

**A NARRATIVE PRACTICAL THEOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE ON THE
SPIRITUALITY OF FEMALE ADULT SURVIVORS OF CHILDHOOD
SEXUAL ABUSE**

BY

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Abstract:

This is a narrative practical theological perspective on the spirituality of adult, female survivors of childhood sexual abuse. Two questions were asked: first, how is meaning made of traumatic experiences, specifically childhood sexual abuse (CSA)? Second, what is the role of spirituality in this process? Spirituality cannot be examined in isolation, and neither can CSA. The context of the story must be taken into consideration. In this study, the context is the Afrikaner, Dutch Reformed community. Epistemologically, the decision was made to work from a postfoundational, social constructionist perspective. This supports the research design, which is based on narrative, practical theological principles, as influenced by feminist and body theology. A single case study was conducted, using unstructured and semi-structured interviews, emails, and poetry. In this iterative design, emphasis was placed on the co-researcher's voice, and her input governed the researcher's choices. The narrative revealed five areas of focus: abuse, identity, her mother, God and faith, and the interrelationship between these. Furthermore, some unique outcomes were identified. This story was presented to a team of three transdisciplinary co-researchers: an occupational therapist, a psychologist, and a Dutch Reformed minister. These contributors shared their ideas with the researcher and the co-researcher, who also gave feedback. A literature review was based on the five areas of focus, the unique outcomes, and the input received from the co-researcher and the transdisciplinary contributors. It was found that it became increasingly difficult to describe spirituality as a discrete concept, as it is intricately bound into the co-researcher's story: this includes body stories, mind stories, spirit stories, stories of relationships and the community, and stories about God. All of these are in constant interaction, and influence one another. As such, time was spent exploring the interrelationships between these stories, and coming to a better understanding of the self as embodied, emergent and multiple. A proposal is made for narrative transversality as a means for exploring the interactions between stories. Finally, questions are raised about the language of the self, as well as about the gaps in research about women and children in the Dutch Reformed Church.

Key words:

spirituality; childhood sexual abuse; postfoundationalism; social constructionism; transversal rationality; narrative research; practical theology; transdisciplinary research; multiplicity of self; emergence of self; embodiment; narrative transversality.



"It is always good to look into the mirror and affirm who you are today, but it's even better to look back to the days of your past and see how far you've come" - shared by Sidney R. Hargro.

Dedication:

For Hanneljie, and for everyone who shares a story like hers. You will never know how much you taught me.

Thanks:

The dominant narrative about writing a dissertation is that it is a ‘lonely road’. This dissertation, then, is a unique outcome, because it would not have come into being without the love and support of a great number of people. Specifically, and most importantly, I would like to thank my parents, for the ‘boot camps’ and ‘take aways’ and too many other things to count. Thank you for believing in me. Friends who have been cheering me on, providing shoulders to cry on in the tough times and wine to celebrate successes along the way, are too many to name. Most especially, though, I would like to thank Janna de Gouveia, who was most often my first reader, and inspired me to greater heights through her example. Furthermore, I’d like to make mention of Debra Smuts, Anton Reynolds and Lizette Viviers, who gave of their time selflessly, to make the transdisciplinary chapter a success. Thank you, also, to colleagues, who supported me and kept me going at work, when I was preoccupied and scatterbrained. In addition, I want to acknowledge the great influence of Chené Swart and the Narrative Apprenticeship community, who have taught me about the beauty, complexity, and infinite possibilities that are wrapped up in being a ‘human becoming.’

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Special acknowledgement:

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* : cd art for Telling the Bees, reproduced with permission from the artist.

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Note:

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

PART ONE: A QUESTION.

1.1 Introduction

...giving an old lady a bath, as much as was possible with a couple of tin basins and some flannels. And that was witchcraft. Then they looked in on a woman who'd just had a baby, and that was witchcraft, and a man with a very nasty leg injury that Nanny Ogg said was doing very well, and that was witchcraft too...

(Terry Pratchett 2007: 229)

Practical theology is theology of real, everyday life. The novel *Wintersmith* (Pratchett 2007) may be a fantasy novel about witches, but it is a handbook for practical theology as well. It tells the story of Tiffany Aching who is an apprentice witch. She has to learn that being a witch is not just about the mysterious and the magical, it is also about the day-to-day care of people. At the same time, she, who helps Nanny Ogg to tend to the sick, has to find a way to defeat the spirit of winter on her own, or spring will never return to their village and their flocks will die. She has to protect the flocks. Upon reading the novel the first time, I was struck by the similarity in thinking reflected by Terry Pratchett, as compared to Alistair Campbell (1986) and Charles Gerkin (1997). Both theologians speak of the courage needed to be a pastor, as well as the humanity, to be able to enter into another's world and be with them in a manner that makes them feel cared for, and in a manner that they need: to be the shepherd of the flock. Campbell (1986:35) refers to the image of Jesus as the Shepherd, who is the "central image in pastoral care," and admits that it is a humbling position to be in, to be expected to be "under-shepherds of the Great Shepherd," because it is a daunting task that cannot be taken lightly. Sometimes, people need a friend to help them with something mundane and sometimes, people need someone to help them to face their nightmares. And, when it is time to help someone to face their nightmares, the task is "costly and dangerous" (Campbell 1986: 36). Moreover: "...all persons, whether young or old, sick or healthy, rich or poor, have ongoing needs for meaning, love, relationship, and community, and pastoral care is the form ministry takes as it strives to help people meet these needs..." (McClure & Miller McLemore 2012: 169-170). That is the work of the pastor.

Furthermore, practical theology is not just practical wisdom. When standing on the edge with those who have been left out in the cold, pushing back the winter, it is not enough to care about people. It is important to come prepared. Thus, the work of practical theology, the theology of real, everyday life, relies not just on practice, but on praxis. Ganzevoort and Roeland (2014: 94) explain that the focus on praxis means that practical theologians are concerned with “action, experience and meaning.” As such, they are interested in the “transcending patterns of action and meaning, emerging from and contributing to the relation with the sacred” (2014: 98). As Heitink (1999: 9) explains: “The word *praxis* is therefore broader than *practice*. It also refers to theory because of the values, norms, and interests involved.”

Thus, practical theology is based on theory and practice. It looks at the life of faith in the world, and what needs to be done within the faith community, “so that there can be real transmission of the Christian tradition” (Heitink 1999: 9). Ganzevoort and Roeland’s (2014: 94) list of examples of “care” to explain the “field of practices” that practical theologians may study is very strongly reminiscent of Tiffany Aching’s lesson in witchcraft: “conversing, being present, paying attention, cleaning, comforting, asking, receiving, meditating...” As such, he makes it clear that practical theology is not only concerned with the practices of pastors, but also with “lived religion” (Ganzevoort & Roeland 2014). The things that Christians do, say, think, and experience on a daily basis are all issues of concern for a practical theologian. In other words, human behaviour, communication, and psychology are of concern. Müller (2013: 1) explains that practical theology “can at one moment incline to the side of dogmatics, whereas at other times to the side of arts.” What drives this “fluidity” that Müller (2013: 1) describes, is the nature of the phenomena in question, because his approach compels us “to listen firstly to the stories of people in real life situations”, to focus on the “specific and concrete situation” (Müller 2011: 3). This means that, where the practical theologian needs to understand a phenomenon related to a specific area of the Christian life, it is the nature of that area of life that will determine the theologian’s approach. In pastoral care, for example, if the theologian wishes to care for a congregant who has identified alcoholism as a problem, the theologian needs to learn about how alcoholism works. Thus, Müller (2013: 2) asserts: “it is clearly inevitable that practical theology will lean on the social sciences for its description and understanding of human behaviour within the context of religion.” Further, if practical theologians are interested in the phenomena that are often studied within the context of the social sciences, then they need to learn from the social sciences. This argument

has two important implications for the practical theological researcher. Firstly, it means that empirical research and the methods taught in the social sciences are of great value. Secondly, it means that the practical theological researcher needs to enter into conversation with and learn from social scientists (Müller 2013: 2-3).

Recently, Ganzevoort and Roeland (2009: 189) asked the questions: “How is posttraumatic spirituality narratively construed and what are the positive factors influencing a healthy or adequate role of spirituality in the coping process?” At the same time, they asked questions about “posttraumatic growth” and the potential of meaning-making from trauma. Ganzevoort and Roeland (2009: 187) highlight the following five dimensions of growth that may be experienced, following trauma: “relating to others; openness for new possibilities; personal strength; spiritual change; and appreciation for life.” They also suggest that investigating spirituality may play a role in our understanding of trauma, and then suggest that posttraumatic growth as a result of spiritual or religious engagement of some kind is possible, given the right circumstances. The possible answers to their questions have implications for the church and for pastoral care.

Following my reading of Ganzevoort and Roeland’s above-mentioned article, my interest was piqued by the seeming contradiction in the phrase “posttraumatic growth.” More specifically, I wondered how it might apply in my own context of Afrikaner culture and the Dutch Reformed Church. In addition, because of the patriarchal roots of this culture (Du Toit 1985; Cauthen 2000), I wondered about the spirituality of women who had suffered sexual abuse. What are the coping skills that they learn as girls? How would posttraumatic growth appear in a context where women are largely silent about sex and sexuality (Parker 1996), and spirituality and religion are dominated by men (McClintock 1991)? Is it possible at all? Is Afrikaner spirituality a help or a hindrance? Before I can ask the question, however, I have to clarify what I mean by *spirituality* and by *sexual abuse*.

1.1.1 Spirituality

Many authors are of the opinion that spirituality is too amorphous a term to define clearly, in the sense of finding a set meaning for the word, and this is true (Koenig 2009). If we turn our attention away from defining it, and rather think of it as a socially constructed concept, then there are many possibilities.

The first question that is often asked, is: what is the relationship between spirituality and religion? Recently, in popular thinking, a distinction has been made between religion and spirituality. The phrase, *not religious, but spiritual*, is often heard when people are asked about their faith (Koenig 2009: Thomas 2006). Many people prefer not to describe themselves as religious and this attitude is often borne out of disillusionment with organised religion: here, religion has come to be associated with conservative, and often judgmental, thinking while in contrast, spirituality carries connotations of open-mindedness and connectedness with the universe. When Ammerman (2013: 276) tested this theory, however, she found that the perceived distinction between the two concepts is not so clear, in reality: “Rather than assuming that ‘religion’ is best measured by organizational belonging and traditional belief, while spirituality is best seen as an individual, experiential creation, we would do well to recognize that both have institutional producers.” Furthermore, she found that, contrary to what may be expected, “at least in the United States, the most pervasive spirituality is the Theistic one... Yet, all but the most conservative of them are also willing to occupy Extra-Theistic and Ethical spiritual discursive territory alongside their secular neighbors” (Ammerman 2013: 276).

One point that I disagree with in Ammerman’s (2013: 276) argument is that “‘religion’ must be understood to *include* a spiritual domain” as if spirituality is only an aspect of religion. Upon reviewing the various possible definitions of spirituality offered, it becomes quite obvious that spirituality is experienced as larger and broader than organised religion. Let us take Egan and his colleagues’ (Egan, MacLeod, Jaye, McGee, Baxter & Herbison 2011: 321) proposed definition as an example: “Spirituality means different things to different people. It may include (a search for): one’s ultimate beliefs and values; a sense of meaning and purpose in life; a sense of connectedness; identity and awareness; and for some people, religion.” Similarly, Senreich (2013: 553) explains: “Spirituality refers to a human being’s subjective relationship (cognitive, emotional and intuitive) to what is unknowable about existence, and how a person integrates that relationship into a perspective about the universe, the world, others, self, moral values, and one’s sense of meaning.”

If spirituality is indeed a socially constructed concept, then it appears to be constructed around aspects of the soul, the ineffable, religion, the universe, making meaning and experiencing faith. This leads me to the conclusion that spirituality is constructed in a similar way to other aspects of religion and faith as separate from the rest of our lives, boxed off for

those days, events and experiences that could be viewed as spiritual, and somehow elevated above the ordinary. Froelich (2011: 164) is quite convinced of this, when he writes:

All religions make the point that, with this emphasis (on the material), an entire dimension of human existence is missing. The human person consists of body and soul, and most religions boldly suggest that in this composite, the soul has a priority. This greater weight of soul over body in anthropology, however, reflects a clear priority in one's entire view of the universe: The spiritual world is more than the material. All religions hold that spirit is above matter, God is above the creature, Spirituality is more important than the preoccupation with materiality. (Brackets inserted.)

Froelich's explanation denies wholeness. In this view, the body and the world are inferior to the spirit and act as hindrances to the growth of the spirit. Thus, humans will only be fulfilled if released from the burdens of the flesh and the temptations of the material world. In my view, this is diminishing of what it means to be wholly alive in body, mind and spirit.

Christian spirituality is equated, by some, with faith and an expression of one's faith. Austad (2010: 9) looks at three aspects of faith to explain spirituality:

1. Spirituality is based on belief in the triune God and is created by the Holy Spirit.
2. Spirituality embraces the faith and life of individuals and fellowships.
3. Spirituality is lived experience of the Christian faith and can be observed.

Austad's third point speaks to something greater than Froelich's sharp distinction between the worldly and the spiritual; something more holistic. The words "lived experience" imply that one's spirituality, inasmuch as one can name it at all, is interwoven in our daily lives. Senreich (2013: 554) also refers to the "reciprocal" relationship between spirituality and the biological, psychological and social aspects of life and urges us to look at people from a "bio-psycho-social-spiritual perspective" (Senreich 2013: 553). People cannot separate one aspect of their well-being from another.

Owen Thomas (2000: n.p.) questions contemporary conceptions of spirituality, when he writes:

If spirituality is optional, you can ignore it. If it is a matter of degree, then pride will enter in the form of claiming to be more spiritual than these "religious" people. If it is distinct from and superior to religion, then churches and their traditions, doctrines, ethics, institutions, and practices can be safely ignored. If

spirituality is a matter of the inner life, then you do not need to bother yourself with all those boring and tiresome things of the outer life, such as the body, the community and society. If spirituality is focused on the individual, private life, then you can ignore all those troublesome and non-spiritual issues of public life in politics and economics.”

Instead, Thomas (2000: n.p.) contends that everything that we have held as separate from *spiritual things* are, in fact, central. As Austad’s (2010: 9) “lived experience” implies, we are urged to place new emphasis on “the significance of the body and the material, social, economic, political world rather than an exclusive focus on the soul or interior life” (Thomas 2000: n.p.). He cites the Christian “themes of creation, incarnation, history, and consummation, including the resurrection of the body” (Thomas 2000: n.p.) in his argument that, in fact, Christians cannot think of spirituality (or religion, for that matter) as anything other than life itself and how we live it, so that the “reign of God” can be manifest.

The implications of Thomas’s argument for this research are that, in searching for *God-language* and trying to know more about a person’s spirituality as it relates to her surviving sexual abuse, the entirety of her story will be taken into consideration. I shall have to consider her relationship with her body, her emotions, and her thoughts; with others; with her work; with nature; with God; with the church; with her abuser; with her memories; and even with me. If her spirituality is “observable” as Austad (2010: 9) asserts, it will be evident in all these things.

1.1.2 Sexual Abuse

An understanding of what sexual abuse is, must begin by understanding both sexuality and sexual health, and trauma, in order to understand why sexual abuse is construed as traumatic. As such, brief explanations of these concepts are provided here.

1.1.2.1 Sexuality and Sexual Health

Sex and touch form important parts of human relationships. They are forms of interaction, through which people express love and intimacy. Sex and sexuality have deep roots and far-reaching influences, since they have such a significant role to play. Edward Tronick (1995:53) teaches that touch is an important form of communication, as it conveys messages between those who are touching: “For example, certain forms of touch, such as gentle holding, might convey the message, ‘You are safe.’” Feldman, Weller, Sirota and

Eidelman (2003) also report the importance of skin-to-skin touch in infant care for the healthy development of positive affect and intimacy in families.

In the World Health Organization's (2006: 5) report on sexual health a working definition of sexuality reads as follows:

Sexuality is a central aspect of being human throughout life and encompasses sex, gender identities and roles, sexual orientation, eroticism, pleasure, intimacy and reproduction. Sexuality is experienced and expressed in thoughts, fantasies, desires, beliefs, attitudes, values, behaviours, practices, roles and relationships. ... Sexuality is influenced by the interaction of biological, psychological, social, economic, political, cultural, ethical, legal, historical, religious and spiritual factors.

Further, a definition of sexual health reads as follows (2006: 5):

... a state of physical, emotional, mental and social well-being in relation to sexuality; it is not merely the absence of disease, dysfunction or infirmity. Sexual health requires a positive and respectful approach to sexuality and sexual relationships, as well as the possibility of having pleasurable and safe sexual experiences, free of coercion, discrimination and violence.

Notably, the authors of the report clearly indicate that these working definitions are not final, as they are the result of years of collaboration with other organisations, which still continues. As research advances and society evolves, these definitions will change as well.

I have elected to quote these two definitions directly, as they reveal the complexity of sexuality and sexual health, in the long list of factors that are mentioned for understanding these two concepts. Furthermore, neither of these is exhaustive. Robinson, Bockting, Rosser, Miner and Coleman (2002) include a number of additional factors for consideration, particularly related to self-awareness, intimacy, knowledge and understanding, communication and freedom of choice.

Upon reading through these lists of important aspects of sexuality and sexual health, I am convinced of the importance of healthy sexuality as a significant part of a healthy life. As much as "sexuality is influenced by the interaction of biological, psychological, social, economic, political, cultural, ethical, legal, historical, religious and spiritual factors" (WHO 2006: 5), all of the above-mentioned spheres are influenced by human sexuality.

The depths of sexuality and sexual health cannot be satisfactorily understood, but it is important to realise, upon reflecting on these brief notes, that sexuality and sexual health are integral to healthy human functioning, not only on a physical, biological level, but also on emotional and spiritual levels. In the following sections, I shall return to these definitions to reflect on the nature of sexual trauma.

1.1.2.2 Trauma

Ganzevoort and Roeland (2009: 184-185) explain that trauma is a broad concept that can encompass a very large variety of experiences, from large events such as natural disasters, to more personal, individual experiences such as rape. At its heart, however, “it stands for all those experiences that threaten our existence or integrity on a fundamental level” or “the overwhelming psychosocial injuries resulting from the confrontation with devastating effects” (2009: 184-185). The experience of trauma is not the event itself, however, but rather the lingering effects of that event. Peter Dale (1999: 14) points to three effects:

- persistent re-experiencing of the traumatic event;
- persistent avoidance of stimuli associated with the trauma;
- persistent symptoms of increased arousal.

Depending on the severity of the trauma, these effects may have a significant influence on a person’s daily functioning. In particular, Ganzevoort (2009: 185) makes a distinction between trauma that occurred in childhood and that which occurred in adulthood, “because the interference with a developing identity makes it structurally different.” Van der Kolk (2005: 3) lists a number of unfavourable effects associated with “adverse childhood experiences,” or trauma, including depression, suicide, substance abuse, sexual promiscuity and sexually transmitted illnesses, and other mental and physical health issues. Most notably, he also points out that: “chronic trauma interferes with neurobiological development and the capacity to integrate sensory, emotional and cognitive information into a cohesive whole.” (2005:3). The crux of the matter, however, is that traumatic events are “shattering life events” (Ganzevoort 2008: 19) that will affect the sufferers for the rest of their lives, because they threaten their very lives, or their “integrity of being” (2008: 20).

1.1.2.3 What is sexual abuse?

As mentioned above, touch and sex are forms of communication that should convey messages of love and intimacy. “These early transmissions have a powerful influence on our

concept of being loved, being valuable, and belonging” (Heitritter & Vought 2006: 13). However, when touch and sexual acts make a person feel unloved, unworthy, powerless, and afraid, then these acts have become abusive. Child sexual abuse is particularly devastating, because the developing child is still learning what the messages of touch mean, by relying on trusted adults and older children to teach them. When these messages are harmful, the child’s development is likely to go awry, as mentioned in the section above (Van der Kolk 2005: 3).

Laura Davis (1991: 13) emphasises that child sexual abuse is “a violation of power perpetrated by a person with more power over someone who is more vulnerable. This violation takes a sexual form, but it involves more than sex.” As such, it is an act of violence in which sex is the weapon the perpetrator uses to exert power over the child, to break the child’s sense of trust, and to devastate the child’s sense of being. Referring back to the definitions for sexual health, especially considering what Robinson et al. (2002) contributed, healthy sexuality includes a significant element of choice and knowledge. Consenting partners should be able to communicate about and understand what they are doing. When one of the people involved is a small child, who does not understand what sex is about, nor is able to give any form of consent, informed or otherwise, the power in the relationship is unbalanced. Thus, the adult is abusing the power that they have to force the child to do what they want. This can be compounded by the additional probability that the child is being raised not to argue with adults, or to complain about what adults do (Pienaar, Beukes & Esterhuysen 2006).

Among the actions that can be experienced as sexual abuse are a number of behaviours, ranging from derogatory and abusive language, to being forced to watch pornography or to watch others have sex, to being fondled, being forced to participate in sexual behaviour, and to rape (Bass & Davis 2002: 21). Similarly, the people who could potentially abuse a child include a list of anyone from a stranger on the street to a child’s most trusted significant adults, including friends of the family, religious leaders, teachers, family members and parents (Davis 1991: 13).

Furthermore, child sexual abuse has distressing, life-long after-effects. Many survivors of sexual abuse struggle with depression, suicidal thoughts, substance abuse, nightmares, sexual aversion or sexual promiscuity, broken relationships, lack of trust, sexually transmitted diseases, dissociation, eating disorders, and low self esteem, to name a

few (Heitritter & Vought 2006; Bass & Davis 2002; Davis 1991; Spies 2006; Finkelhor 1990).

If trauma can be defined as an impact which shatters one’s sense of self and lingers to affect one’s daily functioning for years to come, then sexual abuse is traumatic. Thus, when asking about posttraumatic growth, it may be appropriate to begin by exploring the story of a person who has survived sexual abuse.

1.2 Aim of the research

“You can’t talk about sexuality without talking about how we are made. And that would inevitably lead you to who made us. At some point you have to talk about God.”

Rob Bell (2007:15)

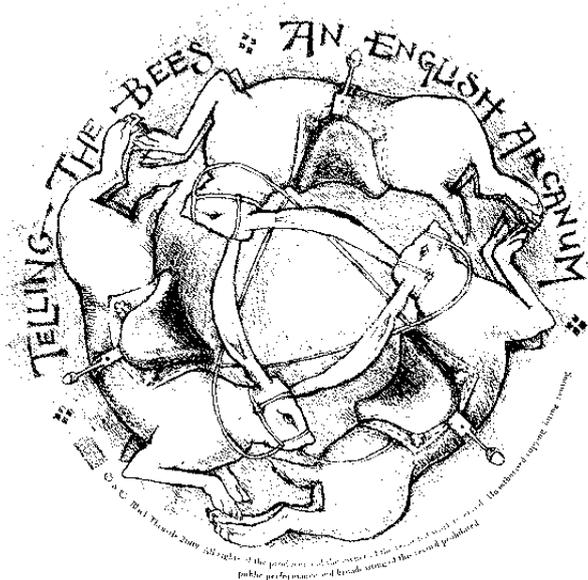


Figure 1.1: The Dartmoor Hare: *Three Hares with Three Ears* by Rima Staines

The realisation that spirituality is inseparable from daily life (see 1.1.1 in this chapter) also brings to our attention that we cannot separate our spirituality from our sexuality (Bell 2007:15). Stories of our spirit and stories of our body will, inevitably, be connected. An ancient symbol of three hares with three ears is associated both with femininity and fertility as well as the holy Trinity (Legendary Dartmoor 2007); that symbol has been employed as far east as China and as far west as Britain, over many centuries. When I first saw it, it reminded me of the human person, as it could illustrate the intertwined nature of our spirituality, sexuality and relationships. There may be three individual hares, but it would be impossible

for any one of the hares to do anything without the other two. Similarly, people's spirituality and sexuality are inextricably bound to other aspects of their lives, and the wellbeing of one aspect will affect the others, and vice versa.

Thus the aim of this research is to listen to the stories of a Christian woman who has survived childhood sexual trauma/abuse in order to find out about her spirituality and how it may have influenced her experience of the trauma of abuse. How does the well-being of one hare, or lack thereof, affect the others?

1.3 Context

Our spiritual identity starts forming when we are very young and our first conception of God can be linked to our first interactions with our parents (Rizzuto 1979). It would make sense to presume that a spiritual identity that was formed in a home where the child's association with its parents is negative or traumatic will not necessarily be a strong positive identity. Consider again, Van der Kolk's (2005: 3) assertion that trauma in childhood has a devastating influence on a child's sensory, emotional and cognitive development. Dale (1999: 7-8) reminds us, however, that "the inevitability of harm" has been questioned, and that there are several variables that will affect the potential for, and severity of, possible consequences.

Poll and Smith (2003: 135) propose, that human "spiritual identity development may undergo changes more accurately represented by a double spiral than a straight line, depending on the person's life experience." Although parents may have a powerful initial influence on their children's spiritual identity, when they are young, their own lived experiences, in relationships with other people, start to exert an influence as well. The family context does play a significant role in a child's experience of sexual abuse, depending on whether the parents are the abusers, whether the parents are aware of the abuse, and the amount of perceived support that the child gets from the parents; nevertheless, other social factors may shape a person's identity (Heitritter & Vought 2006; Bass & Davis 2002; Davies 1991; Spies 2006; Finkelhor 1990; Hunter 2006).

Research has also examined the relationship between spirituality, coping and the possibility of hope and growth in that relationship: "[S]urvivors' relationship with a benevolent God is related to a greater sense of personal hope and self-acceptance, which in turn are predictive of lower levels of depressive mood and greater levels of experienced resolution of the abuse." (Gall, Basque, Damasceno-Scott & Vardy 2007: 114). These authors

continue by exploring a survivor's ability to make meaning of their troubled past as a result of their positive perceptions of God as being benevolent.

It is therefore not safe to assume that an adult who experienced childhood trauma will develop a specific, necessarily negative, spiritual identity. In fact, Sally Hunter (2006) has found that many individuals may not be traumatised, as such, and she refers to these experiences simply as "childhood sexual experiences." Her emphasis is on resilience and the survivor's ability to grow and learn from adversity. She mentions that, among many other factors, a number of her co-researchers believed that their relationship with a Higher Power has helped them to remain strong. She specifies, however, that their spirituality is what she refers to as "robust" (2010:147), and is inclusive of active involvement in the faith community, through serving others. One cannot make a blanket statement that people who describe themselves as spiritual in some way, or belong to a church, will be resilient. However, the supportive elements of religiosity and spirituality, such as active involvement in the community, could help a person to develop a "robust" (Hunter 2006: 147) spirituality that builds resilience (Long 2011; Brewer-Smyth & Koenig 2014).

The specific context within which the researcher's question will be asked is that of the Afrikaner, Dutch Reformed Church. This is a largely conservative community that stemmed from the original Dutch settlers, who brought their own brand of Dutch pietism with them (Landman 1994). Following years of isolation, at first on distant farms, and later as a result of the Boer Wars and Apartheid, the women of the Dutch Reformed Church still retain a strong sense of that pietism and the patriarchy of the Afrikaner culture (Landman 1994; Oliver 2006), as they have been left largely unaffected by feminist thinking from other parts of the world. Recently, with the popularity of the Mighty Men gatherings, there has been a resurgence of patriarchy and its accompanying "Formenism" (Nadar & Potgieter 2010). As such, Afrikaner women have been steeped in traditions that taught them to bow to men and to remain silent about sex and sexuality (Parker 1996). The dominant discourses of this culture will, therefore, also be examined, as they play a significant role in a woman's understanding of her own body and spirituality.

It is my aim, therefore to broaden our understanding of the spirituality of adult survivors of childhood abuse, by conducting a close examination of the many factors that play a role in shaping a person's experiences and, ultimately, the stories she tells about herself and God. It may have become evident at this point that this issue is more complex

than at first glance. The question that was asked is how meaning is made of traumatic experiences and what the role of spirituality is in this process, but spirituality cannot be examined in isolation. One must consider the legion of other role-playing factors, such as the age of the child when the abuse occurred, the position of the abuser in the child's life, the child's relationship with her parents, the child's relationship with others outside of the family, and the family's cultural and religious context. More factors may also still emerge, as the story is explored in depth.

PART TWO: HOW TO ASK AND ANSWER THE QUESTION.

1.4 Overview

In the second part of this chapter, I will explain and outline the rest of the dissertation. The reader may find it useful to have a point of reference for understanding the shape of this dissertation and how it came to be as it is. To begin with, this dissertation is designed in accordance with the guiding principles of postfoundationalism, social constructionism, narrative thinking, practical theology and body theology. Although all of these concepts will be discussed in detail in the next chapter, brief notes on each of them will be given here, as readers will have to rely on their familiarity with these concepts to guide their understanding of the dissertation as a whole.

1.4.1 Postfoundationalism

Science and the philosophy of science are forever changing and evolving. In a recent shift in social scientific circles, postfoundationalism has evolved out of the growth that began with foundationalist thinking. *Foundationalism* is a positivistic, universalistic approach to science that was favoured during the Enlightenment, when it was believed that scientists would be able, after conducting enough rigorous research, to arrive at definitive answers to all the questions about the universe. The search for universal truth had begun. Scientists soon realised that their search for truth raised as many questions as answers. They found phenomena that they could not explain, and found contradictory answers to their questions. One researcher could disprove the findings of another. As such, *non-foundational* paradigms proliferated, and the search for one ultimate truth became the search for relative truth; in other words, truth that is useful within a specific context. Multiversal, relativistic thinking guided research. However, scientists were uncomfortable about the multiplicity, at best, or non-existence, at worst, of truth. This situation seemed fragmented and nihilistic. Scientists

and philosophers still felt that, even within multiplicity, there is connectedness: thus, even in very different contexts we can find commonalities. It is still possible to make connections and to find points of cohesion in the common search for understanding.

Against this background, *postfoundational* thinking was born. The distinguishing feature of this approach is that scientists believe that they are able to get together, from different contexts and disciplines, and enter into dialogue and then find transversal connectivity; they can do this without negating their various contexts, but instead, acknowledging whatever they share (Müller 2009, 2013). As such, postfoundationalism is an inherently humble approach, because the limits of one researcher's knowledge are accepted, while the possibility of learning from other scientists is stressed and favoured. It is an honest acknowledgement of subjectivity, that understands contextual embeddedness, but does not isolate us from those who are from other contexts.

The importance of postfoundational thinking and transversal rationality for practical theology needs to be stressed. Earlier in this chapter, I discussed Müller's (2013:1) explanation of the relationship between practical theology and the social sciences, and the fact that practical theologians need to learn from and work closely with social scientists. The reason is that practical theologians are interested in the real lives of people and the social forces that affect them, within the context of the church (2013: 2). Müller proposes that a postfoundational, transversal approach to research, as described by Van Huyssteen (2006), is the way in which theologians could learn from other disciplines; after all, that approach is focused on context and also on interdisciplinary dialogue. Müller (2013: 4) states: "Theology shares the interdisciplinary standards of rationality, which will not be hopelessly culture and context bound, but will always be contextually and socially shaped." Further, Van Huyssteen (2006: n.p.) explains that transversal rationality is an approach to interdisciplinary conversation that acknowledges differences, while also looking for points of contact between disciplines: "On this view theologians, and also scientists of various stripes, should be empowered to protect the rational integrity of their own disciplines, while at the same time identifying overlapping issues, shared problems, and even parallel research trajectories as we cross disciplinary lines in multidisciplinary research." The emphasis on context, and the influence of social forces, supports the principle of social constructionism as a further philosophical framework for this research.

1.4.2 Social Constructionism

The postfoundational approach prefers shared learning and context-bound knowledge; therefore, it makes sense to work from the perspective of a social constructionist epistemology. Social constructionism is a philosophy that explains that knowledge, and ultimately reality, is co-created. In other words, we create knowledge in our interactions with other people, as we experience life and make meaning of our experiences together. Thus, our understanding of the world is subject to our interpretation of it, within a specific context, and that understanding is shaped by the social and cultural forces active in that context. Berger and Luckmann (n.d.: 19) explain that “Everyday life presents itself as a reality interpreted by men and subjectively meaningful to them as a coherent world.” In other words, our understanding of our experiences is based on our ability to incorporate them subjectively into our existing knowledge. This process is socially mediated and therefore knowledge is also “intersubjective” (Berger & Luckmann n.d.: 23). It is shared, and helps to create the society that we live in, and also creates “social order” (Berger & Luckmann n.d.: 52), precisely because it is shared and becomes part of the “common stock of knowledge” (Berger & Luckmann n.d.: 67).

Language plays a powerful role in this co-creation process as well, as it is the means by which we share experience. However, language includes more than spoken words. Thus, not only words but also gestures, facial expressions, clothing, and patterns of behaviour all shape the manner in which we communicate and share reality (Vinciarelli, Pantic & Bourlard 2009; Krauss, Chen & Chawla 1996). All of these are codified within a specific context. For example, our clothing and the message we can convey with what we wear are contextually bound and socially constructed. In most Westernised cultures, it is no longer frowned upon if a woman wears trousers, although it may have been disapproved of, a few decades ago. When my mother was a university student, her father did not allow her to wear trousers, because it was considered immodest. She kept her trousers in her cupboard in the university residence so that he would not know about them. Today, I only own one dress, as I prefer the comfort of trousers, and feel that I look more professional in them. As our culture has grown and evolved, the patterns of behaviour and their meaning have changed. However, it is still frowned upon in Setswana culture for women to wear trousers. In the context where I work, we are sometimes visited by royalty from the Bafokeng nation, and it is preferred that we wear skirts or dresses in their presence as a sign of respect. “An understanding of language is

thus essential for any understanding of the reality of everyday life.” (Berger & Luckmann n.d. : 36).

This research will be conducted with the understanding that knowledge is contextual and co-created. The social discourses and language that have created them will be examined and kept in mind, when the story is explored.

1.4.3 The Narrative Approach

If we accept that reality is socially constructed, then we must ask how this process takes place. One useful metaphor for understanding social constructionism is narrative. The premise is that humans are inclined to order their experiences into coherence, to find connections between experiences, by telling stories. In other words, they construct their reality through narrative. Clandinin and Connelly (1989 : 4) claim that narrative is “a basic phenomenon of life” and that “the storied quality of experience is both unconsciously restoried in life, and consciously restoried, retold and relived through processes of reflection.” The sources from which people story their lives are their daily experiences; however, these experiences do not occur in a vacuum. They are culturally, linguistically, temporally and spatially bound, and our interpretation of them is influenced by these boundaries (Kohler-Riessman 2013; Moen 2006: 4).

The hope of narrative thinking lies in the potential for growth inherent in the telling of our stories. As Connelly and Clandinin (2000 : n.p.) stated: “in the construction of narratives of experience, there is a reflexive relationship between living a life story, telling a life story, retelling a life story and reliving a life story.” In that reflection lies the possibility for selecting preferred stories and re-authoring stories. To illustrate this point, let us consider the classic fishing story of ‘The Big One that Got Away’. The first telling of the story, immediately after the experience, may be fairly conservative. The fish was about thirty centimetres long, and it pulled loose after a few seconds and swam away. By the tenth time the story is told, the fish had grown to a metre long, and the courageous fisherman had battled against the rapids and the strength of the mighty fish for an hour, before it finally pulled him off his feet and swam away with his prized rod still attached to its powerful jaw. After a few drinks, there will be a dog or a crocodile involved in the story as well. The bare facts of the story remain the same. A man had gone fishing and almost caught a fish, but it got away. Over time, as he retells the story and reflects on it, he attaches meaning to what happened and embellishes on the story. By now, the story is no longer a factual representation, but rather, it

is a reflection of the man's ideas about who he is and how he prefers to be seen by others (Bell 2002: 207). This is an exaggerated example, but it shows how stories play a role in our thinking about, and presentation of ourselves to the world.

Narrative practitioners understand that, because of the multiple external influences on stories, some stories become “thick” (Swart 2013: 171), as they are supported by the context. Other stories, on the other hand, are marginalised, “thin” (Swart 2013: 171) stories, that have not found support in their context. To clarify this, let us return to the story of the fisherman. The thickened story of the giant fish that the man had wrestled at such peril is supported by cultural discourses around masculinity: men are expected to be big and strong. If a fairly small fish got away, then the man cannot be very strong, because a strong man would surely have not allowed a small fish to get away. Because of a fear of being seen as weak, he makes the fish bigger and so the story (and the fish) grows. In this example, the story that is marginalised is that the man actually does not enjoy fishing much, and just wanted to go home to his family, so he was not invested in the activity. The prized rod? He gave it away shortly after. This is the story that he will not tell, because it does not fit the dominant discourses about men in his small community, where men are expected to pursue ‘manly’ activities such as fishing and hunting. However, it may be possible to identify another set of values in this marginalised story. The now ‘retired’ fisherman may come to tell a new story that shows that a man's masculinity need not be measured by the size of the fish he does or does not catch, but rather by the value he places on time with his family. As he retells this story, and embellishes on its details, it will become thickened and he may live into the new narrative and abandon the old one. The size of the fish will not matter anymore.

In narrative research, therefore, the exploration of a story is a deliberately reflexive journey, where the researcher enters into the story with the hope of hearing it in a way which allows investigation of the interplay of the cultural, linguistic, temporal and spatial influences, as well as allowing the researcher to determine whether there are possible alternative stories.

1.4.4 Practical Theological Approach

In the introduction to this chapter, I stated that practical theology is theology of real, everyday life. Moreover, it is the discipline that covers “Christian practice and contemporary situations and thus [is] a form of contextual theology” (Ganzevoort 2002: 35). Therefore, the emphasis in practical theology is on understanding the daily lives of Christians, in all their

contexts, and to bring new understanding to the daily practices of the church. If we consider the underlying principles of social constructionism and the narrative perspective, then the practical theological approaches that are best suited to this research are Lindbeck's (1984) cultural-linguistic theology and Müller's (1996) eco-hermeneutic approach. Lindbeck espouses the belief that theology is shaped within the cultural and linguistic context of the faith community, and he places emphasis on language, in the broadest sense as I defined this earlier (refer to 1.4.2). Thus, our faith and religious worlds are shaped in a "dialectical" (Lindbeck: 1984: 33-34) process, where our understanding of God and our world is informed both by our experiences and by the cultural linguistic system within which they take place. Müller (1996) also emphasises the importance of language in its broadest sense, but he takes the concept further, by adding the ecological element. Thus, if we are to understand our ideas about God and our world, then we have to interpret them as socially constructed, in an ecology of interdependent relationships between our culture, our history, our experiences, our relationships with others, and our behaviours. Likewise, we should consider our rituals, habits, social discourses and the stories we tell.

1.4.5 Body Theology

A further layer of thinking that must be mentioned is my understanding of embodiment, which is derived from body theology. As much as the emphasis in practical theology is on "lived religion" (Ganzevoort & Roeland 2014), it is understood that we live because we have bodies, and we have all our experiences in and through our bodies. Body theology is feminist liberation theology (Isherwood 2004: 154) that deliberately engages with questions of the body and holistic approaches to "enfleshed" (Isherwood 2004: 140) thinking about humans and about God. Body theologians reject dualistic thinking that would have us place the spirit above the body and deny the body; instead they focus on the unity of body, mind and spirit. As Isherwood (2004: 14) explains: "we do not simply hear the word of God, disembodied and dictatorial, but rather the words of each other, challenging us to right the wrongs." This is an interesting mirroring of 1 John 4:12: "No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us." (NIV).

Sex, sexuality, sexual abuse and any other physical, sensory experiences cannot be seen as separate events, that can be removed from spirituality; this is because the separations between body, mind and spirit are "unsolvable," much like the Cartesian dualisms that Bernstein (2011: 22) describes. Furthermore, the role of theologians is to hear the voices of

those who have been marginalised or traumatised; they should not deny the bodily suffering of survivors of sexual abuse, but should understand how that physical trauma is equally a spiritual and emotional trauma. One cannot be understood in isolation from the other.

1.5 Chapter outline

The objective of this research is to attempt to understand the spirituality of adult survivors of childhood sexual abuse. Therefore, this dissertation is shaped around a practical theological approach to understanding or interpretation: namely Heitink's Hermeneutical Circle (Heitink 1999: 197), as shown in Figure 1.2 below.

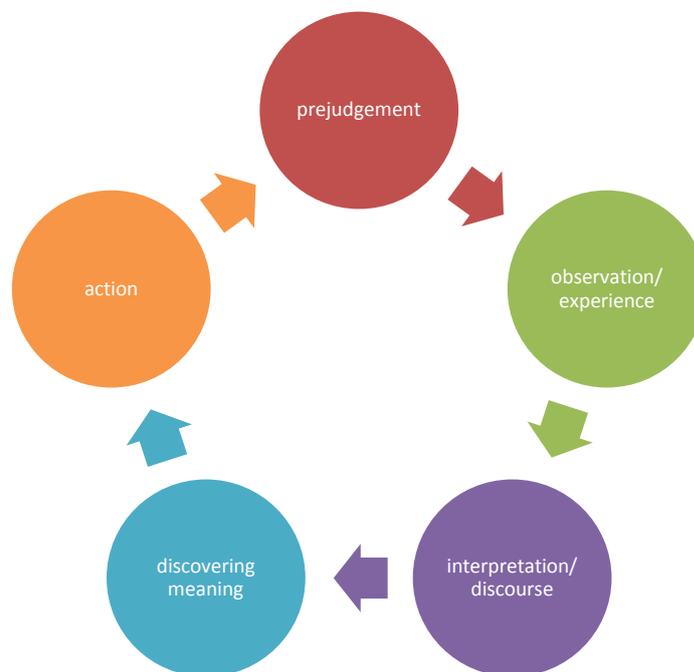


Figure 1.2: Heitink's Hermeneutical Circle

Heitink (1999:196-197) believes that theologians should be aware of and honest about their subjectivity, when trying to understand anything. In view of this, his hermeneutic process begins with what he refers to as *prejudgement*. As such, when we observe something, we do so from within a context: thus, both ourselves and the event being observed exist within a specific context. We need, therefore, to be transparent about this position of prejudgement from where we begin. Secondly, our *observation* is not actually objective and instead is an *experience* of the event observed, that affects our thinking. At the same time, our observation or participation affects that which is being observed. After that, we begin to *interpret* what we have experienced, by entering into conversations with others and finding connections between our experience and existing *discourses*. Alternatively, our experience

challenges existing discourses. As such, we *discover meaning* in the experience, by finding associations with our ethics and values. Next, since we have found meaning, our new understanding can guide new *action*. Finally, new action leads to renewed prejudgement, as what we have learned has affected the original context, which creates a new opportunity to begin the circle again.

Brief notes will be offered on each chapter, to explain how they fit into the hermeneutical circle.

1.5.1 Prejudgement

Chapters One and Two fall into the *prejudgment* phase of interpretation, as they both provide an overview of the position from where this research begins. Firstly, in Chapter One, I give a brief description of the context and aim of the research, with a focus on delineating the most important concepts, both in terms of the research question, as well as the paradigms that guide my thinking. Secondly, in Chapter Two, time is spent on an in-depth explanation of the paradigmatic framework for this research, with an emphasis on thorough clarifications of postfoundationalism, social constructionism, narrative thinking, cultural-linguistic and eco-hermeneutic practical theology and body theology.

1.5.2 Observation and Experience

Chapter Three contains a detailed description of my empirical research. Therefore it describes the *observation/experience* phase of the hermeneutical circle, as I observe and become involved in the story that will be studied. In this chapter, I explain the reasoning behind the choice of a narrative methodology and a single case study, and then discuss the steps taken to conduct the research. Since social constructionism, cultural-linguistic theology, and the eco-hermeneutic approach all place emphasis on the texts created in relationships, the narrative approach to empirical research is a useful one to employ. That approach asks the co-researcher to relate her story and places her at the centre of the research, making her the expert (Babbie & Mouton 2001: 270). This means that she will not be asked to relate factual knowledge, or even opinions, but to talk about her own lived experience.

The ethical implications of conducting research on such a sensitive topic are significant. Rice (2009) emphasises the importance of acknowledging women's "body secrets." When researchers talk to women about their bodies and sexuality, or about anything that may reflect their feelings of otherness, they need to tread carefully. Three steps are built

into this research, to protect the co-researcher's safety. Firstly, care was taken to protect her identity. The name, Hannetjie, that is used throughout this dissertation, is a pseudonym. Details of her biography have been altered as well. Secondly, she was provided with a detailed informed consent letter, which she signed after having discussed its content, and implications, with me. Thirdly, the narrative research design is reflexive in nature. As her story forms the focus of the research, she was always able to reflect on and respond to the work being done throughout the process. Thus, her feedback forms the backbone of the integrity of this research. At the same time, she was involved in each new step taken and could withdraw consent at any point, if she wished to do so.

Attention is paid to the story elicited from the co-researcher, as well as my first retelling of that story, as the outcome of the empirical study. The steps taken were as follows: (1) Three one-on-one, unstructured and semi-structured interviews were conducted to hear the story. (2) Transcripts of the interviews were typed, to be used as the text for interpretation. (3) Areas of focus were identified, through the interpretation process. (4) A prose version of the story was constructed, around the identified areas of focus. This serves as my telling of the original story.

Strictly speaking, my telling already forms the first step in the third phase of the hermeneutical circle: *interpretation*; this because my telling is not a verbatim representation of the co-researcher's words, but instead a prose version of the interview transcripts. This prose version of the story is structured around emerging areas of focus that I identify in my reading of the original transcripts. In order to identify areas of focus, I look for patterns, repetitions, God-talk, language that points to culture and cultural discourses, and metaphors that may help me to interpret the story.

1.5.3 Interpretation and Discourse

In Chapter Four, the *interpretation/discourse* phase continues, as I invite professionals from other disciplines, who share an interest in spirituality and/or sexual abuse, into a transdisciplinary conversation. They read and respond to the story presented, by answering the following four questions about their reading and their disciplines' potential contribution to the story:

- When reading the co-researcher's story, what do you think her concerns would be?
- How would you formulate your discipline's unique perspective on these concerns and why is it important that this perspective be heard at the transdisciplinary table?
- Why do you think your perspective will be understood and appreciated by co-researchers from other disciplines?
- What would you like to learn from the co-researchers from other disciplines?

The transdisciplinary co-researchers' contributions were read by the woman who would share her story of abuse, so that she could respond to them. In my discussion of their interpretations, I focus on areas of consensus, dissensus and unique outcomes. Where appropriate, I respond to their comments.

The aim is to search for transversal comprehension; to “seek to integrate the different knowledges by looking for coherence, correspondences and ‘ridges’ across the differences... patterns across diverse disciplines and discourses.” (Wickson, Carew & Russell 2006: 1052). Thus, transversal rationality is an intermingling of colours, much like the colours in a kaleidoscope. Each bead in the chamber of a kaleidoscope has its own colour, but as the viewer rotates the chamber, the picture is determined by the way that the beads overlap. Wherever they overlap, new colours are formed but wherever the beads can be seen on their own, the original colour shines through. Jahn, Bergmann and Keil (2012: 8) explain that the aim of transdisciplinary research is to search for new ways of looking at societal problems, by looking for a “hitherto non-existent connection between the distinct epistemic, social-organizational, and communicative entities that make up the given problem context.” This can be achieved by integrating knowledge and insights from divergent disciplines. Researchers conducting this type of study need to bear in mind the possible pitfalls of working across disciplines. This gives rise to many possible challenges that need to be addressed and these include epistemological differences, differences in language, and different levels of interpretation. I strive to be honest and to reflect on these matters as this approach will enable me to notice when such challenges arise, and will create space for further learning (Wickson, Carew & Russell 2006).

Chapter Five forms the second layer of the *interpretation/discourse* phase, as it contains the literature review, based on the outcomes of Chapters Three and Four. It is important to note that narrative research principles dictate that the story must guide the researcher's thinking, as the storyteller is perceived to be the expert. Because of this

consideration the “traditional” practice of offering a review of the literature before entering into the empirical research is not followed in this thesis: instead, the literature review follows the research, because “the starting point for inquiry is a practical event, rather than a working theory” (Connelly & Clandinin 1987 :4). The contents of the story, and the various areas of focus that emerge out of the story guide my decisions about what literature to consult, in this inductive (Polkinghorne 2007) process. Furthermore, the transdisciplinary co-researchers’ contributions add to the list of concepts or areas of focus that needed to be examined in greater depth. Finally, as the original storyteller is the expert on her own life, her responses to the transdisciplinary conversation affect my decisions about what to read, especially if she disagrees with anything.

The focus of the literature study is to deepen my interpretation and understanding of Hanneljie’s story. By using the transdisciplinary participants’ interpretations and the contributions of other thinkers, through the literature, I construct a detailed interpretation of her story and the social discourses surrounding it.

1.5.4 Discovering meaning

In Chapter Six, I elaborate on the *meaning discovered* in the steps taken in Chapters Three, Four, and Five. I expected that I would be able to describe clearly the relationships between spirituality, coping and sexual abuse, but a complex web of interactions was revealed, that may cause us to rethink the language of the original research questions. Those original questions were: Firstly, what is the relationship between posttraumatic growth and spirituality? Secondly, and more specifically, what is the relationship between spirituality and surviving sexual abuse? As will become evident in the exploration of the story that Hanneljie tells, there is a strong relationship between her spirituality and the history of sexual abuse. However, the relationship is not clearly delineated at all, nor should it be. If we bear in mind the social construction of reality and the cultural-linguistic and eco-hermeneutic principles of contextual embeddedness, in addition to the holistic thinking of body theology, it may transpire that the original questions were based on an outmoded idea that spirituality can be examined in isolation. Instead, new questions may arise: How does practical theology respond to the emerging literature and thinking about the multiplicity of self, and the embodied self? How would an approach formed around these ideas shape this kind of research?

1.5.5 Action, or moving beyond the local

Finally, in Chapter Seven, I reflect on the process followed and then pose questions about the way forward for practical theology and for pastoral care. Those questions are formulated around the lessons learned in Chapter Six, and aimed at provoking *action*, particularly in the area of embodied practical theology. If it becomes apparent that the original research question is flawed, then this shortcoming is because our thinking about personhood is still steeped in the language that supports a split between body, mind and spirit even though body theologians deny such a split. Only very recently have researchers started to think of the self differently, and the language that names the ‘material’ or ‘embodied’ or ‘singular’ self is still being negotiated, as can be seen in Strawson’s (1999) attempts to explain his understanding of the self. Also, the interrelationships and interdependence between people and their context, and other people suggests a potentially much broader anthropology.

1.6 A note on language

Feminism has made us very sensitive to the use of language, especially in relation to pronouns (Ansara & Hegarty 2013). For many generations, it was common practice to use the masculine pronouns (he, him, his) in writing, when referring to people in general. Feminists have challenged this practice, and in recent decades, it has become common practice to use gender neutral terms or to use a combination of feminine and masculine pronouns (he/she, s/he, he or she). In this research, I decided to use feminine pronouns throughout, except when referring specifically to a male. As I am a woman, and my chosen co-researcher is a woman, I have elected to use the feminine form. Thus, when referring to ‘the researcher’ in a general, theoretical context, I will use ‘she’, since, in this specific case, the researcher is female. Similarly, the general ‘the co-researcher’ refers, in this dissertation, specifically to Hannetjie, as she will be known.

Furthermore, there is much debate about using gender neutral terms in contemporary philosophy of religion, which includes terms for God (Anderson 2013). However, Hannetjie adheres to the Dutch Reformed Church’s conception of God as male, and refers to Him as such. Therefore, when God is referred to, in the context of Hannetjie’s frame of reference, the male pronoun will be employed. This, however, is not a reflection of my personal theology, which more closely resembles Moltmann’s (1980: 164) acknowledgement of God as both Mother and Father.

Finally, in narrative reasoning, that places the co-researcher at the forefront, language is chosen very deliberately, to emphasise the power of the storyteller and to decentre the role of the researcher, and science. For example, the word ‘knowledges’ may appear grammatically incorrect, but it is used deliberately to emphasise the “multiplicity of knowledges” available to us, as opposed to the universalistic idea that the ‘knowledge’, like ‘truth’ is out there somewhere, ready to be found (Swart 2013: 167). As such, narrative practitioners are often creative with language, choosing, and sometimes inventing, words that support their philosophy. Therefore, a reader who is not familiar with narrative thinking may find some of the language strange. I make an effort, however, to explain the language, where necessary, throughout the dissertation.

1.7 Summary

This chapter serves as the introduction to the dissertation that will describe my attempt to answer the question: What is the relationship between a female adult’s spirituality and her survival of childhood sexual abuse? This question was inspired by Ganzevoort and Roeland’s (2009: 189) questions: “How is posttraumatic spirituality narratively construed and what are the positive factors influencing a healthy or adequate role of spirituality in the coping process?”

Before asking these questions, however, I needed to clarify what I mean by spirituality, sex, sexual health, trauma, and sexual abuse. In particular, we need to understand why sexual abuse is perceived as traumatic, and therefore a worthy subject for discussion in the context of the original question. Once I had established my understanding of these key concepts, I was able to expand on the question by explaining the aim and context of the research. These matters were discussed in Part One of this chapter. In Part Two, the focus was on the formal structure of the dissertation, and on making my theoretical framework clear. Here, I described postfoundational thinking, social constructionism, the narrative approach as well as my practical theological approach, which includes cultural-linguistic theology, eco-hermeneutic thinking and body theology. Finally, I used Heitink’s hermeneutical circle to show the design of the dissertation, by linking the various chapters and their functions to the steps in the hermeneutical circle. Now that the reader has been given a frame of reference, we may embark on the journey together.

CHAPTER TWO:

PARADIGMATIC POSITIONING

2.1. Introduction

The journey for a researcher begins with a topic that she wishes to explore. However, it is not enough to have a well-defined topic. Knowing how to explore the topic and knowing what methodology to use, both depend on whether the researcher knows and can articulate the world-view, or paradigm, that best informs her question and best suits her own approach to theology. Thus, some thoughts on both the broader scientific paradigms as well as theological frameworks that have shaped my thinking need to be explored. A definition of postfoundational thinking as a paradigm for rationality is provided, followed by an explanation of social constructionism and how it supports the postfoundational paradigm. A natural companion to social constructionism and the framework that has had the most influence on my thinking and approach to research is the narrative way, which is defined as I understand it here.

Secondly, and more importantly, I dedicate some time to defining the practical theological frame of reference that will be employed here. Based also on the postfoundational paradigm of Van Huyssteen (1986, 1996, 1999, 2000, 2006), I have chosen Lindbeck's (1984) cultural-linguistic description of religion alongside Heitink's (1999) hermeneutic circle to describe the nature of religion and how to understand it in context. Lastly, as I move closer to the heart of the question of sexual abuse and spirituality, I turn my gaze to eco-hermeneutic practical theology and feminist theology, as well as looking briefly at the questions that body theology as a branch of feminism ask about incarnation and embodied spirituality.

2.2. What is Postfoundationalism?

Postfoundationalism was born out of a series of changes in social scientific thinking. *Foundationalism* can be understood to be aligned with positivistic approaches to science, which wish to make absolute truth-claims about reality. The belief is that, with enough well-designed scientific enquiry, any question can be fully answered or any phenomenon fully understood; there is a single universal truth to be found. Difficulties arise when scientists find phenomena that they cannot explain or situations that contradict what they already know. When one attempts to bring different perspectives into dialogue and find a "unified

perspective” the closest one could come is “assimilation”(Müller 2011: 2). As Müller asserts, “A combination of perspectives into a collage of different meanings is regarded as a threat to the truth”, because there is supposed to be only one truth. In response to the problem of foundationalism, *non-foundational* scientific paradigms developed which claimed that there are no final answers. Knowledge is understood to be relative and subjective. The outcome, however, is that everything is rendered unknowable or able to be disproven. There is no universal reality, only a multiverse or “a diversity of opinions” (Müller 2011: 2) that are disconnected and incommensurable. This nihilistic outcome discomfited some scientists, who saw that, even when there are many possible answers, there are layers of connectivity between realities – transversal reality. This *postfoundational* approach teaches us that scientists from different perspectives and even different disciplines can enter into dialogue to look for common ground and learn from one another. No one scientist can claim to have *the* answer, but she can bring *an* answer to the table that will, in dialogue with other answers, shed light on the question that was asked (Müller 2009). This is as a “positive appropriation of a constructive form of postmodernism” (Van Huyssteen 1999:112), “a way of providing a responsible and workable interface between disciplines” (Müller 2011:3) in that post-foundational rationality is inherently creative, relying on a rethinking of postmodern ideas. If universalism is dead in the water and relativism is failing, how can we move constructively beyond these two?

At first, after relativism, the question is whether it is still possible to make rational judgements? What would make for a rational judgement? In Van Huyssteen’s explanation, he refers to the most “crucial epistemic value” as “intelligibility” (1999:114) in that all attempts at rationality are essentially attempts at making something intelligible or understandable, with the aim of making sense of the world around us. One needs to ask, however, how one would decide whether a judgement is intelligible? If one accepts the pluralist notion that context affects knowing, as do the postfoundationalists, as well as that there “are no grounds for believing that there exists a body of self-evident or given propositions that will allow us to justify our beliefs” (Van Huyssteen 1999: 124) as the positivists would have liked, how would any knowledge or theory be judged intelligible by another? Herein lies the responsibility of the researcher to make responsible judgements, based on active engagement with interpreted experience. Interpreted experience is a transaction between our understanding and our experience in that we return to experience with our language about the experience and as such make our interpretation practical. Here,

experience is conceptualised as “the stories of people in real-life situations”– the “real, concrete and definite context” (Müller 2011: 2 and 3).

Post-foundational rationality relies heavily on contextual embeddedness, since it acknowledges the subjective nature of any rationality. Even the most sophisticated science relies on a set of “tacit assumptions” about its nature and how it functions as well as its value (Van Huyssteen 1999:142). These assumptions are value-based in their essence since, even the existence of science itself can be attributed to the assumptions or value judgements made about the value of science. As Van Huyssteen puts it, “A disregard of subjective factors in the making of our judgments – whether scientific, ethical, or religious – would therefore make any evaluation nonrational” (1999:143). A conscious reflection on and deliberate acknowledgement of the context thus becomes imperative.

Thus, within the context of theological research, theology is given a voice in an arena where it was often silenced in the past, because of the supposed divide that exists between theology and science. Van Huyssteen (2006: n.p.) puts forward, “In the dialogue between theology and other disciplines, transversal reasoning facilitates different but equally legitimate ways of viewing, or interpreting, issues, problems, traditions, or disciplines.”

It is important to note that this approach to rationality requires a conscious acknowledgment of the fallibility of our judgements, especially since they are made with a specific context in mind. Van Huyssteen refers to this as “epistemic humility” (1999:131) or “fallibilist epistemology” (1996:16). A postfoundationalist makes every attempt to make responsible judgements, while recognising the incomplete and imperfect nature of such judgements. The researcher is responsible for the co-researcher’s story, and accountable to the co-researcher, in terms of telling and interpreting the story in such a way that it remains true to the co-researcher’s lived experience, but the researcher’s telling is never objective. As Van Huyssteen (2006: n.p.) explains:

The need for accountability to our experience also reveals another important epistemological overlap between theological and scientific modes of inquiry. Because we relate to our world epistemically only through the mediation of interpreted experience, it may be said that our diverse theologies, and also the sciences, offer alternative interpretations of our experience.

A central element of postfoundational rationality, which mediates the fallibilist epistemology while also moving this rationality out of the local context is the notion of transversal rationality. Transversality is the conscious attempt to bring “multiple patterns of interpretation” (Van Huyssteen 1999:135) from different contexts into dialogue, in order to find that which is common, to see if there is room for adjustment and to find that which is different. Schrag and Ramsey (1994: 134) explain, “that the phenomena at issue display an extending over and lying across that effects a convergence without coincidence, the achievement of points of contact without solidifying into a modal identity”. Once this has been achieved, one can move into making meaning together.

It is possible at this point to look back at one’s existing discourses and to look forward to new possibilities. The researcher has to acknowledge the limitations of her own discipline and know that, “standing within specific research traditions, we often realize that a particular tradition may generate questions that cannot be resolved by its own resources alone” (Van Huyssteen 2006: n.p.). Therefore, she enters into dialogue with other disciplines, in search of potential interpretations that will inform her own. Here, humility plays a central role in the researcher’s position, since the researcher knows that “texts have many possible entry points for interpretation, and thus, many possible interpretive outcomes” (Schrag & Ramsey 1994: 135) and, despite the many possibilities and potential differences, it is possible to reach “transversal comprehension” (Schrag & Ramsey 1994).

Transversality allows a researcher to remain true to her own tradition of interpretation, as the postfoundationalist is acutely aware of the importance of context. However, upon entering into dialogue with other disciplines, she moves beyond the specificity of the local context into a space where a broader audience can benefit from the interpreted experience. Herein lies a key difference between the postfoundational and the nonfoundational notions of rationality. A relativist might accept the plurality of interpretations and walk away. The postfoundationalist uses the different interpretations as a starting point for learning. As Van Huyssteen (2006: n.p.) puts it:

the awareness of this contextuality and locality does not imply the choice for some notion of tribal rationality, or for a kind of rampant relativism or easy pluralism. Precisely the open acknowledgement of this kind of contextuality, and of epistemic and hermeneutical preferences, can facilitate, rather than abstract, transcontextual and interdisciplinary dialogue.

Thus, a constructive tension develops between one's own interpretation and that of others, in that the researcher should remain true to her own tradition of interpretation, while learning from others' perspectives:

We are also obliged to return critically to exactly these beliefs and traditions, acknowledge their flexible and fluid nature as they are shaped by the ongoing process of history, and then rethink and reconstruct them in interdisciplinary conversation (Van Huyssteen 2006: n.p.).

Following this conversation comes the moment of returning to the subject with the newly made meaning, since forming new ideas without referring back to the subject will place limitations on the new meaning, keeping it in the realm of language only. Postfoundational research is essentially phenomenological and is aimed at reaching a point of influencing praxis, rather than just theory, thus the need to return to the subject. At this point, one enters into a dialectic loop and the possibility of change (Van Huyssteen 1999:135). Müller (2011: 5) and Van Huyssteen (2000: 436) describe this as finding "a wide, reflective equilibrium", while Pienaar and Müller (2012:7) refer to "the optimal, but fragile communal understanding we are capable of." It is the point where a new balance is struck between the new understanding and the subject, based on careful reflection. Herein lies the creative root of postfoundational thinking and the responsibility of the practical theologian to be adept at moving "along the boundary" (Müller 2011: 4). That writer (2011:4 and 5) uses the metaphor of an *ecotone* (a boundary/transitional space where various plant and animal species share and cross boundaries between territories) in that a "practical theologian approaching his discipline from the perspective of a transversal rationality needs to be mobile and highly adaptable." She needs to engage appropriately with 'species' from the different overlapping areas and must be able to transfer what she learns from one such area into another. In the case of practical theology, the other 'species' may include psychologists, anthropologists and other practitioners in the human and social sciences.

The conclusion one can make about a postfoundationalist researcher is that her thinking is "defined by communicative practices, oriented toward an understanding of itself in its discourses and action and in being with others" since her understanding of knowledge is that it cannot be separated from its "human agent" in that postfoundationalism takes responsibility for "resituating the human subject in the space of communicative praxis" (Müller 2011: 3). She can discern meaning through "evaluation" and "responsible judgment", while acknowledging the limits of her own knowledge and "expertise". Thus, she makes a conscious effort to stay embedded in "the community of those who share the relevant

expertise” (Müller 2011: 3). She does not assume, like a foundational scientist, the position of an expert or authority on ultimate knowledge. Rather, she is a listener and interpreter of stories and, like any narrator she interprets the meaning for the benefit of the audience as she goes on, as Müller (2011: 3) affirms, “Experience is situated and experience is *always* interpreted”. Further, she knows that the people whose stories she is telling are the true experts. Just as the narrator can tell the story of the protagonist, but not act for the protagonist, so can the researcher not take the role of the most important person in the research. The knowledge the co-researchers bring to the table and the meaning they make of the process is most important. They are the axes around which the research must revolve. Her rationality is socially mediated, in that she is in constant dialogue with the co-researchers and other disciplines. At the same time, she makes responsible judgements about the knowledge she is gaining, based on her interpreted experience. Thus, she is able to give a “fitting response” to her question, because her knowledge is “contextually conditioned” – informed by the context, but not determined by it – and able to transcend the context and move beyond the local community (Van Huyssteen 1999: 145-146).

Thus, one can claim that postfoundational rationality frees theological research from the positivist notion of empiricism, replacing empiricism with experience. What else is positivist empirical data if not experience, although possibly experience governed by rules? It balances experience with judgement; with the interplay between judgement, context, tradition and interpreted experience.

2.3. What is Social Constructionism?

Thinking about knowledge and reality, and how humans perceive and create them, social constructionists have come to believe that reality and knowledge of reality are not independent phenomena that can exist outside of human social interaction. Instead, these ideas are co-created between people, in their daily interaction. This is the reason why a social constructionist approach falls firmly within the postfoundational paradigm. Social constructionism as a principle supports the postfoundational notion of transversality very well in that it relies on the communal construction of understanding.

Briefly, as an event occurs, a person will form an impression of it. A second person will also form an independent impression. When these two people talk about the event, their impressions, when expressed, become external objects that can be examined. Together, they examine their versions of the event and come to conclusions about it, based on both

impressions. Hence, they have formed a new version, which both of them will internalise, having agreed on the ‘truth’ of the new, shared version. By doing this, they have co-constructed truth. If a third person asks either one of them about it, the respondent will share the co-constructed truth with them. The third person may take for granted that this is, in fact, the truth and act accordingly, having not witnessed the original event personally. In doing this, the third person strengthens the construction. Others may then follow their example and also act according to this truth, having only seen the third person’s example. The next generation will not have seen the original event or the third person’s example, but will act on the truth in the same way, because ‘It’s always been done that way’. In this way, the newly constructed truth will be taken for granted and form the basis of a dominant discourse. This brief and rudimentary explanation of social constructionism provides a basis for identifying and illustrating a number of important principles.

2.3.1 Many ‘versions’ of truth.

The first assumption that can be made is what Vivien Burr (1995: 5) refers to as “anti-essentialism.” In other words, there is no ‘one true’ or definitive version of an event. Any event or phenomenon can be witnessed or participated in by any number of people, rendering it impossible to say that there exists only one unified version of the event that tells the whole truth. Each participant’s version is true (1995: 48). This can be illustrated using an example of an armed robbery in a small shop, where the robber escaped. The shop-owner’s version will reflect the event as traumatic. His property was taken, and his life threatened. The robber may have abused him verbally and physically in order to intimidate him. In contrast, the robber may describe the event as exhilarating. Being able to overpower another man and take what he wanted without permission gave him a thrill and a sense of power. Getting away without being caught may even give him a sense of elation. The responding police officers, on the other hand, may experience the event as frustrating. Having more than enough work already and finding no evidence that may help them catch the criminal, they are tired and feel powerless. Thus, each person’s experience of the event is true, yet they are very different.

2.3.2 Reality is constructed.

A fundamental difference between social constructionism and many previous epistemologies lies in the assumption that reality is not objective, but is constructed. This construction takes place socially, based on the participants’ versions of truth. As participants interact and exchange thoughts about their versions of truth, they create a reality based on their

interconnected ideas. If we return to the example of the robbery, there is much about each person's version that is different from the others, but there is also overlap. Everyone can agree that the event took place in a shop, as they share a previously constructed idea of a shop as a place where items are bought and sold. They all know that the event was a robbery, since they all share a previously constructed idea of a robbery as an event where one person takes property from another without permission. They all know that the perpetrator is a robber, based on our definition of robbery. They all know that the shop owner is the victim, based on our previously agreed notion that a victim is someone who suffers injustice or injury. Thus, a social constructionist will not refer to reality as such, but rather to "constructed versions of reality" (Burr 1995: 6) and, more specifically, co-constructed versions of reality.

2.3.3 The construction of reality is bound by context.

If reality is indeed constructed within a social interaction, then it follows that no construction of reality is independent of its context. It is "time- and culture-bound" (Burr 1995: 6). When creating the example of the robbery, I assumed that the readers will immediately understand the example; after all, in contemporary South Africa we have the combination of the current high crime rate together with the Western mass media's fascination with crime and police procedure as seen in the popularity of such television series and novels. These factors have caused the construction of the truth that we all know what a robbery is and how it usually plays out. If this example were to be presented to an audience from a culture where the definition of ownership is not the same as in most Western cultures, the concept of robbery as we understand it may not make sense and the example will fall flat.

2.3.4 The construction of reality is bound by language.

It is impossible to examine the social construction of reality, without first considering the power and importance of language. Words are containers for meaning and when communicating with others we rely on the fact that the meaning of words is shared by our audience. Earlier, I explained that there is overlap in the various people's understanding of the robbery, because they share common ideas about key aspects of the robbery; in other words, they share a common language. The meaning contained in the word 'robbery' enables everybody to talk about their very different versions of the event as if it were one event. They can all name the event a 'robbery', because they all share the same idea of what the name means. This meaning is constructed out of previously shared experiences of what ownership

is and the different ways in which ownership of something can shift from one person to another.

Consider the word, ‘duck’. This word is a series of three sounds strung together, yet millions of English-speaking people around the world have agreed on at least three meanings for these arbitrary sounds and have filled the word with these meanings in a way that the use of the word will elicit specific reactions in people, depending on its context. On a bird-watching trip, if someone were to say, “Duck” then people would reach for their binoculars and look towards the nearest body of water for a specific kind of bird. However, if someone were to cry out, “Duck!” on a construction site, people would be more likely to dip their heads, because it may mean that something is about to land on somebody’s head with force. Somebody watching a cricket game on television would want to see which batsman has been bowled out with a zero score. Should I choose to use any other random set of sounds, like ‘snoof’ for example, I would get very strange reactions indeed, because my selection of sounds is meaningless. That ‘word’ is an empty vessel that holds no shared meaning; it names nothing.

2.3.5 Language is a tool for action.

Upon naming an event, the participants will have a set of rules about how they should react to it; the meaning of a word also holds clues for how a person should act, based on previously constructed ideas. If the event is, in fact, a ‘robbery’, then the victim and the perpetrator will act in accordance with these roles. Hence, the victim will call the police, who will rush to the scene, and the perpetrator will rush away. Had the perpetrator not decided on a ‘robbery’ that morning, before he left the house, events would have been different and the participants in those events would have acted differently. For example if the perpetrator had named the event ‘asking a favour’, he may have chosen to ask nicely and not injured the shop owner. The shop owner would not have been able to name him a ‘robber’, but rather a ‘beggar’ or a ‘neighbour’. Hence, he would have reacted differently and may well have chosen to give the man some money or to lend it to him. The man may have stayed for a cup of coffee, instead of rushing away. The police would not have been summoned and they would have gone on with other work. In short, the language we use to describe things affects how we act upon them.

2.3.6 Discourse

Earlier, it was stated that we rely on shared meaning to communicate. We must ask: how is that possible? How does meaning become shared? How did the participants know that the event they were involved in could be named a robbery? How did they acquire that set of rules for how to act in the event of a robbery? If we return to an earlier example, how and why did the third person and those following accept the version of truth presented by the first two? Gergen (2009: 6-10) ascribes the development of discourses to social utility. Thus, if a version of truth fits the context and provides a useful explanation of something, it is accepted as 'true'. As long as it continues to be useful, it will be used and become a "tradition of sense making" (2009:4). It is essentially pragmatic in nature.

The usefulness of meaning is determined in the relationship between participants and the context they share over time. As Gergen explains, "A discourse created outside the textual histories of any culture would not only fail to communicate, there would be no practices to which it is relevant." (2001: 33). Later, he continues to explain that, "constructionists' emphasis is on meaningful action embedded within extended patterns of interchange. Thus, meaningful action is always consequential in the sense of bearing an interdependent relationship between what preceded and what follows." In this context, the "textual histories" (Gergen 2001:33) are, as Burr explains (1995: 50-51), constituted of a multitude of 'texts' inasmuch as customs, fashion, media, language, architecture and other 'texts' all reflect the dominant discourses of a culture. Consider the length of women's skirts. As Western culture around gender and the roles of women has changed, so has the length of their skirts and the relevance of whether they wear skirts at all, for that matter. In a sense, one can 'read' the 'text' of a woman's skirt and come to a conclusion about her culture.

Herein lies the power of examining discourses. Not only do they shape culture and behaviour, but the act of exposing and questioning existing discourses can also change culture and behaviour. In essence, it is possible to construct a new discourse. When a discourse becomes less useful, it is possible and even necessary to "re-construct ourselves in ways which might be more facilitating for us" (Burr 1998: 13). As Gergen also asserts, in his discussion of previously dominant discourses in psychology that pathologised human behaviour: "Vitality needed then, are discourses inviting people into more valued modes of being, ways of constructing self and others that add to the sense of well-being and human

welfare.” (2001: 33). Here, the narrative approach to research becomes crucial, in that it provides valuable tools for deconstructing and reconstructing discourses.

2.4. What is the Narrative Approach?

The narrative approach is a constructionist perspective that uses a story as the guiding metaphor. The basic premise is that “people make meaning, meaning is not made for us.” (Monk, Winslade, Crocket & Epston. 1997: 33). Thus, we are the authors of our stories. As Besley explains (2002: 132), “the meaning that people attribute to events determines their behaviour” and our “interpretation of events depends on the context in which they are received.”

As with other constructionist perspectives, emphasis is placed on language as “performative and action-oriented” (Demasure & Müller 2006: 414-415). The way in which we use language and formulate discourses affects how we act, as it is a “precursor for action and a reflection of thought” and because discourses position people in society (Monk et al. 1997: 36-37). If a woman subscribes to the popular (and much debated) discourse that only slim women are attractive, for example, she is placed in a position where she must choose either to stay on a restricted diet and exercise often or to think of herself as being unattractive. Thus, she will live according to a ‘slim is pretty’ paradigm and her story will be supported, or thickened, by the ever-present media and ideals of beauty reflected in the media, where romantic leading ladies and well-paid fashion models all conform to a similar type. She may also see the story reflected in her experience of relationships with the opposite sex, where the slim women around her find it easier to attract men while the women who are not as slim do not get as much attention from the opposite sex.

In this example, however, we are faced with the problems that subscribing to certain discourses can cause. If the woman in question is unable to live up to the ideals of this discourse, she may be trapped by thinking of herself as unattractive, because she has immersed herself in this discourse and sees only those texts in society that support it. “Our stories can blind us to other possibilities.” (Monk et al. 1997:42).

Dominant discourses become dominant because they go unquestioned and become ingrained in our ways of being. If we do not accept them as ‘fact’ or ‘truth’, but rather think of them as constructed, they can be deconstructed and then reconstructed differently. Let us return, for a moment, to the previous section 2.3, where it was stated that discourses affect

how we act, but that the act of exposing a discourse may help us to change the discourse. In many respects, the work of a narrative practitioner is to expose and question discourses, and to be “suspicious of meta-narratives, transcendental arguments and final vocabularies.” (Besley 2002: 131). Thus, a narrative stance is often also an “inquiring stance” (Monk et al. 1997: 26). The narrative practitioner will not assume that things are ‘true’, but that they have been constructed. So, she may ask questions about the construction of a discourse. As Freedman and Combs (1996: 46) explain, “Our social constructionist bias leads us to interact with people in ways that invite them to relate to their life narratives not as passively received facts, but as actively constructed stories.” The hope is that this form of interaction will open possibilities for reconstructing stories in a more helpful guise. “As people begin to have ideas about how the narratives they are living out have been constructed, they see that those narratives are not inevitable, that they do not represent essential truth. Instead, they are constructions that could be constructed differently.” (Freedman & Combs 1996: 57). If we should use the woman subscribing to the ‘slim is pretty’ narrative as an example again, a deconstruction of her thin conception of beauty as being equal to slimness may lead her to think differently about whether she is attractive or not. She may come to see the possibility that those leading ladies she so admires are not only portrayed as slim, but also as successful professionals or caring people; in other words, their beauty does not only lie only in their physical appearance. She may be open to the possibility that successful, caring women are perceived as beautiful and thicken her own narrative by adding these characteristics to it, thus reconstructing it.

A consequence of believing that ‘truth’ is not set in stone, but constructed, is that it is continually being constructed in ongoing iterations between action and discourse. Thus, our taken for granted discourses affect our behaviour, and in turn, our behaviour strengthens and supports those discourses. Subscribing to a particular discourse should make a narrative thinker aware that our knowledge about ourselves and our world is constantly being constructed. It becomes our responsibility, then, to examine constantly what we construct, to deconstruct it and reconstruct it as necessary. Freedman and Combs (1996: 17) explain: “We would have to examine taken-for-granted stories in our local culture, the contexts we moved in, the relationships we cultivated and the like, so as to constantly re-author and update our own stories. Morality and ethics would not be fixed things, but ongoing activities, requiring continuing maintenance and attention.” Essentially, reality is an ongoing project, a work in progress.

2.5. Theological Position

2.5.1 Theological Paradigm

The theological basis of this research is influenced greatly by Van Huyssteen's postfoundational approach to theological inquiry; that approach is both "problem conscious" and "solution seeking" (Van Huyssteen: 1986: 187) in that it holds an awareness of the 'problem', in a plural world. Thus, there is no one position that offers all the answers, while creatively seeking solutions amongst positions, as seen in the rationale behind transversal rationality. It "enables us to communicate across boundaries, from context to context, from one form of life to another, from one discipline to another" reaching a "tentative and shared mutual understanding." (Van Huyssteen: 2000: 436). While asking theologians to look beyond their own understanding, this approach also requires them to remain true to the context within which they find themselves, by being involved in the reality of the context (Van Huyssteen: 1986:179). As Lindbeck (1984:18) also explains, "oppositions between rules can in some instances be resolved, not by altering one or both of them, but by specifying when or where they apply."

We now turn to Lindbeck and to his cultural-linguistic theology, to begin our understanding of theology in a postfoundational world. He (1984: 33) explains that religion is:

[a] cultural linguistic system [*and*] [i]ts doctrines, cosmic stories or myths, and ethical directives are integrally related to the rituals it practices, the sentiments or experiences it evokes, the actions it recommends, and the spiritual forms it develops." Religion can be understood as being "similar to an idiom that makes possible the description of realities, the formulation of beliefs, and the interpretation of inner attitudes, feelings and sentiments.

This model teaches us that our ideas about faith and religion, and therefore our practice of theology, are shaped within and because of our community and history, in a "dialectical" process (Lindbeck 1984: 33-34). In the case of the Christian community, it means that our understanding of God and faith is not formed within ourselves, or because someone tells us that things are a certain way, but amongst others and in relating with others and the phenomena that shape our culture as Christians: these include our beliefs, rituals and habits. Lindbeck advocates for an understanding of "inner experience as derivative" in that our experiences are not raw, uninterpreted material, interpreted only after they have taken place. Rather, since our religion is so deeply embedded in our consciousness, we have experiences and interpret them, because of our religion. "It is necessary to have the means for

expressing an experience in order to have it, and the richer our expressive or linguistic system, the more subtle, varied and differentiated can be our experience.” (Lindbeck 1984: 37)

Essentially, the approach in this research is relational in nature, exploring the relations between sexuality, spirituality and relationships within the context of the influence of broken sexual and family relationships on spirituality. This is based on the social constructionist and cultural linguistic premise that our conception of God can only be formed in relationship with others and our context. Consider for example also 1 John 4:12: “No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us” (NIV). If we know God through people, how do abusive relationships with those closest to us affect our spiritual identity? Can we know God, despite, or as a result of, abusive relationships? Can we even define God, despite, or as a result of, abusive relationships?

Lindbeck (1984: 114) makes it clear that:

meaning is constituted by the uses of a specific language, rather than being distinguishable from it. Thus the proper way to determine what ‘God’ signifies, for example, is by examining how the word operates within a religion and thereby shapes reality and experience, rather than by first establishing its propositional or experiential meaning and reinterpreting or reformulating its uses accordingly.

If this is indeed true, then it opens the way for questions about how to think about ‘God’: thus, the ‘God’ who is rooted in the ‘linguistic system’ of the Dutch Reformed tradition of contemporary South African Afrikaners (as the co-researcher is) could have a meaning entirely different from the ‘God’ who is experienced by survivors of abuse (as the co-researcher also is). What is the dialectic relationship between these two? Browning (2010: 20-21) also emphasises a focus on “embodied consciousness” that is born out of the metaphors, symbols, idioms, myths and narratives of the cultural tradition and an acknowledgement of the established ways of understanding that have evolved through the “repeated successful understandings of past generations,” when he explains the core of hermeneutic phenomenology. In research and in attempting to understand a phenomenon, one cannot deny whatever happened in the past that had the effect of shaping existing ideas. It is at this point that one is reminded of Tillich’s existential approach to theology which Heitink (1999: 78-79) describes as a series of feedback loops in that theology provides the answers to burning questions, until the answers lose their relevance in society: this in turn raises new questions for which theology is compelled to attempt to provide answers. Theodicy is at the

centre of our questions: How is a supposedly good and loving God able to allow abuse? How can we rethink the ‘repeated successful understandings of past generations’ that are not successful in the face of sexual abuse?

At this point let us return briefly to Gergen’s (2001: 33) explanation of discourses, as discussed in section 2.3.6. Thus, discourses form because of the repeated usefulness of a construction; they must be questioned when the constructions that underlie the discourse are no longer useful, either because the context has changed or something in the context has rendered the discourse dysfunctional.

Harvey Cox (1999:139) explains: “Forms of discourse and modes of inquiry gain their legitimacy because they rest on worldviews that are encoded in subtle and frequently unexamined cultural patterns.” Here, in his exploration of twentieth century religion, Cox reiterates the sentiment of Gergen (2001) and Lindbeck (1984) when he describes “master narratives” and how the changes in religion of the twentieth century have brought about major shifts in thinking and questioning of long established discourses. The cultural-linguistic system of a religion is formed over many years and develops into increasingly intricate and entrenched patterns of thinking that are largely unquestioned, until, as previously stated, the answers they provide lose relevance and compel a new questioning. It forces us to know and understand religion and God anew, but not, Cox (1999:142) argues, from an academic perspective, but rather from the lived experience and stories of believers. Cox (1999:142) explains that, “knowing the gods and demons of people and listening to their prayers and curses tell us more about them than all the statistics and case histories we could ever compile.”

Heitink (1999:154) would argue here for the “bipolar, tension-filled” hermeneutic circle. In his explanation, the relationship between experience and the understanding of that experience is a dialectic circle, where one is constantly tested and criticised by the other in a circle of “prejudgment – observation /experience – interpretation/discourse – discovering meaning – action”. As Lindbeck (1984:34) also argues, the beginning of the circle is a point of “prejudgment” in that one will always enter into a situation with an existing framework of understanding, having been socialised in a specific system. Based on this, one may have an experience that will be interpreted from within that system and communicated from a subjective point of view. Once it is communicated, however, it enters into a space of “intersubjective discourse” (1984: 34). Here, the experience is interpreted and criticised,

which leads to the forming of new meaning. Based on this new meaning, then, the system is expanded with new “norms and values” (1984: 34) and action is taken accordingly. By applying these new meanings and actions, new prejudgements form and the circle can begin again (Heitink 1999: 197). See also figure 2.1 below.

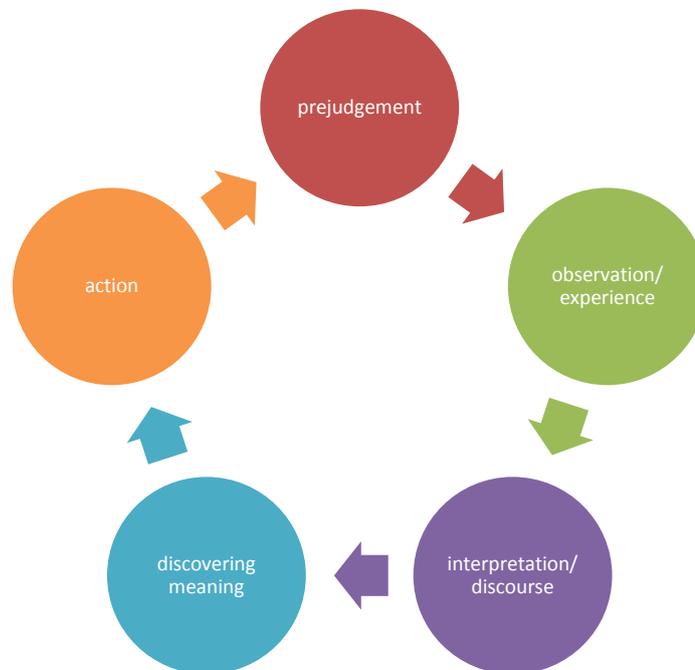


Figure 2.1. Heitink's Hermeneutical Circle

2.5.2 Practical Theological Paradigm

Within the broader theological paradigms of postfoundational inquiry and cultural linguistic theology, I have chosen a practical theological position based on a combination of Müller's eco-hermeneutic model and the feminist model.

Müller explains that the texts about our faith shape our experience of faith. These texts include not only the more traditional ones such as the Bible, but also include the stories of our history and our families' histories within the larger history. Further, they include “woorde, gebare, handelinge, historiese en maatskaplike verskynsels.” (words, gestures, actions, historical and social phenomena) (Müller 1996: 10). This phenomenological approach allows for the postfoundational focus on what Schrag and Ramsey (1994: 131) term “the data,” when they urge us to “suspend your methodological obsession with rules, your criteriological postulates, and permit the data to speak for themselves.” As such, research is focused on the person and his or her context.

Müller includes all the previously-mentioned texts as he espouses an eco-hermeneutical approach to pastoral care; this means that one is concerned with looking at the individual within a socially constructed context, the nature of which is much like an ecosystem insofar as each element of the context influences all the others in a reciprocal, relational dynamic. Here we should note the obvious connection with the question of the relationship between abusive relationships and spirituality. Based on this argument, there is no denying that such a relationship exists and my questions will explore its nature. Hence the hermeneutical element in this theory, as we look at the power that language has on our construction of reality; after all, language is the conductive material through which meaning is created between people (here, we refer to language in its broadest sense, to include gestures, media and other phenomena, as mentioned). This necessarily places the theologian within the social constructionist paradigm, based on the assumption that reality is shaped in the spaces between individuals, where language and relationships are used to co-construct reality. If the language of the system can be understood, shedding new light on the system, then it may open up possibilities for new ways of being: for co-creating new constructions.

Similarly, Denise Ackermann (2003: 207), a feminist theologian, explains that “to choose to live relationally is to choose to undo evil,” by revealing powerful discourses surrounding sexuality and women: discourses that were formed over time, in relationships. Placing the power to “undo evil” within the scope of relational living also shows her agreement with postfoundational inquiry and eco-hermeneutic theology, in that the discourses in question can only be revealed within the lived experience of women, and, more specifically, the interrelatedness of different layers of experience. Feminism here questions the systemic, structural subjugation and objectification of women as well as other discourses about women and their role in the community of faith, in the home and elsewhere. As Riet Bons-Storm (1998: 10) so aptly explains, “I have come to understand this phenomenon not so much as the vice of brutal men, but as a structural problem of our societies and churches, because they are constituted by patriarchal societies”.

A strength of feminist theology is the focus on grassroots theology, in that “practical theology reflects on the practices of all members of the community of faith, as individuals and as members of a community, who live their faith in society” (Bons-Storm 1998: 14). It intentionally draws upon the experiences of all members of the community and urges dialogue, inviting academics, lay persons, and especially those from the margins into the conversation. Carol Hess (1998: 59-60) explains, the Triune God of Christendom is

fundamentally relational; a unity of ‘others’ in constant relationship and conversation, who each have an own identity. Thus, it has real-life implications for our understanding of being ‘church’ (the Body of Christ) in that we are compelled to enter into relationships and live relationally with the ‘other’ despite differences and be open to encountering the ‘other’ in dialogue. “This courageous encounter with difference fosters an understanding of interdependence that is unthreatening.” Bons-Storm (1998:17) writes, in a clear mirroring of Schrag’s transversal comprehension:

the aim of the participants is not to convince or defeat one another, but rather to understand one another [*in that*] the basis of dialogue is the conviction that the One and Only Truth cannot be known, because everybody is limited by her/his own context, position, viewpoint and interests. In dialogue these limitations can be reduced, viewpoints can be broadened and, eventually, interests shared.

If relationships and dialogue are the focus of our theology, then building just and loving relationships, dealing with the effects of unjust, loveless relationships and, ultimately, making sure that the unjust, loveless relationships do not happen again, should be our praxis; after all, practical theology could not live up to its name if it did not move back out into the context and apply what was learned. The hope and aim of feminist theology is change. As has been hinted at in reference to Bons-Storm’s theology, the desired change is structural, a new world, rather than an new idea or a single renewed locality. Thus, Hess (1998: 63) calls for a “post-modern discourse ethics”; in other words, “an approach to community life that involves intense conversation and argumentation over formative practices and decisions,” where the power to make decisions is made available to all the members of the community.

If the Triune, relational God is Light and we are to live as Jesus lived, as seen in 1 John 1-2, specifically 1 John 2:5-6, “This is how we know we are in Him: Whoever claims to live in Him must walk as Jesus did” (NIV), then we are compelled to act in a manner that reflects this and to question the structures in our world that limit us from doing so. As fellow South African Denise Ackermann (1998:89) puts it, “the Christian hope for the actualization of the ‘Reign of God’, when love, justice, freedom, peace and wholeness will flourish provides the moral imperative for healing actions.” Thus, we are denying our faith if we are not working toward the societal changes that will make manifest the things we confess; that acknowledge our brokenness, lament the pain of the world and attempt to bring healing. Thus, Ackermann’s (1998) insistence upon a “feminist theology of praxis” where our thinking and theories coincide with our practices, growing and changing to meet the needs of

those whose needs have not been met by the current structures, systems, rituals and practices of the broader church.

Here, I wish to return to Müller's (2011: 5) explanation of contemporary pastoral care, as described earlier in this section (2.5.2). The church and the world are in a time of challenge and change: what he refers to as "transition". Broadly speaking, the Enlightenment has failed in many respects and postmodern pluralism has left us without any answers. In South Africa, the multiple layers of change in politics, society, culture and church have left us fragile. More specifically, the experiences of the women who were sexually abused and whose stories we are yet to explore raise a multitude of questions about God, church, family and relationships. Müller (2011: 5) explains:

...we are part of a transition which makes us (as pastoral theologians) more dependent, more fragile and more needed than ever. The real meaningful contribution we can make in a situation like this is to facilitate the variety of stories that develop in the ecotone where different storying cultures meet. For the practical theologian one of these storying cultures would always be people's experiences of the presence of God in their lives.

Thus, we have come full circle to the source of our knowledge and the focus of our research: the lived experiences of our co-researchers. Praxis is based on the dialectic between experience and theory.

2.5.3 Body Theology

It is with the focus on lived experience and the question of sexual abuse in mind that it is necessary to look at the value that body theology, as an offshoot of feminist theology, could add to the conversation. The church's relationship with the human body has always been ambiguous and fraught with confusion. It can be summarised by mentioning the influences of the following examples: the creation myth that has shaped thinking about men and women; the priestly laws handed down in Leviticus concerning purity and impurity; Jesus' incarnation; Paul's views about marriage and the roles of men and women; the Gnostics and asceticism of the early church; the sensuality and mystery of the Middle Ages; the repression of the Reformation and Puritanism; the Cartesian dualism of the Enlightenment; and, the multiplicity of our current age, which Lisa Isherwood (In Isherwood & Stuart 1998: 10-11) describes as follows:

In an age when we can transplant blood and organs from one person to another in order to bring life; when people's bodies can be augmented by artificial

means; when a person's sex can be altered; when beings can be cloned; when heterosexual and patriarchal understandings of the body are breaking down, issues of bodily identity worry us and yet in an age when aesthetics appear to have largely replaced metaphysics, the body seems to be all we have.

It is into this confusion that body theologians step with questions about the role of the female body in the church; about what incarnation really means and about what embodied spirituality looks like. Isherwood (In Isherwood & Stuart 1998: 11) highlights a crucial paradox in theology when she describes Jesus as “a man who held people, threw things in anger, cursed things making them wither and cherished people back to life. Here was an incarnated/embodied being,” while so much of our post-Enlightenment theology is based on a body/soul dualism in which the soul is separate from the body, often held prisoner and pulled into sin by the desires of the flesh. Jesus was fully human. He was born and raised like any other child. He became a man who wept and laughed and bled, who ate and drank and ultimately died like any man, but in giving His physical body, He brought about our salvation. His disciples were able to touch his wounds and eat with Him after the resurrection. It is His body and His blood that we remember in the Eucharist. The church is the Body of Christ in the world, here and now. What is that, if it is not embodied?

Body theology asks us to return to the roots of Christianity in the real life of Jesus and in our own real lives. Like Heitink, Van Huyssteen, Müller and feminist theologians, adherents to this theology place emphasis on experience. Elizabeth Stuart (In Isherwood & Stuart 1998:38) explains, “the emphasis on experience in feminist liberation theology is very valuable for body theology. It enables us to take seriously the whole of the person, since experience is not something we have just in our heads”. Thus, although much of body theology and feminism focuses on sexuality, it reaches further than that to an ideal of a whole person, who can experience liberation in all aspects of his or her life, including the sensory, the sensual and the sexual. The whole person is able to eat, drink, go to weddings, weep at funerals, laugh, hold others and have sex unashamedly and joyously.

The problem we face is that we no longer trust our own experience or our own bodies. “Learning to trust and value our own experience is not as easy as it may sound since for generations Christians have denied their own embodied feelings and attempted to achieve disembodied perfection” (Stuart in Isherwood & Stuart 1998: 39). An important aspect of this difficulty with trusting our own bodies is added when one speaks about sexual abuse and how the bodies of others and their actions can affect one's own body and how one thinks and feels

about it, especially in the context of the Calvinist heritage of the Dutch Reformed Church in South Africa. Exposing and questioning a discourse may open the doors for liberation, but it is only the beginning. Here again, we must acknowledge the value of praxis. If we can move from understanding our new ideas to acting upon them and affecting the systems and structures that gave birth to the problematic discourse, we may achieve success. What are the discourses that need to be exposed concerning abuse and the bodies of girls? How can they be challenged and changed in praxis, in such a way that survivors of abuse feel whole? How can we bring the healing that Denise Ackermann calls for?

Body theologians, in their method, look to people's experience, but as with feminism and postfoundational research, they place an emphasis on reflection and interpreted experience. The subjective nature of experience requires a good understanding of the roles of context and relationship to the context as well as the possible consequences of experience (Stuart in Isherwood & Stuart 1998). Likewise, the possible consequences of attempting to change the context or attempting to introduce new constructions into an ancient set of discourses, also need to be well understood.

2.6. Summary

In summary, the frameworks that shape my approach to research are rooted in postfoundational, social constructionist thinking. The narrative approach to research, accompanied by a combination of cultural-linguistic and eco-hermeneutic practical theology, and informed by feminist theology will form the basis of the research methodology employed in this study. In the next chapter, in accordance with the paradigms that shape my thinking, I will first discuss the methodology and the actual research, as these lie at the heart of my chosen focus on experience. I will then look to wherever the co-researchers' experiences guide me in terms of further reading and broadening the scope of interpretation with a transdisciplinary study.

CHAPTER THREE

HANNETJIE'S VOICE

3.1 Introduction

Before entering into a discussion of the method used for conducting the research, I will first refer to the positioning of this chapter in the dissertation as a whole. Many researchers begin with a chapter on the relevant literature, in order to describe the background and context of the research. However, in keeping with postfoundational and feminist principles, I have elected to begin immediately with a description of my research. Thus, the story being explored will inform my decisions about a transdisciplinary conversation and ultimately the literature and the direction which the third layer of research will take.

Readers should note that I have chosen to refer to all aspects of the research as parts of a conversation, which is in keeping with the principle of communicative praxis. Each voice, whether it is my own, or that of the co-researcher (both she who shares her story and the participants in the transdisciplinary conversation) or those who speak to us through their literature, form part of the whole conversation.

3.2 Discussion of Method

3.2.1. Qualitative research

Within a social constructionist and narrative framework, one must choose a method of research that allows the researcher to explore and co-create stories with the co-researchers; to deconstruct existing discourses and examine new possibilities. A qualitative approach then becomes the logical choice, as many aspects of this approach mirror the ideals of postfoundational and social constructionist thinking. The importance of the actor's own, interpreted experience is emphasised. Similarly, focus is placed on the role of knowledge and power and on the issue of who creates knowledge and who owns knowledge. Qualitative research is also inductive, context focused and idiographic. More specifically, a narrative approach, fulfils these requirements, as well as having the benefit of focusing the researcher's efforts on the possible social effects the research may have.

The key premise of qualitative research is that it places emphasis on the "insider perspective" (Babbie & Mouton 2001:271) in that the actors' own understanding of the context is placed at the forefront; after all, the researcher is an outsider and cannot understand

the context or the language of the context as well as the actors themselves do. Hence, the researcher's aim is to gather "thick descriptions" (Babbie and Mouton 2001:272), to look for and explore a very detailed telling of the stories being told, together with the actors. Since the people whose stories are being told and explored are placed at the forefront, they become more than actors. As Mouton (In Babbie & Mouton 2001: 58) describes the "political dimension" of qualitative research, it is understood that the researcher thinks in a different way about power and knowledge, when compared with modern scientists, who placed themselves in a position outside the subject, from where they were able to observe and comment on, but remain aloof from the subject. To a certain extent, they remained aloof from the effects of their findings, as well. Qualitative researchers and co-researchers take co-ownership of, and responsibility for the construction of interpretations together, and consciously work toward effecting change.

There is an epistemological difference between this type of research and other models, in that questions are asked about who creates and controls knowledge. If the researcher chooses to take an 'expert' stance and interprets the story on her own, she is taking power from the main actor. If, however, she asks the actor to interpret the story with her, she places the ownership of the story in both her own and the actor's hands, giving the actor the power to make decisions about the interpretation. Thus, the actor becomes a co-researcher (Epston 1999). After all, the original actor in the story has the most intimate knowledge of the story. Acknowledging this forces the researcher to come alongside the co-researcher in a collaborative stance, as opposed to the more traditionally hierarchical position of 'expert' over 'subject'.

Another key aspect of the type of qualitative research that will answer the questions of social constructionist research is that it is inductive (Babbie & Mouton 2001: 273). Inductive research is successful when the researcher begins not with a hypothesis, but with 'immersion' in the story, getting as much from the story as possible and slowly, as a result of working with the story and co-researchers, constructing interpretations. Hence, a new understanding is co-constructed between researcher and co-researcher, as opposed to a deductive approach which would see the researcher interpreting specific stories based on existing, general interpretations. Here, let us return briefly to the focus of feminist research, which is lived experience. The researcher's task is to ask about experience first and enter into the process of interpretation from the point of view of the experience. Hood (2006: 217) puts it very

succinctly when she teaches that, “(t)heory is developed inductively from data, rather than tested by data.”

The “contextual interest” and “idiographic” nature of qualitative research are also important (Babbie & Mouton 2001: 272). A thick description of the subject matter is only possible if the context is also well-described and considered. Contextual influences shape the story and the co-researcher as well as the researchers’ interpretations, as our thinking about any matter is always coloured by who we are and the place from where we come. To use an example, two women from the same household will have very different experiences and perceptions about the same event. The wife and mother who sees her husband come home late from work may be frustrated by his need to work late, as he used to rush home as early as possible when they were younger. In contrast, her teenage daughter may feel indifferent, having little or no memory of her father coming home early. Although they share a home, the two women’s experiences are entirely different, based on the context of their previous experiences.

This contextual focus makes each story unique, though, and the focus of the research becomes quite narrow. Hence, thick descriptions are necessary. This precept of inch-wide, mile-deep thinking plays a role in shaping the researcher’s approach and supports the inductive nature of the research. The researcher works on deepening her understanding and interpretation of one or only a few stories and their contexts and, based on that deeper understanding, she and her co-researchers construct new meaning. Another aspect of this approach is that it is possible, and preferable, to look, not for evidence which can support a hypothesis, but for unique outcomes. As Flyvbjerg (2001: 310) also explains, in discussing in-depth study, “proximity to reality... will often constitute a prerequisite for advanced learning” since “quite simply because the qualitative/structural researcher does not get as close to those under study as does the case study researcher and therefore is less likely to be corrected by the study objects ‘talking back.’” Each story speaks for itself and because the researcher and co-researcher are creating meaning together, the researcher simply cannot make her own assumptions. Because each story is explored on its own merit, it does not need to conform to a pattern or be an example of a general principle. If it is unique or different, that in itself is worth describing and interpreting. Flyvbjerg (2011: 311) affirms this, when he writes, “it is often a sign that the study has uncovered a particularly rich problematic” when the story is too complex to summarise easily or too varied to fit into a mould.

The question may arise, however, about the value of this type of research. Deductive research is often used to explain and predict; to generalise for the greatest number. How, then can one take a description of one or a few unique stories and interpret them for others? The answer, in part, lies in the assertion that qualitative research is inherently political, with the aim of driving social action and/or empowering marginalised people. Based on lived and interpreted experience, one can formulate ideas and theories for a way forward, as opposed to formulating an idea first and then researching the story to confirm or deny whether the original idea will work. Another part of the answer lies in understanding that one can apply what one learns from one person's story to another's story if these people have enough in common (Hood 2006: 212). In our specific case, the story of one female, Afrikaans-speaking adult survivor of abuse, who grew up in the Dutch Reformed tradition, may shed light on the story of any other woman who shares this background.

It is at this point that the focus must shift from qualitative research in general to a specific approach to qualitative research that best fits the social constructionist paradigm. First and foremost, the focus is on the "insider perspective on social action" (Babbie & Mouton 2001:53). Hence, as previously mentioned, the participant or co-researcher's perspective is placed at the forefront. This in itself is a political action, since it shifts the balance of power from the researcher alone to a shared space between researcher and co-researcher (Babbie & Mouton 2001: 58). It reinforces the notion, as well, that knowledge and understanding are not the sole property of the scientist, but these are simply shared with the scientist, as the emphasis on context also automatically emphasises "experiential knowing" (Babbie & Mouton 2001: 62). Put simply, it means that the researcher cannot 'know' the story, because 'knowing' something comes from experiencing it. Thus, any 'knowledge' the researcher constructs can only come from what the co-researcher is willing to share and explore together with the researcher. Consequently, the possibility of social change or action also cannot remain in the hands of the researcher, but becomes a shared burden for which doors are opened through a joint search for meaning and understanding.

Secondly, the focus is political in that a deliberate choice is made to step into the margins and understand something that may have been previously glossed over or neglected. Narrative thinking can be employed to expose dominant discourses so that co-researchers could challenge them. Daiute and Lightfoot (2004: 83) explain this well when they say, "No voice is isolated, and none are innocent, as all work in some relation to the whole. In short, we read narrative texts in the context of those voices that have in some way influenced

narrators, those that would want to silence them, and those who might be influenced by them.”

3.2.2. Narrative research

So far, narrative thinking has been discussed broadly and only hinted at in the discussion on qualitative research. The question remains, however, of how narrative thinking translates into narrative research. In thinking ‘narratively,’ the researcher should make a number of fundamental assumptions that shape the research.

Firstly, the narrative approach assumes that the co-researcher is also the author of their story, being able to choose and develop a “preferred” story (Freedman & Combs 1996: 88-93). As Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach and Zilber (1998: 8) explain, they “believe that stories are usually constructed around a core of facts or life events, yet allow a wide periphery for the freedom of individuality and creativity in selection, addition to, emphasis on, and interpretation of these ‘remembered facts.’” As a result, they believe that stories “imitate life and present an inner reality to the outside world; at the same time, however, they shape and construct the narrator’s personality and reality. The story *is* one’s identity, a story created, told, revised and retold throughout life” (Lieblich et al. 1998: 7). As Daiute and Lightfoot (2004: xii) also assert: “As a social process, narrating is, in short, a discourse process embodying the people, places, events, motivations, and moralities of life and, as such, narrative in its various forms is ideal for developmental inquiry.” Thus, in exploring the co-researcher’s story one is exploring that person’s very identity and their own shaping of their identity and the choices they have made in doing so. The focus on the co-researcher’s authorship causes a shift in thinking about the co-researcher’s role in the story from ‘powerless actor who simply acts according to the script’ to ‘powerful author who writes the script and is allowed to change the script.’ As Rubin and Rubin (1995: 11) also explain, the interviewee takes on an active role in the interview process, in that the focus is on their own experience. Hence, these writers (1995:11) tend to refer to interviewees as “conversational partners.” As they explain: “Together the researcher and conversational partner decide what issues to explore, suggest what remains to be said, and work to provide the thick description that builds toward an overall picture.” Thus, the researcher cannot be the author, who holds the power and knowledge, but can, at most, be a co-author. The co-researcher’s voice takes precedence.

Secondly, as the co-researcher is the author of the story, it follows logically that the co-researcher has the greatest and most intimate knowledge of the story. When approaching such a story from a narrative perspective, the researcher chooses a “not-knowing” position (Freedman & Combs 1996: 44-45). This is not a position of ignorance, but a position of humility. The researcher’s focus shifts from asking questions and analysing answers (as an ‘expert scientist’ may do) to listening and asking for meaning, unpacking language and reflecting on answers. As Mischler (1986: 53) explains, the role of the interview question changes:

Rather than serving as a stimulus having a predetermined and presumably shared meaning and intended to elicit a response, a question may more usefully be thought of as part of a circular process through which its meaning and that of its answer are created in the discourse between interviewer and respondent as they try to make continuing sense of what they are saying to each other.

The underlying principle is that no assumptions can be made about meaning. Both the researcher and co-researcher enter into the research with their own sets of knowledge and assumptions, not only about the story, but also about how research works, what questions mean and what constitutes an ‘appropriate’ response to a question. A narrative researcher makes explicit the fact that these assumptions exist, by working on making no assumptions, listening well and asking about meaning. For example, when a woman tells of a miscarriage she had and cries, most people will not ask about her tears. They will assume that these reflect her grief. When a narrative researcher asks, “What do your tears mean?” she may find that they are tears of relief at finally being able to tell the story, rather than those presumed to be from grief. This will open opportunities for exploring a different chapter of the story in which the woman was unable to tell her story to others, and exploring the discourses that may have led to her consequent silence. Here, one of the distinctive characteristics of narrative research plays an important role in the researcher’s method, in that “Critical narrative inquiry involves data analysis processes that build questioning about the analysis into the research design.” (Daiute & Lightfoot 2004: xviii). Hence, the role of interview questions and later reflective questions is much broader and more far-reaching than one may think. Returning with questions about meaning and asking the co-researcher about the interpretation of her story form part of the narrative design because these actions play an interpretive as well as an ethical role. The researcher is accountable to the co-researcher first.

Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach and Zilber (1998: 8-9) remind us that narrative research is “interpretive” in that the version of the story generated in the interview is not the whole story,

since it is “like a single, frozen still photograph of the dynamically changing identity” that the researcher has as an entry point into the broader story. Also, this version of the story is affected because it was told for a specific purpose, to a specific interviewer at a specific time, all of which have an influence on the co-researcher’s choices about what to tell and how to tell it. Daiute and Lightfoot (2004:1) also remind researchers; “To take seriously the idea that knowledge of the world is constituted and transformed through the processes of language, discourse, and narrative is to take up the challenge of understanding the struggle between experience and the telling of it, and between the telling and the story told.” As much as the focus of narrative research is on lived experience, all the researcher and co-researcher have to work with is the narrative, which is changed by the telling because of the teller’s choices. Similarly, as shown in the example of the woman with the miscarriage, given in the previous paragraph, the interviewer’s choice of how to explore specific aspects of the story and to ask about meaning, will affect the story and its interpretation.

The third key aspect of narrative research has already been alluded to. Narrative research is political in that it seeks to expose dominant discourses that underlie co-researchers’ stories and may be pushing them into the margins. Daiute and Lightfoot (2004: xii) support the narrative approach here, in that “narrative analysis generates unique insights into the range of multiple, intersecting forces that order and illuminate relations between self and society.” If we return to the woman with the miscarriage, one may ask what the dominant ideas in her world were that led her to believe that she should not talk about the miscarriage. Did she believe that society does not acknowledge a miscarriage as a loss? Was she made to feel that she was to blame? Did something make her believe that she was unable or unfit to bear children? Was she taught not to talk about negative emotions and experiences? How do those around her express grief? What value has her silence had for her?

Fourthly, and in a similar way to other qualitative research and PAR, specifically, context plays a major role in a narrative researcher’s approach. The researcher knows that the research becomes its own context, within which meaning is constructed between the parties involved. Mischler (1986: 64) explains that interviews are discourses and “terms take on specific and contextually grounded meanings, within and through the discourse as it develops and is shaped by the speakers.” This principle applies also to the broader context of the story. If the story is about a family, the researcher acknowledges that ideas, words and actions take on their own meaning within the context of that particular family. Similarly, the context of the actual interview affects the meaning that is created. Rubin and Rubin (1995: 38) explain

that “(k)nowledge in qualitative interviewing is situational and conditional,” as in their following example (1995:38): “An interview right after someone’s mother died is likely to be quite different from an interview conducted a year later with the same person.” Again, the researcher’s task is to ask about meaning, rather than to assume understanding.

It is through this exploration of meaning and development of layers of interpretation that a narrative researcher can develop a thick description of the story. As in other qualitative research, a narrative researcher seeks to thicken stories, by looping back repeatedly, asking different types of questions about the same story. These feedback loops serve a second function as well, as they allow the researcher to ask about interpretation and they place the power over the interpretation back in the hands of the co-researcher. Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach and Zilber (1998: 9) refer here to “unique and rich data” generated as the story unfolds, and the researcher explores its meaning. Subsequently, no two stories can be the same, because “no two interviews are alike, and the uniqueness of narratives is manifested in extremely rich data” (Lieblich et al. 1998: 9). Thus, as will be discussed in the next section, the choice of unstructured interviews makes good sense, in that one is not aiming for some form of standardisation, but looking for uniqueness in each story.

3.2.3. Getting the story

What then, is the best way to explore meaning and develop layers of interpretation? In the case of this research, a decision was taken to use interviews, based on a feminist model that follows an “open, loosely structured research methodology” (Rubin & Rubin 1995: 37); this allowed the co-researchers space to tell their stories in their own way. As explained by Rubin and Rubin (1995: 46-47) *unstructured interviews* are interviews in which the researcher does not come into the interview with a list of prepared questions. Instead, she will ask an open-ended question and allow the co-researcher to tell her story. Subsequent questions which explore meaning and understanding will arise from the co-researcher’s telling. This may lead the researcher to want to focus on specific themes or a specific thread in the story and could lead to a shift to *semistructured* questioning. This shift in approach forms part of what Rubin and Rubin (1995: 46-47) describe as an “iterative design.” As the interview process progresses, and the researcher loops back to re-examine previously covered ground, the research is refined. At first, using an *unstructured* interview, the researcher opens the door for the co-researcher to tell her story broadly. Once the researcher has gone back for a second look at the story, she will return with more specific themes and questions in mind, as well as

questions about her own interpretation, which will call for a *semistructured* design. She may return for a third and even fourth loop, based on feedback from the second interview, adjusting her style of questioning again. In the later interviews, the researcher's focus will be on the co-researcher's thoughts about her interpretations and whether what she has gathered is useful or helpful in any way. This calls for a great deal of flexibility on the part of the researcher, who must be willing to reinterpret and rethink an issue, if the co-researcher calls for this.

In the case of this research, these requirements meant that a minimum of three interviews had to be conducted, followed by further email communication for feedback and interpretation. Narrative researchers should take what Polkinghorne (2007: 12) refers to as “an open listening stance and carefully attend(ing) to the unexpected and unusual participant responses.” The researcher is responsible for making sure that the co-researcher is satisfied that her interpretation is true to the original story and, if not, the co-researcher can “suggest alterations or expansions of the text to more closely display their meaning.” (Polkinghorne 2007: 12). As Polkinghorne warns, “(t)he text is an artifact of the interviewer's agenda and the tone of the interviewer's demeanor” unless the researcher continues to return to the co-researcher for feedback. Inherent in this process is the assumption of narrative thinkers that stories can be told and retold: moreover they can be constructed, deconstructed and reconstructed until they are deemed useful or helpful.

It must be noted here that narrative research should not be confused with “narrative history” (Neuman 1997: 399-400) which is a method favoured by historians. The most notable difference is that narrative research focuses on stories that are seen as alive and constantly being reconstructed, whereas “narrative history” is a retelling of stories from the past; an “outside, in” approach. This focus on the co-researcher's experience and understanding is also an important aspect of feminist research (Neuman 1997: 80), in that the co-researcher's voice is central, as it is in social constructionist thinking as well.

Another aspect that is central to both the feminist and the narrative methodologies is an acknowledgment that the researcher's own understanding – and therefore her questions – will not be objective or neutral, but will be influenced by the researcher's own context (Rubin & Rubin 1995: 38). The effective narrative researcher is honest about this, both to the co-researchers and in her reports. Some feminist researchers may even use their own experiences in their research and their relationship with co-researchers, as they see the relationship

between researcher and co-researchers as a collaboration at least and a friendship at most: “They fuse their personal and professional lives.” (Neuman 1997: 81). Herein lies the importance of the iterative design, as it allows space for the researcher and co-researcher to think about the researcher’s interpretations and evaluate them. Otherwise, there is a clear danger that the researcher’s work will not be deemed valid, in that it may be seen as entirely subjective and relative only to the researcher and her relationship with the co-researchers.

At this point the researcher will opt to involve colleagues from other disciplines in a transdisciplinary conversation. This conversation will be discussed in full in another chapter. It is important to note, at this point though, that the involvement of others in the conversation will further support the iterative design as it will open the story up to alternative interpretation and may raise questions for the researcher about her interpretation. Thus, the researcher may find herself looping back yet again to the original story with new interpretations.

3.2.4. Summary of Method

Postfoundational, social constructionist thinking has led me to choose a qualitative design. This model allows for a narrative approach that embraces feminist ideals in focusing first on the real lived experience of the co-researchers, and asking the researcher to enter into a collaborative relationship with her co-researchers. The narrative design compels the researcher to enter into a series of dialectic loops, returning each time with a new interpretation and new questions. At this point let us refer back to Heitink’s Hermeneutic Circle, as shown in figure 3.1 on the next page.



Figure 3.1. Heitink's Hermeneutical Circle

With this Circle in mind, a researcher will begin in the position at the top, of 'prejudgment'. This represents the postfoundational acknowledgement of the embeddedness of research, thus: "The philosophical hermeneutic position holds one cannot transcend one's own historical and situated embeddedness; thus, textual interpretations are always perspectival" (Polkinghorne 2007: 13). The contexts of both the researcher and her co-researchers have already formed their thinking about the topic and the researcher will make explicit the influence this may have on the conversation. Secondly, the researcher will 'observe' the co-researcher's lived 'experience' through the initial interview or letter. Already in this interview or letter, she will form 'interpretations' which she will reflect back in questions about meaning, so that she and the co-researcher can 'discover meaning' together, unpacking and unravelling their understanding together.

Next, but in a departure from the circle model, the researcher will loop back to the newly formed point of prejudgement, now based on the meaning discovered in the first interview or letter, entering into a new cycle of iterative design. By building upon the meaning derived in the first cycle, the second interview or letter will be an added source for a second cycle, which will in turn drive the beginnings of a third one, growing in thickness and meaning. Ultimately, however, the question a researcher will ask is: when does one take action? As each new loop is entered into, does the researcher skip the point of taking action? The nature of this process is such that it is possible to take action at any point. As will be seen

in later discussions of the interviews, the co-researcher may find that she wants to take action since each entry into the story opens new questions and new possibilities for interpretation that the co-researcher takes home with her. Also, the manner in which the next conversation is conducted is affected by the previous one and this in itself can be seen as action. In this way, the process by its very nature promotes growth and change.

Similarly, as Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach and Zilber (1998: 62) teach, once the researcher has gathered the story and transcribed her cycle of interviews, she is to “read the material several times until a pattern emerges.” These writers repeatedly mention the importance of relistening to and rereading the material, in order to loop back and look for more meaning; to deepen understanding also during the ‘analysis’ phase of the research. This will be discussed in detail, in the next section.

Another benefit of iterating multiple cycles is that this procedure allows the story to deepen and thicken and it helps a true space of communicative action to take shape; that is, action based on the dialectic cycle or in another word, praxis. In the end, the researcher wants to be able to make recommendations for praxis, to return to the co-researcher and to the readers of this thesis with thinking about how to bring about healing.

This description summarises the reasons for selecting the method used for conducting this research. The next section provides a discussion of the choice of co-researcher as well as a review of ethical considerations, followed by a discussion of the empirical research process and its mechanics.

3.3 Empirical research

3.3.1 Choice of co-researcher

When looking for a co-researcher who is willing to share painful stories of abuse, the researcher must think carefully about how best to find such a person. Advertising in newspapers or on the internet was considered as an option, but was ultimately abandoned because of the numerous pitfalls involved in opening the doors to too many people, some of whom could abuse the process to their own advantage. A female researcher faces a significant security risk if she has to go out and meet with strangers, regardless of the chosen venue, especially if sex and sexual abuse are the topics that will be discussed.

Because of these considerations, a purposive convenience sample (Hood 2006: 213) was collected by means of word of mouth. I informed trusted people that I was looking for a person or persons who would fit a very specific description. As people became aware of my research, they were able to put me in contact with potential co-researchers who had the background and experience that I had described as my area of focus. Based on my initial contact with the potential co-researchers, I was able to select one person. Grogan Putney (2010: 116) explains that a case study is a “bounded system” and, in this instance, it is “artificially bounded” by the decisions I made about the suitability of the stories that were shared with me. Thus, I made contact with a woman, whom I will call Hanneltjie in order to protect her anonymity, as agreed when we discussed the subject of giving her consent to take part in this research. As Hood (2006: 213) explains, although the manner in which I came into contact with Hanneltjie may have been a matter of convenience, it was by no means “haphazard.” Many researchers struggle to find co-researchers who fit the description of the person they require, and this usually takes some effort, and so I was lucky to find Hanneltjie.

Initially, I had also identified one other co-researcher, with whom I had established contact, followed by a number of email exchanges. I was challenged, however, because she lived very far away, and I would not have been able to meet with her. Communicating via email about such a complex story turned out to be very challenging as well as cumbersome, as I worked on trying to make sure that I was understanding her correctly, and hearing her story as she would have hoped I would. I was continually confronted with the significance of non-verbal communication and its profound influence on one’s interpretation of another’s telling (Selwyn & Robson 1998). Moreover, as time became a factor, I saw that I would not be able to do both stories equal justice. Instead, I elected to focus on Hanneltjie’s story, since it made the most sense from a practical perspective to work with someone who is geographically close. In hindsight, I know that the other co-researcher’s story would have brought much greater richness to my interpretation of the initial questions, as her story is significantly different from Hanneltjie’s, although they share a similar background. Fortunately, Hanneltjie’s story is rich, and dense with meaning, which offered me enough opportunities for investigation and exploration.

Hanneltjie’s story appealed to me as a researcher, because it serves as what Flyvbjerg (2011: 308) calls a “practical prototype;” thus, her story is rich with many of the aspects that are often researched or investigated in the context of surviving child sexual abuse as well as in the context of questions of spirituality within the Calvinistic, Afrikaans culture of the

Dutch Reformed Church. At the same time, her story is varied, with possible areas of focus that are divergent and fraught with complexity. Further in describing narrative inquiry, Flyvbjerg (2011:311-12) emphasises the special ability of narrative researchers to use a single case study to gain knowledge of great depth because “they may choose to tell the story in its diversity, allowing the story to unfold from the many-sided, complex, and sometimes-conflicting stories that the actors in the case have told.” Thus, the aim is not to summarise and generalise from one case, but to open the reader’s thinking to the many possibilities locked up in one story. As Flyvbjerg, (2011:305) makes clear: “formal generalization is overvalued as a source of scientific development, whereas, the ‘force of example’ and transferability are underestimated.” Similarly, Nieuwenhuis (2007: 76) asserts that generalisation “is not the purpose of case study research. Case study research is aimed at gaining greater insight and understanding of the dynamics of a specific situation.” In this case, I found Hanneltjie’s narrative to be so dense that it satisfied my requirements for arriving at a thick description, not only of her story, but also of the context, and the complex interrelatedness of the two.

Furthermore, in a description of case study research, Patton (2002: 447) asserts that “cases are units of analysis” and Flyvbjerg (2011: 301) elaborates to say: “The drawing of boundaries for the individual unit of study decides what gets to count as case and what becomes context to the case.” Both authors support the notion that a single case can constitute a study on its own, as Patton (2002:447) states: “cases can be individuals, groups, neighbourhoods, programs, organizations, cultures, regions, or nation-states.” The risk that one runs is in assuming that the case study constitutes the entire research project, rather than the first layers of the research, which will be broadened by inviting other voices to respond to the initial case study. This is done in this dissertation in Chapter Four, which is a transdisciplinary exploration of the case study, and Chapter Five, when I turn to the literature for further learning, before coming to any conclusions.

Hanneltjie’s story is also of great value because its richness made it possible to fulfill another requirement of narrative inquiry that Flyvbjerg (2011: 312) describes; thus, according to that author, narrative researchers must avoid trying to limit the findings of their case to one area of specialisation and “instead, they may choose to relate the case to broader philosophical positions” opening the case to interpretation by others. In this instance, different aspects of Hanneltjie’s story may be of value to specialists in the fields of psychology, social work, occupational therapy, and body theology, and will be opened to

them in the second phase of the research; the transdisciplinary study. The choice was thus limited to one co-researcher who has a story to share that can be explored in great depth, yet still stimulate broad conversation, because it is rich with data on a variety of issues relating both to spirituality and surviving sexual abuse.

3.3.2 Conversations

As discussed previously, the researcher chose a combination of unstructured and semistructured interviews. Since the co-researcher's experience, and interpretations of her experience, are the focus of narrative research, emphasis was placed on where she would take the conversation. Consequently, the conversation was approached from this perspective and started in a fairly open-ended and generic way and then flowed out of what she brought to the table. Initial contact was made to discuss the research and to obtain informed consent. Following that, the co-researcher shared her story with me. In the first meeting with Hannetjie, she shared the story of the abuse with me as well as how she felt about it at the time of our conversation. Out of those initial discussions, our conversation started to change direction, based on issues she wanted to focus on and the questions I had.

Conversations with Hannetjie were conducted in a venue of her own choosing and were recorded electronically. Electronic recordings were chosen in preference to verbatim written records, for three reasons. Firstly, these produced a record of Hannetjie telling her story in her own words; thus, the authenticity of her voice could be preserved. Secondly, these allowed me to focus solely on listening to her and not on making notes or trying to remember the conversation. I remained focused on her story and on the subtle nuances of her non-verbal communication from which I could take my cues. Thirdly, an electronic recording allowed me to return to the original text for interpretation. Thus, prior to each subsequent conversation, I was able to listen to the recording and have it fresh in my mind when engaging with her again. In compiling the conversations into one story, I transcribed each one separately at first. Then, I inserted our various emails chronologically among the transcriptions. Finally, I was able to read the conversation as a whole, as it occurred over time.

3.3.3 Ethical concerns

Research of a sensitive nature always requires careful thought about ethical considerations. The researcher must be accountable to her co-researcher and her readers in terms of how she

was able to protect the anonymity of the co-researcher as well as to protect the confidentiality of the conversations and guard against potential harm, whether it were physical, psychological or emotional. Not only do these matters affect her and her co-researcher, but they also speak about the researcher's integrity and accountability. Hence certain measures were taken to protect the co-researcher and the researcher.

First and foremost, the co-researcher was asked to sign that she understood and accepted the contents of a comprehensive letter of informed consent. This took place after a conversation detailing the basics of the research, the importance of the letter of consent, as well as its contents. The actual letter details the following: the reason for the research; the steps that would be followed; the manner in which the information would be disseminated and to whom; as well as warning against potential psychological or emotional harm that may come from sharing such a painful story. The letter emphasised to the co-researcher's right to withdraw at any time, to withhold information, her right to be informed about every step of the research, and to be involved in the interpretation of her story. Hanneljé agreed to sign the letter on the condition that her story would be used appropriately and that I would commit to the process until the end, as she felt that she was not willing to go through the pain of sharing her story if I were not willing or able to go the distance. At this early point, her real life experience already had made a significant impact on my understanding of my role as researcher, and the great responsibility and honour that go with being allowed to enter into and share somebody else's story.

Secondly, the narrative research process has its own inherent ethical implications. As mentioned earlier, the researcher is accountable to the co-researcher for her interpretation of the story. Herein lies a large part of the integrity of narrative research. Because of the reflective nature of narrative research and the deliberate use of feedback loops, "narrative analysis is a mode of inquiry that attempts to integrate theory and ethics throughout the data analysis process" (Daiute and Lightfoot 2004: xviii). Thus, the informed consent letter that is signed initially is only the basis for the researcher's ethical responsibility in opening the conversation on ethical concerns and considerations. Hence the emphasis on the researcher's responsibility to return to the co-researcher with interpretations, to inform the co-researcher of process and progress and to be prepared for the co-researcher to withdraw parts or all of her story at any point.

The third consideration in terms of treating the co-researcher's story ethically relates to the storage and processing of the texts generated. All communication with Hanneltjie, as well as the recordings of our conversations are stored on my hard drive and are password protected, and all her emails have been deleted from my inbox. All printed copies of any of these documents are stored in a lockable cabinet, to which I have the only key.

3.3.4 Method of interpretation

In support of the iterative design for interviewing, this researcher chose a method of interpretation that is strongly influenced by the "holistic-content mode of reading" described by Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach and Zilber (1998:13) in which, in short, "the researcher analyzes the meaning of the part in light of content that emerges from the rest of the narrative or in the context of the story in its entirety." Thus, the relationships between parts of the story and the whole story as well as between the different parts of the story, are all explored in the light of patterns that emerge through repeated readings. Given the nature of the research question, I chose a slightly more focused approach than the one described by Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach and Zilber (1998:15), in that they use "entire" life stories. In this research, however, focus was placed, instead, on the story of the co-researcher's experience of sexual abuse and how it has affected her until now. Since the story spans most of the co-researcher's life, the difference is not so great that the chosen approach would not work.

Upon choosing to read Hanneltjie's story using the holistic-content method described by Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach and Zilber (1998: 62-87), the decision was made to explore the narrative in a manner similar to a model that Spector-Mersel (2011: 182) espouses, centred around "selection and holism." The focus is on reading the story as a whole and understanding its parts within that context while also paying attention to which aspects of the story the narrator chose to tell. Although the decision was made not to follow the mechanics of Spector-Mersel's model, some of the principles, described by her, need to be mentioned. Most importantly, she emphasises, as Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach and Zilber do, the importance of the holistic nature of any narrative. In support of this, she also focuses on the fact that stories are of a constructionist nature. Thus: "If a sense of identity is attained through the stories we tell ourselves and others, not only is identity *expressed* in narrative, but also, importantly, it is also *constructed* by it" (Spector-Mersel 2011:173). In line with her holistic emphasis, she also takes into consideration the importance of a particular narrative forming part of a larger context, in that "(n)arrative identities are constituted within larger and more

constant forces as well” (Spector-Mersel 2011: 173), which cannot be ignored. Social, cultural, family and many other larger narratives all influence the individual narrative and affect its construction. These factors must be taken into consideration again, at the point where the researcher reflects upon the dynamic between researcher and co-researcher and how the researcher’s own narrative affects her analysis.

3.3.4.1 *Holistic-content reading*

Lieblich (in Lieblich et al.1998: 62-77) describes the steps taken (described later in this chapter) in the holistic-content method of reading in much detail, using an example of a life story she had researched. In her description, she places emphasis on a number of factors that should influence one’s reading.

Firstly, she looks for elements that appear repeatedly, creating a sense of continuity and consistency. Looking for “major themes” in this way gives the researcher an insight into “the uniqueness” of the story as well as providing “different perspectives for reading the story as a whole” (Lieblich in Lieblich et al. 1998: 65). Thus, the researcher, in interpreting the text of the story, looks for the biggest windows into the story so that she can see most clearly what is going on inside.

Secondly, she looks for those elements of the story that deviate from the identified pattern. One way is to look for an “episode that stands out” because it is a “negative instance” of something (Lieblich in Lieblich et al. 1998: 71). This allows one to explore a theme in contrast to those parts of the story that do adhere to the identified pattern. Another way is to look for things that have not been said. As Lieblich explains:

In reading a life story for its meaning, the topics that stand out are usually characterized by their high frequency of appearance, proportional length, or vividness in the text. However, meaningful components of a life story sometimes manifest themselves through silences, namely, nonelaboration in the narrative. Their force in the story is implied by their lack, by what may seem like avoidance, or by abrupt flashes of intense nature. (Lieblich in Lieblich et al. 1998: 73).

As much as looking for themes can open up the biggest windows to the story, looking for these breaks from the pattern can open up the back door to the story.

In the case of this story, the term “negative instance” may be confusing. Instead, I have opted to refer to the moments in Hanneljje’s story that reveal something outside of the identified pattern as ‘unique outcomes;’ moments of hope or light that open a window into

instances of growth or examples of resistance to the dominant story. As Freedman and Combs (1996:67) explain: “Unique outcomes are experiences that would not be predicted by the plot of the problem-saturated narrative.” These aspects of the story offer an insight into the co-researcher’s identity and capabilities that transcend the problem.

Thirdly, by looking at the themes and deviations in combination, the researcher is able to interpret the story from a multitude of perspectives and to develop a holistic overview of it (Lieblich in Lieblich et al. 1998: 65).

Since it is important to realise that a single reading of the story will not allow the researcher to develop any detailed interpretation of the text, Lieblich encourages the researcher to reread the text repeatedly with the aim of listening “carefully, empathetically and with an open mind” (Lieblich in Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach and Zilber 1998: 63) with the understanding that:

no reading is free of interpretation and, in fact, that even at the stage of procuring the text, especially in the dialogical act of conducting a life-story interview, explicit and implicit processes of communicating and understanding, and explaining constantly take place. The illusion that we have a static text of narrative material, and then begin a separate process of reading and interpreting it, is far from the truth.” (Lieblich, et al. 1998: 166).

In other words, the process of ‘analysing’ the story is not separate from the initial interview process, but rather the next revolution of the hermeneutic circle as discussed earlier in this chapter and, as also mentioned earlier, an important element of the researcher’s ethical integrity.

As a first step, transcripts of the interviews are compiled through a process of repeated listening to the original recordings. This step is lengthy and laborious, and a researcher may be tempted to find someone else to do it, but it is incredibly valuable for that researcher. The depth of insight that one can attain from multiple returns to the original conversation, through hearing the co-researcher’s and one’s own voice, makes the return to the conversation an essential part of one’s own telling of the story. Upon hearing the sounds and tone of voice, the conversation comes back to life and so the memories of thoughts and feelings that the researcher had at the time help her to become more aware of the impact the story had on her and to think about which aspects of the story stood out at the time. Silverman (in Denzin and Lincoln 2000: 830) explains that “it should not be assumed that the preparation of transcripts is simply a technical detail prior to the main business of the

analysis.” It is an integral part of the researcher’s act of listening. He continues to state that working with transcripts “... involve[s] close, repeated listenings that often reveal previously unnoted recurring features of the organization of talk.” (Silverman 2000: 830).

Secondly, the transcripts are read through repeatedly, in search of emerging patterns or areas of focus. At each reading, notes are made in the margins and areas are highlighted for review. By the third or fourth reading, patterns have become clear, and it becomes possible to bring together different parts of the story, allowing the reading of particular parts to take place within the context of the story as a whole. Thus, connections can be made between the parts as well as between the parts and the whole.

Once connections are made between various parts of the story, one can define more clearly the major themes, or areas of focus, and delve into the story in search of those aspects that shed light on each area of focus, cycling back for a possible fifth or sixth reading, or more, depending on the number of themes. Therefore, I read through the transcripts repeatedly, looking for themes. Once I had identified them, I proceeded to read through the story theme by theme, making notes and looking for further details around each theme. After that, I was able to compare the notes on each theme and look at how they were interrelated.

At this point, it becomes possible to rewrite the original transcripts into the researcher’s prose version of the narrative. The emphasis and challenge here, is for the researcher to make a concerted effort to remain true to the original story, despite the new version that has emerged. Even though rewriting needs a certain degree of interpretation, especially considering the amount of time that the researcher spent reading and looking for themes, it is important for the researcher to use as much as possible of the co-researcher’s own words and language to tell the story. As Mark Freeman (in Daiute and Lightfoot: 2004: 70) states: “I would transform the interview transcripts into narrative form, using the artists’ own words as much as possible in the service of fashioning stories adequate to what they had said. ... Subsequently, the task – not unlike the task of categorizing and coding in a sense – was to determine what went with what...”. This proved to be challenging in the case of Hanneljie’s story, because we had our conversations in Afrikaans. In writing for a broader audience, however, one must work in English. Therefore, I will tell most of the story in English, and provide pertinent quotes in Afrikaans, with translations in brackets. For further emphasis, Hanneljie’s words will appear in green, so that they may stand out. It is at this

point, upon deciding ‘what went with what’ that I will retell the story along the lines of the identified areas of focus, as will be evident in the next section.

Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach and Zilber (1998: 10) remind the researcher to listen to “three voices: the voice of the narrator, as represented by the tape or the text; the theoretical framework, which provides the concepts and tools of interpretation; and a reflexive monitoring of the act of reading and interpretation, that is, self-awareness of the decision process of drawing conclusions from the material.” This process, again, calls for a few returns to the transcripts and results in a version of the story that should resound with the co-researcher’s own voice and that amplifies the beauty of the narrative in a manner similar to the way the body of a stringed instrument resounds with and amplifies the sound of a plucked string. In Hanneltjie’s story, the recordings and transcripts represent her voice while the narrative framework provides the tool of interpretation that is the holistic-content mode of reading discussed here. Finally, my reflection on unique outcomes and issues to ponder, represents my awareness of the decisions I made about the areas of focus that I chose.

3.3.5 Hanneltjie’s story

My telling of Hanneltjie’s story follows and this is based on three one-hour interviews and a number of emails, including one in which she honoured me by sharing a collection of her own poetry with me. Because our conversation was not linear, as is the nature of unstructured interviews, I have elected to tell her story by discussing five major areas of focus, rather than telling a chronological tale. These areas of focus were chosen, based on what emerged out of the holistic-content reading I conducted, as described in the previous section.

It is important to note that I decided to quote her directly in Afrikaans in every instance, since this is our mother tongue and the language we chose to converse in, so that it would be easier to explore difficult aspects of her story. Hence, it represents the truest version of her voice in text. Each quote is printed in green and followed by a translation in brackets.

Hanneltjie was introduced to me via email as someone who might be willing to be involved in my research, because she has a story of sexual abuse to tell. She was introduced to me as a woman in her late forties, working as an accomplished professional in the academic world. Following an exchange mediated by the person who introduced us, we communicated directly via email at first. During this correspondence I informed her about the

nature of the research and provided her with the Informed Consent document that she eventually signed.

At our first meeting at the coffee shop that she chose, she seemed reserved and tense. However, she insisted that she was willing to participate and wanted me to ask her anything. She began immediately by disclosing that she had been sexually abused by a friend of the family for approximately eight years from the age of eight until she was sixteen, stating that the last incident ended in rape. Mostly, he had fondled her and performed a number of different sexual acts with her as well as forcing her to reciprocate; these events culminated in this final act of rape. She explains that this is the only incident where he had penetrated her and this is why she refers to this specific incident as “rape.” Shortly after that, she went to university and, by doing so, was able to escape further abuse.

She was raised in a conservative, “Calvinistic” household by a mother who was a social worker and a father who was a business man. She has an older brother. Her parents were never aware of the abuse and she felt unable to tell her mother for a number of reasons that will be discussed. She describes her upbringing as strict and authoritarian.

As a result of the abuse, she was socially awkward and withdrawn, preferring her own company and the company of books to that of other people. She found university particularly difficult to adjust to socially, but found her escape in academic work. Subsequently, she entered the professional world (which she also finds challenging socially), and earned four doctorates. She explains that this has been a way for her to run away from facing her emotions and to fill sleepless nights. She remains single, despite having entered into a handful of romantic relationships, all of which ended as a result of her reluctance to make intimate connections or to respond to physical intimacy. Working as a counsellor for a phone-in counselling service has provided her with the opportunity to support others in distress and to have an outlet for her deep-seated concern for others, especially those who are vulnerable. She avoids dealing with rape cases, though, because of her history. She also volunteered at a home for mentally disabled women and a shelter for abandoned animals. Recently, she has become increasingly aware that she is averse to almost all physical contact and stimuli. She has also become convinced of the need to address this aversion as it is affecting her ability to interact with others in even the most casual of circumstances. She has consulted a number of professionals for support over the years and, at the time of the interviews, was in therapy.

3.3.5.1 Abuse

Hannetjie was abused for approximately eight years and during this time she was forced to perform a variety of sexual acts with an adult male friend of the family. She was never able to talk to her parents about the abuse and only escaped because she left home to go to university. However, as a child, she acted out by stealing and, although she was caught once, her parents and teachers never seemed to make the connection. This was a source of concern for her as she blamed her mother for not noticing a problem. “Ek het vir baie jare het ek my ma kwalik geneem, want sy’s ‘n maatskaplike werkster en die tekens dat daar fout is was daar. ... ek was ‘n rebel en sy’t nooit twee en twee bymekaar gesit nie en ek het haar vir baie jare kwalik geneem.” (I blamed my mother for many years because she was a social worker and the signs that something was wrong were there. ... I was a rebel and she never put two and two together and I blamed her for many years.) At the time of the interview, she had still not told her mother anything.

As an adult survivor of abuse, Hannetjie is still haunted by nightmares and feelings of guilt and shame, more than thirty years later. One of the reasons for these lasting effects is that her abuser is still a friend of the family and still lingers in the background. She tells of times during her university career, when she would return home for the holidays and he would be around. His presence made it very difficult to enjoy the pleasures that most students enjoy when home for the holidays, especially swimming; a preferred pastime in the hot area where she grew up. “Almal swem en... dat ek kan voel hoe trek hy my uit met sy oë... uhm... Ek kan nie weier om te swem nie, want almal swem. Watter verskoning gee ek?” (Everybody is swimming and... I could feel him undressing me with his eyes... uhm... I couldn’t refuse to swim because everyone was swimming. What excuse could I give?)

Another lingering effect that often disrupts her daily routine is recurring nightmares. These come and go, depending on her emotional state, but they are severe enough for her to want to avoid sleep. She explains: “Ek weet ek moet vanaand in die bed klim, maar die versoeking is groot om tot laat op die sitkamer mat te lê, en ek het vir jare op die sitkamer mat geslaap om nie nagmerries... Ek neem aan ek slaap nie so diep op die sitkamer mat nie, en ... die nagmerries... ek word gouer wakker.” (I know I should go to bed tonight, but the temptation to lie on the living room carpet until late is strong and I slept on the living room carpet for years in order not to have nightmares... I assume I don’t sleep as deeply on the carpet and I wake up more quickly.) Similarly, she has used her doctoral studies to escape

sleep: “Ek is net na elf kamer toe en ek was kwart voor twee wakker na ‘n nagmerrie en ek het nie weer geslaap nie... Nou weet jy hoekom swot ek so baie.” (I went to my room just after eleven and woke at a quarter to two from a nightmare and did not sleep again... Now you know why I study so much.)

Throughout the time of the abuse and since then, Hannetjie has found ways of escaping the pain. At the time, she said: “Die enigste manier hoe ek agt jaar van ‘abuse’ kon oorleef, was om vir myself te sê, ‘Ek voel dit nie.’... ‘Ek voel niks. Ek voel niks. Ek voel niks. Ek voel niks.’” (The only way I could survive eight years of abuse was to tell myself that I felt nothing. ‘I feel nothing. I feel nothing. I feel nothing. I feel nothing.’) This repetitive mantra became her shield. Subsequently, though, she has found it very difficult to reconnect with her own feelings, both on a physical and an emotional level because she became so good at cutting herself off from sensation and emotion. Later in life, she supplemented this suppression of feeling with an attempt to run away, as she describes it: “Ek het die grootste gedeelte van my lewe het ek op intellektuele vlak gelewe. Uhm... ek het gestudeer en sodra ek met een graad klaar is het ek met ‘n volgende een begin. Net om nie te dink nie. Net om nie te voel nie. Net om nie te leef nie. Net om nie te beleef nie. Want ek is ‘n meester om my emosies te onderdruk.” (I lived most of my life on an intellectual level. I studied and the moment I finished one degree, I would start the next one. Not to think. Not to feel. Not to live. Not to experience. Because I am a master at suppressing my own emotions.) Also, as mentioned before, she used her studies to escape nightmares, which as she explains, came back more often: “die oomblik as ek skietgee” (...the moment I let go a little), referring to letting go of her emotions.

This brings me to another aspect of the effects of abuse on her later life. Hannetjie describes herself as a hard worker, who does not give up. She has worked very hard, both at simply coping with everyday life and at dealing with and recovering from the effects of the abuse, as seen in her work to suppress her emotions. More recently, though, she has been working very hard at exploring and understanding her feelings. She tells the story of the day she realised that her aversion to being touched was out of control: “Ek het in die raadskamer gesit en die ‘minutes’ geles van die vorige vergadering. Ek het met my rug na die deur toe gesit en iemand het ingekom en ek het hom nie gehoor nie en hy’t sy hand op my skouer gesit. Ek het hom met ‘n... dit was net ‘n refleksbeweging... (demonstrating a backhanded punch) en hy’t hom morsdood geskrik en ek het my morsdood geskrik. Dit was ‘n oorreaksie. En ek het net besef... ek moet ‘n plan maak. ... Dit was ‘n skrik. Ek het geskrik, maar die

reaksie daarop was nie normaal nie. Jy... jou eerste reaksie behoort nie te wees om die ou plat te slaan nie.” (I was sitting in the boardroom, reading the minutes of the previous meeting. I was sitting with my back to the door and someone came in. I didn’t hear him and he put his hand on my shoulder. I punched him... it was a reflex action. He got a big fright and so did I. It was an overreaction. I realised that I have to make a plan. ... It was a fright, but the reaction wasn’t normal. Your first reaction shouldn’t be to flatten the guy.)

She also relates the story of her attempts to connect intimately with others as a series of failures. With her first relationship with a man, she felt loved and cared for, but: “die oomblik toe hy begin ernstig raak het, ek net baie vinnig en baie ver weggehardloop.” (... the moment he became serious, I ran away very fast and very far.) Later, she was involved with a woman, a relationship she describes as a “disaster” and then another woman – another “disaster.” Both those women felt that she did not react to physical intimacy in the way that they would have expected. She realised that something was wrong.

Since making this realisation and noticing a pattern in the manner in which she would avoid sitting between two people at church or feel completely drained by a fifteen minute visit to a medical professional, she has made every effort to acquire a better understanding of not only her own reactions to physical contact but also her emotions and feelings. She describes this pursuit as an effort, “om een te wees” (to be one.) Upon questioning her about what she means by “om een te wees” she explains that she is currently half a person. She feels that she is only comfortable with some parts of her body and as if “die middelste deel” (the middle part – referring to her lower torso) is missing. She feels perfectly comfortable with her own mind and intellectual pursuits, but she feels decidedly uncomfortable with her own physical reality, almost as if she is disembodied.

This sense of disembodiment has led her to explore many forms of therapy. One of her therapists told her that she treats her inner life like a messy drawer in the kitchen. She keeps throwing thoughts and feelings in without looking in the drawer, until the drawer cannot close anymore and things come spilling out. Then, she opens the drawer to clean it out and reorganise it. I quote her telling of this story: “... almal het mos maar hulle kombuislaai. Jy gooi net in en op ‘n stadium kan die laai nie meer toe nie. Dan ruk jy hom uit en jy pak hom ‘n bietjie reg. Sy’t gesê ek lewe so. Totdat ... tot die laai nou weer kan toe, dan’s ek nou weer ‘fine’ vir ‘n ruk tot iets gebeur dan kan en die laai weer nie kan toe nie.”



Figure 3.2: The Dartmoor Hare: *Three Hares with Three Ears*

At the time of the interviews, she was exploring Tantric mindfulness in an effort to reconnect with her body and emotions. When I shared the image of the Dartmoor hare with her, she identified very strongly with it, explaining that she has overworked her ‘intellectual’ hare and allowed the ‘physical’ and ‘emotional’ hares to weaken. At the time of the interviews, she was engaged with a guru who was teaching her to think about and reconnect with her body in ways that she had not done for several years. Something as simple as being aware of the temperature in the room became an opportunity to exercise mindfulness and to think about her body. As she explains: “Deur al die jare doen ek twee of drie dinge gelyk. Ek sal sit en eet, terwyl ek lees, of terwyl ek op die rekenaar werk en ‘n halfuur later, as jy my vra wat het ek geëet, dan sal ek nie vir jou kan sê nie. Dit begin deur bewus te raak van (touches railing) ‘Hoe voel hierdie ding? Is hy koud? Is hy hard? Is hy sag?... So, dis absoluut ‘n konsentrasie op die fisiese en watter emosies hou dit in.” (Through the years I would do two or three things at once. I would eat and read or work on the computer and half an hour later I wouldn’t be able to tell you what I had eaten. It starts with becoming aware of (touches railing) ‘How does this thing feel? Is it cold? Is it hard? Is it soft? ... so, it’s an absolute concentration on the physical and the emotions attached to it.) Many people may regard her foray into Tantra as a sexual exercise, but she explains that all she desires is to feel

normal and to understand her body better: “Dit gaan vir my oor om te leer om te voel. Om emosies te ervaar. Om dinge wat ander mense as normaal ervaar ook dieselfde te ervaar.” (To me it’s about learning to feel. To experience emotions. To experience things that other people experience as normal in the same way as they do.)

As she works on cleaning out her drawer, the act of unpacking it and looking at its contents becomes “heluit moeilik!” (hell difficult). In order to cope with the severe levels of discomfort she experiences, she has taught herself a number of coping strategies, including listening to music, especially at night when she cannot sleep, and spending time in nature by going for long walks in a local nature reserve. A predictable routine also helps her to feel in control and safe: “En, ek is nie ‘n ou wat hou van verrassings nie, so, uhm, as ek nie ‘n ding kan voorsien en voorberei nie, dan... So, enige vreemde situasie is vir my ‘n challenge...” (I am not a person who likes surprises. If I can’t predict something and prepare for it, then... So, any strange situation is a challenge.)

One of the unique outcomes of her repeated efforts to ‘clean out the drawer’ is that she has been able to reach a level of forgiveness both of her mother and her abuser. She has found liberation in that, because she has released herself from the burden of blame. She has stopped blaming her mother, as she says: “Ek dink nie my ma besef my hartseer nie. Ek dink nie sy... Dis hoe sy grootgeword het.” (I don’t think my mother realises my sadness. I don’t think she... That’s how she was raised.) In forgiving her abuser, she finds a level of freedom: “Om hom te vergewe... Dit gaan hom nie bevry nie. Dit bevry my. Wie weet wat kan gebeur... waartoe meer kan ek instaat wees, as ek sover kom om myself.. om te besef dis nie my skuld nie.” (Forgiving him... it doesn’t set him free. It sets me free. Who knows what could happen... what I could be capable of, if I can get to a point... to realise that it’s not my fault?) It has also given her hope that she will be able to continue cleaning the drawer until she has reached her goal of feeling ‘normal.’ However, she acknowledges that she has not dealt well with her feelings about that last night when her abuser raped her. She explains that she feels partly responsible and has been unable to forgive herself, because, for the first time, her body responded to his and she feels that she may have encouraged him in that. “Daar’s nog baie verskuilde emosies waardeur ek moet werk en... vergewe. Nie net vir hom nie, maar ook myself.” (There are still many hidden emotions I have to work through and... forgive. Not just him, but myself.) Having worked as a counsellor, she understands that a physical reaction, even in an abusive situation, is normal and she should not feel the shame and anger that she is feeling, but she still does: “...ek het gevoel dis my skuld. Ek het dan vir

hom aanleiding gegee. Ek het gereageer op wat hy gedoen het. En ek sukkel nog ‘n bietjie daarmee.” (I felt that it was my fault. After all, I led him on. I reacted to what he did. I am still struggling with that.) This is one of the biggest issues that she would still like to toss out of the drawer, even though she has helped another person to deal with this same issue: “... ek het dit al eenkeer vir ‘n vrou gesê. Dis nie haar skuld nie. Dis net iets wat gebeur, maar ek het nog nie heeltemal myself oortuig dit is so met my nie.” (I have told a woman this. It’s not her fault. It’s just something that happens, but I haven’t quite convinced myself that it’s the same for me.)

3.3.5.2 Identity

Hannetjie’s understanding of her own identity plays an integral part in how she has dealt with the effects of the abuse over the years, and vice-versa. She describes herself as a “normale vrou” (normal woman) with normal desires and hopes, while acknowledging that her reactions to physical contact and intimacy are anything but normal. Her hope is to be ‘normal’ and to feel ‘normal’.

Having been born into a conservative Afrikaans household, she was born into a set of expectations of what a woman should be and how a daughter should behave. “Soos my ma wou hê...” (As my mother would have wanted.) However, after enduring years of abuse and many more years of avoiding much of what may be considered ‘normal’ she developed an identity centred very much around her intellectual abilities, rather than focussed on a desire to marry and have children. It is a great source of sadness for her that her mother does not value her achievements as highly as she would a decision to find a husband and have children. She tells the story of the official function after the graduation ceremony where she received her first PhD. Her mother came to her in front of all her guests and told her that: “sy hoop ek het nou klaar... ek is nou klaar met die boeke en dat ek nou ‘n man gaan soek.” (she hopes that I have finished with the books so that I could look for a husband.)

She is not only an accomplished academic, but also prides herself on being a good manager, because she takes care to communicate with her subordinates and demands nothing of them that she does not demand of herself. “Op professionele gebied is my menseverhoudings goed. Ek kan nie van die mense verwag wat aan my rapporteer om iets te doen wat ek nie bereid is om self te doen nie. En dit respekteer hulle.” (On a professional level, my relationships are good. I cannot expect of those who report to me something I do not expect of myself. And they respect that.) She shows great perseverance and bravery both

in her academic pursuits and in her decades-long work to recover from the abuse. Emotionally, she characterises herself as empathetic and caring, explaining that she can identify with others' pain: "... as 'n mens trauma in jou lewe gehad het, dan's dit vir jou makliker om te verstaan wat die persoon deurgaen." (If one has been through trauma, it is easier to understand what someone else is going through.) She identifies strongly with any person or animal who is vulnerable or exposed to abuse and finds great meaning in her work as a counsellor.

3.3.5.3 *Her mother*

Hannetjie's relationship with her mother is troubled. As a child she blamed her mother for not realising that there was something wrong in her life, especially because her mother was working as a social worker and should have seen the signs. "Ek het vir baie jare het ek my ma kwalik geneem, want sy's 'n maatskaplike werkster en die tekens dat daar fout is was daar." (I blamed my mother for many years because she was a social worker and the signs that something was wrong were there.) The fact that she felt unable to disclose the abuse to her mother is also a factor in this story, because she sees this as an outcome of the shaping of her identity within the Calvinistic tradition and in her understanding of her own inability to live up to her mother's expectations. The perception is that, in the Dutch Reformed Church, women do not talk about sex and sexuality: "In 'n Calvinistiese huishouding: Jy praat nie oor seks nie. 'n Vrou dink nie oor seks nie. Jy weet, dis iets wat in die slaapkamer gebeur, agter 'n toe deur in die donker." (In a Calvinistic household, you don't talk about sex. A woman does not think about sex. You know, it is something that happens in the bedroom, behind a closed door, in the dark.)

Later in life, she felt increasingly alienated from her mother, since she had not lived up to her mother's expectations. At the same time, she felt that her parents favoured her brother and, later, her sister-in-law over her. "Sy kon nie... kan nou nog nie... die goeie in my raaksien nie. My broer is die intelligente, geniale kind wat eintlik met sy talente baie min gedoen het. Hy was maar die blou-oogseuntjie." (She couldn't... still can't... see the good in me. My brother was the intelligent genius who actually did little with his talent. He was the blue-eyed boy.) She tells the story of how her parents promised them both that they would pay off their student loans, provided that they passed their exams. Her brother studied for five years and eventually stopped without completing a qualification. She, on the other hand, worked hard and earned a degree and two diplomas. Her parents paid off her brother's loans

and left her to pay off her own by herself. This story describes a deeply felt hurt that is as yet unresolved. In telling this story, Hanneltjie became very sad and found it difficult to speak.

Furthermore, although she never had children, she is worried about the effects her own upbringing may have had on the children she may have had. She questions whether she would have been a good mother; whether she would have been able to ‘break the cycle’ of “die sondes van die vaders” (the sins of the fathers). “Jy sien so baie dat ‘n gemolesteerde kind molesteer sy kinders, of haar kinders. ... ‘n Vrou wat in ‘n ‘toxic relationship’ is, het grootgeword in ‘n ‘toxic’ huis...” (you see so often that a molested child will molest his or her children. ... a woman in a toxic relationship grew up in a toxic house....)

3.3.5.4 *God and faith*

Hanneltjie’s relationship with God is equally troubled. In the same way that she feels that her mother should have known something was wrong, she also feels that God should have seen her pain and done something: “... al die volwassenes was non-caring en God het nie belangestel nie en hy’t nie omgee nie.” (... all the adults were uncaring and God was not interested and He did not care.)

She questions accepted perceptions of God as being loving, almighty and omniscient and finds it easier to relate to God as a God of vengeance as he is portrayed in the Old Testament: “... ek is meer gemaklik met ‘n Ou Testamentiese God van wraak – ‘n oog vir ‘n oog – as met ‘n Nuwe Testamentiese God van liefde. ... ‘n God van liefde wat toelaat dat ‘n baba aangerand word, totdat sy blind is, is nie vir my ‘n God van liefde nie.” (I am more comfortable with an Old Testament God of vengeance – an eye for an eye – than with a New Testament God of love... A God of love who allows a baby to be assaulted till she’s blind is not a God of love.) At the same time, she seeks God to find solace in Him in her poetry.

Louter

O, onstilbare gees
van waan- en drogbeelde,
storm voort en skud
jou druppels oor my.
Laat sny jou bliksestraal
deur my wese
en skroei die voosplekke
tot naakte rou reinheid.

Verdof my pyn met
jou donderbrul vibrasie

en stuit met jou wind
my wanhoop.
Reinig my visie
en gee na die storm
die stilte.

(Purify

Oh, unquiet spirit
Of delusions and delirium
Storm ahead and shake your waters over me.
Let your lightning cleave through my being
And scorch the worn places
down to raw, naked purity.

Ease my pain with
Your thunderous vibration.
And end my despair with your wind.
Purify my vision
And give, after the storm,
The quiet.)

Similarly, she has had to search for ways to express her faith outside the Dutch Reformed Church, questioning the assumption that the church and the clergy are the only keepers of the faith. “Ek noem myself ‘n Christen, uhm... Wel, ek moet ook sê, ek is baie aangetrokke tot Boeddhisme, wat nie rêrig, as jy mooi daaroor dink, ‘n godsdiens is nie, uhm... Dit is meer ‘n leefwyse wat vir my absoluut sin maak. Kan nie sien hoekom jy nie die twee kan kombineer – wat ‘n NG dominee se hare sal laat regop staan.” (I call myself a Christian, uhm... well, I am attracted to Buddhism, which isn’t really, if you think about it, a religion, uhm... It is more of a lifestyle that makes absolute sense to me. Can’t see why you can’t combine the two – which will make an Dutch Reformed reverend’s hair stand on end.)

Her most profound questions, however, are focused on the role that Calvinism has played in her upbringing and the deeply rooted sense of guilt she feels one is endowed with as a member of the tradition; a sense that one is always in the wrong, regardless of the evidence. To explain what she means, she tells the following story:

“My ma se enigste broer was ‘n skoolhoof en, uh... hy vertel die storie van, van... later was hy ‘n Inspekteur van Onderwys, dat ‘n ouer ‘n klag gelê het. ‘n Kind het, dit was die seuntjie se eerste dag in die nuwe skool en hy staan voor die hoof se kantoor en die hoof roep hom in en gee hom ‘n pak slae en sê vir hom, “Nou gaan terug klas toe.” Die seuntjie antwoord dat dit sy eerste dag in die nuwe skool is en nie weet waarheen om te gaan nie. So hy’t, die skoolhoof, het dadelik aangeneem hy, die kind, het iets verkeerd gedoen. Nou of dit nou ‘n waar storie is, weet ek nie, maar dis wat hy my oom vertel het. Hy’t, die hoof, het blykbaar vir die seuntjie gesê, “Toemaar, ons sal dit die houe aftrek volgende keer as jy kom.”

(My mother's only brother was a school principal and he tells the story of... He later became a school Inspector and a parent had laid a complaint. A child, a little boy who had arrived at the school for the first day had been standing in front of the principal's office when the principal called him in and promptly gave him a hiding and said, "Now, go back to class." The boy replied that he did not know which class to go to because it was his first day in this school. So, the principal had immediately assumed that the boy had done something wrong. Whether it's true or not, I don't know, but that's the story. The principal concluded by saying, "That's all right. We'll deduct it from next time.")

She speaks of the effects of being raised in a Calvinist home with a great sense of hurt and resentment, questioning the ethics of raising children who are 'born in sin' and presumed guilty. "Dit voel net vir my of 'n kind begin dan met 'n, met 'n agterstand. My ma was, was baie bewus, sy's nou nog, dat jy in sonde ontvang en gebore is. Dat sy partykeer die sonde raaksien en nie die goeie nie. ... as daar nie in die Bybel staan, soos in die reg, dat jy onskuldig is tot jy skuldig bevind word, nie, kan ouers nie hulle kinders onder genade... kan ouers nie hulle kinders positief benader waar dit nou negatief is." (It feels to me as though a child starts with a deficit. My mother was very aware, she still is, that you are created and born in sin. So that she sometimes sees the sin and not the good. ... if the Bible doesn't say, like in the law, that you are innocent until proven guilty, parents cannot approach their children with grace ... positively, where it is negative now.)

She relates a specific incident, when her mother immediately assumed that she had done something wrong, when she was actually the victim: "My persoonlike ervaring van bogenoemde is: Ek was nege of tien jaar oud en het in ons agtertuin gesit en lees. Een van die skool boelies het agter ons gebly. Ek het net skielik pyn gevoel teen my wang en bloed het op die boek gedrup. Die seun het my met 'n klip gegooi. Toe my ma by die huis kom wou sy weet wat het gebeur. Haar reaksie nadat ek vertel het wat gebeur het was haar vraag, "Wat het jy vir hom gedoen dat hy jou met 'n klip gegooi het?" Het tot vandag toe die letsel op my wang."

(My own experience of the above is this: I was nine or ten years old and was reading in our backyard. One of the school bullies lived in the house behind ours. I felt a sudden pain on my cheek and blood dripped on my book. He had thrown a stone at me. When my mother came home, she wanted to know what had happened. Her reaction to my explanation was the

question: “What did you do to him, to make him throw the stone at you?” I still have the scar on my cheek.)

3.3.5.5. *The Dartmoor hare: how are these things interrelated?*

Mamma

Mamma, kyk my hart is weer gebreek,
Soos woorde in die duister preek,
So duidelik skree die stem-
O waarom nou, O waarom weer, O waarom dan die seer?

Pappa, kyk ek lê weer platgeslaan,
Die Bybel praat van eiewaan,
Maar nogtans was ek trots-
Dan slaan die see my voete weg en klou ek aan die Rots.

Here, ek is jammer, ek is mens.
Ek wens ek kon net eenmaal
Eerder tortel hoor as kraai-
‘n ander paadjie volg as om U weer eens te verraai.

Wysheid, kyk my pêrels blink nog mooi,
Maar netnou sal ek alles
Weer vir gulsig’ varke gooi-
En sonde los my weer eens in ‘n koningskleed getooi.

Eindelik, is wie oorbly ek en jy,
Wat kom en is en was
Is maar geraamtes in ons kas-
En al hoe ons sal skoonkom, is genade wat ons was.

(Mommy

Mommy, look my heart is broken again,
Like words preach into the dark,
So clear screams the voice-
Oh, why now, Oh, why again, Oh, why the pain?

Daddy, look I am devastated again,
The Bible speaks of conceit,
But still I was proud –
Until the sea knocks me off my feet and I am clinging to the Rock.

Lord, I am sorry, I am human.
I wish I could, just once,
Rather hear the turtle dove than the crow –
To follow another path, rather than betray You yet again.

Wisdom, look my pearls are shining bright,
But just now I will toss
All to the greedy swine –
And sin leaves me yet again clothed in royal robes.

Eventually, the ones who are left are you and I,
Who came and are and were
Are but skeletons in our cupboard –
And the only way we can come clean, is if we are washed in mercy.)

In our discussion, I showed Hannetjie an image of a mythical creature that is often referred to as the Dartmoor Hare.



Figure 3.3 The Dartmoor Hare: *Three Hares with Three Ears*

The hare in question is actually a trinity of hares who share three ears between them, so that they are inseparable. We talked about the relationship between her life and the three hares: thus, the important aspects of her life, being her physical, emotional, intellectual, spiritual and social life, are bound to one another interdependently and so a problem for one aspect is a problem for all. Therefore, it is important not only to look at the various areas of focus separately, but also to reflect on their interrelatedness within the story as a whole.

Thus, if one starts by looking at her experience of abuse as a physical thing, the years of repeated abusive touch made her averse to all physical contact and, as mentioned earlier, caused her to withdraw, not only from the physical touch of others, but also from her own sensory awareness. She neglected that aspect of her life by telling herself that she feels nothing and she did that for so long that it became true and so she has had to force herself, through Tantric practices, to reconnect with her physical being. She had, in effect, become disembodied.

In this seemingly disembodied state, her emotions also suffered, as she also suppressed her feelings along with her sensory experiences. The suppressed feelings would often manifest as nightmares, which would affect her ability to sleep while causing great emotional distress.

Similarly, her discomfort with physical contact, or even proximity to others, caused her to withdraw socially, preferring her own company and the company of nature to that of other people. She describes herself as a “loner” who always felt that she did not fit in with her peers and, at the time of the interviews, had experienced only troubled romantic relationships. Her aversion to contact made it very difficult for her to be physically intimate with anyone, whether male or female. Furthermore, the influence of generations of Calvinistic thinking about sexuality has made hers a lonely journey, as she has never felt able to discuss the abuse or its effects with her family; she also felt unable to live up to their expectations.

Her one escape from the physical, emotional and social spheres was in intellectual pursuits. In an attempt to fill the hours of sleeplessness and to have something else to focus on, she became an academic of note, earning four PhDs in a relatively short space of time. However, this attempt to run away would never succeed for long and she would be overwhelmed with nightmares. One of her therapists described for her the cyclical process she follows. She used the image of someone cleaning out a messy drawer. She would clean it out, by going for therapy, then close it again for a while, until the build-up of suppressed feelings would get too much and she would go back to clean out the drawer again.

This cycle of escape from the physical and emotional and her return to therapy had proven, paradoxically, to be both effective and troubling. She found that she was able to work through some things whenever she was willing and able to open the drawer; therefore, she feels that each new attempt leaves her with less to work on. At the same time, she feels that her attempts to escape her difficulties with her own body and her own emotions have caused her to feel so disembodied, that the journey back to her body is a particularly uncomfortable one. Similarly, going for therapy may help, but it brings all the old emotions to the fore and causes more nightmares than she would experience while avoiding the issue. In addition, in the process of working through the drawer, she has left the most difficult part, dealing with the final rape, for last.

Her relationship with God, also, is simultaneously a source of hope and a source of confusion. She holds on to God as the Creator and finds peace in nature, while questioning

His omniscience and love. As is evident in her poetry, the relationship is complex and layered with feelings of belonging and alienation, awe, questioning and worship.

Ateïs

Is daar 'n God?
Wie is hy en waar woon hy?
Daar is geen God!
Dit glo ek vry.

Bal van vuur ver daarbo
Met skroeiende hittestrale
Met helder lig elke dag-
Hoe kry jy dit reg, so
'n grote daad te vermag?

Kleine, reine blommetjies
Met sagte brose blaartjies
En helder groen stammetjies,
Sagte geur en fyne aartjies-
Mensehand het hier geen deel.

Ek, eens grote, trotse ateïs
Het geval en gefaal!
Gods skepping het 'n weg
Deur my hart gebaan-
Ek glo God moet bestaan.

(Atheist

Is there a God?
Who is he and where does he live?
There is no God!
This I believe freely.

Ball of fire far above
With scorching heat rays.
How do you do it,
Achieving such a great deed?

Tiny, pure flowers
With soft, fragile petals
And bright green stems,
Soft scent and fine veins-
Human hands have no part here.

I, once great, proud atheist
Have fallen and failed!
God's creation made a way through my heart –
I believe that God must exist.)

3.4 Unique outcomes.

Hannetjie's story, at face value, may seem fraught with problems and there are some issues that still pose major challenges for her. However, there are some unique outcomes that stand out for those who care to take a closer look.

Narrative practitioners look for unique outcomes or “negative instances” (Lieblich in Lieblich et al. 1998: 73): in other words, for stories that tell an alternative story to the dominant story, especially when the dominant story is problem saturated (Freedman & Combs 1996: 67). These unique outcomes offer the narrative researcher opportunities to explore aspects of the story that reveal the beauty and strengths that often lie hidden under the problem story. As part of the holistic-content analysis of Hanneljé’s story, I looked for instances that deviated from the dominant story. Hence, as is evident in the discussion of the abuse in the previous sections, the focus was not only on the negative effects of the abuse, but also on times when she grew and learned and developed coping skills. The following sections describe the discussions and reflections on those unique outcomes that were identified.

3.4.1 Hope

During our very first conversation, Hanneljé expresses a sense of hope, when she explains: “Ek sou sê die abuse as kind is soortvan... is verby. Die verkragting is daar nog issues waaraan ek werk en... ja... sal daar kom.” (I’d say the abuse I experienced as a child is sort of... over, dealt with. The rape is still an issue that I am working on and... yes... I’ll get there.) Similarly, in her persistent return to therapy over the years, she shows faith in her ability to deal with both the abuse and the rape and to “get there.” At the same time, her experience of being able to ‘toss some things out of the drawer’ appears to have given her hope that she will be able to toss out those issues that are still lingering and close the drawer. She has formed an image of herself as being someone who could feel ‘normal’ and is working toward that goal. After our first meeting I expressed my awe of her in this, that one person could endure so much and persevere for so long in pursuit of ‘being one’.

3.4.2 Forgiveness and liberation

I am also amazed that Hanneljé could find it within herself to forgive her abuser: not only did she manage it, but she also found a great degree of liberation as a result. Releasing the perpetrator has allowed her to release herself from dwelling on his actions. In talking about her need to let go of her feelings of hatred and revenge, she says: “Die enigste manier om dit agter te los is om te vergewe.” (The only way to leave it behind is to forgive.) Similarly, she hopes that she may free herself from blame when she is finally able to forgive herself for reacting to him. Although she understands on an intellectual level that she is not to blame, she has not dealt with it emotionally. “Daar’s nog baie verskuilde emosies waardeur ek moet werk en ... vergewe.” (There are many hidden feelings that I still need to work through and...

forgive.) However, it looks as if the experience of finding liberation in forgiving the abuser and forgiving her mother has taught her that it is possible to free herself of this as well.

3.4.3 Determination

Hannetjie describes herself as determined. This is most evident in her decades-long journey of therapy and forgiveness. Despite the pain, nightmares and sleepless nights that the process brings, she keeps returning and keeps cleaning out the drawer. When I asked her whether it would be possible for her to close the drawer and forget about trying to clean it out, she replied: “Ek dink nie so nie. Ek is nie ‘n ou wat sommer maklik tou opgooi nie.” (I don’t think so. I am not a person who throws in the towel easily.) She is determined to continue until the drawer is empty of the things that make her feel that she is not whole or normal. She has been able to translate the same determination that makes her a successful academic and helped her to lose a significant amount of weight (27 kg), into the resolve she needs to carry on seeking wholeness. Thus, I saw in her a skill that will stand her in good stead in all her pursuits.

Following our initial interviews, some time passed before I sent this version of the story to Hannetjie for feedback. Her reply was as follows: “Ek het gesê ek is nie iemand wat tou opgooi nie, maar ek het. Ek is 53 jaar oud en dit is seker tyd dat ek realities begin raak. Sekere goed kan nie verander nie en my probleem met ‘touch’ sal nooit heeltemal verdwyn nie. Ek is op ‘n stadium waar ek kan oorleef tussen mense. Die Tantra eksperiment was ‘n mislukking. Die persoon met wie ek gewerk het, is weg en die persoon wat sy aanbeveel het is ‘n man. Die eerste sessie het ek na ‘n paar minute gestop en dit het my meer kwaad as goed gedoen. Ek is sedertdien nog nie weer in terapie nie en is nie van plan om weer te begin nie.”

(I said I am someone who never gives up, but I have. I am 53 years old and it is time that I am realistic. Some things cannot change and my problem with touch will never go away completely. I am at a stage where I can survive among people. The Tantra experiment was a failure. The person I was working with moved away and the person she referred me to was a man. The first session lasted only a few minutes before I left and it has done more damage than good. Since then, I have not entered therapy again, nor do I plan on doing so.)

3.4.4 Poetry

Even in her deepest despair, Hannetjie has been able to write creative and expressive poetry, using it not only as a vehicle for expression, but also as a tool to question her own

faith and find some resolutions along the way. As she explains: “Dit is nogals, dink ek, ‘n goeie weerspieëling van hoe ek godsdiens ervaar het en hoe verwarrend en deurmekaar dit partykeer vir my was.” (It is, I think, a good reflection of how I experienced religion and how confusing it was for me at times.) She writes beautifully and I was honoured to be allowed to read her poetry, which was something she has never allowed anyone else to do; this helped me to find another window into her story. As she says, it has given me an “in diepte insig” (in-depth insight) into her experiences, on a level that our conversations did not. I was honoured by the level of trust she showed in me and grateful for the insights I gained from her poems.

3.4.5 Nature

Similarly, she has used her love of nature to find answers that she has not been able to find elsewhere, especially about the nature of God and her relationship with Him. She finds solace in nature and the way that the natural world adapts in the face of challenges and change, something she finds difficult. “As die lewe vir my te veel word, dan gryp ek my skoene en ek is in die natuureservaat in. ... Ek glo in evolusie in die opsig dat die natuur aanpas by omstandighede. ... En dis vir my wonderlik.” (When life gets too much, I grab my shoes and go into the local nature reserve. ... I believe in evolution in the sense that nature adapts to circumstances. ... I think it is wonderful.) I wonder whether she may be able to use the inspiration she gets from nature in her own endeavours to grow and change.

3.4.6 Counselling

Hannetjie’s natural empathy for those who are hurt and vulnerable, makes her a successful counsellor who has made it possible for others to recover from trauma. She has received a great deal of positive feedback from clients and finds fulfilment in her ability to contribute to others’ well-being. “Dit laat my goed voel om te dink ek het ‘n verskil in iemand se lewe gemaak.” (It makes me feel good to think that I’ve made a difference in someone’s life.) Thus, not only is she working hard on finding healing for herself, but she is coming alongside others who are in pain and helping them to find their way. Her work in counselling intrigues me particularly because it shows, despite her struggles with social interaction, that she has developed the gentle social skills necessary to be there for others in need.

3.4.7 Faith

In her search for meaning outside of a childhood of abuse and the oppression she feels under Calvinism, Hannetjie has found unique pathways to God and is exploring creative ways of reconnecting both with herself and with God, such as Tantric mindfulness and seeking Him in nature. She has resisted the fearfulness and piety that may come with Calvinism and has been able to reach out to God not in blind faith, but in honest questioning and often in anger also, as is especially evident in her poetry. I am intrigued by her willingness to resist the restrictions she sees within Calvinism and to search for other ways to connect with God and herself. She has found freedom in the knowledge that she does not have to interpret the Bible the way she was taught to, as she says: “...dit was vir my nogal ‘n bevryding om te besef dit is menslike interpretasies. Jy hoef nie daarmee saam te stem nie.” (It was liberating to realise that it is human interpretation. You do not have to agree with it.)

3.4.8 Humour

Throughout her telling of her story, Hannetjie often surprised me with her sense of humour; for example, when talking about having opened the drawer again, she joked that she had grabbed a tiger by its tail and was not always sure what to do with it. I wonder whether this is an untapped resource in her exploration of herself.

3.4.9 The hug

At the end of our second interview, Hannetjie asked if she could hug me. I was deeply touched that she, after telling me about her struggles with physical contact, would ask for this and so I asked her about it the next time we met. She explained that it was homework that her therapist had given her and I was honoured by it, because it revealed a level of trust in me and the process that I had only hoped for, but not necessarily expected.

3.5. Reflection on method and story

This chapter focused, in part, on the first of two “methodological directives” that Schrag and Ramsey (1994: 132) describe, that of “narrative interpretation.” They divide this into two more “phases or moments”: “holistic understanding” and “analytical explanation”.

My feeling is that this chapter fulfills their directive ‘in part’ since the holistic understanding, at this point, only stretches as far as understanding Hannetjie’s story as a whole, within which certain parts play a specific role. Understanding her story within the

larger context, as Spector-Mersel (2011: 173) also requires, can only take place once an investigation has been made into the larger contextual issues at play, such as the influence of Calvinism on Afrikaans women's sexuality, particularly within the Dutch Reformed Church. These questions will be returned to in later chapters.

Under Schrag and Ramsey's directive to offer an "analytical explanation that is geared to an analysis of its constitutive elements" (1994: 133), I used the holistic-content model to read the story and look for areas of focus, as they make up the elements of Hanneltjie's story. Each area was explored and thickened by close reference to Hanneltjie's telling and will be reviewed in detail again in later chapters with relation to my interpretation, relevant literature and the transdisciplinary study. Finally, the areas of focus were examined in terms of how they interrelate, in response to Schrag and Ramsey's (1994: 133) reminder that "the constitutive elements must never be severed from the orientation toward holistic understanding."

3.5.1 Choices for areas of focus

In engaging with Hanneltjie's story, firstly in our conversations and secondly through making transcriptions and rereading them, I made decisions about which areas of focus to explore. The version of Hanneltjie's story presented in this chapter is based on those decisions. It follows that certain parts of her story were not explored in depth and there remains potential for further reading and interpretation.

In the interest of validity, "narrative researchers need to spell out their understandings of the nature of their collected evidence" (Polkinghorne 2007: 9) and this requires me to reflect on the choices that were made.

3.5.1.1 *Abuse*

The reason for selecting Hanneltjie as co-researcher is that she has a story of abuse to tell and so it is self-evident that the abuse would form the basis for the first area of focus in this story. What emerged upon reflection, is that the ripple effects of the abuse have been far-reaching and life changing for her, both in the devastation it brought and, interestingly, in showing up her strengths and potential for growth. The horror cannot be denied, but one also cannot deny the manner in which she had risen above it.

3.5.1.2 *Identity*

Hannetjie's identity emerged as an issue that lies at the centre of her struggle with the effects of the abuse. Much of her struggle with her own identity lies wrapped up in the dissonance that her experience of the abuse created between the way she was raised to think about herself, the thoughts she has about her identity in faith, and her sexuality, on the one hand, and the manner in which the effects of the abuse affected her experience of herself and the way she felt others perceive her, on the other hand. At the same time, she has grown to know that her identity is not based on the abuse alone. Large dimensions of her personhood, such as her professionalism and love of beauty could be seen to stand on their own. She is not who she is only because of the abuse. Her relationships with herself, her parents, her church and other people have shaped her significantly. In thinking about her identity, I am interested to know more about how I may have experienced her outside of the context of this very specific conversation. As a researcher, it reminds me that the story we constructed together is context-bound and the context has a profound effect on the images we constructed of each other through the process. I must acknowledge that, based on these three interviews, I can say very little about Hannetjie's identity as a person outside of her persona as a survivor of abuse, apart from the fact that I heard fragments thereof in her narrative.

3.5.1.3 *Her mother*

Upon reading and reflecting on Hannetjie's questions around her own identity, I was interested to notice that her relationship with her mother plays an integral role. Her views concerning sexuality, what it means to be a woman, faith and Calvinism were all influenced profoundly by her relationship with her mother. As she explains, one always has a special place in one's heart for one's mother, and so a difficult relationship with her is painful. As a researcher, I cannot set myself apart from her experience, since we share very similar roots in the Afrikaans-speaking, Dutch Reformed tradition. Similarly, as a woman and a daughter, I also experience the many-layered complexities of the unique relationship between mothers and their adult daughters within that context. On the one hand, this knowledge led me to want to tread carefully in selecting this area of focus, because I did not want to impose my own experience on her story. On the other hand, however, she did place a great deal of emphasis on the relationship as it forms part of the story and she expressed deeply felt emotions about her mother. At the same time, although she talked about other members of her family, most notably her brother, she returned most often to her mother and made almost no mention of

her father. Thus, while keeping in mind my own experiences and possible urge to interpret from my perspective, I explored this very important relationship as an area of focus.

3.5.1.4 *God and faith*

Although it makes obvious sense within a theological study to focus on the co-researcher's experiences of God and faith, with Hanneltjie the decision went much further than this. She is a deeply spiritual person and reflects very earnestly and honestly on her faith and her understanding of God. She asks questions around theodicy and has studied difficult questions concerning the Bible, in great depth. Most notably, however, two matters stand out about her faith. The first is that she writes poetry about and in conversation with God; the poetry is something she describes as her first choice for expressing things she cannot express otherwise. Secondly, she had chosen a spiritual path to healing, not only in her poetry, but also in Tantric practices. Thus, although the decision to focus on faith appears obvious, it was not made for this reason alone. It was also made because she chose to share these aspects of her story in such depth and detail.

3.5.2 Challenges

Narrative research poses its own challenges and this study, specifically, has some worth mentioning. In the case of Hanneltjie's story, as with most narratives from the past, I had to accept that her telling to me is only a version of the original events. In that version, she chose what to share with me and I also chose what to focus on, making my version a much interpreted account. In addition, language as well as the sensitive nature of the story and time all posed challenges to me as researcher.

Firstly, in exploring a person's own telling of their story, one must be aware that even a first-hand telling is a version of the teller's experience of the original events. As Draucker and Martsolf (2008: 1046) also acknowledge: "Because the participants' narratives are retrospective and their recollections are reconstructions of events that often occurred many years previously, we recognize that some of their descriptions might not be historically accurate." In that awareness, however, I have elected specifically to place very little emphasis on the 'facts' other than as the basis for the meaning that Hanneltjie created out of them. This is why my telling of her story of abuse is a mere few paragraphs, while much time was spent on engaging with and exploring the discussion we had about her experience of its effects on the various aspects of her life. Similarly, this is the reason why I often refer to her story as

‘her telling’ or ‘her experience.’ The use of this language in itself implies that there may be other tellings or experiences of this story, both from her and from other participants. As Spector-Mersel (2011: 173) reminds us, narrative research is “constructionist, discursive, and postmodern” and we construct our identity in our version of the story we choose to tell. The implication is that, if we were to make different choices about our tellings, then we would construct different versions of them and consequently construct a different identity. She made choices, consciously and unconsciously, about what she wanted to share with me and what she did not want to share and this affected how I heard her story.

Secondly, just as she made choices in her telling, I also made choices in my interpretation of the story, which were discussed earlier. These choices are a result of a number of issues that influenced my hearing and reading of her story. From the beginning, I already had my own views about her story, based on several factors. These included: what I had read about spirituality and abuse; my own conceptions of the effects of abuse; what I had been told about her prior to talking to her; what I was hoping to learn; what I have experienced in the Dutch Reformed Church; my own ideas about sexuality and spirituality; and, obviously, on the research question itself. In an effort to remain as true to her story as possible, I have attempted to use her own language as much as possible, trying to provide as much “evidence from the text” (Polkinghorne 2007: 14) as I could.

Thirdly, in attempting to respect and use her own language, I made the decision to conduct the interviews in Afrikaans as I believe in the rich nuanced expression that is possible in one’s mother tongue, especially since we share that mother tongue. However, this same rich nuanced expression is sometimes lost in translation and I often found myself torn between quoting large chunks of the original conversation, which can be very clumsy, and simply retelling the story in English, for brevity’s sake. It also meant that some parts of my telling became repetitive and awkward, as this involved including a quote, a translation of the quote and an explanation. As John Western (1996: 237) so beautifully expresses it: “the richer the research I feel I have come to be able to do over the past score of years, the more its own increasingly nuanced nature has entrapped me in just one language, my own.” Although he speaks of conducting research with co-researchers whose home language is different from his own, I identify with the sentiment because my mother tongue may be Afrikaans, but the language I am most at home with academically is English, having been taught in English and working in a largely English-speaking environment, including having been an English teacher for nine years, and having been in an English-medium school since I

was thirteen. If I had opted to interview Hanneltjie in English, which she was willing and able to do, my task would have been much easier, but I know that some of the subtleties of her story would have been lost on us if I had not been able to rely on my ability to decode her telling in our mother tongue.

A fourth challenge, related to my focus on respecting Hanneltjie's telling, links with the sensitive nature of her story. As Draucker and Martsof (2008: 1044) also experienced in their research with survivors of abuse: "for these women, being heard required the listener to be both deferential and engaged." Considering how compelling her story is, it was not hard to be engaged. However, I found myself working so hard to be deferential as to be hesitant. It is a fine balance between asking the next question and deciding not to ask something that could unearth a lot of rich data, but also cause pain. I allowed myself to be guided by her, confessing my hesitancy and depending on her response. This, in itself, may raise a question of power: if the co-researcher sees herself as the 'subject' of research, she may not recognise her right to decline my question. Hanneltjie is from an academic background and was always willing to answer, having explained to me early on that she values research and wishes to support others who study.

In view of the iterative research design and the fact that a person's telling of her story of abuse is "a process that is complex, progressive and multifaceted" (Draucker & Martsof 2008: 1045) it remained a challenge right until the end to know when to stop. When have you asked all the questions? How many times should one ask for feedback? Knowing that each encounter with the story would affect the author's experience of the story and potentially raise new questions for her, whether in our conversation or in her own mind, it is difficult to make these decisions. In the end, I had to satisfy myself with what I was able to do in the time available. Indeed, because this research eventually took place in bursts over a period of four years, time was a serious consideration.

Time, then, was the final challenge. Because the research took so long to conduct, the relationship with Hanneltjie, although short in actual time taken, became drawn out. This situation affected Hanneltjie's final responses to the story, as much happened between our first engagement and our last, to affect the story itself as well as her reading of our original conversations. During the time that lapsed between the third interview and our last interactions via email, Hanneltjie had abandoned her explorations of Tantra and felt much less determined than at the beginning of our exchange. As Draucker and Martsof (2008: 1045)

also explain: “their interpretation of the essence of the abuse experience evolves through each telling interaction.” I would be remiss not to acknowledge these changes and consider them in my interpretation, since they form part of the ever-evolving story.

3.6. Summary

This chapter discussed and described the methodology used to conduct the empirical aspect of the research. Since the question revolves around a topic that deals with the deep, personal experiences of a person, my decision was to follow a qualitative research design, based on social constructionist principles. As such, the chosen design relies heavily on in-context, rich personal descriptions, as supported by the tenets narrative research. Focus was placed on the co-researcher’s right to authorship of her own story. Consequently, my decision was to use an iterative, inductive approach that would allow meaning to emerge from the co-researcher’s story. As accepted in feminist research, the co-researcher’s voice in interpreting her own perspective and context was given preference.

The chosen co-researcher was found through a purposive convenience sampling process based on word of mouth and she was selected because of the richness of her story. Conversations with her were unstructured and influenced heavily by the direction she chose to take in an iterative approach. I am accountable to the co-researcher in terms of confidentiality, possible harm and informed consent. To meet these ethical requirements, a detailed letter of consent was drafted, agreed upon and signed by her, but I also relied on feedback from the co-researcher throughout the process. Her story was analysed using a holistic-content method that allowed me to delve into that story in great depth and to interpret it in terms of emerging areas of focus as well as in terms of the story as a whole. Hanneltjie’s story was then also presented in the form of tellings relating to each area of focus as well as to the whole, with emphasis placed on using her own language throughout. In addition, I identified unique outcomes in Hanneltjie’s story which reveal her strength of character and growth.

Finally, I spent time reflecting on decisions made during the holistic content reading and on challenges faced during the research process. In the next chapter, the transdisciplinary step in that research process will be discussed in detail.

CHAPTER FOUR:

TRANSDISCIPLINARY STUDY – BRINGING IN NEW VOICES

4.1. Introduction

Although this research is essentially a single-discipline study, within the discipline of Practical Theology, I would be remiss if I did not build in a transdisciplinary layer of research in order to thicken Hanneljie's story. Firstly, however, I need to clarify the concept of transdisciplinary research as it was conducted here. Fawcett (2013: 376-377) explains quite succinctly the difference between the oft-confused concepts of multidisciplinary, interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary research. She explains that multidisciplinary research is essentially research conducted in parallel by individuals from different disciplines, with the purpose of consulting with each other, yet still working independently and presenting independent findings. Fawcett (2013: 376) explains that "Interdisciplinary research involves an integrative and reciprocally interactive approach that actualizes a synthesis of diverse disciplinary perspectives leading to a new level of thinking about and studying of a topic or even to a new discipline." Lastly, she tells us that transdisciplinary research goes beyond collaboration between disciplines to the level of integration between sciences, in an attempt to "create a common conceptual-theoretical-empirical structure for research" (Fawcett 2013: 377). Further, Fuqua, Stokols, Gress, Phillips and Harvey (2004) also make a similar distinction. They (Fuqua et al. 2004: 1460) explain that "Although disciplines are defined as distinct fields of inquiry, the boundaries around disciplines are in fact somewhat arbitrary (having fuzzy boundaries). In turn, the boundaries between closely related fields ... are often overlapping rather than mutually exclusive." As such, it is quite possible for co-researchers from different fields to work toward integration between sciences.

Thus, this aspect of my research falls within the *transdisciplinary* realm, since I aim to enter into dialogue with professionals from other disciplines to look for points of consensus as well as to find moments of dissensus, so that each co-researcher could potentially walk away with a new understanding of the topic. In addition, I aim to integrate knowledge gained from the other disciplines into a deeper, more nuanced understanding of Hanneljie's story.

Secondly, some of the reasons for a transdisciplinary study need to be discussed. Rhoten and Parker (2004:2046) hit the nail on the head when they make a distinction between

the overly simplistic assumption that transdisciplinary research is about acknowledging “heterogeneity” and the fact that researchers accept “the scientific complexity of problems currently under study.” Hanneltjie’s story, for example, is ostensibly about spirituality and sexual abuse, but it raises questions about sexuality, gender identity, sensory integration, mother-daughter relationships, the Dutch Reformed Church, Calvinism, empathy, hope, and forgiveness, among others, all of which are of interest to a number of different disciplines and all of which help me to gain a better understanding of the original question. However, as a practical theologian, it would not be within my capabilities to address all of these issues and to do them all justice. If I am to integrate these multiple aspects into answering my original question, then I need to ask other professionals to help me. I can do this, in part, by studying the relevant literature, but this is not the entire answer. Nissani (1997: 201) posits a number of benefits one could gain from involving other disciplines in one’s research. Keeping Hanneltjie’s story in mind, the benefits he mentions that stand out are: 1. “Immigrants often make important contributions to their new field.” Because they have fresh eyes, outsiders often have insights into the question that the original researcher missed or could not see. 2. “Some worthwhile topics of research fall in the interstices among the traditional disciplines.” This definitely applies to Hanneltjie’s story, as it may be of interest to psychologists, social workers, occupational therapists and many others.

Transdisciplinary research is not a new concept, nor is it unique to postfoundational research, but it plays a special role within postfoundational, social constructionist research. Within the postfoundational paradigm, a researcher needs to hear the voices of professionals from other disciplines to enrich and deepen her understanding of the story being heard, in order to seek a “balance” between her own thinking and the broader traditions of thinking that may influence her understanding (Müller 2009: 205). In keeping with the inductive process that has been followed so far, the research has been very specific and focused on Hanneltjie’s story, because “experience is situated and experience is always interpreted” (Müller 2009: 205). However, “a postfoundationalist notion of rationality helps us to acknowledge contextuality, the shaping role of tradition and of interpreted experience, while at the same time enabling us to reach out beyond our own groups, communities and cultures, in plausible forms of intersubjective, cross-contextual, and cross-disciplinary conversations.” (Van Huyssteen 2006: n.p.). In other words, in an effort to move beyond Hanneltjie’s story to a point where her story can be of value to others, I decided to invite other professionals into the conversation.

Furthermore, in order to honour Hannetjie's authorship of her own story, and to empower her as co-researcher, I also invited her to respond to the feedback from these professionals, giving her an opportunity to reflect on and accept or reject their readings of her story. After all, following in Foucault's footsteps, a feminist, narrative researcher is wont to question "the privileges of knowledge" (Foucault 1982: 781) and decentre the researcher from her traditional position of power and place the co-researcher at the centre.

In this chapter, I shall discuss in detail my reasons for including this step in the research; the method I applied; the ethical concerns around such a study; the professionals' as well as Hannetjie's responses and my interpretation of those co-researchers' contributions. I shall also reflect on this process.

4.2. Transversal rationality: an argument for transdisciplinary research

In developing his epistemology of postfoundationalism, Van Huyssteen (2006: n.p.) also makes a case for transdisciplinary research both as a means to open the dialogue between theology and other disciplines and to move beyond the local context into a broader setting. As a practical theologian, my aim is to thicken the story of spirituality and faith in the context of surviving sexual abuse. In this research, then, I am working from the perspective that Van Huyssteen (2006: n.p.) repeatedly returns to in his Gifford lectures when he says "For me as a Christian theologian, this today means that we have not understood our world, or ourselves, until we have understood them in relationship to God." In this chapter, my aim is to bring theology into a conversation with other disciplines that have long traditions of research in sexual abuse and/or spirituality. As mentioned in the previous chapter, Schrag and Ramsey's (1994: 132) imperative for "narrative interpretation" calls for a "holistic understanding" of Hannetjie's story, which is not limited just to her story in isolation, but also within the larger whole of issues around spirituality, sexual abuse, sexuality within the Dutch Reformed Church and the like.

How, then, does one go about initiating a conversation between various disciplines, each with their own epistemologies and traditions of research and then expect the conversation to be meaningful? The answer, according to both Van Huyssteen (2006) and Schrag and Ramsey (1994) is *transversal rationality*. This rationality moves beyond the positivistic *universal rationality* of modernist epistemologies and the relativistic *multiversal rationality* of postmodern thinking into a position where it is possible for multiple, different perspectives to come together. Schrag and Ramsey (1994: 134) explain "that the phenomena

at issue display an extending over and lying across that effects a convergence without coincidence, the achievement of points of contact without solidifying into a modal identity”. In other words, in a transdisciplinary conversation, it may not be possible for a single new perspective to become known from out of the combined views of the different disciplines: nevertheless, it is possible for the conversation to allow mutual concerns and points of convergence to emerge. In addition, it will point the researcher to areas within her own thinking that need to be re-examined, as Nissani (1997: 201) explains; also, an outsider may find errors or provide new insights.

Transversal rationality, then, is not offered in opposition to modern or postmodern rationalities, but as a way to find a path through these two conflicting approaches to a point where dialogue is possible again. As Van Huyssteen (2006: n.p.) explains, transversal rationality, as envisioned within postfoundationalism “does not imply that either modern themes or postmodern concerns are cast aside, but that they are creatively revised in a move beyond these extremes, precisely by constructing plausible forms of intersubjective, rational accountability.” Thus the transversal space between disciplines becomes a reflective space, where the researcher can reflect upon her own and others’ thinking and learn from other disciplines to enrich her own interpretation of the local context. Precisely because of the intent of postfoundationalism, that aims to honour the local context, while hearing the voice of the broader context, Van Huyssteen (2006: n.p.) argues that the theologian is allowed “to remain tied to specific communities of faith without being trapped by these communities.” He continues to make his point by stating that he has “argued for a form of transversal reasoning that honors precisely the universal intent of human reason and, consequently, yields a ‘cognitive parity’ between various and diverse fields of inquiry” (2006: n.p.).

Müller (2001: 4) adds significantly to Van Huyssteen’s reasoning, when he makes the case for practical theology as emerging out of “religion in the praxis of human life” and that “practical theology leaned heavily on social sciences for the description and explanation of human behaviour within a religious context” (2011: 4). Having developed in parallel with the social sciences, practical theology shares some common ground with the social sciences, while asking questions about God and faith. Müller acknowledges that there are “natural limits to dialogue between disciplines” (2011: 4) because, despite potential overlap, each discipline still functions within its own context. However, because of the close relationship between practical theology and the social sciences, he argues for what he calls the “edge effect” (2011: 4). As explained in chapter two, this “edge effect” takes place when different

disciplines operate together within an even larger context. In the juncture between disciplines there is space for rich growth and development as the resources of both can be drawn upon.

4.3. Method – Steps taken; questions chosen and reasons; ethical concerns

In thinking about an inductive, narrative research design, postfoundationalism also guides the researcher. Van Huyssteen (2006: n.p.) explains:

On a postfoundationalist view of rationality, the narrative quality of one's experience, therefore, is always compelling. And in this sense a postfoundationalist notion of rationality is never going to function as a superimposed, modernist metanarrative, but will always develop as an emerging pattern that unifies our experience without in any way totalizing it.

As such, the original narrative is the point of reference for any decisions the researcher will make about this transdisciplinary process as well as decisions on how to interpret the data that emerges. In this case, I decided to allow Hanneltjie's story to inform any choices I make about the transdisciplinary study. Moreover, I decided to complete this aspect of the research before entering into a study of the literature. Consequently, I decided to approach a psychologist, an occupational therapist, and a Dutch Reformed minister, with the understanding that each person has an active interest in one or more of the following:

- Spirituality
- Sexual abuse
- Body and gender issues
- Adult sensory integration and/or sensory intelligence (These are specialist fields within the discipline of occupational therapy that deal specifically with issues related to the integration of one's sensory experience with one's emotional and cognitive experience of the world. In Hanneltjie's case, her inability to engage with her sensory and emotional experiences may be of particular interest to such a specialist.)
- Family relationships

Because all three co-researchers work within the broad realm of the social sciences (although occupational therapy also falls within the medical sciences), this transdisciplinary study can be described as "narrow" (Fuqua et al. 2004: 1468); after all, the research does not encompass a number of diverse disciplines, but rather three disciplines that overlap in some

areas. However, the study can be described as “vertical,” in that each discipline focuses on its own “level of analysis” (Fuqua et al. 2004). Occupational therapy is focused on the daily functioning of people, and its theories are essentially based on neurobiology. Psychology, on the other hand, addresses issues of the mind and identity, focusing on a person’s thinking and emotions. Theology, in the context of ministry, is focused on spirituality and people’s functioning within the church, as well as their relationship with God.

Each transdisciplinary co-researcher was given the opportunity to read the prose version of Hanneltjie’s story that I had written (as seen in the previous chapter) and was asked to respond via email to the following four questions, adopted from Müller (2009: 227):

- When reading Hanneltjie’s story, what do you think her concerns would be?
- How would you formulate your discipline’s unique perspective on these concerns and why is it important that this perspective be heard at the transdisciplinary table?
- Why do you think your perspective will be understood and appreciated by co-researchers from other disciplines?
- What would you like to learn from the co-researchers from other disciplines?

The first three questions as they appear here have been adopted directly from Müller’s (2009) paper on postfoundational interdisciplinary research. Firstly, the question that asks about Hanneltjie’s own concerns was borne out of Müller’s own experience that it would be problematic if the author of the story is not considered in the conversation (2009: 225-226). This, however, raises the question of whether Hanneltjie should be asked directly. In view of the potential for harm to her, however, I am reluctant to go so far. This issue will be discussed further in the section on ethical concerns. The next two questions aim to open the door for thinking about presenting one’s own perspective to members of another discipline. The questions are in keeping with the aims of transdisciplinary research in general as well as postfoundational social constructionist ideals, in that the answers would, hopefully, create space for professionals to look for areas of consensus and dissensus, and for me to identify potential moments of new learning. Similarly, I have added the fourth question to encourage participants to think not only about what they will bring to the table, but also about what they hope to take away, in the true reciprocal spirit of transdisciplinary studies.

Once the responses had been gathered, Hanneltjie and the co-researchers were given an opportunity to read them, via email. Hanneltjie was included in the conversation in this feedback step, and had the opportunity to read and respond in her own way and in her own time. Thus, she was not excluded from the conversation, in a way implying that the rest of us are experts and she is not; nevertheless, she was buffered from having to deal with this part of the study face-to-face, and this was an important consideration in view of her recent reluctance to enter into therapy again. She still had the opportunity to read and respond to the answers, but from a safe distance, so to speak.

Following the initial exchanges, participants were asked to discuss what they had learned from the process: to share concerns and to share hopes. This last step was designed to ensure that the conversation came full circle and was truly inclusive of all the voices. I could have chosen simply to accept all the co-researchers' responses as being good enough, and then tried to integrate them by myself, but I believe that this approach would have been a flaw in a study that is meant to be social constructionist. As such, participants were given the opportunity to construct meaning together, rather than handing their ideas over to me to construct my own meaning alone.

When a researcher conducts a transdisciplinary study, she needs to consider, as in any other research, the ethical issues surrounding such a study. As Hackett (2002: 212) explains, conducting responsible research is rooted in the researcher's understanding of the people to whom she is responsible. Firstly, and most obviously, I am accountable to Hanneltjie for the manner in which I share her story and whether I share it at all. In sharing Hanneltjie's story with other researchers, the till then confidential nature of our conversation was affected because the group of people who would know her story quite intimately would now include others and no longer just the two of us. Although no-one had direct interaction with her, she was aware that her story was being distributed and that she might have felt vulnerable as a result. Therefore, I was unable to enter into this process unless I was sure that she understood the process, and was giving her informed consent. She also had to understand that whatever input she received from the other co-researchers should not be seen as therapy or an offer of their services. Fortunately, she was quite willing to allow me to engage other researchers, with her express instruction to share their responses with her. I obtained her consent to begin this process, not only because it formed part of the original consent form, but also because I had been in consultation with her throughout the process and confirmed her continued commitment at every juncture. At the same time, I was accountable to the co-researchers for

the manner in which I engaged them and then used their input. I entered into an agreement with the other researchers, in writing, outlining their involvement and obtaining their consent to use relevant information about them, and to use their responses in the next steps of my research. In addition, they were made aware that I would share their responses with Hanneltjie, with a clear understanding that their involvement could in no way be construed as an offer of therapy or any other services to her. I was also responsible for asking the co-researchers to consider their ethical responsibility to Hanneltjie and to the study, in terms of confidentiality and care. These matters were outlined in the agreement that we entered into.

The outcomes of the conversation will be used to thicken the story in a way that Hanneltjie's story reaches far beyond her own experience. Here, in part lies the answer to the question: "why only one story?" Thus, a responsible and careful researcher can delve into one story and, with the help of transdisciplinary co-researchers, open it up to speak to others' experiences and inform the traditions of interpretation that may have an interest in the original question. Hanneltjie's story, although it is the singular focus of this research, was never intended to be seen in isolation, but rather as a unit within a larger whole. This single case study is layered. The transdisciplinary layer is the fourth of five layers of information collected about Hanneltjie's story. Consider the "layering" of case studies Patton (2002: 447) describes. As he (Patton 2002: 449) asserts: "All the information one has accumulated about each particular case goes into that case study. These diverse sources make up the raw data for case analysis and can amount to a large accumulation of material." The transdisciplinary co-researchers' responses to Hanneltjie's story are also raw data that will ultimately have to be interpreted by me and integrated into the final reflections on her story and what she can teach us about the spirituality of adult female survivors of sexual abuse. Another layer would be a review of the available literature, based on the outcomes of my listening to Hanneltjie's story, and the conversation with the transdisciplinary co-researchers, will be the topic of the next chapter. The various findings will be integrated into a subsequent chapter.

4.4. The participants

It can be quite challenging to find willing participants for a transdisciplinary study; after all, a researcher is basically approaching professionals and requesting them to offer their time and knowledge for free.

Taking into account the outcomes of the discussion with Hanneltjie, her story will be examined in the next chapter from the perspective that she is a *trinity of body, mind and*

spirit, among other things. It was fortunate that I was able to locate three professionals, from fairly divergent disciplines, who were all willing to contribute. Those three professionals could each speak to one of these three aspects, insofar as it is possible to draw boundaries between the three: an occupational therapist could speak on a neuro-physiological level to Hanneltjie’s physical or practical needs and functioning in the real world (body); a psychologist could address her psychological and emotional functioning (mind); and, a minister could comment on her spiritual functioning (spirit). The most pragmatic approach, in attempting to find co-researchers, was to start with professionals with whom I already had an existing relationship or connection. Kalpana, Dolovich, Brazil and Parminder (2008: 113) are also in support of such an approach, since “Research conducted where there was an existing positive relationship was seen as facilitative of knowledge generation and transfer.” I duly approached an occupational therapist whom I know, who referred me to Debra Smuts. Anton Reynolds, the psychologist, is a colleague of mine in Rustenburg, and Lizette Viviers is a minister whom I know from the University of Pretoria. Their biographical details are given in Table 4.1 below:

Table 4.1: Biographies of participants

Table 4.1A

Participant 1: Debra Smuts, Occupational Therapist

I am an occupational therapist, working in the field of acute adult psychiatry. I share a partnership in a private practice at a private psychiatric hospital where we mostly do occupational group therapy. I am a registered Sensory Intelligence Practitioner and busy with final certifications as TRE (Trauma Release Exercise) Practitioner. I am also a member of the Dutch Reformed Church and involved in a Practical Christianity Focus Group in our congregation.

Many of my clients/patients have stories similar to Hanneltjie’s. I am always looking for better perspectives and believe in the advantages of team work. By taking part in this study, I can learn from but also bring expertise to contribute to this study. I have always believed that a holistic approach is far more effective than going it alone. On a personal level, I am concerned about the relevance of the church (the Dutch Reformed Church in particular) in everyday life, thus my involvement in the focus group.

Table 4.1B

Participant 2: Anton Reynolds, Psychologist

My psychology training has been in counselling psychology, firstly at the previous University of Port Elizabeth after which I obtained a masters degree from Stellenbosch University. I have worked primarily in school settings with 25 years' experience at one boys-only and two co-ed schools. I have also worked in private practice, and the business world for ten years in the human resources field.

Table 4.1C

Participant 3: Lizette Viviers, Minister

I am 33 years old, and a minister with seven years' experience in ministry. I am currently working in the Dutch Reformed Church, as well as the Uniting Presbyterian Church. After a year of studying B.Com, I switched to Theology, and completed my B.Th, M.Div, as well as an M.A. in Ancient Languages. I am currently completing my doctoral studies in Old Testament Sciences with a focus on Hermeneutics and Exegesis (Understanding and Interpretation).

My interest in the current topic is rooted in the pastoral work that I do in the congregations and community that I am working in. I have a desire for a better understanding and insight into how a person who suffered trauma thinks and reacts.

4.5. Responses

The participants' responses are presented here in table format and are quoted directly from the documents and comments that they forwarded to me over the course of about a month: during that time they were able to share responses and respond to one another. Following each table I will discuss the responses in terms of points of consensus, dissensus, and unique insights.

4.5.1 First question: When reading Hanneljie’s story, what do you think her concerns would be?

Table 4.2: First question responses.

Table 4.2A

Participant 1: Debra Smuts

Issues I would list as the concerns to be addressed in an Occupational Therapy treatment programme:

- Inability to manage stress and anxiety effectively
- Intellectualises issues, thus lack of emotional insight
- Feelings of guilt, and repression of emotions
- Poor self image
- Lack of personal insight
- Inability to form meaningful relationships (including her faith)
- Non-assertive behaviour and lack of healthy boundaries
- Sleep problems
- Over therapied

Table 4.2B

Participant 2: Anton Reynolds

From the transcript the following pertinent themes emerge for me.

The person has summarised her current chief concern to be her aversion to physical contact/intimacy with other people and its effect on her ability to interact ‘normally’ with other people. She also has difficulty in connecting with her own physical and emotional experiences as a result of ‘suppressing’ her emotions, which results in her feeling disembodied; a stranger to her own body.

She is still struggling with feelings of guilt, shame and blame, despite being cognitively aware that she does not/need not feel any sense of blame or guilt or shame. The unresolved issue with her mother is also relevant here. She has not yet confronted/disclosed to her mother what happened. The secret is still with her, as is the deep sense of betrayal she feels by the one person she believes should have recognised what was going on. The lack of recognition from her mother for her achievements adds to the burden. She says that she has forgiven her mother, yet does not to appear to have communicated this to her.

She makes no mention of the perpetrator and whether he is still alive. Neither does she make any comment about her father and any possible role he could have played (the “ toxic house” reference). Throughout her adult life she has continually avoided tackling the issue with these key role players in her life. She has tried to address the problem intellectually by seeking to forgive the perpetrator (and her mother) without ever raising the issue with them personally. Currently she is working on her guilt feelings about possibly leading the perpetrator on, when

she felt herself respond to him during the last episode when he raped her.

This is still one of the biggest issues she is grappling with.

Her faith/religious conflict is characterised by a sense of betrayal, in this case by God, who despite His omniscience and omnipotence did not seem to care enough about her to intervene to assist her in her suffering. Her strict Calvinistic upbringing has instilled deep religious values and a belief that a relationship with God is an important part of her existence, albeit it a conflicted one. The image of God the Father and the fact she hardly mentions her father could also be a valuable field of enquiry.

Table 4.2C

Participant 3: Lizette Viviers

The first and most overwhelming impression that I got from my first reading of Hanneltjie's story is that acceptance and 'being good enough' in the eyes of God are issues that lie close to the surface. The adults, and her parents especially, who did not heed her cries for help, and did not protect her, play a major role in her understanding of God and her inability truly to allow God into her life. He is the God of creation, yes; but not 'my God'.

Another concern is that her existence is lacking in terms of being wholly human, with all aspects of being human in balance.

Later response:

Debbie's remark about us being "bio-psycho-social-spiritual beings" resonated with me, because as a theologian I interpret John 10:10 to mean that God wants us to have an abundant, fulfilled life. Christ never referred to his life as 'spiritual' or 'secular,' as the division between the two is not a scriptural concept. Thus, John 10:10 makes reference to a holistic life.¹

4.5.1.1 Discussion

All three respondents indicate that Hanneltjie could be concerned about her well-being, in terms of being unable to live a holistic life. The holistic perspective on personhood is a core element of all three respondents' responses. One particular concern of Debra and Anton, in this context, is that she struggles to maintain healthy relationships, both personal and with God. Lizette underlines this by reminding us that one's relationship with God is not separate from the rest of one's life, as "the division between the two is not scriptural."

¹ The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full. (NIV)

Both Debra and Lizette point to her poor self-image, which Lizette terms “feeling not good enough,” as a possible source of concern, both in her personal relationships and in her relationship with God. Anton later commented that her relationship with herself may be a factor, in that “She has been unable to connect with her own inner self and hence the disconnect with the world of relationships outside herself.”

In addition, Anton and Lizette both noted that she feels betrayed, by her parents and by God. Anton asks: “the key human nurturers in her life failed her at her most vulnerable and in a sense so did God for not ‘stepping in’ to help her. So how can a Father God be good?” This sense of betrayal is coupled with guilt by Anton while Debra also mentions guilt, and so this is also seen as a concern that she may want to address.

Debra brings unique concerns to the fore, when she mentions Hanneljé’s lack of assertive behaviour; she also mentions the more practical concerns of Hanneljé’s inability to sleep and the fact that she has been ‘over-therapied.’

Lizette’s insight into the fact that Hanneljé may acknowledge God as the creator, but not as ‘her’ own God, points to a unique aspect of Hanneljé’s relationship with God that she may want to re-examine.

Anton raises a particular question that may be worth exploring, and that concerns Hanneljé’s relationship with her father and how that has affected her relationship with God as Father.

Overall, the participants point to relational concerns: Hanneljé’s relationship with herself, with God, with her mother and with the perpetrator.

4.5.2 Second question: How would you formulate your discipline's unique perspective on these concerns and why is it important that this perspective be heard at the transdisciplinary table?

Table 4.3: Second question responses.

Table 4.3A

Participant 1: Debra Smuts

As an Occupational Therapist, I look at these issues from a functional perspective. Thus, I take the background into consideration but only work in the here-and-now, taking as the aim of treatment every aspect of her life that is affected, while attempting to reach optimal independence and quality of life in her work as well as personal and interpersonal roles of life. I believe in involving Hanneljie by setting realistic, graded targets for her healing process and optimising her ability to live life to the full.

Later response:

In human development we use the term 'sensory integration.' As the nervous system develops and matures, our various senses interact and integrate with each other in order to produce certain functions: the easiest and best-known example would be hand-eye coordination. In adults we no longer use the term integration; we apply sensory intelligence. Sensory intelligence is the way the senses are used to process information from and adjust to stimuli from the environment. Annemarie Lombard, author of *Sensory Intelligence: why it matters more than IQ and EQ*, describes it quite aptly as the "senses trying to make sense of the environment." The theory is based on the sensory integration theory of Ayres and thus there are some common principles.

Individuals have unique sensory profiles and preferences. Sensory processing and thresholds cause many of the adaptive behaviour responses in activities of everyday life. Nobody senses or experiences the world in exactly the same way. By working out a person's unique profile, then the way that individual perceives the environment and adjusts to it can be understood. Changes in the environment automatically trigger the stress response and what for one person might just evoke a slight reaction might for the next trigger severe discomfort or even anxiety.

I would apply this theory and accompanying treatment principles regardless of whether my client were a male or female.

Sensory profiling is non-threatening. Any discussion of the implications of individual preferences and triggers and how these impact on daily life activities, will reconnect individuals with themselves: a wonderfully safe approach to address dissociation. With this awareness comes the added benefit of tools to adapt the environment to be less stressful. Rather than the environment controlling the person, the individual now controls the environment (this is perhaps over-simplified but it all concerns internal locus of control). It is also at this point where I will introduce stress reduction techniques such as TRE (trauma release exercises) as it is another self regulatory tool and thus also not therapist directed. SI and TRE will give a person such as Hanneljie a sense of taking back control and this should facilitate her in taking ownership of well-being.

Table 4.3B

Participant 2: Anton Reynolds

Aversion to physical contact and suppression of emotions.

The impact of the trauma on her has caused her to have difficulty with owning her own feelings/emotions. She has employed this strategy of suppression and denial (largely unconsciously at the time) to cope with the emotional conflict arising from the invasion of her physical and emotional space. Her mantra at the time, “I feel nothing,” was successful in helping her to cope with the situation when it was unfolding. Now in later years she still uses the same strategy to deal with feelings and physical contact; however, this has proven to be counterproductive as she no longer needs to employ this strategy as the situation she faced is no longer there. It is very real, nevertheless, in her memories.

Guilt and betrayal and anger/resentment.

She has successfully employed her intellectual strength to cope with the issues she has had to face in life. She has intellectually forgiven her mother and the perpetrator, but has never faced them in reality and discussed the issue face to face. The fact that so much time has passed makes it more difficult than ever to confront them with the issue. She may no longer want to reveal the experience to her mother in particular, even though she has the opportunity to do so now as an adult, with much life experience and academic insight. The upheaval it will cause now, may no longer be something she can or wants to deal with. At the same time she finds it almost unbearable living with the effect of the experience on her social and emotional functioning. Healing of childhood emotional wounding of this nature, especially where the key nurturers – mother and father – have played a role, mostly by default in this case – may only be achieved through making that which is unconscious conscious. This ‘making the unconscious conscious’ ideally takes place through a process of facilitated intentional dialogue between the affected parties. In this way she would gain valuable insight into her childhood wounding and the role it has played in her life; in particular, with intimate relationships.

The perpetrator

A particular difficulty for her is the long time span over which the molestation occurred. It is generally recognised that a type of attachment develops between victim and perpetrator where they are in contact with each other over an extended period of time. This sense of attraction is also mixed with a sense of revulsion at what he did to her over this period, culminating in the final act of rape. The fact that she has been unable to confront him even when a knowledgeable adult, underlines the extent of the trauma she experienced over this period of molestation. Her attempt to ‘forgive’ him is an intellectual attempt on her behalf to deal with the issue; but at a distance, in her own head space, but not in flesh and blood.

If he is still alive then the opportunity still exists for her to confront him (with support) in order to engage actively with the source of much of her hurt and incapacitating emotional pain she has experienced all her adult life. It is often only when confronting an issue like this in a face-to-face encounter (a frightening consideration), that the power he still wields over her by condemning her to silence all these years, can finally be broken. By breaking her silence she creates an opportunity for herself to reclaim her ‘voice;’ she will then no longer be the cowering victim but take back from him the ‘treasure’ he robbed from her. In some ways this point is also relevant in regard to her relationship with her mother.

Religious experience

There is much to be said here, about the role of faith and religion in forming our sense of identity and how it affects our beliefs about God, ourselves and the world at large. I will only dwell briefly on one aspect: finding meaning in life. As Viktor Frankl astutely observed from his wartime concentration camp experience, I paraphrase ... if we can find a way to live we can put up with any circumstances we find ourselves in. This person has described how despite the harm she has suffered, she has found a degree of meaning in pursuing a life of academic achievements. She has also sought to help others in need through voluntary counselling support and caring for animals amongst other things. Her poetry has also played a role in helping her find meaning in her existence. Going forward she will need to continue revising her understanding of God's role in her life and what He, her creator and sustainer still has in store for her, particularly with regard to her childhood experiences and their influence on her life.

Table 4.3C

Participant 3: Lizette Viviers

In Theology and the Church, God is introduced to us as the Father; God who protects you. He is a parent, and also male. This becomes an obstacle for women who have undergone trauma, because a male god is difficult to build a relationship with. There is a lack of trust and of comfort. The spiritual aspect of one's life is not separate from the physical or emotional.

In the past few decades, feminist theology has done much around the traditional male characterisation of God. Looking at, and exploring the more female traits of an a-sexual God may open windows on a perspective of God that women can identify with.

Later response:

Anton summarised – very eloquently – Hanneltjie's sense of betrayal by God. In the Calvinistic tradition we have perfected 'feeling or being guilty' to an artform (even when we don't need to feel guilty!). "Going forward she will need to continue revising her understanding of God's role in her life and what He, her creator and sustainer still has in store for her, particularly with regard to her childhood experiences and their influence on her life." What Anton said here is very important. To achieve this understanding and re-interpreting of the role of God in her life, my suggestion is to work through the life-story of Job with Hanneltjie; or to look at Esther, Ruth and the Woman at the Well in John 4.

We live in a world where women are portrayed as weak and men as strong. To be strong, independent and free is the ideal to work towards. There is a lack of respect for women, as women are seen as weak and inferior humans. Empowering women means taking power and privilege away from men, because we live in a social economy where power is limited. The social economy of God is different; it is based on equality.

In reply to Anton's questions about the characterisation of an a-gender God, I would like to share the following on inclusive language. I will email three articles along with this response, one in particular from Prof. Yolanda Dreyer that states my thoughts on gender issues. Prof. Dreyer was the first woman minister in the Afrikaans Churches.

"Vertical inclusive language" is language that equally reflects both male and female aspects of God; it is like inclusive language used to describe humans. Christian scripture and

tradition has almost exclusively used masculine language: Father, Lord, King, He, despite the fact that Christian theology maintains that God has no gender. According to the theology, God's divinity contains the perfections of both the male and female. However, because God revealed God's self as male, Christianity has made masculine language normative in the description of God. Advocates of inclusive language argue that the use of masculine terms demonstrates and perpetuates patriarchy and sexism. Their solution would be the equal use of gendered terms.

(<http://www2.kenyon.edu/Depts/Religion/Projects/Reln91/Gender/godlang&femchristology.htm#About>)

What is really important here is that we do not need to conform to the cookie-cutter ideas and ways of speaking about God or relating to God. As God is transcendent and infinite, there is an abundance of ways of knowing the all-knowing God.

Some other points to consider:

- 1) God has given us free will. The concept of free will needs to be discussed. God wants us to choose Him ourselves, therefore he does not make puppets of us. This is a good thing, because He does not want to force us to make a choice. The problem is that people also choose against God's will. God did not want her to be abused, but her abuser chose against God's will.
- 2) I would place emphasis on the forgiveness she is working on, because it is the best thing for her. Jesus gave us the example and it will truly set her free.
- 3) A relationship with God is like any other relationship: when we are angry with each other, or happy, or frustrated, we share it with each other. So too can we share our feelings about God with Him, because Jesus became human so that He could relate with us on all levels, even at the level of abuse. That is why we can tell God when we are angry. As long as we are talking to Him, even when it is not about good things, there is still a relationship. As soon as Hanneltjie does not want to talk to God at all, she will be in a worse place than she is now.
- 4) Being aware of sin is not a bad thing, but it is only one side of the coin. The other side is the cross and God's saving grace and liberation. Jesus' sacrifice was, after all, to embody God's grace and mercy. A balanced understanding of this is important.
- 5) God and sexuality – God made sex to be beautiful. It is meant to be the pinnacle of expression between two people. But sin also came and made it ugly and it has been used as a form of abuse. Again, this is not part of God's original plan.

4.5.2.1 Discussion

Lizette and Anton agree that Hanneltjie's relationship with God is pivotal to understanding who she is. Here, Lizette's comments on sin and grace are crucial. Both support Hanneltjie in exploring and reconsidering Who God is to her, as well as evaluating the value of seeing God as male. Similarly, both are concerned about the sense of betrayal she feels toward God.

In response to this particular question (4.5.2), I received divergent answers, as illustrated in Table 4.3 above. However, if we bear in mind that each contributor was asked to comment on their discipline's unique contribution, this divergence is no surprise. Thus, Debra shed light on how she would use the sensory intelligence approach and trauma release exercises to empower Hanneltjie to take back control. Anton offered thoughts on how Hanneltjie could take back power by confronting her abuser and her mother. Lizette showed that one need not submit to traditional thinking and that Hanneltjie is in a position to rethink her relationship with God, with sin, and with sex.

However, one issue they all have in common is a concern for Hanneltjie's well being. The input they have offered is aimed at finding a way to help Hanneltjie to reclaim what was taken from her, be it control, power, or freedom from guilt and betrayal, in order to live a full life. The common thread is that of ownership. Is Hanneltjie able to take ownership of her well being?

Another common thread that appears here, again, is the emphasis on relationships. The participants all point out that, if Hanneltjie were to take ownership of her well being, by reclaiming what was lost to her, she will be able to change her relationships with herself and her own functioning, with her mother, with the perpetrator, and with God.

4.5.3 Third question: Why do you think your perspective will be understood and appreciated by co-researchers from other disciplines?

Table 4.4: Third question responses

Table 4.4A

Participant 1: Debra Smuts

People such as Hanneltjie require the professional services of all three of us and may well present with different needs at first; very often though, the reason for the need to seek help will stem from abuse as a child. To me, people such as Hanneltjie might present as a patient who was hospitalised after a suicide attempt and who is now diagnosed with a psychiatric illness and/or personality disorder; to another she might be the one who goes to seek help because of her inability to form intimate relationships. We are bio-psycho-social-spiritual beings and have the need to grow and be independent in all of these. Occupational Therapy (OT) is a very practical form of therapy: it provides a functional and holistic approach to treatment. We assess an individual's ability and level of functioning in all spheres of life, taking the philosophy from occupational science that our doing defines our being. We also assess an individual's motivation to participate in all these spheres of life in order to provide the right challenge in therapy to help the client to take part in the process by giving regular feedback. When one reads Hanneltjie's story it is clear that she has severe functional obstacles

preventing her from having proper quality of life. She also mentions that she tends to intellectualise her problems. OT provides the opportunity to address these issues in a practical way in a safe environment. We would assess the person's function in every aspect of life (personal, interpersonal, work and leisure), formulate a treatment programme based on the client's level of motivation, providing a 'just-right-challenge' to improve insight and to promote taking ownership of a person's own well being.

Table 4.4B

Participant 2: Anton Reynolds

Human existence is multi dimensional: physical, cognitive, emotional, and spiritual. I humbly submit my few thoughts on this brave lady's experience in the hope that it will give some insight into some of the psychological factors that play a role in where she finds herself at this stage in her life. Human experience is not a closed system, but open; as humans we are able to change and adapt. We have the capacity to fashion our own existence by the choices we make and the actions we engage in based on those choices. We often don't have much choice over the circumstances we find ourselves in or the experiences to which we are subjected. We do however have the power to choose what our attitude to them will be and how we will respond to them. We are not the helpless victims of our circumstances; we have the God given capacity to reflect, think and choose how we would like to constitute our lives. We also live within a context, including a social one and are much more likely to experience wholeness when we have meaningful relationships with other people.

Table 4.4C

Participant 3: Lizette Viviers

The common denominator amongst all the disciplines of theology and the social sciences is the understanding of the holistic nature of being human. An understanding that allows the person to re-interpret her life and live a fulfilled life.

As a minister and a woman, I am aware that the old stereotypes and traditional interpretations of the Calvinistic church from which we come do not make sense. I would like to bring a new perspective on how we think about church, religion, and faith, which can, in turn, change or deepen our understanding of being human.

4.5.3.1 Discussion

It is evident that each professional is acutely aware of the value of their discipline's possible contribution, while acknowledging that theirs is not the only perspective from which Hanneltjie could benefit (also evident in their responses to the next question). Notably, each

professional is very aware that Hanneltjie’s well-being is in her own hands. Whatever they have to offer, they acknowledge Hanneltjie’s choice in the matter.

Debra shows that, ultimately, even the deepest and most traumatising stories, or our attempts to re-author them, are about day-to-day functioning and well being. As she states, “Our doing defines our being.” The practical approach of occupational therapy is infinitely valuable, and those of us who are often focused exclusively on thoughts and feelings would do well to remember the importance of thinking about our quality of daily life.

In Anton’s response, he mentions, yet again, the importance of relationships and the choices one can make in those relationships. Most importantly, he says: “Human experience is not a closed system, but open, as humans we are able to change and adapt.” The story as it currently stands does not need to stay the same, because each person has the potential to re-author it.

From Lizette’s response, we are reminded that there are traditions and discourses that should and could be challenged, so that we can “change or deepen our understanding of being human” also within the context of our faith.

4.5.4 Fourth question: What would you like to learn from the co-researchers from other disciplines?

Table 4.5: Fourth question responses

Table 4.5A

Participant 1: Debra Smuts

It is always useful to get as many perspectives as possible. In order to understand a topic in full and to get better insight, it helps to learn about the approaches followed by other professions: by doing this, I can then make better recommendations for clients who need referral to one of the other professions. I love clinical reasoning and exploring new avenues. At the end it is not about us or our profession, but what is best for our client.

Table 4.5B

Participant 2: Anton Reynolds

In the light of my comments about the multi dimensionality of human existence, I look forward to other perspectives on these dimensions as they apply to the person in question.

Later response:

We normally speak about God, the Father, which is unavoidably a male characterisation. Lizette nicely captured the dilemma faced by Hanneltjie. Not only did she suffer abuse at the hands of an adult male figure, she also felt that her parents, father and mother also failed her. The key human nurturers in her life failed her at her most vulnerable time and in a sense so did God for not ‘stepping in’ to help her. So how can a Father God be good?

Re-configuring her God image by emphasising the a-gender nature of God, is an interesting challenge for Lizette as a pastoral counsellor.

How does one go about characterising God in order to capture His genderless character/qualities when dealing with a case like this?

The most valuable aspect to me:

The need for the church to look afresh at its theology and how this impacts on the life of believers in practical day-to-day living and in particular, on its traumatised congregants and potential new converts. How does it make the God out there who created everything, accessible to us down here in the tragedy and struggle of daily life?

Taking ownership of her own well being is her critical issue as she has sought a solution from a number of people, yet the key question is to what extent is she willing to take that ownership of her own well being.

Table 4.5C

Participant 3: Lizette Viviers

I would love to get a broader insight into the manner in which women who have experienced trauma think and react. I look forward to reading different perspectives and ways of thinking about the topic. The complexity of the psychological as well as the physical aspects of this study are things about which I hope to learn more.

4.5.4.1 Discussion

It is encouraging to read the responses to this last question, as each professional has shown that they are acutely aware of, and appreciative of, the things that they may be able to learn from other disciplines and by doing so, enhance their own practice.

4.6 Summary of discussions

Upon reading the three participants' various responses, I learned a number of things. Thus, each participant brought a different and equally valuable perspective to Hanneltjie's story, as they are all concerned about her well-being and aware that their contributions could potentially empower her to live life more fully.

From Debra, I learned that our day-to-day functioning is as important as our deepest thoughts and feelings, as the two are inextricably bound. On the subject of Hanneltjie's aversion to touch, I have come to believe that she may only be able to deal with the aversion truly, on a cognitive level, once she has come to understand and is able to control her body's more primitive, sensory responses. By knowing how she has dealt with everything on an almost exclusively intellectual level, I have come to a new understanding that she may have neglected a crucial aspect of her healing, which could ultimately open the door to fresh thinking and growth. Here I note that her one attempt to deal with the physical, sensory aspects of her life, with Tantra, was a failure: in view of this I am not certain that she will be willing to try a new approach.

From Anton, I have gained a fresh perspective on Hanneltjie's relationship with her mother and, especially, with the perpetrator. In a later conversation with Anton, he said to me that he wonders whether she realises that the same secret the abuser has held over her head hangs over his as well, and that this gives her a great deal of power over him. Anton's recognition of the length of time that has passed since the abuse began until now is also important in helping me to think about Hanneltjie's story, and why it is so complex. This story has had decades to become what it is, and entrench itself in Hanneltjie's life. Any attempt on her part to re-author it will take a great deal of effort and time. Furthermore, Anton's respectful and gentle approach reminds us to go gently and tread lightly, when entering into another person's story. No matter how much we think that we can help, it is Hanneltjie's choice whether she wants to seek more help or take seriously any of the input that has been given.

Lizette reminded me that the Bible can be a tool for helping women to see themselves differently, rather than a weapon to subjugate them. Lizette also showed us that there are people within the church who are ready to rethink the way others within the church have viewed women, sin and guilt, and are ready to help women to see God differently, in a way

that they will be able to identify with, Whoever that may be. It may just be that the church is ready to be truly relevant.

All three participants taught me that a woman like Hannetjie may re-author her story, by refiguring how she thinks about God, by learning about and understanding her senses, and by truly facing her emotional and psychological wounds. However, the aim of this research is not to offer therapy to Hannetjie, but to gain a better understanding of her, and women like her. With that in mind, what is most valuable to me is that this conversation has confirmed what I had come to realise in my reading of Hannetjie's story as well: trying to understand a person's spirituality, whether in the context of abuse or not, is futile, without considering the whole person and how each aspect of who they are within themselves and in relationship to God and others affects that person as a whole. In essence, all her many-layered stories are interwoven, like an intricately woven cloth. In some areas, one colour is brought to the front, and others pushed back. In other areas, different colours are revealed, while others disappear into the back of the cloth, but they are all still there. The story of her spirituality, her relationship with God, is no different. It is interwoven with the rest of her life, affecting it, and being affected by it. If we were to pull on its threads, others will also come loose, or be pulled in new directions.

There is hope for a new direction, I believe, in Hannetjie's case, because, the story of abuse has become overwhelming: its colour has come too much to the fore. If one could look at it as one story in amongst many other interwoven stories, one may be tempted to start concentrating on those instead – looking for the beautiful ones; the ones about love and care, like her counselling; the ones about beauty in poetry and music; the ones about success in academics; the ones that show her wonderful sense of humour; and many others that are waiting to be revealed, relived and revived. Similarly, it is possible to pick out new, previously unseen ones, and bring them to the front, to change the overall appearance of the cloth completely.

4.7. Hannetjie's response

After I received and collated the three professionals' responses to the various questions, I forwarded their responses to Hannetjie separately, mainly to protect her anonymity, but also to put some distance between her and the respondents. As stated previously, their responses are not to be construed as therapy. She was asked to peruse their responses and give her own input as she saw fit. The inclusion of Hannetjie at this point is an essential aspect of this

study, from an ethical point of view: after all, she should know what has happened to her story since she has entrusted me with it, and she should see what others have learned from it as well. Her response is given in Table 4.6 below:

Table 4.6: Hanneltjie's response

Hanneltjie:

Thank you for the commentary that you sent. It is interesting to see what other disciplines focus on and emphasise. I was always under the impression that occupational therapists work with physically disabled persons and people who have been in accidents. I did not know that they can also get involved on an emotional level.

Firstly, I am not planning on going into therapy again. I am 53 years old and I can handle myself if necessary. I don't show up at meetings fifteen minutes early to choose where I want to sit anymore. I don't get anxious when I have to sit amongst people anymore. I don't pull away when someone touches my arm in a friendly manner anymore, and I am not ready to attack when someone stands behind me or suddenly talks behind me.

For clarity, my father passed away in 1999. My mother was the one who was most involved in our education, etc. My father left most of the decisions about what we did to her. If we asked him for something, or to be allowed to do something, he sent us to her.

All the participants talk about choices. When I went to university, I chose not to tell my parents about what had happened during the previous eight years. It was the wrong decision, and to talk to my mother and/or to confront the man now makes no sense. But, it is in the past. I am trying to live for today and I am looking to the future.

Hanneltjie's fairly brief response shed little new light on the question of her spirituality. At the same time, a number of things that she said in that response raised some questions, especially with regard to her relationship with her father. However, in the interest of time, I did not pursue them with her. When a researcher is continuously asking for feedback then she runs the risk that she will never get to the point where all the questions are answered, because each story and each conversation reveals more detail or insight, but also raises new questions. Researchers must decide when to stop asking and start working with what they have. In keeping with the narrative philosophy that the co-researcher is the expert, the fact that Hanneltjie focused on her relationship with her mother also guided me, at this point, not to follow up the questions surrounding her father, despite the other co-researchers' input.

I was heartened by Hanneltjie's telling that she does not react so strongly to certain situations anymore. This picture differs from the one she painted when we had our initial conversations, and I do believe that, therapy or not, she is finding her way forward.

4.8. What light was shed by the transdisciplinary conversation?

Based on the transdisciplinary conversation discussed here, I was able to refine my thinking around the original areas of focus, to determine which particular aspects of Hanneltjie's story will best teach us about spirituality and how it relates to surviving abuse. Upon returning to the original areas of focus identified in chapter three, the learning obtained from the transdisciplinary study will allow me to refine my focus. Therefore, I shall compare each area of focus with the outcomes of this discussion and use this information as an aid to guide my thinking about which literature is most important to pay attention to.

4.8.1 Hanneltjie's story of abuse

Hanneltjie's day-to-day functioning is greatly affected by the effects of the abuse and by the associated sense of disembodiment and emotional disengagement that she has employed as a coping mechanism over the years. Debra's concerns about Hanneltjie's daily functioning support my own concerns regarding the extent to which she leads a full, quality life. Similarly, Anton's concerns about her relationships and emotional well-being are aspects that warrant closer inspection. Just as important, then, is the quality of her relationship with God, as it is affected by the abuse story. Lizette raised the issue of guilt and blame versus grace that needs to be examined. If we consider the all-encompassing effects of the abuse, while accepting that body mind and spirit are inextricably bound together, then it becomes clear that we must examine each of these aspects in detail in order to understand how they may interrelate with Hanneltjie's spirituality.

4.8.2 Hanneltjie's identity story

All three participants are concerned about Hanneltjie's identity, in terms of how she perceives herself. Debra points to an interesting question, when she mentions that Hanneltjie's 'perceived' sensory profile may differ from her true profile, because of the dissociative effects of the abuse. An understanding of how this fits in with her choices of characteristics and activities to describe herself may shed light on what would be 'normal' for her: a concern of Hanneltjie's from the start. As Anton and Lizette point out, Hanneltjie is conflicted about expectations placed on her, especially by the church and by her mother, of what a

‘normal woman’ is. The effects of Calvinism and her thinking about sex should be considered. The values she ascribes to herself are also crucial. Hannetjie describes herself as fair and empathetic and she places a high premium on these qualities. At the same time, she also questions God’s fairness. It is clear that her value system and perception of herself are worth considering, when trying to understand her spirituality, as these are very deeply connected.

4.8.3 The story about her mother

Another aspect of Hannetjie’s story that is intimately connected both to her spirituality and her identity is the story of her relationship with her mother. As has already been noted, understanding her relationships is central to understanding her spirituality, and this most important relationship between a mother and a daughter deserves special attention. The questions that were raised by Hannetjie as well as the other participants are about expectations, both from her mother and from her: for example, whether to disclose the abuse and how helpful that would be; gender role expectations as handed down by her mother; and, again, Calvinism.

4.8.4 God and faith in Hannetjie’s story

It appears obvious that God and faith need to be discussed, if we are to learn about spirituality, but the question remains as to what, specifically, needs to be studied. In Hannetjie’s case, the central question is: “Who is God?” Both she and the participants are concerned that traditional conceptions of God and church have not served her well, particularly the concept of original sin and the guilt that goes with it. Despite these conflicts, Hannetjie has not rejected God, and values the relationship, as is evident in her poetry.

4.8.5 The Dartmoor Hare: The story of abuse, identity, a mother, a God, and a woman's faith



Figure 4.1 The Dartmoor Hare: *Three Hares with Three Ears*

Lastly, we return to the Dartmoor Hare as a symbol of the interrelatedness of all the aspects of Hanneltjie's life. Thus, Hanneltjie and I discussed the fact that it is impossible to separate one aspect of her life from the others; likewise, all three participants repeatedly mentioned this too. We cannot understand Hanneltjie's spirituality if we do not understand how it relates to all the other aspects of her life.

4.8.6 Unique outcomes

In my original reading of Hanneltjie's story, I identified a number of unique outcomes that could point to stories that lie beyond the problem story of abuse. These are: hope, forgiveness, determination, writing poetry, an appreciation of nature, counselling, faith, humour, and a telling hug. It is of interest to me that none of the transdisciplinary participants paid these any particular attention, except in passing. However, those that were mentioned by one or more of the participants do have a bearing on our thinking about Hanneltjie's spirituality. Attention will be paid to them as well in the next chapter.

4.9. Reflections – outcomes and limitations of the transdisciplinary study

Upon looking back on the process and outcomes of the transdisciplinary study, it is important to remember its aims. In the introduction to this chapter, I discussed the value of transdisciplinary research as a central part of postfoundational, social constructionist research, as it creates a transversal space, where various professionals can come together from different disciplines and share knowledge and experience, in order to deepen our understanding of one story; in this case, Hanneljje's. As mentioned earlier, it is not the aim of transdisciplinary research to create some new 'universal truth,' but rather to see where the participants might find points of convergence in their knowledge. Moreover, the aim is to see what they can contribute that is unique, or that may teach the other members of the group something new. Van Huyssteen (2006: n.p.) reminds us that "A postfoundationalist notion of rationality thus creates a safe space where our different discourses and actions are seen at times to link up with one another and at other times to contrast or conflict with one another."

With this in mind, it may help to consider the success of the transdisciplinary study, as measured against these standards. Thus, I shall examine briefly, whether the participants found consensus; whether there were points of dissensus; and whether new thinking was generated.

4.9.1 Consensus

The most obvious point of consensus is the three participants' agreement on the importance of a holistic understanding of being human, coupled with their eagerness to hear from other disciplines in order to strengthen their own holistic understanding.

The second point of consensus was their shared concern regarding the need for the individual to take ownership of well-being and make choices about how that person will interpret his or her experiences, albeit with support or independently.

A third point of consensus is the participants' emphasis on the value of good relationships for a quality life, on many levels. From the individual's relationship with the self, to family and work, to the individual's relationship with God, each relationship can be source of growth and healing, or the opposite.

Finally, all three participants acknowledged the limits of their own discipline in being able to answer all of an individual's concerns and they noted that working with and learning from other disciplines is important to them.

4.9.2 Dissensus

There is very little that the participants did not agree on, but it is important to note a question that Debra raised. As the only participating professional who works in a clinical setting, she was concerned about the level of pathology evident in Hanneltjie's story, and wondered why no one was acknowledging it.

As a narrative researcher, I am wary of a concept such as pathology, because of its association with the positivistic duality of illness and health, as well as the implication that the problematic aspects of Hanneltjie's story would place Hanneltjie in the marginalised position of a 'sick person in need of an expert to cure her,' as opposed to the narrative notion that Hanneltjie has the power to re-author the problematic stories in her life to construct preferred stories; in other words, that she is the expert on her own life. In addition, the concept of pathology negates the possibility that Hanneltjie's problem-saturated story is devoid of potential, something to get rid of, rather than to gain knowledge from. Stephen Madigan (2011: n.p.) explains that: "commonly accepted binary descriptors such as healthy/unhealthy, normal/abnormal, and functional/dysfunctional ignore both the complexity of people's lived experiences as well as the personal and cultural meanings that may be ascribed to their experiences within a given context." From a narrative perspective, Hanneltjie's story would be described as 'problem saturated' rather than pathological.

From this perspective, the problems that people encounter can be situated within a dialogic context and not placed under individual sovereignty. Within narrative therapy's mode of practice, problem saturated stories in our lives are seen to gain their dominance at the expense of more preferred, alternative, or subordinate stories that are often located in marginalized discourses (Madigan 2011: n.p.).

Thus, the aim of therapy would not be to make her healthy, but to elicit preferred stories. Hanneltjie's own response to the transdisciplinary input is a case in point. She acknowledges that her decision not to disclose the truth to her mother may have been a problematic one, but she prefers not to disclose. It is a story she does not want to tell. In the literature regarding disclosure of sexual abuse, disclosure and seeking social support are seen

as “constructive coping” mechanisms (Merrill, Thomsen, Sinclair, Gold and Milner 2001: 1003), so it would make sense, from a psychological perspective, to encourage Hannetjie to disclose to her mother, as Anton suggested. It was helpful, in discussing this matter further with Debra, to consider the potential for a combined clinical and narrative approach in understanding the challenges a survivor of abuse might face; having some background knowledge of the possible pathology. As she explained in an email to me:

Serious trauma, like Hannetjie’s, in childhood often leads to pathology. It is all about survival; the child must fight for everything she wants in life, or even just for survival; another may have to be the least in every situation to keep the peace; some only want to take revenge, etc. – all to protect the ego. Then there are also the illnesses, like post-traumatic stress disorder and obsessive-compulsive disorder. Anxiety is the motivator here, and can immobilise a person, or, simply, steal life from the person by trapping them in rigid thought patterns like, ‘people are untrustworthy,’ or ‘relationships are dangerous,’ or ‘love is not for everyone.’ Medication and therapy can support the healing process in such an instance.

However, from a narrative perspective, the researcher would take a different position. “The normative position invites the professional person to look for commonalities among people; to predict, interpret, classify, and deploy ideas that are considered tried and true.” (Monk et al. 1997:24). Ethically speaking, the story belongs to Hannetjie and she is the author. If a ‘rigid thought pattern’ were identified by Hannetjie, then the narrative researcher would probably refer to it as a discourse or dominant story and explore it as such. The narrative researcher approaches research in a manner similar to narrative therapy as Monk et al. (1997:25) indicate: “the unchecked power or certainty of the counselor’s expertise may easily silence knowledges and abilities that might otherwise have come forth from the client.” Thus, Hannetjie’s telling and her choices will remain central to my reading of her story.

4.9.3 New insight

Müller (2011:4) refers to the potential for new learning between disciplines as the “edge effect.” Similarly, Nissani (1997:201) mentions the “interstices among traditional disciplines” where new knowledge can be co-created. In this study, much was learned by all participants. One particular area of new insight that warrants special attention, however, is the potential for learning if one were to bring the ideas of sensory intelligence into dialogue with the ideas of body theology. On the surface, it appears as if Debra’s more practical input is off-kilter with the psychological and theological input offered by Anton and Lizette. However, Lizette’s support of Debra’s statement that we are “bio-psycho-social-spiritual” beings, together with

her interpretation of John 10:10, indicates the presence of a link. Furthermore, if one accepts the assertions of body theologians that body and spirit are inseparable, then it follows that an understanding of our bodies' primary system for experiencing the world, the senses, could deepen our understanding of spiritual experiences as well. As Elizabeth Stuart (In Isherwood & Stuart 1998: 38) explains: "the emphasis on experience in feminist liberation theology is very valuable for body theology. It enables us to take seriously the whole of the person, since experience is not something we have just in our heads;" after all, experience is always sensory first. "Sensory integration is the process of organizing sensory inputs so that the brain produces a useful body response and also useful perceptions, emotions and thoughts" (Ayers 2005: 28). In other words, we experience the world through our senses such as touch and sight. Our brains then use the information gathered from those senses to decide how to react, feel and think. If we take Hanneltjie as an example, she feels distant from herself and her body, because she had to numb her senses. She suffered years of inappropriate and unpleasant sensory input, and she had to teach herself not to respond to it, in order to shield herself from it. She is unable to make intimate connections, because her body no longer reacts the way she wants it to. She also has a conflicted relationship with God: a God who is, as Lizette said, "the God of creation, yes; but not 'my God'" because God did not shield her from the abuse. It may be worth exploring the connections between her relationship with her body and her relationship with God.

4.9.4 Limitations

As with any form of research, there are limitations to transdisciplinary research. Some are of a practical nature, while others reflect the complexity of transdisciplinary conversation.

I mentioned earlier that Debra questioned why she was the only person working in a clinical setting, who was asked to participate. The answer to that was based on availability: thus, not everyone who was invited to participate made themselves available. Any voluntary involvement of this nature involves dedicating quite large amounts of time but a busy professional may not be able to do this and so they cannot agree to participate. I do not perceive this as a particular area of concern, however, because the three participants' contributions were strong, and generated good dialogue. The fact that Debra's approach is different from the rest is an advantage because she brought a wholly different perspective to the table.

Similarly, one may question why I asked a minister to become involved, since this is already a theological study. I felt the need to involve a minister, because I may be a theologian, but I am not, nor have I ever been in ministry. I felt the need to involve someone who works at ground level with congregants of the Dutch Reformed Church, bearing in mind the significant role that the Dutch Reformed Church and Calvinist thinking has played in Hanneljé's story. The fact that Lizette is a scholar in areas other than practical theology also gives her a different perspective.

As far as other potential participants are concerned, this study could have been enriched with the involvement of a social worker. Again, though, availability and time were constraining factors. In the end I had to go ahead with the study, in the interest of time, using those participants who were available at the time.

Another practical consideration that limited this study is geography. Anton pointed out that it would have been advantageous to bring the three participants together for a face-to-face discussion, as this would have stimulated an even deeper and more meaningful exchange. Because of the time constraints mentioned above, I was not able to consider logistics such as geography. Kalpana et al. (2008: 116) found that other researchers had similar challenges: "A few people noted the challenges of working across distances when doing transdisciplinary research and it was typically recommended to work with people where face-to-face meeting was possible." The co-researchers are based in three different provinces and so, regrettably, it would have been financially and practically very difficult to bring them together.

The potential breadth of any transdisciplinary study is affected by the diversity of the participants' knowledge and backgrounds. The questions concerning who was involved, and who was not, illustrate that the outcome of the study depends on who becomes involved. In this study, I was fortunate to find participants who are not only passionate about their own discipline, but also personally interested in theology and the relevance of the church; they all had a breadth of knowledge to draw from when making their contributions. Debra brought her knowledge as occupational therapist, combined with experience in a clinical setting, as well as being actively involved in her local church's discussions around its relevance. Anton brought years of experience in counselling psychology, as well as many years of avid reading and interest in the Bible and Biblical scholarship. Lizette brought her years of practical

experience of being a minister in the context of the Dutch Reformed Church, Biblical scholarship and a personal interest in the church's thinking about women.

Language plays a significant role in the success of any transdisciplinary study, where one is deliberately asking individuals from divergent disciplines to share thinking. Each discipline has its own language and epistemology. "Language is a living thing and evolves in everyday use; it also evolves in its use within disciplines." (Bracken & Oughton 2006: 375). Where the language is different or ambiguous, misunderstanding can take place. Beers and Bots (2009) point out that some time needs to be spent on establishing "common ground" and that participants should be involved in the analysis of their inputs, to avoid confusion or misinterpretation. One weakness of this study is that I did not make a special effort to help the participants to establish common ground. However, it is to their credit and my advantage that they did take the time to help each other understand by asking relevant questions and giving detailed information. An example is Debra's explanation of the difference between sensory integration and sensory intelligence. Furthermore, as I use the knowledge generated in this conversation in later chapters, time will be spent on clarifying concepts, either through literature, or in consultation with the participants, or other professionals.

It should be noted that the power relationships between participants in a transdisciplinary study are sometimes a concern. Kalpana et al. (2008: 116) also state that "power imbalances could exist" in transdisciplinary work. In the case of this study, there was a natural imbalance from the outset, as the study was never intended to function purely as a transdisciplinary study, in the accepted understanding of the word, where all the participants would work on the outcome together. In this case, because it forms only a part of my larger research, the understanding was that the final interpretations would be made by me. However, I did work to involve the co-researchers in my interpretations, and, as stated above, I aimed to involve them also in later chapters, as necessary.

Ethically speaking, this study was limited because Hanneltjie's anonymity had to be protected. It could have been helpful to involve her directly in the conversation, especially bearing in mind the narrative approach that demands the co-researcher's active involvement in the process. However, given the sensitive and painful nature of her story, this would have been irresponsible. After all, she had decided not to enter into therapy at the time of the transdisciplinary study and therefore, even passing the participants' input on to her was risky, despite her informed consent; consequently, I relied on her judgment about whether she

would be affected by what she read, or not, and how she would react. Her positive response, although brief, was heartening, and ended this aspect of the research with a positive note. In her last email to me, regarding the transdisciplinary conversation, she shared the following sentiment:

"It is always good to look into the mirror and affirm who you are today, but it's even better to look back to the days of your past and see how far you've come" - shared by Sidney R. Hargro.

4.10. Summary

This chapter described the reasons for the transdisciplinary layer of this thesis and then described the method and outcomes. As stated, the aim was to thicken our understanding of Hanneltjie's story, by hearing the voices of three professionals from three other disciplines, using the principles of transversal rationality. As such, the three co-researchers were asked to read Hanneltjie's story and to respond by answering four questions regarding their discipline's approach and possible contribution to understanding Hanneltjie's story. Their responses were given to Hanneltjie for feedback. Based on the outcomes of the transdisciplinary conversation, including a look at the points of consensus, dissensus, and unique insights, I have refined the choices I have made about what to focus on in the next chapter. Finally, the limitations of the transdisciplinary study were discussed. The next chapter will focus on hearing the voices of other researchers in the relevant literature, thus broadening the spectrum of input from a single point, Hanneltjie, to the wider academic community.

CHAPTER 5

VOICES FROM OTHER STORIES

“Either All Days Are Holy Or None Are. I Have Not Decided Yet.”- Terry Pratchett (1997:407)

5.1. Introduction

The various areas of focus that have emerged out of Hanneljie’s story, and the transdisciplinary conversation, are diverse and complex and some are easier than others to relate back to the original question of this research. Therefore, before we review the literature, we should remind ourselves of the aim of this research. Contemporary theology (Bell 2007: 11-14) teaches us that everything in life is spiritual: we cannot separate our spirituality from our daily interaction with the world around us. Similarly, 1 John 4:12 reminds readers that knowing God may have been impossible, were it not for the fact that He is revealed through our love for one another: “No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and His love is made complete in us.” (NIV). Whatever occurs in our spirits is a product of our relationship with the world and with others. Owen Thomas (2000: n.p.) also states: “ I believe that this emphasis on the inner life in contemporary spirituality is fundamentally mistaken, philosophically, theologically, and ethically, and that it needs to be redressed not only to a more balanced view of the inner-outer relation, but also to an awareness that the outer life is the major source of the inner.”

According to the Christian tradition, God is essentially relational. The doctrine of the Trinity teaches about a God who is three in one, with each of the three in a relationship with the other two. Furthermore, God is in relationship with us and we are with God. To understand this assertion better, I turn to Kärkkäinen’s (2011: 224-226) treatment of the Trinity as social three-in-oneness; the “relationality” and “mutuality” within the Trinity, as well as between the Trinity and the world. Kärkkäinen (2011: 226) begins with the concept of God as Love, as in 1 John 4:8, “Whoever does not love, does not know God, because God is Love.” (NIV), to explain these relationships: “Love can never exist alone, love shares, love gives. In other words, there is a reciprocal relationship between the world and God.” Maureen Miner (2007: 115) also emphasises that “the relationships within the Godhead [are] of importance for understanding human relationships with God and with other humans.” Also: “One gains one’s personality by giving oneself to one’s counterpart; thus identity is gained in

separation from, yet also in dependence on, the other” (Kärkkäinen 2011: 231). Thus, our relationships are the spaces where we learn about and teach each other about God and where our spiritual identity is formed. Phan (2011: 194) refers to our knowing of God through “concrete historical experiences of God’s self-gift,” emphasising, too, the importance of coming to understand God through lived experience. Furthermore, our most important relationships teach us the most and that means that our parents and other significant adults have a profound influence on our spiritual identity. Rizzuto (1979: 187) explains that “...the first elaboration of a God representation which we can trace begins with eye contact between mother and child.”

The realisation that spirituality is inseparable from daily life also brings to our attention that we cannot separate our spirituality from our sexuality (Bell 2007:15). Spirituality is simultaneously entirely abstract and entirely fundamental to our make-up. Similarly, sex and sexual abuse is entirely physical and entirely impossible to separate from spirituality. Humans are simultaneously wholly spiritual and wholly physical. Consider Isherwood and Stuart’s (1998: 16) emphasis on Jesus’ body:

Christianity tells us that it took the incarnation of God, the divine becoming flesh, to overcome the great devastation wrought by Eve. It was the body of Christ that took away the sins of the world. It is the body of Christ that brings redemption to the world and to the individual believer. The same body that many of the faithful consider themselves consuming in the Eucharist. This is a very earthy, fleshy, physical way to connect with one’s God...

I return now to the image of the three hares with three ears. The image is an ancient symbol associated both with femininity and fertility as well as the holy Trinity. For our purposes, it also illustrates the intertwined nature of our spirituality, sexuality and relationships. There may be three individual hares, but it would be impossible for any one of the hares to do anything without the other two. Similarly, no person can ‘do something spiritual’ without it affecting their sexuality or relationships or vice-versa.

The question that arises, however, is: ‘What happens to our spiritual identity in broken relationships, especially broken sexual relationships?’ What happens to the third hare if the other two are sick? Conversely, one could also ask what could the third hare do to heal the sick ones?



Figure 5.1: The Dartmoor Hare: *Three Hares with Three Ears*

As mentioned previously, our spiritual identity starts forming when we are very young and our first conception of God can be linked with our first interactions with our parents (Rizzuto 1979). Therefore, it would be easy to assume that a troubled relationship with one's parents could lead to a troubled relationship with God. Hanneltjie's parents did not abuse her, but she has a very complex relationship with her mother, especially, and this exerts an influence on her construct of God.

A person's conception of God does not develop in a linear manner, however and other factors also play a role. As quoted earlier, Poll and Smith (2003: 135) state that human "spiritual identity development may undergo changes more accurately represented by a double spiral than a straight line, depending on the persons' life experience." Hanneltjie's parents to play a significant role in her spiritual development, but her lived experiences, within her cultural-linguistic context, also play an important role in how she thinks about God, and experiences her relationship with God.

Research has also been done into the relationship between spirituality, coping and the possibility of hope and growth in that relationship:

[S]urvivors' relationship with a benevolent God is related to a greater sense of personal hope and self-acceptance, which in turn are predictive of lower levels of depressive mood and greater levels of experienced resolution of the abuse ... CSA (childhood sexual abuse) survivors who turn to their relationship with a benevolent God might be better able to create some meaning of their past abuse (e.g., God's plan) that helps the survivor to maintain a sense of hope and self-acceptance in the face of the consequences of his or her traumatic history. (Gall et al. 2007: 114)

It is, therefore not safe to assume that an adult who experienced childhood trauma will develop a specific, necessarily negative, spiritual identity.

I aim to broaden our understanding of the spirituality of adult survivors of childhood abuse, with Hanneltjie's story serving as a case study. The question that was asked is how meaning is made of traumatic experiences and what the role of spirituality is. My aim is to use this literature-based layer of the research in order to hear the voices of others in exploring how the various areas of focus could relate to Hanneltjie's story of spirituality and/or sexual abuse, inasmuch as these are issues that have an influence on her whole personhood. Therefore, I have selected literature that may shed light on the five identified areas of focus, as well as on a number of the unique outcomes that were identified. What follows, then, is a discussion of the literature, as it relates to Hanneltjie's story of abuse; her identity; her relationship with her mother; her ideas about God and faith; and the interrelationship between these themes. In addition, some attention will be paid to hope, forgiveness, poetry, nature, and empathy.

5.2. Areas of focus:

5.2.1 Hanneltjie's story of abuse

In discussing Hanneltjie's abuse story with her I found that she dwelt on the long-term effects of the abuse, describing sleepless nights, nightmares, a sense of disembodiment, and an aversion to touch. All of these effects are common among survivors of abuse, as discussed by Finkelhor (1986 and 1990), Heitritter and Vought (2006), Bass and Davis (2002), and Hagood (2000). As Finkelhor (1990: 328) states, these effects often resemble symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder and include "nightmares, numbing of affect, a sense of estrangement, sleep problems." Emily Lyon (2010: 236-237) explains these effects from a neurological perspective. She states that:

Under situations of manageable stimulation the hippocampus and cerebral cortex compare new events with past experiences, orient the person to time and space

and inhibit the chemical systems of the brain from over-arousal. In this case memories are stored in ‘explicit memory’ which is conscious and can usually be recalled. However, in a traumatic situation, the brain is overwhelmed with the biochemicals generated by the fear response so that the normal action of the hippocampus is blocked. As a result, the inhibiting chemicals usually triggered by the hippocampus are not released into the brain, so that the activating chemicals continue to over-stimulate the limbic system. ... and (these memories are) stored in the body where the memories retain the unprocessed emotions of terror. (Brackets inserted)

Lyon (2010: 237) explains that these “implicit memories” are the ones that are “triggered” by seemingly harmless situations, such as Hanneltjie’s colleague who touched her shoulder from behind and caused her to punch him. These are also the memories that manifest as nightmares.

Steine, Krystal, Nordhus, Bjortvan, Harvey, Eid, et al. (2011: 1836) found a connection between the frequency and severity of survivors’ nightmares and their perceived social support as well as to the intensity of the abuse. In Hanneltjie’s case, it makes sense, because she has not disclosed the abuse to many people and is essentially fighting the battle on her own, except for the support she receives from therapy. As Steine et al. (2011:1837) explain: “those with lower support levels might feel overwhelmed by their problems, leading to cognitive-emotional arousal and consequently sleep problems.” She has made the decision never to disclose the abuse to her family, and, ultimately, not to experience the potential healing that could come from disclosure. Palmer, Brown, Rae-Grant and Loughlin (1999: 263) tell us that “disclosure is therapeutic for children because it changes secretiveness to openness, shame to self-satisfaction, confusion to understanding, and numbness to expression.” However, Palmer et al. (1999:273) also describe the helplessness felt by those who felt unable to disclose, or felt that they were not believed, or felt that no-one was doing anything. Hanneltjie felt unprotected, because her mother was trained to know and work with victims of abuse, but did not see what was going on with her own child.

As Hanneltjie testifies, these various effects have all been present since the abuse started and all work together. She may not be a natural insomniac, but in order to avoid the nightmares, she does not sleep. She does want to be connected to her body, but she has taught herself not to feel and, as Bass and Davis (2002: 35) explain: “But since you can’t block feelings selectively, you simply stopped feeling.” In shielding herself from the pain of abuse, she has shielded herself from all feeling and, as will be discussed later, this has had a disastrous effect on her love life.

To gain a better understanding of some of the effects of the abuse, it may be helpful to turn to Occupational Therapy, and sensory integration. Knowledge of how the brain is supposed to process sensory input may shed light on Hannetjie’s difficulty with certain types of stimuli. The following diagram provides an adaptation of Van Jaarsveld’s (2012:18) graphic representation of the levels of sensory integration functions:

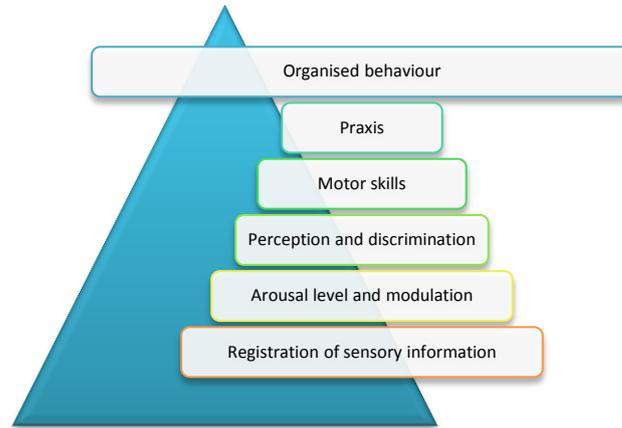


Figure 5.2: Levels of sensory integration functions

Following the logic presented in the above figure, sensory integration occurs in stages. The first stage is the sensory input itself, which is registered by the neurons in the sense organs: for example, the skin, ears, eyes and tongue. Under normal circumstances, the nervous system is receiving input from all the senses all the time, as Lane (2002: 106) states: “many neurons are receiving inputs from many sources simultaneously.” As such, the brain becomes aroused, because a decision needs to be made about whether to act on the input or not. For example, when somebody touches something very hot, the input needs to be translated by the nervous system into action: in this example, taking the hand away. However, not all stimuli are useful. For example, the constant sensation of clothing rubbing against skin needs to be filtered out, or else the person will become over-aroused for no reason and find it impossible to wear clothing. The process of filtering input is known as *modulation*: “Filtering of sensations and attending to those that are relevant, maintaining an optimal level of arousal, and maintaining attention to task all require modulation” (Lane 2002: 104). The brain’s ability to manage arousal and to modulate is the second level of functioning. Thirdly, once input has been modulated, higher cognitive functions can process the input and discriminate between sensations, and make decisions about which actions to take and how to feel about the input. Emotional and intellectual processing of sensory stimuli are only possible, once arousal has been managed. After that, more complex responses can be

managed as well. If the sensory input is overwhelming, as in the case of sexual abuse, for example, it is not processed well at the most basic level. Modulation becomes difficult, therefore discrimination becomes difficult.

At this point it is appropriate to consider the confusion that survivors experience when previously overwhelming – and therefore badly processed – stimulation that was associated with trauma is now presented as love: this scenario could typically arise in the situation of sex with a consenting partner, or even in the case of a friendly touch on the shoulder. How does a person’s skin tell the difference, or discriminate? At the highest levels, praxis (the ability to form new responses to new stimuli), and organised behaviour are impossible. Bundy and Murray (2002: 5) explain: “Individuals who have a decreased ability to process sensation also may have difficulty producing appropriate actions, which, in turn, may interfere with learning and behavior.” Hanneltjie’s defense against this problem is to avoid any physical contact with other people as much as possible. In terms of sensory integration, this is referred to as *sensory defensiveness*. “Sensory defensiveness is a fight-or-flight reaction to sensation that others would consider non-noxious” and is “linked to poor limbic or reticular system processing” (Bundy and Murray 2002: 9). The limbic system “plays a role in learning and memory; eating and drinking behaviors; aggression; sexual behavior; and, importantly motivation and expression of emotion” (Lane 2002: 110).

Let us return, briefly, to Lyon’s (2010: 237) discussion of traumatic memories and the limbic system. If we bear in mind the sensory integration process described here, then Lyon’s explanation rings especially true: thus, the trauma is not processed well, and is stored in the limbic system to return as flashbacks and nightmares. In Hanneltjie’s case, we can observe two types of reactions to sensory input. On the one hand, she overreacts to touch, as in the example she gave of punching her colleague, which leads to defensive, or avoidant, behaviour. On the other hand, she finds herself unable to discriminate between sensations, as in the instance when she explained to me that she was the only one in the office who did not realise that the air conditioner was not working, and she under-responds, or feels nothing. Lane (2002:109) suggests that one may display behaviours that could be described as “defensive reactions until overload (leads) to shut down in the processing of sensory input.” As such, sensory defensiveness could include a number of behaviours that appear contradictory – overreaction or shut down. The behaviours, as such, are not the problem. It is, “not so much that (clients) over- or underrespond to sensation but that their behavior reflects poor modulation and its many ramifications” (Lane 2002: 109). I want to suggest that many if

not most of Hannetjie's current challenges with physical sensations and emotions stem from the years of inappropriate and overwhelming sensory and emotional input that she endured; she failed to process and modulate adequately that which she describes as the divide between her intellect and both her emotions and sensations.

Moreover, Hannetjie placed emphasis on the polarities of blame and forgiveness and the role that these two issues have played in her dealing with the effects of the abuse. Hannetjie blamed her mother, the social worker, for not being able to see that something was wrong and also relates an incident when she knew her father was right outside the room where she was being abused and did not realise what was going on. Heitritter and Vought (2006: 27) explain that victims of abuse often have severely conflicting feelings about those they love, but also hate, like "family members who did not protect them." Similarly, Finkelhor (1986: 182) describes a deep sense of betrayal that survivors feel: "A family member whom they trusted but who was unable or unwilling to protect or believe them... may also contribute to the dynamics of betrayal." As a result, and for other reasons still to be discussed, she felt unable to speak to her parents about the abuse. Finkelhor (1986: 183) refers to survivors who do not disclose for fear of the consequences and explains that they become disempowered and feel trapped. This is a concern, since the opposite is often true. Thus, children who feel supported are more able to cope with the trauma of abuse, as Hunter (2006: 353) asserts: "Some children may be more resilient to trauma, perhaps in part because they receive support from their families." Hunter (2006: 352) also lists the ability to disclose to someone as a strategy of "well-adjusted" survivors. Hannetjie was an adult before she was able to disclose to anyone and still has not spoken to her family.

One story stands out as an aspect of the bigger story and may still require her focus, and forgiveness of herself; this is the story of rape and the fact that she feels that she has not yet dealt with it well. The reason that the rape has earned special attention from Hannetjie is that the abuser had never raped her until the very last time. Until then, he had asked her to do various things, but penetration never took place. She singles this night out as different, because she feels that she responded to him and encouraged him, because her body reacted to his stimulation. Heitritter and Vought (2006: 27) explain that many victims feel a sense of guilt, "because they believe they did nothing to try to stop the abuse, because the abuse was sometimes pleasurable, or because they received special favours or rewards." In Hannetjie's case, it appears that she may feel she did not discourage the abuser, but rather encouraged him, when her body reacted to him involuntarily and now she blames herself. Maralynn

Hagood (2000: 155-156) also explains that “guilt about enjoying some aspects of it is common” and that “one of the most difficult aspects of therapeutic work with adult survivors is to get them truly to believe that the abuse was not their fault.” Even though Hannetjie has dealt with a similar case in her work as a counsellor, she is unable to offer herself the same comfort she has offered another.

From the perspective of the literature, the rape is also significant as penetration is cited as one of the factors that may heighten the victim’s experience of trauma. As Nurcombe (2000:87) explains, certain factors may lead to a “less favourable outcome,” such as “the propinquity of the abuser, the duration and frequency of the abuse, genital penetration and coercion or threat.” It has also been found that the self-blame that Hannetjie describes is associated with increased negative consequences (Filipas & Ullman 2006: 666). These observations are certainly true for Hannetjie, who not only finds the rape the hardest to deal with, but also waited the longest to disclose this particular incident to anyone, despite this event being only one in many years of incidents. One of the complexities of Hannetjie’s story is that the abuse took place over a period of about ten years, and this scenario is very much, as Finkelhor (1990: 328-329) describes: “less of an ‘event’ than a situation, a relationship, a process.” Having said that, the single incident of rape still stands out as being different in Hannetjie’s telling, because the act of penetration shifted the nature of the abuse. Gina Messina-Dysert (2012: 121) describes the cumulative negative effects associated with rape as “compressed suffering,” because those effects reach so deep into the person’s being. Messina-Dysert (2012: 125) then explains that “Rape is an expression of rage, as well as domination over the woman. For the perpetrator, the goal is to humiliate and degrade the woman while achieving control; thus sexual means is utilized to commit this violent act.” If we now consider Hannetjie’s sense of culpability in her reaction, as well as her long silence, then Messina-Dysert’s (2012: 126-127) words also resonate, when that writer observes that women who have been raped often feel abandoned and isolated, because of society’s response to rape, and because no-one is able to understand how she feels. Messina-Dysert (2012: 127) then says: “Subsequently, every relationship is pervaded by a sense of alienation and disconnection.”

In addition, Hannetjie spoke about the long-term effects that she feels the abuse has had on her romantic relationships. She characterised her various attempts at romantic relationships as failures, explaining that she found intimacy difficult and that her partners told her that she failed to respond to them physically. After a failed romantic relationship with a

man, she switched to women, but this did not appear to make a difference, at least in her ability to be intimate with someone. Finkelhor (1990: 328) explains: “As a result of being abused, children get distorted cognitive maps about sex, family and their worth.” Similarly, Heitritter and Vought (2006: 53) state that “being in interpersonal relationships in adulthood can create fears and ambivalence about what ‘intimacy’ might mean and what it may mean to be ‘vulnerable.’” Zwickl and Merriman (2011: 20) also support the notion that the distress associated with abuse confuses a woman’s natural response. It is not that Hannetjie does not want to enjoy intimacy or sexual pleasure. In fact, she made it very clear to me that she is a “normal woman” with “normal needs.” However, Hagood (2000: 155) explains that, for the survivor, it is not as easy: “Sexual feelings *are* pleasurable and if mixed with other forms of abuse create confusion regarding sexuality and sexual identity. Pain, sexual feelings and love may become linked and lay the groundwork for considerable problems in adult relationships.” At the time of the interviews, Hannetjie had given up on having a romantic relationship. All she wanted was to feel comfortable in her own body.

From the time that the abuse started and as she worked her way through these years of therapy, she also developed some coping strategies. Among those coping strategies that Hannetjie has employed over the years are: disengaging herself from her feelings; burying herself in academics; spending time in nature; listening to music; and writing poetry. The relationship between coping strategies and possible future recovery or pathology is hugely complex. Merrill et al. (2001: 1003) have found that so-called ‘constructive coping’ is often associated with strong family support and fewer negative symptoms, but the relationship between these three factors is insignificant, when compared to the relationship between “self-destructive and avoidant coping and symptoms.” Hannetjie has not employed self-destructive strategies such as substance abuse, but she has favoured avoidant mechanisms, such as disengagement, escaping into academics, avoiding social interaction, going for solitary walks, and listening to music alone. For some, this may be a concern, since, as O’Dougherty, Wright, Crawford and Sebastian (2007:598) state: “Results across many studies have revealed that the use of avoidant coping strategies, such as denial, distancing, disengagement and self-isolation, is associated with more psychological distress,” although they “may provide short-term relief from distress and serve to regulate negative affect.” In the literature, certain constructive strategies, such as disclosing the abuse and relying on a good support network are cited as important, although to a limited degree (O’Dougherty et al. 2007, Merrill et al. 2001), but appear almost completely lacking in Hannetjie’s story.

5.2.1.1 *Forgiveness: A Unique Outcome*

Hannetjie has been able to forgive both her mother and her abuser, to a certain degree, citing this as a source of liberation from the abuse. It is also true that, in working with survivors, Heitritter and Vought (2006: 206) have come to the following conclusion: “Forgiveness brings freedom – freedom from being controlled by past abuse events, freedom from emotional ties to the offender, freedom from continual internal conflicts of bitterness and hate.” In a study about forgiveness and abuse, Cooney, Allan, Allan, McKillop and Drake (2011: 112) also found that primary victims of abuse very often find forgiveness of the offender to be of value in that it benefits their healing process. Thus, “They had an internal focus because, although they were not oblivious to external issues (such as the nature and consequences of the offence), they were more concerned about empowering themselves so that they could forgive and thus facilitate their healing.” It is important to note, however, that Cooney et al. (2011) also found that forgiveness is not just a decision. In their study, it became clear that forgiveness takes time and demands a certain level of already attained empowerment. They also found, however, that self-forgiveness is the hardest and takes much time. Hannetjie has been able to free herself from much of the anger and hate that she carried with her, by finding ways to release the abuser from having further emotional effects on her, and by releasing her mother from blame. One person she has been unable to forgive is herself, especially for the incident of rape.

In the transdisciplinary conversation, Anton and Lizette both supported the notion that Hannetjie’s “disjunctive forgiveness” (Helm, Cook & Berecz 2005) of both her mother and the abuser is not enough, and that she should confront them. However, Helm et al. (2005:32) suggest that “trying to shape their emotional experiences into a traditional reconciliation model may be inappropriate or harmful” for someone who has suffered abuse. Hannetjie agrees that confronting either her mother or the abuser would serve no purpose, and she prefers to keep things as they are. Similarly, despite proposing that it may be helpful, Anton expressed concern about the influence of time on Hannetjie’s experience:

The fact that so much time has passed makes it more difficult than ever to confront the issue with them (her mother and the abuser). She may no longer want to reveal the experience to her mother in particular, even though she has the opportunity to do so now as an adult, with much life experience and academic insight. The upheaval it will cause now, may no longer be something she can or wants to deal with.

5.2.1.2 Determination: A Unique Outcome

Much time in our conversations was dedicated to finding out about the hard work of trying to recover from abuse, and the determination and emotional energy required to undergo years of therapy. Also, Hanneltjie showed great courage in making herself vulnerable to a number of professionals and therapists, in searching for different avenues to recovery and coping. Authors agree that the longer one lives with the effects of abuse and employs potentially unhealthy coping strategies, the more difficult it will be to recover. Kathleen Lynch (2000: 1427) writes: “The journey back toward health seemed tiresome – so many twists and turns, false starts and stops on my path...” One concern for Hanneltjie may be her inability to disclose the abuse to her loved ones, because “the psychological energy expended in keeping the secret of sexual abuse is massive” (Hagood: 2000: 147). Another concern is that, in teaching herself not to feel, she has cut herself off from the world in many ways. Heitritter and Vought (2006: 51) explain: “Unfortunately, even though dissociation was once protective in childhood, it can be very dangerous in adult life.” Hanneltjie has testified to this, especially in her deep-rooted struggle with not knowing how to respond to physical touch. Furthermore, all the problems that Hanneltjie faces have had years to become “seriously entrenched” (Hagood 2000: 21). Needless to say, the process of recovering, going to various therapists and finding healthy ways to deal with the aftermath of the abuse is a very demanding one. Not surprisingly, she experiences an intensification of the nightmares when opening herself up to exploring the abuse. Nevertheless, she has persisted for many years, with various therapists and forms of therapy and reached a point where she says: “Some things cannot change and my problem with touch will never go away completely. I am at a stage where I can survive among people.” Similarly, Anderson and Hiersteiner (2008: 418) report that survivors make a distinction between recovery and healing, stating that full healing is never possible, but recovery is. As one of their respondents states: “I don’t think you can ever be healed. *If you were in an accident and your right arm was cut off, you’re never going to get that arm back, but you will learn to go on and manage*” (Italics in original). With this in mind, it is indescribably sad that so many years of work were brought to a halt by one session with a person who claimed to be able to help, but pushed the boundaries too far. Since that day, Hanneltjie has decided not to go for help again. Having said that, one needs to reiterate that it takes great courage and determination to go for help and to face therapy, despite a night of nightmares, and to keep going for help over a period of years. One thing

that the literature has shown me is that Hannetjie is no less courageous now, for wanting to stop, than she had been for so many years for carrying on.

All three transdisciplinary co-researchers expressed concern about the lack of relational connectedness in Hannetjie's story. However, there is a strong connection between her academic pursuits and her identity as well as, and more importantly, between the solitary pursuits of walking in nature and writing poetry and her relationship with God. These factors need to be investigated in the next sections.

5.2.2 Hannetjie's identity story

Hammack (2008:223) defines identity as "ideology cognized through the individual engagement with discourse, made manifest in a personal narrative constructed and reconstructed across the life course and scripted in and through social interaction and social practice." Hannetjie highlighted some of those aspects of her identity and self-concept that are important to her, and as formative of who she is. These include her empathy, her fairness, her tendency to withdraw socially, and her Calvinistic roots. All of these are evident in her narrative, and have been constructed and reconstructed throughout her life by her interactions and relationships with others, and her context, most notably the abuser, her mother, her connection with Afrikaner culture, and her colleagues.

Socially, she describes herself as being awkward, almost fearful, and averse to contact. Spies (2006: 66) explains that "Sexual abuse can seriously hinder normal social growth and healthy development." She points to "social withdrawal" and "avoidance" as behaviours that are often seen in the lives of survivors of abuse. Furthermore, Spies (2006: 68) describes survivors of abuse as "often panicky or fearful in crowded or confined spaces." That writer (2006: 66-67) explains that any form of intimacy or closeness can be difficult, as the adult survivor may have mixed up feelings about intimacy, because the trust that they should have learned from adults was betrayed and intimacy is now linked with memories of the abuse, rather than trust. If we consider Emily Lyon's (2010: 236-237) explanation of how the brain stores traumatic memories, as discussed in the previous section, then it makes sense that even casual relationships can be challenging.

Furthermore, she blames her Calvinistic upbringing for many of the problems she feels she faces in her relationship with her mother, as well as in her romantic relationships; this is because the traditional sex role identity espoused by Calvinistic values leaves no room

for talking about sex, homosexuality and, most importantly, sexual abuse. As such, she never felt able to disclose the abuse or any of her other questions to her family and her mother in particular. Christina Landman (1994: 68) describes the roots of what is most often referred to as Calvinism in Afrikaner culture as running much more deeply in what she calls “a hell-oriented, pietist form of religious expression” that is more closely related to Dutch Pietism than Calvinism. She describes the women of early Afrikanerdom as self-loathing and guilt-ridden, with a “negative view of all people” (1994: 118). Further, she explains that Afrikaner women believed that “everything, including all misfortune, should be blamed on their personal sins” (1994: 118), having been subject to many hardships and living largely isolated lives.

Similarly, Erna Oliver (2006: 1474) describes nineteenth century Afrikaner culture as rooted in the Old Testament and cut off from contemporary nineteenth century thinking in Europe, as a result of the isolation caused by the Great Trek and by settling in remote areas. In addition, she describes the conservative interpretation of Calvinism as the “one tool that helped (Afrikaners) to face the ‘new’ world” (2006: 1476). Oliver (2006: 1478) describes the romanticised, male-headed household “that formed the cornerstone of society and everyone had his and her own place and designated job” as a fundamental aspect of Afrikaner culture and spirituality.

In this culture, women assumed a position of “passive martyrdom” (Landman 1994: 119), in that they had no other recourse, but to keep silent and survive. Although some will argue that Afrikaner women have come a long way since then, Du Pisani (1996: 266) concedes that, despite a concerted effort to change the role of women by the church, there still exists “die Protestantse konsep dat die vrou se plek in die huis is en dat dit deel is van ‘n Goddelik verordineerde skeppingsorde, nog steeds as ‘n dominante mite onder blankes en veral Afrikaanssprekendes.”² Thus, a gap exists between the theory and practice with regard to the status of women in the church (Du Pisani 1996: 267).

In its most contemporary guise, Nadar and Potgieter (2010:141) describe a movement in mainly white Afrikaans-speaking Christian circles that they designate “*formenism*,” this espouses a discourse of “liberation through submission” in that men are seen as superior and women choose to submit to the men in their lives and to allow the men to take on leadership

² The Protestant concept that the woman’s place is in the home and that this is part of the Divine order of Creation is still a myth among white, especially Afrikaans-speaking, people.

roles. According to Nadar and Potgieter (2010: 141-142) the movement was born in response to, and as the female complement to, the “masculinism” advocated by the likes of Angus Buchan at the Mighty Men Conferences. They explain that its danger lies in that women choose this role for themselves, in a process of “patriarchal bargaining” (2010: 147) where they use their submission as currency. Women will submit so that men will take responsibility for the family.

These patriarchal ideals are the discourses at the forefront of Afrikaans women’s lives and most Afrikaners have grown up with them. Somers (1994: 606) states that “all of us come to *be* who we *are* (however ephemeral, multiple, and changing) by being located, or locating ourselves (usually unconsciously) in social narratives *rarely of our own making*.” Enter Hanneljie: an abused girl, who grew up and cannot maintain any romantic relationships now, whether they are heterosexual or homosexual. She is unable to live up to the ideals of this culture and, more importantly, she is unable to share her experience with her very conservative mother, because sex and sexuality belong to men and therefore women cannot talk about it. The result is a great deal of pain and dissonance, as she is unable to relate her own experience and identity to the dominant cultural expectation and is unable to seek solace from her primary caregivers.

5.2.2.1 *Empathy and fairness: Unique Outcomes*

Hanneljie takes great pride in her ability to empathise with others and she enjoys working as a counsellor. When she becomes aware of other people’s suffering, she will identify with them and even cry for them. Staub and Vollhardt (2008: 275-276) write: “Because of their experience with and presumably sensitivity to situations of need, individuals who have suffered themselves may become more easily aware of suffering in others,” and “(o)ne’s own experiences of suffering can lead to a greater ability to understand how people who have suffered feel.” It makes sense, however, for her to avoid helping rape victims, because she reacts too emotionally to their stories. Wray-Lake and Syvertsen (2011: 15) make a distinction between “empathy-related responding” and “personal distress in reaction to another’s situation,” because “engaging in pro-social behavior often requires controlling one’s own negative emotions while also helping others to regulate theirs.” Hanneljie values the feedback she gets from others within this context, knowing that she was able to help someone else.

Professionally, she describes herself as fair, empathetic and as having good relationships. She believes in expecting only those things from her subordinates that she would expect from herself and she also believes that this is why she has good working relationships with them. Her belief is supported by Hassan (2012: 540) who discusses fairness as a basis for trust and job satisfaction. Similarly, Leung, Su and Morris (2001) found that employees who perceive their employers as just are more likely to be satisfied at work. In a discussion on the role of spirituality in the workplace, Zsolnai (2004: 4) explains that “Decisions can be interpreted as *self-expression* of the decision-maker. So the chosen alternative (course of action) shows the *ethicality of self* of the decision-maker in the given situation.” In other words, Hanneltjie’s decision to remain fair in her approach to work relationships is a reflection of her ethics, and has a positive effect on those relationships.

5.2.3 The story about her mother

Although some aspects of Hanneltjie’s relationship with her mother have been touched on, she placed so much emphasis on the relationship in our conversation that it is necessary to dwell on it in more detail.

Firstly, she blamed her mother for many years, because she felt that she, as a social worker, should have seen the signs of abuse in her own child: this reaction is not uncommon for survivors of abuse (Heitritter & Vought 2006: 30). As the psychologist Anton Reynolds stated in the transdisciplinary conversation: “The secret is still with her, as is the deep sense of betrayal she feels by the one person she believes should have recognised what was going on. The lack of recognition from her mother for her achievements adds to the burden. She says that she has forgiven her mother, yet does not appear to have communicated this to her either.” Therefore, despite having possibly forgiven her mother, the distance between the two of them still exists.

Secondly, because of the manner in which her mother expressed ideas about sex and sexuality, espousing Calvinistic values and an emphasis on original sin, Hanneltjie felt a large amount of shame for many years and found herself unable to share her story with her mother. Two important aspects of Hanneltjie’s story should be explored here: firstly, the role her mother played in Hanneltjie’s internalisation of her Calvinistic roots, and, secondly, her subsequent inability to tell her mother about the abuse. O’Leary (2001: 666) describes Hanneltjie’s dilemma precisely when she says: “never was there a greater gap in the understanding of how a woman’s life should be lived than there was between our mother’s

generation and our own... I didn't talk to my mother about sex and I talked less and less to her about religion." Not only does this generation gap exist between Hanneltjie and her mother, but it is exacerbated by the cultural context of so-called Calvinistic Afrikanerdom, and her own experience of abuse. Marcus (2004: 708) summarises the problem as such: "women's sexual inhibitions and hatred of her body are understood as a function of both experiences inherent in the female body and the ways in which this is mediated through the girl's experience with the mother – the maternal body itself and the maternal attitude toward and engagement with her daughter's body and sexuality."

Similarly, as the mother's ideas about sexuality influence her daughter, so do her ideas about God. De Roos, Iedema and Miedema (2004) investigated the link between the mother's God-concept and the child's God-concept and found that strict parenting styles, that do not foster autonomy, affected the child's understanding of God as powerful and themselves as dependent upon God, and being required to submit to God's will. If we consider Hanneltjie's description of the Calvinistic tendency to ascribe guilt to children at birth, then it comes as no surprise that Hanneltjie feels let down by her heritage, and finds herself unable to see God as loving. Not only was she raised in a manner that teaches children that God is powerful, rather than loving, but she also felt abandoned by her mother and by God when she needed them most. To take an extreme example, Landman (2005) tells of Alie Badenhorst's diary, in which she describes life in the British concentration camps: "women were not even allowed to bury their children and pigs feasted on their flesh, a male dominee visited them and told them that the war and the concentration camps were punishment for their personal sins." Although this is an extreme example, it illustrates the roots of Afrikaner piety that Hanneltjie grew up with. Even though the Anglo-Boer war took place around the end of the nineteenth century, concepts concerning womanhood and the role of women and sexuality have changed very little since then, and it is only now, in the twenty-first century, that some Afrikaans-speaking female theologians have truly found a voice (Landman 2005: n.p.). As such, the average Afrikaans-speaking woman has also not truly had a voice until very recently. Thus, the generation gap that O'Leary (2001) describes as growing in the 1960s, has only recently seen the light in the Afrikaner context and is very real for Hanneltjie.

Despite thinking that Calvinism has let her down, Hanneltjie expresses grief at the loss of the relationship that she would like to have had with her mother and the pain of knowing that she has not lived up to her mother's expectations. Butler and Shalit-Naggar (2008:847) have shown that the discourse around mother-daughter "concerned responsiveness" appears

to be true, and that mothers tend to be emotionally closer to their daughters than to their sons. Therefore, Hanneltjie's relationship with her mother does not fit expectations. Margaret Merrill Toscano (1998: 32) describes a similar sense of loss: "I am not close to her, but I feel deeply rooted to her. I seldom talk to her, but I think about her often. I sometimes feel angry at her passivity and denial, but I am also deeply sympathetic to her pain and struggles. There are many things I admire about her, but I am also afraid of becoming like her." There is a distance between Hanneltjie and her mother, that makes it difficult for her to talk to her mother, as she feels that her mother does not value her achievements. Steyn (2004: 241-242) describes the discourses around unmarried women, that describe them as incomplete or unfulfilled, and we see that Hanneltjie's mother also subscribes to this, when she dismisses Hanneltjie's academic achievements in favour of wanting Hanneltjie to look for a husband. Hanneltjie feels less favoured than her sister-in-law, who does live up to her mother's expectations and fulfils the role of homemaker and wife. Hettie Mans (2011: 212-214) also reports the tendency among Afrikaners to idealise the roles of women as pious, and housewifely, and to emphasise the importance of motherhood as the ultimate fulfilment of a woman's purpose.

In addition, she has experienced a great deal of pain because her parents seem more pleased by her brother and are more willing to give him support: this has created a further distance between her and her parents. Stocker, Lanthier and Furman (1997 :218) point to a possible link between conflicts with siblings and poor psychological functioning, because "they raise individuals' stress levels." It has also been posited that children as young as one year old are keenly aware of the differences in the way their parents treat them and their siblings (Mersky Leder 1993: 60). Suitor, Sechrist, Plikuhn, Pardo and Pillemer (2008: 336) also point out that "perceptions of fairness moderate the relationship between PDT (parental differential treatment) and relations with parents and siblings." Hanneltjie feels unfairly treated by her parents, because they paid for her brother's failed studies, but never paid for her own studies. Lye (1996: 98) found that young adult children expect financial support from their parents, and this is seen as the right thing to do. In view of this, Hanneltjie's distress is not surprising. This is an additional stressor in the relationship.

Hershberg (2006:59) describes the connection between mother and daughter as continuously changing, potentially growing or diminishing, because of the way they perceive one another and think about each other. "At various developmental junctures, the growing up daughter, identifying with and differentiating from her mother, inevitably looks toward her

mother in her mind and in her life – longingly, competitively, contentiously, and compassionately.” At the same time, the mother looks at her daughter “bestowing ... a range of explicit and implicit communications, of being female, in a full range of gendered variations.” Referring now specifically to Hannetjie: she was raised in a typically Calvinistic house, with all that it implies. When she was abused, and her mother failed to notice, she felt abandoned by her mother, which caused a rift between them. How much her mother knew of this, we do not know. Because of the cultural context of Calvinism, Hannetjie felt unable to talk to her mother about the abuse. Thus, her mother remained ignorant, as far as we know, and, therefore, unable to respond or support her daughter. As the years went by, the gap widened. With each passing life stage, Hannetjie distanced herself further and felt less able to communicate with her mother (unable to bring her into her world of surviving abuse), as her mother’s traditional expectations stayed the same, unaffected by the abuse she knew nothing about. Thus the gap widened even further to the point where Hannetjie has made peace with the fact that she and her mother will never see eye-to-eye about what it means to be a woman or what a successful woman looks like.

5.2.4 God and faith in Hannetjie’s story

Hannetjie’s relationship with God and faith is paradoxical. On the one hand, her love of nature and persistent return to faith show that she finds solace in her relationship with God. On the other hand, she feels great despair and sadness at her sense that, to a certain degree, God had abandoned her in her hour of need and continues to do so in the lives of many other young victims of abuse.

As such, her concept of God is also paradoxical. She finds it very difficult to accept God as loving or omniscient. Surely, a loving, omniscient God would have stepped in. The issue of theodicy is central to Hannetjie’s relationship with God. Daugherty, West, Williams and Brockman (2009: 44) define theodicy as “a construct based on the perception of God controlling history – even the minutiae of daily events; the term translates from Greek as ‘the justice of God.’” In layman’s terms, it refers to our tendency to want to find a reason for events and to attribute that reason to God’s goodness or to His purpose for our lives. The problem that arises relates to our inability to associate God’s goodness or purpose with evil, as in Hannetjie’s case. The result is that she is unable to think of God as loving or omniscient, and finds it easier to relate to the God of the Old Testament, who is often portrayed as wrathful. Madsen (2001: 232) questions our attempts at theodicy and explains why:

The whole enterprise of theodicy – of justifying God’s ways to man, or rewriting the definition of God such that God can be justified – failed long ago, before feminist theology got hold of it, before Job’s comforters got hold of it. God refuses to fit the mold of perfection. ... Again and again – women write – it seems especially women – of being told that God watched over them and finding themselves forsaken: of being lonely as children and finding God did not assuage the loneliness, of living a selfless life as adults and still losing a child or being betrayed in marriage, of following all the rules and still getting cancer.

Lizette Viviers (Minister) describes Hanneltjie’s relationship with God as being distant, when she says: “He is the God of creation, yes; but not ‘my God.’” Daugherty et al. (2009: 44) remind us that it is possible to make a distinction “between theism (belief in a God currently active in history) and deism (belief in a God whose activity ended with creation).” To a certain degree, Hanneltjie’s concept of God sounds like deism, in that she acknowledges Him as Creator and admires Creation, and finds solace in nature, but questions His presence in our daily lives. In a Protestant tradition, that favours a personal relationship with God, this is problematic. Lizette describes it as “her inability to truly allow God into her life.” Upon reading Hanneltjie’s poetry, one may wonder whether she is comfortable with feeling that God is distant, or would prefer the traditionally favoured personal relationship. To address this question let us compare the following three of Hanneltjie’s poems (for the sake of space, only translations are provided here):

Table 5.1: Three Poems

The Pain	Purify	Atheist
<p>Small, curled up in a corner Eyes, tight shut, little hands clenched She sits there alone and afraid. Her heart races, she’s breathing fast, She hopes that no-one would hear It sounds so loud in her ear.</p> <p>Is there no-one who would stroke the pain Away with a there-there? Don’t they miss her laugh, her cheerful skip? Is there no-one who knows now Of the sadness, the fear That wrap like clamps around her little heart?</p> <p>There is no-one, she knows Who can help, hold her little hand, And this little corner where she is Is the only shelter where she can rest.</p>	<p>Oh, unquiet spirit Of delusions and delirium Storm ahead and shake your waters over me. Let your lightning cleave through my being And scorch the worn places down to raw, naked purity.</p> <p>Ease my pain with Your thunderous vibration. And end my despair with your wind. Purify my vision And give, after the storm, The quiet.</p>	<p>Is there a God? Who is he and where does he live? There is no God! This I believe freely.</p> <p>Ball of fire far above With scorching heat rays. How do you do it, Achieving such a great deed?</p> <p>Tiny, pure flowers With soft, fragile petals And bright green stems, Soft scent and fine veins- Human hands have no part here.</p> <p>I, once great, proud atheist Have fallen and failed! God’s creation made a way through my heart – I believe that God must exist.</p>

In The Pain she feels abandoned and lost, a little girl with “no-one, she knows Who can help”, whereas in Purify she invites God to make her pure and give her solace. Atheist reveals that she is convinced by nature that God exists, and seems comforted by this knowledge. Hanneljé’s relationship is difficult, to say the least, but, as Lizette reminds us:

A relationship with God is like any other relationship – when we are angry with each other, or happy, or frustrated, we share it with each other. So too can we share our feelings about God with Him, because Jesus became human so that he could relate with us on all levels, even at the level of abuse. That is why we can tell God when we are angry. As long as we are talking to Him, even when it is not about good things, there is still a relationship. As soon as Hanneljé does not want to talk to God at all, she will be in a worse place than she is now.

Similarly, Madsen (2001: 252) asks us to consider an imperfect relationship, with an imperfect God:

What is God really? We imagine Elohim creating the world through words, but God’s other Name is recognized by some bodily sense unamenable to words, like scent. It goes deeper than metaphors, deeper than pictures, right to the root of the brain where the sensations live, the tastes and smells and memories by which we judge our safety and our risk. At the frontal lobes God is creator and commander, mother and nurturer, or any image we choose; in the limbic system YHWH is *my rock, my milk, my rosemary leaf*, and words are short-circuited by the body’s allegiance.

There is no language and no rational way of describing God at the sensory level. If we are now reminded of the point that Emily Lyon (2010: 236-237) makes about how our brains process traumatic memories, and compare her ideas with Madsen’s, we can ask ourselves: *If the things we cannot say about God, that make Him difficult to understand and impossible to describe, and the things that we would rather forget are commingled in the same space in our minds, and bodies, how can we relate to God as loving?* Thus, Madsen’s description of an imperfect God, who needs us to comfort, and teach Him (2010: 242), starts to make sense. Likewise, Hanneljé’s difficulty in making peace with the God she was taught about also makes sense.

Similarly, she questions the Calvinistic roots of her faith and the effect that Calvinism had on her community’s thinking about women, sin, and guilt. Dickie, Ajega, Kobylak and Nixon (2006: 57) have found that adult women’s perception of God is less related to their perceptions of their parents than it is to their sense of self-esteem: however, it is not entirely unrelated (Dickie et al. 2006: 67). There is a specific connection between adult children’s perceptions of their mothers and their perceptions of God. “Conservative, religious women”

are “socialized to hold pride in check” (Dickie et al. 2006: 59). Given what we know about Afrikaner Calvinism, and Hanneltjie’s relationship with her mother, it is no surprise that she questions what she has been taught about God, as well as her own experience of God in her pain.

Therefore, Hanneltjie has explored spiritual pathways to God and to healing outside of the Dutch Reformed Church, by studying other religions. She also explored, if only briefly, Tantric mindfulness, which emphasises the unity of body and mind (Skora 2007a) and an attempt to “reconcile the ‘spirit’ and the ‘flesh’ or pure consciousness and embodied sexuality” (Skora 2007b).

As a result of Hanneltjie’s struggle with God, the three transdisciplinary co-researchers asked questions about our concept of God and whether it is possible for someone like Hanneltjie to think differently about God and in doing so, refigure Him in another, possibly feminine or a-gendered manner. This approach could allow her to think about God without the baggage of the patriarchal history of the Bible and the church, or the association with the male body. There is much debate about the suggestion of refiguring God’s gender, with some theologians being strongly opposed to the use of female pronouns or gender neutral terms (Achte-meier 1993 and Frye 1989). Wells (1995), however, explains that even in biblical times, God was given a feminine face. In the book of Proverbs, among others, God is *Sophia* or ‘wisdom:’ a goddess. In that context, it was an attempt to counter the popularity of other feminine deities of surrounding cultures. “By ascribing the functions of the goddess to Yahweh, and of Yahweh to the female *Hokmah/Sophia*, they were able to speak of the one God of Israel in both female and male imagery” (Wells 1995 :38). That writer then argues that feminists recognise that one needs to bring the Bible into conversation within the contemporary context. Wells (1995: 40-41) explains that feminist authors have found in Jesus the wisdom of the Old Testament, and that “the essential point about the Incarnation is not that God became male, but that God became human in Jesus, fully human.” Thus, it is possible to refigure the femaleness of God, without denying or attempting to rewrite the Bible. Similarly, from within the Dutch Reformed Church, Yolanda Dreyer (1997: 94-96) argues that women will find, in Jesus, a counter-cultural God, who included women in His ministry and chose not to favour men over women. In fact, the project of refiguring God - which Madsen (2010) has declared impossible - should be refigured into a project aimed at acquiring a full understanding of the Bible and its history. This exercise would include remembering Who Jesus is: fully God and fully human. Sarah Coakley moves the argument

even further, by reminding us that the Western concept of the ‘maleness’ of God is culturally and historically bound, and that it may be helpful to think of God as more than our human idea of man or woman. She says (2006: 140): “no longer do I start with the binary building blocks of ‘male’ and ‘female’, but instead with a primary submission in prayer to a form of love that necessarily transcends, and even ruptures, my normal forms of gender understanding” an approach in which God’s ‘gender’ is “rendered spiritually insignificant.”

5.2.4.1 *Poetry: a unique outcome*

Hannetjie has used poetry as a form of creative expression, through which she is able to express deeply felt emotions and concerns that she may not otherwise have been able to express. Her poetry opened channels of communication within herself and with God and allowed her to remain creative, despite great pain. Bartow (2012: 89) tells us about “the power of the poetic imagination to catch hold of reality rather than evade it, to join apprehension with comprehension, and to bridge the gap between immanence and transcendence.” Similarly, Hannetjie’s poetry shows me how she brings together her questions, her fears, pain and despair, while also reaching out to God, in a manner that no amount of conversation could have done for us. In Hannetjie’s poetry Bartow’s (2012:90) words also ring true: “In fact, poetic imagination, often beyond and contrary to the conscious intention of certain poets, can serve as an extraordinary means of grace.” Hannetjie is able to express the depth of both her despair and her faith in poetry. I had the experience of Hannetjie’s poetry that Spies (2012: 2) describes when she says, “Wat met Neruda by die ontwaking van sy digterskap gebeur het, ervaar die gevoelige leser ook by die lees van ‘n goeie gedig: Sy skanse word afgebreek om hom nuut na die werklikheid te laat kyk.”³ My experience of Hannetjie’s reality was transformed when I read her poetry, because of the depth of insight I was able to gain from it. Thus, poetry is a powerful vehicle for Hannetjie, both for exploring her faith and innermost thoughts and feelings, and for expressing them and making them accessible.

³ What happened to Neruda at the birth of his poetry, sensitive readers also experience when they read a good poem: it breaks down their barriers to make them look at reality afresh.

5.2.5 The Dartmoor hare



Figure 5.3: The Dartmoor Hare: *Three Hares with Three Ears*

Finally, throughout our conversation, Hannetjie and I investigated the interrelationship between the various aspects of her life. Like the mythological Dartmoor hares, her life may appear to consist of a number of distinct spheres, which cannot be compartmentalised. Her physical, emotional and spiritual spheres all exist within a state of some confusion and pain, while her intellectual life appears strong. However, the latter does not compensate for the upheaval and confusion in the other areas, despite her best efforts. She expressed a deep desire “om een te wees (to be one),” as she put it, in a succinct and poetic echo of my own assumptions that one can neither separate the various aspects of one’s being from one another, nor can they function independently.

As Entwistle (2009: 142) asserts: “A Christian conceptualization of human personhood as a holistic unity allows us to respect biopsychosocial and spiritual realities, and moreover, to see them as unified rather than bifurcated.” Similarly, Jersild (2008:37) has found that “Biblical scholarship affirms this psychosomatic, holistic view of the human being.” Hannetjie’s desire ‘to be one’ is nothing more than a primal need to function well as a human being; to move beyond what tradition has taught her. Hannetjie’s life has been split

between body and mind, in that she learned to dissociate from her body to survive. Simultaneously, she was taught by Calvinist tradition that the body is sinful and that the spirit must overcome the body, and that issues such as sex and sexuality are not to be discussed. Later in life, this resulted in her focusing all her energy on intellectual pursuits, leaving her emotionally and physically unable to relate to others. However, ‘to be one’ Hanneltjie needs to cross the divide between her mind, body and spirit. Punt (2005: 360) supports this notion in his discussion of body theology, when he states: “Body theology addresses the paradox that while in the course of the history of Christianity the body has been seen as something to overcome in order to receive the joys of heaven, a central conviction of the Christian faith is God becoming embodied as human.”

It is of particular interest then, that it is in Hanneltjie’s brain that the reconnection can be made, since the brain is traditionally perceived as the seat of the intellect. However, if we take seriously what we have learned from occupational therapy so far, and can learn from neurobiology, then the brain is the first place in her body where we can look to understand how she has come to think and feel the way that she does, and how she can become ‘one’ again. Miller-McLemore (2013: 746) points to the “complicated nature of the brain as *matter*,” when she reminds us of the intricate and nuanced relationship between the brain and the body, that the two interact and influence one another, and, ultimately, influence our knowing of the world. Miller-McLemore (2013: 746) reflects on her own experience as a mother, that “certain tactile experiences of mothering vividly relocate thinking in the body.”

If we can develop a proper understanding of the consequences of sexual abuse for Hanneltjie’s thinking and knowing, through traumatising sensory experiences in her body, then this will bring us closer to understanding the rifts between her body, mind and spirit. That understanding will shed light on the subsequent rifts between her and those with whom she is in relationships, including God, her mother, her father, the abuser, possible romantic partners, and others. I believe that it is not only the interrelationship between body, mind and spirit that makes people who they are, but also that this trinity forms only one part of a larger set of interrelated aspects, all of which construct our personhood and our connection with God, Who is also a three-in-one mystery. Punt (2005) rightly points to personhood as embodied, not only biologically, but also politically, culturally, religiously and relationally. From our most basic sensory experiences to our most complex feelings about our parents, and thoughts about God, it is impossible to come to a better understanding of who a person is, without understanding the layered complexity of being. As the sciences have developed and

become increasingly specialised, they have become disconnected. At the same time, there is an increased emphasis on a holistic understanding of people. It is important for theologians to connect with psychologists, doctors, and other practitioners, if they are to understand the whole human being.

5.3. Reflection

It is often recommended that a researcher should first compile a literature review, covering the different key concepts of her research, before entering into the empirical step. In the case of narrative research, however, it makes more sense to complete the empirical step first, so that decisions about the literature can be made, based on the outcomes of the empirical study. Narrative thinkers focus on the primacy of the storyteller who in this research was Hannetjie. As Chené Swart (2013: 26) states:

The Narrative approach is always aware of power relations, and intentionally challenges them by taking the ostensibly ignorant wisdom and knowledges of storytellers as jewels, as moments at which to pause, to be recognised and asked about, never frowned upon or judged. The intention of Narrative practices is to firstly view the storyteller/community as a person/group with endless wisdom, knowledges and gifts in the art of living.

This is why it was very important for me to allow Hannetjie's voice to be the loudest one in this research. Therefore, I waited until after I had heard her tell her story before looking for literature. Furthermore, I allowed myself to be guided by her feedback on my interpretation, as well as the interpretations of the transdisciplinary co-researchers, when making final decisions about which literature to focus on, and which voices to add to the chorus. Thus, Hannetjie was given the power to decide how her story should be heard and which parts of our interpretations she did not agree with, or learn from. The transdisciplinary co-researchers and I were removed from the centre of the research and our so-called 'expertise' became dependent on Hannetjie's own knowledge and expertise about her own life.

My selection of literature was determined first by what I heard from Hannetjie, and second, by what the other co-researchers added; consequently, the resulting list of sources is varied and eclectic. I did not rely on sources from specific disciplines, or look deliberately for literature that could answer my questions; instead, I focused on literature that could add to my understanding of Hannetjie's telling. By following this approach, the 'key concepts' that were identified, emerged primarily from my interactions with Hannetjie and the co-researchers.

5.4. Summary

In this chapter I looked closely at literature that could shed light on the five areas of focus identified in Hannetjie's story. I conducted some further exploration of the transdisciplinary conversation, to determine a way of understanding the complex relationship between spirituality and surviving sexual abuse.

In Hannetjie's story of abuse, we learned about the myriad long-term effects that such trauma can have and we came to understand that it is important to recognise how the body and brain interpret trauma and remember it. Hannetjie also taught us about the ripple effects that abuse has on one's perception of others, our relationships with others and our capacity to persevere and to forgive.

Her identity story taught us how a person's identity is constructed through experience, both physical and social. She became withdrawn and feels betrayed, because her culture did not teach her how to cope. Instead, the cultural constructs within Afrikanerdom around sex, sexuality, abuse, women, and gender roles, have left her confused and hurt. Thus, we are reminded to question culture and to investigate the implicit discourses reflected in our words and actions. However, her identity story has also taught us how a survivor of abuse can become a gentle, empathetic caregiver and a fair employer, who cannot stand injustice.

The third story, about her mother, shows us the deeply rooted connection between mother and daughter. We see how a damaged relationship between the two can have far reaching consequences, that, over the years, can become so deeply entrenched that there seems to be no hope of change. A mother's expectations, her modeling of roles and values, and her own faith play a significant role in her daughter's perception of herself.

Fourthly, Hannetjie's faith story is a complex one. We have learned that the experience of abuse has a significant effect on one's relationship with God. By looking at Hannetjie's poetry, we can see that there are times when she questions God's very existence, and other times, when she calls to God for guidance and solace. Finding solace in nature, and awe in the wonders of creation, while still searching for an understanding of the existence of evil, has led Hannetjie on a journey outside her own religious tradition, and begs the question, *How should the church respond to abuse and to its survivors?*

Finally, the overriding area of focus that has emerged, which will form the singular focus of the next chapter, is that, in order to understand spirituality, one must understand the

unity of spirit, mind, body, and relationships. Following on from this, one must understand how the state of health of one aspect can influence the others.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

“Where am I?”

INSIDE THE MIRROR

“Am I dead?”

THE ANSWER TO THAT, said Death, IS SOMEWHERE BETWEEN NO AND YES.

Esme turned and a billion figures turned toward her.

“When can I get out?”

WHEN YOU FIND THE ONE THAT’S REAL.

“Is this a trick question?”

NO.

Granny looked down at herself.

“This one,” she said.

(Terry Pratchett 1992: 281)

6.1 Introduction

This research was initiated after questions were raised about an adult’s spirituality in the context of surviving childhood sexual abuse and what the relationship between these two aspects of a person’s life may be. In making an in-depth study of Hanneljie’s story, it became increasingly clear that these two issues of spirituality and sexuality cannot be understood in isolation. I worked from the premise that one’s spirituality is integral to one’s whole being (Thomas: 2000), and looked into many aspects of Hanneljie’s story to seek her God-language. I also sought out other language that could be related to spiritual matters, such as morality, ethics, values, and creation, that could allow us a window into her *spiritual* story. I found that her spirituality is so interrelated to her other stories that I felt bogged down and overwhelmed by the many intricate connections. My attempt to separate the inseparable had failed. Consequently I feel the need to take a closer look at the many relationships between her diverse stories. In accordance with the eco-hermeneutic approach to practical theology, I will attempt to show the ecology of her personhood; the manner in which her different stories are not only interrelated, but also interdependent.

In trying to understand the complexity of personhood, it may be helpful to refer to contemporary thinking about the multiplicity of self, and the emergence of self, as opposed to

the now outdated representation of the self as a single, fixed unit. A helpful image to keep in mind is that of a kaleidoscope. This is a children’s toy that is usually made up of a small compartment filled with coloured beads, glass, buttons, or even a marble. This compartment is attached to the end of a mirrored tube through which one can look at the changing colours, as the compartment is rotated. The effect of the reflections of different shapes and colours, as one turns the kaleidoscope in front of one’s eye is of an ever changing mandala-like pattern that is often breathtakingly beautiful and never the same twice in a row. With each rotation, the shapes shift and change. The colours change as well, as the various shapes overlap and affect those around them. For example, where a red shape and a blue shape overlap, the combined effect is of a newly formed purple shape. On the next rotation, however, the beads will shift and the red may overlap with yellow, creating an orange shape.



Figure 6.1: A Kaleidoscope image

Similarly, in current thinking about personhood, the self is also shifting and multifaceted. As Pamela Cooper-White (2011: 143) explains, every person is “a network of self-states” and that person comes with his or her own perspectives, emotions and thinking that have been formed over time through experiences. By way of elaboration, she adds:

“These self-states and internal personalities, further, do not function as autonomous, structured ‘beings’, but continue to grow and change in unconscious dynamic interaction, both among themselves internally and in connection with other persons beyond the ‘self’” (2011: 143).

One question for which there have been many proposed solutions, relates to the unity of the multiple self, often at the cost of multiplicity (Turner 2011: 131-132). If the self is multiple and emergent, is there a core self? What makes it possible, despite the multiplicity, to say, ‘This is me’? If we accept multiplicity, does this mean that we accept fragmentation?

Turner (2011: 128-129) speaks of the importance of acknowledging the self as narrative in nature, in order to understand how a multiple collection of selves can be experienced as a continuous self, even if it does not exist: “The construction of these stories, the process of narratization itself, encourages a sense of personal continuity and singularity – of having been a single continuous person through different relationships, environments and transformations of self.” His thinking certainly supports the concept in narrative theory, of a person being able to choose a preferred story and, in essence, live out an alternative self (Swart 2013:49).

Turner (2011: 136) explains that multiplicity, rather than unity, is a natural “adaptive ability.” To him, it is essentially unproblematic. He places emphasis on the narrative aspect of multiple selves for a person’s ability to create a sense of a singular self by making meaning of events and by connecting stories. Pamela Cooper-White (2011: 153) describes the “core self” as a function of multiplicity, in that selves are essentially multiple, but able to perceive a “unified, coherent sense of ‘I’” in the midst of multiplicity. She (2011: 154-155) focuses on the ethical implications of this approach, in that thinking of the core self as being decentred, means that it is flexible and changeable. The person is able to choose from a multiplicity of selves, to create a preferred self. Thus we are able to learn and change. This, too, resonates with the narrative concept of choosing a preferred story. Hetty Zock (2011: 177) explains that she supports Hermans’s (1996) theory of the dialogical self as a multiplicity of “voices speaking in the self” (Zock 2011: 169) as well as the “basic narrative character” (2011: 168) of the theory. She (2011: 177) encourages pastoral caregivers to “focus on the ‘I’ as the experiential and reflexive center of the person as the starting point for the search for moral and spiritual meaning.”

In my reading and interpreting of Hanneltjie's story in this chapter, it has become clear that the multiple "voices speaking in the self" (Zock 2011: 169) come from within and without; what have been described as "external I-positions" and "internal I-positions" (2011: 169). All of these speak at the same time, to form the self: "Yet all the voices that sound in the self are colored at the same time by one's personal character and life history, and by the cultural groups one is part of or is in touch with." (Zock 2011: 169)

In addition to understanding the multiple self, it is important to consider personhood as emergent. Consider, again, the concept of choosing a preferred story. With each story chosen and each new layer added to the self, it grows and changes. With each new story comes a potential new cast of characters, who change and add to it. Thus, the story grows in richness and fullness. No new layer can obliterate a previous one but instead, enters into a relationship with it, affecting both the old story and the new. "In other words, the person is a complex: not something unitary and simple that has complexity or doesn't, but an effect of a vast multiplicity of embedded relations... Like all complex, self-organising systems, the person emerges in relation to its others." (Keller 2011: 303). The self does not exist in a bubble, but as an interwoven part of a larger whole of relationships with other complex parts that are in constant flux as they affect and influence one another, and emerge anew with each interaction.

Hanneltjie's personhood is shaped by all of the "voices within the self" (Zock 2011), as they speak together, and against each other. One of those voices is the voice of her spirit while another voice is the voice of God. These cannot be heard on their own, however, as they are intermingled with many other voices from inside and outside. Those other voices all have an influence and can be heard as well. They include: her mind and body; her family and community; the abuser; the books she has read; the poetry she has written; nature itself; the therapists she has consulted; her clients and co-workers; her different conceptions of herself; and her lovers.

A discussion of Hanneltjie's story now follows, through the lens of the manifold interrelations it reveals. I have divided it into three collections of stories which include the relationships that Hanneltjie is most deeply "embedded" (Keller 2011: 303) in. Specifically, I will examine the relationships between her various stories, with her family, with the immediate community, with the abuser, and with God. Some aspects may be evident in more

than one area, as they are all constantly in a relationship, moving, affecting, changing, and emerging.

6.2. Stories about Hannetjie

The first three interrelations between Hannetjie's multiplicity of selves that will be discussed, are the relationships between her body story, her mind story, and her spirit story. These will be discussed within the context of inputs received from the transdisciplinary study, especially from the field of occupational therapy, as well as insights gained from literature, regarding embodiment and the role of the brain in all three spheres. It is important to be aware that, from a holistic, embodied perspective, the conceptual divisions between body, mind and spirit are artificial products of modernistic thinking. Hannetjie's body stories, mind stories and spirit stories are conflicted, because, in her telling, she has revealed that she feels disembodied. In other words, the division has become real for her and it feels unnatural. It has caused problems for her.

Firstly, however, I need to explain how I distinguish between body stories, mind stories and spirit stories, as far as possible, within the context of this discussion. Jeeves' (2014: 203) concept of "duality without dualism" may prove helpful here as he explains: "As far as people are concerned, the primary ontological term is 'person', the individual subject of whom we assert two types of predicates, mental and physical." To this, I would like to add the spiritual predicate as a third part of this "primary ontological term."

In referring to Hannetjie's body stories, I am concerned with the stories that tell of her physical body and physical experiences, including sensory experiences and how the brain processes them on a biological level. Hannetjie's mind stories are those that she tells about her intellect, identity, conscious choices and thinking. The mind is a larger, more complex thing than the brain, and much debate and research have been entered into, regarding the relationship between the two (Scruton 2011; Maiese 2011). When I mention her spirit stories, then I refer to those tellings that can be connected to her relationship with God, including moral and ethical stances and her expressions of faith. Tanyi (2002: 506) defines spirituality as follows: "Spirituality is a personal search for meaning and purpose in life, which may or may not be related to religion. It entails connection to self-chosen and or religious beliefs, values, and practices that give meaning to life, thereby inspiring and motivating individuals to achieve their optimal being."

The identification of those stories that relate to God, her religious life, values and beliefs, faith, hope, healing and empowerment, as Tanyi (2002) mentioned, plays an important role in this interpretation; after all, these elements all point to her spiritual story. It must be noted that these narratives will not be dealt with as individual stories, but in relationship to one another.

Hannetje's body stories are stories of conflict, as it is through her body and her physical experiences that she was violated and abused. Her senses and brain responded to the trauma in such a way that all later physical touch became difficult to process (Wilson, Hansen & Li et al. 2000; see also 5.2.1 in this dissertation). As such, she distanced herself, feeling increasingly disembodied. On a physical level, she closed herself off from sensory experience, avoiding physical touch, as tactile defensiveness is often an effect of sexual abuse (Kinnealey, Oliver & Wilbarger 1995: 449). This has had far-reaching consequences for her in terms of life choices, in view of her conscious decisions to avoid physical touch and sensory input to minimise anxiety (Pfeiffer & Kinnealey 2003). She has done this so well that she has become largely unaware of her senses. Instead, she has preferred to live out stories of the mind, focusing on an intellectual, academic career, and pursuing solitary activities such as reading in her private time. Furthermore, even in her attempts to understand the abuse, as well as her own sexuality and spirituality, she has chosen intellectual pathways such as studying Comparative Religion and making a survey of different religions' approaches to sexuality. She also feels betrayed by her body, because it became aroused during the instance when the abuser raped her, further reinforcing her distrust in her physical reality. The years of abuse have left her with contradictory body stories. On the one hand, she acknowledges that she has 'normal' desires, but on the other, her body does not react the way her partners would like. Sexual dysfunction of one kind or another is often an effect of sexual abuse (Fleming, Mullen, Sibthorpe & Bammer 1999). As she attempts to process the trauma, she has nightmares and sleepless nights, affecting her daily physical functioning, while serving her intellectual pursuits. She does not get enough sleep, but she has plenty of time to study at night. In her spirit story, it is evident that her physical aversion to touch, or tactile defensiveness, makes it difficult for her to worship in a full church, as she feels nervous when she is surrounded by people. Avoiding crowds is common behaviour among sufferers of tactile defensiveness (Heller 2002: 4).

In an attempt to bring her body story back into conversation with her mind and spirit stories, she has explored Tantric mindfulness practices; these are essentially spiritual

practices, aimed at raising one's levels of awareness, also on a sensory level, because Tantra is based on the principle that "nothing exists that is not divine" (Wallis 2012: 468). According to that principle, even the most ordinary things such as being aware of the temperature in the room, can connect a person to the divine. Her own attempt has failed, however, and she has decided to leave matters as they are.

She tells a story of determination and will power, which has translated into a very successful academic career, in one story of the mind, as well as significant weight loss, in another account of her body.

Writing poetry is an intellectual exercise that she is fond of, and this has also served a deeply spiritual and emotional purpose. Her poetry is a creative outlet and also serves as a vehicle for exploring issues of faith, and for entering into conversation with God (Gillie 1999; Tsur 2003). Similarly, her favourite choice of exercise is to take long walks in a nearby nature reserve, which addresses a physical need of her body, while allowing her time to contemplate nature. It is in nature that she often finds confirmation of her faith and inspiration for her poetry. In the following two poems she employs a large amount of natural imagery to describe God and to relate to the Divine (Only English translations provided, for brevity's sake):

Purify

Oh, unquiet spirit
Of delusions and delirium
Storm ahead and shake your waters over me
Let your lightning cleave through my being
And scorch the worn places
down to raw, naked purity.

Ease my pain with
Your thunderous vibration
And end my despair with your wind.
Purify my vision
And give, after the storm,
The quiet.

Atheist

Is there a God?
Who is he and where does he live?
There is no God!
This I believe freely.

Ball of fire far above
With scorching heat rays
How do you do it,
Achieving such a great deed?

Tiny, pure flowers
With soft, fragile petals
And bright green stems,
Soft scent and fine veins-
Human hands have no part here.

I, once great, proud atheist
Have fallen and failed!
God's creation made a way through my heart –
I believe that God must exist.

Hannetjie has made a conscious effort to forgive her mother and the abuser, but she has not yet succeeded in forgiving herself. On an intellectual level, she understands the need to forgive all three persons, and has found liberation in forgiving the others. Here we should note Tanyi's (2002: 506) reference to forgiveness as an aspect of spirituality and healing. However, Hannetjie may understand the reasons why she should forgive herself, but she is unable to, feeling betrayed by her body.

Through her academic pursuits, she has come to understand that she need not be a slave to the traditions of the Dutch Reformed Church, as far as some of those traditions have made her feel marginalised and oppressed. As such, she rejoices in knowing that she can reinterpret the Bible for herself and seek God in other traditions that make sense to her, such as the principles of Buddhism. However, she is deeply concerned by the manner in which she was raised within this tradition, and how her mother's deeply held beliefs affected her own troubled relationship with God (De Roos et al. 2004; Swart 2013: 31). Lizette, the Dutch Reformed minister, mentioned, in her transdisciplinary contribution, that it may be valuable for Hannetjie to come to a better understanding of the other side of sin: forgiveness and grace (Watson, Morris & Hood 1988).

Lastly, in seeking recovery, she has searched for ways to bring the different body, mind and spirit stories into conversation, and to reconnect with her physicality and emotions. She has done this by studying matters of faith and sexuality academically, and by engaging with God in poetry and elsewhere. An aspect of our relationship with God is revealed when we seek and experience healing or recovery, as Jesus is the bringer of healing and liberation, through forgiveness (Busch 2010: 92). In one of her last emails to me, she honoured me by sharing some of her academic writing with me, specifically in Comparative Religion. I was interested to see how she had compiled a broad collection of information that shows how sex and sexuality are perceived in the various religions.

6.3. Stories about other people

The second collection of interrelated stories to be addressed are those that Hanneltjie shared about her interpersonal relationships; these stories tell of how her personhood is affected by others, including her family, her community and the abuser. They will be examined in the context of the narrative and social constructionist concepts of the co-construction of reality and “taken-for-granted beliefs” (Swart 2013: 3), as well as the ethical implications of social Trinitarianism (Irvin 2011).

From an ecological perspective, Hanneltjie’s family stories are embedded within, and interdependent with, her community stories, in that her family forms a part of her community (Bronfenbrenner 1977; Visser 2007: 106). As such, there are many points of interaction between family and community. Firstly, her family forms part of the larger Afrikaner community and her family members constructed their identity within that tradition. At the same time, her family forms part of the Dutch Reformed Church, shaping their values around the Calvinist ideals of faith and gender in particular. In terms of gender, her mother has played a particularly important role, raising her with certain ideals of femininity and motherhood, including a tacit assumption that women do not talk about, or even acknowledge, their sexuality. This has had devastating consequences for their relationship, as well as for Hanneltjie’s status in the community. Women who do not marry and have children are often marginalised in the Afrikaner community, which values marriage and motherhood (Steyn 2004). She has felt isolated and less favoured by her family, because she has remained unmarried and has had no children, choosing a career instead. Her mother appears to favour her sister-in-law, who has assumed the more traditional roles of wife and mother. Another layer of marginalisation within her family and community, is the underlying patriarchy and sexism that is the other face of the Dutch Reformed, Afrikaner feminine ideal (Du Pisani 1996). Her brother, the only son, was favoured by both parents. The combination of the notion that women do not talk about sex, and the taken-for-granted belief that girls serve men (see Swart 2013: 11) rendered her incapable of talking to her family about the man, her father’s friend, who was abusing her. The fear of judgement that comes with being raised within the context of original sin compounded the matter, as she already knew that her mother would blame her when someone else had done something to harm her.

The abuser’s valued role as a member of their close community, a friend of the family, gave him power over her and intensified her experience of trauma. The level of

perceived betrayal and its subsequent influence on a child's ability to trust is affected by the role that the abuser plays in the child's life, depending on whether he is a trusted adult or not (Heitritter & Vought 2006:33). In addition, his physical presence in the immediate area, and at family gatherings, meant that he was able to exert pressure and influence her thinking long after the abuse ended.

From Hanneltjie's side, she has worked hard to forgive both her mother and the abuser. She has gained much insight about her own family and community and made peace with much of what has made her life difficult, although not all. She knows that she will never be able to confront her mother or the abuser and is satisfied with the level of "disjunctive forgiveness" (Helm et al. 2005; see also 5.2.1.1 of this dissertation) that she has been able to grant both of them. She still feels hurt by her parents' habit of favouring her brother and her mother's lack of support for her academic achievements.

Beyond her family circle, Hanneltjie's interpersonal relationships are also difficult, and she has very few friends. She has given up on romantic connections, having had no success yet. In each attempt, she has either avoided intimacy or found that she was unable to connect with her partners or to respond to them physically, as is often the case for survivors (Noll, Trickett & Putnam 2003). She describes herself as a loner and mentioned only one friend, who, at the time of the interviews did not want to talk to her because she, herself, was going through a difficult time. It is clear that her relationship with the abuser and the effects of the abuse have had a significant influence on her interpersonal relationships, since her resultant sensory defensiveness makes it very difficult for her to interact with others (Heller 2002: 115-116).

On the other hand, she has fairly successful professional relationships, because she has a strong work ethic and a sense of fairness. Moreover, her ethics have enabled her to form valued connections with vulnerable people and animals that she supported, ironically, mostly as a result of her own pain from the abuse. Although these are not friendships as such, she finds meaning in these relationships, where she is able to help others (Stidham, Draucker, Martsof & Mullen 2012). Lastly, she has had a number of relationships with various therapists, with varied degrees of success. On the whole, however, she reports having grown from some of those relationships, in terms of learning to cope with the after effects of the abuse; one notable exception was the Tantric guru who appeared to have over-stepped the boundaries. Despite this setback, however, she appeared to be more comfortable in her own

skin in her last communication with me. She tells of no longer experiencing the intense anxiety that she used to experience in social settings. Although she feels that she will never be as comfortable as she would like to be, she knows that she has grown.

6.4 Stories about God

The third collection of stories to be discussed are those she shared about God and her relationship with God. Hanneljje was raised in the Dutch Reformed Church and so she grew up with the Heidelberg Catechism and the Apostles' Creed as reference points of her concept of God (Busch 2010: xxii); these were in addition to what she learned from her own experiences in relationship with God and others inside and outside the church, and the Scripture. Against this background, my discussion of her relationship with God will be based on the thinking about God that has shaped the Dutch Reformed Church. I shall keep in mind ideas already explored about the self as multiple and relational, as well as the narrative and social constructionist emphasis on relationality. Thus, I shall attempt to discuss Hanneljje's relationship with God in the context of Moltmann and his contemporaries' theology: here, God is conceptualised as communal and relational, and emphasis is placed on lived experience of God's self-revelation. The understanding of the reciprocity in human relationships in social constructionist thinking (Van der Ven 2002:302) is congruent with the mutuality expressed in the Social Trinity. Simultaneously, the Narrative imperative to learn from lived experience (Kramp 2008:108) fits well with the ideal of learning about God through revelation in history and experience. As mentioned in Chapter 5, it is accepted in social Trinitarian thinking that one comes to know God through one's relationships and lived experience of God's revelation. "...it is not the mind knowing and loving itself that is the analogy of life in the Trinity, but our knowing and loving others, and ultimately God, in the world and in history, that points to the plural reality of God's inner life" (Phan 2011: 194).

Having established these ideas as the basis of the discussion, and knowing Hanneljje's relationship with God to be fraught with questions and contradictions, it is already clear that Hanneljje's God-stories are exceedingly complex. I intend, however, to use Hanneljje's lived experience, as described in her stories, to look for the God-talk and related clues that may point us to the working of God, or lack thereof, in her life. Such clues may include references to the church or the Bible; to religious or spiritual practices; to values or ethics; and to social Trinitarian principles, such as those based on 1 John 4:12 "No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and His love is made complete in us" (NIV).

Before undertaking the task, however, there is a need to define the concept of the Trinity; this will help us in understanding the context within which Hanneltjie's God-stories are told, which is the context of the Afrikaner, Dutch Reformed Church. Theologians have spent many years and much thought on attempts to define the Trinity and I do not propose to add to those attempts; indeed I do not even fully understand their ideas. Nor do I wish to enter into the debate around the nature of the Trinity. Nevertheless I will attempt to provide a working definition of the concept of the social Trinity, based on the work of respected Reformed theologians, in order to understand one theological approach to the multiplicity of self. Turner (2001:200) refers to recent theologians' explanations of "the *imago Dei* in as much as it relates to the single, autonomous, multifaceted individual." To begin with, I stand on the shoulders of Jürgen Moltmann (1980: 174-175) and Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen (2011), who explain that the Trinity is a social three-in-oneness, based on "mutual indwelling" and "fellowship." As such, the three persons of the Trinity are defined by their relationships with one another, more so than with the world. Thus, the Father is the Father, because of the Son, and the Son is the Son, because he has a Father. Sarah Coakley (2006: 137) tells us that the Father can be more closely identified as a loving, compassionate caregiver, rather than a monarch or patriarch. There is mutuality and equality in the relationship. Similarly, the Spirit gains identity from the relationship with the Father and the Son: "it is in these relationships that they are persons. Being as persons in this respect means existing-in-relationship" (Kärkkäinen 2011: 227). Further, the Trinity is described as a unity in movement: the Father, as Creator, made the universe in an act of creative love. When the Son was made flesh and sacrificed in that same love and rose to the throne, the Kingdom was passed on to Him. Finally, the Spirit remained with humanity, as the outpouring of the love in which everything was created. Peter Phan (2011: 201) states: "the Father has that which is given but remaining the ever incomprehensible Mystery, the Son as the uttered Mystery, and the Spirit as the Love of this Mystery and his Word enabling us to welcome this divine self-gift." At the risk of over-simplification, when I look for the presence of God in Hanneltjie's story, I associate the Father with Creation and with God's love as communicated to humans through the giving of the Son. The Son, "the uttered Word" is begotten and borne by the Father and expresses His love in His salvific act of sacrifice and ultimate forgiveness. Thus He is revealed in forgiveness and in healing in our lives, as He brought healing. It is through this act of sacrifice and forgiveness, that humans may also identify God as Father, as Jesus became our brother (Moltmann 1980: 164). The Holy Spirit is poured out after the Son rose to the throne, and is associated with "animating the life of the church" (Hunt 2011: 371), with being God's

breath, and is best experienced in communion (Hunt 2011: 399) with others, because God is love.

Hannetjie's telling of her story reveals a conflicted relationship with God, for various reasons. Firstly, the abuse has left her wondering about whether God is truly loving. Secondly, within the Afrikaner, Calvinistic tradition, the patriarchal conception of God, as she calls Him "the God of the Old Testament", features strongly in her telling, as she makes a connection between this conception of God and her own experience of abuse; of a distant God Who does not love us. She does not experience God as the compassionate Mother in Moltmann's (1980) theology. It is for exactly this reason that Moltmann (1980: 164-165) and feminist theologians (Coakley 2006: 137) have questioned the patriarchal conception of God. Her experience of her mother's focus on original sin reinforces this image of God as vengeful. As such, even in her poetry, she expresses a need for forgiveness: "To follow another path, rather than betray you again." Thirdly, she holds on to God as Creator, although this image does little to allow her to experience God's love, but rather God's might. She loves nature and is fascinated by evolutionary ideas of adaptation, which allow her to acknowledge God's existence, although only as Creator, as is evident in the poem, *Atheist*. Lizette, in particular, when making her contribution to the transdisciplinary conversation, expressed concern that focusing on God as Creator only, does not reveal whether Hannetjie has a personal, intimate connection with God.

Further, if we turn to social Trinitarian thinking, regarding our lived experience of God, then this creates more questions than it answers. If we are indeed intended to witness God's love through our experience of others' love for us (Irvin 2011: 399-402), then it comes as no surprise to find that Hannetjie does not identify with a loving God, after all, she has felt largely isolated from her family and peers for most of her life, and was abused by a trusted adult. How can she make a personal connection, if she has not experienced God's nurturing love (Moltmann 1980: 164)? How can she know liberation and freedom through Jesus Christ (Hunt 2011: 374), if she feels condemned? If she feels that God is distant, how can she hold on to the nearness of Jesus' incarnation as one of us (Moltmann 1980: 120)? Feeling isolated and misunderstood, how can she know the love of the Holy Spirit that should pour forth from the Body of Christ, the church (Phan 2011: 371)? There are narratives about God that may be told in the church and in theology, but these are not present in Hannetjie's story.

This section was introduced with an explanation of the social Trinitarian principles and an undertaking to search for the presence of God in Hannetjie's story. Although I have identified a number of areas where God appears to be absent, it is by no means the whole picture. The outpouring of God's "boundless love" (Kärkkäinen 2011: 226), is evident in her story. Hannetjie is able to live out strong values and she express empathy and love, in the manner in which she conducts herself at work and in her service to vulnerable people and animals. By doing this, she is able to express the love that she appears not to have received from many others, based on the information she has given. In her suffering, she is able to identify with others who have suffered, and holds dear the values of fairness and integrity. She is also able to experience the liberation of forgiveness of others as well as liberation from guilt, in knowing that she does not have to interpret the Bible or think of her religious life in the way she was taught as a child. Thus, it appears that God's forgiveness and liberation are present in her life. Her creative gift for writing, from the Creator, remains a channel of communication with God. She is able to find hope and meaning through these things. Does she know God better than is apparent at first?

6.5 A multiplicity of stories

The three collections of interrelated stories that have been discussed, all also interrelate with one another. In addition, the various stories within each collection all interrelate with each other, in an ever-moving dance. If we imagine a dance floor, as seen from above, then we see that the dancers begin in a set pattern, three in a group: however, as the music continues, the patterns shift and change, as each dancer moves around, momentarily partnering with one dancer, then with another. Sometimes, they dance in a big circle, sometimes in odd combinations of four and five, or six and three. This dance floor analogy represents the collections of stories that make up a person's selfhood: thus, they all interact with and constantly affect each other, sometimes making patterns that make sense and at other times making no apparent sense.

If we consider the relationships between Hannetjie's different stories, namely, herself, God, and others then we come to see that her relationships with others, especially her family and the abuser, have had a profound influence on her relationship not only with God but also with her own person and with the wider community. The abuse has caused her to experience God as unloving and distant. Her relationship with her mother is strained and distant as well: this is as a result of not only the taken-for-granted beliefs that are perpetuated in the

Afrikaner, Calvinist community (Swart 2013: 11), but also, and in combination with, the abuse, which she is unable to disclose to her family. Her inability to disclose, with the consequent lack of social support, may have also worsened the effects of the abuse, as she felt isolated and under stress, resulting in more frequent nightmares (Steine et al. 2011: 1836). A further complication in her relationship with her mother, that also has spiritual implications for Hannetjie, is that she blamed her mother and carried that added burden for many years. In the same way that she felt that God had left her to be harmed, she felt that her mother should have known about her pain, and seen the signs.

Her relationship with the abuser has had a huge impact on her relationship with her person: it made her feel disembodied; it removed her from her own feelings and emotions; estranged her from her own 'normal' sexuality; and drove her to lead a largely cerebral life. Conversely, her disengagement from her own person has led her to disengage from the community, making few friends, avoiding groups of people, and staying away from romantic relationships. In most of her relationships, but in romantic relationships especially, the manner in which her brain processed the trauma may have caused cognitive confusion (Finkelhor 1990: 328) about what love looks and feels like, making it difficult for her body to discriminate between inappropriate and appropriate touch (Ayers 2005: 109), leading to impoverished relationships (Heller 2002: 115-116).

As much as she feels disembodied, she also feels distant from God. Spiritually, she has built her faith around God as Creator, but, since she is emotionally disengaged, she is unable to forgive herself, despite being able to visualise this on a mental level. She is, however, able to engage with God on an intellectual level in her studies and in poetry. Uniquely, in spite of what seems like an overwhelming case for complete disengagement from the world, Hannetjie is able to let love flow from her, in the form of a strong sense of justice and fairness, as well as deep empathy with those who are suffering. She has also forgiven both her mother and the abuser, despite being unable to forgive herself. In this, her intellect has helped her to reason out why it would make sense to forgive others, and liberate herself in the process.

Ironically, this same capacity to reason the matter out has proved to be lacking in her efforts to forgive herself. Although she shows God's love to others, her own life, based on the version of the story she has told me, appears to be largely without love and she still struggles to love herself. She is concerned that the Afrikaner Calvinist community may have had an

influence on her, in that her mother placed emphasis on original sin and blaming oneself for whatever misfortunes may come. Furthermore, her religious community's discourses around sex and sexuality also had an impact on her relationship with herself and may have contributed to the guilt she feels about her body's natural response to being raped.

This brief discussion illustrates that it is possible to re-read Hanneltjie's story time and again, and find more and more complex relationships between the various stories that make up the collection. Hanneltjie's stories are interrelated and a confirmation of social Trinitarian thinking about humans being made in the image of God. Irvin (2011: 399) states that: "Being made in the image of God means that human beings are made to be in communion." Furthermore, it shows us that the various stories of a person cannot be isolated from the whole. Each part and each role-player in that person's life contribute to the whole. "One gains one's personality by giving oneself to one's counterpart; thus identity is gained in separation from, yet also dependence on, the other" (Kärkkäinen 2011: 231). Turner (2001: 200-201) also asserts that: "the substantive individual cannot be separated from his or her being-in-relation."

However, Turner (2001: 201) takes his argument further by explaining that this "substantive individual" is not static; on the contrary, there is a "dynamic process of self-organization at work," which he describes in narrative terms. The many selves are integrated through a process of "narratization" (Turner 2011: 128). Turner also (2001: 202) states: "Such a narrative synthesizes the synchronic and diachronic elements of the 'me' into a coherent, unified whole." Thus, as a person constructs narratives that describes their 'me', each new narrative is added to the previous ones, connecting to and relating to the previous ones. "Personhood involves the continuous 'updating' of the person in the light of new experience; and, thus, the self must be conceived in dynamic terms" (Turner 2001: 204). Hence, my use of a room full of dancers as a metaphor for the self. There is movement between the stories of the self that brings people to a new understanding of themselves and new stories about themselves, with each new experience. Furthermore, in constructing narratives about their various selves, people become the authors of their lives, which means that they have the freedom to choose preferred narratives (Turner 2001 & 2007; Swart 2013). In Hanneltjie's case, for example, she has exercised her freedom in choosing to believe that the Bible is open to interpretation and that she does not have to agree with everything she was taught in church.

Schrag and Ramsey's (1994: 134) explanation of transversality comes to mind: "the phenomena at issue display an extending over and lying across that effects convergence without coincidence, the achievement of points of contact without solidifying into a modal identity." The various stories that influence who Hanneljie is, form layers that overlay, overlap, sometimes meet and sometimes do not meet, so that there are areas that make sense and areas that do not; this scenario accords with our analogy of a kaleidoscope which was presented at the start of this chapter. As the shapes and colours move and change, so will the complete image move and change. However, the different shapes do not meld together and so they will always be mobile. Referring also to our earlier analogy of the dancers on the dance floor, they will move and change position and affect other dancers' movements, creating a whole, without becoming one dancer. This raises three questions: (1) Hanneljie's collection of stories is like a dance troupe that is out of step. Some of the dancers are injured and some are not dancing in harmony. How could an understanding of the multiplicity of self help someone like Hanneljie to bring the dancers back into step? (2) Is it possible to understand the multiplicitous, emergent qualities of personhood from the perspective of what I would like to call *narrative transversality*? (3) In other words, would it be helpful, in pastoral care and counselling, to facilitate a conversation between different self-narratives, to shed light on how they inform and shape each other? For example, the 'Hanneljie-who-writes-beautiful-poetry' could have something to share with the 'Hanneljie-who-struggles-to-communicate-with-her-mother' about expressing herself.

6.6 Reflection

The rationale behind writing this chapter was to strive towards a clearer understanding of why it is difficult to isolate spirituality as an aspect of a persons' life, and then to look at it in isolation. With this in mind, a thickened description of Hanneljie's story was written, as a fifth iteration of the original interviews. On this occasion, the focus was on the interrelatedness of the various stories of her life. However, as mentioned earlier in this chapter, this is by no means a complete representation of Hanneljie's personhood. Rather, it illustrates the interconnectedness of the stories that make up the continuous, multiple self. It is possible to delve into and search ever deeper for further connections; to find new threads and pull them to see which other threads they are connected to. In the process, I have read and wondered about the multiple, emergent self.

I now propose that one may turn to transversal rationality, as described by Van Huyssteen (2006) and Schrag and Ramsey (1994), as a starting point for understanding personhood not only as multiple, but also as transversal. I have used transversal rationality as a means for hearing the various voices in a transdisciplinary conversation, both when they are in consensus and when they are not. Might it be possible to use a similar approach to hearing the voices of a person's multiple "internal I-positions" and "external I-positions" (Zock 2011: 169)? May this be a way to understand more of the manifold aspects of self, as these emerge through the course of a person's life, in the way that the person's narratives interact?

6.7 Summary

After I conducted a detailed exploration of Hanneljie's story, from a transdisciplinary perspective, as well as through relevant literature, I came to realise that it is futile to attempt to understand Hanneljie's spirituality as it relates to her past history of abuse. Instead, I needed to examine her personhood from a holistic, ecological perspective, taking into consideration all aspects of her multiple selves from within and without. Therefore, I approached her personhood as three collections of stories that she has told, each interrelated within itself and with the other collections. First, I examined the interrelationships between the stories she tells about herself, in terms of body narratives, mind narratives and spirit narratives. Secondly, I discussed interpersonal relationships with her family, the community and the abuser. Thirdly, I discussed the influence of God. Finally, the relationship between the many different stories was addressed.

Having reflected on this process, I now pose the question of whether it may be helpful to employ transversal reasoning as a lens through which to study personhood in its multiplicity and emergence; to look at the narrative transversality of the various selves. Hanneljie expresses the desire "to be one," to feel less fragmented or disembodied. Turner (2007: 12) writes: "self-fragmentation is understood as a disruption of a person's sense of continuity precisely because of the impact it has upon a person's sense of being one and the same person over time"; and, in Hanneljie's case, within herself. Might it be useful to her, to see that desired 'oneness' not as a unification, but rather as a harmonisation, as bringing the dancers into step by getting them to talk to one another? She is fascinated with nature's ability to adapt to changing circumstances, so it may interest her to see her stories from a similar perspective, in that their multiplicity and changeability are "means of coping with a complex world", that it is a "natural, even adaptive, ability to switch between alternative

modes of being” (Turner 2007: 14-15). The same author (2007: 16-17), then explains that “A single person, of course, can tell a variety of stories about his or her life” that “allows someone to recount the transition from one self-image and one experience of self to another.” I wish to propose that, in the context of pastoral care, it would be possible not only to ‘recount transition,’ which comes across as a linear process, but also to explore narrative transversality; in other words, to teach people how to ‘look into the kaleidoscope’ and to see the interaction between narratives for their beauty and endless possibilities.

CHAPTER 7

FINAL REFLECTION AND QUESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

7.1. Introduction

Finally, the last step in this research journey is to reflect back on what was done, in order to look forward to what may be done in future. Thus, using Heitink’s hermeneutical circle (Figure 7.1) as a guiding framework, I shall reflect on the previous six chapters, with a focus on how postfoundational, social constructionist, and narrative principles were applied. Furthermore, I shall reflect on what Hanneltjie has taught us, with the aim of considering further questions for future thinking and research.

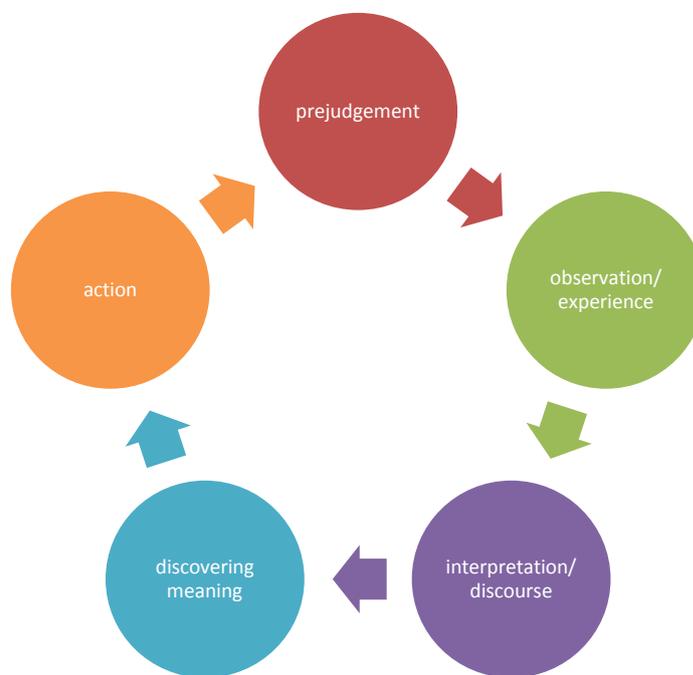


Figure 7.1: Heitink's Hermeneutical Circle

With the hermeneutical circle as a starting point, I shall reflect on the steps taken to tell Hanneltjie’s story and to learn from her. The following table contains an overview of the discussion:

Table 7.1: Overview of reflection

Movement in the circle	Steps taken
Prejudgement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Questions were asked about spirituality and sexual abuse. • Existing assumptions and knowledge were discussed. • The paradigmatic context, which determined the approach to research, was described.
Observation/Experience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>First telling:</i> Hanneltjie's story was heard and transcribed.
Interpretation/Discourse	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Second telling:</i> I wrote my telling of Hanneltjie's story, and organised it into areas of focus. • Hanneltjie read my telling and gave me feedback. • <i>Third telling:</i> The transdisciplinary co-researchers also read my telling and interacted with me and with each other. • Hanneltjie responded to the other co-researchers' input. • <i>Fourth telling:</i> Based on Hanneltjie's story, voices from literature were heard, to thicken the interpretation and explore discourses that were revealed.
Discovering meaning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Fifth telling:</i> Hanneltjie's story was revisited, based on new insights.
Action	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New insights will lead to further questions.

7.2 Prejudgement.

This research was initiated following my reading of Ganzevoort and Roeland's (2009) article, entitled '*All things work together for good?* *Theodicy and Posttraumatic Spirituality*' in which they posed the question: "How is posttraumatic spirituality narratively construed and what are the positive factors influencing a healthy or adequate role of spirituality in the coping process?" (2009: 189). After reading this article, I became interested in the spirituality of women who have survived childhood sexual abuse, in particular in my own context: Afrikaner, Dutch Reformed culture. Thus, I posed a new question: What is the relationship between women's spirituality and their survival of childhood sexual abuse?

Firstly, however, I had to know what the assumptions and existing knowledges are concerning spirituality and sexual abuse. I had to understand why sexual abuse could be described as trauma, and why there could be a relationship between spirituality and sexual abuse. For that purpose, I explored the following concepts: trauma; sex and sexual health; sexual abuse; and spirituality. I also had to know what assumptions have been made about women in the Afrikaner, Dutch Reformed culture, and what that could mean with relation to sex and sexuality.

I learned that trauma can be described as the long-lasting effects of being confronted with something that posed a serious threat to a person's life or to their sense of being (Ganzevoort 2008; Dale 1999; Southwick & Charney 2004). Sexual health is an essential part

of personhood, that forms a part of people's natural need for nurturing touch (Tronick 1995; Routasalo & Isola 1996). A healthy sexuality is well informed, consensual, and nurturing, which means that a person engaging in sexual acts, whether verbal, physical, or otherwise, should feel safe and loved (Robinson et al. 2002; WHO 2006). Therefore, when an adult violates a child's sense of being, by abusing their power over the child, to force that child into a sexual relationship of any description, this behaviour can be construed as abusive, and traumatic (Davis 1991). Spirituality is very difficult to define (Koenig 2009; Speck 2005), as it is, in fact, not a separate aspect of a person's life (Thomas 2000). It is most directly linked to the human search for and understanding of the Divine, and to religion and religious practices (Ingersoll 1994; Hill, Pargament, Hood, McCullough, Swyers, Larson et al. 2000). However, it is deeply embedded in our daily lives, as our physical actions and choices reflect our morals and values (Thomas 2000). Moreover, it is intertwined with our relationships, and with our involvement in our communities (Austad 2010).

In terms of the Afrikaner, Dutch Reformed culture, which is the context in which this research was conducted, I learned that women in the Afrikaner culture are pious (Landman 1994), taught to submit to men, and kept silent about sex and sexuality (Nadar & Potgieter 2010; Parker 1996; McClintock 1991). This raised the question: How do girls from this context cope with sexual abuse, and how does it affect who they become as adults. Furthermore, is their Afrikaner spirituality a help or a hindrance?

Having chosen to begin by thickening my understanding of the abovementioned topics, I must acknowledge that the list of topics that I focused on is not exhaustive. If I had chosen, at the outset, to introduce any of a number of related ideas at this early stage, then the direction that my thinking may have taken would have been affected by these choices. As I formed a prejudgement about what I had learned from the topics I chose to focus on in this step, it coloured my outlook in subsequent steps (Lester 1999: 1; Denzin & Lincoln 2009: 151; Diamond 2014: 471).

Secondly, I had to make decisions about the approach that I would take in this research, based on my practical theological framework, as well as the scientific and philosophical paradigms that underlie my chosen method: narrative research. As such, I spent time clarifying what I mean by practical theology, and how I understand the theologians whose influences can most clearly be seen in my approach: these include Müller, Lindbeck, Heitink, and Van Huyssteen, as well as a number of feminist and body theologians. Van

Huyssteen is also the primary source from whom I learned about postfoundationalism and transversal rationality, both crucial concepts for understanding contemporary practical theology, as well as transdisciplinary methods. In addition, I spent time exploring social constructionism, and the narrative approach, as these two strands both complement one another, and the postfoundational practical theological emphasis on lived experience and social context.

This research was conducted within the discipline of practical theology. Therefore, I explained my understanding of practical theology as being the theology of real, everyday life. To make my meaning clear, I referred to Gerkin (1997), Campbell (1986), McClure and Miller-McLemore (2012), and Müller (1996, 2009, 2011, 2013). From these writers, I learned that pastoral care is not just about religion and religious practices, it is about the daily lives of the members of the faith community. The practical theologian works from a position of praxis: learning from lived experience and from theory, to inform the daily practice of the church, in its broadest sense (Heitink 1999). If one works from this perspective, it is important to consider the influence of the context within which the particular faith community lives. As such, I turned to Lindbeck's (1984) cultural-linguistic model for practical theology, that stresses the need to understand that it is the cultural-linguistic context of the community that shapes people's lived experience. Furthermore, Müller (1996) explains that the culture and language of the community are constructed and transferred via spoken language, books, songs, rituals, behaviours, as well as by other means. He (1996) also stresses the ecological nature of the faith community, in that people's lived experiences are not only shaped by the context, but that their experiences form part of the ecology of the community; that the various texts he mentions, and people's actions and experiences are interdependent. Müller (2011; 2013) also makes it clear that practical theology works best in the interstices between disciplines. We are concerned with people's daily lives and so it follows that we need to know about those daily lives. This means that we need to enter into the postfoundational, transversal space, between disciplines, to learn from other disciplines, especially the social sciences and humanities (Van Huyssteen 1986, 1996, 1999, 2000, 2006; Müller 2009, 2011, 2013).

Given the Afrikaner, Dutch Reformed context, and what I had found out about women and sexuality in this culture, I decided that it may be valuable to acquire the perspective of feminist theologians and body theologians. Feminist theology also complements my approach to practical theology, as it is also centred around lived experience.

Moreover, the focus in feminism is on giving voices to the voiceless (Nencel 2014). Thus, when a feminist researcher listens to a person's story, it is with a socio-political aim, and a reflexive ethic in mind. Denise Ackermann (1998, 2003) calls us to express compassion and to speak out against injustice. Similarly, feminist body theologians Isherwood and Stuart (1998) ask us to listen to women, but specifically to stories of their bodies. Body theology is an off-shoot of feminist theology that places emphasis on embodiment and embodied experience. Thus, as in feminism, the focus is on people's real life experiences, but with the added dimension of exploring those experiences as physical experiences. The reasoning behind their approach is that humans do not have disembodied experiences. We cannot see, hear, feel, touch, or taste anything if not through our senses and through our bodies (Isherwood & Stuart 1998). If we bear in mind the very real and physical nature of sex and sexual abuse, it made sense to listen to body theologians as well.

My definition of practical theology is centred around lived experience, the influence of context and the role of language in the context, and the fact that practical theology needs to be fluid enough to learn from other disciplines. In view of this, I had to explore further the philosophical principles that best underlie these ideas. The postfoundational epistemology, as advocated by Van Huyssteen (1986, 1996, 1999, 2000, 2006) and Müller (2009, 2011, 2013), speaks of knowledge as context-bound and socially constructed. Furthermore, although it places a strong emphasis on the context, there is also an emphasis on transversal rationality. This means that, despite the cultural, linguistic, historical specificity within which knowledge is created, it is not nihilistically relative. In other words, in spite of differences, it is possible to learn and share knowledge with others from another context. More specifically, it makes transdisciplinary conversations possible. Since practical theologians should be open to learning from other disciplines, this is an important approach.

Additionally, another underlying principle of my approach to practical theology is social constructionism, as it explains some of the ideas inherent in cultural-linguistic theology (Gerkin 1997: 110 and 122) and postfoundationalism. In short, social constructionism helps us to see that knowledge is not an external, objective thing, but it is co-created by people interacting with one another, through language. Language is meaningless without the meaning that we attach to it, and these meanings are created within specific contexts. For example: I recently had a conversation with an American friend about 'vienna' sausages, and it took me a while to realise that she had no idea what I was talking about. When I switched to using the word, 'hotdog', she understood. This happened because I remembered that the

South African word for the pink sausages in question is ‘vienna’, while the American word is ‘hotdog’. In South Africa, the word ‘hotdog’ refers specifically to the complete sandwich, made of a long bun with a vienna sausage and condiments inside. In the States, the word ‘hotdog’ refers both to the sausage and the sandwich respectively. If language gets its meaning from the social context, and language is the vehicle that we use to convey meaning, then an understanding how language works is central to understanding social constructionism (Burr 1995, 1998; Gergen 2001, 2009). Furthermore, it must be emphasised that language includes speech, behaviours, rituals, stories, songs, body language, clothing and more (Vinciarelli et al. 2009).

Thirdly, having chosen my theology and epistemology, I had to choose an approach to research that would reflect my thinking. Narrative inquiry is best suited to my approach as it starts from the point of lived experience, places the story-teller at the centre of the research, focuses on the importance of context and language, and questions taken-for-granted beliefs and ideas. Narrative thinkers support the notion that meaning is created out of the random experiences of life through story-telling, as this gives the teller a sense of the cohesion of events in her life (Besley 2002; Clandinin & Connelly 1989). The stories that are told, however, are not invented out of thin air, but shaped by the time and place in which they took place. They, and the meaning that the teller gets from them, are socially constructed, within the context of the socio-cultural-linguistic milieu in which that person finds herself (Moen 2006: 4). Because narrative research is focused on lived experience within a specific context, and their unit of inquiry is a story, the person at the centre of the research is the storyteller. Therefore, narrative researchers do not refer to people as ‘subjects’, but rather as ‘co-researchers’ (Epston 1999). Also, the co-researcher’s knowledges and interpretations of her story will guide the researcher’s thinking through every step of the research (Swart 2013: 25-27). This means that the research had to be designed to be inductive and iterative (Rubin & Rubin 1995).

The prejudgement phase of this research is encapsulated in Chapters One and Two of the dissertation. Following that, the observation/experience phase is reported in Part One of Chapter Three.

7.3. Observation/Experience.

Once I had decided on what I would like to research further, and what principles the research would be based on, I designed a narrative, social constructionist research methodology. Based on qualitative research methodology (Babbie & Mouton 2001) and narrative principles, I opted for a single case study, and decided to employ unstructured and semi-structured interviews as the method for hearing the story. Using purposive convenience sampling (Hood 2006: 213) with the aim of finding a potentially rich story, a co-researcher was selected, who was willing to share her story with me. I afforded her the opportunity to read through and respond to an informed consent letter, which explained the aims and methods of the research in detail, in her own time. We agreed that I would keep her identity anonymous, and I chose to call her Hannetjie. Following her agreement to be involved, I interviewed her on three occasions. She also shared some of her poetry, and some academic writing with me. Looking back, I wonder what I would have found, if I had spent more time discussing her poetry with her, and engaging more critically with the poetry itself in later chapters. As Cox (1999: 142; see also 2.5.1 of this dissertation) says: “knowing the gods and demons of people and listening to their prayers and curses tell[s] us more about them than all the statistics and case histories we could ever compile.” We kept in contact via email, as I kept her in the loop throughout the process. This was a condition of the informed consent that she gave, as well as a core element of my research design (Josselson 2007: 548). I transcribed the interviews myself, as I believe that hearing the recordings again helped me to pick up on nuances that I would have missed, if I had not done it that way (Silverman 2000: 830). I used these transcriptions as source documents to formulate my own prose interpretation of her telling, to present to the transdisciplinary co-researchers. As such, in this second half of Chapter Three, I entered into the interpretive phase of the hermeneutical circle.

Brief mention must be made again of the second potential co-researcher, who did form part of the original research design. As stated in chapter three, I elected to remove her story from the project, not because it did not add value, but because it became increasingly challenging to communicate with her via email only, as she lived very far from me. I felt that too much of the nuance of our interaction was lost, because we were unable to communicate face to face. Therefore, I adjusted the research design to fit a single case study.

The decision to focus on a single case may be a controversial one, as many would question the value of using a single case study for such a broad topic. As explained in

Chapter Three, however, I elected to use a layered research design that includes a transdisciplinary study, as well as a literature study, based on the case study. As such, Hanneljé's story may be the heart and lifeblood of the dissertation, but it does not constitute the entire research project, in the same way that a person's heart and lifeblood does not constitute the entire person. The fleshing out of Hanneljé's story in Chapters Four and Five, as will be discussed again in the following sections, serves to broaden the study to move beyond the local, into a space where we are informed not only by Hanneljé, but also by the transdisciplinary voices and the literature, based on Hanneljé's story as a starting point.

Reflecting back on this part of the research, I first became aware that by the time she told me her story, it was already a much interpreted version of the story: the events had happened many years earlier, and she had made decisions about what to tell me and how to tell me. My interest, however, was not in the facts, but in the meaning she had created. Similarly, I knew that my hearing and recording of her story, was already interpreted by virtue of the questions I chose to ask and the points I chose to focus on, in addition to the prejudgement I had formed while working on my understanding of the concepts discussed in Chapter One. If I had focused on different issues, or asked my questions differently, the research may have taken a different turn. As such, with each return to the story, the pathway forward is affected. This is a consequence of the "open, loosely structured research methodology" (Rubin & Rubin 1995: 37) that I chose. If I had chosen a more structured approach, then I might have been able to predict the path of the research more clearly (Renou, Hergueta, Flament, Mouren-Simeoni & Lecrubier 2003: 1), but it would not have been commensurate with my epistemology. Secondly, I thought about the subtlety of language, and how important it was for me to hear Hanneljé's story in her own mother tongue, despite the practical difficulties it would pose in my writing. I found that our interactions in Afrikaans were rich and nuanced, because we share an idiomatic understanding of the language, and this was invaluable in my further interpretations. Thirdly, I felt challenged by the time-frame involved, because our relationship stretched over four years. Ultimately, though, the growth and change in her story over these four years helped me to see even more layers, as long as I was open to this (Diamond 2014: 478; Jessop & Penny 1999: 229). I feel, however, that if I had made further face-to-face contact with her later in the process, instead of relying on email, the changes in her story would have been explored more deeply. I did not do her later tellings as much justice as her earlier ones. Fourthly, I felt ethically compelled to be especially careful in my choice of questions, because of the sensitive nature of her story. It

was most helpful, whenever I was hesitant, to be honest with her about it and follow her lead. She was always forthcoming, despite also admitting how hard it was for her to share her story.

7.4 Interpretation/Discourse.

The second part of Chapter Three describes the beginning of the interpretation/discourse phase of the research, as this contains my telling of Hanneltjie's story, which is an interpretation. The phase continues into Chapter Four, which shows the transdisciplinary co-researchers' interpretations of Hanneltjie's telling. In both of these sections, I spent much time exploring not only interpretations, but also searching for dominant, as well as alternative stories (Morgan 2000), which reveal the discourses, or taken-for-granted beliefs (Swart 2013: 31), that underlie Hanneltjie's narrative. The final part of the interpretation/discourse phase is captured in Chapter Five, where I consulted the relevant literature to understand more about the various areas of focus that had emerged.

Upon repeated readings of the transcriptions, using the holistic-content reading method (Lieblich et al. 1998: 62), I identified a number of areas of focus in the story. At this juncture, I had the option to choose from a number of different approaches to reading, that focus on the form of the narrative, or content analysis, for example (Lieblich et al. 1998: 13). However, I elected to use the holistic-content approach, since it allows for the type of analysis that Schrag and Ramsey (1994: 133) propose as the most useful, in that "the analytical explanation of constitutive elements must never be severed from the orientation toward holistic understanding." Using the identified areas of focus as headings, I wrote a prose version of Hanneltjie's story, retelling the stories about each of the areas of focus. The stories that were identified are: the story of abuse; the story of her identity; the story of her mother; and her story of faith and God. Additionally, the manner in which these stories is interrelated was explored. Finally, I identified unique outcomes in her story: parts of the story that contradict the problem-saturated story. Unique outcomes that were identified are stories of: hope; forgiveness and liberation; determination; writing poetry; finding solace in nature; offering healing to others in counselling; faith; humour; and giving me a hug. Each of these unique outcomes helped us to see potential for alternative stories, some to a greater degree than others.

Once I had completed my interpretation of her story, I presented it to three professionals from other disciplines for the purposes of a transdisciplinary conversation.

Postfoundationalism and transversal rationality are guiding principles upon which this research was based, which compelled me to include a transdisciplinary step (Van Huyssteen 2006). There are natural limits to any discipline and it is wise to cross the boundaries between disciplines to learn from others (Müller 2011).

Three transdisciplinary co-researchers were selected. The degree of relevance to Hanneltjie's story was the most important criterion used to determine who would be approached for involvement, bearing in mind the narrative imperative to view the storyteller as the expert (Coetzee 2009: 23). From Hanneltjie's story emerged areas of focus that may interest a number of professionals in the social sciences. The most prominent questions that arose were about her relationships, her body, and her faith. As such, the decision was made to approach a psychologist, an occupational therapist, and a Dutch Reformed minister. I would have preferred to involve a social worker as well, not only because Hanneltjie's mother was a social worker, but also because social workers often have experience with children who have suffered abuse. Similarly, it may have been enlightening to involve someone from a profession that is not as directly related to theology and psychology, in order to introduce an additional, alternative voice. Either, or both of these choices would have brought a different dimension to the conversation (Müller, Groesser & Ulli-Beer 2012: 500). Ultimately, however, time and practicality played important roles in the final choice. Anton Reynolds is a counselling psychologist, with a particular interest in relationships. Debra Smuts is an occupational therapist, who specialises in Sensory Intelligence. Lizette Viviers is a Dutch Reformed minister, with a special interest in the role of women in the church.

During the transdisciplinary conversation, the co-researchers answered the following four questions, adapted from Müller (2009):

- When reading Hanneltjie's story, what do you think her concerns would be?
- How would you formulate your discipline's unique perspective on these concerns and why is it important that this perspective should be heard at the transdisciplinary table?
- Why do you think your perspective will be understood and appreciated by co-researchers from other disciplines?
- What would you like to learn from the co-researchers from other disciplines?

Following their initial responses, the three co-researchers had the opportunity to read one another's answers and respond to those as well. It would have been very useful, at this juncture, to get the three co-researchers together for a face-to-face exchange, as this would most certainly have brought about much deeper engagement, as Anton Reynolds pointed out to me. However, geography played a role, as the participants live very far apart across the country. Next, Hanneltjie was asked to read the researchers' inputs and respond with her own thoughts. From an ethical perspective, I was challenged to think very carefully about the manner in which I shared the transdisciplinary co-researchers' input with her, because some of their input could have caused her pain, particularly their input about her relationships with her mother and the abuser. At the same time, I felt ethically compelled not to withhold information from her, because it is ultimately still her story. I settled for a compromise. Thus, I shared the responses with her, but in private, and not in a shared email, as I had done with the three co-researchers. I also reminded her of our agreement about her consent, and reminded her that she could still withdraw, if she wished. She was willing to read their emails and gave valuable feedback, although it was very brief. She commented to me that they had pointed out things that she had not known or thought about previously.

My work was to identify places of consensus, dissensus and unique insights, in accordance with the principles of postfoundational, transversal rationality (Müller 2009). What emerged was that all the participants were especially concerned about Hanneltjie's relationships, including her relationships with herself, her family, God, and others. They were also concerned that she appears not to be living a full life. They emphasised a need for a holistic approach to her well-being. All three participants also agreed that Hanneltjie needs to take ownership of her own well-being and reclaim her power. A particularly interesting unique insight relates to Debra Smuts' input regarding sensory integration, and the role that this plays in healthy daily functioning. If we bear in mind Hanneltjie's specific concerns about a sense of disembodiment, this was a most useful insight. Moreover her input was invaluable if we consider the emphasis in both disciplines, occupational therapy and practical theology, on people's daily lives and functioning. Each participant accepted that there are limits to their own discipline and were eager to learn from other disciplines. Having learned as much as I did from this process, as well, I want to reiterate their, and Müller's (2013: 4) sentiments. It is imperative that we learn from other disciplines whenever the opportunity arises. At the same time, the knowledges and gifts that theologians can bring to the table are of great potential value to other disciplines (Van Huyssteen 2006). Within this conversation, though, I

acknowledged in Chapter Four, that I could have allowed some of the potential depth of the exchange to become lost, as I had not spent time with the co-researchers on sharing ideas about language, and how our subject-specific language may affect the conversation (see 4.9.4).

The interpretation of Hannetjie's story served as the third iteration of the telling; afterwards, I was ready to consult the relevant literature. Narrative principles governed the choices I made in this research design. Therefore, I did not conduct a full literature review of the topic until I had finished the empirical part of the research (Connelly & Clandinin 1987: 4). Following the empirical process, I was ready to learn from other scientists about what had emerged out of Hannetjie's story, as well as the co-researchers' and my interpretations. As my reading of Hannetjie's story deepened, with each step in the process, it became increasingly clear to me how complex her story is. I was grateful that, as a postfoundational researcher, I am not expected to know everything, but to acknowledge my limitations and to turn, in "humility" (Schrag & Ramsey 1994) to others whose knowledges could enrich my own. Furthermore, I am not bound by universalist principles, to look for 'one truth', but rather to look for "similarities in difference" (Schrag & Ramsey 1994: 135), which meant that I was not limited to any one discipline when I began to look for helpful literature.

In this fourth iteration of the telling of Hannetjie's story, in Chapter Five, I listened to the voices of authors from many disciplines, ranging from Tantric practices to neurobiology. I learned that a human person is extremely complex, because the various aspects of our lives, that we are so used to dividing and compartmentalising, such as spirituality, relationships, mind, body, emotions, and more are inextricably bound together, and that they all exert an influence on each other.

7.5 Discovering meaning.

In Chapter Six, having learned about the complexity of personhood, I explored the interrelatedness and interdependence of Hannetjie's various stories. I re-examined her story through the lenses of the multiplicity and emergence of self, and holistic embodiment.

Before I can continue, however, I must clarify my thoughts concerning multiplicity and embodiment. Throughout this dissertation, I have discussed these ideas of multiplicity and holistic embodiment, in parallel. Is multiplicity to be conceived of on a different level to embodiment, in the sense that embodiment is a property of multiplicity? In order to

understand more about these two approaches to personhood, and whether it makes sense to deal with them together, I turn to Hermans. He (2003: 109) writes: “the dialogical self assumes the existence of an embodied, spatialized, extended, socialized, and open system with dialogical relations between positions.” As such, I understand him to mean that embodiment is a position of the self, which serves, in part, to determine a person’s context and subjectivity. He explains (2001: 249): “as an embodied being, the person is not able to freely ‘fly above’ his or her position in space and time, but he or she is always located at some point in space and time.”

Specifically, I retold Hanneltjie’s story as a multiplicity of stories: the story of herself; the story of her relationships; and the story of God in her life. Layered within these three main storylines, I identified a myriad of intertwined stories, that all relate to the three main storylines, as well as to each other. This was a particularly difficult process, as I encountered a number of challenges. Firstly, I found that the language available to talk about a person’s life and the various facets of their personhood does not do justice to the complexity of personhood. Further, I struggled to put into words the holistic nature of Hanneltjie’s story, as the words that we still use, such as ‘body’, ‘mind’ and ‘spirit’, come from a modern, positivistic framework, where it made sense to compartmentalise personhood. Consequently, I came to question my original assumptions about ‘spirituality’ as a construct, and wondered about the value of the original research question, that is about ‘spirituality’. The word ‘self’ is also problematic, because it implies a static unity that denies the multiplicity, and sense of becoming that I had discovered.

Having struggled to express the holistic, embodied, and yet multiplicitous, ideas about the self in language, I turned to metaphors. In combination, the metaphors of the kaleidoscope and the dance floor served to illustrate in fluid, dynamic terms, what I was unable to express in other words, or in static diagrams. Initially, I had attempted to represent the interrelatedness of Hanneltjie’s collection of stories in a schematic diagram, as a starting point for Chapter Six, but I found the two-dimensional image to be too rigid to show the fluidity and movement inherent in a person’s stories. I abandoned that line of thinking entirely. These analogies of the kaleidoscope and the dance floor demonstrate the rich, beautiful movement that is possible within the multiple, emergent self. This points us to the endless possibilities that lie waiting in each person.

Hannetjie's narrative is overflowing with possibilities that could be discovered, and I wondered about the manner in which one could use the principle of transversality to bring the various stories in her life into conversation. Hermans (2001) advocates for an understanding of the self as "dialogical," that is made up of a number of "I-positions." He (2001:101) explains moreover, that these "different I-positions are embodied in voices and able to entertain dialogical relationships, both internal and external, with other voices." He also posits that (1) a new I-position could be introduced, (2) a previously hidden position could be called to the foreground, and vice versa, and (3) two or more positions could work together to strengthen each other. From a narrative perspective, this makes sense, as it is exactly in the search for "unique outcomes" (Freedman & Combs 1996: 67-68) that the narrative practitioner is actively engaged in looking for one or a combination of all three possibilities, when exploring a person's self-narratives with her. Arril (2007: 273) teaches that a transversal approach could endow a person with "perspectival nimbleness – the ability to leap lightly from one point of view, realization, or level of consciousness to another and to hold them in tension."

It is in the tension between the different narratives that the true creative energy of narrative practice could come to the fore. Glynn (2000), in a discussion of Schrag's work, describes identity as "the product of the ongoing narrative by which we constitute the convergence between the different aspects of what we consequently come to articulate as the self." Thus, identity is an ever-changing, evolving process, rather than a static subject, which means that growth and healing are always possible. I recently had a conversation with a teenager, and after I had presented him with the differences between his problem saturated story, a story of 'Laziness', and an emerging alternative story, I asked him which one he prefers. He thought for a moment, and said: "The new one, but I don't want to lose the old one. It could be useful on a Saturday." Immediately, the alternative story was no longer the one I had asked him about, that we had begun to develop together, but a new, even richer one, with greater depth than I could have hoped for, because he had brought the two stories into a conversation. He also showed me that a problem saturated story is not necessarily a 'bad' or a 'negative' story. Rather, it could still have its place and add value to his life, when placed in relationship with another story.

Therefore, if Hannetjie had been willing to enter into such a conversation, I would have been interested to see how we could get her various self-narratives, both internal and external, to inform each other in conversation, potentially creating, what Hermans (2003:

111) terms “coalitions” that could work together towards authoring a new story. Internally, the different voices could teach each other, as I proposed in Chapter Six. Externally, also, her different stories could teach her family, her community, and the church. What would happen if the ‘Hannetjie-who-has-studied-comparative-religion’ and the ‘Hannetjie-who-interprets-the-Bible-creatively’ became vocal and active in her local congregation? What could the general members of the Dutch Reformed Church learn from the stories of creative survival, about sexual abuse, about their own faith community, and about being human, if Hannetjie, and others, felt free to share? During our final communication, she indicated clearly to me that she is no longer interested in therapy of any kind. Nor does she feel free to share her story. This begs the question: What needs to happen in the Dutch Reformed Church and in the Christian community, for a woman such as Hannetjie to feel free to be actively involved and to teach others about surviving trauma, and about having a truly honest relationship with God, despite the pain she has suffered?

7.6 Action, or moving beyond the local

Finally, I have reached the point where I wish to look forward. What action could be initiated by what we have learned? In the first paragraphs of this dissertation, I made it clear that practical theology must return to the faith community with new wisdom, which should affect the practices within the community, regardless of whether those are in specific institutions, such as the Dutch Reformed Church, or in the wider, caring community of believers. What follows is a discussion of the burning questions that I have, after having heard Hannetjie’s story.

7.6.1 Women and children in the Dutch Reformed Church

Feminists across the world have worked tirelessly for many years to make the voices of the marginalised heard (Nelson 2012: xiv). Bons-Storm (1996: 16-30) argued for practical theologians to listen to women’s silence, because women, despite many pastors’ best efforts, did not feel heard, or understood. In the largely Afrikaans-speaking Dutch Reformed community, women still appear to be silent, while in the broader South African Christian popular culture, following the popularity of Angus Buchan’s ‘Mighty Men’ conferences, women are being taught to use their femininity as a bargaining chip (Nadar & Potgieter 2010: 141). Botha and Dreyer (2013a: 9) confirm that women are still encouraged to be submissive and that “die eeuelange kondisionering deur die kerk en samelewing, die diepgewortelde onderdanigheid en minderwaardigheid van die Blanke Suid-Afrikaanse vrou veroorsaak, wat

dit vandag steeds vir hulle moeilik maak om as volwaardige en gelyke persone in die samelewing en huwelik te funksioneer.”⁴ They continue to express the view that the situation is untenable. If we consider Hanneltjie’s story, this view makes sense. She does not fit the mould of a traditional Afrikaans-speaking woman, who married young, had children and is happy to submit to her husband. Neither would she want to do this or find herself able to: her history negates the possibility. Botha and Dreyer rightly point out that it is not only in stories like Hanneltjie’s, but in the community as a whole, that the traditional, patriarchal manner of thinking is long outdated, and yet it still continues. Botha and Dreyer (2013b: 9) make an appeal for a radical shift in understanding, that matches the shifts that have taken place elsewhere in society, for a reconstruction of the church’s understanding of gender roles and family.

Hanneltjie’s story strikes at the deepest roots of this challenge. The literature dealing with the role of women in the church mainly concerns adult women (Compare Botha & Dreyer 2013a & 2013 b to Yates 2012), but her problem started when she was much younger. In a world where women are silent, girls are allowed to say even less; after all, children of Hanneltjie’s generation were raised with the adage: ‘Kinders moet gesien en nie gehoor word nie.’⁵ Women do not become silent overnight, they are socialised from childhood to be silent (Swart 2013; Botha & Dreyer 2013a). I found it very difficult to find literature about children and how they are viewed in the church in South Africa, except for an article by Meijer (2014:1) in which he uses Calvin’s model for education, dating back to 1559, as a model for contemporary education. He proposes this model as an antidote to the current South African Education Department’s policies and points of departure, although he does not make his reasons clear. I do not wish to enter into a critique of Meijer’s thinking, but I am astonished that a five hundred year-old document is put forward as the solution to problems in contemporary schools. Are there not more recent, relevant ideas about how children could be taught and socialised that would raise them to be members of the Body of Christ in the real world of today? More importantly, if there is such a silence in literature about children in the church in South Africa, do we know whether children feel safe to disclose abuse or to seek help in times of adversity? Hanneltjie did not. Yates (2012: v) has identified two large gaps in practical theology in South Africa: “(i) a lack of focus on children and their rights, and (ii) a

⁴ ...the centuries-long conditioning by the church and society caused the deep-rooted submissiveness and sense of inferiority of White South African women that still makes it difficult for them to function as equal and worthy persons in society and marriage.

⁵ Children should be seen and not heard.

general absence of strategic perspectives on how the theological community can deal with the contextual realities of children in South African society.” In a later publication Yates, along with Swart (Swart & Yates 2012), comes to the conclusion that not being ready to listen to children “effectively leads practical theologians to abandon the public cause of children to be dealt with by others.” This is a very serious indictment.

7.6.2 Gender in the Dutch Reformed Church – God as more than...

In much the same way as questions have been raised about women and children in the church, there have been attempts and appeals to help the faith community to understand God as being more than the traditional patriarchal father figure (Dreyer 1997; Johnson 2000; Wells 1995). Body theologians and feminists have worked on engaging the church in conversations about embodiment (Isherwood & Stuart 1998; Spalding 1999; Isherwood 2004) as well. However, there is very little evidence of this in the local Afrikaans-speaking church.

In the same way that perceptions of women still have to change, the predominant social construction of God is still a male figure of authority, rather than the a-sexual loving God espoused by Moltmann (1980) and others (Johnson 2000; Wells 1995). Again, I found it almost impossible to find locally produced literature that attempts to answer these questions, except for Dreyer (1997) who asks believers to rethink what they know about Jesus: to see Him as more than God Who became a man, but as God Who became a human being. At the beginning of this dissertation, I stated that I would use the masculine pronoun to describe God, in the context of Hanneltjie’s story, as this is how she sees God. Furthermore, she sees God as Creator and as vengeful, as in the Old Testament. She cannot fathom God’s love. Nor does Jesus Christ feature in her telling. What would a transversal dialogue between Hanneltjie’s story and the story of the contemporary church in the Afrikaans-speaking community sound like? What could they learn from each other?

7.6.3 Love and the faith community

There is an interesting tension between two of Hanneltjie’s stories. On the one hand, it was found that she appears to have experienced very little of the care and love that is preached in the Christian community. On the other hand, she has allowed an outpouring of love from herself to others who are vulnerable. From a narrative transversal perspective, again, I wonder what these two voices could teach each other. Further, I wonder what a dialogue between Hanneltjie, as a member of the faith community, and the larger faith community would sound like. Irvin (2011) reminds us that the faith community should, if it proclaims

that it is made in the image of God, be a source of love. I am reminded of 1 John 4: 8 (NIV): “Whoever does not love, does not know God, because God is Love.”

7.6.4 New language for multiplicity and holistic thinking

Earlier in this chapter, I mentioned that I found it difficult to write about embodiment, because I felt limited by the language available to me, wanting still to categorise Hanneltjie’s stories into ‘body’, ‘mind’ and ‘spirit’. I also struggled to decide whether it still made sense to use the word ‘spirituality’, long after I had stated that it is a construct that does not really make sense, because it is inseparable from personhood. Similarly, in writing about multiplicity, I was often undecided whether it would be appropriate to use the word ‘self, or rather to use ‘selves’. I felt stuck, trying to think of postfoundational ideas in foundational terms. Powell (1996: 1505) suggests that “modernism and postmodernism are conceptually and culturally related; they reflect a common, specific cultural and historical perspective”, a Western perspective. As such, he proposes that one way to rethink the language we use to describe the self, is to look outside of Western thinking, to Buddhism, for example, which sets up a way of thinking that “goes beyond concepts” because, if we adhere to the principles of social constructionism, we know that “the world of language is constructed and unessential” (1996 :1505). He accepts, however, that (1) “the question itself and the apparent answers are often products of a limited cultural discourse even when the aim is to critique the limits of the cultural discourse itself” (1996: 1508) and that (2) “[m]ost postmodernists agree, with reservations, that categorization is a necessary tool for understanding and organization... When we use categories, we must do so with a functional goal in mind” (1996: 1518). To support his assertion, Powell (1996: 1519) explains that the functions of categories “must be explicit” and also “tentative, relational, and unstable.” In other words, when we choose to employ a category, it must be well defined, but not seen as definitive, a ‘working title’ so to speak. Therefore, I refrained from using clearly modernist language such as ‘body’, ‘mind’ and ‘spirit’, but instead referred to ‘body stories’, ‘mind stories’, and ‘spirit stories’, and explained how I delineated them, and separated them from one another. Furthermore, I chose to use metaphors for describing multiplicity. However, I wonder whether it may be possible, over time, to construct new language that would better suit the thinking behind multiplicity and embodiment.

7.7 Summary

This chapter served as the final summary and reflection on my dissertation. As such, I returned to the undertakings I had made in Chapter One and reflected on the journey that I took in order to achieve what I had set out to achieve. Therefore, I offered a brief explanation of the steps taken in each chapter, and explained how these fit into the hermeneutical circle. I also offered a brief reflection on each chapter. Next, I reflected on the questions that were raised during this journey, as I heard Hanneltjie's story repeatedly, and became aware of issues that appear to have not been addressed well in the Afrikaans Dutch Reformed context. Specifically, I asked questions about women and children in the church as well as the persistent patriarchal thinking in the church, as it pertains to women and children, as well as to God. Finally, I wondered about the growth of the rhetoric around multiplicity and embodiment, and whether the language that we are using to describe these concepts will come to reflect the thinking more clearly.

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ADDENDUM A: Informed Consent Letter

Informed Consent Form for Co-Researchers

Department of Practical Theology

This informed consent form is for adult female survivors of childhood abuse, who are being invited to be co-researchers in research, entitled “A Narrative Practical Theological Look at the Spirituality of Female Adult Survivors of Childhood Abuse.”

Name of Researcher: Heidi Human

Name of Organization: University of Pretoria

Name of Project: A Narrative Practical Theological Look at the Spirituality of Adult Female Survivors of Childhood Abuse.

This Informed Consent Form has two parts:

- **Information Sheet (to share information about the study with you)**
- **Certificate of Consent (for signatures if you choose to participate)**

You will be given a copy of the full Informed Consent Form

Part I: Information about the Research

Introduction

My name is Heidi Human, enrolled at the University of Pretoria, and I am working on a research project for my thesis. I am doing research on the spirituality of adult female survivors of childhood abuse and the relationship between these two aspects of a survivor’s life. This form is to give you information and invite you to participate in the research as a co-researcher. Before you decide to participate, please feel free to discuss your decision with somebody that you trust and to ask me any questions that you may have.

Purpose of the Research

Childhood abuse has been researched by “experts” for many years, but it is only recently that researchers have asked what the relationship between a survivor’s spirituality and their abuse may be. I believe that it is only somebody who has lived through the experience of abuse who can be called an “expert” and who can answer the question fully and in-depth. I want to learn about the different ways in which survivors make meaning of their abuse and if their spirituality plays a role in this. Spirituality includes all beliefs, thoughts and feelings about God as well as about religion and need not be connected to any specific religious institution or way of practicing religion.

Method of Research

This research will involve a series of at least four, private, in-depth conversations of one hour each between you and me. If necessary, we will negotiate further appointments. Alternatively, you may choose to communicate with me via e-mail, in which case we will exchange detailed letters. The reason that a number of conversations or letters is necessary is that I do not wish to tell your story in my research without your continual input and feedback or to leave out anything that you may feel is important. Considering the fact that sensitive information may be shared, I do not want to take any step without your consent, either.

Participant Selection

Since you are a survivor of childhood abuse, your (and other survivors') story(ies) is the best source of knowledge for answering the question and will be placed at the heart of the project. For this reason, I shall refer to your story first and learn from you first, before asking so-called "experts" for their ideas.

Voluntary Participation

Your participation as a co-researcher is entirely voluntary. If at any time you feel uncomfortable and wish to withdraw, you are free to do so. At the same time, if there is a part of your story which you wish to keep private, I urge you to tell me and it will be disregarded. If you have any questions, please ask me.

Procedures

I am asking you to help me learn more about surviving childhood abuse and the role your spirituality may have played in that. The best way for us to do this, is by taking an in-depth look at your story and how you interpret your story. For this reason, we will have a series of conversations during which you will be asked to tell your story and I will ask questions as they arise.

I will not have a set of prepared questions or force you to provide any information that you wish to keep private. Our conversations will be based on what you wish to share. The first conversation will also include an opportunity for you to ask any further questions about the nature of the research and your role in the research.

The conversations will take place in a private space, where we may not be interrupted, which we will decide on together.

All conversations will be tape-recorded and *only you and I* will have access to the recordings. All recordings will be kept with me under lock and key and digital copies will be password-protected. Your name will not be used during the conversations, so that it will not appear in any of the recordings. Any quotations and interpretations from the recordings and conversations will be given to you to approve, before they are used in the final research.

If you choose to communicate with me via e-mail, the same rules will apply. I shall ask you to attach all letters as Word or .pdf documents, so that they may be downloaded and removed from my inbox and saved in a secure place. You will also be asked not to use any names or identifying information in the letters, so as to protect yourself and others.

Duration

The initial in-depth conversations/exchanges will take place once a week over a period of four weeks, at times that we will choose together. Further feedback will be negotiated with you as necessary, but will be limited to a maximum of two further conversations, unless we both feel it necessary to have further conversations/exchanges.

Risks

I am asking you to share some very personal information that may even include or affect people that are near to you. It is important that you know that I will not force you to share anything you are uncomfortable with and that you may withdraw at any time. None of the information that you share with me will be included in any report or in my thesis without your prior consent.

Benefits

Apart from having an opportunity to share your story, there will be no direct benefit to you resulting from this research. The primary benefit of this research is that your story may shed light on a question that could bring healing and/or understanding for many others who share a similar story, since my thesis will be made available in libraries and on the internet, where other survivors and people who wish to help survivors will have access to it. Furthermore, the research will form part of an international programme that is aimed at shedding light on the question of adult survivors' spirituality.

Reimbursements

You will not be offered any incentives to participate in this research as it is entirely voluntary, but you will be reimbursed for any costs that you may have incurred as a result of this research, such as travel costs. Reimbursements will be calculated according to market related scales.

Confidentiality

Any and all information that you share with me will be treated as confidential, with the understanding that portions and interpretations of your story will be published in a thesis, based on feedback from you. For this reason your and

others' names will not be used in any of the documents involved, other than this one. Similarly, any identifying information, such as your address, will not be divulged.

Sharing the Results

During the run of this research your story will be kept confidential. However, the results of this research, including portions of your story and interpretations of your story, that you consent to, will be used for an interdisciplinary study, where other professionals will be asked to respond to your story. Finally, the research will be published in the form of a thesis, and possibly an article, which will be made available to an international community of researchers who are currently all researching aspects of the question we are asking.

Right to Refuse or Withdraw

This is to emphasise that your participation is entirely voluntary and you may choose to refuse or withdraw at any time. It is important that you know that I acknowledge the sensitive nature of the story you will be sharing and will not force you to share anything that you are uncomfortable with.

Who to Contact

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me via e-mail or telephone:

E-mail: human.heidi@gmail.com

Cell: 084 556 3576 (after 14:00)

This proposal is subject to the approval of the University of Pretoria Faculty of Theology Ethics Committee and the research will be conducted by Heidi Human under the supervision of Professor Julian Müller (Head of Department: Practical Theology).

Part II: Certificate of Consent

I have been invited to participate in research about the spirituality of adult female survivors of childhood abuse. I have read the foregoing information. I have had the opportunity to ask questions about it and any questions I have been asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I consent voluntarily to be a participant in this study

Print Name of Participant _____

Signature of Participant _____

Date _____

Day/month/year

Statement by the researcher/person taking consent

I have, to the best of my ability, made sure that the participant understands all the information and answered all their questions. The following will be done:

- 1. All information will be kept confidential.**
- 2. Any information that may be used or published will be given to the co-researcher for approval first.**
- 3. If the co-researcher chooses to withdraw portions of their story or all of their story, all relevant information shared by them will be disregarded and documents and recordings will be returned to them or destroyed immediately.**

I confirm that the participant was given an opportunity to ask questions about the study, and all the questions asked by the participant have been answered correctly and to the best of my ability. I confirm that the individual has not been coerced into giving consent, and the consent has been given freely and voluntarily.

A copy of this ICF has been provided to the participant.

Print Name of Researcher/person taking the consent _____

Signature of Researcher /person taking the consent _____

Date _____

Day/month/year

Note: This form is based on a World Health Organisation template, as provided at: http://www.who.int/rpc/research_ethics/informed_consent/en/