct himself before the person in therapy, and constructs a relationship of trust and equality. I find this instructive towards a respectful way of doing pastoral therapy with an enquiring White person.

I struggled with the idea that I had to work in the shadow of minister Weaver. It seems that this minister is perceived to be like a god by many church members. He is much sought after locally and nationally for spiritual guidance. He has breadth and depth of knowledge with regard to spiritual development and much counselling experience, while I am only a beginner. I became aware in me of what Henry Nouwen (1992:79) cautions one against, "self-rejection". Nouwen writes that "the powers of darkness around us are strong, and our world finds it easier to manipulate self-rejecting people than self-accepting people" (Nouwen 1992:79). I applied this 'self-rejection' to me as a person of colour. Nouwen teaches that life is about "brokenness" and that each person experiences

brokenness in a unique way. What cheered me up is a story he tells about a priest in a play to illustrate that we should not live under the curse of brokenness but to put it under the blessing of God's unconditional love which beholds each one of us as "the beloved". In the story, a priest is holding a glass chalice and is being carried high by his people. Suddenly the human pyramid collapses and the priest comes tumbling down. The chalice falls to the ground and is shattered. As he walks slowly through the debris, he hears children's voices singing, "Laude, laude, laude" - "Praise, praise, praise". Suddenly the priest notices the broken chalice. He looks at it for a long time and then says: "I never realized that broken glass could shine so brightly" (Nouwen 1992:82-83). As a person of colour, my life has been shattered by Apartheid. I do not have the spiritual credentials of minister Weaver. In spite of this, I enlisted positive self-talk to stand against self-rejection and, putting my own brokenness under the blessing of Christ, I resolved to make my shattered life shine brightly like broken glass. I do not wish to attain a high profile and prefer to be anonymous while being able to serve effectively.

When Rob asked me if I was born again, he informed me that he was a "born again" Christian. This got me to be reflexive about my own spiritual life. What is it to be spiritual? Where do I draw the line between the spiritual and the secular when everything I do is done before the face of God (*coram deo*)? Following a postmodern approach to spirituality, I believe that I am in a continual state of spiritual process as put forward by postmodern process theology (Henry 1995). In two New Testament texts, John 3:3 and Ephesians 5:17 the verb "to be" is used. Jesus says to Nicodemus that he must "be born again" of the Spirit and Paul writes to the Ephesians to "be filled with the Spirit". I understand this as a present continuous collaborative activity between me and God, in contrast to church doctrine which states that one must be born again through a single instance by being baptized with the Holy Spirit. Rob's doctrine highlights the different Confessional approaches within Christian practice. Different doctrines speak of multiple Christian perspectives in seeing and doing. I am moving towards a postmodern confessional perspective which is underpinned by curiosity, an evolving spirituality and being respectful as to where a person stands in relation to a personal God. Thus Rob's confessional position was a challenge to me to be accepting and respectful of him while at the same time I needed to find a way to help him take a more loving approach towards his

mother's spouse.

Rob was also powerful in character. He said that I should listen as he told his story and thereafter I could make comments. He controlled the session throughout and spoke for one and a half-hour. Once or twice during the session I tried to intervene but he politely asked me not to interrupt and to hear him out. I felt quite disempowered by him. While I believed in a non - hierarchical approach and in de - centering the therapist (Anderson & Goolishian 1992), I experienced a reversal of roles in this situation. I felt I was supposed to facilitate the process through questioning and deconstructing issues (see White 1991:27). It is hard on me when someone forces his will on me, especially a White person. I have been silenced too long by Apartheid and feel oppressed when my newfound freedom of expression is curbed. Being silenced usually leads me to passive resistance and to non co-operation and to not attending closely to the other. Looking at the positive side, Rob gave me a chance to practice my listening skills. So I stayed with listening (Swan 1998; DiNicola 1997) and wrote down four full A4 pages of notes. In feedback a little later, Rob commended me for being sensitive and I took this as a positive comment for my patience.

Rob started by saying that he was financially well off. He has his own printing business. He was struggling with his mother's "paradigm shift". His mother is seventy - four years old, went on holiday to Canada and met a man of seventy-nine whom she married. Rob and his family are happy for her to find a companion but they are depressed because the man their mother married is not a Christian. Rob believes that her husband of a few months has lured her away from being a devout Christian towards espousing secular values.

Rob spoke of "paradigm shift" and he definitely seemed to have an elaborated linguistic code (Bernstein 1972). I wondered if he had read Thomas Kuhn's *The structure of scientific revolutions* (1970) from whom I learned about the term "paradigm shift" when I studied at university. I explored the effects of "mother's paradigm shift" with him. It had led to sadness and a preoccupation with his mother's "waywardness". It also had a depressing effect on him and this de-energised him.

From my own cultural perspective, I experienced a kind of culture shock to hear about his mother getting married at the age of seventy - four and that Rob's family was comfortable with that. Indians are generally not accepting of a parent remarrying at such an old age. Parents tend to live with one or more of their children in a culture of interdependence (see Augsburger 1986; DiNicolai 1997). I am familiar with the practice of older Whites retiring to old age homes. Rob's mother lived on her own in Cape Town while her sons live in Gauteng. This speaks to a Western practice of independence and self-reliance (Sampson 1989:14) that is even espoused by a White woman in her seventies. The practice of independence of women seems to be stronger in White English culture compared to Afrikaans and Indian cultures in South Africa. It also highlights the point that the pursuit of intimate relationships is not limited to the young. Even older people long for satisfying intimate relationships.

Both Rob and his mother are financially well off. Rob's mother enjoys a debt free life. This is not so with me. My parents struggled desperately to survive financially and were not able to leave anything for me. In fact I accommodated them in their last years. At the age of fifty, I do not have an adequate retirement fund as I support my family with money that I could save. But this would be culturally selfish of me and I would not be at peace within me. However, I deeply admire Western people for their financial success. It does make life so much easier for them vis a vis the millions of Blacks who suffer in the squatter camps all around us. The values of accumulation and achievement have worked for Rob's family and I had to be respectful of that, even though it might be invisible to them that their comfortable life has been achieved within a racist capitalist system. As I do not espouse materialist values such as a comfortable life, I did not envy Rob. I am content with the food, shelter and clothing that I have. Many White **Christians** are unaware of what it means to be White in South Africa. Some feel that they have not been racists, as they did not vote for the Nationalist Party. A few weeks later, in an e-mail response to me, Rob stated that he had never been overtly racist. Mark Trudinger (1996), reflecting on what it means to be White in Australia writes of Australia being "the greatest White supremacy the world knows these days against the smallest black minority" (Trudinger 1996:21). He reflects quite movingly on his own life when he says:

I had recently come to see that to be White meant that there were all sorts of privileges that I took for granted: access to education, more chance of finding a job, better health care, and on and on. And since listening to Indigenous people, I've come to understand that being White in Australia means that I'm living here only because of 209 years of genocide...Only looking at the Namatjira case ignores the fact that racism is institutionalized, that it still exists, and that I directly benefit from it: *We have inherited, perpetuated and benefited from these actions. All of us are implicated.*

(Trudinger 1996:22)

Even though Apartheid is legally over in South Africa since 1994, racism is still alive, but very few White Christians are involved in alleviating the plight of poor people of colour. They continue to live in affluent suburbs and generate moral problems of their own which brings them to counselling which is largely a White middle class practice. In combating the effects of racism, Trudinger says further:

Today, I know it's still happening, that all White people are implicated, that I have a part to play in ending it.

(Trudinger 1996:23)

If only White Christians will learn to **listen** to indigenous people as Trudinger did, they may realize their role in complicity in the subjugation of people of colour.

"Mother's paradigm shift" had also led Rob to worrying about his mother's sexual behavior while she was courting her lover. His mother was now married, yet he was worried that his mother and boyfriend had slept in the same hotel room before marriage and wondered if they had engaged in sexual activity. I appreciated Rob confiding this sensitive aspect to me as a person of colour. This

said to me that he was trusting me as a pastoral therapist and was not looking at my colour. Rob's religious doctrine influenced him to disapprove of sex outside of marriage but his concern was that "mother's paradigm shift" had influenced her into sinful sexual ways. I had the same beliefs about sexuality when I was much younger and even saved myself sexually for marriage. Thus I was able to respect him for this doctrinal belief. Yet I felt sorry for Rob for the effect that "mothers paradigm shift" was having on him. It was "de-energizing" him and causing him meaningless suffering.

My intuitions told me that it might have been the case that Rob's mother and her boyfriend had engaged in sex before marriage, but being honouring (see Neal 1997:363) of his doctrinal beliefs about sex before marriage, which I have since abandoned, I did not comment on this. I need to search for academic writings on women's sexuality of which I have not read much. Thus I was not able to help Rob in this area. Instead I latched on to a unique outcome (Morgan 2000) which I heard and pursued. Rob's mother had been accepting of his wife who was not a Christian. His mother's acceptance spoke to me of God's grace which accepts people with 'unconditional positive regard' (Kahn 1991). The roles of mother and son had now become reversed. It was now Rob's turn to practice 'unconditional positive regard' towards his mother's non-Christian husband. Like the elder son in *The return of the prodigal son* (Nouwen 1994), Rob was stuck. "Mother's paradigm shift" had the effect of him becoming disconnected from her and putting her in the same situation as the prodigal son who left for a far away country. Only now she was the prodigal mother while Rob seemed like the self-righteous elder brother. Nouwen's fresh reading of the parable is that the elder son is also lost. Though a respectful model son, he is lost in Pharisaic self-righteousness and judgement against his brother and "...is imprisoned in obedience and duty lived out of slavery" (Nouwen 1994:76). I could have easily switched places with Rob in this situation as I have found it very painful to come to terms with women's' sexuality. Thus both Rob and I need to evolve towards being like the loving father which is the central theme in the parable.

Rob came to counselling for a spiritual perspective. I was called on as a pastoral therapist to provide such a perspective. Griffith (1995:124) cites a research finding that

clients want to reflect on their spiritual experience in therapy, and that they feel fragmented by attempting to delegate psychological, relational issues to conversations with their therapist and spiritual issues to their priest, rabbi or pastor.

Griffith (1995: 129,135) cautions pastoral therapists not to be limited by prescriptive constraints, that is, that God should be spoken of only in a certain way. Rob informed me that he was from a charismatic church so I was careful not to resort to two certainties discussed by Griffith:

- \* I know what God is like for you because I know your religious denomination
- \* I know what God is like and you need to know God as I do

I tried to be honouring of Rob as I listened to his religious perspective for one and a half-hour. I listened with curiosity (Anderson & Goolishian 1992) giving primacy to his story as he described his experiences with his words (Griffith 1995:137). Griffith writes that the pastoral therapist should be open for surprises. I truly was surprised about a seventy-four year old White woman getting married and engaging in sexual activity. The voice of pathology within me whispered that this old woman is behaving like a teenager and should be saved from her non-Christian husband who is like the serpent who seduced Eve in the garden of Eden (Genesis 3). However, the voice of postmodernism is growing louder and reminded me of uncertainty and of non fixed identities (Neimeyer 1998; Carson 1996) in a globalized postmodern world.

Rob's mother quickly realized that she acted against her better judgement by marrying and telephoned her children from Canada that she was not happy and was reconsidering the marriage. Rob's doctrinal position speaks against divorce. He said: "Our position is that she can't get divorced. She can't renege on her marriage. She's got to live in there - even though he is devious, she's committed to that".

As I did not have sufficient opportunity to make interventions in the first conversation with Rob, I decided to extend the conversation further by letter writing (See Morgan 2000). This took the form

of e-mail communication with Rob. Instead of being diagnostic and prescriptive (see McLeod 1997), I constructed a scenario for Rob to consider. The scenario is based on the real experience of an Indian lady friend of mine who was a deacon in her church. I set it out below as fiction and it is followed by Rob's e-mail reply.

*Here is a scenario: a woman who is a Christian is in an abusive relationship with her husband. He insults her all the time, throws the food onto her if he does not like it. He does not go to church with her. He is jealous of their two children being too close to his wife and treats them badly. He does not smoke but when he takes alcohol, he is sexually demanding of his wife even after she is very tired at the end of the day. He does not allow her space to study to develop herself nor does he allow her church friends to visit. She is like a bird in a cage. He does not help with the children or household chores and spends time with friends living like a teenager. After ten years his wife cannot take it anymore and divorces him. Will God understand this divorce? What do you think?*

This was Rob's response:

*Laurance,*

*I am not convinced of the position of the "character" in your example. Yes, she is going through a period of trial, but GOD promises relief from this trial one day. Is the time she spent with her "unbelieving" husband not short compared to the time of respite in eternity? Maybe this is being too idealistic. We are reminded in 1Cor 7:14 that the believing spouse will sanctify the unbelieving spouse. What do you say to this? Do we presume that God is not big enough to rectify your lady's situation? What do you think?*

Rob's response is that he is not convinced of the character in my story. And I wondered. Could it be that many White Christians are so insulated in their comfort zones that they cannot believe that the scenario I constructed is part of the everyday life of township people? I can't help expressing that people of colour have been so dehumanized by Apartheid that they turn upon each other in abusive



practices. In addition to his insular life, Rob also uses biblical texts in a very prescriptive manner, similar to how I used scripture before enrolling for this course.

Rob expressed his situation as one of disappointedness in relation to 'mother's paradigm shift'. He did not support his mother's marriage to a secular man nor does he accept that she can be divorced. He was in a state of spiritual suffering. Henry Nouwen (1994) came to mind with his thesis that human life is about brokenness. I realized that even affluent White Christians are not exempt from inner brokenness and suffering. I felt helpless as Rob seemed set in his own religious doctrine. I can relate to this as I also come from a fundamentalist Christian tradition that takes the scriptures literally. Augsburg (1986) and Graham (1997), both Christian theologians teach about the biblical tradition being part of storied tradition of a culture. Espousing postmodern approaches these authors write that as part of a storied tradition, the scriptures may be understood as metaphors which suggest how we should perceive ourselves, our peers and our world. However stories change over time and some people remain stuck in old stories. Augsburg (1986:263) says that

In therapy or growth, people change only when the essential metaphors that direct their emotional, relational and moral life come to awareness and are framed or replaced by new, more inclusive, or liberating metaphors.

After my e-mail interaction with Rob, I did not pursue pastoral therapy with him any further. His "mother's paradigm shift" helped me to see how I was making a paradigm shift from biblicist thinking in theology and modernistic social theory towards a more liberating postmodern perspective. Since "mother's paradigm shift" had the effect of leaving him with a sense of disconnectedness from and disappointedness in her, I thought it was time for him to make a paradigm shift. However, he was not ready for this, and in keeping with respectful ways of doing pastoral therapy (Neal et al 1997:363), I left this to time.

### 3.5 *A bickering intercultural couple: going round in circles*

Jose and Kathy came to counselling for about twelve weeks. Jose is Portuguese and Kathy is English. The different White groups represent different experiences of the history of my oppression as a person of colour. I majored in history at the University of the Witwatersrand. I remember the Portuguese as the earliest slave traders of black people. The English had colonized India for over four hundred years and taken a lot out of the people and from the land. On one occasion I was in the library paging through a book on India when I saw a photograph of a beautiful Indian woman in colonial times. The woman was naked and stood against a wall while several big English men had sex with her. I felt pain about this. It seemed like gang rape of an oppressed woman. Yet I had to come to terms over the years that Indian women in South Africa were fascinated with White skin and found it a privilege to have sex with a White man. They would speak about their White boyfriend with pride and they tend to be equally racist towards blacks even though they were oppressed. This seems to be the paradox in human nature, like the Afrikaners who suffered under British rule and then perpetuated the same and even worse form of oppression on people of colour. And so my approach towards Jose and Kathy was based on a theology of grace (Augsburger 1986), to accept them unconditionally and help them as humans struggling in their marriage relationship.

It seemed that *bickering* was after this marriage in a big way. It sneaks in through their conversations and makes them believe that they have a communication problem. *Bickering* has a powerful ally in 'insecurity'. The couple has a three-year-old son and *bickering* even uses their son to make their relationship unhappy as Jose feels that Kathy puts their son before him. Jose is also unhappy when Kathy goes out on her own with their son. One Sunday she went to church with her son and *bickering* used 'insecurity' to accuse her of not going to church but somewhere else. It so happened that I was in the same row of seats with Kathy and her son and I was able to confirm that they were in church. *Bickering* has convinced Jose that his wife is the problem as it gets him to moan about her

untidiness, her hay fever, lack of communication and poor sex life. On the other hand *bickering* used Jose's mother and his materialism to make Kathy unhappy in the relationship.

The issue of Jose's mother being the problem and that of materialism for Kathy and Jose's problems about cleanliness and poor sex led me to understand *bickering* as emanating from a wider story of cultural discourse. I realized that with couples it was necessary to follow a "just therapy " approach (Waldegrave 1990) which takes into account the gender, cultural, social and economic context within which people participate in therapy (Kotze 1994). This view is supported strongly by Neal et al (1999:360, 364) who write that narrative therapists think about and work with the effects of cultural discourse, and that

As such, understanding and behaviour reflect personal and unique interpretations of culturally defined ways of knowing and behaving rather than characteristics of clients or their relationships. A couple's feelings, thoughts, and relationship patterns are organized and constrained by culturally dominant ideas and practices.

Being an Indian who has been historically oppressed by Whites, together with millions of other people of colour, I had constructed a stereotypical view of all Whites as being part of the oppressor group. In this situation, as a postmodern narrative pastoral therapist, I had to learn to be culturally sensitive. Kotze (1994:111) writes that

cultural sensitivity is necessary because it enhances meaning-specific sensitivity, which is important in all therapeutic situations, even within a culturally homogeneous therapeutic environment. It is the explicit task of the family therapist as professional to act in a culturally sensitive way.

For Kathy, *bickering* focussed centrally on Jose's mother to destabilize the marriage relationship. The couple knew each other for about ten years. The mother problem did not manifest itself to Kathy during the four years of courtship as she and Jose each lived with their own parents. It seems as if

for liberating traditions within each culture. An example is given of an Anglo woman married to a Mexican-American whose cultural traditions have rigid gender roles. At first, the Anglo wife became angry when she was expected to serve her husband's dinner when they dined at his parent's house. Later she worked out that this was a practice of showing respect for her in-laws rather than being subservient to her husband. She accepted this custom as it provided a way of connecting with the women in his family.

The similarity between Jose's culture and mine with respect to mother-son relationships did become my presenting problem in the process. Similarity tried to seduce me into getting Kathy to see the positive side of Jose's mother. But this did not fit for Kathy. I sympathized with her wanting to be in control of her own home and needing space from Jose at times, but she often lapsed into silences that made me uncomfortable. I did manage to keep an ear cocked for difference between Jose and me. When Kathy threatened to leave home, Jose did ask his mother to leave and stay with his brother. This does not usually happen in an Indian family. If a wife complains about her husband's mother, he often takes his mother's side and reprimands his wife. Recently, I met an attractive Indian lady who lived with her husband and mother-in-law. She related how she is dominated and controlled by her mother-in-law. She tried to stand up for her rights and was badly assaulted by her husband and his mother and was put out of the house by them. She went back to her own mother after the assault. Jose's action to send his mother away shows that he does value his wife unlike with Indian men for who mother comes first. Hindu culture teaches that there are four important persons in an Indian person's life: mother, father, guru and God, which is chanted in Hindi as *mata, pita, guru, deva*. As can be seen mother is first in the list. In Jose's situation, I needed to work with the idea that it was a unique outcome for him to send his mother to his brother's house so that Kathy could be the main woman in the house.

*Bickering* also used the couple's sex life to destabilize their relationship. In one conversation I focussed on Jose's concern about their sex life. Being inexperienced in sex therapy, I admitted to getting stuck and not knowing how to proceed on sexual issues. Kathy as counsellee assisted me to take the conversation forward. This indicated that the pastoral therapist is not the only sentient being

in the therapeutic situation. Kathy knew what she wants when she said, "There is such a thing as respect". "Respect" is a central word in this project. Kathy asked for respect as a woman and it was important for me not to lose sight of the gender struggle that she was engaged in vis a vis her Portuguese husband's more rigid cultural approach to gender relations.

When I saw the couple again I noticed that *bickering* had been quite busy tearing the couple up. This time *bickering* enlisted 'insecurity' again. Jose informed me that Kathy was pregnant and he was very unhappy, as he did not want another child because of the tensions in the marriage. He blamed Kathy for getting pregnant, as he had not planned for another child. I had known that Kathy was pregnant but I acted as if I was ignorant. I was pleased with myself that I succeeded in keeping it in confidence and imagined this to be in keeping with a respectful approach to a counsellor's wishes. As Jose did not want anymore children, I explored with them what steps they could take to prevent the birth of another child. Kathy thought of a vasectomy for Jose and he immediately disagreed. I wondered why and Jose said it would take away his manhood completely or lower his libido. This was the talk amongst men he knew. I shared with him that after two sons, I had a vasectomy, as I did not want my wife's body to be cut and scarred. I would rather have it done to me as there would be no visible scars as in a hysterectomy. Sharing is what Neal et al (1999:381) do in their approach to narrative therapy. They believe that the therapeutic situation is not about one story but about two stories, that of the therapist and the person in therapy. I endorse this approach. But Jose would have no talk of a vasectomy and preferred that Kathy have her tubes tied after the birth of their second child.

Zimmerman and Dickerson (1996:389) would put the couple's sexual woes into a gender story about male entitlement and female self-sacrifice. The male sexual drive discourse tells Jose that he is entitled to having his sexual needs met by his wife on demand. Kathy finds herself overpowered by Jose's nagging and gives in. This is her self-sacrifice. Jenkins (1990:41) adds that male sexual conquest and performance are traditional criteria for male self-esteem and that male sexual entitlement is related to ownership of the partner's body. "The female partner should be available and is expected to provide for the male's sexual needs" (Jenkins 1990 :41). This obsession with

sexual performance by White males scares me and I cannot imagine wanting to have sex everyday. With my lack of knowledge in sex therapy I did suggest to Kathy to try to relax instead of offering resistance as she finds herself having to give in. However I am unable to be respectful of Jose's uncompromising need for sex every second day. Kathy was generous in wanting to have sex every third day. So it was not that as a female she had a lower sex drive. In *Men's Experience*, Gary Sanders (1991) writes that the popular notion in Western culture that men are believed to be more interested in sex and women more interested in love was, in fact, mythology. He says

I now strive for a more *mutualist* perspective because of the fact that **both** partners in a relationship, whether heterosexual, or male homosexual or female homosexual, indicated to me that each wanted exactly the same *experiential* thing.

(Sanders 1991:7)

Jose was unwilling to settle for a mutual sexual relationship and this gave *bickering* the upper hand. Further allies recruited by *bickering* were Jose's constant complaint that Kathy does not give him the support he needs. She is not tidy as his mother is and he attributes this to her being spoiled by her parents. He complained that Kathy's sister is just the same in her marriage to an Englishman. *Bickering* sent Kathy into a state of withdrawal and depression, which Jose interpreted as a communication problem. Neal et al (1999:387) theorize that

When the cultural specifications of masculinity and femininity support a relationship in which the woman's experience is invisible to the man (and the woman knows this), there is often anger, distance, and a sense that he is unable or unwilling to understand. In other instances, in which neither of them notice that the woman's experience is invisible, - her experience and understandings are viewed by both of them as subordinate and less valid than his - then one is more likely to witness individual expressions of distress that many people think of as "symptoms" of

individual psychological problems, such as depression and anxiety.

What I find quite instructive is the point made by Neal et al (1999:387) that a useful way to think about depression is to consider it as an effect of some experience of oppression. Thinking about depression in this way helps a pastoral therapist to appreciate the power differentials in gender relations.

Kathy was also unhappy that Jose did not help her with attending to their three-year-old son. She had to do everything for the child. I found a big difference in my experience and that of Jose about caring for children. I just loved doing things for them. Here Kotze (1994:110) reminds me that "apart from recognizing culture, therapists should also be aware of individual dynamics and differences within each culture". In his article, *Personal and political responses to patriarchal culture*, Gobbett (1990:30) tells of his own transformation:

I remember thinking at one stage that it was important for me to help my wife with "her work"! It wasn't until some years later that I appreciated that housework is people's work and that, apart from breastfeeding, every task of parenting can be shared.

Jose agreed to a preferred story of sharing responsibility for his son, yet did not get down to actually doing it every time he came back to see me.

The next big issue in the relationship was money. When they had courted for four years, Jose appreciated Kathy for saving money with him towards a house. They bought a house for five hundred thousand rands and paid it off before he was thirty years old. This was a phenomenal achievement to me as I have turned fifty years of age and do not own a house to date. My political consciousness had told me not to own a house while the Apartheid government had made Africans aliens in the land of their birth. Africans had been dispossessed of their land and granted ninety nine-year leases in township houses, which meant that they would die before that and the houses would

be leased to new tenants. I also do not have savings as I assist family with about five hundred rands per month. This amount means I could save six thousand rands per annum for myself but my conscience would not allow me to do this while others in the family struggle. For example my brothers and sister are so destitute that they cannot afford a funeral policy. This stresses me out because if one of them dies the funeral costs would be on me. So I pay a hundred rands per month towards an extended family funeral policy for a simple funeral cover. In this way it would not be embarrassing for the family should one of us die suddenly.

I celebrated Jose's and Kathy's achievement. Jose is proud of it and sees people as being jealous of him because he is a money saver. However, *bickering* cut their celebrations short. Kathy complains that Jose is obsessed with money, that he is materialistic. For her money is not everything in the world and love for money is the root of evil. When she had a car accident with minimal damage, Jose was more concerned about how much he had to spend to repair the car than whether she was injured or not. Jose complains that Kathy is not money-wise. The voice of *bickering* accuses her of wasting petrol if she uses the car to visit her mother about two and a half kilometers away. Jose saves his salary every month and they use Kathy's salary for daily expenses. The cost of living has been rising and Kathy who makes ends meet finds that she has a shortfall of about six to eight hundred rands per month. Jose blames her for the shortfall and is reluctant to withdraw money from the savings. *Bickering* has convinced him that the savings are his own and that the house belongs to him as well, even though it is in both their names. Jose has often told Kathy to get out of "my house" and this is a cause for much pain for Kathy. This confirms the point made by Jenkins (1990:83) that many men see a woman as their private property and Neal's (1999:387) observation that a woman's contribution remains invisible to most men.

Jose's pride in his five hundred thousand house and his statement "I am a saver" shows up the myth of independence in mainstream Western male culture. In Jose's case the mainstream Western ideals of individualism and self-determination have become "tyrannical measures of human worth" (Wylie 1994:46). It masquerades as an autonomous achievement and renders invisible the woman without whose support the achievement would have been a difficult one. DiNicola (1999:199) says that "the



concept of the autonomous distinctive individual living in society...is precisely what makes Western culture unique among world cultures". However Sampson's (1989:3) deconstruction of the autonomous individual is that it is a product of early capitalism and that "the individual arose as a dynamic cell of economic activity...interested in securing what economic benefits were " (Sampson 1989:4). Jose's materialistic approach fits well into this reading of individualism in Western society. For me Kathy's depression is an expression of the need for recognition as a main player in Jose's achievements and illustrates the interdependence (see Augsburg 1986) between him and her.

While I am happy for Jose's achievement, I do not envy his big house. With Peterson (1989:34), I believe in the ephemeral nature of material things. For me life's emphasis is on the spiritual. I am at peace connecting with nature, animals and the mystery of God. My faith statement is that I look forward, not to a mansion, but to a crown of righteousness (inner transformation) in the coming kingdom of Christ. My only pain is that while many Whites enjoy their money, mansions and Mercedes, millions of black people still live in abject poverty. And I grieve and wonder how Christians can justify affluent lifestyles in the name of Christ who rejected power, wealth and status.

The last issue that I wish to discuss is that of spirituality. As a pastoral therapist, I am not only involved in the care of souls but also in the cure of souls (Peterson 1989:57). In line with Griffith (1995), Peterson does not advocate any imposition of spiritual values. A pastoral therapist should rather ask himself: "What has God been doing here. How can I get things going?" (Peterson 1989:61). Both Jose and Kathy had not been attending church regularly. After entering counselling Kathy mentioned that she started to attend church again because it was important for their son Mark to grow up in church. But *bickering* sneaked into her life again and used 'depression' to discourage her from attending church. Her faith began to waver because of problems in the marriage. Jose occasionally attended a cell meeting in his charismatic church. The story of their faith had become darkened and overshadowed by *bickering*. If I tried to get things going by encouraging them to attend church, read their bibles and pray or read the scriptures and pray for them, then I would be giving them "spiritual band aids" (Crabb 1996:12) and not helping them to address the central issue of connecting with themselves and with God. I believe they knew enough about this but were

allowing *bickering* to nurture the antagonism between them.

Kathy stopped turning up for counselling after a few conversations. Her position was that "we were going round in circles". In a conversation with Jose I enquired whether she thought that I might be taking sides. Jose thought not but made an important point that as he and I were males, Kathy may feel marginalised. I immediately agreed especially since I understood the sameness between Portuguese and Indian cultures. I wondered if it would be useful to ask a female pastoral therapist to join us to make things sort of even. Jose thought that it was a good idea and would inform Kathy. But Kathy continued to stay away and Jose continued to disqualify her through the voice of *bickering*, saying that he was trying his best to compromise but that she shows no appreciation. *Bickering* used 'insecurity' to convince Jose that Kathy loved him only about fifteen percent.

With this couple I had reached a therapeutic impasse. We had worked out that a preferred story of their relationship would be Appreciation which entailed mutual respect, helpful communication, affirmation of each other, budgeting together and joint responsibility in caring for Mark. But *bickering* seemed just too powerful for them and Kathy gave up on counselling. When such a stalemate occurs in counselling intercultural couples, Biever et al (1998:186) suggest that a therapist view impasse as an attempt to impose beliefs/values on others. The authors believe that

Therapeutic impasses occur in conversations where each of the participants believes that their own description, or explanation, of a situation is correct and tries unsuccessfully to persuade others to adopt their position. This competition of ideas results in participants becoming increasingly committed to their initial positions. Thus, the conversation becomes 'stuck' with little opportunity for the development of new ideas or behaviors.

Jose continued to see me every three weeks just to get his frustrations out and was helpful in giving me feedback on issues for which I am grateful. But Kathy's silences and eventual withdrawal left me feeling somewhat inadequate. I took it personally for a while, but eventually found relief in the

conclusion that my task was not to provide solutions but to open up space for the couple to make choices towards an alternate story.

### 3.6 *Imprisoned by marriage vows: with a bit of work this marriage can work*

Andy presented himself for counselling with two agendas. The main one was to tell a story of his innocence through bitter criticisms of his wife Ellen. Yet inspite of all this he wanted her back and wanted me to assist him. The latter was his second agenda. His recurring phrase in almost all of the conversations was "With a bit of work, I believe that this marriage can work". The "problems version" of the relationship (Epston 1997) was awful. Ellen lies about him to people in church. She is extremely manipulative and toys with his emotions. She is on drugs and alcohol and has been in hospital because she is suicidal. She is sexually promiscuous and he suspects her of being involved in prostitution. There is a Satan in her. He sees the situation as a lose-win one in which she is winning and the temptation on his side is to get revenge. However, "loves version" of the relationship (see Epston 1997) is surprisingly different. He loves this woman and cares about her a lot and wants her back. With her being married three times before, he knows he should have backed off but he is unable to control his strong emotions for her. Ellen is a bubbly, sincere, loving and caring person. Andy showed me letters and cards from courting days in which she said she loves him. Ellen now wants a divorce and he refuses to sign any divorce papers because he is committed to his marriage vows. Although she "blows hot and cold" he says "I know she loves me". He loves her and with a bit of work he believes this marriage can work.

*Marriage vows* coached Andy into holding on to the relationship even though Ellen had moved out just over a year ago. He was fearful of losing her. The effects of *marriage vows* on Andy's life was quite devastating. He was not sleeping. He was full of anxiety and was physically shaking with his hands trembling and stomach vibrating. He felt like vomiting but nothing came out. He was unable to keep any food down. He had developed an ulcer and a rash had broken out all over his body. He was smoking ten times more. He was angry with God who had forsaken him. He had become apathetic and suicidal. He had become so bitter that *marriage vows* were telling him loudly that he should seek revenge on Ellen. He was not going to make it easy for her to get a divorce. "She is

going to work for it". He was shattered but he believed things could still work out.

*Marriage vows* had convinced Andy that there was still hope to get Ellen back even if she was sleeping with another man. It had said to him that as Ellen had moved out near Christmas time, she was merely going through a honeymoon period and that when the honeymoon was over she would pick up the phone and call him to get back together again. "With all her instability she's still got class", Andy said. Andy also brings to mind Henry Nouwen's (1994) *Return of the prodigal son*. In this parable the Father welcomes back his son who squandered his inheritance on prostitutes. But the elder brother is bitter and critical of his father's reception of his younger son. In this case *marriage vows* made Andy to seem like the father awaiting the return of his prodigal wife. But while he was *Waiting for Godot* (Beckett 1965), the elder son in him is bitter and revengeful. I find that I also have elements of the Father's grace and the prejudices of the elder son within me. This is in keeping with a postmodern perspective that our lives are about shifting identities and not a single one (DiNicola 1997:12).

On a Saturday I received a call from Andy's father. He did not know what to do as Andy was threatening to kill himself and asked me to come and help. I went to Andy's home and after conversing with him, he relaxed. This brought to mind Larry Crabbs's (1996) reconsidered approach to pastoral therapy. To really connect with people a pastoral therapist should enter the battle they are engaged in beyond the consulting rooms. This is different from Muller's (1998) position that it is not appropriate for caregivers to take on obligation for other people's lives. I am more inclined to connect with a person seeking help even beyond the therapeutic rooms when needed. Andy's father's call for help was a case in point. After this I visited Andy several times at his father's home. I found myself in the odd situation of keeping a White man away from suicide. The pain of oppression and exploitation I experienced by Whites had often made me suicidal and depressed. Yet I did not succumb to meaningless suffering but worked through issues until I found a sense of inner peace again. I felt sorry for Andy as he seemed unable to come to terms with his situation, even with the support of his father. While I was at his home on the first visit I asked for and received permission from Andy to invite his wife to counselling so that he may know face to face where he stood with

her.

Ellen was very polite when I telephoned her and invited her to counselling. But she was firm that she did not need counselling. I asked her where she stood as far as *marriage vows* were concerned. Her position was that she was not coming back to Andy as he was abusive, he did not have a steady job, his own home and that she did not love him.

One of the purposes of Andy's coming to the Pastoral Care center was to put forward his innocence as he believed that Ellen had blamed him for all the trouble in the marriage. *Marriage vows* persuaded him to go to the church and clear his name. Andy said he was tired with fingers being pointed at him; that he wanted to set the record straight and clear the lies told about him.

In a conversation with the Pastor for counselling and another pastoral therapist, Andy spoke of the badness of his wife. When the pastor for counselling heard how disqualifying he was of his wife, she stopped the conversation and said to Andy that she was not prepared to provide an audience for him to disgrace his wife; that his coming to counselling should not be about Ellen but about himself. She accepted that Ellen was a common denominator between a few men. However, Andy should be aware that she and the counsellors are discerning enough to see through things. She expressed that Ellen is still a child of God and that there is a pastoral therapist who could care for her, but, the important thing was for Andy to start taking care of himself. She said to him that he was in good hands with me and left the meeting with the other counsellor.

The approach of the Pastor for Counseling provided me with a powerful experience in self-assertiveness. She was strong and said to me later that she was from a British culture that did not take nonsense from people. What she demonstrated powerfully to me was that she was not willing to be seduced into the agenda of a counsellee.

Being assertive has not been part of my character. On the one hand Apartheid has crushed me so much that I allowed myself to be abused by Whites in the twelve years that I worked as a clerk

before going to university. When I became a Christian and read the life of Jesus I accepted the value of being vulnerable rather than being assertive in the sense of having power over people. Being vulnerable often meant that I would be marginalised while others received recognition above me. I was comfortable with this as Christ did not seek power or status in this world (see Matthew 4 and Philippians 2). Andy's situation made me realize that I had to find a balance between being vulnerable and being assertive. The Pastor for counselling seemed to uphold assertiveness as a virtue and agreed with Andy in the reflecting team conversation that assertiveness is what I lacked. DiNicola (1997:199) traces the origin of assertiveness in Western culture to the eighteenth century in England when there was a cultural shift from relatedness to an "extreme assertion of the self (my emphasis) and the value of individual experience". I would not like to go for an either/or position of either assertiveness or vulnerability but for a both/and position of both assertiveness and vulnerability (see Sampson 1989; Biever et al 1998 for discussions on either/or and both/and).

The Pastor for Counselling had told Andy that there was somebody to take care of Ellen if she requested help. In my first conversation with Andy, he mentioned that his wife could not live without the help of counselling and would drag him along as well to different counsellors. Before coming to me, he had been with her to Lifeline, a psychologist, two psychotherapists, to the pastor at another church, to a Methodist minister and to a pastoral therapist at the Methodist church. Seven in all. I was the eighth. The experience with the clinical psychologist stayed with him, as she was not neutral. She blamed him for all the problems and threatened to take Ellen's two children away from her if she went back to Andy. Andy found her approach so antagonistic that he considered reporting her to a national council for psychologists. Following Griffith (1995) and Mcleod (1997), it seems that Andy was hurt as the psychologist did not allow him to tell his story as he experienced it, but seemed rather to take on the role of the expert in the situation. I saw this as an important lesson for me in not subjecting counselees to participate in 'authorized versions of their lives that are produced by 'authority figures' (McLeod 1997:55). This event brings in the issue of power relations between the therapist and counsellee. Hoffman (1992:14)) cautions that "therapists of all kinds must now investigate how relations of domination and submission are built into the very assumptions on which their practices are based". For Hoffman traditional methods of family therapy "all seemed based on

secrecy, hierarchy and control" (Hoffman 1992:15). If Andy found a White psychologist to be unsympathetic, I realized that as a person of colour, I had to learn to also be sensitive to a White person so that the race issue did not get in the way of therapy.

As postmodern narrative therapists, Neal et al (1999:367-368) favour a position in which the therapist makes known his/her assumptions and experiences and some acknowledgement of the therapist's gender and how the therapist believes this informs his or her work. These authors provided me with a valuable lesson for future work in pastoral therapy, to explore assumptions of race, gender and spirituality in an ethical way that is respectful of a person in therapy.

The reflecting team conversation with Andy, the two other pastoral therapists and me provided me with a way to shift the focus from Ellen and help Andy to start to care for himself. I approached this by *Extending the conversation* (Epston 1994) through a letter which I took to his home. I summarized the conversation we had in the reflecting team situation and added some information from telephonic conversations I had with his wife. The next day Andy telephoned me and was furious with me about the contents of the letter. He said it was not what was discussed in the meeting with the other two pastoral therapists. He was especially angry with me for including information from his wife; to consider his own share of responsibility in the failure of his marriage and that he should try to be open to his own shortcomings and not be defensive. He said that he was not coming back to me for counselling as Ellen has got me wrapped around her fingers. I explained to him how I had respected his advice and asserted myself with Ellen and asked her politely not to telephone me but to communicate with him directly or through her lawyers. He calmed down and apologised and said that he would be attending church the next Sunday.

Andy's angry approach towards me hurt a lot. My parents never shouted at me in an abusive manner, but here was a White man venting his frustrations on me. I felt inadequate as a pastoral therapist and humiliated as a person of colour. I had discovered that I was not the only one that Andy shouted at. On several occasions when I was at his house, he shouted at his father as well. In my next conversation with him I addressed the relationship between the two of us. In their postmodern



approach to therapy Biever et al (1998:187) say that impasses may also occur between the therapist and one or both members of the couple. When this happens it is useful for therapists to ask what understandings are they imposing on the clients. I went over to Andy's house and had a conversation with him and expressed my difficulties in helping him. Ellen had expressed that she was not coming back to him, and wanted an amicable divorce because she was living with another man. She had also said that she did not love Andy. I concluded after a month, that Andy's situation should not be about marriage counselling but about divorce counselling. I expressed that I was unable to help him any further if he continued to focus on Ellen's badness. I shared with him my own experience with my wife. When she left me to live on her own, I tried desperately to get her back to preserve the family for our children's sake and because I believed that we could work things out. For four years she told me the same story, that she had no romantic feelings for me. I then came to terms with this and decided to get on with my life. Hoffman (1992:22) also supports the practice of sharing experiences with counselees where it is appropriate. As Andy had a complaint about the contents of my letter, I respected his feelings and expressed regret for including what his wife had said to me about her not coming back. What I did is also supported by Hoffman when she says: "I would openly assume responsibility if the client had a complaint about the therapy, rather than treating it as evidence of resistance" (Hoffman 1992:16). Painfully, Andy responded that the reflecting team was right. He thought that he could be Ellen's saviour, but he had to start looking after himself and not allow Ellen or *marriage vows* to "push my buttons". He said he was going to mow the overgrown lawn, try to make his father happy and find some good friends. I felt happy to hear this. It sounded like a breakthrough and I hoped it was going to be the beginning of an alternate story. I expressed to Andy that I did not feel competent to deal with his problems and obtained his permission to take his situation to a supervision group for assistance.

The pastor for counselling had recruited a clinical psychologist from the church to supervise our pastoral therapy. At supervision, I mentioned an incident that had been very disturbing for Andy. One Sunday, his wife and young lover drove up and down in front of his house and the boyfriend taunted him and said that Andy was jealous as he was now sleeping with his wife. After I outlined the problems and my approach, the clinical psychologist immediately said that Andy was not in

touch with reality, that he was experiencing psychotic episodes. She believed that Andy was imagining or had made up the story about his wife coming to his house with her boyfriend. She advised me not to go to Andy's house as I would be fighting the battle in his territory, that I should take responsibility for only the hour in the counselling session and not beyond that. She also said that I should draw up parameters or boundaries with him and get him to sign it and if he transgressed it, I should feel free to get up and go. That afternoon, I had to go for an accountability meeting to the head of counselling. She asked me how did the supervision with the psychologist help. My response was that she spoke a different language to mine. Andy's wife lives nearby my flat and I have seen her car and believed that her boyfriend went to his house to taunt him. My view of Andy not being in touch with reality is that the problem, *marriage vows*, blinded him into hoping that Ellen was coming back to him. At first I thought that the idea of drawing up boundaries was useful, but when I thought about it, it did not seem to fit with a postmodern narrative approach as it would restrict the spontaneous telling of a counsellees story. To me outbursts of anger and disqualifying language were acceptable as they were part of the dominant plot of a person's life-story. I would rather explore the effects of anger stories and work towards a preferred way of being rather than impose parameters or boundaries on a counsellee. When a story is not allowed to be told in full, the therapeutic relationship becomes one of inequality (see McLeod 1997). Hoffman (1992) traces that most family therapists seemed to support the idea of therapist control, whether exerted openly or secretly. Her approach is to break down hierarchies by honouring where people stood and how they saw things. She places a value on "a participatory experience validated by the expression of many voices, rather than by a reliance on the voice of an expert" (Hoffman 1992:16).

In my letter to Andy I reflected on his association with Ellen's last husband Toby. He had become friends with Ellen's last husband who also assisted him with odd jobs. In a subsequent appointment, Andy brought Toby along. I interviewed Toby using the 'internalised other questioning' approach (Epston 1998b). Andy sat listening as Toby answered as if he were Andy. One of the things Andy heard from Toby was that "There is no way I can ever take this woman back". I asked him the all important question about *marriage vows*, that if he were Andy what would he do. He said that he would make divorce easy for Ellen. Toby mentioned that he had studied martial arts and that his

instructor had taught him to "Never fight a war on your opponent's battleground. Choose your own". He thought that this was what Andy was doing with Ellen. When I conversed with Andy he said that "the whole back of the problem has been broken". To my surprise, Toby had become Andy's support base. Melissa Griffith (1995:127-134) teaches that a pastoral therapist should "...connect more creatively with other persons, expecting to be **surprised, rather than stifled**" (my emphasis). I was indeed surprised with an ex-husband befriendng Andy in his darkest moments. For me it was a certainty that association with Toby was not good for Andy's emotional healing. Now I accepted that when a person breaks a leg, he needs a crutch to walk with and if he is broken emotionally a human crutch becomes necessary. In this story even an ex-husband was able to be an emotional crutch to Andy and more by providing him with odd jobs. Griffith also writes that "we hope to open these certainties to the refreshing breezes of curiosity and wonder, in which multiple realities can coexist and relationships can evolve" (Griffith 1995:127). For me learning to be open to Toby's role in supporting Andy became a respectful and honouring way of doing pastoral therapy.

I re-established links with Andy some time later for feedback on the therapeutic conversations. He was now taking his life back. He said: "My brain is ruling my heart". He was happier and sleeping better. It seemed that *marriage vows* were no longer in control of his life. Andy was no longer *Waiting for Godot*.

The next chapter is an important one in that it reflects on feedback from White counsellees on important issues such as race, culture, spirituality and respectful ways of doing pastoral therapy.

## **CHAPTER FOUR: REFLECTIONS ON FEEDBACK ON THE THERAPEUTIC CONVERSATIONS**

The interviews for this chapter were conducted by the Pastor for counselling and I did not have the opportunity to ask for thicker descriptions of issues from counsellees as most of them were not available.

The information or data in this section was constructed through a single interview after completion or towards the end of the therapeutic conversations. Counsellees were invited to participate in a single conversation in order for me to get feedback from them on the therapeutic conversations. All of the counsellees were willing to give feedback, but not all were able to come to be interviewed due to work pressure. Three counsellees were interviewed while four others sent their responses by facsimile (fax) or e-mail. The interviews were conducted by the Pastor for counselling. This was done in the interests of reliability or trustworthiness in qualitative action research (Maykut & Morehouse 1994; Schumacher & Mcmillan 1993) The transcribed interviews were given back to counsellees to check for accuracy and make comments where necessary. After that the transcripts were given to the Pastor for counselling who did the interviews as well for checking and comment. The whole procedure followed a social construction approach that was collaborative with and accountable to counsellees and the Pastor for counselling. I find this a respectful approach compared to a traditional scientific approach in which the researcher relies on his/her expertise for meaning by constructing a pre-determined research design which is not accountable to research participants. Gergen and Gergen (1991:79) write that a social construction perspective puts the focus on relational processes and the importance of language for a reflexive approach to research. The authors articulate this as follows:

The reflexive attempt is thus relational, emphasizing the expansion of the languages of understanding. The aim is to realize more fully the linguistic implications of

preferred positions, and to invite the expression of alternative voices or perspectives into one's activities (Gergen 1991:79).

Gergen and Gergen argue further that in traditional scientific research 'subjects' serve as reactive pawns for manipulation, control and observation; are not allowed to reflect on their situations in the study but serve the purpose of developing the researcher's voice. In contrast to this, a social construction position shares power by transforming 'subjects' into participants through a reflexive dialogic approach (Gergen 1991:86).

Through the interviews done by the Pastor for counselling, I hoped to gain understanding of the meanings that White counselees have constructed with regard to race, cultural and spiritual issues which may assist me towards respectful ways of doing pastoral therapy. The focus of the interviews was on "therapy as relationship, not therapy as method" (Andersen 1997:126).

#### 4.1 Race

Counselees were asked about their impressions on being referred to an Indian pastoral therapist. Except for one man, most counselees said that they were comfortable from the start with me being an Indian pastoral therapist rather than being a black person. An English woman said that my race did not bother her at all but she was curious to see how an Indian person would conduct a therapy session. However, a Portuguese man was a little doubtful as he thought that I might not understand where he was coming from as a White person and as a Portuguese. If I were a culturally encapsulated counsellor (Augsburger 1989), then I agree I would have understood him from my political bias. From a narrative perspective I learned to be respectful and to proceed with curiosity (Griffith 1995; Anderson & Goolishian 1992) His bias towards me comes from his experience with Indians in the workplace where he found them to lie a lot. His manager is Muslim and goes to Mosque three times a week from work yet swears at him. He finds his manager to be a hypocrite and does not respect him. A few weeks after the interview, I got back with him and asked for more information on his experiences with Indians. He told me a story of a car he had sold. He had advertised an old car in a

newspaper called *Junk Mail* and a Muslim man telephoned him to buy it. When the man arrived to buy the car, he discovered that he had given him a different name to what appeared in his identity document. The Muslim man explained that he had given him his nickname over the telephone. The buyer had cash on him but my Portuguese counsellor did not trust the man. He took him to the bank, filled out a deposit slip and asked the buyer to deposit it into his account. He did this so that the bank teller could check that the money was not counterfeit notes. What made the Portuguese man comfortable with me was that he found me to be different and a "totally honest person". He said: "If I did not trust him, I would not have continued to come". This counsellor showed his appreciation for me by bringing me about two month's supply of toilet paper and tissues from his workplace. I was overwhelmed by this. Andy, an English counsellor said that some Indians are big crooks but also said that there are also ten million White crooks as well. I related this prejudice to my younger son. He laughed and told me what a White comedian said in a show that he went to that, in South Africa blacks and Whites have something in common - they are always being taken for a ride by Indians. I also laughed at the joke, yet I was sad to hear about the perception of Indians being liars and crooks. I have strong views against lying and this is guided by the words of Jesus against Satan, that he was a liar from the beginning (John 8:44) and has deceived humans to turn away from God. At the risk of being defensive, I would like to locate Indians who take others 'for a ride' within a capitalist social system created by Western people. This system is underpinned by cutthroat competition in which greed for money controls the lives of business people (see Sampson 1989; Jenkins 1990). Religion seems to be a mask of respectability that attracts customers for business profit. In this sense Indian business people have also been socially constructed into the 'normalizing gaze' of a capitalist consciousness. My experience in South Africa is that when Indian Christians, Muslims and Hindus succeed in becoming financially well off, they tend to attribute this to God's blessing on their loyalty to him and not to some stealthy business practices such as tax evasion.

Hansie, an Afrikaans man had a very different approach to race. He said: "I think he must stop worrying about that. He's making an issue out of it more than other people. He thought that I might encounter problems if I tried to be a pastoral therapist in an Afrikaans centered church but not in the Methodist context. His view highlighted the importance of context. The national head of the

Methodist Church is a black man and Afrikaans members make up about thirty percent of the membership in the Benoni congregation where I am a pastoral therapist. The practices of this congregation indicate that it is moving towards non-racialism. I was formerly a member of the Indian Reformed Church which is a daughter church to the Dutch Reformed Church. I recalled a time when Afrikaans missionaries took the Indian youth to visit an Afrikaans church. The White youth teased and laughed at us and I went away feeling humiliated.

Should I not make race an issue in South Africa? Pope-Davis & Liu (1998:152-153) suggest that

Within counselling, race is an inescapable feature that needs to be addressed. The construction of 'Whiteness' is critical to understanding the development of 'Africaness, Asianess, Hispanicness, and Nativeness'. Thus racial groups have not been constructed as isolated groups but in relation to each other.

The history of relations of domination of Whites over people of colour is a long one spanning many centuries. It is not easy for people of colour to forget and pretend that everything is all right in a new South Africa. People of colour have been dehumanized politically and socially, and exploited economically and sexually. The pain of loss is so immense, that, like the Samoan novelist Albert Wendt, I can also say "We are what we have lost" (Tamasese & Waldergrave 1994:55) and that as part of a large oppressed group, I have a "racialized consciousness" (Scheurich 1997:121). The Afrikaans counsellee was aware of the prejudices of White adults and referred to his children as wonderful examples of accepting other children of colour as friends in the townhouse complex where they lived. This reminded me of the words of Jesus that unless we become like little children, we cannot enter the kingdom of God. My experience is that children of different races accept each other with unconditional positive regard until the 'normalizing gaze' of racial prejudice separates them from their humanness. Recognizing that prejudice is still around, Hansie thought that it would be fair to give Whites a choice. He said: "It should be up to people to say they don't want to be treated by a black, Indian or Coloured, because if you go into something

and you're not going to trust or open up, you're not going to reap any benefit". I agree that this would be a sensitive approach in doing pastoral therapy with White counsellees. In fact I did what Neal et al (1999) do in the first conversation. They allow the counsellee to interview them so they know something about them. Counsellees asked me mostly about my training and spirituality. In this way White counsellees had sufficient information about me to decide whether they wanted to continue with me as their pastoral therapist. Hansie also has a positive outlook for the future because he said that since post-Apartheid elections in 1994, we have been thrown into a melting pot and everybody has to learn about everybody, that society is becoming more and more integrated and that racial prejudice will disappear in thirty years time. I do share his hope for the future, but do not support the idea of a melting pot. The melting pot idea supports the ideology of assimilation and does not celebrate difference. In his work on cultural family therapy, DiNicola (1997:11) writes:

My purpose is not to alleviate our anxieties about strangers by searching for universal human qualities but to find ways to embrace differences and to live with diversity. I hope to challenge the North American stereotype of assimilation that sets out implicit rules for dealing with such situations.

I really would like not to make race an issue in pastoral therapy. We have to be aware that racism is still quite alive in South Africa as Trudinger (1996) realized as a White person in Australia. For example, my Portuguese counsellee, Jose understands Apartheid as a legitimate separation of the races along political lines. He believes that Indians are slightly below Whites while Blacks are the lowest. He disapproves of inter-racial marriages between White and people of colour, as the children would be coloured. About Blacks being the lowest "class", he said that if the Whites did not force Blacks to go to school, about eighty percent of them would not attend school as they did not have a school culture before the Whites came to South Africa. He also mentioned being discriminated against in the army by Afrikaans soldiers who believed that they were the chosen nation and that as a Portuguese he was not pure White. He is married to an English woman and said that he preferred being married to an English woman than to a Portuguese woman. I wondered silently if being married to an English woman added to his status amongst Portuguese men. Andy, an English



counselee understood differences not in terms of race but in terms of class. He believes that after Apartheid "you will still have your upper class, middle class and lower classes...". The different approaches to race amongst my counselees illuminates that even though they were the former ruling race, Whites do have variations amongst themselves about race relations. Pope-Davis & Liu (1998:154) suggest that counsellors become sensitive to variations in the construction of race. They write that:

As a collaborative process, counselling may be the place to develop a consensual definition of race between the client and counsellor. In doing so, the counsellor may develop a better understanding of what race may mean for the client, and in part, understand how the counsellor has come to understand him or herself as a racial being.

So how may I try not to make race a stumbling block in the therapeutic process? A postmodern narrative perspective helps me to do that. DiNicola (1997:25) has an instructive quotation from Richard Rorty about overcoming prejudice:

In my utopia, human solidarity would not be seen as a fact to be recognized by clearing away "prejudice"...but, rather, as a goal to be achieved. It is to be achieved not by inquiry but by imagination, the imaginative ability to see people as fellow sufferers. Solidarity is not discovered by reflection but created. It is created by increasing our sensitivity to the particular details of the pain and humiliation of other, unfamiliar sorts of people.

In pastoral therapy with White counselees, I did see them as fellow sufferers and I stayed in there with them, and being sensitive to the "particular details of their pain and humiliation". Though the pain of my loss is immense, the challenge for me is to still

move forward with an open mind, attempting from time to time to understand the complexities of racial constructions, both from an individual perspective, and the social context of one's cultural experience (Pope-Davis & Liu 1998:159).

## 4.2 Culture

Counselees were asked about sameness and difference in relation to their Indian pastoral therapist.

There was a consensus view amongst White counselees that because I am Christian that there was sameness between them and me. The English man, Andy, said that I was not Hindu or Muslim but Christian. "As Christians we are on the same level. Culture does not come in. He's Christian. I'm Christian - we are talking the same language. His personal culture is Christian. I shouldn't say this, but he's one of us". The Portuguese man, Jose, accepted me as Christian and said he doubted if he would have come to me if I were not Christian. Andy put this stronger: "If he was an Indian non-Christian, I wouldn't have spoken to him". He said further that he didn't see any colour between me as an Indian and him as a White man. He believed that cultural differences come across in the religions we practise and that if there were any objections or fears over cultural differences, he would have stated it from the beginning and looked for someone else. A woman counsellee, Mary, wrote in a facsimile:

No matter what the culture, if you have a belief in Jesus Christ...you have the most important, life saving issue in common. Having an Indian Christian as a therapist made me comfortable with the fact that Christianity is for people of all races and cultures and that any prejudice that I might have had is diminished.

I think that this was an important way for White counselees to deconstruct (Wolfreys 1998; Sampson 1989) race in a church context. By not seeing race only in terms of physical characteristics (Pope-Davis & Liu 1998:156), counselees opened up space to accept me on the basis of sameness. Giving me feedback on this issue in the interviews, the Pastor for counselling wrote: "My impression

was of wanting to minimize difference and to look for similarities such as Christianity".

I should have been happy when Andy said that "He's one of us", but I felt sad. It reminded me of what I have lost. I have been disconnected from Indian culture by not being able to speak an Indian language properly. Having been Christianized at the age of twelve, I espoused some Western Christian ways of living. My loss resonates with that of a Chinese therapist, Chow (1994:32) who writes that in America her family had been "cut off from the wisdom and authority of the culture they had grown up in". Eventually she re-connected with her people and was able to say with happiness "I was finally 'one of us' instead of 'one of them'" (Chow 1994:35). I remember a struggle in the Indian Reformed Church in the 1980s. The Indian pastor wanted to practice Indian culture within the church while being Christian, but the Westernized generation of which I was part, revolted against this. Eventually the Indian pastor left and formed a church where the congregation embraces Christianity through Indian culture. Today, having been exposed to a postmodern epistemology which accepts multiple realities and diversity (Polkinghorne 1992), I am able to celebrate the cultural practices of the Indian pastor and within me there is "the ache for home" (McGoldrick 1994:38).

On difference, the Afrikaner man, Hansie, thought that there was an advantage in me being from another culture. He said that I see things "objectively" compared to him being counselled by the Pastor for counselling who may be from the same culture as he is. With this counsellor, I was able to deconstruct his problem as not being internal to him, which he believed, but as being located within a capitalist value system. I am critical of the effects of some capitalist values on human relations. Thus I was not neutral. For me the important thing was to open up issues in a way that was respectable (Neal et al 1999:363) to my counsellor. It seems that he understood this approach as being objective.

An Afrikaans woman, Rita, said: "I wasn't particularly fussed at all - I believed the church office referred us to the best person for our situation", while an English woman commented: "I didn't see him as an Indian Christian, I saw him as our therapist. I did not experience any difference that may have influenced the therapy process". Hansie and Andy also said that they "took things at face value"

and accepted me as their pastoral therapist. This seemed to be another way in which White counsellees deconstructed the race and culture issue. What was important for them was my ability to be a pastoral therapist, not my being Indian. Rob, an English counsellee said: "...I have absolutely no objection to you counselling so-called Whites. You are suitably qualified and sensitive and I think you do a good job". Rob had enquired about my counselling knowledge before he presented himself for counselling. Having some professional training made the counsellees comfortable with me. In fact I started the conversations by informing them of my training so that they could decide if they were comfortable with me. What became significant during conversations is that White counsellees wanted to know how to solve their problems. They saw me as the expert who could provide solutions. It did not matter that I was Indian, so long as I had the expertise. Training in a postmodern perspective had made me aware of moving away from a knowing approach to a more collaborative approach to pastoral therapy (see Anderson & Goolishian 1992:29) and I often had to remind counsellees that they were the experts on their lives.

The Afrikaans woman, Rita, pointed out if there was any difference that came up, it was the gender difference while the English woman, Mary, pointed out that the conversations highlighted the cultural differences between her husband and herself. She said that addressing cultural issues helped her because her husband is from an Afrikaans culture and "I have definitely discovered that his cultural background is different from mine". Although I applied the teachings of Neal et al (1999) and Zimmerman and Dickerson (1996), gender sensitivity in the therapeutic situation is no easy task. I often felt that I was unconsciously siding with the male. This was especially so when Kathy, the English wife of a Portuguese man stopped coming to counselling and said: "We are going round in circles". In my mind I was trying to achieve a mutualist perspective (Sanders 1991) but, when Kathy became silent for a while, it seemed that I was not being helpful.

### 4.3 Spirituality

Counsellees were asked about what they thought of the spiritual aspect of the conversations. They were happy when I connected their stories with the greater story of God (Gerkin 1986: 97). Some

of the feedback on spirituality were:

- Andy:           He always brings in scripture as well. Counselling has picked me up.
- Hansie:         He doesn't try to force himself upon anybody. He accepts that I come to church but he does not change anything.
- Jose:            He's personally godly. The maturity is there. It exists in his lifestyle. I found it helpful when he brought in a few scriptures into the counselling. I enjoyed it.

I find the counselees comments on my spirituality very generous. When I was accepted as an intern pastoral therapist at the Methodist church, I was required to go for six sessions to a minister who is a narrative pastoral therapist. The minister is Afrikaans and I had related to him the struggle towards reconciliation that I went through in my marriage in the 1980s when I discovered the bizarre affair that had occurred between my wife and an old Afrikaner man. At the end of my six sessions with the minister, I asked him for a view on me. His response was that he thought that I am stuck in my relationship with God. This statement allowed self doubt to re-enter my life and I started to doubt that I was a Christian. However Nouwen (1992) helped me to stand against self-rejection and I refused to measure myself against the standards of the minister. The minister's view seemed to come from a position of certainty whereas I understood my own spirituality as an evolving one with the greater story of God 's love. In doing this I was attempting to curb the influence of a "racialised consciousness" (Scheurich 1997:121), whereby I see myself through the eyes of Whites, from putting myself down.

Griffith (1995: 125) makes an important point when she writes that counselees would like to talk about their own spirituality in therapy without having to go to a pastor, priest or rabbi for spiritual issues and to a psychotherapist for psychological issues. To me narrative pastoral therapy does both by integrating spiritual and psychological issues in the form of stories (Gerkin 1997:97). Coming

from a fundamentalist evangelical church that takes the scriptures as the only norm, I have a long relationship with certainty. Certainty had influenced me into self-righteousness, arrogance and a judgmental approach on moral issues. The effect of certainty has often been alienation and loneliness and a sense of disconnectedness from people with different perspectives. Curiosity has been wooing me over to her side and I am much more attracted to her. However, certainty is very powerful and, like an abusive lover, seduces me into its charming arms again and again. The use of scripture in an expert way has been shown to be an isolating approach, which is not pertinent to postmodern times. It follows the sequence of confession, biblical exhortation and repentance (Crabb 1997:33). Peterson (1989:32) writes that " Hitting sin head-on is like hitting a nail with a hammer; it only drives it in deeper". Peterson takes a subversive approach with the use of parable that literally means to throw alongside. Parables exercises the imagination and is honouring and preserving of a person's integrity. Parables do not

herd us paternalistically into a classroom where we get things explained and diagrammed. They don't bully us into regiments where we find ourselves marching in a moral goose step....God does not impose his reality from without; he grows flowers and fruit from within. God's truth is not an alien invasion but a loving courtship in which the details of our common lives are treated as seeds in our conception, growth, and maturity in the kingdom.

(Peterson 1989:33)

I find Peterson's approach to the use of scripture to be a liberating one for narrative pastoral therapy. The embrace of curiosity is getting stronger and her voice louder in my approach to life. Interestingly I have chosen a kitten as my totem animal for some time. A kitten stands for curiosity, a playful approach, adventurousness and survival and this totem will help me stand stronger against certainty in the future.

#### 4.4 Respectful ways of doing pastoral therapy

This section reflects on how respectful or culturally sensitive I was towards White counsellors.

Counsellors used several words to describe me as being respectful of them. Some of these were:

Hansie:        He's very **open**. He's very **easy to talk to**. He speaks with **respect**. I met him a few times in the street. He's always greeting, **always the same**. He's a **caring** type of person.

Andy:         His **calmness** influenced the counselling process. He's got a lot of **compassion** and he **listens** before he speaks. He was extremely sensitive to my wants and needs. He phoned me to ask how I was doing. **He's always there**, checking...he's just a wonderful person, no two ways about it.

On listening before I speak, I have acquired useful listening skills as an educator, but as I grow more into a postmodern consciousness, I listen for the unsaid (Sampson 1989:12) as well. DiNicola (1997:300) says that " Listening is a foundation for the co-construction of reality. In order for our interventions to be meaningful, we have to check our impulses always to act. Physicians have a great temptation to reach for the prescription pad; therapists want to make a treatment plan". DiNicola's experience is that through listening the therapist waits for an opening which may be the beginning of a new story. He suggests further

My choice to listen to (and co-edit) their narrative challenges the metaphor of "therapy" as an active, directive, change-oriented process. Let's listen in again.

(DiNicola 1997:300)

For me being caring and having compassion is exactly what pastoral care is about. This comes from a communal approach to life within the lived experience of traditional Indian culture (see DiNicola 1997; Augsburg 1986). I grew up in an extended family in Natal until the age of eighteen and communal values remained with me. It was just normal for me to extend my compassion to White counselees as well, inspite of having been oppressed by them in the past.

Andy cited an example to illustrate my respectfulness:

On respectful, I can put up one instance - the triangle between him, myself and my wife. She was trying to get information out of him and ...I got angry with him and he respected that. I said to him all I want him to do is I don't want him to counsel her and me....He respected me getting angry which I take my hat off to him....**He respects the way you feel.**

I remember how tense it was when Andy got angry on two occasions. He was defensive when I enquired about his responsibility in the breakdown of his marriage. My information was based on what his wife said about him. Yet I kept my cool and did not allow his temper to unsettle me. I saw a White man imprisoned in pain and I wanted to be able to help him free himself. And I remembered Nouwen's (1992) writing that human life is about brokenness. The Western practice would have been to assert oneself and end the therapy. However he was in my care and I felt sad for him. I could not say with Cain that I am not my brother's keeper (Genesis 4). The storm soon passed and Andy was a friend with me again. I visit him regularly and have coffee with him and his seventy eight-year-old father who appreciates my caring for his forty one-year-old son. I was able to handle his anger in a way that was honouring and respectful of him (Neal et al 1999:369).

Jose who had been in pastoral therapy with me for over twelve weeks had this to say:

He was respectful to me as a Portuguese. It's difficult to say he was taking sides. He seemed neutral....He tried to find a common line between me and my wife.



The Pastor for counselling asked Jose if I worked in a collaborative way and he said "Yes".

With Jose's and Kathy's bickering problem, I really had to strive to be culturally and gender sensitive. Jose appreciated that I was respectful of his culture but Kathy felt that we were going round in circles. I attempted to be collaborative but I was not neutral as Jose said. I was trying to deconstruct their problem and open up space for them to appreciate sameness and difference (Kotze 1994) and to take a both/and approach (Biever et al 1998; Wolfreys 1998). As a pastoral therapist I was also being subversive of materialistic values and male values of entitlement. I was trying to do what Peterson (1989:28) writes about being a subversive pastor "I am undermining the kingdom of self and establishing the kingdom of God".

Hansie was also going to a psychologist and came to the Pastoral Care Centre for pastoral therapy. He compared the two approaches and had a conversation with the Pastor for counselling along theses lines:

Hansie: He's very knowledgeable. I'm actually growing more in my sessions with him than with the psychologist I'm seeing.

Pastor: What's the difference?

Hansie: We speak to each other but with the psychologist, she's sitting there behind me and I'm just talking. I don't think that's what I need. I need someone to tell me what to do. I feel bad with the psychologist that I'm just talking. Every now and then there is a long silence whereas with Laurance it's a face to face communication. He looked more into my life than she was. I find him very good. I enjoy seeing him. What he does seems to work. The way he works with me seems appropriate for me.

Pastor: Can you say how it works?

Hansie: It makes me think about things. We focus on something different each week. I have a problem about my life. I keep everything inside. He's trying to get me to talk. It's working. At the end of the day I'm far happier with his performance than I am with the psychologist.

Hansie's conversation highlights that a counsellee is a knowing being. He knows what he did not want and what was appropriate for him. Two other counsellees also mentioned that they were happier with my approach than with the clinical psychologist they had been to. Andy said that the psychologist threatened his wife to leave him or she will have her children taken away from her. He had considered reporting her to a council for psychologists. In following a narrative perspective, I attempted to be respectful of Hansie's own agency in the re-authoring of his life. Externalization opened up space for him to collaborate against the problem that lay outside rather than inside him. Neal et al (1999:361) use externalization of the problem to open up space by locating the problem in the dominant, oppressive narrative within which a client might be living and this assists in the telling of an alternate story by the counsellee himself or herself. This to me is an appropriate and respectful way of doing pastoral therapy as a person of colour, as it helps me not to allow racial prejudice to get in the way of the healing relationship between me and White counsellees.

In keeping with a postmodern reflexive approach to research (Gergen & Gergen 1991:79), I gave my transcripts to the Pastor for counselling and asked her a few questions. Some of her responses were:

I think Laurance has heightened my own awareness of the oppression that he endured as a person of colour. I have always seen him as a person of colour and have tried to be sensitive from his side about being the only person of colour. I have been in quite a few situations where I was the only White person. I'm not sure if this is the same thing - but for me it is a unique experience to be a "minority" person instead of a majority.

I think my being involved in his research has enabled us to work together on a more equal footing and to share "not knowing positions"

I have appreciated Laurance's respectful approach - which I especially felt as a woman.

The White counsellees have unreservedly praised Laurance for his respectful approaches and his approachability. I believe that his personhood has overwhelmed

any cultural ideas they may have about him.

The pastor for counselling was aware of me being a person of colour and I appreciated that she was sensitive to my being the only person of colour in the Pastoral Care Centre. Although she is an assertive White person, and I might have mistaken this as racial control over me, she related to me on the basis of gender. I was pleased to read that she appreciated my respectful approach to her as a woman. She has played an invaluable role in my development as a narrative pastoral therapist. As part of their socialization, most men find it a 'normal' practice to be assertive and disqualifying of women. While legalised racism ended in 1994 in South Africa, the political struggle against men's oppression over women still has a long way to go. Like Trudinger (1996), who believes that Whites have a role to play in ending racism, I believe that I also have a role to play in ending men's oppressive ways of being towards women.

In the last chapter that follows, I reflect on the empowering aspects of this project, and the research problem of being an Indian pastoral therapist to White counselees.

## **CHAPTER FIVE: REFLECTIONS ON THE JOURNEY**

In this concluding section I would like to reflect on how empowering this project has been for me as a person of colour and the possibility of being a pastoral therapist of colour to White counsellors. I shall do this through discussions on aims, methodology and procedures that assisted the project to be a worthwhile one.

### **5.1 AIMS**

#### **5.1.1 Having a voice**

As noted in chapter one, one of the aims of the project was to express my own voice alongside the therapeutic process. McLeod develops the concept of 'voice' as being important for people who have been silenced. He says that the voices of two people are in the therapy room, each engaged in its own type of telling. For clients the importance of 'voice' is that of "being accepted, being heard, being understood" (McLeod 1997:96). I found that this applied to me as well as a therapist of colour.

Following a feminist approach (Jones 1990; Dixon 1999), I made my voice more explicit as a historically oppressed person in the interests of self-reflexivity. For me self-reflexivity is also a political and not just an epistemological issue. Thus it was important to deconstruct myself along the journey in my own voice in relation to White counsellors. Expressing how I experienced Whites in relation to race and culture helped me to deconstruct my own voice that is located in a particular racial and cultural space. Through a postmodern narrative approach, I was able to decentre myself as a narrator and make my own assumptions explicit. I learned to write in a narrative journalistic way by writing in the first person. This assisted me to reflect on both 'inner and outer events' (Dixon 1999:7) in a personal way. Dixon says further that

the social construction thread of journaling is that it is a form of narrative as well as a form of research, a way to tell our own story, a way to learn who we have been, who we are, and who we are becoming. We literally become teachers and researchers in

our own lives, empowering ourselves in the process.

(Dixon 1999:59)

As a person of colour my voice was suppressed by an oppressive Apartheid system. Even when I was at a so-called liberal university, I was not permitted to speak in my own voice. I remember embracing the Critical Theory of the Frankfurt School but this was not acceptable to liberal academics because it had links with Marxism. This project enabled me to express my views about the tough approach of White caregivers, their assertiveness, and to compare my cultural practices with that of Whites. In the process I was able to modify some of my ways of seeing and to embrace a postmodern both/and approach (Biever et al 1998:185) to narrative pastoral therapy. Learning to be assertive while remaining vulnerable was one of them and learning to engage in a theology of grace and a theology of values (Augsburger 1986:140-141) was another very important one. Most importantly I was able to express the pain of my own loss and I felt that I was understood and accepted. Haarhoff (1998:128) has written that narrative therapy is useful in research for writing as healing. DuToit (1997), in reflecting on the truth and reconciliation commission, says it played an important part in dealing with painful memories. I am in full support of Haarhoff's statement that "We cannot change what happened but we can change the way we interpret it" (Haarhoff 1998:129). Giving expression as the other voice in this project was indeed a form of healing to me.

### **5.1.2 Personal empowerment**

A central aim was to embrace a postmodern and narrative approach in order to do pastoral therapy in a respectful way. This meant understanding and moving away from unethical approaches to pastoral therapy. Crabb (1997:33-34) has a creative way of writing about these approaches in the Christian context. He says that some pastoral therapists try to promote change through an "exhortation/accountability model or through a treatment/ repair model. The former may lead to conformity but never to maturity while the latter may lead to more sociable and adaptable patterns of selfishness but not to a sense of connectedness. Drawing on scripture (Isaiah 50:10-11), Crabb uses

of selfishness but not to a sense of connectedness. Drawing on scripture (Isaiah 50:10-11), Crabb uses a metaphor of “ fire lighting” to describe the role of certainty. He writes that

Fire lighters are experts who love formulas. They trust their models and techniques. Firelighters hate uncertainty and are terrified of confusion. For fire lighters the model represents the truth. Firelighters are afraid of the joy of discovery and are compelled by the passion to explain.

(Crabb 1997:112-113)

Du Toit (1997) links truth to power which is behind human interests in mastery and control. Drawing on Foucault, he speaks about a ‘government of truth’ which refers to the power over human conduct and way of living which Western societies have long extended to those who are authorised to speak from a position of knowledge in the name of truth”(Dutoit 1997:947). I would like to link certainty to truth. Certainty as truth serves the interest of control of a pastoral therapist in the therapeutic encounter. My supervisor perceived very early in my studies in pastoral therapy that I was coming from a position of certainty and recommended an article by Griffith very timeously. Griffith cautioned against four certainties but it was especially the certainty “ I know what God is like and you need to know God as I do” (Griffith 1995:134) that continued to seduce me. Gradually I shifted more into a postmodern approach of curiosity (Anderson & Goolishian 1992:30) and embarked on the ‘joy of discovery’. I changed my style of communication as advocated by Rossouw (1993:902), that is, from downloading religious information to a style that involves the experiences and expectations of counselees. On the certainty of expertise, Rossouw says that “ Expertise must be enriched and informed by the experience of those on the receiving side of expert opinion” (Rossouw 1993:902). All this has been immensely helpful to me to learn to “open certainties to the refreshing breezes of curiosity and wonder in which multiple realities can co-exist and relationships can evolve” (Griffith 1995:127).

I learned that one of the best ways of addressing certainty and defensiveness was to develop a strong sense of accountability that is an important political tool in narrative therapy. Vanessa Swan (1998), a White feminist therapist, describes her journey through defensiveness while helping Aboriginal women. Challenged by indigenous therapists of trying to colonize the experiences of Aboriginal women, she learned to stay with listening, to privilege asking and hearing about the effects of her practices over understanding and knowing about others' ways. She writes that " **Accountability is not a process of acquisition of information, but an ongoing commitment to learning and changing**" (Swan 1998:37). When I apply this to myself, it means being willing to challenge my own behaviour instead of focussing on the other, and to be open to the views and critiques of White people without colonizing their experiences from the basis of my racial oppression. As a pastoral therapist, I understood my deconstructive task as exploring the effects of some of the Western values of my counselees that had led to their stories becoming stuck. Yet my counselees also taught me important lessons as well. For example, Hansie suggested that race should not be allowed to get in the way of pastoral therapy and Andy helped me to stand against his wife's divisive agenda. The feedback from White counselees confirmed to me that Whites differed in their approach to race and that people of colour err in stereotyping them enmasse as oppressors and should be sensitive to differences among them. Thus, engaging in processes of accountability helps me to minimize certainty and defensiveness as I critically examine my ways of seeing and doing.

Accountability led me towards a culturally respectful approach to pastoral therapy which is what a narrative perspective is about. A clinical psychologist who supervised our pastoral therapy commented that a narrative approach was taking the easy way out. I found the reverse to be true. It was easier to use a medical model approach (McLeod 1997) which also underpins a treatment/repair approach to pastoral therapy. For me the knowing approach of the medical model can be compared to a knowing quantitative research approach which has a predetermined research design (McMillan & Schumacher 1993) in which the researcher merely seeks confirmation of what he is looking for, whereas a not-knowing qualitative research approach has an emergent research design (Maykut & Morehouse 1994:44) through which issues emerge in the process of the research.

What was a challenge to me was that White counsellees seemed to come to the Pastoral Care Center when their marriages were on the rocks and expected me to get them afloat again. When my marriage did not work out, I tried desperately to persuade my wife not to leave me. But when she left, I found myself on a new path of intellectual and spiritual learning. Divorce became a way of doing hope for both my wife and me. We became better friends after divorce and have remained good friends after fourteen years. Thus for White couples with problems, I also believed in hope after marriage. But when a counsellee was desperate to save his marriage, I felt like someone who could not swim and who was thrown into the deep-end of a pool. All I could do in empathy was to drown with them or use the expert medical 'drug metaphor' approach (DiNicola 1997) which was so easy to depend on. Certainty would get in the way and I would be seduced into making suggestions. Gradually I learned to stay with listening (Swan 1998) and to create an enhanced sense of agency through externalization of the problem (White 1995; Neal et al 1999). One of the skills I learned was "the importance of keeping pace with the client" (Zimmerman & Dickerson 1996). A Narrative approach taught me to slow a counsellee's story down, to enable him/her to see the problem against a wider cultural frame and to collaborate with him/her towards a preferred way of being in a respectful way. I learned to ask permission to talk about sensitive issues, to take a difficult situation to a supervision meeting for help and to admit aloud when I was stuck with something. I learned also to take back transcripts to counsellees for validation and for further comment. This helped me to grow away from certainty and towards a more accountable approach to people.

In the next section I focus more specifically on how this project may be helpful to therapists of colour who hope to work with White counsellees as well.

## **5.2 ON BEING A NARRATIVE PASTORAL THERAPIST OF COLOUR TO WHITE COUNSELLEES**

### **5.2.1 Epistemology**

Here I go back to Scheurich's (1997:121) point that the problem for scholars of colour is that they



have to become competent in epistemologies which are the social construction of the dominant White culture and which have been hostile to their own race and culture. Brueggemann (1996:63) also writes that hurt lies at the bottom of a person's imaginative apparatus and one must lay alongside it the greater power of hope and joy. However, he emphasizes that "our unresolved negativities exercise a more powerful and finally decisive influence upon our capacity to receive and imagine than any positive counterpart" (Brueggemann 1996:63). As much as I enjoyed embracing a postmodern approach, I found myself slipping back into totalizing the experiences of White counselees. Because of a long experience of oppression, my prejudices are deep-seated and and it is a hard struggle to embrace difference and a "not knowing" approach. I am grateful to my White supervisors for pointing issues out to me. I do find a postmodern epistemology liberating. Although it is a racial epistemology in that it is the creation of White practitioners (Scheurich 1997:121), for me it is not a racist epistemology as it allows for multiple perspectives (Lowe 1991:45). This made it possible for me as a person of colour to appreciate and reflect on the different value systems between mainstream Western and Indian cultures, which was the focus of this project.

A postmodern social constructionist epistemology assisted me with the central aim of being an Indian narrative pastoral therapist to White counselees. A person of colour is faced with a racial dilemma when doing pastoral therapy with White counselees. I often wondered what Whites were thinking about me and what they said about me in between sessions. Even in a post-Apartheid society, I still felt unequal to them. This inequality is fed mainly by the condescending attitude of many White Christians who are not affirming of me and who do not want to give up power, and still want to be in control of people of colour in the workplace. A Western culture of individualism and privacy also contributes to a perception of aloofness even if it is not intended to create racial distance. Yet it is important for therapists of colour to get involved in therapy with White people in order to contribute towards truth telling, reconciliation and healing in our land. Racism is far from over as was seen on a Special Assignment television programme (8 November 2000) in which White policemen used black men as practice targets for training their dogs. These policemen may be representative of deep-seated resentment of many Whites towards black people for the loss of racial privilege. A social construction discourse made it possible for me to grasp the systematic and institutionalized ways of

seeing and being of White counselees (Lowe 1991:45). This helped me to suspend my own prejudices about Whites in general and attend to different ways in which individuals have constructed their own value systems. A narrative perspective was useful in helping me to listen patiently as a White counsellee told his or her story in his or her own way. Counselees told different stories about race and gender and as an Indian person, I had to attend to each one as a human text on its own and engage in “good reading” of a text (Wolfreys 1997:9).

### **5.2.2 Methodology**

A qualitative approach helped to focus on meaning and understandings that events have for White counselees. My initial struggle as an educationist was that of being an expert in giving meaning and making suggestions in a direct way. This often led to a battle of discourses. I found White men and women to speak in elaborated linguistic codes (Bernstein 1972) compared to people of colour. This speaks of their cultural advantagedness that was provided by political privilege under Apartheid. With more experience I learned to put suggestions or give meaning in the form of a question and leave it to counselees to make choices. I think that a person of colour should be fairly competent in epistemological and cultural discourses, otherwise she or he may feel inadequate with White counselees. While a qualitative approach was useful in establishing intersubjective meanings, its weakness was that it is limited to description of what White counselees experience. Thus it was important to use a form of deconstruction to challenge the values of counselees in the therapeutic process.

### **5.2.3 Research procedures**

As pastoral therapy is also about transforming values (Graham 1996:136), I had to find a respectful way to challenge the values of White counselees through a form of action research. A postmodern approach to action research goes beyond the resolution of problems and proposes “struggle without end or resolution, indeed to deconstruct, construct and reconstruct meanings in making sense of the world” (Jennings & Graham 1996:175). The word ‘struggle’ in this approach was significant with

White counsellees. I found Whites to be articulate and assertive. While these are everyday cultural practices, they can be powerful political ways of silencing a person of colour and recruiting him or her into the personal agendas of White counsellees. I had to stay with politeness and externalization of issues (Zimmerman & Dickerson 1996:363-364). Exploring the effects of problems helped me not to get into debates over issues that would strain the therapeutic process. In this way I was able to challenge practices, such as those in which men spoke for women and introduce White counsellees to multiple perspectives.

With regard to data, Scheurich (1996:47) cites the point that “ data collection is data construction”. Following this postmodern approach, I focused on information that was hindering the stories of counsellees. For example, with White men I found it important to explore the effects of values such as individualism, private property and sexual entitlement on the lives of spouses. I also found both White men and women’s lives to be insulated from other races in South Africa. There was need to explore an issue such as affirmative action when it was mentioned so as to release Whites from ethnocentric concerns and begin to talk about reconciliation with people of colour. This is an urgent agenda in South Africa and churches do not seem to be addressing this in a meaningful way. White churches tend to do charity amongst black communities. This is commendable, yet in the end they still remain distant and no real close friendships are established. As an example, I have been working as a pastoral therapist in a Methodist church and attending church there for over a year and a half. Yet not one White pastoral therapist or church member has made a friend of me. We meet at cell meetings and that’s the end of it. I once saw a black man in the White filled church I attend. After church, I befriended him and took him for lunch. He was visiting from Transkei and he expressed his appreciation to me with tears in public in the restaurant that we were in. In the therapeutic situation, some Whites expressed views that were against the new black regime. They saw no future for themselves and their children. The black government was perceived as totalitarian and practising reverse discrimination. Some perceived Indians as dishonest and as liars. Thus White counsellees also need to learn to do hope with people of colour in this country for better relational health with other races. In this sense spirituality has a social and political dimension.

The idea of continuous struggle is a useful one. With most White counsellees I did not find outright solutions to problems in pastoral therapy. Whites went away with food for thought that they found helpful and had to find respectful ways to relate to each other. I learned that a deconstruction process is not about providing solutions but about opening space for helpful alternatives for counsellees to choose from. This also has implications for opening up Practical Theology as a theological practice in the South African context.

#### **5.2.4 Practical Theology**

With Wolfaardt (1993:29), I accepted Practical Theology as a theological theory of communicative acts. I found Heitink's idea that Practical Theology is concerned with the transformation of society as a whole too ambitious. Practical Theology as a theory of communicative acts seems more modest by focussing on context and personal biographies. For pastoral therapists of colour this implies accepting White counsellees unconditionally and being sensitive to their stories of political and personal pains. This involves constant reflexivity on the part of a therapist of colour so that Practical Theology does not become a form of theological theory with a narrow political programme. This can become a temptation to a therapist of colour as a politically vindicated person in a post-Apartheid context. As a theological theory of communicative acts, I believe that Practical Theology has the task of emancipating both Western and people of colour from practices that are dehumanizing of people in the interest of control, and exploitation of the natural environment in pursuit of wealth. This entails transformation of values in the linguistic domain of pastoral therapy.

#### **5.2.5 Pastoral therapy**

I would like to modify Heitink's (1998:129) position that Practical Theology has to do with the actualization and maintenance of the relationship between God and humanity. In South Africa, Christian National Education supported the maintenance of "no equality and segregation" between Whites and blacks (Rose & Tunmer 1975:127). Pastoral therapy, when based on Practical Theology as a theological theory of communicative acts, can go along with Griffith's (1995:137) notion of co-

creating a critical evolving relationship with a personal God. This implies an expansion of faith maintenance to include a programme of liberating White counselees from a culturally narrow either/or perspective to an inclusive both/and approach. As the former master race, Whites were socialized into the values of individualism, domination and control, acquisition of money and private property at the expense of people of colour. Drawing on Lowe (1991) and Graham (1996), I suggest that pastoral therapy engage Whites in reflexive activity in order to understand that the personal is political in a wider social context. Transformation to a both/and approach (Biever 1998) recognizes the humanness of people of colour and responsibility of Whites to do hope in repairing the damage done by Apartheid. Taking the view of Doan (1997:130), I suggest that a postmodern pastoral therapy may assist Whites in moving from a universe (the master race concept) to a multiverse (equality of all races) of meaning; to understand that reality has many stories and to be inclusive of the stories of other races, women and religions. Thus the pastoral therapist is not limited to being a conversational artist (Anderson & Goolishian 1992:27), but is engaged in real and meaningful communicative acts which go beyond the therapy room. In undermining the kingdom of self and establishing the kingdom of God (Peterson 1989:28), my own pastoral therapy approach is about interdependence and connection (Augsburger 1989; Crabb 1997), both self development and responsibility to a community and non ownership of people. In the South African context, pastoral therapy ought to be a moral activity and a call to participate in justice. I agree with Graham (1996:125) that the norm of pastoral therapy is liberation that entails the promotion of full humanity. This supports the idea of establishing the kingdom of God, which is seen as peace, justice, freedom, and salvation by Practical Theology as a theory of communicative acts (Wolfaardt 1993:33). A pastoral therapist of colour needs to be constantly reflexive so that his/her practices are ethical, accountable and transformative. In short, narrative pastoral therapy should open up possibilities for people to become other than who they are (Wylie 1994:44). However, a pastoral therapist of colour needs to be reflexive and be vigilant that his approach is not limited to a narrow political theological programme of change that can become oppressive to White counselees. A post-Apartheid South Africa has unleashed more stresses and strains on Whites in the form of robbery and rape; affirmation action; and the constant threat of the undermining of their human dignity by criminals and negative statements by politicians of colour. A therapist of colour has to be very ethically sensitive in conversations around these issues.

I would like also to reflect on what enabled me personally to be an Indian narrative pastoral therapist to White counselees.

A “destructive postmodernism” (Dockery 1995:38) does not permit me to do therapy across cultures as it promotes an absolute relativism. Henry analyses that

...destructive postmodernism eliminates not only God but also freedom, purposive agency, the self, realism, truth, good and evil, and historical meaning. It holds that there are no shared values, no universally agreed facts...Cultural dialogue is a cosmic show: interpretation is king, and everyone sponsors his or her own.

(Dockery 1995:39)

The above approach means that I am not able to understand the cultural constructions of White counselees as they are culturally inaccessible to me. In contrast to this a “constructive postmodernism” (Dockery 1995:39) approves pluralism as a necessary and desirable cultural and philosophical phenomenon. Lyddon (1998) and Neimeyer (1998) have argued that something that every culture seems to share in common is human agency and that culture is in continuous process. For me it is my agency that allows me to share meaning with the agency of a White counsellee. I shall not be able to understand them completely and understanding shall always be on the way (Anderson & Goolishian 1992:32), but I am able to connect with the humanity of a White counsellee. However this has to be done within their own cultural context. In support of this, Du Toit (1997:942) writes that a postmodern perspective rejects the exclusive transcendent notion of truth and that

Within postmodernism the relation between speaker and listener, between reader and writer, has been complicated by fragmentation so that real encounter is inhibited. This reduces the relationship to a **playful one** (my emphasis) where all reference becomes part of a game itself.

I like the metaphor of language games, which enables a pastoral therapist to explore the meaning systems of another culture. A postmodern social construction epistemology (Lowe 1991:44) helped me to become "discourse sensitive" and to be able to explore the meaning systems of White counsellees through language.

Du Toit also explores an issue that was of central importance to me in believing that I was able to be an Indian pastoral therapist to White counsellees. He draws on Rorty who replaced the notion of universality with human solidarity. Solidarity consists simply in our common capacity to suffer and feel pain. Progress is about moral progress in the direction of greater human solidarity. Of importance for a postmodern approach, Du Toit (1997:948) explains further that

**...solidarity is not thought of as recognition of a core self, the human essence, in all human beings. It is rather thought of as the ability to recognise more and more the unimportance of traditional differences such as tribe, religion, race and customs when compared to similarities in pain and humiliation (my emphasis).**

Over a dozen White counsellees were referred to me during my internship as a pastoral therapist. Some couples tried to draw me into their own personal agendas, for example, that I should inform a husband or a wife that he or she did not want to continue with the marriage. Some broke down and cried like little children when they realized that their spouses wanted to leave the marriage relationship. Some became aggressive and threatened revenge. Others were very depressed and in bad physical condition. A few husbands or wives continued to have fun with friends and neglected their children and also made the other spouse insecure. I heard about affairs and abuse, about lies and irresponsibility as well. And I pondered about such people being my former masters to whom I had to defer and give way on the pavements. I saw before me people who were not in a sound mental and emotional condition to govern over people of colour. I had to put up with outbursts of anger against me and assertive power over me. Within me I was constantly reminded of my physical smallness

against tall and fair men that Indian women are attracted to. I needed to take steps to cope with these issues. One of my icons is Nelson Mandela who spent twenty-seven years in prison. When he was released he said that he was not bitter towards Whites and works towards reconciliation. I celebrate this in a man who has suffered so much. Through the example of Christ I have also learned not to be bitter towards White people and say 'Lord forgive them, even though they know what they do'. I relate to Whites with a stance of reconciliation in order to do hope in our country. Within me I engage in self talk all the time, saying that I am beloved of God (Nouwen 1992) and that I am wonderfully made in the image of God (Psalm 139; Genesis 2). I have acquired books on positive self-imaging and feed on these all the time. I believe I have no choice but to go on in hope. The alternative is bitterness and anger and depression that impact on one in a psychosomatic way, resulting in anger diseases such as cancer and arthritis (Siegel 1988).

A narrative perspective enabled me to listen to the stories of pain and humiliation of White counsellees and I was able to accept and understand them as fellow sufferers. From a theological perspective, the writing of Henry Nouwen (1992) has been very helpful. In *Life of the beloved*, Nouwen suggests that human life is about brokenness and that each person experiences brokenness in his/her own way. Brokenness becomes like a curse in a person's life and she or he may enter into a state of self-rejection in relation to how others perceive him or her. He writes that the way to do hope is to place the curse under the blessing of Christ who has triumphed over suffering. As a pastoral therapist, I found this an instructive approach to connect with White counsellees. Race became less important to me than the commonality of pain, suffering and brokenness. As a pastoral therapist I proceeded from a theology of grace while being vigilant of my deconstructive task to explore and transform values that were having negative effects on the lives of counsellees. After twenty five years as a Christian psychotherapist, Larry Crabb (1997:44), has come to a conclusion that the lives of most people in Western society are about disconnection. He says that

...disconnection can be regarded as a state of being, a condition of existence where the deepest part of who we are is vibrantly attached to no one, where we are profoundly unknown and therefore experience neither the thrill of being believed in nor loving or being believed. Disconnected people may often be unaware of the empty recesses



in their souls that long to be filled. They often mistake lesser longings for greater ones and settle for the satisfaction of popularity, influence, success, and intense but shallow relationships.

This seemed to be true of White counselees in the church context. A commendable aspect of the narrative perspective is that it promotes a sense of connection by encouraging counselees to find a community of support (White 1995). This perspective taught me to work outwards and to expand an individual's sense of interdependence (McLeod 1997). In this way I was able to undermine the kingdom of self that is so strong in mainstream Western culture and attempted to establish the kingdom of God which is about community and connectedness. Through a narrative approach to pastoral therapy I was able to do hope with White counselees. It helped me to co-create an evolving story with God that is unique to persons and to do this in ways that were honouring and respectful of them.

I would like to end in a narrative way by relating a story from DiNicola (1997: 13). The author himself tells a story from a novel in which the central character hears a dog barking wildly. The main character understands the barking as a protest against the limits of dog experience: **"For God's sake open the universe a little more!"** The author articulates that the dog's rage, and its desire, is also mine, ours, everyone's, and believes that

the effort to expand one's narrative voice is what makes us human, building the solidarity that connects each of us to a community, making us larger than ourselves, working across differences for the sum of our alliances.

(DiNicola 1997:14)

Being exposed to a postmodern narrative perspective has been wonderfully transforming of my limited Christian experience. I have expanded my narrative voice and shall continue to seek connection and build solidarity with other communities. For me this is an important spiritual and

political project of pastoral therapy, of doing hope by working towards personal transformation and social reconciliation with the different races in South Africa.

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## APPENDIX 1

TO : PASTOR SUE SKIDMORE  
PASTOR FOR COUNSELLING  
NORTHFIELD METHODIST CHURCH  
NORTHFIELD, BENONI.

FROM: LAURANCE SINGH  
STUDENT: MTh: PRACTICAL THEOLOGY  
SPECIALIZATION: NARRATIVE PASTORAL THERAPY

RE: PRACTICALS IN PASTORAL COUNSELLING

DATE: 12 JUNE 2000

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Dear Pastor Sue

I have been doing pastoral counselling in the Pastoral Care Centre since March 1999.  
I would now like to seek permission to do counselling with six counselees towards a research project required for the Masters in Practical Theology.

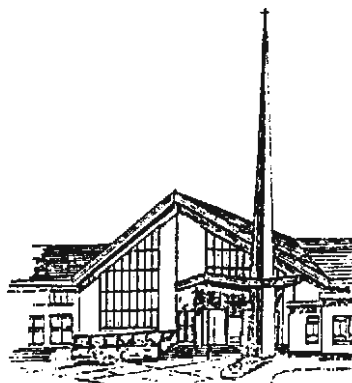
As I shall require feedback from counselees on my therapeutic conversations with them, I would also like to request your assistance to do an externalising conversation on my conversations with the six counselees. It would help me very much if these conversations can be tape recorded.

Counselees shall be assured of the confidential nature of any information received from them.

Yours sincerely

Laurance Singh

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A Wesley Cell-Church in Mission

Every Member in Ministry

20 June 2000

Dear Laurance,

Thank you for your letter requesting to do interviews with counsellors as part of your thesis. I am very happy to give my full permission for you to do that - particularly as they will be assured of confidentiality and that they will personally benefit from such interviews, through your transparent approach to this dissertation.

I am willing to undertake to do taped interviews with your counsellor. I hope this will be of assistance to you, but will also allow the counsellors to be open and direct about the influence of you as a counsellor in their lives.

I wish you every success with your dissertation and look forward to seeing the finished result.

With best wishes

**SUE SKIDMORE M.Ed Cert. Ed RN**  
**Pastor of counselling**

## APPENDIX 2

# CONSENT FORM

Cross-cultural counselling has been done mostly by white professional therapists in South Africa. As a student in Pastoral Narrative Therapy, the researcher is not aware of any professionally trained pastoral therapists of colour in the Gauteng area. Being required to do his practicals in the area of pastoral counselling, the researcher was only able to find a Pastoral Care Centre in a historically white Methodist Church. The project of being an Indian pastoral counsellor to white counselees arose in the context of doing practicals in the Pastoral Care Centre which catered for its church membership.

In this project the researcher hopes to learn conversational skills in cultural sensitivity and also for both him and white counselees to become aware of cross-cultural issues through therapeutic conversations. The main emphasis of the conversations will be to help counselees through a collaborative approach to find preferred ways of being.

I hereby give consent to be a participant in the research project of Laurance Singh on Pastoral Therapy Across Cultures. I understand that the project is towards partial fulfilment of a Masters Degree in Practical Theology with UNISA.

I am assured that no real identities are to be used and that all information is treated with confidentiality.

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

### APPENDIX 3

**In the interviews below, the names of counsellees have been changed in the interests of confidentiality.**

#### Taped interview with Hansie

The interviewer, Sue Skidmore established that Hansie had been coming to Laurance for counselling for about 3 months. An agreement form has been signed by Hansie to be a participant in the research on cross-cultural pastoral therapy.

Sue: *When you first saw him how did he come across to you?*

Hansie: Very wise. He's a gentle person. Soft spoken. I quite liked him from the beginning.

Sue: *Was there anything that said that this man is not from my culture?*

Hansie: Put it this way. When I phoned the church they recommended him. Who am I as a desperate person to say I don't want this one or that one?

Sue: *You said you found him wise.*

Hansie: Very much so. He's very open. Very easy to talk to. He obviously knows what he's doing. He leads the whole thing. He just takes everything out of you and puts it back into you. He's very easy to speak to.

Sue: *He wants me to ask you about his manners.*

Hansie: He's very well mannered.

Sue: *What does manners mean to you?*

Hansie: He's polite. He's never late. If we miss each other by two minutes or so he always apologises. He speaks with respect. He's well mannered. Everything about him is good. He speaks with respect. It's not as if he's here doing a job and you're the one with the problem and you shouldn't be here. I met him a few times in the street in town. He's always greeting, always the same.

Sue: *How would you describe his personality?*

Hansie: Soft and gentle. A caring type of person. If there is a problem with an appointment, he reschedules. I appreciate that as well.

Sue: *When you look at how he's worked with you... his knowledge... his counselling ability, what can you say about that?*

Hansie: He's very knowledgeable. I'm actually growing more in my sessions with him than with the psychologist I'm seeing.

Sue: *What is the difference?*

Hansie: We speak to each other but with the psychologist, she's sitting somewhere there behind me listening and I'm just talking. I don't think that's what I need. I need someone to tell me what to do. I feel bad with the psychologist that I'm just talking. Every now and then there is a long silence whereas with Laurance it's a face to face communication. He looked more into my life than what she has. I find him very good. I enjoy seeing him. What he does seems to work. The way he works with me seems appropriate for me.

Sue: *Can you say how it works?*

Hansie: It makes me think about things. We focus on something different each week. I have a problem. I don't talk about my life. I keep everything inside. He's trying to get me to talk. It's working. At the end of the day I'm far happier with his performance than I am with the psychologist.

Sue: *What about him as a spiritual being?*

Hansie: He doesn't try to force himself upon anybody. Rather he's dedicated. He gives rather than being given. It might come later but at this point in time we haven't emphasized the spiritual side of the counselling sessions at all. He hasn't really pushed on that. We pray at the beginning or end of a session. He accepts that I come to church and he does not change anything.

Sue: *You didn't find it easy to talk. How deeply are you able to share with Laurance?*

Hansie: With Laurance...very deeply. That's where I fail. I can speak to strangers. It's with my family that I don't speak. I don't tell my problems. I don't tell them what I'm going through. In the beginning when both me and my wife saw him, a lot of stuff came out from both of us- I don't have a problem speaking to him.

Sue: *How do you think he could improve, especially looking at the cross-cultural?*

Hansie: I think he must stop worrying about that. He's making it an issue out of it more than other people. I live in a townhouse. I'm surrounded by all sorts of cultures. I'm used to it. My children are used to it. It doesn't phase me at all. At the end of the day it's like going into a hospital. If you need an emergency operation and you get a black doctor who can perform it and you got a white doctor who is on holiday, who are you going to take? To me it makes no difference what culture you are as long as you are well qualified and you are competent. That's the crux of it. I personally think Laurance makes too much of an issue out of it. (Sue:Yah, Yah). The first thing we were asked when we came for counselling was if we have any objection. No, I don't have any objection....he's living with the problem.

Sue: I believe there are problems...

Hansie: I believe that if you had to look at our community or our congregation, then I don't believe there would be many problems. But if he were trying to do this in a more Afrikaans - centred (church), you might have further problems yes. ...In the light of this church and him performing his functions here, I can foresee no problem.

Sue: If you don't foresee any problems, do you see any advantages in people of different cultures counselling each other?

Hansie: It could very well be because people are brought up differently, especially like myself because it can be determined that my problems come from my past. Yes, it can be helpful. He puts a totally different perspective on your way of upbringing ... whereas hypothetically had I been coming to see you (that is SUE) for counselling, we have invariably grown up in the same way and there's not much you can do about that whereas he sees things objectively . So I think it can have a positive effect. Amongst the blacks there are many different cultures... we can take the best from everything and try to incorporate it into our lives instead of being narrow minded...



Sue: So you see some kind of place for cross cultural counselling if you just move away from you and Laurance. What could the disadvantages be?

Hansie: I can't really see disadvantages. If you take society as a whole today, everybody has to learn to work together at the workplace... We're all thrown into this melting pot together. At the workplace if you know nothing about the other person's culture you are just at a disadvantage and I feel everyone is trying to learn about everybody else. In the average workplace you suddenly have blacks in the offices, Indians as clerks and Coloureds... you're trying to find out about them, where and how they live. People have got a natural curiosity. If it came down to a therapy situation it wouldn't be a problem. I can't see there being any disadvantages really. It should be up to people to say they don't want to be treated by a Black, Indian or Coloured. I think they could have that prerogative because if you go into something and you not going to trust or open up you not going to reap any benefit. Maybe from this aspect this could be the only disadvantage... if a person did not want to be counselled by someone from another culture.

Sue: But you could say the same about being counselled by a woman.

Hansie: Exactly. It all depends on the nature of what you coming to see the person for. Hypothetically, if the person is a white bachelor, he is not particularly wanting to be counselled by a woman. But I don't see any major disadvantages. With society being more and more integrated that kind of issue falls away. The children they don't see any difference. It is us people who have grown up with prejudice that are still creating negativity.

Sue: Is it possible not to be prejudiced, do you think?

Hansie: Maybe not us because that's the way we were brought up. If we are more open minded with our children by the time they have children there's going to be no difference as far as I see it. As long as children are allowed to grow up without parental prejudices these stigmas of the past will disappear. It's going to take twenty or thirty years but it will disappear. We've got to learn from the children. If they accept everybody as equal as we are supposed to do...unfortunately we have been brought up with certain prejudices.

Sue: If somebody white said to you they were looking for counselling, would you recommend them to Laurance?

Hansie: I have already recommended Laurance to one of my white co-workers. I have given him his phone numbers.

Sue: Is there anything else you wish to add?

Hansie: I am happy with the way he conducts himself...happy he is willing to share the knowledge he has with others. I'm comfortable with his whole approach...I wouldn't change him. At this stage I'm deciding whether to go back to the psychologist.

TAPED INTERVIEW WITH ANDY - MONDAY 11 SEPTEMBER 2000  
AT 8h30. INTERVIEWER: PASTOR SUE SKIDMORE

Sue: *What were your first impressions when heard that your pastoral therapist would be an Indian person?*

Andy: It didn't bother me. I've dealt with a lot of Indians in my life. I have lots of Indian friends and lots of Indian customers. I had no negative thoughts...

Sue: *Do you have any positive thoughts since you know so many Indians?*

Andy: I actually took it at its face value. If I'm given a counsellor whatever race colour or creed... I was comfortable because he was an Indian...I will admit that...as opposed to a Black or whatever...I do feel more comfortable if we had to go across the colour line with an Indian than I would with a Black person...because I do believe that Indians can be very deep and helpful and friends. I've got some good Indian friends.

Sue: *Are there any negatives?*

Andy: The only negative was in the last ten months with this whole marriage situation that I've went through. Some Indians customers were turned against me. I was brought up in Zambia and went to school with all races...so, I'm more used to this than a lot of South Africans... so, it doesn't bother me at all.

Sue: *What did you wish the conversations to be respectful of your culture?*

Andy: He's neither Indian or Muslim. He's Christian. As Christians we are now on the same levels. I don't think the culture would really come into it unless if he was Indian or Muslim or Palestinian or something like that. As Christians we are basically on the same level. He's Christian. I'm Christian - we're talking the same language.

Sue: *Had he been an Indian non-Christian, how would that have been?*

Andy: I wouldn't have spoken to him. I came to the church looking for help and I wouldn't have spoken to him.

Sue: *Any similarities between you?*

Andy: Basically what we both went through. He briefly mentioned what he went through and used his experience ... relaying to me at times how he got through things - how he also used to hold onto things...he used his experience to help other people. I have also done this in the past. I always said that I can sort somebody else's life out but I could never sort my life out.

Sue: *Was there some kind of connection there that Laurance went through a similar kind of thing?*

Andy: Yes. The similarities and there was a connection right from the word go. That's the only way I can explain it .

Sue: *Are you able to say how the connection came?*

Andy: I either like someone or I don't like them. It was just a case with Laurance that it just happened. There were times when I got angry with him and he understood. That's how a connection was made. He's cool, calm and collected. He's very compassionate...extremely compassionate...and in times like that is what people need...and if you don't have the compassion you don't make the connection. So I would say...going a little bit deeper now... it's based on trust. So from the word go, I trusted him. We went through a little rough patch...we spoke about it and cleared it. We had to sort it out immediately. I don't say he realised he was being manipulated...I'll put that in inverted commas, but I pointed it out to him and said "be careful". He sorted it out immediately. So that's the reason for trust. If you don't trust anybody you never get along with them.

Sue: *Culturally, how do you experience yourself and him as different?*

Andy: Not at all. I accepted him. What I can say about Laurance and other Indians, his personal culture is very different because he's Christian. As for Laurance and myself, the culture is the same. I wouldn't like to say this...but he's one of us.

Sue: *However, black and white is quite visible in South Africa*

Andy: I did not see any skin colour. He's just another person...a human being.

Sue: *Why is that?*

Andy: I don't understand. I didn't see any colour. Basically I don't think there's a difference between Laurance as an Indian and myself as a white man. I believe the cultural differences come across in the religions we practice. If you are Hindu or Moslem or Palestinian, you got different views. Laurance is a Christian. I am a Christian. Basically that is what I'm interested in.

Sue: *What then influenced the counselling process for you?*

Andy: His calmness, his grasp of the situation. When things started to run into trouble, that is, the triangular conflict between him ,my wife and me, he assessed the situation, extremely fast, put a stop to it and carried on from there. He's very quick to assess the situation. Like I said he's got a lot of compassion and he listens before he speaks.

Sue: *To what extent was the conversation sensitive to issues in your culture or to you personally?*

Andy: It's difficult to answer the question when the word culture comes up. I believe he is a practising Christian and our cultures are the same to me.

Sue: *Your being in Zambia. How much did he know about that?*

Andy: He knew a little of what I told him about. And I told you I always had a lot of respect for Indians... some of them are big crooks...but we probably got ten million whites who are crooks as well...I can laugh and joke about this with him.

Sue: *I wonder if these issues almost overwhelmed any cultural issues*

Andy: Definitely not. Definitely not. Sue, if there were any objections or my fears of cultural differences, I would have stated it from the beginning and probably looked for someone else.

Sue: *How sensitive and respectful were the conversations?*

Andy: Extremely sensitive to my wants and needs. There were times he would phone and ask how I am doing and I would say I am alright this week or down this week. He's always there, checking...he's just a wonderful person, no two ways about it. On respectful: I can put up one instance - the triangle between him, myself and my wife. She was trying to get information out of him and ... I got angry with him and he respected that. I said to him all I want him to do is I don't want him to counsel her and me. He asked her to come into counselling sessions and she was not interested, therefore she's gone. He respected me getting angry which I take my hat off to him. We sorted it out chop chop. He respects the way you feel.

Sue: *Did you experience any aspects of his culture in the process?*

Andy: To me culture is not the same if we are from different religions. That's the only difference in culture that I can see.

Sue: *What social, political, economic or other insights did you gain about whites and people of colour?*

Andy: We did not look at this. I am aware of the difference between blacks and whites. A couple of years ago I was doing a contract in Johannesburg. The blacks under me were extremely political. I called them in and said that as far as I am concerned " scrap Apartheid", but there will be social segregation. You will still have your upper class, middle class and lower class, and obviously in South Africa, the destitute. That's the only difference that I can see.

Sue: *Is there anything else?*

Andy: I've been extremely happy with Laurance. He's been there. He's always phoned me. On two occasions I decided I got to phone Laurance and find out how he is and he phones before me.

He explains this as telepathy. He's extremely perceptive. He always brings in scripture as well.

Sue: *I know about Laurance's knowledge of the Bible*

Andy: This morning he slapped me with Jose 10:10 (laughs). All this nonsense is finally coming to an end. I would recommend him to anybody. I want to thank you Sue for all the help. I'm still struggling but not as much as I was. Counselling has picked me up. It's time I started paying back.

END.

## E-MAIL FROM ROB

The following section is feedback I received on questions I e-mailed to Rob Roy on my counselling. Rob wrote:

*I am happy to participate in your research:*

- 1) I was happy to speak to you and had no problem speaking to an Indian person. You have the same spiritual foundation as I have and I view you as a fellow brother in CHRIST.*
- 2) I have viewed Indians to be very upright in their moral standing, I have had close friends who are Indians and the institutions I have been exposed to share a similar view to me.*
- 3) I have never been overtly racialistic. However I believe all people should be given a fair chance no matter what creed, colour or culture.*
- 4) Yes. Because I believe that we have reverted back to a totalitarian way of thinking .....now only in reverse.*
- 5) Laurance I have absolutely no objection to you counselling so called whites. You are suitably qualified and sensitive and I think you do a good job.*

*Hope this helps with your study.*

*Blessings  
Rob Roy*

## INTERVIEW WITH JOSE

Interviewer: Pastor Sue Skidmore

I had provided Jose with the questions beforehand in the hope that it would enable the interview to go smoothly. He said to Sue that it was helpful to receive the questions beforehand.

In the interview Jose explained how it came about that he came to the Methodist Pastoral Care Centre for counselling. His wife is a member and asked Jose that they both come to counselling for marriage enrichment. Jose expressed that he was not too keen to come but compromised with his wife on this.

Below is a summary of the interview with Jose.

I was a little negative about the whole thing (having an Indian pastoral therapist), say about 20 % negative. I thought he may have a lack of understanding about where I came from both as a white and as a Portuguese. He asked me if I was comfortable with him as an Indian and I said I was. What brought the comfortableness about was that he is a relaxed person. He listens. I did not sense any stereotype from his side. He was not judgmental of my views. He is too soft spoken but that wasn't a problem.

I wanted him to be respectful of my background. I don't believe that I should be 80% in control and my wife 20% but more of a 51%-49% position in my favour. I like to have the last say because I think logically. If my wife's right and I'm wrong then he should take her side. It is part of a strong background of mine to have the last say on things. I wasn't expecting him to respect my wish because he's Indian. I would expect that from a white person as well.

I did not pick up a major difference between his and my culture. He did not make himself open about his feelings. It's difficult to say. He was not taking sides. He seemed neutral and tried to find the middle line between us... a compromise. Sue asked if Laurance worked in a collaborative way and Jose said yes.

I would say he was 51%-49% sensitive to my culture and that of my wife. He was sensitive to my Portuguese culture as he asked about my background. I was not too sure if he asked about my mum and dad.

I cannot say what aspects in his culture was helpful. He did not bring up anything about his culture. He did speak about his poor background, that he did not have shoes to go to school. I found this sharing helpful. I also had a rough background. I didn't have any of the goodies . I got

a slap from my father when I asked for pocket money. He understood my background as we had a similar pattern growing up.

The social insight I became aware of was that Laurance was different from other Indians. Historically I had the stereotype that Indians lie a lot. I experienced this with the ones I worked with. Because of this stereotype I had a reservation about being counselled by an Indian person. Laurance is a totally honest person. If I did not trust him I would not have continued to come. I don't see Indians and Blacks as the same. I see them on their own. Historically there was racism against the Chinese. I saw them as White but as different. There are differences between Afrikaans and English but Chinese are slightly different from white. I see Indians on the other side.

He mentioned that he did not go to church for a quite a while but that he has been with God for a long time. I see it in him. He is personally godly. The maturity is there. It exists in his lifestyle. I found it helpful when he brought a few scriptures in the first few sessions. I enjoyed it.

Sue asks if there is anything he wished to add. Jose says he found the questions tightly knitted and it covered the issue 110%.



## FEEDBACK FROM THE PASTOR FOR COUNSELLING ON THE TAPED INTERVIEWS

After transcribing the interviews with the Pastor for Counselling, I asked her for comments on a few issues. I provided some guiding questions. Her comments are included.

### **1. What were your impressions on the race and cultural issues from the side of white counsellees towards Laurance as an Indian therapist?**

The white counsellees seemed to be unaware or not speaking about the race and cultural issues. Culture was said not to be an issue for them, particularly in relation to Laurance. Some carried stereotypes of Indians, eg. they steal a lot but this was disapproved with Laurance. I didn't pick up any thoughts about the counsellees' own culture in relation to Indian culture. My impression was of wanting to minimize difference and to look for similarities such as Christianity.

### **2. What were your impressions of how Laurance went about doing pastoral therapy with white counsellees?**

My impression of Laurance was one of respect. He always wanted to ensure that being Indian was okay for the counsellees. Laurance went the "extra mile", especially in accommodating out of hours times for appointments and keeping in contact with counsellees between appointments. His understanding of the Bible was evident.

### **3. Being involved in the research, what influence did the whole process have on your relationship with him:**

#### **a) as a person of colour**

I think Laurance has heightened my own awareness of the oppression that he endured as a person of colour. I have always seen him as person of colour and have tried to be sensitive from his side about being the only person of colour. I have been in quite a few situations where I was the only white person. I'm not sure if this is the same thing- but for me it is a unique experience to be a "minority" person instead of a majority.

#### **b) as head of the Pastoral Care Centre**

I have seen Laurance use determination and persistence in order to achieve his goals for the research, qualities which I will also require to complete my own research. I think my being involved in the research has enabled us to work together on a more equal footing and to share "not knowing positions".

#### **c) during supervision and individual meetings with him**

I have appreciated Laurance's respectful approach-which I especially felt as a woman. I have felt that we have worked on knowing each other better.

**d) listening to what white counsellees had to say about him**

The white counsellees have unreservedly praised Laurance for his respectful approaches and his approachability. I believe that his personhood has overwhelmed any cultural ideas they may have about him.