

**NARRATIVE REFLECTIONS ON A LIFE THAT MATTERS**

**BY**

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## ABSTRACT

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This study was inspired by the ever growing need for significance expressed both by my life coaching and pastoral therapy clients as well as the need for existential meaning reported both in the lay press and academic literature.

This study reflected on a life that matters with a group of co-researchers in a participatory action research context. The study has been positioned within pastoral theology and invited the theological discourse into a reflection of existential meaning.

Adopting a critical relational constructionist epistemology, the research was positioned within a postmodern paradigm. The implications for meaning and research were explored and described.

My fellow researchers were invited to reflect on what constitutes a meaningful life or “a life that matters” to them personally. These stories of meaning were explored and situated within personal meaning histories. Meaning discourses introduced to the discussion of “a life that matters” were deconstructed, their effects externalised and embedded in life long meaning stories. In the process outsider witnesses were introduced to these stories, enriching these as we did.

Together the research community made up of me and my fellow researchers, reflected on the meaning discourses introduced to the conversation on a life that matters in this way. These discourses included spirituality, purpose, and being meaningful in somebody else’s life. Only then did the group decide that perhaps these discourses were complemented by identity discourses.

When we reflected upon the value of the research process as meaning enhancing action in their lives, my co-researchers suggested that it was the reflection process which added most value to their own experiences of meaningfulness.

Throughout the research process, the voices of literature were invited into the conversation, exploring their perspectives on existential meaning. These voices acted as outsider witnesses, authenticating the stories of meaningfulness which were introduced by my fellow researchers.

This study may serve to revive the conversation both in the practical theology discourse and the pastoral theology discourse. It positions existential meaning within an uncertainty discourse and suggests that reflexive co-construction in the manner suggested previously, can contribute to the meaning enhancing multilogue.

Meaning making is introduced in a non-totalitarian way, strongly suggesting that an experience of meaningful living is possible even in postmodern times often described as confusing and potentially relativistically or nihilistically meaningless.

This study creates space for spirituality in the existential meaning conversation; perhaps even strongly proclaiming that it should be part of any conversation on meaningfulness.

Meaningfulness has been introduced as a *local experience* devoid of the power discourses of meta narratives and do-it-yourself recipes. Local process rather than universal content was positioned as meaning enhancing in the study, thus opening space for local life knowledges and negating the need to conform to meta-narratives of meaningfulness which may in effect be alienating and disempowering in that they relegate the life knowledges of objectified people into anecdotal and fictional.

### Key concepts:

Existential meaning, narrative, participatory action research, practical theology, spirituality, relationships, purpose, identity, reflection, examined life

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