

## Chapter 3. Research Methodology

Willms in Smith, Willms and Johnson (1997:7) describes the traditional connotation with research as that of scientists in laboratories with white coats, microscopes and computers: the domain of scientists and academics. Inevitably one would expect this perspective to support certain power discourses about who should be doing research and whose research would “carry weight” in academia and science alike. I would, however, like to align my thinking of research with Willms’ perspective of research as a process of rediscovering and recreating personal and social realities.

By way of introduction, I would like to refer to the phrase “to look at again” (that is, to reflect on or afford another thought): in Old French the verb for “to look at again” *recherchier*<sup>41</sup> gave rise to our word *research*. The Latin for “to look at again” or *respicere*<sup>42</sup> became the root for *respect*. I would like to posit that this is no coincidence and that research should never be done without respect. Research should always be done within an ethos of respect, that is, research and ethics go hand in hand and this chapter will therefore have to discuss both discourses.

Perhaps we should first establish what the relationship between the research process and the study of meaning in life is. In this regard, Dane (1990) has suggested that research is a natural human phenomenon, which in its broadest sense is humankind’s continual attempt to discover the “why’s” and “wherefore’s” of life. And is that not the study of a meaningful life in broad terms?

### 3.1 Overview of the structure of the chapter

This chapter will provide a map for the research methodology which was adopted in this study. It will take care to indicate how this methodology is aligned with and is actually a product of the ontology and epistemology which forms the context for the study.

Research will also be discussed within a (practical) theology context, verifying that practical theology has an interest and will be able to inform the research process.

Participatory Action Research (PAR) as the research methodology facilitating the study will be described at length in the earlier part of the chapter. PAR will be discussed from a critical relational constructivist perspective.

The research ethics within which the study is positioned will be introduced next. The story of ethics will be related by tracking its history from the pre-modern, throughout the modernistic era and into

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<sup>41</sup> Willms in Smith, Willms and Johnson (1997:7)

<sup>42</sup> The Free Dictionary: <http://www.thefreedictionary.com/respect>

the postmodern. Care will be taken to describe the role of power within the research process. The privileging of voices in particular will be discussed and an ethic proposed to de-centre the researcher's voice.

The chapter will conclude with a detailed description of the actual process, paying attention to the negotiated nature of the process and suggesting how research reporting may be aligned with the research ethics proposed in this chapter.

The following paragraphs will indicate how our research methodology, ontology and epistemology are all aligned with a participatory ethos, thus preserving the integrity of the study.

### 3.2 Participatory Action Research

*Those promoting participatory action research believe that people have a universal right to participate in the production of knowledge which is a disciplined process of personal and social transformation<sup>43</sup>. In this process, people rupture their existing attitudes of silence, accommodation and passivity, and gain confidence and abilities to alter unjust conditions and structures.*

Paolo Freire in the Foreword to *Nurtured by Knowledge* (Smith, Willms, and Johnson, 1997: xi)

Seeing that a participatory ethos has been adopted in this study, the research methodology used has been Participatory Action Research (PAR). The reason for choosing PAR as the preferred research methodology should be considered within the context of the aims, objectives and epistemology framework of the study. These were described in chapter 1 of this thesis. These included not only gaining insight into what constitutes "a life that matters", but also an active facilitation of participants' journey towards such "a life that matters" or meaningfulness.

Hosking (1999: 118) suggests that in positioning the study within this context, the research practice will attempt to move **beyond** the restrictions of *modernist research methodologies* that

*give central significance to the presumption of a real world, and so*

*centre the researcher as a knowing subject who should strive to be separate from knowable objects and who – in so doing - can*

*produce knowledge (about the world) that is probably true and a matter of fact not value .*

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<sup>43</sup> Refer back to the chapter on Theology for references to transformation in the description of the tasks of Practical Theology.

Hosking (1999: 123) offers the following understanding of PAR:

*As we understand it, participatory action research (PAR) involves working with others as co-researchers and co-subjects, dialoguing multiple **local realities** and **relations between realities** (not seeking resolution or consensus), and constructing power to [as opposed to “power over”, for instance]. “Participation” is intended to reference a relational ontology i.e., that self and other only exist in relation i.e., participation is not ‘just’ a method, a form of governance in a knowable right-wrong world. Dialogue (we prefer to say **multilogue**) is central to heterarchy and power to. (My boldfacing and comment in square brackets)*

I want to position the research as a congruent real-life process by adopting as dictum the text provided by Peter Reason (1994) when he quotes Marja-Liisa Schwantz stating that

*I do not separate my scientific inquiry from my life. For me it is really a quest for life, to understand life and to create what I call living knowledge—knowledge which is valid for the people with whom I work and for myself.*

John Heron describes PAR by saying that

*the aim of participatory action research is to change practices, social structures, and social media which maintain irrationality, injustice, and unsatisfying forms of existence. (Reason, 1994).*

Reason (1994) provides a working definition for action research when he describes it as a participatory, democratic process concerned with developing practical knowing in the pursuit of worthwhile human purposes, grounded in a participatory worldview. He continues by stating that it seeks to bring together action and reflection, theory and practice, in participation with others, in the pursuit of practical solutions to issues of pressing concern to people, and more generally the growth and flourishing of individual persons and their communities.

According to Blake (2007), PAR “seeks to embrace a locally specified problematic and prioritises local knowledge developed in a relational setting”. Quoting Benhabib (1990), she draws a very important distinction with most of the research done in the West, which according to her assumes a “Hobbesian ontology and rationalist epistemology” – essentially a Hobbesian ontology is empiricist, materialistic and characterised by self-interested individuals, every man [sic] against every man with a right to everything, even to one another’s body (Miyakawa, 1999: 189).

This will be very important for the positioning of this research in that it will seek locally significant outcomes which will be important to the participants, potentially enhancing the meaningfulness of

their lives. No global truths based on or supporting metanarratives will therefore be established. Relationality is key to this research approach. As will become clear when the themes of meaningfulness are introduced in chapter four of this thesis, not all participants to this study shared the same meaning-generating discourses. Meaningfulness was shown to be such a local truth in their lives.

Blake (2007) continues to describe PAR as a political process in that “[s]ignificantly, PAR diverges from the scientific tradition through the subjectivity of the researcher and the relationships that form between the researcher and the researched. The work of doing PAR involves regular interaction and participation in the activities of the community with which the researcher is doing work. By working with community members in collaboration, PAR researchers engage with a subject position that identifies them as simultaneously researcher and community member.” This has important implications for the relationship with the co-researchers, especially as far as a sensitivity for power relationships is concerned. Another very important observation she makes, concerns the mutual impact the study will have on study facilitator and fellow researchers alike:

*This involves not only encouraging researcher reflexivity, but facilitating the researcher’s personal engagement with the study, including a recognition that the researcher and her or his social milieu impacts on the other participants and findings and is, in itself worthy of being researched. In contrast, the scientific traditional [process] emphasises objectivity through social distance between researcher and research subjects.*

This will have to be accounted for in the study process and the research contract between research facilitator and fellow researchers.

In conclusion, PAR may result in some problems within an academic context. A potential problem faced by PAR in an academic context, is the decision about what the research topic and research question should be. Because of the participatory nature of the research process and the democracy suggested by Reason (1994) above, it is clear that the (academic) needs and requirements of the study facilitator cannot be the only needs satisfied by the research process. It may therefore be necessary to revise the study objectives in the course of the study.

Hagey (2002:1) lists seven characteristics of PAR. These will be reported here, but at the end of this chapter we will have to assess the research design and process to verify that we have indeed been doing participatory action research. The characteristics may be described as 1) the study problem should be identified by the community or workplace themselves; 2) the research goal should be to “improve” the lives of those involved; 3) the (research) community should control the research

process; 4) the focus should be on *oppressed* groups (here she includes issues of oppression like *inaccessibility, colonization, marginalization, exploitation, racism, sexism, and cultural disaffection*); 5) empowering or restitution of agency should be strengthened by making people aware of their own capabilities; 6) the people themselves are the researchers in association with the research facilitators; and 7) research facilitators may be outsiders to the community, but should be committed learners in a process that facilitates change.

Furthermore, she suggests (2002:2) that the research process should always start with a survey of the political environment within which the research process will take place.

Hagey (2002:4) comments on the credibility of PAR, proposing that PAR will be gain credibility by honouring the extent to which the research process is actually a political process and *by working out the terms of relations as the process goes along*. As such PAR relies on honesty and veracity in declaring agendas and in carrying out the research and implementing its goals.

### 3.3 Research ethics

*No science is immune to the infection of politics and the corruption off power.*

Jacob Bronowski in O'Leary (2004:42)

O'Leary (2004:42) describes how research and therefore researchers are responsible for the *shaping the character of knowledge* and this has led to a growing recognition and acceptance of the need for ethical and political awareness in research. She expresses this even stronger, suggesting that ethics is *foundational* to all research (2004:50).

Hagey (2002:1) describes the fate of a vast number of studies which end up as "dead reports on dusty shelves". According to her these research projects are seen to be reporting on needs with no intention of doing anything to address those needs. This contrasted to participatory action research which is set on empowering co-researchers as research communities to be able to "transform their lives for themselves".

Before I describe the research ethic adopted in this study, I would like to elaborate on the implications of postmodernism on ethics and more specifically, research ethics.

#### 3.3.1 Postmodern ethics

With the advent of postmodern thinking a major shift was signalled, the shift from the modern to the postmodern world. This was a move from an emphasis on *being* in the premodern world, to *knowing* in the modern world, to *meaning* in the postmodern world (Sire, 2004:214-219).

Postmodernity signalled the Death of Truth: if independent human *knowers* are incapable of arriving at truth on their own, then the truth about the reality is forever hidden. All we can do is to tell stories about the truth (Du Toit, 1997: 939-940).

Then there is the epistemological movement (see also Chapter 1 in this regard) from the

*premodern* which is characterised by believers (like Christians) with God and a revealed biblical narrative that explain the nature of reality to the *modern* idea of the independent human knower, rationalist or empiricist, with the capacity to know truth, and then to the *postmodern* notion that reason and human knowledge are fallible, and all we can do is create our own stories out of language to create meaning to serve our own purposes (Sire, 2004:223).

All discourses (including identity and ethics) are political. This follows from Nietzsche's claim in the Genealogy of Morals that self-knowledge, particularly in the form of moral consciousness, is a strategy and effect of power whereby one internalizes social control (Best and Kellner, 1991: 50-51). This was later adopted and generalised by Foucault. We can therefore reflect on language as power. All narratives make a play for power (Sire, 2004: 224). Any one narrative or story used as a metanarrative or master story is oppressive. Sire (2004:224) suggests that within a postmodern paradigm there are only stories which, when they are believed (and as long as they are believed!) give the storyteller power over others. He then describes how we can follow the course of 1) a premodern acceptance of the scriptural story of creation, the fall of mankind and its redemption as revealed by God in the Bible to 2) the modern story of the epistemological and scientific powers of humanity which can discover truth about reality to 3) a postmodern reduction of all stories, premodern and modern, all as power plays.

This in itself does not signify the failure of postmodern ethics; rather if we are sensitized to this and we were to invite it into our discussion of ethics, we would enter the dialogue as worthy contributors. This potential risk is not to disempower and leave as lame and disillusioned, but provide us with an awareness of power and motive (whereby our agency is actually reinforced). Our ethical discourse then becomes one of many powerful discourses in the (research) ethics dialogue.

Postmodernity could also lead us to question identity. What is a person? What is a meaningful personal existence? According to Sire (2004:225) within a postmodern paradigm, “human beings make themselves who they are by the languages they construct about themselves.” This results in the death of the substantial self. In this regard, we can now observe the movement of the 1) premodern theistic conception of the person as made in the image of God to 2) the modern notion of the person as the result of random evolutionary processes to 3) the postmodern notion of the insubstantial self created by language in a powerful social situation (2004:225).

Perhaps Nietzsche’s Parable of the Madman anticipates the question, “Can we be good without God?” (see Sire, 2004: 226ff). Like naturalism and existentialism, postmodernity realizes that ethics are a human creation, especially through language. Ethics, like knowledge, is a linguistic construct. Social good, therefore, is whatever society takes it to be. Premodern ethics are based on the goodness of a transcendent God who has revealed his moral will to humanity in scripture; modern ethics is based on the idea of a *universal* human reason and experience and the human ability to determine right and wrong; the postmodern notion is that morality is grounded only in the language of a culture which is free to legislate any form of morality, especially by those in power (2004:215).

Smith (<http://www.dur.ac.uk/r.d.smith/pmethics.html>) describes Bauman’s views on the “essence” of the postmodern approach to ethics (“essence” here is of course rather ironic in that the postmodern position is turning from essentialism). Bauman explains that this approach lies not in the abandoning of characteristically modern moral concerns, but in the rejection of the typically modern ways of going about its moral problems (that is, responding to moral challenges with coercive normative regulation in political practice, and the philosophical search for absolutes, universals and foundations in theory). Following Smith it therefore seems as if the postmodern thus becomes “morality without ethical code”. The following quote explains what is meant by the previous statement:

*Human reality is messy and ambiguous – and so moral decisions, unlike abstract ethical principles, are ambivalent. It is in this sort of world that we must live .... Knowing that to be the truth ... is to be postmodern. Postmodernity, one may say, is modernity without illusions (the obverse of which is that modernity is postmodernity refusing to accept its own truth). The illusions in question boil down to the belief that the “messiness” of the human world is but a temporary and repairable state, sooner or later to be replaced by the orderly and systematic rule of reason. The truth in question is that the “messiness” will stay whatever we do or know, that the little orders and “systems” we carve out in the world are ... as arbitrary and in the end contingent as their alternatives” (Bauman, 1993:32-33)*

However, agency and responsibility is actually restored to human beings by his views when he states that

*It is society, its continuing existence and its well-being, that is made possible by the moral competence of its members – not the other way round .... Rather than reiterating that there would be no moral individuals if not for the training/drilling job performed by society, we move toward the understanding that it must be the moral capacity of human beings that makes them so conspicuously capable to form societies and against all odds to secure their – happy or less happy – survival .... [I]t is the personal morality that makes ethical negotiation and consensus possible, not the other way round. (1993: 32, 34)*

### 3.3.2 Michel Foucault and Ethics

If we use Foucault as an example of postmodern or more specifically post-structuralist thinking, we come to appreciate a number of interesting positions with significant implications for ethics and moral philosophy. According to Best and Kellner (1991:51), Foucault followed Nietzsche in claiming moral consciousness to be strategy and an effect of power. Foucault concerned himself with power throughout the first phase of his life. His perception of power was that of “a multiple and mobile field of force relations, where far-reaching, but never completely stable effects of domination are produced (Best and Kellner, 1991: 51).

During the course of his active life, one can distinguish two shifts in Foucault’s work: from the archaeological focus on systems of knowledge in the 60’s, to the genealogical focus on modalities of power in the 70’s, to the focus on technologies of the self, ethics and freedom in the 80’s (Best & Kellner, 1991: 59).

Best and Kellner describe the respect of differences as being the guiding motivation of Foucault’s work (1991: 39). This is indicative of the movement from the totalizing and universalizing so characteristic of modernity. In the place of absolute moral principles, ***this approach opens space for difference in ethical norms.***

In his later work, Foucault studied premodern Greek, Roman and Christian cultures. In his reading of Greco-Roman culture, ethics is the relation an individual has with him/herself (Best & Kellner, 1991: 62). In this period of his life Foucault spent a lot of time on ethics as care of and mastery over the self. The mastery referred to here was intended as mastery over one’s desires. In this period he also wrote a lot about freedom, but not the freedom which is so popular in DIY literature. This freedom was discussed once again as a discourse. Best and Kellner phrase it very well when they refer to



“ethics [as]... the deliberative component of free activity and the basis for a prolonged practice of the self whereby one seeks to problematise and master one’s desires and to constitute oneself as a free self” (1991: 62). This freedom was also meant to be freedom of the common nostalgia we feel for “lost worlds” and “past normative models”. Foucault was clearly adamant in supporting a non-normalising morality.

Postmodernity as represented by Foucault is often appealing for a non-universalising and non-normalising ethical practice, which is “attentive to individual practices, while emphasizing individual liberty and the larger social context of the freedom of the self” (1991: 64). He distinguishes liberation from liberty, which he describes as an ongoing ethical practice of self-mastery and care of the self, or put in his words, liberty as the “ontological condition of ethics” and ethics as the “deliberate form assumed by liberty” (1991: 64).

A very important point made by Best and Kellner (1991: 64) is that ethics does not require that we continually discover ourselves and our “secret inner beings”, but that we continually produce ourselves. Although the subject is still *discursively* and socially conditioned and situated within power relations, (s)he now also has the power to define his/her own identity, master his/her body and desires, and forge a practice of freedom through “techniques of the self”. It is important to note these practices will still be socially constituted. Once again this becomes possible because these discourses are not only constituted in power relations, but in themselves are recognized to be power-wielding. This will be discussed in the section on advances and risks of postmodernity as one of the most important advances of postmodern ethics.

### 3.3.3 Power and Knowledge

*Knowledge is full of politics and dreams and actually arises from rebellious struggles to change the world and ourselves.*

Paolo Freire in the Foreword to *Nurtured by Knowledge* (Smith, Willms, and Johnson, 1997: xi)

In the discussion of the role that power plays in the research process, I will refer to Foucault’s approach to power as being relational and closely associated with knowledge in a power/knowledge symbiotic discourse.

Best and Kellner describe Foucault’s discourse on power as a “relational” power that is “exercised from innumerable points”. Furthermore it is highly indeterminate in character, and is never something “acquired, seized or shared”. There is no source or centre of power to contest, nor are there any subjects holding it; power is a purely structural activity for which subjects are anonymous

conduits or by-products. (1991: 51-52). Foucault saw power and knowledge to be so closely related that he often contracted this into a single discourse and often referred to the “indivisible amalgam” power/knowledge (West, 1996: 171). This refers to the power relation which develops in the discourses defining subjects.

Foucault’s analytics of power has important implications for ethics. Compared to the understanding of power as an external force defining us as subjects, Foucault is attentive to every human relation to be some degree of a power relation. “We move in a world of perpetual strategic relations” (Best and Kellner, 1991: 54). But does that leave us exposed or helpless? On the contrary, apart from discourses being formed by power, power is a discourse per se (see the paragraph on discourse). And in its very character, lies the potential for resistance. Best and Kellner describe Foucault’s perspective here where he claims that “as soon as there is a power relation, there is a possibility of resistance. We can never be ensnared by power: we can always modify its grip in determinate conditions and according to a precise strategy” (1991: 55). This can facilitate the liberation from the oppression of the subject, both as underling “by control and dependence” and confined identity “by conscience and self-knowledge” (1991: 50).

Smith in Smith, Willms and Johnson (1997:173-225) describes the role of power in PAR at length in the chapter *Deepening Participatory Action-Research*. She develops three power discourses which she calls *power-over*, *power-with* and *power-from-within*, terminology gleaned from work by Starhawk (1987).

*Power-over* refers to the power relationships characterised by people exercising power over other people, using Physical, economic or social (potential) penalties as the means of control. Smith (1997:190) continues to describe *power-from-within* as arising from relationships with other people: the bonding and connecting that occurs when people are connected to a common cause which awakens their abilities and potential. This is associated with *power-with*, a form of shared social power meaning people’s relationships with each other. This she characterises as power shared among people *who value each other as equals*. *Equals* does not imply identical capabilities or the same personalities though; it should rather be understood from a political perspective aimed at providing space for equitable or fair relationships and opportunities.

Smith’s proposition as it refers to PAR is therefore that PAR facilitates a shift from *power-over* to *power-from-within* through *power-with* (1997:192). In doing so, it should reach its goal of *achieving states of being in which people are more aware, heard, capable and productive*.

My own power position in this research derived from a number of social discourses. These included, but were not limited to gender (being a male), qualifications (having post graduate degrees), alignment with the owner of UrCareer (being a friend and training partner), age (being older than most of the participants), race (being white) and language or terminology (being familiar with “meaningfulness speak”). In the research process these discourses were tabled and discussed in order to expose and hopefully disarm them. I took special care not to use academic language during the process, externalising any academic terms and references to “cleverness” introduced by the research participants.

### 3.3.4 The Advances and Risks of Postmodernity

The risks of the postmodern position include the fact that postmodernity’s rejection of all metanarratives in itself becomes a metanarrative, the criticisms of master stories becomes the master story itself. Hence, beware! Postmodernity’s notion that we have no access to reality is a claim about reality - it is really real and true that we can’t get to what is real and true! Then also postmodernity’s critique of the autonomy and sufficiency of human reason is based on the autonomy and sufficiency of human reason. The irony is this: if reason itself can’t be trusted, how can it be used to make the critique?

The most common argument against postmodern ethics is relativism. If postmodern ethics is relegated to become merely relativist reflection, it will lose any motivational power it might have had (see Furrow, 1995: 19 in this regard). Relativism here is used to refer to the impossibility of using any moral language at all **and not (as I would like to use it) to the impossibility of a universal ethics**. If postmodern ethics is accepted to be only relativist it will therefore not be as influential as virtue ethics for instance. Virtue ethics in being characterised as aspirational ethics would be significantly more motivational. If security (refer back to Chapter 2) were a value construct required by a society, postmodern ethics understood as relativist ethics will find it hard to convince that it could make any significant contribution. This study will have to discuss the possibility of “a life that matters” or a meaningful life altogether within a postmodern paradigm!

In being “incurably aporetic” (see Smith, 1997), postmodernity may risk positioning itself against everything that is associated with modernity. This is similar to the position of political parties which do not aspire to become anything other than opposition parties! If we do not proclaim the advances of postmodernity, the space for diversity, the possibilities for resistance and continual reinventing of the self, postmodernity will fall victim to its own discourses and reduce itself to insignificance.

The strongest contribution and advances of postmodernity in ethics in my opinion, is the space that it creates for diversity or alterity, the reverence for different positions, the potential to create and recreate new positions and the perspectives on power it has brought about. In ethical discourses postmodernity in its truest form should accommodate contributions from the premodern, the modern and postmodern alike. This could harvest the riches of difference. The perspectives on power and knowledge could assist to reduce the risk of colonizing meaning.

I conclude this section with the words of Foucault (Best & Kellner, 1991: 34):

*[T]he impression of fulfilment and of end, the muffled feeling that carries and animates our thought, and perhaps lulls it to sleep with the facility of its promises.. and makes us believe that something new is about to begin, something that we glimpse only as a thin line of light low on the horizon – that feeling and impression are perhaps not ill founded.*

### 3.3.5 Relational ethics and a participatory ethos

Building on the opportunities generated by the postmodern paradigm described above, a relational research ethic will be honoured in this study. This implies that the research ethos will be participatory and the ethics negotiated and agreed by the research participants. This should never be confused with a relativist or laissez-faire ethic (an accusation often lodged against postmodern ethics), as the work ethic will be mutually agreed among all stakeholders or participants to the research process. These stakeholders will include the dialogue with the academic requirements from the University of Pretoria and Department of Practical Theology.

The research ethic will be sensitive to power discourses as described above. These power discourses will include the power relationship between the company management from the company where the participants are employed, and study participants potentially influencing the freedom of expression and silencing of voices of the fellow researchers, the power embedded in the relationship between study participants and study facilitator, and the power relationship between the study process and the academic discourses.

As far as influencing and power are concerned, the following text from Hosking (1999: 122) confirms the suggestions above and should be taken into consideration:

*... relational constructionist arguments make it possible to view research as a process of social construction and to view researchers as part of the relational processes they narrate themselves as studying. The questions raised include those that can be asked of any relational process, including:*

- *what kinds of relations are in ongoing construction e.g., hierarchical or heterarchical;*
- *what gets locally warranted as real and good, and how?*

*These can be viewed as questions both of knowledge and of power. Further, since relating inevitably combines both knowing and influencing, research processes necessarily join inquiry and intervention. This, in turn, opens up the possibility to give a different and more significant role to the influence - we might say change or intervention - potentials of inquiry.*

In the light of the previous (critical) relational ethics position, seven principles have been identified and proposed as an ethical context for the study:

### 3.3.6 Seven perspectives of research ethics

In this regard I have adapted Bosch's (1991:483-489) seven perspectives of a dialogical missionary stance to develop a research ethic. The motive for doing this will become clear in the following adaptation:

#### 3.3.6.1 *First perspective: diversity happens!*<sup>44</sup>

Following Bosch (1991:483-484), I would like to propose the first perspective to be the acceptance of the co-existence of different meaning discourses, values and beliefs in a postmodernist world and in the global village, because we cannot possibly enter into any dialogue with or present our case to people if we resent their presence or the views they hold.

#### 3.3.6.2 *Second perspective: the validity of adopting one's own viewpoint*

Secondly, a genuine dialogue presupposes and implies a commitment to one's own theological tradition, epistemology and ethical position<sup>45</sup>. If this is not the case, dialogue would be superfluous. Compare Bosch's argument about faith in this context:

*Without my commitment to the gospel, dialogue becomes a mere chatter; without the authentic presence of the neighbour it becomes arrogant and worthless. It is a false construct to suggest that a commitment to dialogue is incompatible with a confessional position (Bosch 1991:484).*

Relational constructionism creates the space for this perspective in that it invites different voices into the conversation, without the requirement to abandon or sacrifice any personal discourses.

<sup>44</sup> Similar to the manner described in the movie *Forrest Gump!*

<sup>45</sup> In this regard, the reflection on "not-knowing" in chapter 1 needs to be revisited

### 3.3.6.3 *Third perspective: privileging of knowledge*

This perspective flows from the previous perspective and qualifies it.

In the third perspective, Bosch (1991:484) criticised the exclusivism of Karl Barth's theology and proposed espousing a compassionate and eschatological mode in our dialogue.

*Thirdly, dialogue...is only possible if we proceed from the belief that...we are not moving into a void, that we go expecting to meet God who has preceded us and has been preparing people within the context of their own cultures and convictions....We do not have him [God] in our pocket, so to speak, and do not just 'take him' to the others; he [God] accompanies us and also comes toward us. We are not the 'haves', the *beati possidentes*, standing over against spiritual 'have nots', the *massa damnata*. We are all recipients of the same mercy, sharing in the same mystery. We thus approach every other faith and its adherents reverently, taking off our shoes, as the place we are approaching is holy.*

Adapting this perspective to research ethics, we can now say that we as researchers to not carry some superior or preferential knowledge into a void. I as researcher will have to take off my research shoes when I enter the research conversations.

### 3.3.6.4 *Fourth perspective: the researcher's position of humility*

Bosch (1991:484) proceeded in his fourth perspective to elaborate on the nature of the Christian witness as weak and vulnerable. Therefore, true mission and dialogue can only be conducted in an attitude of humility and never in arrogance.

And I would like to propose that this goes for the researcher's position of humility as well.

### 3.3.6.5 *Fifth perspective: the interdisciplinary dialogue*

In his fifth perspective, Bosch (1991:485) rejected an excessive holism (for example the New Age Movement) as an attempt to accommodate various different beliefs. He also rejects a simplistic pluralism where rival truths are simply part of the mosaic, where there is no such thing as orthodoxy, where we are all heretics in the original sense of the word. In either case (i.e. in holism and pluralism), the **creative tension with a theological tradition is not honoured** while such a **tension** is the genuine **indicator of a postmodernistic paradigm shift**. For Bosch (1991:486), authentic faith in a postmodernistic culture neither fist into pluralism, nor into holism.

In the case of research I would like to posit that participatory research will accommodate and foster such creative tension.

### 3.3.6.6 *Sixth perspective: the action imperative in action research*

In this perspective on true dialogue and mission, Bosch (1991:487) reminded us that dialogue cannot be a substitute for mission. Dialogue cannot be an attempt to dodge mission. Bosch (1991:487) reflected on the relationship between dialogue and mission and said:

*They [i.e. dialogue and mission] are neither to be viewed as identical nor as irrevocably opposed to each other. It is fallacious to suggest that, for dialogue to be 'in', mission has to be 'out,' that commitment to dialogue is incompatible with commitment to evangelism....Neither dialogue nor mission is moving along a one-way street; neither is stubbornly dogmatic, bigoted, or manipulative. In both, faith commitment goes hand-in-hand with respect for others. Neither presupposes a 'completely open mind' - which, in any case, is an impossibility. In both cases we are witnessing to our deepest convictions whilst listening to those of our neighbours.*

If we were to substitute “action research” for “mission” in the paragraph above, it will describe the research community’s commitment to the outcome of the research process.

### 3.3.6.7 *Seventh perspective: an ethos of awe and wonderment*

In this perspective, Bosch (1991:488-489) affirmed the **mystery of the paradox** of God’s universal will to save the human soul, that is the possibility of salvation outside the church on the one hand, and, on the other hand, the necessity of Christian missionary work. He acknowledged the **tension** between Christianity’s claim of Jesus Christ as the only way and at the same time he states that Christians cannot set limits to God’s saving power and that God is constantly at work in ways that pass human understanding, even outside Christianity. Bosch (1991:489) commented:

*Such language boils down to an admission that we do not have all the answers and are prepared to live within the framework of penultimate knowledge...This is not opting for agnosticism, but for humility. It is, however, a bold humility - or humble boldness. We know only in part, but we do know. And we believe that the faith we profess is both true and just, and should be proclaimed. We do this, however, not as judges or lawyers, but as witnesses; not as soldiers, but as envoys of peace; not as high-pressure sales-persons, but as ambassadors of the Servant Lord.*

This is proposed to be a unique position for pastoral narrative research, which I would like to carry into the research process.

### 3.3.7 Informed consent

Part of the research ethos concerns the matter of informed consent. A participatory process has some implications for ethics approval of the research and consent to the use of interview material. Blake (2007) suggests that informed consent (and copyright) is a challenge. Informed consent and the eventual reporting or communication of the process will have to protect the integrity of the relationships among fellow researchers and researchers and research facilitator alike. Ownership will have to be discussed and understanding agreed. Blake refers to Howett and Stevens (2005) when she proposes that 'negotiated authorisation' replaces the traditional *a priori* signatures and autonomic anonymity. Descriptions of the process are advised to be both verbal and oral. Permission should be obtained for any interviews and the participant's right to withdrawal should be explained and respected. Only once the participants had the opportunity to familiarise themselves with the content of such recordings and any other reporting and interpretation of conversations should they be required to sign the consent forms. At such time preferences about anonymity and use of voice recordings should be discussed and agreed. Blake suggests that the advantage of such post-participation discussions would be that *at this stage people know what they have said and have a better idea of the process involved*. This will ensure that they can make informed decisions about how their words and other languages are used. Unfortunately this implies that the research participants may withhold consent, which however, is not different from some current ethics procedures. The likelihood of this happening is actually reduced if participants are better informed.

Should interim reports or conference papers be written part way through the research process, care should be taken to obtain prior permission for the use of research information in such communications. Additionally, and particularly relevant to PAR, the community group or partner organisation could also act as a steering committee for the research project and as part of their remit oversee ethics procedures.

In the light of this suggestion, it was decided to have two letters of Informed Consent - a preliminary document of Informed Consent and a Confirmatory Informed Consent which is to be signed by participants at the reporting stage of the research process. These documents are included as Appendices 1 and 2.

## 3.4 The Process

Initially it was planned to approach and recruit a company with an interest in a staff development program with a specific focus on living more meaningful lives, to participate in the study. The nature



of their business was not considered to be critical to the inclusion of such a company in the study. More important however, was a willingness to

- engage in a participatory process and
- become part of a doctoral study with the academic rigour and exposure of personal narratives which invariably will be part of such a process.

It was considered advantageous if such a company could be a small to medium sized enterprise where a certain work community will already be established. Such a community may be more open to relational processes.

Another advantage though not a requirement would be if the company's personnel could be diverse in its constitution as far as gender and ethnicity are concerned. This is not a requirement as the intention is not to produce generic representative truths which would be globally applicable. This would revert back to a modernist approach to research and support the discovery of meta-narratives.

I was subsequently approached by a staff recruitment agency which is owned by a friend. She learned about the study while we were jogging together and was immediately interested in making the program available to her own staff. Her company has about 7 employees, some of whom left and were replaced during the process of the study.

It was explained to her that the candidate co-researchers (see Epston, 1999) would be introduced to the study topic, its aims and objectives and what would be required from them by means of the Informed Consent letter attached as Appendix 1. Another letter of Informed Consent which will confirm that the transcriptions of interviews are accurate and may be used in the research is included as Appendix 2. See the section on Ethics and Informed Consent above.

The process proposed for this research started with a general introduction to the research topic, its context, the academic context including this thesis, some personal experience from the study facilitator, and the intended research process. The co-researchers were invited to propose changes to this process and set a time frame for the study, including dates and times for individual and group meetings. The process has been mutually agreed at this meeting.

In the sessions following this introduction, the participants have been invited to relate their life stories as these pertain to meaningfulness. These interviews have been done individually. Externalisation (see Freedman and Combs, 1996: 47-48, 58-63; White and Epston, 1990: 16, 38-76) and deconstruction of discourses (Freedman and Combs, 1996: 120-121) have been used to facilitate

the process and to identify the prominent themes of meaning stories. Power relationships were explored as part of the deconstruction process. In the process, the meaning stories were expanded from “thinly described” to thickly “described stories” - see among others White (2005: 10).

In these interviews the co-researchers were asked to assess the meaningfulness of their lives and to assign a metric to this value. This metric was determined by the co-researchers and has been anything from the size of the centre in a flower of their choice or a number on a self-determined scale. This metric was used to determine a value which could be used as a reference point; this was revisited during the course of the research process to assess the progress made.

Once these interviews have been conducted and reflected upon mostly by means of letters or e-mails written to the co-researchers, the meaning discourses from these conversations were collated and returned to the group. The group then reconvened and reflected upon the discourses identified during the initial exploratory story telling phase of the research. The group was now invited to make changes to this list of discourses, adding any other discourses they might consider critical to the process or even deciding that some of the discourses could be disregarded.

Another dialogue was then started – the dialogue between the participant discourses and published texts. I now researched the discourses in the literature, reporting the findings back to the research group as I did. Once again, no artificial boundaries were introduced to the research process: the texts were sourced from any relevant disciplines and not only from Theology or Practical Theology for that matter. Thus a multi-disciplinary conversation will always be taking place.

The research group was invited to reflect and comment on what the published literature had to say about these discourses they have identified. Once again, power relations have been managed very carefully, sensitizing the group to the value and the validity of their contributions to the process. This dynamic process have been maintained until the dynamic had been exhausted, at which stage this study report was prepared and handed over to the academic process for its own dialogue with the text.

### 3.5 Reporting the research – some ethical implications

*It says to the audience ‘here is my story of the good’ as opposed to ‘I proclaim the universal good’.*

Reason and Bradbury (2008:165)

As far as the reporting ethic is concerned, Hosking (1999: 122) comments that PAR as relational process does not proclaim universality, offering research reports as a representative record which

can be replicated and generalised to non-local settings. This results from it being inherently a relational local process which does not depart from a starting point with constructions of *ontologically independent persons and a natural world*. We are therefore not suggesting that the ongoing process of reflection on meaningfulness as instrumental means to some non-local end.

The construction derived from this research process may have some potential *legitimacy* outside the relational setting of this study, but we do propose that the process of the research could become interesting in its own right. In Hosking's words:

*In other words, the research process can be viewed as a way of 'going on' in relation, constructing knowledges, doing things, and socially validating them as e.g., good, relevant, and useful...*

According to her proposition, research in being construction, may be constructed in relation to the standard or received view of science, or may be constructed in relation to other game rules (see e.g., Woolgar, 1996).

Reason and Bradbury (2008:165) suggest that reporting action research *illustrates values in action* and becomes more like storytelling than like *sermonizing*. Shotter (1999) has written on this topic suggesting a culture of "witness-writing" rather than "aboutness-writing". Reporting should therefore, as all the other processes within the research project, be controlled by the research community.

## Chapter 4. Voices that matter – introducing the stories of the co-researchers

**“GREAT THINGS ARE NOT DONE BY IMPULSE, BUT BY A SERIES OF SMALL THINGS BROUGHT TOGETHER”**

UrCareer slogan

Now that the context of the study has been described in the first chapter, an epistemology has been adopted in chapter two and the research methodology has been described in the third chapter, it is time to invite the voices of the co-researchers into this study conversation. The first three chapters created the ethical framework or context for the study, arguing the points of why this study was considered to be necessary, how the knowledge process would constitute new relational realities and how the research process would be conducted and managed. But now centre stage will be occupied by my fellow researchers, introducing their stories of meaningfulness and authenticating the research process as they do.

In this chapter, a record of the conversations which formed the fibre of the research process will be provided. The introductory paragraphs will create a work context by telling the UrCareer story. This together with the individual stories of the co-researchers from UrCareer can be seen as the company identity. Before any of the personal stories and the company narrative were included in this thesis, all the co-researchers first had to approve the content. Their consent was obtained and any modifications they suggested, was introduced.

Following this section, the fellow researchers will tell their life stories of meaningfulness. They will start to tell their stories, after which I will respond with some questions which will reflect on the discourses within these life stories. Externalising and deconstruction will be used to identify the discourses, reflect on the power relationships involved in these discourses and understandings. Once they have had the opportunity to respond to my reflections, we identified the key meaningfulness discourses present in the conversations, naming them “themes of meaningfulness”. The chapter will be concluded with a list of these themes which have been identified in a participatory process.

Every organisation has a story – as for individuals, company identity can also be thought of as storied.

Our research was done with UrCareer, a small recruitment agency. Here is UrCareer's story.

#### 4.1 The UrCareer Story (In their own words – excerpts from their website)

UrCareer believes a company is as good as its people. Remaining competitive and managing resources in a fast changing environment is becoming increasingly difficult. To complicate this even further is the adherence to South Africa's strict and complex labour laws, which not only proves to be time consuming but also distracts management from focussing on the company strategic objectives and targets.



We also believe that at the end we are all just human. We all have a need to succeed, to belong, to grow, to be loved and believe God is always in control. The only thing we can offer is opening doors and creating opportunities to great people who take ownership of their own careers.

We have a proven track record of going the extra mile. Our team is highly dedicated and committed to the task at hand.

UrCareer is a recruitment agency, doing things a bit differently. Although we are still relatively young (established in June 2006) we do recognise that excessive economic inequality affects stability of society and hampers economic growth.

#### 4.2 The Co-Researchers from UrCareer

These are quotes taken from the official UrCareer website and are quoted as they appeared on the web page.

##### AMORITA MALAN »



Managing Member has been involved in businesses (Small to Medium in size- & Corporate Companies) for the past 22 years. She started her career at the Armscor Group, later moved to Momentum Life who gave her a strong base to build her career on. She worked in Communications, Media & Medical industries for a couple of years but always felt drawn to her passion: Recruitment. Amorita enjoys outdoor sport, travelling and supports the Cheetahs!!!

**JURIE VENTER »**

Pretoria.

Jurie has been involved in business consulting for the past 12 years with special emphasis in the advertising, media & marketing fields. He has special interest in the arts & vintage cars. After living in Cape Town for 8 years he returned to his roots in

**LIDIA COETZEE »**

UrCareer provides the perfect environment to express my passions and values. Other interests are art, music and enjoying quality time with my family”.

When I ventured into the recruitment consulting industry in the 80's I realised that this is the field in which I wish to spend the rest of my career. My passion for building lasting business relationships, focus on service delivery and playing a positive role in assisting people to reach their career goals kept me in recruitment for all these

**ESTELLE HURN »**

Her hobbies include living life to the fullest and reading (Human Science and Behaviour).

Interested in Business Management, has a passion for Customer Service and enjoys matching candidates to her clients' profiles. Her dream - to be a successful career woman by helping as many people as possible. Honesty and integrity are 2 attributes that are very important to her. Estelle desires a foundation for success, not just in

**MILLICINDA VORSTER »**

Currently studying towards her CRM diploma through UNISA to broaden her knowledge on managing customer relationships and effective service delivery. Proud mom of little freckled face Jayden.

Passionate about service delivery. Serious about consistency and the need to establish our customers' requirements. She will endeavour to deliver what was promised. For the past 15 years she has worked in the Sales & Marketing Industries.

**MAHLATSE MATLALA »**

world.

Loves and is crazy about Ballroom and Latin dancing. Enjoys taking challenges head on and is passionate about recruitment. She holds a B.Soc.Sci degree and is currently studying BA (Hons) specializing in Industrial Psychology. Her next goal is to travel the

**DELICIA PILLAY »**

Has lived in 4 countries but don't get confused by the American accent – she is full blown “Proudly South African”. Delicia holds a B.Soc.Sci Degree and is currently tackling her Honours. She has also completed a specialized course in Human Resource Management. She is a people's person who is passionate about her candidates and clients. Delicia enjoys travelling and is eager to add to her list of countries visited.

**SHARON MEULENBELD »**

Happily married to Frank, a chaplain in the military. They share the same goal which is adding value to people's lives. Sharon has been in the banking industry for about 16years which has developed a strong customer care focus. During her spare time she enjoys scrapbooking, embroidery, reading and entertaining. Her eagerness to learn and willingness to help others makes her a much loved team member. She enjoys travelling especially within Africa and has the passport stamps to prove it!! She has been to Uganda, Swaziland, Zambia, Zimbabwe, Lesotho and Botswana.

**LEZANNE BOTHA »**

Proudly from the States (Free States!!!) had to settle down in Blue Bull territory. Balance plays an important role and she loves nature and the outdoors. Lezanne has been in the Customer Care Relations field for the past 7 years, more specifically on recruitment past few years. She is focused on building strong relationships with her clients and has a passion for Labour laws.

### 4.3 My own story and how it relates to this study

My personal relationship with this study has a binary character. It involves both my story of academic personal development and my own quest for a more meaningful life, a life which I personally can consider significant.

When I was 13 years old the seed was first planted that I might have the ability to obtain a postgraduate qualification and more specifically a doctoral qualification. This was part of the story which developed around academic achievement and suggestions by teachers, even at primary school level. Throughout my high school career this story added events to its story line to become more embedded in my life story. It culminated in me being placed 4<sup>th</sup> in the then Cape Province in my Matric exams. This generated a certain expectation of where my academic career could go, both personally and in the verbalised and more subtle suggestions from important others - like parents and teachers - in my life throughout my formal full-time academic career.

Certain discourses in society – academic and non-academic – led me to believe that a doctoral qualification was the only logical apex of academic progress. It was also suggested to me that a doctoral degree was the only means to academic credibility.

Thus, obtaining a doctoral degree has been an integral part of my (knowledge) story for almost as long as I can remember.

As I grew older in my school years, my career dreams systematically changed from the illustrious to the significant, which I defined for myself as a career which could benefit others. When achievement threatened to let me lose my focus and become the sole objective of my studies, I reflected on where my (academic) career was heading and did the very unpopular thing to stop my studies in the middle of my first year at university and take a six months' break from studying.

When I went back to university the next year, I was committed to become more socially involved and although my academic achievement remained fairly consistent, I experienced my university life as more meaningful. Unfortunately my choice of a study area did not meet the significance criteria I set for myself.

I qualified as a statistician, which may seem as a paradox, seeing that it is not a career with a high level of social involvement. The fact that I lectured mathematical statistics at the University of Port Elizabeth (now the Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University) did however provide me with the opportunity to help develop students - even if it was only academically.

However, I have always had the desire to become more directly involved in helping other people and eventually an opportunity arose in 1997 when I was accepted into an MTh program in pastoral therapy at Unisa. This also served to give me exposure to the narrative approach, an event which proved to be the Rubicon of my own meaning making story. This study is the direct result of the seeds which were planted during my MTh studies and of my ever inquiring nature with a very strong desire to always learn more.

In choosing a study topic, formulating the objectives and adopting an epistemology, I was guided by a personal ethic which required that the research should not attempt to generalise or categorise - or put people in boxes - (see the opening quotation in the opening pages of this thesis); it should really make a difference *as assessed by the stakeholders of the study process*; its outcome should not merely be a document which will gather dust on some academic department library shelf; and it should be a text which I will be proud to add to my own personal story.



Henceforth I will refer to myself as research facilitator or study facilitator, indicating the (de-centred) role in which I would like to position myself during this study.

#### 4.4 First letters (e-mails)

I have asked my co-researchers to introduce themselves and tell us their stories about meaningfulness. The e-mails are posted verbatim as they were forwarded to me. I have responded to some of the statements made by the co-researchers, asking some externalising questions and exploring the discourses which were present in their responses to my initial request for stories. As will be clear, some of these discourses were deconstructed in the process.

All the e-mails were preserved in the original language preferred by the fellow researchers.

In reporting my co-researchers' conversations I will often use italics to indicate my questions and responses, which normal fonts and style will report my fellow researchers' words.

##### 4.4.1 Delicia's Story

Dear Francois

How are you? Sorry it has taken me so long to reply, this week has been hectic after the breaks! I hope my feedback to your questions below is relevant and you can use it, if not feel free to let me know.

**Intro** – My name is Delicia Pillay. I was born in South Africa and moved to the states when I was 16 months old. I have lived in America, Nigeria and Uganda. I am a proud South African however I also very patriotic to my indian heritage and the cultures of the countries I grew up in. I studied Psychology and would like to continue on and obtain a PhD; my dad is a Geneticist with a PhD and I would like to follow in his footsteps in terms of education. I am still working in my first job as a Recruitment Consultant and I do enjoy it immensely. I believe I am an easy going person though I know I can have an 'attitude' at times. I think a major factor in my story has to do with other peoples thinking. I am very interested in how we are all the same and yet there is so much ignorance and hate towards people. Living with other cultures has made my interest in psychology grow. I am most concerned with racism and cruelty towards animals.

**A life that matters** – I believe every life matters. I believe in Karma and even an animal deserves to be treated with respect that we should give each other. I guess a life that matters is a very personal opinion as some people are very focused on their career for example and would look down on someone with less ambition or on a garbage man. However the garbage man might be more

content and happy with his life than the businessman. Therefore I suppose as long as your life has meaning for you and you are generally happy with your situation then you would feel your life matters.

**Words to describe meaningful/success/significance** – content; happy; to feel wanted; feel loved; feel needed; many of us equate success in terms of money however I also think of being successful in terms of having a rich life full of friends, family, laughter and love. Success can be passing exams. Significance can be your meaning in other peoples lives. Its important to have other people in your life that make you feel wanted and loved. It's a very lonely life if you do not have that significance to others.

**Meaningfulness in my life** – I know my life is meaningful as I am happy. My family is very important to me, I have 2 younger brothers and my parents who I know love me and only want the best for me. I have a lot of relatives however I choose not to incorporate my life with them as I have different views and beliefs that clash with theirs. Being around people like that only irritates me and shows me how many people there are in this world who lead sad and miserable lives because they only see the doom and gloom in the world. Instead I have friends that are my family; i am still in touch with childhood friends and my friends are loyal and genuine. I have been very successful in my work this year... not so successful in my driving license but I am on a mission for it and I will get it. I strive to feel good about life and the only way to do that is to make the right decisions and make others feel good about themselves. When someone is rude to me I take it very personally because I know I do not treat people the way I don't want to be treated. The excuse of a 'bad mood' is the most useless idea ever. I hate when people use their bad mood to bring other people down or get others to be in a mood as well!

**Progress** – the biggest thing in my life at the moment is obtaining my license and a car. I also need to get started with my honours as time is going by... I also want to continue with my placements because in this line of work no placements can give the impression that you are not pulling your weight. I take my work very seriously and I want my colleagues to know I am a hard worker who is serious about getting far in my career. Placements can be very unpredictable and you can put in a lot of work and at the end of the day a client can hire someone else. On a more personal note I would like to lose weight that I have picked up since graduating.

**Reflecting** – since I have had time to reflect on my life I have realised there is a major factor in my life that I choose to not think about as it brings me down. My boyfriend of 4 years is back in uganda

and though we are not together anymore we chat every day online. We are still friends, however I know my parents do not approve. My mom was fine with us, but my dad did not even give him a chance. Since the incident we have not brought it up and when I am with them we act as though it never happened. I sometimes wonder if they now know they behaved rashly and regret words spoken, but I will never ask. This is probably why the theme of racism and psychology is so strong in my life. An insight would be that I do not think about it or dwell on this because it just brings me down and I hate feeling low. Even if someone is rude or I see something unfair, it sits with me a long time and I have that gnawing feeling.

It was interesting to know everyone's definition of meaningfulness in their lives. We are all so different and I know my views are different from my colleagues however I think we are able to respect each other and not be judgemental. My views on meaningfulness will probably adjust as I get older and it's interesting to see how the younger people's views compare to the older ones in the office. I also know that religion is a sensitive topic in our office and my ideas may not be what the other Christians believe is right. I am a Christian however I do not believe that people of other religions or faiths are doomed to hell. I know this is not what is preached in most churches and I don't agree with it as I believe that is a man-made idea.

Hope this helps. Enjoy your weekend!

regards

**delicia pillay**

#### **4.4.1.1 My responses to Delicia's story**

- 1. I was wondering whether you could tell me more about the story of "Attitude"? Has "Attitude" ever played a role in your specific understanding of a "life that matters"? Has it ever strengthened your respectful bearing towards other people? How has "Attitude" affected your position on people who differ or other cultures? Has "Attitude" ever come in the way of "a life that matters"?*
- 2. You mention "content", "happy" and "meaning" when you are referring to "a life that matters"; would you care to elaborate on what makes you feel content? How is happiness understood in your own life? What gives meaning to your life? How do you create space for these "significance partners" in your life? What in your experience, helps to sustain these "partners"?*

3. *Am I right in hearing from the paragraph above that meaning in your life is closely associated with the **relationships** that you form and maintain? How do you know when you have “meaning in other people’s lives”?*

4. *Do I detect “Attitude” coming out to assist you in making a deliberate decision not to associate with the “doom and gloom” crowd? Is “bad mood” one of the adversaries of the “significance partners” (including “Attitude”)? How do you manage to refuse “bad mood” a place in your “life that matters”?*

5. *Perhaps you could on a scale from 1 to 10 indicate how far you are with each of these projects (perhaps you could draw a line 10cm long and mark with a “X” where you are at the moment). What **one** thing could advance you by at least 2 cm on these progress lines for each of the projects?*

6. *How is the “sitting with you” affecting your “happiness”, being “content” and being meaningful in others lives? Is “sitting with you” ganging up with “bad mood” against your “significance partners”?*

*How is “I will never ask” aligned with “Attitude”? Is prejudice or racism silencing you here?*

*How is your position about meaningfulness reflected in your position on religions?*

#### **4.4.1.2 Delicia’s responses to my questions**

1. “attitude’ refers to my short temper with people who are rude or do not treat others the way they would like to be treated. I demand good customer service; it’s just the way I think. However to some this can be construed as being snobby or stuck up. Attitude plays an important role in a life that matters, because a person’s attitude says a lot about them. It really can show you if they also believe your life matters, in the sense that they will respect you. My attitude is usually not affected by people who differ from me or by different cultures; I tend to get an attitude when someone gives one. So it can be someone from any culture.

2. Little things make me content; I always try to be optimistic about things. I failed my license for the 3<sup>rd</sup> time on Saturday. I felt like such a failure... I have spent a huge sum of money on this process and that to me is actually worse. To throw money away is something I hate. However I have to believe there was a reason for this otherwise I would go crazy. I didn’t dwell on it or shed a tear (though I felt like it). Instead I went out with my friends and had fun. I can be content with a good book and some cheesecake! For me to be happy, I don’t need to win the lottery. I also refuse to let

my weight bring me down; I do sometimes think I will be happier when I am my normal size... but who wants to say no to KFC? I like to laugh, I think when you are laughing there is no other way to feel but happy. I like comedies and stand up comedy. I also have friends who are hilarious and who can cheer you up in an instant, for that I am grateful. Friends, family, work, these all give meaning to my life. I create space for these things in my life by making plans with friends, going to visit my family for long weekends and of course I am at work during the week. Sustaining friendships is a 2 way thing; friends who make time for you also see you as a significant factor in their life. Friends who say 'let's meet up' but never attempt to I would rather do without. I have a ton of friends, however I also have a ton of 'acquaintances' or people I like to be around but they are not likely to be in my life for the long run. Making an effort to me is important to sustaining relationships.

3. You are right in saying relationships are very important to the meaning of life to me. Don't get me wrong; I am not a needy person who cannot be alone, or for something to matter someone has to see or know about it. I enjoy my own company, I go to the movies alone, have coffee and read a magazine at a coffee shop, shopping, etc. just because I am alone does not mean I am a loser or lonely. I think one can feel when they have meaning in others lives. There is a saying that people don't remember what u say to them, but they remember how u make them feel. Therefore I can feel when I am important to someone. They may send you an sms or email or just a look from them; however the way you feel lets you know as well. Some people are more expressive in their emotions or thoughts; this also shows meaning.

4. I suppose my attitude does assist me in making a decision not to associate with down in the dumps people. My relatives probably think I have an attitude, am a snob, or that I think I am better than them. However this is not the case at all. I suppose my 'attitude' can also be because I hate being fake. I would rather not go to Durban than to go and pretend, do the fake laugh and fake smiles and ask the fake questions. If I do not like someone I will be polite to them; but I will not go out of my way just to appear friendly and likeable. I suppose my attitude allows me not to care what others think or say!

Refusing 'bad mood' is a conscious effort. Of course it's easier to wallow in ones misery... on Saturday after my failed test I could have easily told my friends, let's sit at home, am not in the mood to get dressed up and go out, or to lie in my pajamas and sleep! But I consciously made the effort to do the exact opposite. And the rest of the day I didn't think about failing the test.

5. With my license I would say I am 8 cm in. The ONLY thing I can do to achieve those last 2 cm is to pass my test! It's very frustrating because I have been driving over a year now and I know I can drive, I can park and I can do an incline. However in the testing situation I make a mistake.

Placements wise or work wise, I would say I am 6 cm in. To gain an extra 2 I have embarked on making an HR presentation about cultural diversity in the workplace and if it goes well we can offer it to clients as a service. This is a big challenge for me; I will have to work very hard on it as it can bring in extra income for myself and the company.

On the weight loss side... Well I can say I am 5cm in. I drink over 2 litres of water a day; I don't have too much sugar, red meat or bread. However to increase 2 cm I should exercise more. In fact, any exercise at this point will make a difference.

6. The "sitting with me" definitely affects my happiness. It is a lot harder to just forget someone being rude to me than it is for me to get over my own shortcomings. (License) at times this will affect my whole mood and then I would rather read a book in bed than to be social.

The 'I will never ask' is not aligned with my attitude. My 'attitude' would tell me to question my parents, to ask them if they even thought it through before saying such harsh words to me. And in fact that night my attitude did question them but they were so angry they were not listening to me. I would rather just not bring it up because I am probably afraid my parents will say something that I would never think they could say. That is what happened last time and it was a shock to me that my dad had prejudiced views. My perfect dad who I look up to and admire so much could think in such a small minded way was something I had to deal with. However since that time my parents have met my brothers black girlfriend and they were perfectly ok with it. I am not sure if it is just because he is a guy or because they have had time to realize what a mistake they made in my case. And the fact my mom still asks about Baker also tells me she regrets what happened.

I think my position on meaningfulness does reflect with my position on religions. Meaningfulness is very personal to me; meaning two people can have completely different views but we are both right. In the same way I believe religions really all have the same core but is just externally different. Who is to say one is completely wrong? I knew a girl in America who was agnostic however she had such a good heart. She was kind, and to me was more of a Christian than many of the teens at my church. Therefore I see religion as a personal thing; this may not be too 'Christian' of me but in my heart I know God and that's all that matters to me!

#### 4.4.2 Mahlatse's Story

Hi Francois

Hope you had a great weekend, apologies for getting back to you this late.

- Could you please provide me with an introductory paragraph which I could use to start the account of your story in the study document?

Mahlatse, born and bred in Limpopo, grew up in a village Jane Furse. Always want to be a top achiever in everything she does. Her passion is research and development especially in the economic sector. She would love to see SA being one of the top countries in the world in terms of their economic status. Passionate about helping other people as well, find joy in people happiness. She is a God-fearing woman, loves prayer and loves to sing, talk and motivate others.

- Please confirm your unique version of "a life that matters"

Being happy in everything that one does.

- What words have you used to describe meaningfulness / success / significance?

Achievements, happiness,

- What will make up / constitute this meaningfulness in your life?

Top achiever, financial freedom and being happy.

- How will you know that you are making progress towards this more meaningful life?

All my dreams must come true.

My life keeps changing everyday, I like giving out to see more people happy, and I always look back everyday to see what difference I have made in others.

I did get insights but I would really keep them private now as I am still trying to evaluate them.

Being happy, and making everything surrounding me part of my life, more natural

No, people tend to put material things first as their meaningful life whereas there are more important things to cherish that will really give meaning to one's life.

Thanks Francois, hope everything is in order.

#### 4.4.2.1 *My responses to Mahlatse's story*

1. *I was wondering whether you tell me a few stories about you helping other people, "finding joy in their happiness". How about adding a few "motivate" stories? How do you enter the lives of other people? How do you know what will help them?  
You use a very specific phrase to tell me about your religious position – would you care to elaborate on "God-fearing"? How is this understanding affecting your "life that matters"?*
2. *What does this understanding of "a life that matters" feed upon? What are its worst enemies? How do you sustain being happy? If I could call in a witness about your happiness, who would that be? What would he/she be telling me about Mahlatse The Happy One? What role has s/he been playing in your story of happiness?*
3. *What achievements have formed part of your happiness? How do you decide that something you have done is an achievement?*
4. *When you say "Top Achiever" who decides that? When would you be financially "free"?*
5. *What are these dreams that you referred to at the moment? How important is it for you to dream?*
6. *You mentioned people putting material things first: this sounds interesting. What did you have in mind? Why?*

#### 4.4.2.2 *Mahlatse's response to my questions*

1. Firstly I help by being at their service. E.g. When I was doing my 3<sup>rd</sup> year in varsity I was approached by thus older lady who had no work, money and proper winter clothes. She asked if I had at least a job for her, I then remembered that I had 2 months laundry that have been piling. I asked her to do washing for me on a Saturday, she did. I could see that she was happy that at least she was doing something to put bread on the table for her grandchildren. Initially I wanted to pay her 250 but when I told my granddad about the whole thing he offered to pay extra and in turn paid 550 for the lady. She was so happy; the look on her face was incredible.  
Secondly, motivating people is when I talk to anyone I meet in taxi or a bus or even while shopping and I get to talk to people. I share knowledge I have about jobs, or anything I can remark on positively.  
To approach or enter in people's lives I smile. Sometimes people approach me.



I do not what will help them I just say what's in my heart and they tend to add some advice I gave them to their own solutions.

I got saved in July 1999 while I was in high school. God has been the centre of my life because I would not do anything without consulting him first through His word. As much as I trust God, I fear Him as well. He is marvellous, but the one thing I do not want is His wrath falling upon me. Therefore that is why I use God-fearing.

A life that matters to me is being happy in anything that one does. God provides for all my needs, he supports me, he comforts, He guides me and He literally does everything for me. I believe without Him in my life there is no life that matters. It is by His grace that I am able to do anything I want.

Religious position- I call myself a Christian as I just want to be like Christ.

2. A life that matters feeds upon the knowledge that one possess, could be limited could be unlimited. I go by the phrase what you see is what you get. I do sometimes tend to study the underlying features into a situation, but they come up to be the worst enemy at that point however realize that I have the power within to really up root any uncomfortable situations. This power comes from the knowledge I have.

Always positive and rejoicing every day.

Anyone who knows me, but my **granddad**. They will probably tell you that I am always happy, energetic, stubborn and if I am not happy about something I tend to withdraw from that for a while.

3. Getting my degree from a university, being able to sustain myself and both of my brothers as well as upgrading my grandparent's house. Anything that feels good to me and it is visible and also making others close to me happy.
4. I decide that I am a top achiever. When I start to Nett R1 million rand per annum.
5. I dream of being an extra ordinary woman. Now this is based on Prov 31: The Virtuous woman. She was a woman of God, a woman with many talents. She was domesticated, business minded and compassionate. I want to be just like her. That is my dream, and it is important to dream as I draw energy from that, as well as perseverance to become what I have dreamed of. At the moment I want to be a top biller at work, grow spiritually, meaning spending more time meditating on the word of God and letting Him reveal what He wants me to do more in His kingdom.

6. Well for starters, life is more important than money, clothes, cars and being famous (wanting everyone to notice you). Yes all this are necessary to have but should not rule your life.

Love, Caring, compassion, supportive, passion, knowledge (positive), understanding of other people, peace, these are the terms I would have to always have first as they really are the cornerstone of a meaningful life and they bring happiness in one's life.

#### 4.4.3 Amorita's Story

Amorita used the original e-mail that I had sent to them as the framework for story and in a cryptic manner filled in her story after the paragraphs which she considered important. The introduction is therefore the original request by e-mail that I have sent to the co-researchers.

Meaningfulness: Being the salt and light to a dark and insecure world

Success: Safe and sincere relationships with all & being financial independent

Significance: To make a measurable positive difference in the lives of others

*What will make up / constitute this meaningfulness in your life?*

Too be 100% sure that I will go to heaven!

*How will you know that you are making progress towards this more meaningful life?*

Inner peace

The way I handle conflict and disappointments

Have deep meaningful relationships (with my staff, friends, boyfriend(s))

Making the right choices (business, love life, friends, etc)

*I am also curious about:*

*What has been happening now that you have had time to reflect on your life and the lives of your colleagues?*

I am more relaxed with them; there is a certain calmness and compassion when dealing with my staff. E.g. I know now how important is success in my company is to them

*Did you get any new insights which were valuable to you and which you could perhaps share with the rest of the group?*

I definitely understand my colleagues better – the fact that they trust the team by showing their vulnerable side was extremely special to me

*Did you notice any "themes" common to our understanding of "a life that matters" or meaningfulness?*

Not really – maybe – everyone here is quite people orientated – making a difference in other's lives (get them a better job etc)

*What is behind our understanding of meaningfulness?*

Should I die tomorrow – I will leave a huge empty space in other's lives!

*Do you buy into what is generally understood as "meaningful"? Why or why not?*

My perception is that most people I know really want to make a positive difference around them

#### **4.4.3.1 My questions about Amorita's story**

- 1. You use a few interesting metaphors / symbols when you refer to meaningfulness, Amorita. How does the Bible influence your understanding of meaningfulness?*
- 2. How does the "dark and insecure world" influence you? And then, how do you influence the "dark and insecure world"?*
- 3. When you talk about success, you mention relationships. How strong is your relationship with "meaningfulness"? Who could be witnesses to this relationship? How have they become role players in your meaningfulness story?*
- 4. How did "safe" and "sincere" enter the relationship story?*
- 5. How will you know that you are financially independent? Who will decide that? Independent as compared to what?*
- 6. You describe significance in terms of being "measurable". What measures would you be using? How will you know that these measures agree with the difference the other people want or prefer?*
- 7. Where are you on your way to 100% certainty? How will you know?*
- 8. Please tell me about conflict and disappointments. What are your relationship with these characters ("conflict" and "disappointment")?*

9. *How will you decide that a choice was “right”? What role do “choices” play in the meaning story?*
10. *How can we go on to ensure an environment which would sustain this trust?*
11. *You mention “making a positive difference”. How will they know and who decides that their contribution is making a “positive difference”?*

#### 4.4.3.2 *Amorita’s responses to my questions*

1. I use the Bible as my base
2. Tend to make me negative and focus more on the uncontrollable. I don’t always feel safe in this country (sometimes I am scared during night time when I hear noises or something woke me up, also need to stay alert for false teachings or insincere people around me) In business people are not always trustworthy, battle to get my money out of them. The media and movies make fun of religion or Jesus, I hate that
3. (Trying to be light and bring fun to them, want to make people laugh and trust me, and know that I care. In my work I try to contribute in terms of their careers)
4. Hopefully – very strong, but I know I am not there yet, not sure if I will ever get to that place, but that’s not important, what is more important is that I’m trying
5. Rina, Hannah and Christa, my best friends. Jannie, my ex-boyfriend, still a good friend, Annatjie, our talks in the morning is extremely valuable to me – more than the exercising
6. We always talk about meaningfulness and some of us are on the same page, I trust and look up to them. If we not always on the same page, it’s also okay because the respect still remain
7. People are not always who they seem to be, it’s not their fault, only God is unchangeable. Initially I took it very personal if people hurt /lied / cheated on me – but I’ve realised that it’s their character – not who I am and that we are all just human, I myself are not always 100% honest as well, which I’m not proud of. Bottom-line – we should forgive others and not judge them or make them feel guilty about mistakes.
8. Although I don’t feel safe with people I can’t trust, it doesn’t mean I don’t want them to be part of my life or I hate them, just won’t expose myself to them. Was disappointed in previous romantically relationships where guys haven’t been always honest and exclusive – which made me feel vulnerable and insecure. These days I try not to “put” myself out there and am much more “picky” with the friends (any kind of friend) I am close with
9. For me, being in a situation where I am back in the property sector, lives in my own home, and if I do not bring any new business in for 3 months I will still be financially stable. Not to

have any debt in my bank accounts. Everything in a plus on all my bank statements – no overdrafts!

10. Measurables – 80% of my relationships to be strong and trusting (including my clients). I will experience sincerity and trust with those around me when I reach my goal.

11. I'm handling disappointment better than conflict. Will deal with conflict, but will delay it first and strategise a way to deal with it. With disappointment, I take time out, spend time alone, avoid others for a while – don't want to be bad company during disappointing times. For me I made a right choice if it was a win-win situation for both parties. When trust between people has been established. When I can laugh, be silly and talk deep stuff with the same person, trust them with my opinions (sometimes not so logically!!) and not judge me by doing things a bit different

#### 4.4.4 Millicinda's Story

Brief on my Life Story:

[I] grew up in a very strict conservative family

Dad's militaristic approach to upbringing was suppressive

Couldn't live out my own interest and develop my talents

Was shy as a kid and a big part of my adult life

Taught myself to overcome shyness and built "self confidence" which I only got much later in life

Enormous milestone in my life was when I moved to Cape Town. It gave me a chance to get to know myself properly and to discover my strengths and weaknesses. Helped me to overcome a lot of my reservations and it challenged me and it developed me as a person. It changed my perspective of myself.

Another big event in my life was the birth of my son. It moved my focus from me to my child and it changed my whole life. Decision making was different, even my friends changed. It was very challenging and I sometimes struggle to find balance in my life.

I am currently very career and success focused. I am determined to succeed and strive to reach my goals. I am still focused on my child's happiness and development something I will find very hard to compromise on because his well being is also partially fulfilling my purpose.

I haven't had much "time" to focus on meaningfulness and purpose lately because I don't want to lose focus. I try and live out certain values in my journey to succeed in what I'm currently doing.

Meaningfulness to me would be to identify and live one's purpose. I truly believe that each one of us has a specific purpose and usually this purpose goes hand in hand with your deepest desires. My purpose I believe was given to me by God and He pre-destined me for a certain task.

Success is to achieve my goals without compromising myself.

Significance – There is always people making a significant difference in one's life but I try not to rely on that. The faith and believe of one person in your life can make all the difference (Amorita for instance believes in me and that makes a huge difference). Significance is the difference I can make in other peoples' lives because their presence in your life is not accidental. By that I do not mean that we have to be people pleasers.

In our pursuit for meaningfulness I believe we need to acknowledge God in everything we do.

Progress? Contentment and peace?

This session is a reminder that we must be careful not to get so caught up in life and achieving goals that we miss the target and lose focus of our purpose.

#### **4.4.4.1 My response to Millicinda's story**

*Dankie vir jou terugvoer. Dit het my regtig aan die dink gesit.*

*Omdat ek met jou wil gesels om die res van die gesprek met die res van die groep te deel, sal ek hiervandaan in Engels voortgaan.*

*I would like to pick up on 3 or 4 things you mentioned in your story, namely "suppressive" upbringing, move to Cape Town, purpose, and other people's belief in you.*

*You mention that the strict upbringing you had was suppressive. What passions and talents did it suppress? This relationship between you and "suppressive upbringing", what influence did it have on you? What influence did you have on "suppressive upbringing"? What "voices" in society supported "suppressive upbringing"? How was your own voice silenced in the process?*

*What did the move to Cape Town symbolize? What did this say about you? Have there been similar events since then. What does this say about a "meaningful life" or future?*

*Tell me more about this move please. Did some people close to you oppose this? What advice did you get about this? What values and principles are illustrated by this move of yours? How do these strengthen your resolve for your “purpose”-driven life in the future?*

*You have mentioned purpose a few times. How has “purpose” become a “life partner” in your “meaning story”? What is your relationship with “purpose”? Is “purpose” a kind partner? How have you learnt to be sure about the real “face” of purpose? What assisted you in this quest? What can you teach us about “purpose”? Is “purpose” personal or does it link up with “significance” as you describe it in the last paragraphs of your letter? What role do relationships play here?*

*What do you think people like Amorita see in you that allows or convinces her to believe in you? Are there more stories like that? What does this say about you? If you use this like a filter which you can fit onto a camera lens, what does the world look like through this new filter?*

*Thank you for participating.*

*Regards, François*

#### **4.4.4.2 Millicinda’s response to my questions**

Francois, I don’t really want to share all these things with my colleagues. I am selective about what I share mostly because I have made peace with a lot of things in my life and I find it almost negative to revisit (Subsequently, Millicinda agreed to share her story with the rest of the group).

*What passions and talents did it suppress?*

I was very creative as a child, dreamt of being a fashion designer. I had to do accountancy and science, even registered for BSc. on my dad’s persistence (hated it) Dad reckoned that there is not a place in the world for artists. (To his absolute horror, I bunked my whole 2<sup>nd</sup> year and in the 3<sup>rd</sup> year I changed to BA. Arts – they took it so badly that I couldn’t finish my first year and I had to move out of home)

*This relationship between you and “suppressive upbringing”, what influence did it have on you?*

I didn’t develop my own character, was always quiet and subdued. I was also fearful. Didn’t want to try anything for fear of not succeeding. Things easily made me nervous and I suffered from very bad migraines since Gr.1 (I was very scared of my dad as a child – he was very agro. He worked very hard and he had to take care of a lot of people not just our immediate family). The relationship between me and my mom was very bad (she was physically abusive when I was a baby and became

verbally and emotionally abusive as I grew up. Could never understand why she didn't love me). I really had no self image as a child and a greater part of my adulthood. Through the years I have reasoned out most of these to myself (My mom was a good person but I was an unplanned baby, my brother was only 3 months old when she fell pregnant with me. She already "had" to get married, she tricked my dad into marriage by falling pregnant and falling pregnant with me was not welcomed – we just never had any bond whatsoever)

*What influence did you have on "suppressive upbringing"?*

I eventually became rebellious and I suppose stubborn. I actually just wanted to leave home. I know that I was fairly intelligent but I didn't make much of it. I mostly did work where I didn't get noticed much.

*What "voices" in society supported "suppressive upbringing"?*

Rest of family / First serious relationship

*How was your own voice silenced in the process?*

I didn't have much of a voice ...

*What did the move to Cape Town symbolize?*

(I just turned 30) I had to overcome most of my fears. I had to overcome my shyness as well. I just had to succeed. (and luckily I did achieve my sales targets for the first year, wasn't easy but I did it) It was my first sales job and I always thought I would be a terrible sales person but I end up enjoying it. I actually find out that I am a people's person where I always believed that I am a loner. I also had to travel far distances by car on my own which I have never done before and that also was a great challenge at the time. I discovered that I love travelling and I love exploring new things.

*What did this say about you?*

I proved to myself that if I put my mind to it I can succeed.

*Have there been similar events since then?*

Yes, my decision not to get married when I fell pregnant and raise my child by myself.

*What does this say about a "meaningful life" or future?*

I haven't really focused on a meaningful life – more on survival. I sincerely hope that the future will bring me closer to a meaningful life.

*The move:*

Nobody really interfered, I was sad to leave my sister behind. I didn't have a boyfriend at the time. Some friends said that I will be back in two months, I stayed for four years.

*What values and principles are illustrated by this move of yours?*



Values and principals??? I wanted to see what I was capable of and I wanted to break away from everything I knew and try something new. The move wasn't planned at all. I have never been to Cape Town.

*How do these strengthen your resolve for your "purpose"-driven life in the future?*

I have come to learn that I am very strong and that I can face challenges. My purpose, I am not sure about that. I in a way I believe that my God given purpose and what I am doing now is not related. I am focus driven – maybe survival driven – not my Godly purpose driven.

*You have mentioned purpose a few times. How has "purpose" become a "life partner" in your "meaning story"?*

I was very spiritual as a child and I believed that I would dedicate my life to my purpose which I believed was to work with orphans, now it seems a bit impossible. For now looking after my child day by day is my purpose. And, making a difference even if it is just seasonal in people's lives (I had plenty of that). Purpose helps you to pick up your life and continue.

*What is your relationship with "purpose"?*

I am not in sync with my original purpose.

*Is "purpose" a kind partner?*

I think living your purpose will be very fulfilling.

*How have you learnt to be sure about the real "face" of purpose?*

Not sure, I struggled for a few years now to find out what purpose is? What is the purpose of living? Been through a lot of tragic events, my sister died, I was extremely devastated. I lived for 3 years so close to the feeling of death, that purpose became absolute. I was only functional not purposeful. But finding purpose is vital.

*What assisted you in this quest?*

I am not there yet. I truly believe that the main reason for this because I am a bit confused about Christianity, I believe that Christianity became distorted by people. I don't believe in the latter day teachings of the charismatic, I believe if you take away a lot of these teachings and principals (prosperity and faith healing etc) people will not support Christianity anymore. I became confused about the role God plays in our lives. But having said that I truly believe that if God wasn't with me I would never have survived. I believe that God created us for His purpose and His purpose will not be boastful, self gain, proud etc. I believe I must give and make a difference.

*What can you teach us about "purpose"?*

*We can't live without purpose. Purpose is different for each one of use. I also think God created us for a purpose. If we do not live to achieve our purpose, life becomes empty.*

*Is "purpose" personal or does it link up with "significance" as you describe it in the last paragraphs of your letter?*

It is personal but it can link up with significance. Think that living your purpose will make you feel significant.

*What role do relationships play here?*

Relationships can contribute but I think we mustn't rely on relationships to define our purpose or significance.

*What do you think people like Amorita see in you that allows or convinces her to believe in you?*

Commitment maybe?

*Are there more stories like that?*

Don't think so

*What does this say about you?*

I am not focused currently on what difference people can make in my life (and I know people do), I am more focused on the role I have to play to make things work.

*If you use this like a filter which you can fit onto a camera lens, what does the world look like through this new filter?*

I've got mixed feelings about this. I have come to learn that life can be very hard especially if you "fall" out but I also believe that life can be very rewarding (I have a zest for life, I appreciate the fact that I am alive).

Having said all off the above it might create the impression that I am negative but I am a very enthusiastic person. I look for the positive and try and not surround myself with negative depressed people. Small things excite me and I create little opportunities to make life interesting for myself. I try to reason things out for myself.

#### 4.4.5 Estelle's Story

Estelle preferred to write her story in Afrikaans:

Ek was gebore in Klerksdorp. Kort daarna het ons Pretoria toe getrek. Ek is die oudste van drie kinders. Ons het baie rondgetrek toe ek in die Laerskool was as gevolg van my pa se beroepsontwikkeling. Ek was altesaam in ses Laerskole en het dit baie geniet om te trek en nuwe mense te ontmoet. Ek het die Kaap vreeslik geniet! Ons het daar gewoon vir twee jaar. Ons het na Pretoria toe getrek toe ek met Hoërskool begin het. Ek het darem vinnig vriende gemaak. My ouers het geskei toe ek in my st.6 jaar was. Ek bly by my pa, en my boeties by my ma. Na Matriek het ek besluit om Sielkunde te swot by die Universiteit van Pretoria. Ek wou nog altyd Sielkunde swot, maar

het in my eerste jaar besef dat dit nie vir my was nie. Ek het werk gekry by UrCareer en geniet dit vreeslik baie.

My doel op die oomblik is om hard te werk, ondervinding te kry en as persoon te groei. Ek glo dat die Here 'n plan het met almal se lewens. Ons almal maak deel uit van Sy groot raadsplan. Ek glo en vertrou dat die Here my sal lei en my sal help om my doel in die lewe te bereik.

Ek hanteer konflik baie sleg, maar werk nog daaraan! Ek geniet dit om te werk en het altyd geglo ek kan onder druk werk.

Dit is vir my lekker om in 'n warm atmosfeer te werk. Wanneer ek iets bereik, moedig dit my aan om harder te werk. Ek kry maklik seer, maar steek dit goed weg.

Ek glo dat die Here niks op mens se pad sal plaas as Hy nie dink jy sal dit kan hanteer nie.

Die mense in my lewe beteken alles vir my!

Warm regards

Estelle Hurn

UrCareer

#### **4.4.5.1 My questions about Estelle's story**

*Seeing that Estelle wrote her story in Afrikaans, I respected her language preference and responded in Afrikaans. This is an example to staying with the client's (or in this case, the co-researcher's) experience-near language.*

*Estelle, baie dankie vir jou lewensverhaal wat jy bereid was om met ons te deel. Dis altyd 'n voorreg en ook iets kosbaars as mense hulle lewensverhale op hierdie manier deel.*

*Ek het gewonder wat jou siening oor 'n "betekenisvolle lewe" is.*

- *Watter woorde gebruik jy gewoonlik as jy oor sinvol leef dink (byvoorbeeld "n lewe wat saak maak", suksesvol, gelukkig, tevrede)?*
- *Waaruit bestaan so 'n "lewe wat saak maak" vir jou?*
- *Wie het 'n rol gespeel in jou verstaan van 'n betekenisvolle lewe?*
- *Waar staan jy op die oomblik op die pad na so 'n "lewe wat saakmaak"?*
- *Hoe sal jy weet jy is daar?*

*Jy vertel dat jy glo dat die Here 'n "plan met almal se lewens" het en dat ons almal deel uitmaak van sy Groot Raadsplan.*

- *Hoe weet ons wat die Here se plan met ons is?*
- *Watter rol speel dit in jou eie siening oor Lewensin of 'n "lewe wat saakmaak"?*

*Wat is jou doel in die lewe? Wat is die verhaal agter hierdie doel?*

*Jy skryf: "Ek glo dat die Here niks op mens se pad sal plaas as Hy nie dink jy sal dit kan hanteer nie."*

*Het daar al sulke dinge oor jou pad gekom? Hoe het jy dit hanteer? Het jou lewe steeds sinvol gebly te midde van die uitdaging?*

*Verder sê jy "Die mense in my lewe beteken alles vir my!"*

*Watter mense speel sleutelrolle in jou lewe? Wat sou hulle ons van Estelle kon vertel?*

#### **4.4.5.2 Estelle's response to my questions**

1. Ek sou se dat sukses sal wees wanneer ek 'n werk het waar ek gelukkig is en my volle potensiaal kan bereik. Wanneer ek as mens ontwikkel het en tevrede voel met wat ek tot dusver bereik het. Wanneer ek weet waarheen ek oppad is met my lewe.
2. Jy vra 'Waaruit bestaan so 'n "lewe wat saak maak" vir jou?' Dit bestaan uit mense wat positief bydra tot my lewe. 'n Gemaklike werksomgewing, sukses en tevredenheid met wat ek bereik het.
3. Op jou vraag oor wie my verstaan van 'n betekenisvolle lewe beïnvloed het, kan ek as volg antwoord: My pa het my nog altyd aangemoedig om hard te werk en my beste te gee in alles wat ek doen. Hy het vir my baie riglyne gegee. Almal het maar 'n eie idee van wat 'n "betekenisvolle lewe" moet wees.
4. Waar ek staan op die pad na 'n betekenisvolle lewe? Ek sou sê dat ek nou 10% daar is. Ek het nou begin met my werk ens.
5. Ek sal weet ek is daar wanneer ek gelukkig en gerus gaan voel.
6. Hoe weet ons wat die Here se plan met ons is? Ons weet nie. Ons moet maar net glo en vertrou. Ek plaas my vertroue in die Here en glo dat Hy my sal help en lei.

7. My doel in die lewe? My doel op die oomblik is om as mens te groei, en om goed te doen in my werk.
8. Ja, daar het al moeilike dinge oor my pad gekom. Ja. Ek kon dit beter hanteer het. Ek reageer te vinnig. Ek het my lewe bevraagteken maar het uit al my ervarings geleer.
9. My pa, en my vriende speel sleutelrolle in my lewe.

#### 4.4.6 Jurie's Story

Hi Francois

Jammer ek antwoord nou eers! Laat aande gehad om op te vang met al die emails. Hoop my antwoorde help.

Hiermee my antwoorde:

*Could you please provide me with an introductory paragraph which I could use to start the account of your story in the study document?*

My name is Jurie Venter. I was born in Ladysmith Natal, the eldest of 5 children. I had a very happy childhood and grew up with my father being a Minister and my mother a housewife. We moved quite a lot which I believe also brought a sense maturity in having to adapt to new environments.

After I finished school I had to National Service. I joined the Police Force where I was stationed in the PRO division of the Computer Division. A lot of my foundation in my life was build there. With the knowledge and experience I gained in the Police Force, I started my own business and was working for myself since then up to June 2005. My mother passed away in 1991 which was a huge event in my life. It took me years to accept her death but was also the reason I committed myself to God. He's now the centre point of my life.

*What words have you used to describe meaningfulness / success / significance?*

Meaningfulness - Able to help and be there for other people.

Success - To discover the purpose God has for your life.

Significance – In making a difference in other peoples lives.

*What will make up / constitute this meaningfulness in your life?*

To discover the purpose God has for your life – When you discover that you feel complete.

*How will you know that you are making progress towards this more meaningful life?*

In growing in yourself through your relationship with your God your Creator.

*What has been happening now that you have had time to reflect on your life and the lives of your colleagues?*

To look at your life and see what you **have and haven't accomplished**. I think so many of us has a passion to do or accomplish certain things in life and never take the time to actually sit down and work out a plan to accomplish those dreams or goals.

*Did you get any new insights which were valuable to you and which you could perhaps share with the rest of the group?*

I definitely have a better understanding of the rest of the group and that also help to know how to approach or handle people better and with more consideration.

*Did you notice any "themes" common to our understanding of "a life that matters" or meaningfulness?*

Each person wants to be loved, understood and appreciated.

*What is behind our understanding of meaningfulness?*

To know what it is and what it takes in making your life meaningful.

*Do you buy into what is generally understood as "meaningful"? Why or why not?*

No. Everyone perception of meaningfulness is so different. What one person see as meaningful might be very "un-helpful" to another person.

regards

**jurie venter**

#### **4.4.6.1 Some questions I asked Jurie about his story**

*Beste Jurie*

*Dankie vir jou respons. Ek het oor 'n paar dinge gewonder en sal dit baie waardeer as jy dalk daarop sou reageer. My kommentaar en vrae is in kursief hieronder.*

- 1. I am curious to know to what extent "adapt" became a theme of your life story. How were you able to hold on to meaningfulness while you are adapting?*

*It sounds as if your mother played a major role in your life. What would your mother have witnessed about your meaningfulness story?*

2. *Most people are more concerned about their own lives when it comes to meaningfulness. Has this been your experience as well? Is it not strange then that you associate meaningfulness with being “able to help and be there for other people” and “making a difference in other people’s lives”? Where do you think this originated? Did somebody play a role to this effect in your life? Was this an example set by anybody? Please tell me more about this?*

*How do you think we can learn the purpose God has for our lives?*

3. *What will “complete” be like for you? How far are you on the road to “completeness”? How will you know you are there?*
4. *Can you tell me a little more about this please? What is growth in your life? Are there any voices in the community or society telling us what this growth looks like? Do you support these?*
5. *If you talk about “accomplish”, how would you describe such accomplishment? Accomplishment relative to what would that be?*

*Why do you think we never “actually sit down” to plan our lives and dreams?*

*Have you got “accomplishment tips” which you could from experience share with the rest of the group?*

6. *Do you associate with these sentiments? How are these linked to stories from your own life? Has anybody played a significant role in this understanding of meaningfulness?*
7. *You said: “Everyone perception of meaningfulness is so different. What one person see as meaningful might be very “un-helpful” to another person. How is this insight helpful?*

#### **4.4.6.2 Jurie’s response to my questions**

When I asked Jurie about his mother’s role in his life, directing a re-membering question to him about what his mother would have witnessed about meaningfulness in his life, he responded by saying that it was difficult to single out something. He had been living in Pretoria while his parents were in Potchefstroom and therefore did not see them that often. She would however have been able to tell me about his helpfulness and told me about how he helped his grandmother move house.

When we discussed people's pursuit of meaningfulness Jurie agreed that most often these endeavours are self-centred. According to him people were not interested in what value they could add, but rather what they could get out of life. Frankl on the other hand suggested that meaning was not derived from what life offered us, but rather what we offered to life (2004:85). Or stated differently: not what we expected from life, but what life expected from us.

Jurie indicated that he considered himself to be somebody whom one could wake up at 2 in the morning and he would be willing to help. The fact that he derived meaning from "making a difference to somebody's life" could be the result that he was brought up like that. Although his father was away a lot, he did the best he could for his family. Hence the helpfulness discourse may be considered as the way he compensated for this, Jurie suggested.

When asked about "completeness" which he mentioned in the original interview, Jurie indicated that for him it meant to be in peace and harmony with God. The relationship with God and communication with Him was what life purpose was all about for him. He was reminded of a story of somebody who had a special relationship with God and when he had to enter a place about which he had certain forebodings, he just prayed "Lord, would you please go in first?" That was the type of relationship with God he thought of as complete.

At some stage in our conversation, "Not understanding" entered the discussion. When I asked Jurie whether not understanding did not reduce his experience of meaningfulness, he replied that trust made it possible for him still to experience even misfortune as meaningful. He told me how sometimes when he almost felt like giving up, a small event like a word or a sermon was enough to inspire him with trust and meaningfulness again. He concluded this thought by remarking that God is good.

Jurie's meaning story is closely related to Purpose. He compared it to people sometimes reducing their quest for meaning to a hunger for material things. In this regard he suggested that we are given our talents with a purpose. He told a story how he depends on God for even the small things in life like buying clothing. He commented that the guidance we receive are aligned with God's promise to make his will known to us, "directing our ways" (Prov 3:6).

He did mention that he did not "spend as much time with God" as he would like to. In this regard he agreed that he thought of spending time with God in the traditional formal way as in prayer and meditation or Bible study.



#### 4.4.7 Malcolm's Story

A life that matters is a life that is not restricted by anything and can do as much as to Fly in their mind, a life that matters is a life that makes a difference to others but before so achieves in its own first. A life that matters is a life that can put others success and dreams before its own and still feel accomplishment.

Reaching the pinnacle of success, freedom and peace will constitute meaningfulness in my life.

If my life is not stagnant and it keeps throwing new things at things and challenges at me and I strive in all I take upon I will know that my life is making progress in terms of a meaningful one.

The term of meaningfulness has changed since we had the two sessions with my fellow staff members, from person to person the term has a different meaning and it has shown me that life is a whole lot more than what the eye can see. Success, Happiness and freedom are words that were mostly used to describe meaningfulness. This also made realise that success differs from person to person and we can all use the same word in a sentence but all mean different things.

It has made it better for me to communicate with my fellow workers and easier to understand a lot of things that did not make sense before.

I do not buy into what is generally understood as meaningfulness simply I have been unique my whole life believe strongly that if people are thinking the same thing a lot of people are not thinking. I see meaningfulness differently from other people and the way by which I will achieve it will also be different from others.

##### 4.4.7.1 My questions regarding Malcolm's story

1. *How will you know that you are making a difference in others' lives? Who will decide what difference is needed?  
Who has been instrumental / influential in this understanding of "a life that matters"? What would s/he be telling me about your life that matters?*
2. *What will be the elements of "success", "freedom" and "peace" as you describe them above? What stories affect our understanding of what success is? What is your relationship with each of these characters of your meaning story?*

3. *How far are you on this unique path that you have mapped out for yourself? Is there one thing (perhaps one thing in respect of each of the elements you mentioned in the previous paragraph) which would take you strides further on this path?*
4. *Why do you think these terms were used most often (“Success”, “happiness” and “freedom”)?*  
*What was it like for you realizing that there are multiple stories about what success for instance is? How could this multi-story success assist you to move beyond “restriction” as you have mentioned in the first paragraph, allowing you to “Fly” indeed?*
5. *How has his uniqueness benefitted you in your life so far? How did it partner with you in living a meaningful life? Has it ever become a “nuisance” rather than assisting your life towards significance?*

#### **4.4.7.2 Malcolm’s response to my questions**

1. Bringing joy and laughter into people’s lives, nobody will decide what different is needed but I will give them and help the best way I know how to and if that doesn’t make a difference to them then I will move to next person and try to make a difference in their lives cause there is only so much one can do and whole lot one cannot do and at the end of the day I always keep in mind that I cannot make everybody happy. If the person could talk, I would know what they would say but he can’t. It’s my little brother I go out of my way to make sure he is happy and will do anything to ensure I make a positive difference in his life.
2. If my life is not stagnant and it keeps throwing new things at things and challenges at me and I strive in all I take upon I will know that my life is making progress in terms of a meaningful one.
3. The term of meaningfulness has changed since we had the two sessions with my fellow staff members, from person to person the term has a different meaning and it has shown me that life is a whole lot more than what the eye can see. Success, Happiness and freedom are words that were mostly used to describe meaningfulness. This also made realise that success differs from person to person and we can all use the same word in a sentence but all mean different things.  
 It has made it better for me to communicate with my fellow workers and easier to understand a lot of things that did not make sense before.
4. I think the word success is used a lot because people believe in order to be significant in anybody’s life you need to have made a success in yours first therefore one will be taken

seriously. I believe happiness was used a lot because if one if one is not happy then one cannot make another happy there as one cannot make others happy, I say this because I believe in order to make people happy you, yourself has to be happy first. Freedom was used a lot, but in all cases for different reasons, some wanted financial freedom and some wanted spiritual freedom. Some all went as far as saying they want both...

Well it was something I have always known that people have different views of what success and freedom are. So it was something I expected cause all of us are individuals that are very different in our own right, I wouldn't say it surprised me or any feeling like that. This multi-story has helped let loose and take things very easy and not put myself under immense pressure because all of us have different views of what success so now I am more open minded about doing things and tackling different situations.

I do not buy into what is generally understood as meaningfulness simply I have been unique my whole life believe strongly that if people are thinking the same thing a lot of people are not thinking. I see meaningfulness differently from other people and the way by which I will achieve it will also be different from others.

5. Being unique has benefited me in both good ways and bad, reason being there are stereotyped people out there who rebel against people who are not the same as everybody else and there are also people out there who are intrigued by a person that has their own qualities and stands out where ever present. It has in some instances become a "nuisance" because some places I have been to are filled with people that are resilient to different people which makes almost impossible for me to take the next step towards significance.

#### 4.4.8 Lee-Anne's story

Lee-Anne joined the group later during the course of the research process. She was briefed about the objectives of the study and decided to participate in the study. I have unfortunately only communicated with her via e-mail and never met her personally.

The correspondence follows:

15 May 2008

I was born in Pretoria

( I'll never be a Blue bull...)

I had a wonderful childhood.

We lived in Natal and I fell in love with the ocean everyday day for fourteen years. To my advantage God blessed me with a talent and passion for swimming. Since I could remember I dedicated my time to sport. My dream was to become an Olympic Athlete. Unfortunately my mind and body was separated at the age of 14 when I was forced to quite sport due to a bad injury. I entered my teenage years with a lot of disappointment. I rebelled against my faith at that stage and made things very uncomfortable for myself.

From 2004 – 2008 I was formally introduced to God and the world.

Realizing the difference between my fantasy of life and reality, I would say that was the most important lesson I had to learn in life.

In 2006 I studied photography and ended loving it more than I thought I was capable of...I've always been playing instruments, but when I started understanding and practicing art, the music came naturally. The Arts & Music have always been a big passion, but I never realized that it would become so attached to me...

My dreams have changed a lot this last year, for good I presume. At the of the day I'll be making my own biscuits.

Life motto: *"Live everyday as if it is you last."* - Personally, that still remains a challenge for me

If I had the opportunity to say one last sentence before I leave this planet, it would be:

*"Love God, Love yourself and Love those around you!"*

My weakness - I get bored easily

My strength - I'm very committed

The thing I am the most grateful for - The love, support, understanding, respect and wisdom my parents raised me with.

*"Treat people like how you would be like treated."*

Thank You

#### **4.4.8.1 My initial response to Lee-Anne's letter**

*Dear Lee-Anne*

*I haven't met you formally, but let me start off by saying that it is a great privilege to be entrusted with your life story. Thank you for joining our group.*

*Seeing that you haven't had the chance to tell your story to the rest of the group, would you be willing to tell the story at our next meeting – please do?*

*I would be curious to know how it was for you to tell your story (in this letter). Did it bring any new insights or open up new meaning for you? Did you have a sense of connectedness?*

*You write about creativity in various forms. How was your creativity stimulated in telling your story?*

*You say certain things with a definite touch of humour. How was telling your story instrumental in strengthening this sense of humour?*

*Did it take courage to write your story and send it to a stranger? How did that affect your confidence?*

*I have a few more specific questions about your story below. My questions and comments are in blue bold italics.*

*Kind regards*

*François*

The more specific questions are reported below.

- 1. You have a very interesting way of describing the consequence of the accident. Has mind and body been remarried ever since the tragic event?  
How did “rebellious” affect your life? Was “rebellious” always an enemy, an adversary, or has it ever joined forces with you? What did “rebellious” tell you about your faith at the time? What supported these allegations? Did you buy into these stories?*
- 2. Tell me more about these twin sisters, “Fantasy” and “Reality”. What lesson did you learn about life? Is there a lesson in this for the rest of us as well? If you could teach us one thing, what would that be? What would this life school be called?*
- 3. How did photography give you a new lens to look at the world? What does the world look like through the lens of your camera? Are there other lenses we could use to look at life differently?*
- 4. Would you care to share your dreams and current fantasies with us?*
- 5. Does the “one sentence before leaving the planet” describe your understanding of meaningfulness? Who played a role in this understanding? What would they/he/she be able to tell us about your meaningfulness story?*

6. *How has “boredom” played pranks on you? Were there times when you could outwit him? How did you do that?*
7. *If they could be present at our storytelling sessions, what stories do you think they would be telling us about you? What does this say about you?*

#### **4.4.8.2 Lee-Anne’s response to my questions**

What follows is Lee-Anne’s response to my introductory letter to her.

I’m not very good at presenting myself; I’d rather just email my story to the group. I’ve already spoke to the team about it and they all said its fine. I think it’s also going to speed up the process. If it interferes with your plans, I’ll obviously do it, no questions asked.

*Did telling your story bring any new insights or open up new meaning for you? Did you have a sense of connectedness?*

I am a very shy person and I prefer writing than speaking. Telling the story is fun, I think the group has a right to know who their colleagues are and vice versa.

*How was your creativity stimulated in telling your story?*

Mostly expressing my feeling and thoughts through words, especially English words.

*How was telling your story instrumental in strengthening this sense of humour?*

I think the humour eased the story telling.

*Did it take courage to write your story and send it to a stranger? How did that affect your confidence?*

Yes!!!! My life is my life and luckily every ones different, but yes it affected my confidence in a positive way.

Her response to the more specific questions:

1. Not in the way that I imagined it, no... but yes I have recovered to a point where I can move on with my life. I never found a sport to replace swimming, but I call myself an all-rounder at the moment.
2. Rebelling was my choice, but if I had another opportunity I would rather walk the other way. Between the age of 13 and 16 I lost track of any religious views, I experimented with all types of things, everything except the truth. I had very dark teenage days. I don’t want to elaborate too much, but yes it was a scary time in life. I ruined a lot of relationships. Events that were out of my control, I dealt with causing self inflicted pain and self pity. More emotionally than physically. I rebelled against Christ. Tried different religions. I can honestly say, it was, at the end Jesus who answered my questions and heard my prayers, no

other God. Growing out of that “faze” was a hard road to follow, it’s something I had to do alone and proof myself towards the ones I loved. I learnt a lot about myself and life. I gained my wisdom the hard way..

3. I don’t want to sound too philosophical, but to answer your last question first. That is exactly what I call it –

Life = School - As we educate ourselves for 12 years to enter the “big world”. I believe we do the same in life to prepare ourselves for eternity/after life.

I believed that my fantasy was my reality, but when my eyes opened...I was discussed with myself and the world. It suddenly made sense why we never could get along. I was always fighting against the natural flow of things.

Reality was a big shock for me, that’s where I realized how strong love can be and how powerful our minds are. Your hero’s become normal human beings, like you and me. Your friends become family and your heart learns how to deal with everyday emotions. You warm up towards people around you, start trusting. Start believing. Reality is hard, but I would say worth every second.

After I changed my view of life, my way of coping with life changed as well. Instead of punishing or being disappointed in myself for the wrong I have done, I rather see it as lesson that has to be learnt. I would recommend that mind set to people.

Another thing that has been helpful for my recovery is knowing that we have freedom of choice.

4. My philosophy of art is freedom. The freedom to be an individual. Photography is a good example of “the freedom to be an individual”. Two different people can photograph the same object/subject and both of the photographs will be completely different.

At the beginning I took photos of the dark/evil in the world, representing a portfolio of fear and warning signs. Now I portray truth and peaceful imagery. Something’s that comfortable on the eye and soul.

No lessons here, except... when you enjoy what you do , you automatically work hard.

If you are I a position where you don’t like your situation, make a choice and move on..staying in that situation, you are only fooling yourself, the world is not going to wait for you!

5. Sure, I'm not going to share it in detail, otherwise you'll be reading a book with chapters. I want to start my own business and grow with in that business. I'll give you more information as the plan falls into action.
6. Yes, this is my understanding of meaningfulness. I'm sure when reading the previous answers above you realized that I did everything except the quote above. Life is worth living when you have love! A lot of people will be able to tell a story, my history involved a lot of people who got hurt and supported me in my change for good... Living the way I mentioned/Quoted works for me.
7. Yes! It's funny that you ask that. It play's pranks on me. When I get bored I start brain storming on what I'm going to do with my situation. My outcome is usually a big project. In the middle of completing my project I get bored once again or I have something more important to do. That's why there is so many unfinished art lying around in my house.
8. I think they would speak of me growing up...the "cute" things I did. I think It says that somewhere deep down inside I still have a very innocent side.

Unfortunately Lee-Anne left the company before the research process was completed. Her initial contributions are included in the chapter, because they did form part of the conversation on meaningfulness at the start of the process. Unfortunately I was not able to contact her to confirm her understanding of the key discourses which were identified in the study.

#### 4.4.9 Bianca's Story

My whole life starts in 1985 to two wonderful people my mom and dad. I am an only child and if people ask me was it lonely I always answer no because I have never knew how it would have been. I have was the star pupil at school from the first day I arrived in sport and academics never not made it into a team and never failed a test but was a rebel when it came to taking direction from anyone trying to stop from achieving what I wanted to. So I do not have stop button until I crash and burn like people have told me will happen. I am very hard headed person I cannot take criticism. After school I got in university with a full scholarship and I turned it down just too much expectation on an 18 year as I thought. I moved to PE two weeks later and worked and partied there for 6 months and nearly killed myself in the process. Once I moved back I met my husband to be and he was the first love of my life ever. I then decided to become a flight attendant not to see the world just to do something different. I then started living all over Africa in SA for 2 weeks and out for 6 weeks. The



last contract I did I had to cut short because I was very sick or was I? No it was my daughter making herself known. I had found a job in SA and starts doing the things big people do house children and husband. I worked for 1time but being a flight attendant and mom was just not working out my child was more important to me than anyone and anything else. 6 months went by had a new job settling in when I had my first miscarriage. Then 6 months later had my second miscarriage and then a year later my third miscarriage. I had come to a stage of my life where I blamed my work my environment the people I worked with and decided to make a change and here I am today. I have a beautiful daughter a wonderful husband and a with a new start at new job with new people. So in a nutshell my constant in my life is my family they are the reason I am here they are the reason I live.

#### **4.4.9.1 My questions about Bianca's story and her responses**

Bianca's responses are included after each question for the sake of the integrity of the process.

*Bianca, thank you for sharing your life story with us.*

*I was wondering what it was like to share your story. I had no problem just strange looking into your life.*

*Did it evoke new ways of thinking about your life? It has changed the way I look at myself the fact I put a lot ahead of.*

*Was the telling of your life story a meaningful activity in itself? It was more eye opening*

*What is your view of a meaningful life? Can't put in any other way but Fulfilment*

*What words do you usually use when you think about meaningfulness (e.g. "significance", "a life that matters", "success", "happiness")? Fulfilment*

*What makes up "a life that matters" to you? My family*

*Who has played a role in this way of thinking about meaningfulness? My family*

*How far are you down the road towards "a life that matters"? I would say very far away*

*How will you know when you are there? When I have fulfilment*

*In your experience, how does one sustain a meaningful life (even through adversity)? You have to live a life the way you feel is the most stratifying*

*Thank you for your contribution so far.*

*Kind regards*

*François*

Unfortunately Bianca left the company shortly after this communication and therefore she did not participate in the rest of the process.

#### 4.5 Identifying the themes emerging from the stories told by the co-researchers

Once all the interviews had been conducted and the externalising questions and deconstruction of discourses had been done, a list of all the discourses or (as we subsequently called them) themes was compiled. I drew up a list of themes to act as agenda or “seeding list” for the identification process. This list was tabled at the next discussion of the full research group. Together we then agreed upon a list of the core themes which emerged from the research process.

The initial list is reported below.

Discourse / Theme	Participant
Happiness (own and other people’s), happy in everything one does	Delicia, Mahlatse
Content	Delicia
Optimistic	Delicia
Friends	Delicia
Feeling loved, understood, appreciated	Delicia, Jurie
Feeling needed	Delicia
Having meaning in other people’s lives, caring for loved ones, making a difference in others’ lives, helping other people, bringing joy to other	Delicia, Millicinda, Mahlatse, Malcolm, Jurie, Amorita
Doom and gloom vs. motivating	Delicia, Mahlatse

<b>Discourse / Theme</b>	<b>Participant</b>
Religion	Delicia
Rebelling	Lee-Anne, Millicinda, Malcolm
Freedom, financial freedom, financial independence	Lee-Anne, Malcolm
Love God	Lee-Anne
Love yourself	Lee-Anne
Love those around you	Lee-Anne
Survival	Millicinda
Purpose	Millicinda
God-given purpose	Millicinda, Jurie
Spirituality	Millicinda
To God every life matters	Mahlatse
Achievement	Mahlatse
Passion	Mahlatse
Success	Malcolm
Peace	Malcolm
Completeness	Jurie
Being the salt of the earth, lights in a dark and insecure world	Amorita
(Safe and sincere) relationships	Amorita

Having considered this list of potential themes the group subsequently agreed that the list could be summarised in three core discourses or themes. The group clustered the themes into Social Involvement, Purposeful Life and Spirituality.

Once these three were identified, Bianca proposed that we could not begin to consider these themes if we did not know ourselves. It was therefore decided to add Identity to the core themes.

This finding was consistent with what is reported in the literature: according to Kaufman (1986), most people express four to six main themes in their life stories.

These discourses will be discussed as the core themes in subsequent chapters of this thesis. These discussions will be introduced by the co-researchers stories of each of these themes, after which the literature will be invited in as the academic voice as another equal partner to the research process.