

COMPARATIVE INFLUENCE OF RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD AND
WITH SIGNIFICANT OTHER ON SELF-UNDERSTANDING IN
PROTESTANT CHRISTIANS, AND RELATION TO COUNSELLING
PRACTICES WITH CHRISTIAN CLIENTS

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All research procedures reported in the thesis received the approval of the relevant Ethics Committee (where required) or a relevant safety committee if the matter is referred to such a committee.

Signed:

A handwritten signature in purple ink that reads "Luke P. Thorne". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'L'.

Statement of Appreciation:

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Abstract

Poststructural models of psychotherapy such as narrative therapy propose concepts of self or selves that are a construction, formed in large part by relationship with others. Because people in the Christian community conceive of a “personal relationship” with God, this study sought to explore the contribution and nature of this human-Divine relationship to the notion of the relationally constructed self.

A qualitative exploratory project was conceived and 20 people who identified as Protestant Christian were interviewed about the influence of their relationship with God on their construction of self. A second interview about relationship with a significant person in their life was conducted to provide a comparison. A narrative analysis, a descriptor analysis, and a metaphor analysis were performed on transcripts of the interviews.

Without exception, each participant could detail the influence of their relationship with God on their understanding of self. These narratives were different but similar in style to the narratives of the relationship with a significant person in their life. Many of these stories paralleled or were interwoven with the influence of other people, time, and life experience. A detailed analysis of the narratives which focussed on descriptors of self, other and God demonstrated a clear preference for the use of *internal state understandings* of self over *intentional state understandings* of self.

Metaphors were utilized more often when endeavouring to describe the human-Divine relationship compared to the human-human relationship. There was a range of metaphors, some commonly used in society, some commonly occurring in Christian circles, and some uniquely personal metaphors. Metaphors used in reference to relationship with God matched with intentional state understandings more often than metaphors used in

reference to relationship with other. Entity metaphors only emerged when participants described relationship with self.

In narrative therapy, the existence of “intentional state understandings of self” (White, 2007) has been noted for its therapeutic usefulness. This research demonstrated that for people who identified as Protestant Christian, there was strong evidence of the influence of the personal relationship with God in the way they spoke about the self, and while both internal and intentional state understandings of self were in evidence, it can be concluded that there is clear evidence of the existence and use of intentional state understandings, matching a relational construction of self. Similarly, but to a lesser degree, participants demonstrated a relational construction of self as a result of the influence of an other person who was significant in their lives.

This research has demonstrated unequivocally for the 20 participants of Protestant Christian faith, the existence of intentional state understandings of self, which have been informed and influenced by relationship with God and an other significant person. The implications for research include the imperative for counsellors to take into account the relationship with God in counselling, with its attendant ethical issues of respect, training and supervision.

Key words: Narrative therapy, narrative analysis, poststructural, structural, relationship with God, counselling, metaphor analysis, relationally constructed self, intentional state understandings of self

Chapter 1 Background and Setting

The poststructural notion of the “relational self,” or what has been termed the “intentional state understanding of self” in narrative therapy (White, 2007) has offered a unique lens through which to explore how an understanding of self might be influenced by relationships. The project reported here explored the influence that the human-Divine relationship might have on the understanding of self, using this notion of the relational self for people who self-identified as Protestant Christian, and who conceive a personal relationship with God (e.g., Schaeffer, 1979).

This chapter outlines briefly the historical context of research in the counselling field, and recent moves to take spirituality and religious concerns seriously in counselling conversations. It thus locates the project in its disciplinary and historical context before giving a brief outline of the project, and the structure of the thesis.

There is evidence for the influence of spirituality and religious beliefs in Western countries on mental health and coping (Hill & Pargament, 2003). In the last two decades, research and writing in this area have begun to emerge from a number of sources both internationally (Furness & Gilligan, 2010a; Koenig, 2009; McMinn & Hall, 2000; Miller, 2005; Stevenson, Eck, & Hill, 2007) and from within Australia (Dowson & Miner, 2012). There is now a significant and growing body of writing and research regarding the integration of spiritual and religious concerns in counselling, and the related disciplines of psychology and social work, driven predominantly by a growth of interest and work in the USA (Frame, 2003; Paloutzian & Park, 2005; Plante, 2008; Richards & Bergin, 2005; S. R. Russell & Yarhouse, 2006; Walsh, 2009; Worthington & Berry, 2005).

The counselling and psychology professions have had an interesting relationship with religion. There has been debate, accommodation, tolerance, avoidance and more recently, attempts at integration. At the extremes of the positions of psychology on religion

sit William James, the founder of modern psychology, who actively explored and engaged with religious experience, and the acknowledged founder of psychoanalysis, Sigmund Freud, who regarded God as an illusion, with many other views in between (Freud, 1927; James, 1890; S. R. Russell & Yarhouse, 2006). Despite the protracted if turbulent relationship between psychology and religion, Hill and Pargament (2003) concluded that psychologists generally keep their distance from religion and spirituality in both conceptual and empirical realms.

Research that has been carried out in the last few decades has reliably established that religious and spiritual involvement is positively associated with improvement in mental health and well-being (Fallot, 2007; Furness & Gilligan, 2010b; Granqvist & Kirkpatrick, 2008; J. L. Griffith, 2010; Hall, 2004; Johnson & Myers, 2010; Koenig, 2009; Lindgren & Coursey, 1995; Plante, 2008). Koenig (2009) reviewed the literature on this association and concluded that for the majority of people, religious beliefs and practices are related to improved coping, and even for clients with psychosis, religious beliefs and practices may increase stability and reduced isolation, while acknowledging the potential for these beliefs and practices to increase symptoms of concern.

The focus of the research has shifted over the past decades from a focus on the definition and measurement of religion and spirituality to a focus on the benefit or otherwise of being religious. A more recent focus is the integration of religion and spirituality in the counselling room and the training of professionals to be more in touch with their own spirituality and thus to be competent to counsel with people who present religious and spiritual issues (McMinn, Worthington, & Aten, 2011; Plante, 2008; Souza, 2002; Walker & Moon, 2011). Despite the growing demand for spiritual and religious concerns to be addressed in counselling conversations in many Western countries, there is

evidence that a holistic approach to psycho-spirituality has been quite neglected globally (Hill & Pargament, 2003) and in Australia (Passmore, 2003).

The Project Conceived

As a counselling approach, narrative therapy is unique in its emergence from Australasia. Narrative therapy emerged from the roots of family therapy and was developed by Michael White of Australia and David Epston of New Zealand in the late 1980s (Besley, 2002; Madigan, 2011). It is also unique in self-consciously holding a poststructural approach to counselling (Freedman & Combs, 1996; Madigan, 2011; White, 2007), and is referred to by some writers as a “postpsychological” approach (Besley, 2002; McLeod, 2004; Riessman & Speedy, 2007).

The notions of self and identity are significant in counselling. Key to narrative therapy is the authoring and re-authoring of narratives of the self, and in those stories, the relationship of the self with problems, and with people (Madigan, 2011; Morgan, 2000; White, 2007). In narrative therapy, people are encouraged to consider the possibilities of relationships and the multiple ways that relationships can be negotiated and re-negotiated, or to use narrative terminology, “re-membering conversations” about an “association of life” (White, 2007, p. 129). The benefit of re-membering life associations is that those relationships which contribute helpfully towards the alternative story where the problem story is not dominant are considered the most helpful relationships to the development of the alternative narrative, and the client is encouraged to engage purposively with such relationships (Besley, 2002; Morgan, 2000; White, 2011b).

In recent decades, the notions of the relational self, relational selves or relational being have been explored and written about in counselling and related fields of psychology, social work and sociology (e.g., Andersen & Chen, 2002; Botella, Herrero, Pacheco, & Corbella, 2004; Chen, Boucher, & Tapias, 2006; Evans, 2005; K. J. Gergen, 2009). Such

writing has explored the influence of human-human relationships with significant other people. However, in the Christian community, people conceive of a further relationship, that of a personal relationship with God. For example, the influential theologian Schaeffer (1979) wrote, “God always deals with man on a basis of personal relationship” (p. 148) and further, “man was created to be in perfect fellowship with God and to love him” (p. 149).

This project was conceived to explore this previously unexplored extension to the concept of the relational self, as influenced by relationship with God. It also explored one significant relationship in the lives of the participants, and so included a horizontal as well as a vertical dimension. This project is intentionally situated within the poststructural narrative therapy approach to counselling. It is a qualitative study that employed a narrative analysis, a descriptor analysis, and a metaphor analysis. It was designed to explore the influence of the relationship with God and relationship with other on the understanding of self, and to contribute to the small but growing body of research and literature within the field of counselling and narrative therapy. It stepped lightly into other disciplinary areas including the psychology of religion, and biblical anthropology, and could be considered to make a contribution to research that fits broadly within the realm of spirituality and counselling.

Structure of the Thesis

This project has been situated within the current scholarship on psycho-spirituality and narrative therapy through a review of the literature, which follows. This review culminates by identifying the gaps in the literature and the research questions for this study. The research design and methodology chapter that follows describes the poststructural epistemological basis of the methodology, and how that was chosen as a natural fit with narrative therapy. The methods of the study are detailed and the multi-pronged analysis described. The next three chapters detail the results of the three analyses: the narrative

analysis, the descriptor analysis, and the metaphor analysis. The final chapter is a discussion of the significance, the relevance, and the application of the findings to the practice of counselling, and the possibilities of further research.

Chapter 2 Literature Review

Despite the ongoing existence of religious belief in the community and the acknowledged impact of these beliefs on mental health and coping, Passmore (2004) claimed that researchers and writers in Australia have been slow to address psycho-spirituality. In the last two decades, research and writing in this area have begun to emerge from a number of sources both internationally (e.g., Koenig, 2009; Miller, 2005; Pargament, 2007) and from within Australia (Proctor, Miner, McLean, Devenish, & Bonab, 2009; Proctor, 2013).

The nature of the relationship with God, and its influence on health and functioning are viewed according to the theoretical framework, discipline or field of the scholars. A poststructural framework was chosen for this project because of the well established link between poststructuralism and the narrative approach to counselling and psychotherapy (Besley, 2002; Denborough, 2011; Epston, 2011; Madigan, 2011; Thomas, 2002). Through a poststructural lens, the exploration of relationships and their influence on the notion of self or selves are readily accessible. In this paradigm, self is considered to be a construction, influenced by relationships and the community in which we live (Thomas, 2002). Narrative practitioners Freedman and Combs (1996) said that “selves,” in this paradigm, “are socially constructed through language and maintained in narrative” and therefore they conceived self “not as a thing... but as a process or activity that occurs in the space between people” (p. 34). Madigan (2011) explained it this way: “the *I* is related to and known, experienced, and located as (always) being in the situated context of a relationship” (p. 65).

While this project was based on a poststructural paradigm, and intentionally located within the counselling field, there is a wealth of academic research and writing on the human-Divine relationship based on other paradigms and from other disciplines, and these

have significant and valid contributions to make to the present project. For example, there is a growing body of work on the nature of relationship with God from the area of attachment to God, an extension of attachment theory. The area of attachment to God is of particular relevance to the human-Divine relationship, and so the literature review will briefly survey this work. The literature review will also briefly survey some relevant aspects of the psychology of religion, as well as some relevant theological writing on the notion of self, from the discipline of biblical anthropology. Following a discussion of the term “counselling,” the spotlight will turn to the concept of the self, with a focus on what poststructuralist writers in narrative therapy have to say about the self. The chapter closes with the research questions and a statement about what this study will potentially contribute to the counselling literature.

Use of Terms: Counselling, Psychotherapy and Therapy

This project was conceived as a research project situated within the sphere of counselling. In Australia there are two national peak bodies for counselling, the Psychotherapy and Counselling Federation of Australia (PACFA), a federated association of associations of counsellors and psychotherapists, and the Australian Counselling Association (ACA), an association of individual counsellors and psychotherapists (Australian Counselling Association, 2011; Psychotherapy and Counselling Federation of Australia, 2013a). In 2011 these two national peak counselling bodies jointly launched the independent Australian Register of Counselling and Psychotherapy (ARCAP), on which the majority of counsellors chose to be listed as nationally registered counsellors for the sake of community access to professionally qualified counsellors (Australian Register of Counsellors and Psychotherapists, 2011).

According to the PACFA (2013a), counselling and psychotherapy are described as:

professional activities that utilise an interpersonal relationship to enable people to develop self-understanding and to make changes in their lives. Professional counsellors and psychotherapists work within a clearly contracted, principled relationship that enables individuals to obtain assistance in exploring and resolving issues of an interpersonal, intrapsychic, or personal nature. Professional Counselling and Psychotherapy are explicitly contracted and require in-depth training to utilise a range of therapeutic interventions, and should be differentiated from the use of counselling skills by other professionals. (para. 1)

PACFA continued in its definitional statement to distinguish between “psychotherapy” and a more technical term, “psychoanalytic psychotherapy.” In this paper the words “counselling” and “counsellor” have been used to designate the professional activities of counselling and psychotherapy, but do not include the concept of psychoanalytic psychotherapy. The terms “counselling,” “therapy” and “psychotherapy” have been used interchangeably throughout this paper, with the intended general meaning of the PACFA definition above. The literature review has included research from the counselling realm, with its growing body of research and scholarship, as well as from the broader and overlapping fields of psychology and social work.

Relationship with God

In the relatively short history of psychology and counselling, there has been some controversy about the human-Divine relationship. The psychology of religion is maturing, and new debates and conceptualizations about spirituality, religion, and the sacred along with empirical research about the reported mental health benefits or detrimental effects from this perceived relationship are a growing international phenomenon (e.g., Ano & Vasconcelles, 2005; Foster & LaForce, 1999; J. L. Griffith, 2010; Hill & Pargament, 2003; Koenig, 2009; Mencken, Bader, & Embry, 2009; Paloutzian & Park, 2005; Pargament, Koenig, & Perez, 2000; Pargament, 1999, 2002; Richards & Bergin, 2005; Rose, Westefeld, & Ansley, 2008). Professionals and researchers within this field include those

who would attempt to explain religion and spirituality away with psychological explanations, those who focus only on the detrimental effects of religion, those who seek to promote and explore the benefits of religion and spirituality, and those who hold many other positions (Pargament, 2007). There is little doubt about the importance of religion in our world today, given the rise of religious and political tensions across the globe. At the individual level, given the need to cope with the stresses of modern day life, there is a growing demand for counsellors to be informed and sensitive to the religious and spiritual needs of clients in the global and the Australian context (Proctor, 2013).

Definition of spirituality and religion. It is necessary to comment briefly on the use of the terms “religion,” “religiousness” and “spirituality” within the literature on counselling. While there is a lack of consensus on the definition of these terms amongst psychology of religion researchers, they are generally accepted to be related and potentially overlapping terms (Pargament, 1999). Despite the difficulty in separating these constructs, there has been a connotation associated with the term religion that for some is unappealing or unhelpful - hypocritical, intolerant or divisive - and where the term spirituality has generally carried a more appealing or helpful connotation (Hill & Pargament, 2003; Pargament, 1999, 2002, 2007; Plante, 2008). With some variations, most recent authorship in this area has adopted definitions of these constructs with the notion of spirituality as the broader, overarching concept. A typical example is Walsh (2009), who defined spirituality as “a dimension of human experience involving personal transcendent beliefs and practices” (p. 5). She added that spirituality could be experienced within and without religious structure and organizations, usually with a contribution from cultural heritage, and including a connection with nature. Walsh’s matching definition of religion is “an organized, institutionalized belief system, set of practices, and faith community” (p. 5).

This thesis has adopted the definitions of the terms religion and spirituality within the generally accepted use in the field of counselling, matching those of Walsh.

Attachment to God research: relevance and applicability. There has been a strong revival of interest in Bowlby's (1969, 1983) work on attachment in recent years (Cassidy & Shaver, 2008; Wallin, 2007). During the second half of the twentieth century Bowlby and his colleague Ainsworth wrote and researched extensively in the area of the mother-child attachment bond and the repercussions when this bond is disrupted for any reason (Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters, & Wall, 1978; Bowlby, 1969, 1988). While originally applied to children and their caregivers, there has been a resurgence of the theory of attachment in the last few decades in the study of adult relationships, including romantic partners (Beck & McDonald, 2004; Beck, 2006a; Granqvist, Ivarsson, Broberg, & Hagekull, 2007; Rholes & Simpson, 2007; Sanford, 1997; Simpson & Rholes, 1998).

In the 1990s Kirkpatrick (1990) was the first to propose that attachment, based on early parent-child relationships, could be extended to relationship with God. The premise in this body of work is that God is considered by many in western society as an ideal attachment figure: a protective, trustworthy and available parental figure, matching Freud's early twentieth century view of God as an ultimate protective father figure (Armstrong, 1994). Based on this premise, relationship with God has been explored in the psychology of religion within the well-accepted attachment framework.

Granqvist & Kirkpatrick (2008) claimed that "no model of adult interpersonal relationships in general, or attachment relationships in particular, will be complete without explicit acknowledgment of the role of God... in people's relationship networks" (p. 928). It was their hope that by extending attachment theory to the area of relationship with God, researchers in the psychology of religion as well as psychologists interested in such topics as interpersonal relationships might find the attachment theory a helpful one. Since that

time there have been numbers of researchers addressing attachment to God concepts (Beck, 2006a; Granqvist et al., 2007; Kirkpatrick, 1992). Within Australia, researchers from the University of Western Sydney, Proctor, Miner, McLean, Devenish, and Bonab (2009), have been working on the development of an instrument that can capture and describe the nature of the Christian believer's attachment to God, and Miner (2009) has written about the impact of religion and spirituality on psychological concepts such as attachment and adjustment. Beck (2006a) concluded from research in the area of attachment that relationship with God can be "as complicated and conflicted as human romances... potentially stormy and chaotic... blissful and fulfilling... frustrating and emotionally draining" (p. 45).

It is of significance to note that there are two competing hypotheses that exist within the area of attachment, which have been extended to the research on attachment to God. A *correspondence* model has been proposed, whereby patterns of attachment to caregivers from early in life correspond to patterns of attachment to God. The second is a *compensation* model, whereby God is theorized to function as a substitute figure for people who experienced insecure attachments with the caregivers in their lives. With varying success, research has been conducted and various theoretical attempts have been made to reconcile, integrate or explain the co-existence of these two hypotheses (Beck & McDonald, 2004; Granqvist & Hagekull, 2000; Granqvist et al., 2007; Granqvist & Kirkpatrick, 2008; Kirkpatrick, 1992, 1994, 1998; Rowatt & Kirkpatrick, 2002).

While there is general agreement in the psychology of religion that the human-God relationship can be considered a "relationship" and furthermore an "attachment relationship" (Granqvist & Kirkpatrick, 2008), there are obvious and significant difficulties when comparing the human-Divine relationship with the infant-caregiver relationship or even the romantic adult-adult relationship (Rowatt & Kirkpatrick, 2002). Prayer has been

considered by some theorists in the psychology of religion as analogous to Bowlby's (1969) maintenance of proximity behaviour of the infant, and that glossolalia (speaking in tongues), and the raising of arms in worship which is evident in Pentecostal church services, are similarly analogous to the child raising their arms to the parent and babbling (Granqvist & Kirkpatrick, 2008). When comparing the human-Divine with adult-adult romantic relationships, the absence of the sexual component, and a lack of mutuality have been noted (Kirkpatrick, 1994). A further difficulty that has been highlighted is that God is considered by most Christians to be omnipresent, and therefore his "absence" cannot be experienced in the same way as an absent romantic partner (Rowatt & Kirkpatrick, 2002, p. 647). Despite this logical distinction, there exists in Christian literature much about experiencing the "presence" of God, and much about the "dark night of the soul," when God seems to be absent, or His presence is not felt (St John of the Cross, 1953/2003).

In the context of further exploring the already established link between spirituality and mental health mentioned previously, Hall (2004) argued that measures of spirituality need further development, and he suggested the possibilities of narrative analysis of the spiritual lives of people as one way to access the implicit processes behind spiritual maturity or spiritual transformation, that when used in association with quantitative measures could enrich and strengthen the study of *between* and *within* individual differences (p. 78). This measure was adopted with considerable success by Proctor, Miner, McLean, Devenish and Bonab (2009) when they explored relationship with God from the attachment framework.

The distinction between this significant and growing body of research in attachment theory and the current study lies in the philosophical assumptions underpinning each, as well as the research frameworks used to explore the concepts. Attachment theory is based in a modern scientific and biological framework, following the early work of Bowlby

(1969, 1988) to the present work of researchers (Granqvist & Kirkpatrick, 2008; Kirkpatrick & Shaver, 1990). Bowlby (1988) made a deliberate choice to move beyond psychoanalytical concepts that were predominant in his time, as he argued that the psychoanalytic framework provided an inadequate explanation of the phenomena of attachment and loss behaviours in children, and furthermore it was inherently difficult to research. Determined to work within a natural science based on “sound biological principles,” Bowlby labelled his framework “neo-Darwinian” (p. 66). His work was therefore consciously based in the more positivist epistemologies of ethology, evolutionary theory and developmental psychology, and contemporary attachment research has, in the main, chosen to retain this framework.

Despite these significant differences, there is much that can be taken from attachment theory research such as the perception of God as an ideal parental figure (Kirkpatrick & Shaver, 1990, p. 318; Miner, 2007, p. 112), a potential “safe haven” and even more significantly a “secure base” for Christian believers (Beck, 2006b; Kirkpatrick & Shaver, 1990, p. 319). There is some relevance in the much researched and recorded mental health benefits resulting from a secure human-Divine relationship,

Contribution of object relations theory of relationships. The human-Divine relationship and the concept of psycho-spirituality have been explored by researchers who are informed by the theories of psychoanalysis and object relations, most commonly using the notion of “images of God” (e.g., Corveleyn & Luyten, 2005; Eigen, 2004; Hertel & Donahue, 1995; Kunkel, Cook, Meshel, Daughtry, & Hauenstein, 1999; Mencken et al., 2009; Potvin, 1977). The object relations theory of relationships developed from psychoanalysis and the psychodynamic framework, as did Bowlby’s attachment theory, and hence they share some similarities and foundational presuppositions (Hall, 2004). As Beck (2006a) pointed out, there is a conceptual similarity between the “object representations” of

object relations theory and the “internal working models” of attachment theory. In object-relations theory, influential caregivers (or “objects”) of the infant result in the infant gradually developing “object representations” or internal schemas of the caregiver and the self, and ultimately “object relations” (Paul, 1999).

While attachment theory departed deliberately from this base in an effort to become more scientific and hence more open to modernist research endeavours, Hall (2004) argued that attachment theory and object-relations theory moved significantly closer in the mid 1980s when attachment theorists shifted their focus from the infant-caregiver relationship to adult-adult relationships, and psychoanalysis moved from its focus on the individual to a focus on relationships. In an effort to integrate these two theories of relationship, Hall outlined five organizational principles linking these theories and Bucci’s (1997) multiple code theory, another offshoot of psychoanalysis. Hall proposed a theory of “implicit relational representations” – a term conceptually similar to the “object representation” of object-relations theory, and the subsymbolic level of Bucci’s multiple code theory (p. 68). Hall drew from a wide range of academic writing and research on the area of psychology of religion including the fields of attachment to God, object relations, the more recent work on the neurobiology of emotion, and earlier work on images of God for his own theory. He proposed as a basis for his own theory, the principle that “people are fundamentally motivated by, and develop in the context of emotionally significant relationships” (p. 68). He further claimed that “current research in affective neuroscience is also corroborating the notion of relationship as the context of our being” (p. 69). Hall pointed out that despite minor distinctives, common to all the systems that have attempted to conceptualize relationship with God from the fields of attachment, developmental psychoanalysis, object relations, and neuroscience, is the internalization of relationship patterns that become

encoded in the mind and predict and shape future relationships without conscious awareness.

In an effort to study how believers understand and experience relationship with God, Beck (2006a) compared the attachment to God theory with two additional theories – object-relations and Sternberg’s (1988; 1986) triangular theory of love, which proposed that love has three crucial components: intimacy, passion and commitment. When Beck explored the three theories using their own instruments, he found two orthogonal factors, communion and complaint, and concluded that the co-existence of these two intermingling factors confirms that the human-God intimacy relationship is comparable with human love relationships. He concluded:

Overall, despite their theoretical differences, each theory is attempting to describe a relationship which is captured by the simple declarative sentence offered by millions of believers across the millennia: “I love God.”...The love experience with God can be, at times, anxious, dismissive, jealous, infatuated, empty, unstable, or disappointed. Yet it can also be, at times, exciting, intimate, warm, and committed. In short, loving God is an extraordinarily complex love experience. (p. 48)

Beck (2006a) suggested that future research might be needed to explore the complexity of the human-God relationship over time. This current research project captured the relationship status of the participant with God, but it also offered more than one opportunity to describe the nature of the relationship over time by highlighting stories of the development of the relationship from the past to the present, as organized and narrated by the participants.

A proposed theological framework for human-Divine research. It is not possible to talk about relationship with God in the Christian community without some reference to Christian spirituality and a brief foray into relevant theological thought regarding the notion of self in this community. While this is clearly not a theological project, it is not possible to

write about and develop themes about a personal relationship with God without some theological framework for discussing these themes. The notion of God being Trinity – not one self, but three selves in relationship, and the notion of the church being the “body of Christ”, rather than an institution (e.g., Bidwell, 2008) are commonly accepted in Protestant Christianity. It is with this view of poststructural counselling and psychotherapy in mind that this research project cannot but include a reference to the literature that includes some of these diverse and yet associated disciplines – psychology of religion, and biblical anthropology.

Maureen Miner, an Australian researcher in the attachment to God field, bridged these two disciplines of psychology and theology in an article she wrote in 2007 in which she noted the absence of a solid theological base for the field of attachment to God, and in which she proposed the use of the social relational model of the Trinity as described by theologian Colin Gunton (1997, 2003). Miner (2007) argued that the model proposed by this contemporary theologian “allows for a fully inter-subjective attachment relationship between a person and God in which there are circular and reciprocal relationships involving the individual, parents, partners, the Christian community and the Trinity” (p. 120). She further argued that this model “gives theologically grounded reasons why people should be drawn to God as an attachment figure, how relations of attachment to God might develop, and how scriptural texts might be powerful means of religious change and development in conjunction with attuned caregivers from the Christian community” (p. 120). This contemporary trinitarian view of God as developed by theologians such as Colin Gunton and Stephen Grenz has been chosen as the most helpful and relevant theological view to discuss and develop themes of the human-Divine relationship. The following section will briefly describe this theological view in its historical setting, and argue its relevance to the current project.

From a theological standpoint there has been a resurgence of interest in the doctrine of the Trinity and its relevance to the social and relational nature of the human being in recent decades (Deddo, 1999; Dowson & Miner, 2012; Grenz, 2001; Gunton, 2003c; Kruger, 2005). This viewpoint has been variously described and theorized by authors from the fields of the psychology of religion and biblical anthropology. Sanders (2012) wrote of the “energy and excitement of modern trinitarianism, a thriving and prolific ecumenical undertaking” (p. ix). Because this research project addressed the Protestant Christian view of the self and the influence of relationship with God and others, it is worth noting the contribution of contemporary authorship on this topic. Trinitarian ideas and their influence on the view and understanding of the self range widely, depending on the author’s stand on ontology, anthropology, the mysterious doctrine of the Trinity, and the understanding of the creation of humankind in the image of God (*imago Dei*).

At one end of the spectrum are writers who consider personhood is based on the idea of a trinitarian God. Two prime examples are Colin Gunton (1993, 1997, 2003a, 2003b) and Stanley Grenz (2001). At the other end of the spectrum are writers who do not attribute any relevance of trinitarian ideas to anthropology. Theologians such as Peters and La Cugna have challenged the need or usefulness of the notion of the immanent Trinity to explain relationship with God (Gunton, 2003b). Woodhead (1999) went further and challenged the often pronounced linear movement from pre-modern to modern to post modern views of the self and expressed scepticism of the fragmentation thesis of the self since modern times. She proposed instead four strands of the contemporary self, and demonstrated how closely Christianity is implicated in each strand. She questioned the notion of a social self, as an expression of the trinitarian notion. While it is therefore acknowledged that not all theologians and writers in the psychology of religion concur with

these ideas, the significance of trinitarian ideas and their contribution to anthropology are judged to be relevant and useful for this project, and will be briefly described.

A social trinitarian model described. The rise in interest in the social model of the Trinity in recent Christian theology has been noted after a period of some centuries in which it was relegated to the dry tomes of systematic theology (Grenz, 2001; Gunton, 1997, 2003b; Miner, 2007). The Trinity was first established as a theological notion in the Chalcedonian Council of 451, as one substance (*ousia*) in three persons (*hypostases*). The social model emerged first in the patristic era, but has been thoroughly resurrected in the last century (Grenz, 2001). In the past century three major treatises on the Trinity have impacted theology – Barth’s in 1932, Rahner’s in 1967, and Lossky’s in 1944 (Gunton, 1997, p. 1). Rahner (1970) famously proposed that “the ‘economic’ Trinity is the immanent Trinity and the ‘immanent’ Trinity is the ‘economic’ Trinity” (p. 22). A trinitarian framework encompasses the notion of God as three persons in one, relating to each other, in communion with each other. A trinitarian framework offers the possibility of a knowable God, transcendent yet immanent. Relating to a God conceived in this way encompasses a wide spectrum of relationship – relating to Father God, Son and Holy Spirit. Recent research in evangelical Protestant circles, in which this research is based, challenged a strict realist reading of the trinitarian notions like Rahner’s Rule but did not challenge the core trinitarian ideas (Harrower, 2012). Miner (2007) chose to adopt for her work the trinitarian ideas of one theologian – that of Colin Gunton, who drew the conclusion that God is a communion of persons, a being in relation and because humans are made in God’s image, therefore God is the basis for all human relationships. For theorists and researchers using the concept of attachment to God, Miner proposed that Gunton offered a sound theological model. He drew a picture of a God who is “ontologically relational, encompassing subjectivity and objectivity in God’s being and actions” (Miner, 2007, p.

118). Gunton (1997) made the point that “because God is triune, we must respond to him in a particular way... corresponding to the richness of his being” (p. 4). In response to this, he claimed that “to be a human being is to be related to the Father through the Son and in the Spirit, and it is the character of Christian experience to realise that relationship” (p. 5).

Gunton (1997) further explained that because Arius emphasized the oneness and the aloneness of God, the God he described is therefore non-relational. Against this backdrop, Gunton, building on the Nicene theologians and the Cappadocians, and Orthodox theologian Zizioulas, proposed a trinitarian ontology of God which encompasses paradox and linguistic devices, by which God is conceived as “one in being,” with a “oneness consisting in the inseparable relation of Father, Son and Spirit” (p. 9) or “a communion of three persons – not individuals – in mutually constitutive relations with one another” (p. 11). He went further to claim that “there is no ‘being’ of God other than this dynamic of persons in relationship” (p. 10). Gunton (2003b) claimed that “the Father, Son and Spirit are *persons* because they enable each other to be truly what the other is: they neither assert at the expense of, nor lose themselves in the being of, the others” (p. 16), and asserted that the Trinity thereby becomes a model for human beings.

A second contemporary trinitarian theologian, Grenz (2001) explained that in the social model the Trinity is thought of as three different persons, with “three subjective centres of action” (p. 4). Based on this model, Grenz (2001) expressed his desire to describe a “trinitarian anthropology of the self” (p. 10). Grenz also proposed that a trinitarian view of God offered a model for human relationships, when he said, “the same principle of mutuality that forms the genius for the human social dynamic is present in a prior way in the divine being” (p. 48). The mutuality, communion and co-existence implied here in trinitarian thinking have been captured by the Greek term *perichoresis* (Deddo, 1999; Grenz, 2001; Gunton, 2003b).

Grenz (2001) graphically described the socially formed postmodern self as “a bundle of fluctuating relationships and momentary preferences” (p. 136). Grenz (2001) claimed that a biblical anthropology must take full account of the renaissance of trinitarianism, and in fact calls for something more than a relational self. He proposed the term “ecclesial self,” which he defined as “the new humanity in communion with the triune God” (p. 312). This ecclesial self is based on divine love and has an eschatological focus. Of particular interest to the current research is the way in which Grenz viewed this ecclesial self as “a self formed through narrative” (p. 329). By this he meant that for Christians who see themselves as “in Christ,” the narrative that they form of their life involves a retelling of their life in the light of the narrative of Jesus’s life. In this way, it becomes a communal story as a result of participation in community with other Christians, and the Christian identity is therefore a shared one, based on the connection with the Jesus narrative. Grenz (2001) concluded:

Because the triune life can be represented only within a relational context, the self is truly ecclesial; the self of each participant in the new humanity is constituted through the relationality of the community of those who by the Spirit are “in Christ.” (p.331)

Along similar lines, Christian feminist Catherine Keller proposed the “connected self” that is constantly becoming, and “whose relations with others are not seen as external... but as internal to the self’s own identity” (p. 13). In Keller’s model, self is incomplete at any moment, and in a sense “multiple,” with a “selving process” weaving “fragments into a new – if provisional – whole” (Grenz, 2001, p. 13).

Gunton (2003) claimed that the logical flow on from trinitarian theology is the one and the many being given due weight, avoiding the dual dangers of collectivism and

individualism. For Gunton (1997), anthropology derived from this theology of the Trinity, is that:

the person is neither an individual, defined in terms of separateness from others, nor one who is swallowed up into the collective. Just as Father, Son and Spirit are what they are by virtue of their otherness-in-relation, so that each particular is unique and absolutely necessary to the being of the whole, so it is, in its own way, for our being in society. (p. 13)

In facing the question of what it means to be made in the image of God, Gunton (1997) made the following claim: “To be made in the image of God is to be endowed with a particular kind of personal reality... If God is a communion of persons inseparably related... it is in our relatedness to others that our being human consists” (p. 116). Further, Gunton proposed that the relatedness has two orientations: vertical – in relationship with God, created by the Father, conformed to Christ, through the agency of the Holy Spirit; and horizontal - a human person with a destiny to being in relationship with other human persons and with responsibilities to the created world. Gunton concluded with this statement: “The triune God has created humankind as finite persons-in-relation who are called to acknowledge his creation by becoming the persons they are and by enabling the rest of creation to make its due response of praise” (p. 120).

Trinitarian anthropology against the backdrop of alternative biblical anthropologies. As Bidwell (2008) noted, at first glance, a social constructionist view of the self is an uneasy fit with Western Christianity due to the long association of Christianity with the Cartesian rationalism and the dominant modernist view of the bounded autonomous individual. Bidwell noted, however, that the social understanding of the Trinity, already referred to, demonstrates the possibilities of a fit with this understanding of self in Christian thought. He also noted that in the taking of the sacraments in communion

with others, Christians are called to “shed our narrow personal identities to identify with the body of Christ” (p. 7).

While some in the Christian community have struggled with and critiqued postmodernism and social constructionism (J. K. A. Smith, 2006), the concept of the relational self is not foreign to Christian theology. For example, while some traditional theologians might hold to a view of the self as created by God and unchangeable, others like George Stroup in the field of narrative theology have encompassed the concept of a self that is autobiographical or constructed. Links have been made between biblical anthropology and social psychology around the notion of relational self. For example, Grenz (2001) maintained that this notion of self-in-relationship with God was present in the writings of the early Christian fathers such as John of Damascus, diminished due to Augustinian influences, and is returning as a notion worthy of note over the last century. He wrote, “Personhood... is bound up with relationality, and the fullness of relationality lies ultimately in relationality with the Triune God” (p. 98).

Romans 12:2 speaks of the charge to be “transformed,” and psycho-spiritual transformation is a central concept in much Christian writing. Metzner (1998) maintained that “lucid and detailed accounts of the phenomenology of transformative experiences” can be found in the mystical literature (p. 11). Brown (1998) outlined the Biblical view of self as “a God-breathed soul (Gen. 2:7), living in relationship with God and others” (p. 6). Influential in evangelical circles, Christian psychologist Hart (1993) defined the modern self as “an empty self, easily troubled, fragmented. It is a highly conscious self, extremely aware of how it looks, feels, sounds, thinks, and expresses itself. But it is also naturally sinful, devoid of any real substance apart from God” (p. 168). In Hart’s view, self-actualisation, a concept developed by Maslow (1943), needs to be adapted for the Christian to mean “making Christ real in every part of the self” (p. 238).

A view of the self that has been adopted and adapted by some in the Christian community interested in contemplation is the dichotomy of the true self/false self, a psychoanalytic concept developed notably by Winnicott (1965). Pennington (2000), in writing of the challenge of the surrender of the mind necessary to the practice of “centering prayer,” referred to “the pernicious philosophy ... of Descartes, [which] has as its bottom line: I think, therefore I am” (p. 40). Pennington claimed that the reality is in fact the reverse: “I am and therefore I think, I dance, I play” (p. 41). Hart (1993) claimed that the “true self is built on the solid foundation of Christ” (pp. 168-169). From another angle, Benner (1998) claimed that the focus on self is best returned to a psycho-spiritual focus, or better yet, a somato-psycho-spiritual focus, encompassing the totality of personhood. In addressing the relationship between psychological and spiritual development, Benner claimed that the so-called spiritual and psychological components of a person are inseparable, and furthermore that processes governing relationship with God and other people are the same.

Arkwright (2008) raised the issue of the deficit construction of self, and challenged therapists to reconsider the binary notion of “being OK or not” and its effects in the counselling room and beyond. Thomas (2002) explained how therapy might “enable the rich description of preferred stories of identity” when we move beyond the notion of a consistent fixed self (p. 87). The application of narrative theological ideas when working with clients who have a Christian faith enables the use of biblical narratives for their potential liberating effect as they deconstruct problem stories of self and reconstruct alternative preferred stories (Meteyard, 2008).

The trinitarian framework, based primarily on the work of Stanley Grenz and Colin Gunton, was chosen as the basis for discussion of the human-Divine relationship from a

theological viewpoint and the basis of the analysis of references made by the participants to the Trinity.

Ways of Speaking about the Self in Counselling

The ways that people think and speak about self, selves and identity varies enormously, and at times this can be confusing and contradictory. For example, in answer to the question, “Who are you?” people may respond with an answers that include reference to roles, gender, skills, job titles, possessions or metaphysics. Answers to this question in a study of American students included such statements as “I am tall,” “I am a human being,” “I like to cook,” “I am outgoing,” “I have a driver’s license,” and “I love my family” (Kanagawa, Cross, & Markus, 2001, p. 95).

In counselling, how problems are conceived, and the treatment of those problems, flow from the way in which the self is conceived by the client and the therapist. Within the wide field of counselling and psychotherapy, there are many and varied approaches to counselling and psychotherapy, arising from the theories, notions and research of widely diverse scholars and practitioners over the last century (Corey, 2013). This study was planned and conceived within the approach to counselling called narrative therapy. There is no assumption that from amongst many sound counselling theories and their conceptions of the self, narrative therapy has the only valid or indeed substantial lens by which to view self, nor is there an assumption that its perspective is superior to any other. Rather, narrative therapy was chosen because of its established and close ties to poststructuralism, the chosen epistemology of this project, in addition to the unique perspective it brings to the notion of the relational construction of self.

The narrative approach to psychotherapy is heavily influenced by the writings of recent continental philosophers, especially Lyotard, Foucault and Derrida, and the philosophical basis of narrative therapy is generally acknowledged by narrative therapy

scholars to have emerged from and continues to sit within the poststructural framework (Denborough, 2011; Epston, 2011; Madigan, 2011; White, 1992, 2000, 2007, 2011b).

Many of the concepts flow directly from poststructural writings, and this fact is acknowledged by many writers in the field of narrative therapy (e.g., Freedman & Combs, 2002; Madigan, 2011; Thomas, 2002; White, 2007). In this regard, Madigan (2011) wrote, “Epston and White appropriated, reshaped, and mapped out many of Foucault’s ideas onto the foundational practices of narrative therapy understanding” (p. 40). For example, the notion of the “absent but implicit” is a Derridean notion developed for therapeutic use in the writings of Michael White (1992, p. 136, 2000, 2006, p. 153). Epston (2011) wrote of the importance of therapy practice remaining contemporary with respect to theory when he wrote:

Don’t you think that we in narrative therapy need to renew our reading of anthropology, cultural studies, sociology, women’s studies, etc., to catch up to the world in which we live? That has always been narrative therapy’s lifeblood. (p. xxxv)

Ways of Speaking about the Self in Narrative Therapy

Because narrative therapy is self-consciously situated within the philosophical realm called poststructuralism it is necessary to briefly describe how poststructuralism has influenced the way that narrative therapists conceive of, and therefore talk about the self in counselling. First, however, it is necessary to briefly describe poststructuralism and how it emerged during last century.

Poststructuralism followed on the heels of structuralism, and can be best understood by contrasting it with structuralism. Narrative therapist Thomas (2002) explained that structuralist ideas in the social sciences influenced the way that identity was conceived. She explained how in structuralism, people could be studied as discrete objects, with the implication that deep below the surface there was an “inner self” to be discovered, as

scientists had made discoveries about “truth” by searching beneath the surface of matter. Thomas explained that many approaches to therapy are based on this type of thinking, so that when people are behaving in ways considered less than desirable, this has been conceived to be “due to some disorder, deficit or distortion in the inner self” (p. 86). She concluded that structuralism had influenced the way therapists conceived of problems about people, the way “truth” about people could be inferred by the expert therapist, and the treatments designed to address these problems.

King and Horrocks (2010) explained that in poststructuralism, the interconnection of discourses and power and the shifting meaning of language are key ideas. In fact, language itself is seen as the producer of knowledge, and knowledge is generated rather than discovered in the process of conversation. For example, in a counselling session, knowledge is co-produced by the social interaction between the counsellor and counsellee. There is an active engagement in the production of meaning and knowledge. As M. Gergen and Gergen (2003) put it:

Accounts of “experience” seem more adequately understood as the outcome of a particular textual/cultural history in which people learn to tell stories of their lives to themselves and others. Such narratives are embedded within the sense-making processes of historically and culturally situated communities. (p. 578)

Madigan (2011) proposed that “poststructuralists argue for a consideration of a posthumanist and decentred view of identity” (p. 67). Madigan described the concept of identity adopted by narrative therapy as “cultural, discursive, multisited, multistoried, contextual, and relational” (p. 66). He attributed the narrative origins of a relational self to the work of Russian linguist and psychologist Bakhtin in the 1930s, and concluded that from this standpoint, “we are therefore direct contributors to each other’s emerging identity” (p. 68).

Narrative co-founder White (1992, 2007) distinguished between the tradition of structuralist thinking of identity based on internal state understandings of self and an alternative poststructural way of thinking about identity, which he termed *intentional state understandings* of self, after Bruner. Internal state understandings of self presume a central core or essence from which actions emanate. The elements of this core include “unconscious motives, instincts, needs, desires, drives, dispositions, personality traits, personal properties (like strengths and resources)” (p. 101). In this way of thinking, the individual expresses the essence of himself or herself in a positive “functional” manner, or in a “dysfunctional” manner. White linked the development of these internal state understandings of self to the modern notions of “human nature,” the modern concept of “self” as a fixed core entity, and the development of a normalizing judgement as a system of social control, extending Foucault’s concept of “modern power.” This structural notion of self has been variously described in the literature as a “modern,” “bounded, disciplined, autonomous self” (Messer & Warren, 2001, p. 195); “bounded, autonomous and atomistic” (Bidwell, 2008, p. 7); “autonomous” and “authentic” (J. Russell, 1999); “self-controlled, unitary, discrete, orderly” (Michael, 1992, p. 77); “rational, autonomous and self-transparent” (Besley, 2002, p. 130). K. J. Gergen (2009) warned of the dangerous potential of the bounded self, with its focus on isolation, success and failure and its demand for self-esteem. He advised that the notion of an essentialist self “invites alienation, loneliness, distrust, hierarchy, competition, and self-doubt” (p. 61). In addition, Wortham (2001) spoke of the distinction between the realist notions of “the stable psychological self” and the social constructionist “dialogic self” (Wortham, 2001, pp. 138–148). Regarding the uniqueness of the notion of the essentialist self to Western cultures, sociologist Geertz (1974) said:

The Western conception of the person as a bounded, unique cognitive universe, a dynamic centre of awareness, emotion, judgement and action organized into a distinctive whole is, however incorrigible it may seem to us, a rather peculiar idea within the concept of the world's cultures. (p. 71)

White (2007) distinguished such structuralist thinking from intentional state understandings of self by the notion of personal agency, which he claimed “casts people as the originators and negotiators of life's meaning” and “originators of... the preferred developments of their lives” (p. 103). The intentional state notion of self includes such categories as intentions, purposes, values, beliefs, commitment to ways of living, hopes, dreams, passions and callings. White acknowledged Bruner as the source of these notions of personal agency and intentional state conception of identity. Bruner (1990) proposed that the influence of positivist thinking in psychology had obscured personal agency, and delegitimized intentional notions of selfhood.

In contrast to ways of thinking based on the structural self, the notion of a poststructural self has been described variously by different theorists as “postmodern” and “protean” (J. Russell, 1999); and “fragmented,” “alienated,” “hyper-reflexive,” “multiple,” “multiplicitous,” “malleable” and “multiphrenic” (Foucault, 1979; K. J. Gergen, 1991; White, 1992). Amongst writers who have welcomed the concept of a relational self is sociologist K. J. Gergen (2011), who argued for the use of the term “relational being,” because of his desire to move away from the individualistic connotations of the term “self.” The notion of self in the poststructural paradigm is one that is primarily relational, constituted continuously, and is not fixed, unified or enduring (Lather, 1992; Lovlie, 1992). This de-centred self does not possess a unified core and identities are negotiated and renegotiated (Lather, 1992). This notion of the self has been the core of some of the postmodern counselling approaches such as strengths-based, feminist, solution-focussed, collaborative, and narrative approaches to therapy (Tarragona, 2008). These approaches

require the more flexible, malleable concept of self as the basis for their approach to the notion of self and change. While Bruner (1990) maintained that the selves are not “isolated nuclei of consciousness locked in the head” (p. 138), he intimated the co-existence of both enduring and constructionist notions of the self when he proposed that the self “stand both as a guardian of permanence and a barometer responding to local cultural weather” (p. 110).

Based on White’s work, Morgan (2002) distinguished between what she termed “structuralist categories of identity” and “non-structuralist categories of identity” and Table 1 illustrates the distinction she made between these categories of identity. For the purposes of this project, the term internal state understandings will be used to capture the structuralist category of thinking about the self, and intentional state understandings to capture what Morgan (2002) termed “non-structuralist categories of identity” (p. 53).

Table 1

Categories of Identity

Structuralist Categories of Identity (internal state understandings)	Non-structuralist Categories of Identity (intentional state understandings)
Motives	Principles
Needs	Commitments
Traits	Hopes
Characteristics	Dreams
Resources	Values
Strengths	Beliefs
Qualities	Passions or callings
Attributes	Intentions
Drives	Purposes
Deficits	
Talents	

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Ways of Speaking about the Problem and Treatment in Narrative Therapy

Coming from this poststructural standpoint, narrative therapy conceives of, and therefore speaks of the person and the problem in distinctive ways. In addition, the stance of the therapist with respect to the person, the treatment goals and the treatment itself, are distinguishable from structuralist approaches. In Table 2, Thomas (2002) helpfully summarized and contrasted structuralist and poststructuralist ways of thinking and in the third column, she has listed the invitations that poststructuralism offers therapists as they work with people.

The problem conceived. One of the invitations for therapists, and in fact a key distinctive of narrative therapy, is the use made of externalisation of the problem (Epston & White, 1992; Morgan, 2000; White, 2007, 2011b). Michael White (2011b) maintained that when the problem is conceived to be resident inside a person, the history and politics of the problem are obscured, and personal agency is diminished. He explained that externalisation of the problem required the rejection of an essential, individualized self and instead required a poststructural understanding of a constituted self. In the process of therapy, the problem is named, and the relative influence of the problem can be discussed, with the culture and history made explicit and open to deconstruction. Through the process of externalising the problem in this manner, the problem is seen not as residing in the individual, nor in the family, but existing in language, as a social construction, and as such the relationship between the problem and the person can be revised (Denborough, 2008; Guterman & Rudes, 2008; Madigan, 2011; Morgan, 2000; White, 1992). In narrative therapy the premise is that “the problem is the problem, as opposed to the person being seen as the problem” (Morgan, 2000, p. 17). Madigan (2011) explained it this way: “when narrative therapists take the poststructural step not to privatise problems inside a person’s

Table 2

Structuralism, Poststructuralism and Invitations for Therapists

Structuralism thinks...	Poststructuralism thinks...	Poststructuralist thought invites us as therapists to...
<p>The aim of inquiry is to search for "deep structures" or "essential truths" about people</p>	<p>It's important to draw attention to the real effects of the process of looking for "deep structures" or "essential truths". One of these effects in the health professions has been the development of various norms and ideas about what people's lives should look like in order to be healthy</p>	<p>Assist people (where relevant) to stop measuring their lives according to what certain social norms say life <i>should</i> be about</p>
<p>Such a search for "deep structures" or "essential truths" can be objective</p>	<p>What we are looking for, what we believe and where we come from will shape both how we look and what we'll find.</p>	<p>Question therapist "objectivity", "expertise" and "practices of interpretation".</p>
<p>It is 'deep structure' (e. g. inner-self) that shapes life.</p>	<p>Language and the use of language plays a vital role in shaping life. What people say and do and how we relate to each other shapes life. The meanings that we give to the events in our lives, and how we organise these into stories about ourselves and others, shapes life.</p>	<p>Question taken-for-granted ideas and assumptions that might be sustained through the language we are using in therapy. Consider how stories and rituals and other performative aspects are relevant to understanding the process of therapy.</p>
<p>Our ideas, problems, qualities, are linked to some internal self.</p>	<p>Our ideas, problems, qualities are all products of culture and history. They have been created over time and in particular contexts.</p>	<p>Externalise ideas, problems and qualities in therapy conversations.</p>
<p>Our identities are fixed and essential – to be found within our inner-selves.</p>	<p>Our identities are constantly created in relationship with others, with institutions and with broader relations of power.</p>	<p>Take seriously how every therapy conversation will shape the identity (to some extent) of both the person consulting the therapist and the therapist. Think through how we can involve appreciative witnesses to the work that is occurring in the therapy room. Develop accountability practices to check out the real effects of therapy conversations on those who consult with us.</p>
<p>Our identities are always consistent.</p>	<p>Our identities are made up, and continually being made up, of many (sometimes contradictory) stories.</p>	<p>Consider how the stories of our lives shape our lives and how therapy might enable the rich description of preferred stories of identity.</p>

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body, then the person, problem, and therapeutic resolutions begin to look relationally different” (p. 65).

The practice of externalising the problem is in contrast to therapy approaches from structuralism that locate the problem inside the person. Morgan (2000) explained that the problem in structural thinking is linked to an inner self, and the causes of problems are conceived to range from chemical imbalance, genetic dispositions, “deep-seated” trauma, and “disorders” of the “personality”. Morgan added that labels are frequently ascribed to such problem causes, and stigma and discrimination often follow such practices.

Another key idea in narrative therapy that emerged from poststructuralism is the decentred positioning of the therapist (Madigan, 2011; White, 1992, 2007, 2011b), based on the Foucauldian notion of the decentred subject. White (2007) described this stance as “decentred but influential” (p. 39). The client is considered to be the expert on his or her own life, and the therapist is not the expert on the life of the client. This stance of the therapist can be distinguished from the stance of the therapist in a counselling approach informed by structuralism, where the therapist is generally considered the “expert” (Morgan, 2000).

The goals of therapy and treatment. White (2007) explained that in the process of therapy, people are interviewed regarding intentions, purposes and values, and intentional understandings of self are developed such that “they become generalized themes about life and identity” (p. 259). White made it clear that by privileging nonstructuralist intentional state understandings over structuralist internal state understandings, he was not dismissing them entirely as unhelpful therapeutically. He wrote, “there are many cherished internal state understandings of life that are quite beautiful and that can be seen to have positive consequences” (p. 104). However, he noted the limitations of such notions regarding personal agency, and the individual isolation

inherent in such notions. It was White's claim that internal state understandings of self are culturally dominant, and it is the role of the therapist to invite the client to re-engage with the possibilities of intentional state notions of identity (p. 242).

In narrative therapy, identity is considered to be open to formation and development, and this focus is encapsulated by such terms as "rich story development", "identity projects", "alternative stories of life and identity" (White, 2007, pp. 9, 104, 136), and the capacity to "generate identity conclusions" (Madigan, 2011, p. 36). K. J. Gergen (2009) commended narrative therapy as "outstanding in its sensitivity to the way in which meaning is molded in relationship" (p. 300). By means of linguistic-semiotic analysis, Muntigl (2004b) used linguistic analysis in his focus on the narratives of clients experiencing narrative therapy, and he noted the way in which change to a more agential narrative facilitated significant change in the clients.

Narrative therapists generally express concern at the totalizing effects of "negative identity conclusions" (e.g., White, 2007, p. 26), and they use externalization of the problem in order to tease out the effects of the problem on the person, including the politics of the problem, situated in its cultural context. This externalization allows people to distance themselves from the problem, and hence from the negative and often totalizing conclusions about their identity. From this "constitutionalist" perspective, deconstruction of the problem with its dominant power and politics is then possible (Morgan, 2000; Parker, 1999; White, 1992, 2007). For example, White (2011a) argued that to engage in "expert internalizing discourses of psychopathology" (p. 64) is a political act, and one that reminds therapists that their work is not free of responsibility for our actions and interactions within the counselling conversations. Because identities are conceived to be constructed through relationships, and influenced by the subjugating cultural, political and ideological discourses, they can be re-negotiated and, through deconstruction, the political,

ideological and cultural discourses are exposed (Madigan, 2011). By contrast, the goals of counselling which conceptualize a structural self are self-development, self-actualization, self-efficacy and self-determinism, fitting with the individualism and human potential movement of the 1970s (J. Russell, 1999).

The Study in Context and the Expected Contribution to the Literature

Social constructionism has significantly informed postmodern counselling (Guterman & Rudes, 2008), and the acknowledgment of self as a construction based on relationship has been firmly established in therapeutic circles (M. E. Griffith, 1995). This project takes the literature one step further as it has explored the relationship with God and will potentially shed light on the concept of self as informed by this human-Divine or vertical relationship. Because self is a key element in the therapeutic setting, this study is expected to contribute to understandings of the relational self for practitioners of counselling and psychotherapy.

The relationship with God is of major importance for those of Christian faith. The findings of this study would contribute significantly for those in pastoral care settings, who take account of how the self is both constructed and understood in relation to God. The findings will assist in the development of the concept of psycho-spirituality, which has been neglected in Australia (Passmore, 2003). In addition, for those professionals who work outside of counselling settings with people who have a relationship with God, this work will contribute to an understanding of the significant themes that might arise in the conversations, and contribute to confidence in facilitating such conversations by adding to their language base (J. L. Griffith & Griffith, 2002).

Conclusion and Research Questions

To this point, the literature review has introduced the importance of addressing psycho-spirituality, and briefly surveyed some of the literature on attachment to God, as this is the lens that most counsellors and psychologists have used to view the human-Divine relationship and its influence on people to date. It was argued that while this body of work has significance and relevance to the study to hand, there are limitations due to the differing view of self adopted by those in the attachment to God field. There was justification for the choice of a social trinitarianism as the lens of choice for discussing theological themes that emerge from the interviews. The distinction between internal state understandings and intentional state understandings of self was developed, and its relevance to counselling explained. Narrative therapy and its placement within the poststructural framework were then outlined, along with a brief description of poststructuralism.

It is proposed on the basis of this survey of the literature, that while there are scholars writing in the area of psycho-spirituality from a number of theoretical positions, there is a paucity of specific research on the spiritual dimension of the relationally constructed self for those within the Christian community, amongst whom it is common to refer to a personal relationship with God (e.g., Keating, 1996; Peck, 1978). This study is designed to specifically address this gap in the literature, and explore through conversations with people who identify as Protestant Christians, how they talk about the influence of their relationship with God on their understanding of self. This study, then, explored what Pargament (2002) called “the most distinctively human of all phenomena” – that is, human spirituality and its application to the uniquely poststructural expression of counselling that is narrative therapy.

This brings us to the following four research questions:

1. How do people who identify as Protestant Christian speak about the influence of their personal relationship with God on their understanding of self?
2. How do people who identify as Protestant Christian speak about the influence of the relationship with a significant other person on their understanding of self?
3. What similarities can be seen in the ways that people who identify as Protestant Christian speak about the influence of relationship with God and relationship with other on their understanding of self? What differences can be seen?
4. Does the reported relationship with God seem to be more influential than the reported relationship with other in understanding of self?

Chapter 3 Research Design & Methodology

The literature review in the previous chapter culminated in the listing of the following four research questions:

1. How do people who identify as Protestant Christian speak about the influence of their personal relationship with God on their understanding of self?
2. How do people who identify as Protestant Christian speak about the influence of the relationship with a significant other person on their understanding of self?
3. What similarities can be seen in the ways that people who identify as Protestant Christian speak about the influence of relationship with God and relationship with other on their understanding of self? What differences can be seen?
4. Does the reported relationship with God seem to be more influential than the reported relationship with other in understanding of self?

In this chapter, the research design and methodology, with their underlying philosophical assumptions, are described. Justification for this methodology choice is made with reference to the research aims. The research method is then described, including recruitment, conducting of the interviews, analysis and interpretation of the data. A discussion of rigour and ethics relating to this research project concludes this chapter.

Research Paradigm

Because the research questions focus on an understanding of self and relationship, a qualitative research approach was chosen for this project. Given that qualitative research has an emphasis on understanding, meaning and process, and detailed, rich description, rather than seeking measurement or analysis of causality, it was judged to be the most appropriate choice (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007). Exploratory

qualitative research has also been recommended in situations such as this where the topic is previously unexplored (Creswell, 2003).

Qualitative research has been conducted over the past decades by researchers in the social sciences who share a wide range of worldviews from positivism through to a range of more postmodern views (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). While the point has been made that such categories as epistemology, ontology and paradigms are “socially conditioned and historically relative” (Scheurich, 1997, p. 32), it is the general practice to outline these assumptions at the outset of a research project, so that the reader is aware of the philosophical assumptions of the researcher.

This qualitative research project is situated within the epistemological realm of poststructuralism. Structuralism and poststructuralism, which followed quickly on the heels of structuralism, both emphasize the significant role of language in the process of acquiring knowledge of the world, and both stand in contrast to the realist notion of the possibility of acquiring knowledge of the real world. Many of the key ideas of the poststructural view have been attributed to the ideas of Michel Foucault (1926-1984). In particular, the interconnection of discourses and power and the shifting meaning of language are key ideas (King & Horrocks, 2010).

In poststructuralism language itself is seen as the producer of knowledge, therefore knowledge is generated and discursively produced, rather than “uncovered” in the process of the conversation of the interview. In interviews, knowledge is co-produced by the social interaction between interviewer and interviewee, with an acknowledgement of situated historicity, power relations and discursive practices (Hosking & Pluut, 2010; K. Vaughan, 2004). There is an active engagement in the production of meaning and knowledge. As M. Gergen and Gergen (2003) put it:

Accounts of “experience” seem more adequately understood as the outcome of a particular textual/cultural history in which people learn to tell stories of their lives to themselves and others. Such narratives are embedded within the sense-making processes of historically and culturally situated communities. (p. 578)

In this poststructural epistemology, the goal is not to find “truth”; rather the research project can be understood as “a game of truth and error” in seeking to explore and understand (Foucault, 1990, p. 6), where in this context, “game” is taken seriously (McArdle & McWilliam, 2005). In this context, the interviews were considered to be the product of a reflexive process rather than an opportunity to produce data from an objectively neutral perspective (Denzin, 2003; Elliott, Fischer, & Rennie, 1999; King & Horrocks, 2010). From a poststructural, or indeed from a postmodern view, such an objective neutral perspective does not exist; there is “no view from nowhere”; situatedness is a given (Nagel, 1989). In the social sciences this view has been echoed by such writers as M. Gergen and Gergen (2003), who recommended the pragmatic possibility of research producing “situated knowledge” (p. 587). Such a project looks not to make foundational claims in order to establish what is real and true about the world, as a modernist approach would, but rather, this project has taken an approach, akin to neopragmatism, to describe and summarize generalizations, acknowledging all such generalizations to be unfinished and to contain uncertainties (Polkinghorne, 1992).

While the intended epistemology of this research is poststructural, it is acknowledged that there are unintentional residual assumptions in the planning and execution of this study which might more accurately fit within a positivist, or, as Scheurich (1997) put it, “realist” epistemology. As Scheurich said, “simply saying at the beginning of a report that one is doing interpretive, phenomenological, criticalist, feminist, or constructivist research does not mean that one is not enacting a realist perspective” (p. 176). The residual assumptions Scheurich identified are threefold: the autonomous, self-

defining agency or the subjectivity of the researcher; that the researcher is capable of and plans to use reason for the analysis; and thirdly, that there exists some degree of validity or trustworthiness in the data in representations or interpretations of “real” stories. Scheurich further claimed that some of the research practices which are included in a study such as this – recruiting, interviewing, recording, coding and thematic analysis – might reasonably be considered to be “modernist practices of reason” (p. 162). To further substantiate this challenge, King & Horrocks (2010) maintained that analysis of narratives is founded on “scientific, positivist modes of thought” (p. 213), and as such, may be challenged as to being a good fit with the chosen epistemology of this research enquiry. MacLure (2010) has reminded researchers that despite the best intentions, there will always be “remainders” of positivism and Enlightenment rationality in qualitative research. This project is no different, and while the key analysis is the narrative analysis, and intentionally used a poststructural epistemology, it is acknowledged that the descriptor and the metaphor analyses might fit better within a positivist framework and assumptions.

Stages of the Research Process or Method

Recruiting & Participant Selection Criteria. Eight protestant congregations in the Brisbane region were identified across a range of denominations, including Anglican, Baptist, Church of Christ, Australian Christian Churches (previously Assemblies of God), and independent. While advertising for volunteers might reduce unintentional coercion, methodologically it can result, by self-selection, in a sampling of people who are not sufficiently balanced or diverse, or a poor response (King & Horrocks, 2010). In this case, there was a desire to include both men and women, and self-selection was not the best way to ensure this would happen. The first approach to a church to seek volunteers was made through the church receptionist by asking to place an advertisement in the weekly newsletter, seeking volunteers. In this case, after two weeks of advertising in the news

bulletin of the first church approached there were no volunteers. For both theoretical and practical reasons, an alternative strategy of using the clergy as “gatekeepers” and “insider assistants” was formulated and implemented (King & Horrocks, 2010, p. 31).

Seven further congregations in and around Brisbane were identified and the clergy were approached by email or a phone call to request an appointment to explain the project, its purpose and benefits and to seek their assistance to invite participants from their congregations to be a part of the study. The clergy in this case were considered to have the role of “gatekeepers” for participants from their church (King & Horrocks, 2010). While it was not considered essential either ethically or legally to approach the clergy in this manner, it was considered desirable and advantageous, as the cooperation of the clergy to assist with recruitment as “insiders” was considered to be significantly important for the success of the recruitment process (King & Horrocks, 2010).

The clergy were asked to identify up to four people from their church, preferably two men and two women, whom the clergy considered might be willing to participate in the research, and to pass on the packets which included the Letter to Participants (Appendix C), Consent Forms (Appendix D) and Background Questions (Appendix B) to these four people. Acknowledging that the pastor has a form of power in this relationship, these packets also included a stamped addressed envelope in which volunteers could return their paperwork, rather than have them return the completed paperwork through the clergy. This strategy helped ensure the voluntary nature of each participant and also increased the level of anonymity (King & Horrocks, 2010). In most cases, the clergy person approached was the senior pastor of the congregation, but in one large church, the researcher approached a pastor who held a suitable level of authority to act as gatekeeper and insider assistant, but who was not the senior pastor.

During the appointment with each clergy or pastor, the researcher briefly explained the purpose of the research, the time commitment for participants and the potential benefits. Each church leader was supplied with written information about the project by email or hard copy. Some requested more information than others, and all questions were answered. This brief appointment gave the clergy an opportunity to meet the researcher and establish a degree of trustworthiness and safety necessary for them to be willing to invite people from their congregation to take part. The interview also offered the opportunity to establish common interests and people in the Protestant Christian network, which enabled the clergy to make an assessment about the credibility of the project and trustworthiness of the researcher.

This direct recruitment strategy employed has been termed “purposive sampling” (Punch, 2005, p. 187). As the aim of the study is to gain insight and understanding of the relationship with God in the conception of self among the communities of people who self-identify as Protestant Christian, this was judged to be the most appropriate strategy for sourcing volunteers. Because the participants were sourced from a range of Protestant Christian churches in Brisbane there is the likelihood of diversity and yet potentially some cohesive understandings. At the same time, being a poststructural inquiry, there was not a strong expectation of the representativeness of this group of individuals coming as they do from their unique social, cultural, historical and spiritual locations (Chase, 2003).

The initial phase of recruiting with these eight churches yielded a return of 20 surveys, from a distribution of 30 surveys. One of the clergy reported back that they could not identify any prospective participants, which accounted for four non-returns. The remaining six non-returns were presumed to be people who took packets of information and surveys but chose not to participate. Of the 20 returns, two people withdrew from the study after completing the initial consent form, stating that they had reconsidered their

involvement due to time constraints. The final two participants of the required sample of 20 were recruited by approaching the clergy of a ninth church, with a request to help locate two volunteers.

The selection criteria were applied to the returned background surveys, and the filter questions scrutinised. The selection criteria were that the participant should be over 18, consider themselves to be a Christian currently, and consider that their religious beliefs or personal faith are important, quite important or very important, as indicated on the survey form. No doubt because of the recruiting strategy of using direct recommendation by clergy, all 20 volunteers met the selection criteria. Some basic demographics such as age grouping, sex, and denomination were also collected on this background survey (Appendix B).

All in all, 20 participants were recruited from seven churches representing five different protestant denominations in Brisbane, Australia. The participants ranged in age from the age bracket 18-25 to the age bracket listed as over 70. Nine men and 11 women were interviewed.

The Interviews. The interviews were designed to be semi-structured, with a series of questions prepared by the researcher, and used for each participant, and freedom given to the participant to expand on any particular question, and to develop the ideas in any direction on the given topic. Semi-structured interviews have been particularly recommended as a methodology where the purpose is exploratory (Davies & Allen, 2007). Semi-structured interviews allowed for an informal, relaxed and private conversation (Kunkel et al., 1999).

The interview question schedule was designed by the researcher and can be found in Appendix A. Some of the key questions were based on an exercise in relational identity outlined by Freedman and Combs (2002). After further consultation with one of the

authors, Jill Freedman, the questions were adapted for use with the human-Divine relationship. Written permission was sought and granted to use and adapt the exercise.

In order to value the time and investment of the participants, and to make it as easy as possible for them to participate, the venue and timing of the interview was within the control of the participants. They were given the option to be interviewed in their home or workplace, or at the home of the researcher. Sixteen interviews were conducted in the home of the researcher, one in the researcher's professional offices, and the remaining 23 interviews were conducted in the home, church or workplace of the participant. For health and family reasons, some participants could not have taken part in the study had they been required to be interviewed away from their home or workplace. Some participants expressed appreciation for the flexibility of the venue and timing.

The two interview conversations were conducted with at least two weeks between conversations. These conversations were video-recorded on an unobtrusive video-recording device with the written permission of the participant, and confirmed at the interview. No participant objected, though some expressed slight discomfort about the idea of the recording at the beginning of the conversation. In each case, the option to not record the interview was offered, but declined. As words can sometimes be difficult to find when talking about a relationship with God, gestures were expected to be used sometimes in place of words, or to add emphasis to words, so it was judged that video recording would add significant data, especially for the conversation about personal relationship with God (J. L. Griffith & Griffith, 2002). The practice of recording both audio and video has also been recommended in order to capture the voice and intent of the participant (Salmon & Riessman, 2008). Sandelowski (2002) warned against the dangers of reducing research to the transcript of the interview, without embodiment, and this warning was echoed by Hydén (2013) in his ground-breaking storytelling work with people with dementia. Hydén

proposed that researchers need to consider the embodied and present dimensions of storytelling, which require more than a transcript of an audio recording.

The order of conversations was initially designed with the first interview about relationship with a significant person, and the second interview about God, and this is reflected in the Letter to Participants (Appendix C), and the approved ethics application. As Lather (1991) reported, the use of sequential interviews facilitates a sense of collaboration with participants. Because discussion of personal interaction with God in our society is not common with a stranger (Joseph, 1987), it was initially decided to make the second interview about relationship with God in order to allow time to build rapport during the first interview, and thus build an environment so that sharing about relationship with God in the second interview might be more comfortable.

After reflecting on the results of the first two interviews, as is appropriate with a reflexive methodology, it was decided instead to reverse the order for half of the participants, so that some did the interview about God first, and the others did the interview about another person first. This was decided because in the early interviews, participants demonstrated little or no discomfort about talking about God, as initially expected. Therefore the reason for making this a subsequent interview was invalidated. Instead, it was judged that alternating the order of the interviews would increase the trustworthiness of the data.

It was also decided to add three preliminary questions about self at the start of the first interview, whether that was the interview about relationship with other or relationship with God (see Appendix A). These open-ended questions gave the opportunity to check whether the participants attributed changes to their self-understanding to relationship with God, relationship with an other, or other factors. Three questions about God were also devised and added to the interview about relationship with God. The questions about God

were designed to get a baseline appreciation and understanding of the participants' notions of God, and to explore whether the participants considered personal relationship with God to be possible. While the selection criteria included commitment to the Christian faith, it was decided that it would be worthwhile to explore the participants' basic ideas about God, and possibility of relationship with God, before going deeper into the story of the relationship with God.

The ethics committee gave approval for these minor modifications. It was the intention that for half of the participants, the conversation about the other was to be first and the interview about personal relationship with God to be second, and vice versa. As it turned out, 11 participants started with the interview about another person, and nine started with the interview about relationship with God. This is considered an insignificant difference.

Transcription. The researcher transcribed 24 conversations verbatim, and an assistant researcher transcribed the remaining 16 interviews. Whilst this was a time-consuming task, it had the benefit that it gave the researcher an opportunity to review the interviews as they were being transcribed. The audio file was extracted from the video file, and the transcription of both interviewer and participant was made from this audio file. The system chosen for transcription was developed by King & Horrocks (2010). It included notation for pauses, interruptions, audibility, and other features like tone of voice to be noted where it would change the meaning of the speaker. Once the transcripts of individual interviews were completed, they were compiled into one interview per participant, combining the preliminary questions about self and God, the interview about another person and the interview about God. Thus there are 20 interview transcripts matching the 20 participants.

At this stage all videos were reviewed by the researcher against the transcript, and significant nonverbal gestures were added to the transcript. The video viewing was an additional opportunity to review the material of the interview conversation in a holistic way, especially for interviews that had been transcribed by the assistant. It needs to be noted here that one video file (Jennie's interview about relationship with God) was accidentally deleted, and the interview was reconstructed by notes taken during the interview.

As mentioned earlier, participants were invited to choose a significant person about whom they were to be interviewed. If the participant said they were unsure about whom to choose, the first four questions were read to the participant, and many said they found that helpful in making the choice. As pictured in Figure 1, half of the participants (10) chose to be interviewed about a spouse. For nine of the ten participants, it was a current spouse. Marion chose to speak of her second husband who had died some years previously. Liz was the only participant who chose to speak of a parent, and Rachel chose to speak about her relationship with her daughter. Sharon chose to be interviewed about her Nana, Biggles his brother, and two (Vincent and Wayne) chose friends. Three (Patricia, Bob, Jane) chose to be interviewed about mentoring relationships, and one (Danny) his pastor. Of these, the majority (13) were equal or peer relationships, with the remaining seven choices being unequal in terms of power or influence. These unequal relationships included parents, grandparents, pastors, mentors, parents and child relationships.

Pseudonyms were inserted for the name of the participant and the person they chose to talk about as a significant other person in their life. Participants were invited to choose a pseudonym. When participants left the choice to the researcher, or said that they did not mind their own name being used, it was explained that the ethical requirements of the research called for the use of pseudonyms, and the researcher chose the pseudonym.

Transcripts of the conversations were sent to the participants for their comments and clarification of anything that was recorded after completion of both interviews. Any comments they wished to add, delete or amend were added, deleted or amended (Lather, 1991).

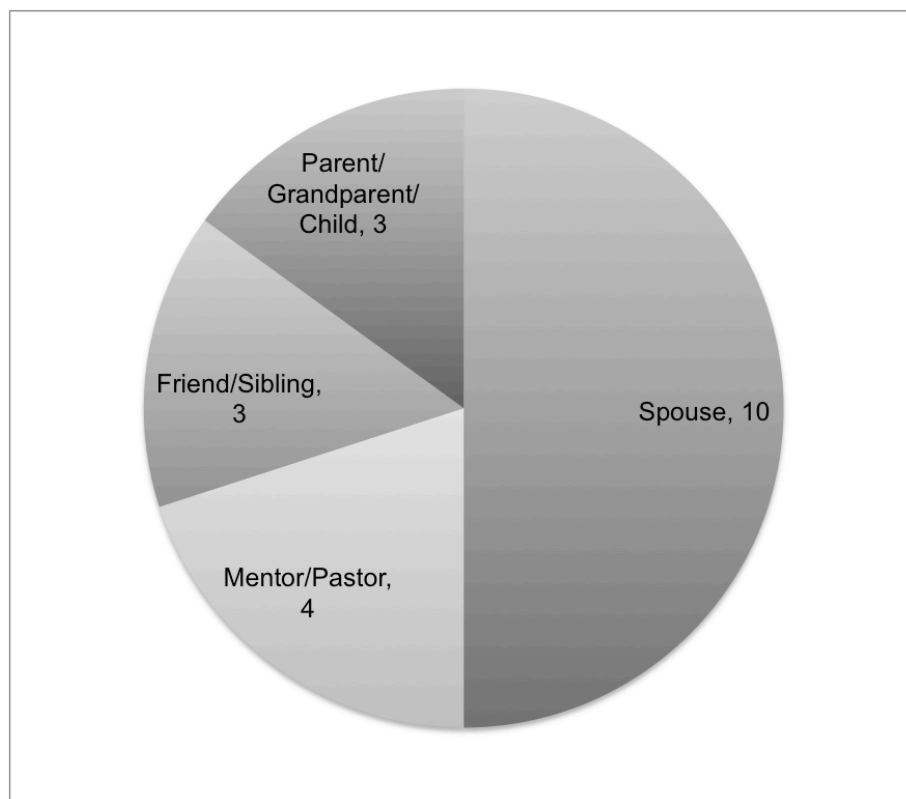


Figure 1. Participants' relationship with chosen other. This figure illustrates the type of relationship between the participant and the person chosen for the purpose of the interview.

When interviews are conducted, and stories are told, there is a degree of performance, if in modified form, that is inherent in the telling of stories (Cortazzi, 1993; King & Horrocks, 2010; Loots, Coppens, & Sermijn, 2013; McLeod, 2004). As Cortazzi put it, “[people] are rehearsing, redefining and regenerating their personal and professional lives, since self is what we believe ourselves to be, our self-narrative” (p. 139). For this reason, there was an unwritten expectation of an audience response of appreciation of a performance – in this case, the response of the researcher listening to the telling or retelling of events. This was evident in the researcher’s minimal encouragers (sounds like

“hms” and “yes”) and comments that became a part of the conversation, rather than simply asking questions and recording answers. Part of the role of sounds like “hms” and “yes” is more than an expression of appreciation for a performance, as they are also a bridge to develop rapport and convey empathy, well documented in the counselling literature (Corey, 2013; Young, 2008). The verbatim transcript in this project therefore included all comments by both researcher and participant, to acknowledge the co-construction of the narratives produced.

Analysis and Interpretation

The literature described a vast and potentially confusing array range of qualitative analysis styles that match in varying and contested degrees with the philosophical assumptions of this project (e.g., Punch, 2005; Saldana, 2009). It is acknowledged that finding a good fit for a style of analysis and interpretation and underlying assumptions is difficult. It was decided to use different styles of analysis from the literature in order to explore the data in the fullest possible way. It was decided to adopt first a narrative analysis, followed by a detailed analysis of the narratives that focussed on the use of descriptors. It was decided after reading the transcripts to add a further analysis of the narratives that focussed on the use of metaphors in the transcripts. Table 3 records the research questions that are explored by each of these analyses. It is clear from the table that the narrative analysis and the metaphor analysis addressed each of the four research questions, and the descriptor analysis addressed the first three research questions.

Narrative analysis. Narrative analysis has been used in a range of disciplines over the past decades since what has been called the *narrative turn*. More recently, there have been an increasing number of studies using narrative analysis in many of the social

Table 3

Analyses that Explore each of the Research Questions

Research Question No.	Narrative Analysis	Analysis of Narratives	
		Descriptor Analysis	Metaphor Analysis
1	✓	✓	✓
2	✓	✓	✓
3	✓	✓	✓
4	✓		✓

Note. The wording of the research questions can be found at the start of this chapter.

sciences disciplines, including the disciplines of psychology and counselling (Cortazzi, 1993; King & Horrocks, 2010; Riessman & Quinney, 2005; Riessman & Speedy, 2007). In 1998 the cross-disciplinary *Journal of Narrative Inquiry* was launched in response to this interest. Narrative has been defined in many ways, but Riessman and Quinney argued that there is a consensus that sequence and consequence are key distinguishing features of narrative, whereby the chosen story elements are organized into a sequence that has meaning for the audience of the story telling.

Narrative analysis was considered because of the consistency of its philosophical assumptions with the epistemology of this study, and the key role assigned to language in the making of meaning. Narrative analysis was also judged to be an attractive choice for this project because of its strong links with narrative therapy, which is an intended application for this research, and also because of its compatibility with the subject of this study, the notion of self (Larsson & Sjöblom, 2010; Riessman, 1993). While King and Horrocks (2010) claimed that “it is through these narratives [of self] that we make ourselves intelligible with coherent and unified identities” (p. 218), others have argued that the notions of coherence and unification of the narrative of self fit more with a modern essentialist self. They challenged researchers working within postmodern paradigms to consider that self narratives are best considered a performance of a preferred identity, and

to be aware that such performances can be contradictory or fragmented, much as the postmodern self can be protean and disjointed (Crossley, 2000; Loots et al., 2013; MacLure, 2010; Polkinghorne, 1992).

A key distinction in the description of narrative analysis is the distinction between “paradigmatic knowing” and “narrative knowing,” based on Bruner’s work (King & Horrocks, 2010, p. 213; Polkinghorne, 1995, p. 12). It has been surmised that until recently paradigmatic knowing has been more acceptable in research circles than narrative knowing because of its “scientific” appeal (Botella et al., 2004; Riessman & Speedy, 2007). Polkinghorne (1995) helpfully distinguished between the results of these two ways of knowing, maintaining that paradigmatic knowing leads to analysis of narratives, and narrative knowing leads to narrative analysis. He associated the former, analysis of narratives, with the more frequently used thematic analyses such as that employed in grounded theory, with its purpose to “generate general knowledge from a set of particular instances” (Polkinghorne, 1995, p. 14). Polkinghorne described the latter, narrative analysis, as a task that does not start with storied narratives, but rather results in a narrative or coherent story, which the researcher develops or discovers from extensive data collection. As such, he pointed out that the term “analysis” is used very loosely (p. 12). The function of narrative analysis is to seek for explanations of outcomes, and to understand persons and produce knowledge of the particular rather than the general.

There is a wide range of methodologies that come under the umbrella of narrative analysis, and little consensus about the specifics of methodology (Georgakopoulou, 2006; Ollerenshaw & Creswell, 2002; Polkinghorne, 1995). Polkinghorne (1995) claimed that narrative analysis requires sufficient data elements, not necessarily in storied form, from which to develop a plot over time, and the final product is “a storied gestalt in which the meaning of each part is given through its reciprocal relationships with the plotted whole

and other parts” (p. 18). Polkinghorne explained that these synthesized historical plots are recorded and narrated by the researcher, drawing on his or her skills and expertise to provide a retrospective explanation of events or relationships, by linking events across time in accordance with their chosen discipline. In this style of analysis, the researcher constructs or emplots a story from diachronic data, and produces a narrative. The prototypical narrative analysis is thus the case study or a biography based on research from a range of data sources.

For two major reasons, it was judged that this project was unsuited to narrative analysis in Polkinghorne’s (1995) strict process as outlined above. Firstly, this research project used a larger number of participants – 20 – than is usually employed in narrative analyses. Secondly, the data available were already in relatively diachronic storied form, because of the interview questions and style, and thus not suited to such treatment. For these reasons, a modified narrative analysis strategy employed by ethnographer Luttrell (2010) was therefore chosen. Using Luttrell’s modified narrative analysis strategy, the multiple stories told by the participants were identified and listed for each participant. These stories were read, and reread, and unique “God stories” and “other stories” were developed for each participant, most relatively coherent but sometimes fragmented. The next step was to note trends, commonalities and exceptions across the stories. In this way, unique narratives that contributed answers to the research questions, as well as potentially cohesive understandings, were observed and noted. It needs to be acknowledged that while something can be learned from this treatment, something of the uniqueness of participants is lost in this process of seeking for trends and commonalities. It is also acknowledged that there are limits on the notion of representativeness or generalizability from such a research design methodology.

From a different angle, Georgakopoulou (2006) urged researchers not to ignore incomplete and previously disregarded snatches of communication, which she termed “small stories,” and to avoid the trap of viewing narratives as “authentic and uncontaminated accounts of self” (p. 129). It was decided that this analysis would include data from the interviews that Georgakopoulou termed both “big stories” (conventionally understood as temporal ordered events with a beginning, middle and end), and “small stories” (the snatches of conversation between questions; the incomplete stories) (p. 129). These small stories would be noted as part of the narrative analysis, and in this project they focussed on the concepts of self and change, separate and additional to the key God stories and other stories, which were designed to relate the story of relationship with God and relationship with other. Notions regarding the concept of God, and particularly ideas around the Trinity, were also noted as small stories.

Analysis of narratives. It was decided from these early interviews that in addition to the narrative analysis it would be most useful to include an analysis of narratives that would focus exclusively on the descriptors of self, other and God. As explained in the previous chapter, White (2007) identified two types of self-understanding: internal and intentional state understandings of self. In view of the fact that this inquiry was to explore the relational aspects of the construction of self, it was decided to use these categories of self-understanding as the basis for an analysis of the descriptors used in the narratives. Thus in this analysis of narratives, all descriptors of the self, other and God were identified, and then categorized as either internal or intentional state understandings, and a comparison was made to determine similarities and dissimilarities from the three domains of God, other and self. This has been called a descriptor analysis throughout the thesis.

Coding Comparison. In the process of reflecting on the coding, it became evident that the descriptor analysis was reasonably subjective, as it required a judgment as to

whether descriptors used by participants matched best with internal state or intentional state understandings. In an effort to address trustworthiness in the analysis of the narratives, it was therefore decided to include a second coder in addition to the researcher.

Each transcript was a compilation of the first and second interview and included the preliminary questions about self and God (see Interview Schedule, Appendix A). Following the coding analysis of the complete transcripts of participants Katie and Bella by the researcher, the transcripts were given to a second coder familiar with the concepts of internal and intentional state understandings. The second coder was asked to read the unmarked transcripts and identify and then to code statements applying to self, other and God, and then to choose whether the descriptor statement employed internal or intentional state understandings. Both coders used the definitions from the table prepared by Morgan (2002) (see Table 1) to assist in the coding process, following the established practice of the use of clear definitions in order to increase inter-coder consistency (Martella, Nelson, Morgan, & Marchand-Martella, 2013).

Table 4 lists the concurrences and discrepancies in the coding of transcripts for participants Katie and Bella by the two coders. In a consultation that followed the coding, each discrepancy was addressed with a rationale and a decision was made by consensus between the coders about whether or not to include the statement in the category or not. This process was quite straightforward, and as agreement was already quite considerable, it was simply a matter of agreeing that a statement left out by one should be included or not, and if there was a difference of opinion, the definitions being used were reviewed as part of reaching consensus.

Discrepancies were found to be due to two potential sources. Some discrepancies were due to a statement being identified by one coder and not being noticed or judged by the other as suitable for coding. Other more significant discrepancies were due to a

Table 4

Coding Comparison for Participants Katie and Bella

Category	Agreement	Disagreement		% Agreement
	A and B	A not B	B not A	
Internal				
God	18	0	2	90
other	23	20	12	42
self	61	20	8	69
Intentional				
God	2	0	0	100
other	7	7	2	44
self	42	18	9	61

Note. Internal = Descriptors coded as matching internal state understandings.
Intentional = Descriptors matching intentional state understandings.

difference in the judgment regarding whether the statements fit the category of internal or intentional state understandings. A further minor discrepancy was found to be due to the lack of a definition of “other.” In this study, the term “other” was frequently used to refer to the person chosen by the participant to talk about in one of the interviews. Both coders lacked clarity as to whether to include statements about other people not chosen as the “other” in the interviews, but referred to in the interview.

While the percentage agreement for descriptors for God was very high (90% for internal and 100% for intentional), and reasonably high for descriptors of self (69% for internal and 61% for intentional), the percentage agreement for descriptors of other was lower (42% for internal and 44% for intentional). This was found to be due more to the fact that each coder selected a range of different statements, rather than disagreement about whether the descriptor matched internal or intentional state understandings. In the process of the analysis, it was found to be difficult to be completely thorough and accurate in identifying all statements about the other, due to the length of the document. This fact, in addition to the lack of clarity about the definition of other already referred to in the

paragraph above, explained the low percentage agreement for the category of other. Due to the overall considerable degree of coding agreement, and the fact that the majority of discrepancies were due to omission rather than disagreement about judgement of the categories, it was decided that the coding comparison for two participants was adequate as a coding check, and no further coding comparisons would be needed.

After reading of the transcripts, an additional analysis was performed to identify the language used when referring to God. This analysis was designed to explore what Trinitarian ideas might contribute to self-understanding for these Protestant Christian participants, and to explore whether the social trinitarian model of God offered a sound theological basis for exploring and describing anthropology and relationship with God.

Metaphor analysis. From a review of the literature in the area of relationship with God, and the way that people often struggle to articulate that relationship, there was a strong expectation of the use of metaphor in the data (DesCamp & Sweetser, 2005; J. L. Griffith & Griffith, 2002; Hertel & Donahue, 1995; McFague, 1982; Prest & Keller, 1993). Signs of the occurrence of metaphor in initial interviews confirmed that a further focus of the analysis of narratives could include the exploration of the use of metaphor, with an expectation that this would result in some rich data relating to the research questions.

The literary use of metaphor is frequently included in narratives that people tell. Lakoff and Johnson (1980b) proposed that our “conceptual system, in terms of which we both think and act, is fundamentally metaphorical in nature” (p. 3), and metaphor is therefore prevalent in our thinking and action. They explained that metaphors are used in an attempt to describe less concrete notions through the use of more comprehensible, concrete concepts. It is acknowledged that the meaning of any metaphor is culturally determined and linked to past experiences of the speaker and the hearer (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980a). The observation and study of metaphor in the context of a narrative

research project is not unusual, given the focus on language, and it was an expectation that an analysis of metaphor could generate fresh understandings and meaning (Jensen, 2008; Levitt, Korman, & Angus, 2000). It was therefore decided, given the prevalence of metaphors in the interview transcripts, that a metaphor analysis would be appropriate to include as well. This decision was made subsequent to the readings of the transcripts, as fitting with a qualitative exploratory approach to research, where developments for analysis and interpretation often emerge during the process of the research.

By performing both a narrative analysis and an analysis of the narratives (in this case including a descriptor analysis and a metaphor analysis), the expectation was the generation of expansive and diverse answers to the research questions, which would include both paradigmatic and narrative knowledge. As Polkinghorne (1995) put it:

Both paradigmatic and narrative cognition generate useful and valid knowledge. They are part of the human cognitive repertoire for reasoning about and making sense of the encounter with self, others, and the material realm. (p. 9)

In a similar vein, Lather (2007) consistently argued for the utilization of methodologies that incorporate both realist and deconstructive approaches, arguing that employing what she termed a “double science” acknowledges the possibilities and the limitations in the production of knowledge. This “double science,” or mixed methods approach, has been used by other qualitative researchers in the narrative arena, with the benefit of understandings that emerge from different styles of analysis (e.g., Luttrell, 2010; Marshall, 2005). Ollerenshaw and Cresswell (2002) demonstrated the application of two very different styles of the re-storying stage of narrative analysis, and in the process highlighted just two possibilities for narrative analysis. Other researchers and writers in the field have claimed that using a variety of analysis styles enables multiple viewpoints and a broader capacity for analysis and interpretation of the data (e.g., Creswell, 2003; Larsson & Sjöblom, 2010; Luttrell, 2010). Miles and Huberman (1994) were proponents of the use of

multiple styles in qualitative research, which they colourfully called “hybrid vigor” (p. 310).

Following the recommendation of Miles and Huberman (1994), schematics and visual displays were used in the reporting of qualitative results in an effort to offer clarity. Tables and figures have been included where appropriate, to complement and enhance the prose style of reporting of the data and resulting findings.

After consideration of the available and tested analyses, their fit with the topic under study, the research questions, the intended application, and the initial interview data, it was decided to do a narrative analysis, a descriptor analysis, and a metaphor analysis.

The following is the list of analyses that the data were subjected to:

Narrative analysis:

- Narrative by Participant – God stories,
- Narrative by Participant – Other stories,
- Narratives about change in self, and
- Comparison among these three domains.

Descriptor analysis:

- Descriptors of God,
- Descriptors of other,
- Descriptors of self,
- Comparison among these three domains, and
- Trinitarian analysis.

Metaphor Analysis:

- Metaphors used to describe relationship with God,
- Metaphors used to describe relationship with other,
- Metaphors used to describe relationship with self, and

Comparison among these three domains.

Rigour

In positivist paradigms, reliability, validity and generalization are the three key notions to consider for any research project, especially for quantitative projects (Tobin & Begley, 2004). In a qualitative study such as this, other factors addressing the rigour of the project need to be considered. A range of factors have been proposed to replace these criteria for qualitative research, including such notions as trustworthiness, credibility, transferability, authenticity and triangulation (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003; Seale, 1999). Arminio and Hultgren (2002) proposed six lenses through which “research goodness” of qualitative work may be judged: (a) a clearly stated epistemological framework, (b) a methodology that matches the epistemology, (c) an explicit statement of how data was collected, (d) representation of voices of researcher and participants, (e) appropriate and fresh meaning making, with examples given, that results in (f) helpful application to the profession. Some of the concerns related to research design and methodology have been addressed in this chapter. Other concerns are embedded in the thesis, or located within other chapters, and “goodness” as an overarching principle can only be judged on the overall study.

From a related but different angle, Riessman and Quinney (2005) reviewed published research in social work, and utilizing the following five criteria for “good enough” narrative inquiry:

1. Was the work empirical, that is, based on systematic observations?
2. Did analysis attend to sequence and consequence?
3. Was there some attention to language, and were transcriptions made and inspected? Did analysis attend to contexts of production (research relationships, and macro institutional contexts)?

4. Were epistemological and methodological issues treated seriously, that is, viewed critically, seen as decisions to be made, rather than ‘given’–unacknowledged? (p. 397)

Each of these criteria has been addressed by the design and methodology of this project. The work is empirical as it was a study conceived and executed by a researcher with participants. The narrative analysis attended to both sequence and consequence. In the writing of the narrative stories, the interview transcripts were read, re-read, and a narrative created that took into account both sequence and the meaning for the participant.

Transcripts were made of each interview, verbatim, and transcripts were used in the narrative analysis, using language as close as possible to the transcribed interviews. Brief and extended quotations from participants have been included as appropriate, to enable their voice to be heard in the finished article. The dialogic nature of the interviews was acknowledged, with participants considered co-researchers. The epistemological decisions regarding this project were settled early in the project development, and were taken into account in the methodology, as a poststructural framework was chosen due to its natural fit with narrative therapy. It is important to make the distinction at this early stage between *narrative therapy* founded on poststructuralism, and *narrative psychology*, founded on more realist epistemology and phenomenology (Crossley, 2007, p. 134).

A significant measure contributing to increased rigour in this study was the use of reflexivity. Reflexivity is used here as described by Atkinson and Coffey (2003) with the intent “to acknowledge that the methods we use to describe the world are – to some degree – constitutive of the realities they describe” (p. 115). In this light, interviews are not considered a means to collect information about the unobservable experience of relationships, but rather the interview “generates accounts and narratives that are forms of social action in their own right” and become “valid ways of capturing shared cultural

understandings and enactments of the social world” (pp. 118-119). Reflexivity is a significant concept associated with a poststructural epistemology since the role of the researcher and their influence on the construction of meaning is acknowledged (King & Horrocks, 2010; Morrow, 2005), and the dialogic nature of the interviews is acknowledged, with an understanding that the participants and researcher co-constructed the final interview (Salmon & Riessman, 2008). The concept of “personal reflexivity,” a term that also incorporates a degree of critical self-reflection, fits in with this understanding of qualitative interviewing (Hewitt, 2007; King & Horrocks, 2010). This reflexive methodology allowed exploration of the experience of participants in a respectful and decentered way (Lather, 1993, 2007; Tootell, 2004).

It is appropriate in reflexive research for the researcher to acknowledge their situatedness (M. Gergen & Gergen, 2003). In this case it is appropriate that the researcher acknowledges the relevant background, history and bias in the context of the current project. The researcher has been involved in psychology, counselling, pastoral care, theology and education at various stages of her career. It is of relevance to acknowledge that the researcher self-identifies as a Protestant Christian, and considers herself to have a personal relationship with God, so can be considered an “insider” with respect to the participants (King & Horrocks, 2010). The researcher has also worked with Protestant Christians in pastoral care and counselling, and has had conversations with them about the influence of their relationship with God on their view of self. In more recent counselling studies the researcher was introduced to the ideas informing narrative therapy, which have informed her understanding of ideas about self and relationship.

Analytic memos were created throughout the whole research project, from conceptualization to completion. The purpose of an analytic memo is to reflect critically on the research process – the participants, the process, the interviews, the coding, the

results, and record this in a way that can be accessed by the researcher. It was a place to question assumptions, vent frustrations, record thoughts and describe actions. These memos were part of the reflexivity implemented in this project, and are distinguishable from field notes (Saldana, 2009). The use of such memos was a further attempt to increase the rigour of this study.

In addition to researcher reflexivity, epistemological reflexivity is a concept that acknowledges the need to reflect on the impact of theoretical assumptions held by the researcher and the particular methodology on the research (King & Horrocks, 2010). Its use is a further attempt to increase the trustworthiness of the project. In this study, epistemological reflexivity was employed on an ongoing basis to ensure that the research questions, the interviews and the analysis and interpretation were as consistent as possible with the intended epistemology.

The knowledge, skills and understanding of participants, and their capacity to analyse and interpret the data as co-theorizers or collaborators is acknowledged (Crocket, Drewery, McKenzie, Smith, & Winslade, 2004; Ellis & Berger, 2003; Lather, 1993; Tootell, 2004). The process of interviewing calls for a conversation in which the researcher is an active participant who collaborates and negotiates in the process of and outcome of the conversation or interview. The interviewer/researcher becomes a part of the social action that is the interview, through active reflexivity (e.g., Atkinson & Coffey, 2003; Ellis & Berger, 2003; Luttrell, 2010). In this project, it was decided to include the participants in what has been called “member checks” of the transcripts (Elliott et al., 1999, p. 18; Saldana, 2009, p. 35). Inviting the participants to check the transcripts was intended as a step to enhance reciprocity with participants.

The researcher offered transcripts of the interview material to the participants with the offer to remove delete or alter anything that may appear on reading to be misleading or

inaccurate. While this inevitably prolonged and possibly complicated the analysis stage of the project, this approach was adopted to strengthen the ethical base and the trustworthiness of the project. Most people corrected only minor details, with the majority suggesting no comments or changes. One or two added a brief commentary on the process and their reflections as they read the transcripts. Only one participant submitted substantial changes as a result of further reflection after reading the transcript. These changes were incorporated in the final edit of the transcript.

There is a further step taken by some researchers in which the voices and views of the participants have been included in the results and discussion of the researcher's interpretation, a practice that can be included in the broad understanding of the concept of "triangulation," but on both philosophical and logistical grounds, its practice has been contested, and it was decided not to employ the practice in this project (Seale, 1999; Tobin & Begley, 2004).

Narrative researchers coming from a poststructural epistemology generally reject the goal of generalizability for their work, and often include only one or a small number of participants. With the narrative turn, the focus is on the particular and the unique instead of the general (Atkinson, 1997; Chase, 2003). This study included 20 participants, but it has been argued that it is the richness of the interviews rather than the numbers that contribute to trustworthiness of the data (Morrow, 2005). The narrative analysis will give substantial space to the stories of each of the 20 participants, who is considered an expert on his or her own life and experience. "Thick" description is the term given to qualitative data that give voice to participants through substantial quotations, in addition to full descriptions of the setting of interviews, methodology and the use of reflexive memos (Ponterotto, 2006). The terms "thick" and "thin" descriptions originated from the anthropologist Geertz, which he attributed to the philosopher Ryle (C. Geertz, 1994). One of the marks of "validity" in such

narrative analysis is the thick description and rich data gathered (Larsson & Sjöblom, 2010).

Because of the relatively large sample, there was an expectation of the emergence of some cohesive understandings of the God stories and other stories. At the same time, the limits of representativeness and the difficulty of generalizing from these 20 participants to the Protestant Christian community in Brisbane or beyond are acknowledged. This project was designed primarily to capture local and historical knowledge and, by the primary method of narrative analysis with thick descriptions, capture something of the unique and personal experience of the participants.

Sandelowski (1991) recommended a narrative approach as a unique framework to capture human experience and meaning, and claimed that narrative fidelity is related to the concepts such as coherence, probability, and satisfactory closure, rather than positivist notions of truth, and correspondence to truth. As she put it, “tellings are remembrances, retrospections and constructions about the past in the fleeting present moment soon to be past” (p. 165). Therefore, Sandelowski argued that it would be misguided to focus on verification of the elements of the narrative, but rather to focus on searching for the meaning in the telling.

This exploration of the relational self in the light of a personal relationship with God was set within the Protestant Christian community. There is no assumption that people outside the Protestant Christian community cannot equally hold a personal relationship with God that contributes to their understanding of self. However, it was decided in the interests of a first attempt to look at this topic, that the Protestant Christian community is a valid place to begin because of its familiarity with such a concept. The setting is people associated with Protestant congregations in and around Brisbane, because of the familiarity and cultural competence of the researcher with these communities, and it

is acknowledged that any understandings will be limited by these choices, both of faith groups, and of geography. As previously stated, there is no intent to claim significant generalization of the results of the data beyond these participants to all people of Christian faith, let alone the population in general.

Ethical Considerations

Participants were assured of the confidentiality of the material they shared in the conversations, and were informed by letter and again at the commencement of the interviews of plans for the storing of transcripts and video recordings (see Sample Letter to Participants Appendix C). Signed permission was sought for the demographic surveys, as well as for the conversations, the transcripts, the videos and inclusion in the final write up, and publication of the thesis.

One of the ethical challenges for interview style research is the potential for people to be recognized by themselves or others in the final work, which may result in discomfort or stigma (Hewitt, 2007). While the content of this study was not considered a particularly sensitive one, it may be considered a culturally private topic (Joseph, 1987). As previously mentioned, pseudonyms were assigned from the time of transcription, and in some cases at the start of the recorded interview at the request of the participant, to help ensure confidentiality. Because one of the interviews was about the participant and another person in his or her life, pseudonyms were assigned to the participant as well as to any other people referred to in the interview, according to best practice, and records that would enable a matching of real names and pseudonyms were stored separately (Josselson, 2007). The use and choice of pseudonyms was confirmed with the participant at the time of the interview, or when transcripts were sent to them (King & Horrocks, 2010). References to Brisbane in general were left intact, but according to Josselson's recommendation,

locations that might conceivably breach confidentiality by linking the person with a specific location were edited out rather than altered.

It was made clear to participants that they were permitted to withdraw at any stage of the process, renegotiate their contribution and request that their material not be included, or edited (Punch, 2005). It is acknowledged that ethical considerations must take into account not only explicit ethical contracts, such as the participant consent forms and processes balanced by ethics committees guidelines and audits, but implicit ethical practices as well (Josselson, 2007), and the researcher was alert to and sensitive to ethical considerations throughout the interview process and with all communications with the participants. As previously noted, two participants withdrew after completing the survey. There were no further withdrawals, and the 20 participants completed both interviews with graciousness and some expressed their eagerness to be of assistance.

The next three chapters describe the results from the analysis of the interviews. Chapter 4 describes the results of the narrative analysis, Chapter 5 describes the results of the descriptor analysis and the analysis of trinitarian notions, and Chapter 6 describes the findings of the metaphor analysis.

Chapter 4 Results – Narrative Analysis

As described in the previous chapter on research design and methodology, the researcher conducted two interviews with each of the 20 participants over two separate events. The 40 interviews were video-recorded and transcribed verbatim, with a notation method that included pauses and significant nonverbal actions of the participant. The software program QSR NVivo10 was used to store, organize, code, categorize, explore and analyse the material in these transcripts. The next three chapters contain the results of the analysis of these transcripts. As explained previously, the analysis was done from three perspectives: a narrative analysis (this chapter), a descriptor analysis, (Chapter 5), and a metaphor analysis (Chapter 6).

Because of the relatively large number of participants (20), a modified form of narrative analysis was used in this project. In this modified narrative analysis, used and described by Luttrell (2010), a relatively coherent narrative has been written by the researcher for each participant, based on the interview transcripts, using the language of the participants, and written in the first person. While the intent was to provide unique and rich description for each participant, some cohesive understandings and common themes among the resulting narratives have been noted, as is the practice among some researchers using narrative analysis (Creswell, 2003).

There were a number of measures taken to privilege the voice of the participants in this project. Participants were sent the transcripts from the interview by email or hard copy, depending on their preference. In this project, only a few of the participants of this study chose to comment or edit the transcripts provided, a phenomenon noted by Luttrell (2010). Most sent an email confirming general acceptance of the transcript, one sent minor editing changes, and only one participant proposed significant changes. All requested changes were incorporated in the final version of the interview transcript. As described

earlier, it was judged logistically too complex to offer participants the opportunity to comment on, or offer different versions of the interpretation made by the researcher based on the transcripts.

While every attempt has been made to report the stories that the participants shared, the interviews are acknowledged to be co-creations between participant and interviewer. It is also important to acknowledge that this narrative analysis, and the analyses which follow in subsequent chapters, have significantly privileged the voice of the researcher, who chose which parts of the story to include, which to leave out, and the sequencing of each element. In this regard, Luttrell (2010) commented, “I don’t believe that researchers can eliminate tensions, contradictions, or power imbalances, but I do believe we can (and should) name them” (p. 500).

In this narrative analysis, two narratives were developed for each participant. One narrative is about the influence of relationship with God on self-understanding and the other about the influence of an other person on self-understanding, and these have been called a “God story” and an “other story” respectively. The narratives have been developed from the transcript of the interviews, using narrative analysis strategy. In this strategy there is a temporal as well as a logical sequencing of the stories, each starting with the concept of self before the relationship with the other person, or with God, then a section about what happened, and then the conclusion about what happened as a result. Each narrative is comprised of a re-telling of the story of the influence of the relationship described initially by the participant in response to questions by the researcher (see Sandelowski, 1991). While these narratives are a paraphrased compilation written by the researcher, each story has been encapsulated by a title, unique to the participant, and using his or her own phrasing. The process of writing the narratives and choosing a title necessitated multiple readings of the transcripts, in order to attempt to capture the voice and something of the

style of the participants (Bernard & Ryan, 2010). As previously mentioned in the Literature Review (Chapter 2) and the Research Design and Methodology (Chapter 3), this project has adopted a poststructural framework, and therefore the stories told by participants are not expected to offer a necessarily coherent and unified story. Rather, a relatively organized plot, imposed by the researcher for the sake of meaning, has been derived from the disjointed and less coherent stories emerging from the answers to the interview questions (see Loots et al., 2013).

The God stories and other stories are formatted in the way other participant quotes have been formatted in the thesis, and are written in the first person to indicate that the voice is that of the participant. It is important, however, to note that these narratives are researcher-written compilations, based on the interviews. As mentioned previously, the participants were not given access to these compiled, paraphrased stories, to correct or edit them, and there may be unintentional inaccuracies.

The God and other stories themselves form the heart of the narrative analysis. In addition, as explained in the previous chapter, it was decided to include some exploration of the cohesive understandings that emerged from these stories about the influence of relationship with God and other on self-understanding, and an exploration of the commonalities and differences between the stories of influence relationship with God and relationship with other on self-understanding. As Luttrell (2010) explained, something of the individual is lost when noting such patterns, but something is also gained. By seeking to identify and note recurring themes or threads among the 20 stories, paradigmatic knowing or cognition is acknowledged alongside narrative knowing and this contributed to a fuller picture of the understanding under review (Polkinghorne, 1995).

In addition to the God stories and other stories developed by the researcher, an additional section of this narrative analysis recorded “small” or “under-represented stories”

(Georgakopoulou, 2006) that are “equally observable, analysable, and researcher-researched accountable” (p. 129). While narrative analysis methodology has traditionally given preference to cohesive narratives formed by temporal and logical sequencing, this project took heed of Georgakopoulou’s challenge to include the small stories, with their shift from the coherent rehearsals of the development of self, to the “messier business of life and telling” (p. 129). In this project, many of these small stories emerged predominantly around stories the participants told in answer to three questions about whether they had changed and to what they attributed the change in self. These open-ended questions were explored early on in the interviews before the discussion of the possible change in self attributed to the influence of relationship with God and an other person.

Narrative by Participant – God Stories

Katie’s God story: in a sweet spot

In the past I needed to be in control of everything. I was highly strung and I worried unnecessarily. When I first became a Christian, everything was new and exciting and in a rush; I was running after God. I learned to give the control of everything over to God and to realize that He is in control. I have tried to live a Christ-like life.

I am now in a pleasant, comfortable, *sweet spot with God*, where we walk along together at a leisurely pace. I am doing life with Him, “in the groove,” like a way of life. In this relationship with God I see myself as one of His loving daughters who adores Him and tries to obey Him. Although it doesn’t happen all the time, when I can give control of everything to God, the stress is reduced, less nervous energy is wasted, and there is more peace and relaxation. As a result, I can take more risks, I can enjoy being a new mum, and I can forge stronger relationships with my husband and my friends.

Liz's God story: my locus is "child of God"

My relationship has been one of knowing God from an early age, and knowing Him as Father. It is a relationship that has grown over time. I have always been able to call out to God in times of weakness, fear, loneliness and insecurity. It's like whatever is happening, I am anchored and secure. It's also a place of quiet when everything around is noisy.

I used to struggle with insecurity and questions about my identity. After a period of significant rethinking and a period of rebellion, I experimented with "just being ME," but I came to the conclusion that I am self in connection to God and to others in my life. Understanding myself as a child of God filled the human need for love, the human need for acceptance, with the result that I no longer look to others to fill that need, because I am so anchored, rooted in knowing who I am. Maybe I'm very role based in my thinking, but sometimes I see the relationship as Father/daughter thing, and sometimes as a friend.

My locus is "child of God." The difference I have noticed is that when I can hold on to this understanding of myself as a loved daughter, I know myself, I am more secure, and I'm less inclined to seek approval of others, and to feel the pressure to conform to society. There is an "inner anxious cycle" I can get caught into when I am not anchored. In this cycle, I worry about what people think of my dress, house, appearance and the behaviour of my children, and the discrepancy between what is going on inside and the outward manifestation.

I know my identity is in Christ, being anchored, knowing He is there, my Father and my friend, my companion, my refuge. There's more synchrony, and more harmony between who I am on the inside, and who I am on the outside. I am more genuine, real, and alive. There is significance and security in this knowing. I love where I am. It's like a diamond, you know? Everyone is looking for it, and I've found it! It sounds quite profound, but this is what I'm living.

Knowing that my identity is rooted and anchored in Christ gives me meaning and purpose in life. I can love the unlovely, because if Christ offered His love for me, when I am still unlovely.

Bella's God story: 12 feet tall and bullet proof

I believe God's nature is gentle, kind, patient, forgiving and consistent. He is the creator of all and – my Father, a Father who never made a mistake.

I read the Bible and had many conversations with God and I found out how He sees me. He is like your best friend; He makes times to listen to me, accepts me and doesn't judge me. He leaves me alone when I want to be left alone, but He isn't far away. I know if I call, He'll be there. It's a good, no, a great relationship! I know He loves me no matter what; He accepts me just as I am, and there is probably, no, definitely room for improvement!

God doesn't push me; He shuffles me along, correcting my path if I get off track. I know I am a child of God, and with His help, I know I can do anything!

I used to define myself by how others see me; I didn't accept myself. I tried to be who others wanted me to be. I was pretty opinionated, foul-mouthed and a single yuppie. I did crazy things and some wrong things, and I can't believe people just let me get away with it.

As a consequence of this relationship with God, I no longer define myself as others see me. I'm more accepting of who I am. I am less selfish because I believe God put Simon in my life.

I'm now okay with who I am; I have more confidence. *I feel like I am 12 foot tall and bullet proof.* I am assertive and I can take risks, and I'm willing to fail. I'm taking steps to test myself and see if my inner strength and faith is enough to withstand possible persecution.

Lily's God story: free to be who I am

I think of God as a supreme, spiritual being, as a personal, relational being, but not created, and not an impersonal force. It's possible to have a relationship with God, but I realize that is a big claim, and because He took the initiative, a privilege.

Until 17 I led quite a sheltered life, then I had some crises and it's like everything was stripped bare. The Christian teaching I had grown up with was legalistic and dogmatic, and I saw God as quite demanding.

I had some difficult life experiences or what I call purifying experiences or pivotal moments, and these have led me to a major re-evaluation of my life and relationship with God. At one point I had a kind of a spiritual experience. I felt God speaking to me about the way my life had been heading, and He was calling me back. It was very vivid at the time.

I had been attending church until I experienced some pressure and control about whom I was to marry. So I left the church, and subsequently I questioned my relationship with God, whether He even existed and how I could trust Him ever again. At that lowest point I experienced God's love tangibly, and heard Him say, "I love you for who you are, and that's all you can hold on to, so it doesn't matter what you believe... just know I love you." And that was really, really powerful! It has kept me going through so much!

When I was with my first husband, we were planning to go on the mission field, and when that didn't happen, I felt a failure until I realized that I had put the dream ahead of God, and that it was my relationship with Him that mattered, not what I did for Him.

I have read, prayed, opened up to others, got some counselling, forgiven and made choices. In this I have experienced a God who was accepting of me, approachable, gracious, and merciful. I have come to know Him as a loving Father, not a demanding God. He showed me that the relationship with Him was more important than what I did for Him. It seems like He is less demanding recently, but perhaps that's my perception.

I know I'm a child of God, if at times a rebellious, strong-willed, affectionate and playful one, and I'm a bit eccentric too, not liking to be put into boxes easily. I think God would say, "Lily's my child." I experience grace, being loveable, belonging, contentment, peace and rest, and a knowing I don't have to strive or perform. As a result, *I am free to be who I am*. I have more confidence, knowing I can cope without relying on others. I experience a God who demands less of me, and just wants to be with me. He has restored my sanity. I can minister to others with empathy and compassion from the sisterhood of suffering, knowing that if I am loveable, then no-one is unlovable!

Michelle's God story: He's a good mate

God is my Father, and He knows what is the best for me. This is probably a mean thing, but it's a comfort to me when I'm attacked that God has said, "Vengeance is mine." I love that He is my vindicator and more just than the most just person. Like He knows when someone's done you wrong, and he hates it. I love that my name is in the book [making reference to the book of life in Rev. 3:5, 13:8]. *He's a good mate*, a good mate. Yeah.

I rely on God to be there all the time. It's not an even relationship, because I expect more of Him than He gets of me. While I think I don't communicate lots, I probably acknowledge Him more than I think.

My Dad abandoned us suddenly when I was 21, and after that I had panic attacks. I usually bottled it all up if I disagreed about something, and I used to complain or whinge a lot. I went through quite a lot - postnatal depression, grief, accidents, accusations, and through all of this, God developed me, gave me wisdom and made me stronger. I have learned to walk in faith and hold onto His promises. I believe His Word is truth. I walk in love, faith and obedience. I believe that with life, you can't get out alive. God gets you through it. God protects me, protects my emotions and gives me peace.

He would say I'm cherished, adored and protected, like sheltering under His wings. I know He thinks that about me. I believe He nurtured me even before I was born. I am now independent and fairly confident. As a result on these new understandings, I no longer complain and whinge. In fact, because God encourages me, I can encourage others.

When I'm in touch with God, I feel alive, led and empowered, and I have no doubt He can do anything through me. Jesus said, "You can do this and more" and I want to be a part of it! Every Christian should be able to walk into a house and see somebody sick and do something about it! But I know I need to walk in love, faith and obedience. This knowing keeps me focused and my path ahead is clear. My world is ordered and orderly. I like being orderly too. Mess makes me unhappy, so I don't enjoy life if things are too messy. Part of being orderly means keeping on top of your life to do your job and family stuff.

I love not being the boss, and instead being directed by God. I'm ready to respond and obey when He directs me. I love knowing what is expected of me. If I see someone walking along the street who needs a ride, and He tells me, "Pick 'em up!" I do it. I love that! I could do a lot more if there were five more of me – five people like angels who would just do everything I wanted them to do. Arghh! I need staff!

Biggles' God story: with God I am complete

I always knew there was a God; Mum was a strict Catholic, but Dad wasn't a Catholic at all, but I think I always knew there was a God. I knew I was on the run from God. For a long time, I carried a lot of baggage, blamed others and avoided taking responsibility for my life choices.

My brother became a Christian first, then I followed at 33. At that point, I started to take responsibility for my choices. I'm committed to letting God have His way in my life. I've grown as I have prayed, read and thought. When I think of God, I think of words like big, love, Father, truth, worshipping. He's vast - beyond me! It's hard to articulate.

I'm at a stage in life where I want to give back. Things that were precious to me, like cars and sound systems, just aren't important anymore. The relationship with God has grown. I have thought more, read more, and prayed more. I anticipate a torrid time, some angst and to-ing and fro-ing, but I'm committed to letting God have his way. I know I am a child of God, and *with Him I am complete*.

I think God would appreciate my sense of humour. He'd see me as His child, a bit scatterbrained, not non-committal but someone who could be more disciplined. I'm the caregiver for our children, and I think He would appreciate that I'm a good dad, but point out a few areas that need change. But He'd say, "All's good!" I think He'd say that.

I think of God almost every moment of every day, and as I do I am aware of my humanity and shortcomings, which leads me to remorse, or perhaps some guilt.

I think of myself as "eclectic," like I've put a lot of things together to see how they work. I think we are made up of the people around us, and the environment we grew up in. I don't really like being this way, but I don't believe we can change

who we are, and that's a good thing. We might be disappointed in aspects of who we are, and want to change those, but we can't really change the soul, or the deepness of who we are.

My preference is to do things differently - to be more focussed, dedicated, take initiative, to change things rather than have things change me. I want to engage people for the truth. My desire is to be Christ to other people - a Little Jesus. There's fear in that, because we have to give up our self, and we're afraid to lose who we are.

Sharon's God story: I feel alive

I've always been a quiet, caring person. I was raised in a Christian family, so God's always been there in my thinking. There was a time I didn't go to church, but I still believed in God and prayed. It was a horrible time in my life. I came out of that and decided that I wanted to be in a God-based family. So that was a time when I wasn't as close to God as what I have been. During that time, when I needed Him the most, God gave me the message, "You're a lot stronger than you think you are," and that kept me going.

I have lacked confidence in the past, and could easily become overwhelmed by life, for example, with the challenges of raising a family as a single parent. Even so, God wouldn't list my insecurities, but see me as compassionate and loving, capable, and kind.

I can't imagine and I don't want to imagine life without God. He has always been a very real presence in my life. At 13 years old, when I was confirmed, I had a very real experience of God. I have always experienced God as very caring and He's been a great strength to me. In fact, He is everything to me, and a very real presence. Without God, life doesn't make sense. He was there at the beginning; He's there at the end. Without God, there is nothing... God is everything.

I feel alive when I am in worship with God, or talking about God with others. There's just something that is stirred within me. It's like I'm in touch my core presence, and a heart that responds to Him.

I am willing to do whatever He wants me to do. Because of His presence in my life, I have peace, security, comfort, happiness, recharged batteries, assurance that

all will be okay, and stability. I also have confidence that there's a bigger picture and purpose for my life, which enables me to keep going even when I feel I have reached the end.

When others see me still going, and sense God's presence is with me, it enables me to be an encouragement to them, giving them hope and strength. When I stay strong and focused, moving towards my goals, this also encourages others. When stability is there, it is contagious, and I can share heart to heart with others. God also gives me love that fills me and overflows to others.

Rachel's God story: always there

Until I was 28, God was just a concept; the relationship was nowhere from my viewpoint. I had no idea who I was, or how to find out who I was. I tried to impress, and to be who others wanted me to be. I tried to please others and I got too busy.

About that time, I worked with a lady who had a wonderful faith. Through her I went to church and met some real and caring Christians, and this was very attractive. I read the Bible, talked and talked about God with these friends, and listened to hymns. I got a voracious thirst for more, like a dripping tap or a sponge. The more I learned, the more I wanted to learn, and the more I understood, the more impressed I was. God became Someone; Someone who was alive and able to relate to me and I was able to know Him.

I have come to believe that God is the creator of all things, the supreme being, with a vested interest in His creation. He is absolutely good. His plan is to live with us and to have us live with Him and enjoy Him. *He is always there.*

I have a joy in my heart, a buoyancy. My relationship with Him is a comfort to me, a strength. And a real trust that I know that He is who He says He is. I can trust who He says He is. He knows I trust Him. He would appreciate that I try to see where other people are coming from, that I try to think that there must be a reason for them to feel the way they do. He would probably see me as a bit wayward, and a bit hot and cold. But He knows that I trust Him, and that's vital to any relationship.

I am a carer and single mum to a daughter with a fairly major disability, whom I love dearly, so there's not a lot of support and free time. But when I stop and just be with God, there's a joy, and I can sing. Being joyful like this is freeing and liberating; it's who I am meant to be. There is also a peacefulness so that I can be in the moment, and enjoy the now, knowing everything's all right. With joy in my heart, it is a genuine pleasure to relate to people, and I'm not too busy. I can genuinely care for people. Holding on to this view of myself, I know I can be a positive influence. I think people see it in me, and it can change the neighbourhood by breaking down walls of prejudice. At church, I pray for God to give me opportunities to demonstrate genuine and sincere caring to someone who might be feeling lonely.

Vincent's God story: still me, but the best me

As a child I knew about God and tried hard to be good enough, but in grade five I had a Sunday School teacher who didn't like me. In ninth grade I thought I could bargain with God. I pleaded with God for the life of a friend, who was like a big brother to me, after a motorbike accident. But he died, and I turned against God and after that I gave Christians a hard time.

Then I had a personal encounter with God the creator that changed everything. I heard the voice of God audibly challenging me for holding out on Him, and I became a Christian as a result.

I had been bullied and there was a lot of sickness in the family. I've stood and cursed God - "I hate you God, you're not fair!" - in this very car park and had severe depression, yet through all of that, whenever I've surfaced, whenever I've turned my head, or listened, He's right there. When I experienced depression since becoming a Christian, God told me not to take my life, and since then I do not act on suicidal thinking.

God is the creator, the Alpha and Omega, beginning and the end. He is personal, and seeks His own glory. He is not capricious; He cannot go against His own good nature, or break His promises. He is Holy, perfect and righteous; unchanging, and someone who seeks relationship, and community. We can have relationship with God, an absolutely intimate, personal, close relationship with God, which blows my little brain! This is only possible because of what Christ has done for us. He

reaches out and pulls us to Him. You can't build up to Him, but He can grab hold of you and bring you to Him.

I used to be, and can still be at times very selfish, narcissistic, bad-tempered, aggressive and I can be under a dark cloud when depression is present. Through the struggles in my life and the battle with depression I have become more relaxed, mellow, forgiving, and have realized my mortality, especially after a serious bike accident.

I want to be more like God, and a better person everyday. I want to finish well. At the end I want to hear, "Well done my good and faithful servant." I am an eternal optimist with an eternal hope that is true, and my whole life is based on that.

When I'm scared, that's when He's the closest. He reaches out and pulls me to Him. I need to fit into God's life and not vice versa. I'm content in this beautiful way of being, and I seek to become like Christ. I'm safe in the boat called Christ. I have freedom to be more than I ever thought I could be. There's nothing greater than to touch God's heart and to cry and feel like Him. When I feel His pain, I feel closest to Him (tearfully). I don't want to dry these tears. They are so precious! I'm not swamped by being a Christian; *I'm still so me, but the best me.*

Patricia's God story: closest trusted friend

I had a fragmented relationship with God. I had a relationship with Jesus, but the relationship with Father God was a distanced, revered, even acquaintance type relationship, and I was cut off from the Spirit. There was insecurity, and for many years I attempted to be acceptable to others by mirroring my persona on other good people.

My relationship with God has deepened over the 40 years I have known Him. As I improved the relationship with Father God, the Spirit and Jesus, I have come to understand the community nature of God, and connectedness. This came about mostly through prayer and journaling, which is a two way, deeply intimate conversational, bare-all writing where I wait for a response, which I then write down, and there's a flow of conversation. Looking back, I am aware that at times my communion has been with Father or Mother God, sometimes the Lord, and sometimes the counselling wisdom of the Spirit. *He is like a closest, trusted friend.*

I think God would appreciate that I have learned to just enjoy being in His presence, as I have learned that it is not about what I can do for Him, but about being with Him. He would perhaps describe me as one who strives too hard at times, and someone who would benefit from more time in the playground. He would describe me as one who deeply feels, deeply loves, and has a gentle spirit that can easily be wounded. He would say I have a deep sense of compassion and that I can be way too hard on myself and that I am someone who needs to heed her own words more often.

In this healed, connected, improved, more intimate relationship with the triune God, I am a vulnerable traveller with God. This has led in turn to an acceptance of self, and a marked increase in inner security and peace, where there is freedom, no fear of rejection, the ability to surrender, and an experience of fullness, oneness and wholeness. In this way of being, as a counsellor, I have wisdom for those I counsel and I have found that this way of being gives permission for my clients to be vulnerable.

Swanson's God story: lost without Him

I was raised a Mormon in the US but I broke from that at 14 because they didn't allow blacks to hold the priesthood, and that didn't seem right. I had some anger issues and did some bad things. I was fairly proud and self-reliant. I had a bit of a prodigal son experience. I drifted away from my Christian foundations. During that time I used to have a recurring image of being out in the cold and snow, longing to getting into a nice, cosy, warm room with a log fire, but I couldn't find the door. I kept thinking... "I'd really like to be in that room!"

A friend shared the good news of Jesus at University and I became a Christian at 19. It was only after I became a Christian that I had the realization that Christ is the door to that room I longed to get into. Now I know that I can be in that warm room because Jesus is the door.

I believe that the relationship began when I asked Jesus to come into my life. The relationship with God is through Jesus, and I think more in terms of Jesus. I'm not as spiritually mature as I should be after 38 years of walking with Jesus, but I think I'm more mature. I guess God would appreciate that I came to realize why Jesus

came to this world, and acted on it. He would see me as a decent bloke, flawed, but in the bigger picture, created in His image.

Early on I used to think, "I'm not such a bad guy," but as the years have passed I have realized that I was bad, and I am more and more aware of my sin and utter dependence on God. I'd certainly be in trouble without Him. In fact, *I'm lost without Him*; I need Him. I think of myself as one who has received from a generous benefactor as a son and heir, although I am undeserving. I've been spared a lot, because I have not been caught like others. I'm convinced of my utter dependency on Him, although that goes against my pride to admit it, and I think it is part of a deeper life of faith to realize it. I am humbled by the sense of blessing on my life that is totally undeserved. I realize how blessed I am to have found what I'd been looking for. I have a conviction that I need to be willing to share this news with others around me that need to hear the message.

Susan's God story: the craving for acceptance is gone

My father left after I was born, and I was an angry child, struggling to fit in. I fluctuated; I hungered and craved the acceptance and approval of others. There was a hardness; I used to say, "This is who I am. If you don't like it, too bad!"

I've always had an awareness of God. Nana gave me a children's Bible and I went to Sunday school on occasion. I always knew that I could pray for help at any time. As a teenager I got caught in a storm with friends on a boat. It was quite scary and the boat was standing vertical. I remember praying and when the storm eased and we came to safety, I was fully aware that it was God's doing.

At 17 I went overseas on a Rotary Exchange and became a Christian through the friends that I made there. On my return I started going to church, and met and married my husband, who is a pastor's son.

Because I now see myself as a child of God, I value the essence of who I am based on what God says of me in the Bible. I can't quite imagine myself without Him. I couldn't think of myself apart from my relationship with Jesus. To lose that, I couldn't describe myself.

I have a comfortable relationship with God - there's no pretense. The way I figure it He knows what I'm thinking anyway so to put on highfaluting words and airs and

graces when He knows what's in my heart anyway, seems a little bit silly because there's no point pretending really. I talk with Him conversationally through prayer every day, and read the Bible most days, because it reveals more about Him.

As a child of God I know I am cleansed, holy, and acceptable to God. I am also His servant and friend. I can do stuff for Him that He has planned and given me the gifts to do. That gives my life purpose and meaning and puts everything into perspective.

God would appreciate that I care about people. At times, there's a dynamic tension between what I want to do and what I do. I ask God for help when I battle desires to do things that are wrong. One of the big differences since I have a relationship with God is the way I see myself. I don't sense that hunger for acceptance, and the hardness is replaced by softness, and there's more caring for others. *The intense craving for acceptance is gone* because God meets all of my needs. When I am close to Him, it's not there at all, but at other times, it can be present. Because I'm softer and I don't need their acceptance quite as much, people actually want to be around me, and I feel better about myself.

Because of that, there's more stability, calmness and unshakeability. I feel more whole and complete. I'm not affected so much by the opinions of others. I am content in my role as a mother and content with what I have. My attitude would be better in my volunteer roles if I could hold onto this view of myself as whole or complete.

Jane's God story: a princess in His eyes

My parents divorced when I was very young. I've come to rely solely on God. He's become just like another person in my life, someone I can always rely on.

I have my own "God-space" where I can talk conversationally with God like a friend and get his feedback. My "God-space" is an actual place in my mind where I go and I imagine myself sitting down with Jesus or God, and just chatting, or walking around like in a forest or a field and it's just fun, like a friendship really. There are hard times too, when I say, "Are you really there? I can't hear you or see you or feel you?"

This relationship helps shape how I live and conduct myself. I desire to be a good representative of Jesus. He is always very encouraging, even when I expect otherwise. He's proud of me, and regardless of my many failings I have had in the day, He's just like, "You're cool. You're doing great!"

I think God would appreciate my genuine desire to create a safe and accepting place for all people, regardless of sexual orientation, moral code or belief system.

I think of myself as a princess in His eyes, because He is a King and I'm his daughter, so technically, *that makes me a princess*. I think of Him as good all the time. I know God has my interests as His first priority. He's a source of strength, a shelter, safe haven and a refuge. I feel good and know that I'm on the planet for a reason and I'm doing well so far.

In this relationship with God I am in touch with all my senses, and able to make connections between events and my reactions. This allows God to highlight areas I may need to address. As a result of this I am more self reflective and self-actualizing, and I like this because this gives me added confidence in unfamiliar settings like work, or where I need to take a stand with my family, who think differently to me. This confidence is a confidence without arrogance.

Wayne's God story: a giver, not a taker

I was the youngest of seven and grew up in the country. I always went to church with my family. I know I'm a sinner, like everyone else, but I lead my life as Christ wants me to, as best I can, and do what needs to be done.

I envisage God as someone up there who created the world and created man. He is all powerful, and all everything... I don't know the words... but there's nothing that can't be done by Him.

I know God guides me and looks after me, but I don't feel like it is a close relationship. Through my prayer life I never get any real response, but I keep going anyway. The theologians say that we will receive an answer, but that has happened only a few times in my life. There was the time when He has communicated with me clearly and specifically - once recently when I had a strong impression to give \$1000 to a missionary, and once to tell me what to do in a specific situation. There

was one other time, over 30 years ago, when I sensed great joy, accomplishment and satisfaction at a job well done.

I think God would appreciate my generosity and the way I live. I used to desire worldly things, but have learned to be content with what I have. *I am a giver, not a taker*, and I get a great deal of satisfaction from giving and helping. I'm aware that sometimes I discriminate more than I mean to, but I like to help, be involved and mix with others. I desire to be a good influence on other people, and to love them. My daughter tells me I am more of an influence than I am fully aware of. I go out of my way to help out in order to further the gospel, both at church and by volunteering at church organizations.

Taylor's God story: I no longer take up a rifle, but a cross

My mother died when I was 15. I was a drinker, smoker, swearer and womanizer. I had no repentance, sorrow or guilt. I considered myself generally "a good bloke," but I served my own needs as a priority. At 17, I joined the army, and until 29, I had no religious influence.

It was at 29 that I recognized I was a sinner in need of God, and in need of relationship with God, and I became a Christian. A lot of things had to change in my life over a period of time. God has since sent me to Bible College, brought my wife into my life, and I am now studying to become a chaplain. *I no longer take up a rifle but a cross.*

I see God as creator, sustainer and ruler of the universe, whether people acknowledge that or not. I believe God is everything... and impacts everything.

The relationship with God is a personal one because He died on a cross for me. It is a developing relationship, one of faithfulness and obedience, an obedience out of love, not because I am being ruled by an iron fist.

I would hope that God would see me as a "good and faithful servant," most of the time, and appreciate my willingness to place the needs of others above my own.

The relationship has transformed me... instead of prioritizing my own needs, I choose to prioritize His needs and the needs of others. I desire to be like Christ, with God's strength, not my own, and that in turn benefits other people. My self that has been developing over these 36 years is now heavily influenced by God,

strongly influenced by my combat service in the Australian Army, and equally by the people surrounding me.

I think God has designed us to be in relationship not only with Him but with other people, and to have a generous relationship with others. Because God wired me that way, I feel better for being in those relationships. I am committed to serving God in whatever capacity He tells me, and I am devoted to raising a family with godly values.

Marion's God story: without Him life isn't worth living

I always knew God was there, as I was lucky enough to be brought up in a Christian family. I think of God as the creator, someone who has been there from the beginning. He's also a great friend, someone I can turn to. He is loving and kind – in fact He is everything! You can see Him in nature, and in everything. When I think about what Christ might look like, I think it is different to what you see in the typical paintings. I think His eyes are very penetrating.

The relationship with God just grew over time. I've given my heart to Him. I like to talk to Him and ask about what to do. In the mornings I have a quiet time with Him, and that sets the day for me, so I know He is with me. And before I go to bed, I do the same. He's become a friend as well as a saviour. I'm aware that He's with me, and I'm also aware of failure to do things I know I should have done.

He sees me as one of His children. I think He'd appreciate that I have given my heart to Him, and that I like to talk with Him and ask for what I need to do.

It's a way of life for me to be with Him, and to talk with Him. Because of this significant relationship I have peace, because I know someone cares for me, loves me, is interested in me, and that one day, I'll be with Him. It's easier to make time to be with God because I am on my own now.

In times of grief, like when my husband passed away, or when I have faced major operations, the peace I experienced was so strong because I knew God was there. *If He weren't there, I wouldn't think life is worth living.* I think that's the only way to do life, and I wouldn't like to be without Him. I'm ready to go and be with Him at any time.

Danny's God story: I've learned to trust

After I left the orphanage, I worked on a dairy farm and at timber mills. I used to sing in the pubs, and when I was 19, I was invited to sing at a church where there was a crusade. I gave my heart to the Lord Jesus Christ when I realized the sin in my life. I had a real sense of peace, and I felt a call to go to Bible college. My whole outlook changed. I started to be interested to learn, especially the Bible. I wanted to help others. I told God, "Just use me," and He's given me opportunities to sing, and to tell others about Him. God gives me the words to share with others that He is alive, and wants to show them His love. I am dependent on Him for wisdom for parenting, for guidance, and everyday needs. I know I cannot do anything without Him. He's given me freedom and liberty to worship Him. I have peace and joy. The church has given me a sense of belonging I never had before, and a place to give as well as receive.

I think of God as the creator of all things, and He provides for each and every one of us. He's the great physician, the healer, and the one who watches over us. Christ came into the world to show us the personal nature of God and demonstrate that God is interested in each one of us. It is very important that He is Father, and He is very personal. I know I'm dependent on Him for every day needs, and guidance for raising a family. He answers my prayers, like when he provided the fees for me to go to Bible college.

I think God would say that I'm a "good and faithful servant," even though I'm aware that I haven't always been faithful, but I've devoted my life to doing the best I can for Him. He would probably describe me as fairly good natured, and approachable. I use humour to make people feel better.

I have learned to trust God and others. God speaks to me personally through the Bible. I can be reading the Bible, and sometimes although I know the scriptures pretty well, all of a sudden, yeah – "that's me!" and that's what He's doing... He's talking to me. It becomes very personal and that's a touch of God that's very hard to explain.

I want to have a heart that is responsive to Him. Whatever challenges life throws at me, like health or money troubles, I can praise God that He's with me, that He has mapped out my path, and I can trust that my life is in His hands. This trust has

made it possible for me to witness to others about God's salvation more readily and more confidently.

Jennie's God story: free to be me

As a child I learned about God through a religious education teacher at school and I have believed in God since then. I was baptized as a teenager, but had some very challenging times after that. After I met my husband, eight years ago, we chose to put aside some lifestyle patterns we had adopted and to do life differently, more in line with how God would want us to live.

I think of God as very real, someone willing to be with you. Jesus said, "God is love," and God loves, but His love is conditional – there is a "but." I believe God created man in His image, and that God's nature includes a sense of law and justice, and He requires certain responses. But I know that God is there no matter what. If I saw myself through His eyes, He would say of me, "my child who I love."

Because I know God sees the bigger picture, I don't have to know everything, and I don't have to look after myself. Because I don't have to carry it all, I can be a child, play and have fun. I can enjoy life, and in turn, this improves my mental health and increases my purpose and meaning in life. The end result is that there is something redeemed from all of my life, whatever has happened.

I am free to be me, the person I was created to be. I'm included, and this is important to me. There was a stage where I felt I was not in "the popular group" with God, and I was just tagging along. I now consider that I am included. I'm not on the inner circle, because there is no "inner circle"; we are all included! The price has been paid, and I no longer feel guilty for my sin, although at times there is a battle in my mind about whether I am valued.

I like seeing myself with inclusion and freedom. It is a more pleasant way to live, and it enables me to have a ministry amongst feminists. If I kept this view of myself alive, there would be more genuineness and honesty, which reduces anxiety. I would be less driven to perform. If I imagine seeing myself as even more free, liberated and included, there would be a difference in my church, work and family communities. In each of these communities, people would realize that I'm

human, that I have flaws and am open to correction. In turn this would give them permission to be human.

Malcolm's God story: infinitely valued by God

I was brought up in a loving family but there was some defensiveness and insecurity. At twelve I invited Christ into my life, and since then I've grown gradually closer in my relationship with God. I have learned to distinguish the voice of God speaking to me through the Scriptures and the promptings of the Holy Spirit. I have journalled for 23 years, which is a deep and powerful way for me to commune with God. Through journalling I am able to hear the voice of God. At first it was just me writing my thoughts. But I would write and then I would just try to pause and still my thoughts, and then begin to write things that came to mind. I believe I've heard the voice of God come and speak through my mind and through my pen.

The more I've grown in my faith, the more secure I have become in my relationship with God. I think I'm a stronger person, I think I'm a more mature person. I think I am able to give love and receive love far more fully now more than I was able to ten years ago or ten years before that, although not perfectly by any means. I think that is a result of my personal growth and my spiritual growth, which are not mutually exclusive, but very much intertwined.

I could describe God with wonderful theological answers... He is omnipotent, omnipresent, omniscient, all knowing, all-powerful, and all present. And He is all of that and more. But if I was just talking to the average person, "God is love!" is what I would say. He is the eternal being, the eternal creator. And while He is the eternal creator of the universe, He is a friend.

I believe God appreciates that I really do genuinely try to be faithful. I attempt to be obedient to Him; attempt being the operative word there. But I believe He knows my heart, and when I fail at that, He accepts me and helps me. I think He values my love for him, impure as it is, and my faithfulness, flawed as it is. But He sees my heart and values that.

I know I am His child; one of His children in whom He delights. Where once I might have, I don't doubt His delight in me, despite my imperfections, and that is

wonderfully liberating. I know absolutely that God loves me and I love Him, and that nothing can separate me from His love. I know I'm valued and accepted by God for who I am. *I know I am infinitely valued by God.* Through the relationship with God I am able to be so much more honest with myself. The defensiveness is less and there is far more security. When centered on God, I am liberated and secure, and there is an inner peace in place of intensity and stress.

I talk with Him as a friend. I worship Him. I try to be faithful and obedient. He knows my heart, so when I fail, I know He still accepts me. He values my love, impure as it is. Because I trust God implicitly I can be completely honest with Him, as He knows all about me. This has increased my honesty with myself, and my self-awareness, my emotional honesty and emotional intelligence. This way of being is infectious. As a pastor, I now have a church that is real, mature and self-aware.

Bob's God story: a stabilizing factor in my life

At ten years of age, I made a commitment to live for God. Over the years, God has stuck with me more than I have stuck with Him, as I've been hot and cold at times. I need to continually consolidate and work on my relationship with God, like any other relationship.

These days I feel in touch with God constantly. For example, in traffic I use red lights to sit and reflect with Him, and when I get green lights, I say, "Thanks!" It's reassuring to know there's someone there with His hands on my life.

God is someone I look to for guidance. *He is a stabilizing factor in my life.* I'm not sure what He'd appreciate about me. I'm thinking I won't know until I get to the end of my life. I'm not sure how God would describe me. It could be pretty terrible – "You've done this! You did this and maybe you shouldn't have!" Who knows?

God has given me the opportunity to do it His way or mine, and I try to do things His way. I pray to ask His guidance, and I talk things through with God. There have been specific times when He's sorted things out for me after I have prayed, and I have concluded from that, that He is real.

In the second grade I stole an eraser from a shop, and felt a lot of guilt. It may have been the most influential event in my life. Because of experiencing so much guilt

from stealing the eraser, I am scrupulous in my financial dealings. For example, I give back wrong change in shops, and I always try to do the right thing ethically and politically. If I do the right thing, I can be relaxed and comfortable, I get satisfaction from my job, I have a sense of well being, and I don't have to look behind my back or look for knives. There is much less stress.

Table 5 summarizes the answers to one of the key questions in the interview:

“What am I in touch with in the relationship with God?” The table was developed in order to demonstrate both a glimpse of the wide range of unique answers, as well as the potential to observe common threads.

Common threads among the God stories. Each of the unique “God stories” recorded 20 unique relationships and an influence on the understanding of self that emerged from these relationships. As previously noted in Chapter 3 (Research Design and Methodology) a narrative analysis is generally the creation of the individual narratives in and of itself, and the spotlight is on the unique and personal. However, it is not uncommon when doing a narrative analysis to note recurring patterns or cohesive understandings, akin to a thematic analysis. Three threads or cohesive understandings reoccurred through these narratives: a heightened awareness of limitations, experiential responses, and the desire to respond in some way.

Table 5

Answers to “What am I in touch with in the relationship with God?” by Participant

Name	What am I in touch with in my relationship with God?
Katie	more aware of my need to be in control; more aware of worry leading to increased surrender
Liz	my identity in Christ; me as daughter; weakness; anchored/rooted; role of companion/friend
Bella	frailness/limitations AND capable of anything
Lily	being lovable; sisterhood of suffering; acceptance
Michelle	feel alive/led/empowered; no doubt He can do anything
Biggles	my humanity/shortcomings
Sharon	my core presence/being; more alive; The Spirit/the heart; warm fuzzy feeling
Rachel	joy and desire to sing
Vincent	the difference between us (The Perfect God compared with me); seeking to do well
Patricia	changes frequently e.g., prejudice; new perspective; encouragement; wisdom
Swanson	my need for Him; "I'm lost without you"; Jesus is the way into the place I always wanted to be
Susan	there's nothing more to do to have His acceptance
Jane	in touch with all my senses; my spirit; my emotions
Wayne	a love for people; desire to help and give/generosity; desire to influence others as a Christian
Taylor	my willingness to put God above my desires/wishes/inclinations i.e. sacrifice
Marion	peace; aware of His presence; consciousness of failure
Danny	great comfort; responsive heart
Jennie	protecting me; limitations; aware that I don't know everything and can't look after myself
Malcolm	self awareness/ increased capacity to be honest with myself
Bob	awareness of right; trying to do the right thing at the right time, sense of purpose

Heightened awareness of limitations. For some participants there was an increased awareness or experience of humanity in the light of relationship with God. Participants told of how they were more aware of their humanity, limitations, weakness, frailness or failure in the light of their relationship with God. Vincent contrasted God’s perfection and a heightened awareness of his own imperfect humanity. Swanson spoke of his awareness of his utter dependence on God, and his need for Him. Along similar lines, Jennie spoke of how she is aware that she cannot look after herself and her reliance on God.

Experiential responses. Among the participants there were reports of an experiential response attributed to the relationship with God. Jane, for example, described an increased awareness of all her senses. Michelle spoke of an awareness of being alive and empowered. In a different development, Malcolm described how he has an increased

capacity to be honest with himself because of his relationship with God. There was the heightened awareness for Lily of being loveable, for Susan of experiencing acceptance, and for Swanson there was a heightened and profound sense of belonging. There were reports of comfort, peace, and Sharon spoke of a “warm, fuzzy feeling” she experienced in relationship with God. Rachel described a joy that she captured through the relationship that manifested in a desire to sing.

Desire to respond. The influence of the relationship with God resulted for some in an outward focus – a desire to love others, to help others, to sacrifice self for the sake of others, and even to participate in their suffering. Bob was aware of a strong desire to do the right thing at the right time, and Vincent spoke of seeking to do well. Liz explained that relationship with God helped her to love without an expectation of any return, and to “love the unlovely.”

Narrative by Participant – Other Stories

Katie’s other story: my own cheer squad

Before I met Brent, I was really timid and on occasions even a pushover. I needed to be liked by everyone and to always feel accepted. I rarely tackled new projects or ventures without someone to do them with, and could get very nervous performing with my instrument or leading worship at church, because I worried about how others might judge me.

I was attracted to Brent because I hadn’t long been a Christian, and he was so open about his faith and I needed someone to sit and listen, and someone I could talk with about the Christian faith. We didn’t have many common areas of interest but we have grown to share some areas of interest, and we enjoy spending time together.

In the relationship, it’s like an equal partnership. If I ever feel like Brent is pulling rank, or putting me down unintentionally, I tell him straight away, we talk about it and get over it. If there’s a decision to be made we try to make it together, or come

to some agreement that works for both of us, although if he makes a decision I don't agree with, I will tell him but support him nevertheless. Like all partnerships, it has its ups and downs.

About the same time I met Brent, I took a trip overseas, and both these events resulted in an increase in independence and a growth in confidence in my own abilities. In particular, I'm sure my increased self-acceptance is due to Brent's acceptance of me, and his constant support and encouragement, which has given me increased confidence to tackle projects on my own, like my recent venture into cake decorating. *It's like having my own cheer squad.* I can now perform and lead worship with less anxiety, and his support has helped quieten the worrisome thoughts about what others might be thinking of my performance. Brent sees me as competent and capable of doing whatever I tackle. Brent is always telling me I'm beautiful and that I'm a good mum. Having his support has contributed to an "I can do it" attitude.

I now have a stronger relationship with Brent, and there is a greater stability in the home environment. I'm very comfortable with being completely honest with him.

I can now think more positively about the possibility of managing a second child and a job with a degree of confidence. As a mum, I can step back a bit and allow my daughter to grow up in her own way. With my friends, I can be more relaxed and not need to always be the one taking on the organisational role and stress, when others are chilled, and enjoy themselves.

In my different roles in the church community I think I am more approachable, and certainly less stressed in my leadership roles, and I think this will help me avoid burnout in the future. At work, as my confidence grows, I am sure I could go further in my career and be able to take advantage of more opportunities if I keep this view of myself to the fore. Because I'm a high achiever, if I had bucket loads of confidence, I might come across as a bit obnoxious. So it's probably good that I'm not overly confident.

Liz's other story: "the apple of his eye"

My father was a great father and a great man, who invested his life into his family. He was hard working, spiritual and a loving father. *I was "the apple of his eye,"* as

the firstborn, and the only daughter, I knew I was very important and very dear to him. Our relationship was very rich and very deep, and although I always knew I was “Daddy’s little girl,” the relationship grew to be one of friendship and mateship, and he became someone with whom I could share the journey of life, a “buddy along the journey.” He would say of me, “She’s an intelligent kid” and “Yes, she loves God.”

We connected well and could talk deeply on spiritual and emotional matters. It was a very rich and very deep relationship. He laid solid foundational principles: I remember he often quoted Matthew 6:33 “Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added unto you.”

I look to God, and say, “Lord, if my earthly father could do so much for me, could love me so much, how much more could you do?” And, you know, that just amazes me! How good He is. How blessed I am. I am so grateful that He gave me such a fabulous father. You know there are the downsides - I’m not saying he was an angel. He had his weaknesses, but the weaknesses have also contributed a lot to who I am. In fact, my father has been most instrumental in shaping who I am and it seeps into every part of me. I can’t just be me by myself. I am ME when I am in connection to others. Through the relationship with my father, I am in touch with strength, like a solid rock. This strength is deeply rooted in faith, and has elements of resilience, persistence, positivity and hope. This strength has permeated and touched every area of who I am. It has even made my relationship with God stronger, because it feels like I am anchored to God.

This strength has brought significant improvement to my relationship with my husband. Before he was a source of irritation because of his battle with undiagnosed and untreated depression, and my own dysfunctionalities, but he is now becoming a friend. The relationship is more peaceful and there is less strife. During the tough years of our marriage, the model of my father who always sought God encouraged me to persevere in prayer for the precarious situation in which I found myself.

This strength has also changed my relationship with pain. Before I saw pain as my enemy, and now I have begun to appreciate pain. As a counsellor, what I bring to my clients is hope, and the influence of my father’s values, which permeate

everything I do. In the church community, the strength enables me to be a source of encouragement and exhortation.

Bella's other story: loved just as I am

I used to define myself by how other people saw me, and I was often trying to be someone else, depending on the group of people I was with. I was pretty opinionated and could be foul-mouthed. I forgot to be myself. Along with this way of being, there was a lot of anxiety and second-guessing when it came to decision-making. My self-esteem went out the door.

I believe God put Simon in my path, and I have known unconditional love and acceptance from both God and from Simon. We have been married for 11 years, and he is like the best friend I always wanted. In our relationship there's fun, understanding, unconditional love, friendship and relaxation. He always tells me I am beautiful no matter what I look like. We are quite different in personality. He tones me down, and I liven him up; where I peak and trough, Simon is just this constant.

Simon loves me just as I am, and I no longer define myself on how others see me, and now contentment and safety are a defining part of my way of being, and I am more accepting of who I am. Where anxiety and flightiness were present, now calmness and constancy are a part of my life. Now that I can bounce ideas off Simon and confer with him, decision-making is easier. I believe that God put Simon in my path in order to allow me to fulfill who He wants me to become. Simon has a lot to do with who I am now. When I am with Simon, I'm calm. I feel quite calm. I confer with him about things. I notice that I'm not JUST me. I'm "us": I'm in an "us" relationship.

This change has had both negative and positive outcomes. Because I used to confer with my father instead of Simon, I think my father has taken this personally, and our relationship has deteriorated. The impact on others has been positive. Before I was unable to understand or be present with people with issues, and I needed to protect myself from such people, but now I am happy and willing to take on other people's issues. For example, I used to distance from a friend with postnatal depression, but after I became more comfortable and happy in who I was, our

relationship rekindled, as I was quite happy to be with her, and we have become strong friends.

I am now free to relate comfortably and freely in the communities of which I am a part. I recently found confidence to go back to work in a challenging workplace, with the knowledge that I can be in a pretentious environment without having to be pretentious myself, and I have an increased confidence to be myself there, and to deal with conflict.

Lily's other story: appreciated as a woman

I grew up sheltered and naive, so it took a long time for me to realize I was in an abusive relationship with my first husband. I suffered a breakdown after I left him, and for a long time I could only manage one day at a time, barely functioning as I cared for my boys. I remember clearly doing a little counselling and a lot of soul searching to work out how I got to that situation. I realized I had grown up avoiding conflict, and repressing my own needs and wants. I couldn't make decisions on my own or stand up for myself.

I met Charles about two years ago in an art class for the homeless. He was here in Australia hunting for his daughter, and he ended up on the streets. He's got the softest, tenderest heart, and he just stuck at it, and stuck at it, and against all odds he found her, fought for her through the courts, and we now have full custody of her. He is patient, gentle, perceptive and intelligent. We have discussions about religion and history, and philosophy, which we find stimulating to talk about.

Charles thinks that I'm caring, and likes that I have brains. He appreciates all the little things I do around the house, and for some reason I don't understand, he thinks I'm beautiful. *He appreciates me as a woman*, something I definitely missed, and I know I am treasured, which is lovely. In this relationship I feel special for who I am, not just the role I play. He sees me as practical, down to earth and creative, and perhaps a little indulgent with my sons.

There's a freedom knowing there is acceptance and no judgment, and we have open dialogue. The difference it makes is that I always know that there's someone always by my side, being that support in the midst of everything else, and someone I can talk with about things. Because of this, I have confidence to face life. Charles

is who he is, and I'm who I am, and we can walk together hand in hand through life, mutually supporting each other, without having to demand change, or insist on our own way. So it's a mutual, beneficial thing. The benefit for him is a sense of belonging and commitment. There is a commitment to honesty, acceptance and a willingness to be emotionally available to each other, and making the choice to believe the best about each other. I have a best friend for life. I pinch myself every day that it is a reality. Having someone to love and to appreciate me has changed me.

Michelle's other story: He looks at me and says, "I like that!"

My motto is "It's not always about me." I don't believe you can live a selfish life, even if you want to. God won't let you do that. I think I'm a nice friend, and interested in people. I try to be a diligent wife, although I do have my own mind. I used to turn myself upside-down, walking on eggs shells, trying to be a "good wife." I was a little embarrassed about who I was. I thought everyone had to like me.

Sam and I have been married almost 20 years now. We are compatible, and like holidays, it's about 70% good and 30% bad. I've been asking God to show me how to be passionately in love with Sam again. To spice up our relationship, we have secretly bought motorbikes and plan to ride together on days off. I'm really looking forward to this, 'cause it's going to be "our time"!

Sam is passionate and he brings out the femininity and the sexuality in me, and we have a lot of fun in the bedroom. *He looks at me and says, "I like that!"* He makes me feel pretty. Sometimes I wish he would see more than that, and demonstrate a bit more care. But when there's a crisis, he always there; he always steps up.

He gives me a lot of freedom. Sometimes that's good, and sometimes that's bad. In the relationship with Sam, I have experimented with expressing disagreement and I've even become a bit rebellious! But I still honour my husband. I like being a mother, but I have to say I love being a wife... I really like being a wife, yeah. He says that I'm a hard worker, and hospitable to his friends. He would describe me as a good daughter and a good mother. He would probably say that he appreciates that I look after myself. I also know that I can drive him insane!

There is safety and trust in the relationship, and I feel content. When I'm content, I'm happy, and I'm more likely to be in a good place with God, where my focus is not on me, but on what is right. If I experienced this contentment more consistently, I would consider that I am walking in faith. In this way of being, I know it's not all about me, I can be a better witness of the good news of Jesus, and I have increased self-confidence. I experience shalom, a concept that embraces completeness in health and prosperity and everything else.

Biggles' other story: we stop, talk and build relationship

I'm made up of the people around me, in a sense. I have children, a wife, brothers and sisters. I'm made up of what has influenced me and what I've influenced. I have a perception of the world that is unique, shaped by how I've grown up in the world. I don't believe we can be complete without God. I would probably describe myself as a fluid person, and I've changed as a result of the mistakes I've made. I think I've changed for the better.

As a teenager I lived an insincere life. I was unstable, opinionated and I don't think I was much fun. I had no close friends. I have always hated insincerity, even though I now realize I was insincere in the way I did life, because I didn't know how to live any differently. I have a concern that others might think of me in a bad light. I sometimes express selfishness and can be quick to judge.

In my relationship with Freckles, my younger brother, I am aware of love and companionship, and a shared sense of humanity. I think he'd say that I am reliable and good to have a chat with, because I listen. When we are together, *we stop, talk, and build relationship*. He's a normal human being, but he has an unshakeable faith, and he'll tell me often, "Just trust God!" When we get together, we are both very keen to pull out our Bibles and talk about God, and I come away invigorated.

I am not an inauthentic person. I think I am an authentic person, just working out how to be more authentic. In this way of being, where I am seeking authenticity, truth and the power of God, I am more grounded, more honest, and more reflective. There is a cost... it requires love, humility and energy to seek authenticity, and it challenges the selfishness and greed in me. However, by seeking authenticity, I experience what it is to be in the family of God. I have better perspective. In this

place, I can offer hospitality, I am more understanding, and I can give people the benefit of the doubt, and I'm not so quick to judge.

Sharon's other story: someone always in my corner

I would say I'm fairly easy going, a quieter person and a team player. I'm fairly caring as well. As I have matured I have become more assertive and more defined in who I am, less easily influenced by people and more willing to stand up for what I believe. I have lived with insecurities. I've been my own worst critic and judged myself worthless. I have found it hard to confront others and I get into difficulties because I badly want everybody to be happy.

I had a very close relationship with my Nana, because she cared for me when my younger brother was unwell. We used to live on a farm with her when we were very young, and later we spent many holidays with her. She was very direct and honest with me, but also very loving and supportive as well. She wasn't shy in "calling the kettle black."

In the relationship with Nana, I experienced love, warmth, hospitality, and total acceptance, without judgment or condemnation. She appreciated me for who I was. There was no expectation except to be me. You were her grandchild, so therefore she loved you! And there were eight of us, and while we were all different, we all have felt loved by her. There was a magical quality about my Nana. We lost her about seven years ago, when she was 85. I think she would have been pleasantly surprised at how many people turned up at the funeral.

Nana thought I was a lovely girl, quite considerate and caring, and easy going. It was like I had *someone always in my corner*, and someone who believed there was better for me when I gave up believing that after my first marriage ended, and I was caring for the children alone. She saw me at my unhappiest time, a period of total worthlessness, and she inspired me to move on, because she wanted me to be happy. She would not accept that there was not another partner for me. She never met my new husband, as she passed away just before I met him. I know she would have been really happy about it.

As a result of this relationship with Nana, she gave me the confidence that I am loved and loveable, and she inspired a total acceptance and confidence to be me. I

guess I just know that she loved me, so I could see myself as being loveable through her eyes as well. Knowing I am loved and loveable gives me a new and better way of looking at myself.

She also inspired me to follow God, and this has given me a more positive outlook on life. She had a very simple faith. God is God and that's it! She never really questioned the workings of God, or anything like that. It was always that acceptance that at the end of the day, things are for a reason, and it's the bigger picture that matters.

The result of the relationship is an increase in strength and the capacity to reach out to others and contribute to the community. When I see people going through hard stuff, I guess I like to think that I've been able to help them. I come alongside them and just hold their hand and say, "It's going to get better, because it's rock bottom now, but it's going to get better." So I hope I can do for them what Nana did for me.

Rachel's other story: "Mum enjoys my company"

They often say a self is who I am when no-one is looking. I think I'm comfortable with who I am, and I like to make others comfortable. I was slow to learn who I was. I think I was trying to be who others wanted me to be. Early in life I became aware of a need for recognition, a need to impress at a stage where I was searching for who I am and what life is about. I still see glimpses of this in myself from time to time, and I dislike it.

My daughter Janine was born with a disability, and I have raised her mostly on my own, since her father left when she was five. She's a lovely girl – a woman. She's quite grown up now at 27 years old. She's a clever girl, and recently got her Queen's Award in Girl's Brigade.

I have found that Janine and I have a lot in common, although we have some tensions, especially around food, and relationships with boys. It's a mother/daughter relationship, but also a friend relationship. We enjoy singing praises to God together. We enjoy watching films together and we play tennis. I think she would say, "*Mum enjoys my company.*" She knows that I love her dearly, and she is secure in that.

As a result of having and raising a daughter with a disability I now have a lot more empathy for people with disabilities and a greater dependence on God. The day she was born the doctor told us that he was sorry about this bad news, but God said to me, “in all things I work for good with those who love me.” So I've been able to turn to God and say, “I need your help, what do I do here?” And He's been brilliant. So Janine has brought that out in me, a dependence on God, that and a sense of solitude – being happy with my own company, and not lonely.

The dependence on God enables me to know that I'm okay with the world, and I'm living today, not worried about yesterday, or tomorrow. I was quite ill four years back, but I have this sense that God will look after Janine if anything happens to me and I don't really worry about things like that. It brings a deep peace and contentment, and I can make a more effective contribution to my church community and my neighbourhood, by being used of God. At the same time, there's a bit of discontentment, because I'm sensing that I want a deeper walk with God. I want to be used of God, anywhere, any place, and that's why I'm seeking this deeper walk with God.

Vincent's other story: like a big brother to me

The self is the uniqueness of what is inside this core – the thoughts, the actions, the physical, mental and spiritual abilities, skills and the barriers that affect my relationship with myself and others and the environment. As a person, I'm the result of my genetics, environment, upbringing and my choices. I've never had anything easy, but the struggle has made me a better person. I'm an artist, and in recovery from major depression. I'm talented, fit, and blessed to have been married to my second partner for 27 years.

I was an atheist, and only interested in anything that attracted the girls – theatre and dancing. I hated God and the church and was deliberately antagonistic to Christians. I was selfish, arrogant, vicious, angry, and bad tempered. I constantly criticized myself, was pessimistic, prone to depression and suicidal thinking.

Malcolm was someone I saw and admired. He was older than me, owned a bowler hat and was in a rock group. I thought, “Gee, this guy is cool!” He had a smile that could light up a room.

Soon after I met Malcolm, I had a “Pauline” experience. God spoke to me personally, challenging me to stop fighting Him. I told Malcolm and prayed the prayer of commitment with him. We held hands; we prayed; we cried. We became close after that, and our families were close too, like we were a part of each other’s weddings.

Malcolm has been *like a big brother to me*. He took me under his wing. I am completed by having him in my life. I’m a truer, more consistent, kinder, gentler person. I can be very honest with Malcolm; I don’t have to put on a mask. He is such a special man, and I don’t see him enough. I love him so much, as a mate.

Recently I visited him at his church, and he lit up because I was there, and I went, “It’s not a one way relationship. You’re not looking after me; we’re looking after each other. We’ve grown up.” Our relationship had gone from mentor/older brother to just brothers. We’re both mature men who’ve had our challenges.

I think Malcolm would appreciate my openness and honesty. He brings out in me a sense that I’m a better person than I really think I am, but a work in progress. Our joke with each other is that we’ll both make it into heaven, but just inside the back door, with God just looking at us, shaking His head in disbelief.

Malcolm would describe me as a person of passion, a genuine mate, but someone who needs to soften off, relax more, and try to change, but not change too much. It’s hard to speak for a mate – he might even say I’m an absolute idiot, in a jovial sense!

When I’m around him, I don’t have to be something different. I can be grumpy. I don’t have to put on a mask. But it’s hard to be that way because he allows me to be that way. He allows me to see the bigger picture of who I am, who we are, what the world is. Around him I can cry, I can get angry, I can be frustrated. He does not judge me. Around Malcolm, I’m a truer person, a more consistent, kinder, gentler person.

As a result of Malcolm’s influence I now see myself as an optimist with a true hope, and that is a metamorphosis – a natural change from the inside out. Because I can be an optimist with true hope, people respect my views and like being around me, and I have compassion and sympathy for people. I listen to them and they listen to me. If I embodied this view more fully, I believe there would be a revival.

I really believe it. You can be the spark that sparks another, that sparks another... it's that atomic explosion.

Patricia's other story: he holds a mirror to my soul

I look at the idea of self holistically. It's about fullness in terms of my physical being, my spiritual being, my emotional being, social, sexual – it's about the wholeness of the totality of who I am, and how I express that. There is an active part of me, a contemplative part, and a part that likes to give and receive... maybe a part that likes to hide as well.

My self has changed dramatically. I used to be much less secure. I mirrored my persona on other people, and created a pseudo-self, which I thought would be acceptable to others, because of what I felt about the real self underneath. I had a desire for wholeness/holiness; I knew I wasn't there. I was constantly having to prove myself, and I was asking constantly "Where will I go?" "What will I say?" Over the years with healing from some pretty traumatic experiences in my youth, I have found an inner peace that in turn has enabled me to accept who I was.

Ryan has been my mentor for over 15 years, and together we explore difficulties and darkness. We develop thinking, and tease out possibilities. *What Ryan does is hold a mirror to my soul.* Together we wrestle with the ups and downs of living, without formulating pat answers and clichés. In this relationship I am able to be real, and not face judgment, criticism or condemnation. In the relationship with Ryan I have experienced what I would call a safe transparency.

I think Ryan would use the word wisdom in describing me, and contemplation, and probably challenge. The gentle side would be mentioned, but with a rider. He would probably say "But if you get to know her well enough, you'll find that there's also a side of her that can be quite sharp as well."

In this way of being with Ryan, which I would call safe transparency, there is a heightened awareness of both depth and shallowness. I am in touch with my shadow side, my prejudices, and I am able to face myself. If you have someone safe to do this with, then all of you gets addressed. I can experience the wholeness of being true to self. Because of this, I can grow, mature, and embrace the shadow side. As a result, there is less internal conflict between who I desire to be and how I

am living life, and I can enjoy contentedness and peace. I can just be and allow others to be. I don't have to prove myself; there's no people pleasing, there's no approval seeking, there's no performance anxiety. It's like a comfortable skin. It doesn't mean I'm free from having to address issues, but because I can be content with who I am, that's okay.

I believe people are crying out for conversation, friendship, relationship, where they can have safe transparency. And so I've watched the difference in my work, in my friendships, and seen almost visible relief for some, and I hope that that's an ongoing gift or model that I can continue. I've received and now I give. Being this way gives permission for others to be real and take risks in relationship. It's taken time for me to recognize that some people are not ready for it, and you have to cap it a bit, for their safety as much as your own.

Swanson's other story: she brings me down to earth

I'm a 58-year-old male. I am a Christian, and I enjoy golf and fishing. I was born and raised in the US as a Mormon, but I left that and became a Christian at 19. I met Cameron, my wife, while I was still in the US navy. We married and chose to settle in Brisbane. We had some marriage issues because of my struggle with anger, even after I became a Christian, but after some prayer and counselling, I realized just what I was jeopardizing, and the anger is no longer an issue. I think the spiritual maturity that has come through 38 years of walking with Jesus, reading the Bible and having time with Him every day helped sort out the anger issues.

We've been married 25 years and Cameron would consider me a loving husband and good friend. I nearly lost her twice – once in childbirth and once to cancer. Those experiences were really terrible, but they solidified our relationship. She knows that I'll stick by her in a tight situation, and it showed me beyond the shadow of a doubt that I wanted to spend my life with her, that I loved and was committed to her.

I would hope that she would see me as a loving husband, a good friend, and a committed, hard-working man dedicated to looking after his family.

When I was young, I was someone who used to daydream, and I would often be “off with the fairies.” It was a form of escapism, because I wasn’t very happy at the time. I experienced longing and envy because I lacked contentment in my life. In this relationship I have a better grasp of reality. There are no illusions that I’m the greatest thing that ever happened, because *Cameron has a way of bringing me down to earth*. I may still daydream at times, but not as much as I used to. The groundedness and living in the moment is helpful for me because it brings contentment. I am happy with my life, where I am and what I am doing. There is family harmony and I am more effective in my work team, and the church community and endeavours because of the groundedness. There’s the potential for likeminded oneness, if you will.

Susan’s other story: in a safe harbour

I was a very withdrawn child. My father left soon after I was born. Primary school was okay, though I based my self worth on my achievements. Teenage years were more turbulent as I had issues re-connecting with my father. I was unsettled and insecure about who I was. Although I was anchored to some extent by my relationship with Jesus, I was often battered by interactions with others.

I became a Christian at 17 when I was overseas on a Rotary exchange, and on my return I met Max and we married 15 years ago. We are both spontaneous and uninhibited. The relationship with Max is open and trusting and we both share a deep faith in God. This faith is integral to the relationship. We have some different values but respect what each brings. He says that he appreciates my care and listening to others. He would probably see me as fairly passionate about things; someone who can be volatile at times, but seeks to do the right thing and to treat others properly. He’d probably say that I was intellectually bright, and a sensitive person. Max is a sounding board for me, and someone who connects with me. He loves me unconditionally.

It’s probably a contradiction, but Max brings me in touch with stability, a sense of order in a world of confusion, and also being unpredictable, and an ability to enjoy every moment. So for example when we’re up at Easter Fest and it was bucketing down and we got flooded in the concert arena, he was taking his shirt off and sliding in the puddles down the hill and stuff like that, with all the 20 year olds

around him. On the one hand he is very, very stable, and someone you can trust, and that brings out feelings of stability for me. My sense of self is stabilised and I am more accepting of others. Because there is more stability I am more content to be myself, and sit still rather than run around looking for things to fulfil myself. I am content to be at home with the family. Because of the secure base I have with Max, we can enjoy spontaneity together.

Because there is more compassion there is more care for others in my life and my life is richer. Even though I have cared for people, I used to dismiss other people's difficulties as hard luck stories. Together we've spent a lot of time with people on the fringe who struggle with a variety of things, and my attitude has changed in a response to others from "Get over yourself!" to "How can we come alongside and help you?"

All this contributes to sense of "being at home" with myself. Since I met Max I feel like *I have come into a safe harbour* where I am loved, appreciated and sheltered to some extent from life's difficulties. I derive strength from knowing he is there. "Being at home" frees me to rest and enjoy who I am. I spend less emotional energy defending myself, reacting and second-guessing. If I can hold onto this stability I can switch the focus more from myself to others, and the result will be deeper caring for others, more strength to give without seeking recognition or approval, and more energy for the communities of which I am a part. All round I feel balanced or complemented in my relationship with Max. Before Max came along my self image was harder, because that was how I dealt with life. I guess I've become more vulnerable with Max and my image of myself has changed from a hard, impervious wall to being able to give and take, and trying to relate more. Someone said the other night, "You two make marriage look like so much fun!" If I more fully embraced this view of being balanced and complemented, I would have more resilience and buoyancy when I get knocked down. So long as I have one person that believes in me, and whose opinion matters to me, I would manage negative comments better, and stop the chain reaction of negativity and withdrawing, and the community would benefit.

Jane's other story: I want a bit of Kate in me

I think that self is a combination of body, soul and spirit because you can't have a body without a soul or a spirit and there needs to be a bit of a connection, between the three because they all impact each other. I suppose that my self would be my own individual body, soul and spirit and my personality so to speak, or how I've grown up and how I've been influenced differently from you, and that's what makes my self different from your self. I am a bubbly, positive, social, driven, determined person, who is a thinker. I have had life experience and learned from both my mistakes and good choices. My parents divorced when I was young. I was busy doing my own thing, and everything revolved around me.

I've known Kate for four or five years. I met her at church, and I noticed how she did life and *I decided I wanted a bit of Kate in me*, so I asked for her to mentor me. Right from the beginning we clicked and get on well together. It's an intentional mentoring relationship, but we balance it out with friendship. We switch easily between a friendship and a mentoring relationship. She's like the older sister I never had; like family. She always refers to me as "little sister." She always says she couldn't live without me, and that I'm a bubbly, lovely, nice person. She acknowledges, recognizes and appreciates my capacities and abilities, like being genuine, getting alongside people, rallying people and leading them.

As a mentor Kate asks some really hard questions sometimes, which I appreciate. She helps me work out who I am and what's going on. I'm really interested in the supernatural, and things like prophecy and healing, and she can share her information and experiences with me.

In my relationship with Kate I am in touch with vulnerability, and my true raw feelings, also, my "God-self" – the spiritual side. The relationship helps me be a more rounded person. Kate highlights areas of my life I can't see, as I don't have a 360-degree perspective.

This relationship adds richness and depth to myself, and helps me be more realistic and level-headed. It gives me greater wisdom to know when to pull back and when to push forward. It helps me be more self-reflective and self-actualising. It contributes to me having a self-reflective way of being, where I'm able to reflect on the impact I have on people and vice versa. Because of my increased capacity for

self-reflection and self-actualising, I am able to relate to people more responsibly. I have an increased awareness that my life is not just about me, but it has an impact on those around me. I want that impact to be a positive one. I hope that my attitude will rub off on others so that they see their impact on others also.

Wayne's other story: always ready to offer a helping hand

I think the family you are brought up in, and the influences in your life form you to the person you are, whether you call it a person or a self. I think all those things have had an influence to bring you to the point at the time, because when you meet someone, and you decide to get married, you've got to portray the person you are, or your self to that person, and whether it's good or bad. It's about that time that you, that person or that self has been formed. And for me, you go on from there.

I used to be backwards in coming forward, and not terribly confident of what I did or who I was, although I got on well enough with everyone. I had good friends and did fairly well at sport. I believed in God, got to church and mixed with friends. But I felt like I was not quite the person I would want to be, or better at the things I did, and that carried on until I reached 40 odd. I ended up having a couple of nervous breakdowns over stressful work situations. I may not look it, but I'm now 80 years of age.

When I was about 30, I met Jonathan at a sailing club, and we became good friends. So we both belonged to the association but we quite often went out together, and then he went his way and I went mine. He started going to church and became a Christian like me. I was not directly influential in that result, but I think the positive atmosphere in our family influenced him.

I lost touch with Jonathan until about 10 years ago, when we were both living in Brisbane and I invited him for Christmas. We got together and joined a sailing club, and we spent time building boats together. He moved into the lower half of my daughter's house, and we both began building boats in the shed at the back. We helped one another, and encouraged one another. He would say I'm a good friend, very helpful, a good husband and father and that I raised my family well. I like Jonathan. I wouldn't say he's been the strongest influence in my life, but we've had a lot to do with each other.

In this relationship I am in touch with being available and willing to help out, *always ready to offer a helping hand*, and this makes me feel good about myself, and is very rewarding. It's a willingness to be involved with the person in whatever they are doing. I'm no longer backwards in coming forward. When I turned 80 earlier this year, I decided to step back from offering physical help that requires heavy lifting, but if it's advice or someone needs a driver or something like that, I will help out.

Let me tell you a story... Jonathan's wife came back from a trip to India last year, and she was interviewed in the church service, and after service... it wasn't an idea, but it's like the words were written across the inside of my forehead "Give Cynthia a thousand dollars." And I thought, "That's bloody madness!" All that next week, every time I turned my head, I got that on the inside of my forehead "Give Celia a thousand dollars." Anyway, the next Saturday, with this thing still inside me forehead, I went and drew a thousand dollars out of the bank, and it made a big hole in what I had, but it didn't matter, because if God wanted me to give Cynthia a thousand dollars, I'll give it to her. So I gave it to her on the Sunday, and I said, "That's for your people in India," and she couldn't believe it. On the next Wednesday I got a letter from the taxation department saying that they had paid 994 dollars and 65 cents into my account as a result of a review of my tax. Talk of miracles! The thousand dollars didn't cost me anything.

The next Saturday, Cynthia said, "Come over to the car!" And she pulled a great big plastic bag out, and pulled this big quilt. She said, "This is for you." So miracles do happen!

My willingness to help out makes for good community and good church community. Just last week I was amazed when two people got in their cars and bothered to come and visit me when I was in hospital. That makes you feel good. So that's what I do, and hopefully will continue to do.

Right from the start, when I retired, after my wife died, my attitude is that because I have a roof over my head, a car to drive, plenty of food and money, with a part-time job... what more could I want? That's all I need. God is looking after me.

Taylor's other story: she brings out the loving side

I would say I'm a combination of a few different "selves." Basically that self would be developed because of the different and significant influences in my life that have brought me to the self that I am now. At 15 my mum died and I joined the army soon after that. Not only did I have the developing of self that came with one parent, with the lack of a female model in the home, I then joined the army and took on all of the discipline and all those sorts of things that come with military life. Yeah. So over the course, of say 15 to about 19 years old, there was a massive period of developing self, from the death of my mother to becoming comfortable as a soldier. I was a rough and ready fighting man. I call that part of me the "infantry Taylor." I had a large pay-packet that I used to buy fantastic toys and all sorts of destructive things.

I became a Christian at 29, and this completely transformed who I was. That's probably the biggest change in my life. I would see myself as generally easy going, committed to serving God in whatever capacity He tells me to, or calls me to, devoted to raising a family with godly values, dependable, and trustworthy.

I met Kirsten when I became a Christian. She is my best mate and my wife. We are opposites; for example she likes study, whereas I don't. I've never heard her say anything negative about me. She would appreciate that I am trustworthy and dependable. She would see me as someone who puts his family needs above his own. She would probably describe me as a loving husband, a loving father, a committed Christian and a neat freak.

My love for Kirsten is sacrificial. I always put her first, because that is what God expects. That love flows to others as well. My military programming had blocked out the loving side so letting someone in to witness the love was not easy, but *Kirsten brings out the loving side* – the committed part of me. Now sacrificial love is integral to me, as a vein is to my body. Expressing sacrificial love makes me happier and I feel blessed, but I don't do it to feel happy, rather because I love Jesus and it is what He wants me to do.

If the sacrificial love grew, I would be even more blessed and happy, and there would be less conflict with the "infantry Taylor" (which is still a part of me) when I

see people rorting the system and I would more readily choose to help them even when I have misgivings.

Marion's other story: he advertised for me

I think of my self as my life or my being. There are probably many sides to my self, and that has changed with age. At times I can be a happy person, and sometimes a little despondent, but mostly happy. I can be adaptable and self-sufficient, which I've had to be because my husband passed away and I've lived on my own for a long time. Many people have influenced my life, including my father, with whom I was very close, and my first husband, who died at 42.

I was widowed with three children after my first husband became an invalid, and then died. I met David later in life. I always say that *he advertised for me...* he was a managing director and needed a secretary, and I applied for the job. He had others to choose from, but we got on famously at the interview, and he chose me, even though I was bit cheeky and told him I'd think about the offer. We parted ways after he left the company, and then he got in touch again, and things went from there.

We were married for 20 years, and he died 11 years ago. The relationship was very comfortable and very loving. He liked that I stood up for him when others didn't, that I had a mind of my own, and that I had strength of character because of what I had been through. We were very compatible, and like-minded, and we nussed things out together when we had a difference of opinion. There'd be times where he'd put his foot down and say, "No!" when I wanted to do something, but on the whole, I was given a lot of leeway.

In this relationship I was in touch with a different kind of loving. It's much, much different to be in a second marriage, and the relationship is more mature. I had someone who cared for me, and I knew I was important to someone, that I was not travelling alone, and that I meant something to him. This helped me experience contentment, and also helped me learn not to strive after things I didn't have. I'd like to experience more of that contentment, but I'm on my own again. I can be content being on my own now, but it's a different contentment. If I didn't have it, I would be a bear to get on with in my community.

Danny's other story: one in Christ

I'd describe myself as a male, a bit over middle aged and a Christian. My whole outlook changed at 19 after I gave my life to the Lord Jesus Christ.

I was born out of wedlock during World War II. My mother couldn't afford to keep me and I was too old to be adopted, so I was put in a home and then moved to an orphanage in Australia. There was no personal touch there and I couldn't trust anyone. I wasn't able to share with anyone, and I used to hide my feelings. I was expelled from one of the homes when I got into a fight with a girl, and I defended myself from a housemother who hit me with a broom. It seemed that I got the blame for everything.

I wondered why anyone would be interested in me or what I do. Leaving the orphanage was very frightening for me, as it was hard to cope with the world. There was an emptiness in my heart - a void. Having no family was a big barrier for me. I used to do my own thing, and I didn't care much about other people. I thought I was an "all right guy."

At a crusade at 19, I became a Christian, and subsequently married and had children. I met Alex when we came to this church about 6 years ago. He is one of the pastors, and we work together, as he leads the meetings when I sing. He cares about me and I really trust Him, and look up to Him. I learned to trust God when I became a Christian, and this has flowed to other relationships like Alex. We share openly and deeply with each other. Knowing we can't be perfect helps us share openly. It helps that there is trust and confidentiality in the relationship. The love of Christ has brought us together. We both trust in God and this brings a peace, a unity of purpose and a singleness of mind. It's like *we are one in Christ*. We pray for each other, and this encourages us both in what we do. It's a comfortable friendship, and we can share things about our day-to-day lives, knowing that we're not perfect.

He would appreciate my helpfulness, dependability and devotion to my work. The fellowship and friendship we share in this relationship makes me feel good about myself, and it encourages Alex in his ministry, because it's not easy being a pastor. I think it's a wonderful life, and I can see God's hand all the way through it. Having been institutionalized, I'm aware that the outcome is not always so good.

Some of the other children have committed suicide because they couldn't handle life after leaving the orphanage.

Jennie's other story: not just all about me

I would equate self with character. It's not the body, but the enduring thoughts, feelings, and attitudes towards the world. Every person is unique, and experiences the world differently. Like I grew up with one brother, and we both thought our parents favoured the other! This might also be influenced by your genetics, which give you certain tendencies.

I had two teen pregnancies and some adversarial and unwise relationships, which led to trauma and difficulties for me. I think of myself as fairly damaged. I sometimes have a battle about being valued. I have some good abilities, but I have a serious lack of self-confidence, which can lead to a deal of anxiety. I don't like to see myself as a difficult person, but I am seen like that in the wider family, because I'm the one in the family who sets and maintains the boundaries.

I still sometimes feel very much like a child, and I'm only just starting to feel like a grown up, which must sound really silly. In some ways I feel very vulnerable, and in some ways, very resilient.

I met my husband Mark eight years ago. We both came from pretty damaging family situations. I had been looking for a partner, as I wanted stability. It's like we shed our skins for something new – we both chose to give up some bad habits. We have a very close relationship, and it is mutually supportive. There is great affection between us, and closeness. We have weathered a lot together. He would say I'm the rock of the family, because I play a significant anchoring role in the family, which I don't always enjoy. I am also the boundary keeper and I don't like that role either. He deals with my crappy family, and I deal with his crappy family! The main frustration is that he is very moody, and it can take a long time for him to bounce back after a set back. Sometimes when I've been in turmoil, I've actually wished I would exhibit physical symptoms so that somebody would see my distress and I would get some care.

I've heard Mark say a lot of nice things about me. He would probably describe me as resilient, a feminist, a Christian, and a "know it all," if he were being really

honest. In this relationship I am humbled by Mark's wisdom and insight, and blessed by the way he doesn't limit me in my work, despite the poor pay, and the natural limitations of a family with five children. I need to be more aware of how Mark feels affirmed and loved, because we are different. Without Mark in my life I would have a massive ego. He keeps me accountable and reminds me that it's *not just all about me*. In this relationship I feel protected and supported. I am 90% happy with this. The 10% part expects I shouldn't rely on others. With an increase in being supported and protected I would experience less anxiety, and have even more confidence and complete freedom, because I would not get "the guilts" when I have to rely on other people because I have to travel for my work.

My work is to stand against the objectification of women in culture, so of course, we get attacked and even death threats. When I'm under attack and I ask for help, my colleagues also contribute to my sense of being protected and supported.

Malcolm's other story: I trust her implicitly and she me

I think of self as personality and behaviour – the core of who I am. I'm an ENTP in Myers Briggs terms, so extrovert, intuitive, thinking and perceiving. I'm complex in that while I'm an extrovert, I'm also very sensitive. I vacillate between being impulsive and methodical. I'm more academic than practical. I'm aware of my strengths and my weaknesses. Having said all that, my identity as a child of God transcends all of these things, because it defines me more than those things. I am grounded by the assurance that nothing can separate me from God's love, so I know I am valued and ultimately accepted by God for who I am.

Vicki and I are very, very different personalities, and sometimes we drive each other nuts. We met professionally and married later in life. We have a deep, deep connection in terms of values and spirituality, though that is expressed differently for each of us. We are best friends and enjoy spending time together. The relationship is rich, but by no means perfect. We value the security and trust in the relationship; *I trust her implicitly and she me*. Vicki appreciates my rational logical approach and the healthy independence. Vicki would describe me as highly, highly intense, and that drains her because she is a highly feeling person. So in the relationship I am most aware of my intensity, and the impact of that on her and others. It's only Vicki who has brought that to my attention. As I become more

aware of this intensity and its effect on others, I have modified my behaviour and in turn this has improved relationships with Vicki, our sons and others.

I am also in touch with transparency in the relationship. I can be transparent with her in a way that I am with no other. Because of this increased transparency, I am viewed by others as more real, and this has enriched my life, because as a pastor there has been a ripple effect and others are more real as well. I'm richer for being more transparent, however I think I've managed to pay it forward, so to speak, in that I've seen others change as well. The connection and relationships with others in the church and community are deeper and more real as a result.

Bob's other story: a shield around him

The self is the bringing together of everything that moulds you, like your parents' input, upbringing and education. I'm reasonably focused on making sure I do the right thing, especially in my job as a politician. I don't think I've changed one bit, and I'm comforted by that, as I don't want to be corrupted and changed by being a politician, as so many are.

I was asked to mentor Tim about five years back. I mentor him in his life and job as a politician, just as I've been mentored, and learned from someone else. He would appreciate that I spend time with him, keep in touch and put a bit of *a shield around him*, especially while he is going through a tough personal time just now. I need to find a way to demonstrate care and concern without the demands of that care taking over my life and affecting other relationships. I don't want him to become overly reliant on me. In that regard, I've put him in touch with other people who can mentor him in personal matters.

In this relationship, I'm in touch with demonstrating concern for others. Someone did it for me, and I'm now doing it for someone else. I'm a bit selective on whom I show real care for, but I made a commitment to my leader to mentor Tim, so I will do it, even when it's challenging. I also do it because it's what the good Lord put us here for, and it gives me a sense of purpose to be able to do this.

Table 6 summarizes the answers to one of the key questions in the interview:

“What am I in touch with in the relationship with the other?” While the narratives give

some of the background and highlight the uniqueness of each participant, as is fitting for a narrative analysis, this table gives the flavour of the range of answers, and makes it possible to observe some of the common threads.

Table 6

Answers to “What am I in touch with in my relationship with the other?” by Participant

Name	What am I in touch with in my relationship with the other?
Katie	intellect; confidence; having my own cheer squad; know I can get it done
Liz	resilience; faith; persistence; see the positive; living hope; connection with father in heaven; role as daughter
Bella	calmness; dependence - the "us"
Lily	femininity/ appreciated and treasured/special as a woman; being a farm girl; freedom; acceptance
Michelle	pretty/sexuality/femininity; appreciation; freedom
Biggles	humanity; love; companionship
Sharon	confidence that I am loved; total acceptance
Rachel	empathy; contentment/solitude; dependence on God; knowing that he will help
Vincent	more honest; an equal; no judgment; a better person; a lot of positives
Patricia	depth AND shallowness; heightens awareness of self; safe transparency
Swanson	brings me down to earth/a grasp of reality
Susan	more stability; togetherness; order; more compassionate; AND impulsive/unpredictable/ spontaneity
Jane	my real/true/raw feelings; capacity; life skills; my self AND God self
Wayne	willingness to help, be available and involved; positive attitude
Taylor	my loving committed side
Marion	love; increased maturity
Danny	fellowship/friendship - comfortable; "peace" with God; feel good about myself; "one in Christ"; confidentiality
Jennie	humbled; blessed; awareness of differences; need to recognize love
Malcolm	my intensity
Bob	care and concern for others

Common threads amongst the other stories. Just as each of the God stories was unique, so the 20 other stories described a rich and varied range of responses as the participant described his or her relationship with other, and how that might have influenced the understanding and experience of self. In seeking common threads or what the literature calls cohesive understandings or common themes amongst the narratives (Creswell, 2003; Polkinghorne, 1995), there was an expectation that there might be some

parallels between the God stories and the other stories, given that Protestant Christians generally conceive of the relationship with God as a personal relationship (e.g., Schaeffer, 1979). In line with the research questions, similarities and differences between the God stories and other stories were explored. In these other stories, three threads were identified that were similar to the threads found amongst the God stories: a heightened awareness of limitations, experiential responses, and the desire to respond. In addition, there was one further thread, that of a heightened awareness of sexuality.

Heightened awareness of limitations. Four participants described how the relationship with an other person resulted in an increase in their awareness of their humanity or limitations. Biggles spoke of how his own shortcomings were highlighted in his relationship with his brother. In a related but different development, Swanson described how his partner helps to “bring him down to earth” and to stay “grounded” when he might otherwise drift into unreality or fantasy. Rachel spoke of how the way in which her carer role for her daughter threw her into dependence on God, and Jennie said she was humbled in her relationship with her husband in the light of his wisdom and insight.

Experiential responses. Five participants spoke of how they got in touch with a sense of being loveable or increased confidence in their own lovability or capacity to give and receive love through their relationship with their chosen other. Other participants described the encouragement or support they experienced through the relationship with other. Katie expressed this as “having my own cheer squad” as a result of her husband’s encouragement. Liz told of a strong sense of her role as the firstborn child and only daughter to her father, and the meaning that had for her of being loved and treasured. Bella was aware of the “us” in her relationship with her spouse, and Danny described a form of unity that he expressed as “one in Christ”, in the relationship with his pastor. There were many other descriptions of experiential responses, including awareness of resilience, faith,

persistence, calmness, stability, compassion, being blessed, empathy, contentment, acceptance, maturity and intensity. The participants welcomed most of these experiential responses as preferential developments.

Desire to Respond. While most participants could identify ways that their relationship with other resulted in some way to respond and pass on the benefits of their relationships, Bob and Wayne in particular highlighted an awareness of their desire to care for or help other people, as a result of their relationships with the other.

Heightened awareness of sexuality. Lily and Michelle described how their relationship with their husbands increased their awareness of being “treasured,” and more aware of their femininity and sexual attractiveness.

Similarities and differences between God stories and other stories. There were three similar threads or themes identified among the God stories and other stories, and one additional thread for other stories, that of sexuality. When the categories were explored and compared, it was evident that while three common themes emerged from God stories and other stories, there were subtle differences in the content. The category of heightened awareness of limitations was more substantially represented and touched on by more participants (8) in the God stories when compared with the other stories (4). For many participants the limitations, frailty or humanness were expressed in terms of comparing themselves against God, and in the case of other stories by comparing themselves against the other. In the light of participants’ relationship with God, they spoke of “failure”, “weakness”, “limitations,” and “shortcomings” before God. Along similar lines, Vincent spoke of his awareness of the vast difference between “the Perfect God” and himself. With reference to relationship with the other, the language was about “humanity”, being “brought down to earth”, “humility”, and Jennie told of how in relationship with her daughter she was humbled as she contemplated her dependence on God. It is evident from

these stories that the greater discrepancy came from a comparison between themselves and the Divine when compared with a comparison with a fellow human being, however highly the other may be esteemed.

The heightened awareness of limitations for both relationship with God and relationship with other had a direct and indirect influence on the self-understanding of the participants. As a consequence of comparing themselves with the Divine, or the esteemed other, explicit identity statements about the self flowed. Liz, for example, described her relationship with God and happily concluded that she considered herself “a daughter, a child of God” and expanded at length about how her “identity in Christ” gave stability and meaning in her life. Vincent described saw himself as “a better person than I think I am” and “a truer you, a more consistent you, a kinder, a gentler you” because of the relationship with his friend Malcolm.

Experiential responses were represented in both God stories and other stories, although they were represented more frequently in other stories. All 20 participants could readily and articulately describe emotional responses to their relationship with other, while most (17) could identify and describe some form of experiential response to their relationship with God when asked. This may indicate the possibility of a higher level of intimacy which people experience in their relationship with other when compared with relationship with God. As evidence of this possibility, while some participants spoke of a deeply intimate relationship with God (e.g., Katie, Liz, Patricia, Marion), one participant, Wayne, mentioned that he struggled in his desire to experience God’s presence. The type of experiential response was similar. For example, love featured as a response to the relationship with God and relationship with other, although it was mentioned more frequently in the other stories. Acceptance and lack of judgment featured in God stories and other stories. For example, it was important to Vincent that he experienced no

judgment from his friend Malcolm, and in turn, Vincent spoke of how this helped him experience self-acceptance. Susan spoke of how the acceptance she experienced from God had virtually eradicated the craving for acceptance she experienced from others.

There were expressions about a desire to respond in some way to the relationship with God and relationship with other. There were more elaborated expressions of this desire represented in the God stories. Taylor's relationship with God, for instance, led him to a desire to sacrifice his own desires above those of others and Bob described a strong desire to do the right thing at the right time in view of his relationship with God. Katie's awareness of her increased worry led her to a response of surrender to God. Wayne described a strong desire to give generously and sacrificially in response to his relationship with God. Only two participants, Wayne and Bob, described a desire to respond directly based on their relationship with the other. Wayne spoke of his desire to be available to help out, and Bob spoke of an awareness of care and concern from the relationships with other people. It is understandable from a Christian faith perspective that relationship with God led to an expressed desire to help, give sacrificially and care and love others, given that Christian teaching encourages people to give as they have received, or pass on the blessings they have received from God (e.g., Matt. 10:8).

An increased awareness of sexuality was mentioned when the relationship was between human partners, and that category was absent when participants spoke of relationship with the Divine. While intimacy with God may be considered a biblical theme, there is no sexual component in this intimacy in contemporary Protestant Christian teaching. This would therefore be an expected difference in the threads arising from a description of relationship with God and relationship with an other person.

While it is difficult to place a value judgment on the importance of the influences on the understanding of self, a comparison of the narratives about relationship with God

and relationship with other gave evidence that while both domains held significance for the participants, the relationship with God was more influential than relationship with other on understanding of self. Statements about the influence on understanding of self from other stories included such wording as considering myself “a better person,” experiencing “more stability,” “feeling good about myself,” having an “awareness of differences” and experiencing “increased confidence.” The understanding of self that resulted from the God stories included such statements as feeling “capable of anything,” “aware of my core presence and being,” having “joy and a desire to sing,” “I feel alive,” and experiencing “great comfort”. These latter descriptions about the influence of relationship with God appear to hold more significance, while deeper intimacy was possible in relationship with other.

In order to explore the relative importance of the influence of relationship on the understanding of self, a comparison of the two interviews was done with respect to the number of times that God or the other was mentioned. This comparison demonstrated that 18 out of the 20 participants spoke about their relationship with God seven times on average during the interview about relationship with other, yet when speaking about relationship with God, only 10 participants referred to the relationship with other, 1.45 times on average. A further check was made by analysing the answers to the three preliminary questions about the self (see Appendix A). This analysis revealed that, when talking about self, 13 of the 20 participants made reference to God 4 times on average, while only 7 participants made reference to the significant other, 0.6 times on average. These data are evidence of the pervasive influence of the relationship with God. The data also suggest that the relationship with God is more influential and pervasive than their relationship with an other significant person in their life. Two participants who were remarkable in the number of times they referenced God in the interview about other were

Liz and Rachel. When the interview transcript was read, some interesting observations emerged. Liz spoke of the pervasive influence of God on her life and understanding of self, when she said, “So it has been, always has been, self has been me and God (RH and LH clasped apart). It has been – my definition of self, my locus if I could say, has been ‘child of God’ – in relation to God (LH and RH moving towards each other).” Rachel told the following compelling vignette in her interview about her daughter Janine:

I don't know if I mentioned but when she was born... I don't know if you've had this sort of experience when she was born, the very day that she was born... she was born at quarter to eight in the morning, and about six o'clock that night, the sister came in and said that the doctor wants to speak to your husband and yourself, would you come out to the other room? And we did and he told us of her condition and X, my husband started crying and anyway... But into my mind came a verse from Scripture. And I can't... People say to me, “How did you think of God at a time like that?” Well I didn't, but He thought of me. I know that to be true and He brought into my mind a verse from Scripture “in all things God works for good for those who love him and are called for according to his purpose” and here was the doctor telling us that he was sorry about this bad news, but here's God saying to me “in all things I work for good with those who love me”. It really has been... it's on our wall in the kitchen and it's really been... So I've been able to, because of that, I've been able to return to God and say I need your help, what do I do here? You know? And He's been really brilliant. So Janine has brought that out in me, a dependence on God.

From these excerpts it is clear that Liz and Rachel were able to articulate a relationship with God that pervaded their other relationships and impinged on all aspects of their lives.

While Liz and Rachel were notable in the number of times they referred to God in the interviews about other, many of the other participants made reference to the significance of the influence of relationship with God on the self-understanding during the interviews. For example, Taylor said, “my self is heavily influenced by God (nodding), um, ur, strongly influenced by the Australian Army (p) and, I suppose additionally and

equally influenced by the people that are surrounding me.” Susan expressed the pervasive influence of her relationship with God on her understanding of self when she said:

But I could not actually think of myself as apart from my relationship with Jesus. That to me is the core of who I am (hands outstretched in front palms up). So to lose that is... (shoulders shrug, hands opening further sidewise) I couldn't describe myself... I guess the value and the essence of who I am is now based in what He says of me in the Bible, rather than just purely in terms of human characteristics.

“Small stories” about Change in Self

Because this project was designed to explore influences on self-understanding, it was decided to ask some open-ended questions of the participants to explore their views on change in self and self-understanding. This narrative analysis of small or incidental stories focussed on answers to three questions about self and other snippets of conversation throughout the interviews that captured the participants' view of change in self.

When asked whether the participant thought he or she had changed, 19 of the 20 participants agreed that their self had changed in some way. The only participant who claimed not to have changed, and was happy about that claim, was Bob. On this topic, he said:

I don't think I've changed one bit. I think I'm still the same old me, which I'm pretty comforted by. It means that... that bringing together of environment and self from way back is (p) very much encapsulated in who I am. So I guess I could say I'm reasonably reliable.

This excerpt demonstrated that Bob had associated reliability with lack of change of self, and that change in self was viewed as a lack of reliability, and therefore not a positive or preferred development. This view fits with a cultural value associated with consistency across situations and time (Kanagawa et al., 2001). As the conversation progressed Bob shared a poignant story about how he had stolen an eraser from a shop as a child. He said,

“It may have been the most influential thing that has ever happened in my life. ... It’s about being honest.” The conversation continued about honesty and how that had become a strong value in his life and subsequently in the life of his son. It is possible to deduce from this interchange that Bob had been influenced by the early experiences of his life. It is possible that since this experience happened in childhood that Bob had dismissed this as evidence of change in self. This is confirmed by his comment in the excerpt above where he spoke of being “encapsulated in who I am.” Bob also referred to the way that politicians can be easily corrupted, a notion which he seemed to associate with the notion of change. In this context he added, “The ‘back story’ of course is that politicians get corrupted and are changed by the job.

Another participant, Wayne, talked about change in self in the early years of his life until mid twenties, and then he made the following comment: “It’s about that time that you, that person or that self has been formed. And for me, you go on from there.” Interestingly, at a later stage of the interview, Wayne described a positive change in his self with regard to being more available and helpful. He said: “It’s the opposite of what it used to be. (Pause). I used to be a very backwards person – and stand in the corner, and let other people step forward, where now I don’t hesitate. When something needs to be done, or someone needs a helping hand, I step forward and make myself available.”

A third participant, Biggles, expressed a desire to change, but was resigned to the fact that it may not be possible. At one point in the interview, with some resignation, Biggles said, “I’ve always WANTED to change, but ... I don’t think we can ESCAPE who we are.” Despite this assertion, later on in the interview after a story about how he had started to take responsibility for mistakes in his life, Biggles concluded, “I think I’ve changed for the better.”

It is therefore of interest to note that despite the fact that each of these three participants held some notion that change was undesirable, unattainable or unexpected, each one told at least one story of change in self due to life experience or a change in attitude. It is noteworthy that the language of these expressions from Bob, Wayne and Biggles – “the same old me,” “encapsulated,” “formed,” “who we are” - are strongly suggestive of a concept of self that sat squarely within a framework matching internal state understandings of self.

From the stories and comments about change in self-understanding from the other 17 participants, there were some statements that fit with internal state understandings, and also some statements that fit with intentional state understandings of self. For example, Katie spelled out her aspirations when she said, “I’m really bad at interviews... but I had to actually APPLY for jobs, I had to put myself out there, and so I DID that, in order to get to where I wanted to be.” Liz expressed her dissatisfaction with her current self, and aspirations for the future when she said, “I could change in so many areas. There could be things that I could learn and improve on.” Lily spoke intentionally of the time when she realized that she was in an abusive relationship with her first husband, and needed to change, when she said: “I didn’t WANT to continue on [like that], I didn’t want to be a doormat”.

By asking how change in self had happened, the participants had the opportunity to attribute the factors for change in the self-understanding, without any reference to relationships by the interviewer. The result was that the participants attributed change in self-understanding to a number of different factors including relationship with God, relationship with other, time and maturity, life experience, a change in attitude or behaviour, or a combination of these factors. The following sections give examples of how the participants attributed these factors to their change in self.

Narratives about change in self attributed to relationship with God. Of the 20 participants, 12 attributed change in self, at least in part, to relationship with God. That is, when asked how change had happened, they referred to their relationship with God as a contributing factor, without any prompts. Danny called relationship with God “the big factor” in his life change, and Malcolm referred to relationship with God and an assurance of God’s love “a powerful thing”, allowing him to grow in his capacity to give and receive love. Patricia claimed that her renewed relationship with the triune God made a “HUGE difference” to her capacity to accept herself. Taylor said that relationship with God “completely transformed who I was.” Because Bella came to believe that God “loves me no matter what”, she was able to change her outlook. Marion described how she came to a greater serenity and acceptance from her belief that God is in control of her life.

In the conversation with Susan, she attributed a major shift in stability to her relationship with God. This is how the conversation flowed:

Interviewer: There seems a strong sense that your 'self' was stabilised since becoming a Christian.

Susan: Yes (nodding). Yeah. Yep.

Interviewer: And is it, and is it that becoming a Christian that you attribute that change to?

Susan: Yes.

Interviewer: Most significantly. One hundred per cent most significantly?

Susan: Yes. Yes (nodding).

Narratives about change in self-understanding attributed to relationship with other. When asked about the source of change, there were only seven of the 20 participants who attributed change in self-understanding to relationship with others. Of those six, three participants attributed change in self-understanding to the other person they chose to speak about for the purpose of the interview. Bella spoke of how “Simon

loves me just as I am”, and how that has contributed to an increased sense of self-confidence. Lily explained how her recently married partner Charles is more accepting of her choices, and this change has contributed to a greater sense of confidence in her choices and generally well being. The remaining four more made a general statement about the influence of other people on their formation and understanding of self. For example, Malcolm explained that in addition to spiritual growth, he attributed other changes to “time, ... experience, ... and certainly relationships are a big part of it.”

There were some participants who attributed the change in self-understanding to some combination of relationship with God and relationship with other. For example, Bella spoke about how God put her partner Simon “in her path” to love her, just as God does, so she put this into action in this way, “It’s God directly, through Simon.” Taylor concluded that his self-understanding is “heavily influenced by God (nodding), um, ur, strongly influenced by the Australian Army (p) and, I suppose additionally and equally influenced by the people that are surrounding me.”

Narratives about change in self attributed to time or maturity. Six of the participants attributed change in self to the passage of time, or growing up. It is difficult to ascertain whether those participants were thinking of age alone or the life experiences that are part of that process of growing up. Some of the comments hinted at a combination of time, maturity and life experience. For example when asked, “Do you think your 'self' has changed over time? And if so, how?” Vincent answered, “Okay, yes. I've aged.” And Marion said, “self changes, and I think it changes with age.” In a more comprehensive answer that focussed on physical change, Swanson said:

I’m changing physically. I’m getting older. I can see the grey starting to come into my hair (touching hair), wrinkles, age spots (pointing to arm), um... I have to really work hard to get, to keep my weight in control. I’ve developed arthritis

mostly in my knees (touching knees). So – I can't, like, run or do much strenuous exercise, so all I can really do now is walk to keep my fitness levels up.

Narratives about change in self attributed to life experience. Twelve participants attributed change in self to life experience, and many gave examples. Lily spoke of “crisis points” in her life that caused her to re-evaluate everything in her life, and how that contributed to significant change. She concluded with the definitive statement, “Yeah, so I can definitely say as a result of that, that I am not the same person I was before.” Vincent spoke of “the struggle” that has made him a “better person,” and after talking about major challenges with his experiences of clinical depression concluded, “I've changed because I've had depression.” Jennie spoke of the toughening effects of life experience in changing how she thought of self when she said:

But yeah, I think self has changed in that I no longer really feel like a child, but I think that's actually a result of a lot of trauma and difficulty faced as an adult, where I've just been kicked quite a few times over the last few years, and have had to toughen up a little bit, and become a little more resilient.

Malcolm included time and life experience along with relationships, when he described how he thought change in self had happened.

Narratives about change in self attributed to change in attitude or behaviour. Most of the participants (16) attributed change in self at least in part to a new attitude or a change in behaviour. For example, Liz explained how she had chosen to embrace pain in order to cope with life's struggles. Liz also spoke of an increase in self-acceptance when she said: “The more you know yourself, the more you know the unlovely bits in you, and you can go, ‘Oh goodness! Is that me?’ And then saying, ‘Oh, that's me and others have got their unlovely bits too.’” For Patricia, the change in self was also in relation to self-acceptance. She said she had reached a point where she could say: “I don't have to PROVE myself. I don't have to be concerned about their opinions of me.” Jennie spoke of

a related development this way: “I think the good thing about being in my thirties, is that... I less and less care what people think of me.”

While Jennie spoke of “having to toughen up a little bit” in order to reach self-acceptance, she also spoke of how both she and her husband Mark “shed their skins” and chose to do life differently when they married. This “shedding” involved leaving old habits and addictions behind. Another participant Susan described how she had become “softer towards people,” and was more able to express care and compassion. She spoke of how she liked that new development in herself when she said: “I actually do feel better about myself as a person, not being hard.”

Both Katie and Michelle talked of growth in confidence. In addition to growth in confidence, Michelle described an intriguing development in the way she related to her husband:

But now I’ve found I can be a little more rebellious (laughing a little), and I don’t mean that in a disrespectful way, but I don’t think I need to be (p), being afraid to disagree. I can disagree. I’m allowed to. I’m allowed to... I’m allowed to have my own mind if I don’t agree. I still honour my husband.

Taylor spoke of the change in the way he deals with other people by extending “sacrificial love,” when he said: “I think I’m a far better person in the fact that I think about other people before myself, and that means that other people benefit from the things that I do.” Another participant, Marion, spoke of an increasing contentment in her life, and a decrease in striving for things out of her reach, and how these changes had contributed to her overall happiness. Swanson described how he had “mellowed” as a result of dealing with his outbursts of anger that had threatened his marriage. He explained that he attributed the change to couple counselling, with the turning point coming after he decided “it wasn’t worth it” and he owned the problem instead of blaming his father.

When these small stories or narratives about change in self and self-understanding were explored, it was possible to note that without prompting, some participants identified that relationship with God and relationship with other as contributors to a change in self-understanding, alongside time, life experience, change in attitudes and maturity.

Conclusions

The narratives of relationship with God collectively produced strong evidence that the personal relationship with God is a significant contributor to the participants' construction of self. Each participant was able to describe some way in which the relationship with God had influenced his or her thinking about self. For some participants the evidence was explicitly stated. For example, Susan stated emphatically that she had lost her craving for acceptance because God met that need. Michelle said that because of her relationship with God she believed herself to be cherished, adored and protected. Liz claimed that understanding herself as a child of God filled the need for love and acceptance. Bella said she is not only accepting of who she is, but she feels "12 foot tall and bulletproof" because of the relationship with God. These are unequivocal statements of an enduring and positive influence on self, attributed directly to relationship with God.

For some participants the influence of the relationship with God on construction of self was more subtle, but nevertheless evident in the narrative. Sharon spoke of feeling more alive when in worship with God. Rachel spoke of a joy and a buoyancy in knowing God is there, and the resulting peacefulness. Danny spoke of the peace and joy he experienced as a result of relationship with God. The narratives of these participants implied a strong influence of the relationship with God on their self-understanding.

Two of the participants spoke of a negative influence from their relationship with God. In both cases, this negative influence led to a positive outcome. Biggles stated that his increased sense of the presence of God had led him to a growing awareness of his

shortcomings, which in turn led to remorse, and culminated in a desire to be Christ-like. In a similar vein, Swanson spoke of his increasing realization of his sinfulness and his utter dependence on God. While the awareness of this dependence was clearly uncomfortable for Swanson to acknowledge, he commented that it was assuaged considerably by his awareness of God's unconditional love and a sense of undeserved blessing.

In each story about relationship with an other person in their life, there was strong evidence of how this relationship had influenced the construction of self. As with the God stories, the other stories included explicit reference as to how the relationship had influenced their self-understanding. Katie, for instance, said unequivocally that her husband Brent's acceptance of her had increased her own self-acceptance, and his encouragement and support had increased her confidence. Patricia articulated how the safe transparency she experienced in the relationship with her mentor, Ryan, enabled her to embrace her shadow side, grow and mature. Susan described how since she has been with her husband Max she had experienced a stability like being in a safe harbour. Susan explained that her life is enriched by being in this harbour, a place where she feels loved, appreciated, and sheltered. Taylor spelled out how his wife Kirsten had brought out the loving, committed part of him. These are just a sampling of four of the narratives where an influence on the construction of self was made explicit.

As with the God stories, some of the other stories told of an influence on the construction of self that was less explicit and more subtle. An example is Marion's relationship with her second husband David. In this relationship Marion described how she came in touch with a different kind of loving, and as a result she experienced contentment. Along similar lines, Bob described how mentoring a less experienced politician had put him in touch with his commitment to demonstrate concern for others.

It was evident from the dual interviews that the manner in which the construction of self was influenced by relationship with God was similar to the manner in which self was influenced by relationship with the other. Just as participants were able to express the way in which their relationship with God had contributed to their self-understanding, participants expressed clearly the way in which a significant person in their life had contributed to their life, and in particular to their construction of self.

Some participants struggled to isolate the influence of another person from the influence of God on their lives and understanding of self. For example, Taylor said,

as I became a Christian, I met Kirsten, so the two parallel, so I think to a certain degree it might be hard to separate one from the other. I was the way that I was to Kirsten because of what the Bible tells me to do. Do you know what I mean? So one flows out of the other.

In the following excerpt Katie seemed to struggle to articulate in words the parallel nature of the relationship with God and the relationship with her husband Brent, but she enacted the metaphor of moving forward in parallel, and then added that in a circular fashion, the relationship with God influenced how she related to Brent:

I've never had my relationship with God THROUGH Brent, if that makes sense, like I've never depended on Brent to have a relationship with God... We both have our relationship with God, and then we just sort of, like, move together (each hand held cupped on the table separately and then brought together and moved away in parallel). BUT, ... through stabilizing my relationship with God – it (has) actually helped then as to how I ... interact with Brent.

When the small stories about change in self were considered, it was possible to conclude that all participants could readily tell stories of change in self, which they attributed to time, life experience, or a change in attitude or behaviour, or a combination of these three. Bob was the exception, in claiming that he had not changed, but even he acknowledged the influence of a significant life event as a child, but he preferred to see

himself as someone who was “reliable,” a concept he associated with the absence of change. These stories of change need to be acknowledged as a background to any changes that may then be attributed to relationship with other people and with God.

Six of the participants attributed change in self to the passing of time or maturity, including physical changes. Twelve participants attributed change that they attributed to life experience, and 16 told a story of how they had changed as a result of a different perspective on life, or a conscious choice to change their stance. For example, one participant told how she had chosen to embrace emotional pain rather than fight it. Another described how she had moved to greater acceptance of self and others. Yet another participant described how she had come to the point where she no longer felt she had to prove herself. One participant spoke of the change she saw in her self due to a growth in confidence, and another spoke of growing contentment.

The intermingling of these stories of change, and the difficulty of isolating the causal factors of change, was well captured by Malcolm in this excerpt:

I've been privileged to have a good education and access to a good education and that academic path for me is a thirst for knowledge in a variety of ways. I have understood more and as I've understood myself more and other people more I've grown through that. Parallel with that, and as part of that is my faith journey, the spiritual dimension. The more I've grown in my faith, the more secure I have become in my relationship with God, the more I've come to understand HIM as greater revelation from the scriptures and the promptings of the Spirit come as my faith has grown, the more I have changed as a result of that. I think I'm a stronger person, I think I'm a more mature person. I think I am able to give love and receive love far more fully, not perfectly by any means, now more than ten years ago or ten years before. I think that that is a result of my personal growth and my spiritual growth and not that they're mutually exclusive, but they're very much intertwined.

Recurring threads or cohesive understandings were noted among the narratives, in an effort to add paradigmatic cognition to narrative knowing (Polkinghorne, 1995).

Amongst the God stories, three threads could be found: a heightened awareness of limitations, experiential responses, and a desire to respond. Among the other stories, each of these threads was in evidence, and an additional thread, a heightened awareness of sexuality, was also present. A closer analysis of these categories revealed that the theme of limitations was more present in the God stories, and the experiential responses more frequent in the other stories. The theme of a desire to respond was more frequently expressed in the God stories.

This narrative analysis has demonstrated that each of the participants in this study described a personal relationship with God in a comparable manner to the relationship with a significant person in his or her life. Further to that, it has demonstrated unequivocally that this relationship has been a significant influence in the construction of self. For some participants this influence was explicitly articulated, for some it was more implicit, but nonetheless evident.

There was evidence that the relationship with God was more pervasive and influential than the relationship with other on understanding of self. The fact that God was referenced more frequently than the other when talking about self indicated the influential nature of the relationship with God. A comparison was made, and the results indicated that God was referred to frequently when the interview was about relationship with other person, but the other person was infrequently referred to when the focus of the interview was the relationship with God. When the participants were asked directly about change in their life and how that might have happened, without any prompts about relationships, 12 of the 20 attributed the change, at least in part to relationship with God. Only seven of the 20 participants attributed the change to relationship with other people. These results demonstrated the importance of relationships and the possibilities of the notion of the relational construction of the self. In addition, these results supported the importance of

relationship with God in the self-understanding over and above relationship with others for these Protestant Christians.

Chapter 5 Results – Descriptor Analysis

As explained previously, the analysis of the interview transcripts was done from three perspectives: a narrative analysis (Chapter 4), a descriptor analysis (this chapter), and a metaphor analysis (Chapter 6). This chapter describes the analysis that explored the participants' understanding of self, by categorizing each and every descriptor used by participants during the interviews, when they referred to self, other and God. The descriptors were categorized in two mutually exclusive categories, as employing language that matched either internal or intentional state understandings. The use of internal or intentional language when describing self, other, or God, was presumed to indicate the participants' understanding of the self. Thus, when intentional descriptors and language were employed in reference to self, other, or God, it was assumed that the participants employed a poststructural framework in their understanding of self. It was assumed, likewise, that when internal descriptors or language were used in reference to self, other or God, that participants were employing a structural framework in their understanding of self. This focus on language, and specifically on descriptors, attempted to explore some answers to research questions one and two, that sought to understand how people who identify as Protestant Christian speak about the influence of their personal relationship with God and relationship with other on their understanding of self.

A second focus of this analysis was a study of the terms the participants used in referring to God, and whether these terms fit within a trinitarian framework. This analysis was designed to check whether the social trinitarian model of God offered a sound theological basis for exploring and describing anthropology and relationship with God for the counselling context, while adding a further dimension to the analysis of the narratives. The wider context of the use of these names for God was researched in order to see

whether there was evidence for internal or intentional state understandings associated with the use of trinitarian language for the Divine.

Descriptor Analysis: Internal vs. Intentional State Understandings

As described in the research design and methodology chapter (Chapter 3), the process for this analysis involved both the researcher and an independent coder selecting all descriptors from the interviews of two participants when they made reference to self, other or God. These descriptors were classified by the coders as utilizing White's (2007) mutually exclusive categories of internal or intentional state understandings. The coders used Morgan's (2002) expanded definitions of these two categories (see Table 1), which were considered to be equivalent to her "structuralist" and "non-structuralist" categories. Following the coding of transcripts for two participants, the two coders met and discussed discrepancies and the decision-making process. Based on this discussion and the fact that the inter-coder reliability was sufficiently high, it was judged sufficient for the researcher to complete the analysis of the remaining transcripts without a second coder. This coding was completed for each of the 20 participants, and the results for self, other and God were compiled and analysed.

Internal and intentional state descriptors of self. During the interviews, all 20 participants used descriptors that fit with internal and intentional state understandings when referring to self. Some descriptors could be clearly and readily judged to fit within either a structural framework or a poststructural one. When Katie used the descriptors "motivated," "weak," and "a bit of a control freak," both coders identified the use of the term "motivated" as coming under one or more of Morgan's (2002) subcategories of internal state understanding categories of *traits, strengths, or qualities*. Katie's use of the terms "weak," and "a bit of a control freak" were equally readily identified as coming under the internal state understandings subcategory of *deficits* (p. 53). When Katie said, "I

often want to help people wherever I can,” both coders agreed that this statement was a based on a poststructural framework, fitting neatly into Morgan’s subcategory of *intentions*, and her statement “I don’t just let people push me into a corner” fit into Morgan’s subcategory of *principles* (p. 53). An example of the subtle difference between the categories surfaced when comparing statements about being a child of God: Katie described herself as “one of His loving daughters who adores their Father,” and Marion described herself simply as “one of His children.” Katie’s description was judged to fit within the intentional state understanding framework in the subcategory of commitments, while Marion’s description was judged to fit better within the internal state understanding framework.

Various methods were considered in order to make a fair comparison based on the usages of descriptors by participant and by category, particularly as some descriptors were one word, and others involved a string of words, or even a few sentences. For example, the use of internal state understanding descriptors by Katie included the following discrete descriptors within one answer: “Motivated (p), independent (p), caring (p), intelligent (p), and tall”. Another participant, Vincent, described himself at one point in his life as an “aggressive, pessimistic, angry, vicious, self-centred, competitive human being,” and separating these into discrete descriptors was not considered to be appropriate because it was judged that the participant intended to constitute a full picture. Some descriptors fitting with an intentional state understanding were wordier because of the concepts that needed to be developed. For example, Katie said, “I do TRY to follow his ways. I do TRY to be compassionate to people. Or I TRY to DO those things that, you know, that He’s commissioned us to do, but, as I said, I’m not always successful.” These sentences were considered to be one descriptor fitting with intentional state understandings, and were counted equally with her statement, “I’m a planner,” which was categorized as fitting with

internal state understandings. The possibility of comparing categories by the number of words, rather than by the number of usages was considered. This was ruled out, because it was judged that it would be invalid to equate a one-word descriptor matching internal state understandings with a string of words required to capture a descriptor fitting with an intentional state understanding. For example, it is difficult to see how one could equate for the purpose of comparison the use of a short descriptor, such as Sharon's use of "a mum" when referring to herself, with a descriptor such as Michelle's statement: "And as far as parenting goes, I try but I fail often – I do a lot of yelling, and I don't like that (laughing gently). No, I don't do a LOT of yelling, but I do raise my voice, and I have a very good relationship with my kids." After due consideration, the number of statements was judged to be the most useful and valid manner by which to make comparisons.

As discussed in Chapter 3, inter-coder comparison highlighted discrepancies due to two possible sources: omission of the statement by one or the other coder, and disagreement about whether the statement fit within the internal or intentional state understandings. For example, Bella's statement, "I don't want to be that person any more," came under discussion between the coders. On the one hand, the statement fit within Morgan's (2002) subcategory of *intentions* in the intentional state understandings (refer to Table 1 on page 30); however, there was a hint of an internal framework that came through with the use of "that person." Another statement of Bella's that came under discussion was this: "I'm not into the frills and the nails and the hair and the makeup." Once again, this could be seen to fit within Morgan's subcategory of *intentions*, however it could also be understood as fitting with the internal subcategory of *traits*, if it were understood as "I'm not someone who is into the frills...." The context of this statement was also relevant to the judgment, as this statement followed the clearly internal statement, "I'm not an incredibly feminine female." It is therefore acknowledged that there was some

considerable degree of subjectivity involved in the process of the analysis of these narratives.

Because of the difficulties of having a trustworthy measure of comparing categories, either by numbers of words used, by the numbers of usages, and the subjectivity involved, quantitative statistical tests were not judged to be useful. With an appreciation of the limitations of reducing these data to numbers, it is yet worth reporting that participants used descriptors of the self 934 times. These descriptors were categorized as matching internal state understandings 546 times, and those judged to match intentional state understandings 388 times. Each and every participant used both internal and intentional state understandings when referring to self, with a strong dominance of internal state understandings.

The following are samples of descriptors that were categorized as matching internal state understandings that participants used when speaking of self:

Vincent: “an artist”

Bella: “an incredibly emotional person”

Liz: “the firstborn”

Susan: “a ‘free spirit’”

Jane: “an out-loud reflector”

Danny: “an ‘all-right guy’”

Jennie: “a ‘know-it-all’”

Swanson: “just a working stiff”

The following are samples of descriptors that were categorized as matching intentional state understandings that participants used when speaking of self:

Katie: “I try to appreciate Brent all the time, but I think sometimes I, like you take people for granted.”

Michelle: "I believe His word is the truth, everything. I'm not um (p) selective on what I believe. If Jesus said it, and it's in the Word, I believe it, (p) even if I don't like it."

Biggles: "I have always sought out authenticity, and um, I hate, and always have hated insincerity."

Rachel: "I like to make others feel comfortable."

Rachel: "I enjoy myself, not just for Janine, I enjoyed myself having fun, and I think adults need to keep doing that anyway. They don't always have time for having fun."

Vincent: "I wasn't going to a church. I didn't want to go to a church. I hated church - churches were full of hypocrisy."

Taylor: "My hope is that people would see that I behave in that particular way because I love Jesus, not because I love the feeling of being blessed. Yeah."

Taylor: "devoted to raising a family with godly values"

Danny: "because I love singing, that is one of the gifts which I do use. And I try and use it as much as I can."

Jennie: "I hate labels, anyway (laughing), because sometimes I think it inspired thoughts about a person that aren't necessarily accurate."

Descriptors of the other. In addition to a scrutiny of descriptors of self, the transcripts of each participant were scanned carefully for descriptors of other. As mentioned in Chapter 3, the ambiguity of the term "other" meant that coders were initially unsure whether to code all statements or just the statements about the other person in their life chosen for the purposes of the study. For the purposes of coding the remaining chapters, it was decided that the category of other included all other people referred to in the interview by the participant.

While it was necessary to take into account the cautions referred to above when reducing the references to numbers, it was interesting to note that each and every participant used at least one essential and at least one relational descriptor when referring

to an other. Descriptors referring to other were once again coded as matching either an internal or intentional state understanding, using White's (2007) terms and Morgan's (2002) helpful categorization (see Table 1). What is notable is that there were 450 descriptors matching an internal state understanding and only 103 descriptors that were categorized as matching an intentional state understanding. Clearly there was a strong preference for the use of internal state understandings when speaking of others.

The following are samples of descriptors that were categorized as matching internal state understandings that participants used when speaking of an other:

Liz: "she's born overseas but a naturalized Australian"

Bella: "He's kind. He's gentle. He's strong."

Michelle: "She's a good mother-in-law, she never interferes"

Biggles: "I mean, he's just, you know, head down, butt up. Very, very, very solid human being. Sort of black and white."

Wayne: "a lady friend"

Bob: "there was a lady who wrote a book about wealth creation"

The following are samples of descriptors that were categorized as matching intentional state understandings that participants used when speaking of an other:

Liz: "a man who had such a passion to, to... (p) for the things he did in raising us, loving us, in loving his work. He loved his work; he loved us, his family. He loved us."

Bella: "He is here to provide for us, and that's what I believe he thinks. That's his job here on earth (laughs), to provide for his family, and be a good dad."

Lily: "And he loves learning about... we have lots of philosophical discussions, and I love that too, so we have discussions about religion and history, and philosophy and stuff. It's always... stimulating I guess to talk about, rather than the average, everyday stuff."

Michelle: “But he’ll always step up to the mark. He steps up when, um, you know, when there’s a crisis, he’s there.”

Sharon: “So I guess she was always in my corner, and she always believed there was better for me (wipes tears).”

Vincent: “People that are terminally ill don't want more money, they want time, time to repair the things they've said, take back their words, say the good things, hug their children more, spend more time with the people that they've loved, heal the rift with the person that they've had enmity with.”

Descriptors of God. Participants used many and varied descriptors of God and these descriptors were similarly categorized as either matching internal or intentional state understandings using Morgan’s (2002) categorization (see Table 1). Of the 20 participants, 19 used at least one descriptor that could be categorized as matching internal state understandings, and 17 used at least one descriptor that could be categorized as matching intentional state understandings. Of the 132 descriptors of God, 86 were categorized as matching internal state understandings, and the remaining 46 descriptors as matching intentional state understandings. Once again, it is important to note the limitations of using these numbers. Despite the limitations, it is noteworthy that there is a doubling of the descriptors matching internal when compared with intentional state understandings.

The following are samples of descriptors that were categorized as matching internal state understandings that participants used when speaking of God:

Katie: “omnipresent”

Liz: “a good God”

Bella: “God is the creator of all”

Biggles: “He IS real.”

Sharon: “God’s the very essence of life (hands cupped). He was there in the beginning, He’s there at the end (hands move from left to right). Without God

there's nothing (hands open flat and facing upwards), there's no life, no... God is everything.”

Vincent: “He's, well He's real. He's not make-believe.”

Patricia: “God is... King, for me God is father, for me God is creator”

Taylor: “God is the creator of the universe, the sustainer of the universe, the ruler of the universe, whether people acknowledge that or not.”

Bob: “He's certainly not a figment of the imagination.”

The following are samples of descriptors that were categorized as matching intentional state understandings that participants used when speaking of God:

Liz: “He will answer prayers”

Lily: “it's like you have a child and you're going to love them regardless that they mistakes, fall over or whatever, and He ultimately knows the outcome of who He's making me, moulding me to be. So I see that as a positive thing that He is not ever going to give up on me.”

Vincent: “He only wants the best for me.”

Rachel: “His plan is to live with us and to have us live with Him and to enjoy Him.”

Vincent: “Christ's whole purpose on this earth and then through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, is that we have that relationship with God.”

Swanson: “He wants everyone to go to heaven, no-one to go to hell.”

Jane: “Yeah and 'cause I know, if you could use this terminology, it's because that's how 'Daddy' (fingers make quote marks) sees me and He's proud of me and regardless of how many failings I had in that day He doesn't beat me around the bush, He's just like ‘you're cool, you're doing great.’”

Comparison among these three dimensions. Table 7 shows the number of usages of descriptors of self, other and God matching internal and intentional state understandings as described above. The limitations of using numbers has been described; however, even with these limitations, it is possible to note general, strong and consistent trends in these

figures towards a framework matching internal state understandings when compared with intentional state understandings. This trend towards a structuralist framework is more evident when referring to others (more than fourfold usage), and when referring to God (almost doubled usage), and an approximately 40% increase when referring to self.

Table 7

Numbers of Descriptors used for Self, Other and God matching Internal and Intentional State Understandings

	No. Descriptors	
	Internal	Intentional
Self	546	388
Other	450	103
God	86	46
Total	1082	537

Figure 2 illustrates the proportional use of descriptors by each participant, according to whether the descriptors were used for God, other or self, and whether the language matched with internal or intentional state understandings. From this figure it can be seen that only one participant, Swanson, did not use internal state descriptors for God, and three participants (Biggles Katie and Wayne) did not use intentional state descriptors for God. When speaking of others, all participants used one or more descriptors matching internal state understandings, and only two participants, Jane and Marion, used no descriptors for others consistent with intentional state understandings. All participants used descriptors for themselves that matched both internal and intentional state understandings.

From Table 8 it can be seen that some participants stood out from others in their particular usage of descriptors. Of the five participants, Wayne, Bob, Jennie, Susan and Katie, who used a framework matching with internal state understandings in 90% or over in their use of descriptors, Wayne was particularly high on his usage of descriptors fitting

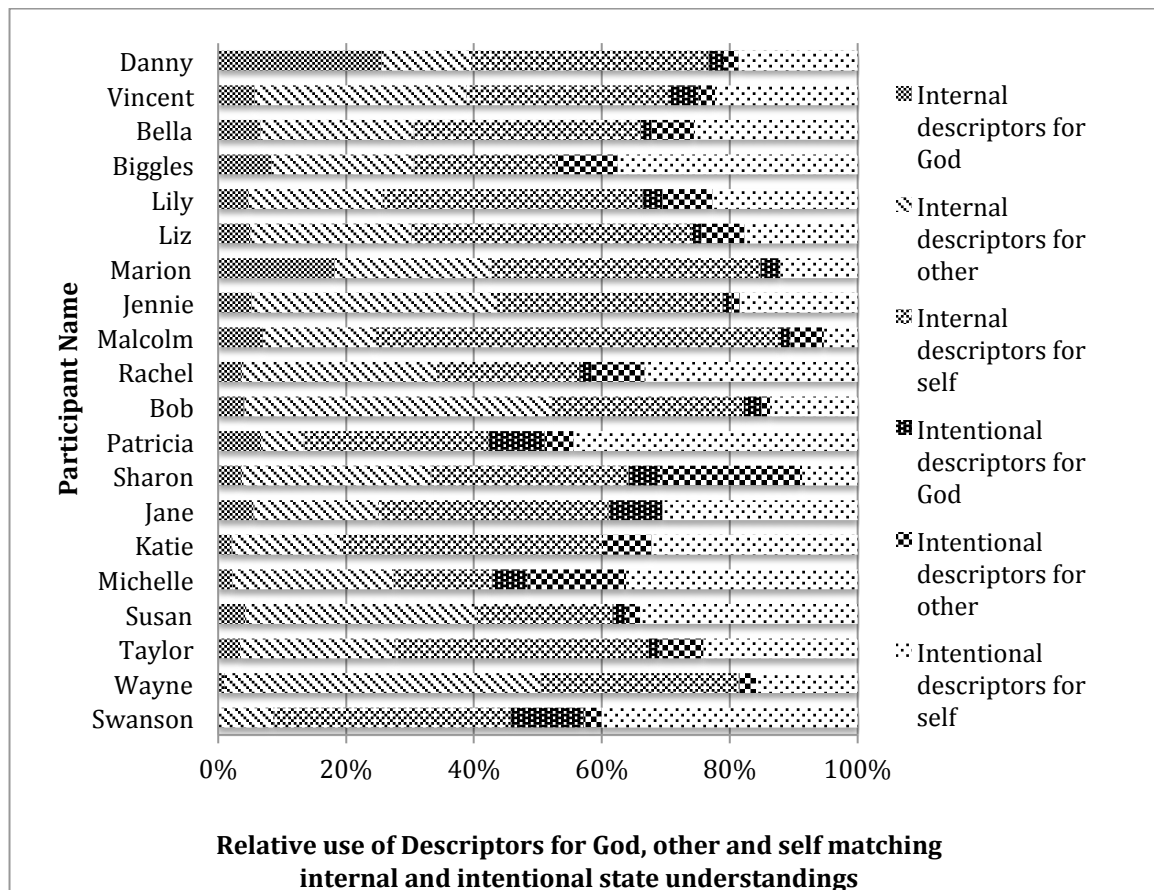


Figure 2. Relative use of descriptors by participant. This figure illustrates the relative number of descriptors used by each participant according to whether the descriptor was for God, other or self and whether it matched with internal or intentional state understandings.

with internal state understandings (96%), when compared with descriptors matching intentional state understandings (4%). From his transcript it is possible to see that his speaking style is to readily refer to himself and other people using language matching internal state understandings. For example he spoke of himself as: “a fairly lonely person,” “I had this positive attitude,” “a good friend,” “a pensioner,” and “a giver, not a taker.” When Wayne spoke of other people, which he did more than any other participant, he used a similar style of language: “these civilians,” “that fellow,” “all good people,” “the oldies – the over 50s,” and “a young fellow from Bolivia.” When he spoke of God, he said: “He’s all powerful, all everything,” and “someone up there who created the world and created man.” Wayne had no intentional descriptors for God, and only three statements about

others that were categorized as matching intentional state understandings. An example is his statement, “she decided she wanted to be a missionary to Lebanon,” which was categorized as a statement of intent. There was a significant interchange in the interview about what the relationship with God brought out in Wayne. The following interchange emerged from this line of questioning, with some scaffolding provided by the interviewer, and it stands out as a significant and unique use of intentional language in the self description:

Interviewer: What does this relationship with God bring out in you?

Wayne: (Pause). A love for people. Um (p). That I should not discriminate, but I do. I shouldn't be racist. I feel I am at times. (Pause). But I have that DESIRE to help people, to help the church I belong to and other Christian organisations where I can. (Pause). And to try to INFLUENCE those people that I mix with to understand that though I'm a Christian, I live a certain way, and hopefully that influences other people.

Interviewer: So in this relationship with God, you're in touch with a love for people, and a desire to help without prejudice, even though that's challenging. Would that be correct?

Wayne: Yeah. Yeah (nodding).

Interviewer: And desire to influence others. And that help seems to include a generosity as well, would that be correct?

Wayne: Yes. Yeah. That's right.

Interviewer: So would it be true to say that you are in touch with a love for people, a desire to help and generosity.

Wayne: Yeah (nodding vigorously).

Interviewer: Uh-hm. Or a desire to give, whichever fits for you.

Wayne: To be generous to others.

Table 8

Number and Proportion of Descriptors matching Internal and Intentional State Understandings by Participant

Participant Name	No. Descriptors		% Internal Descriptors
	Internal	Intentional	
Wayne	109	4	96
Jennie	70	6	92
Bob	67	6	92
Susan	43	4	91
Katie	84	9	90
Taylor	51	7	88
Vincent	166	24	87
Liz	103	16	87
Rachel	93	15	86
Jane	31	5	86
Malcolm	49	8	86
Swanson	30	5	86
Bella	103	18	85
Lily	108	20	84
Biggles	59	13	82
Patricia	36	9	80
Marion	26	7	79
Michelle	70	21	77
Danny	30	13	70
Sharon	56	25	69

Participants who used a high proportion of intentional descriptors of self compared to internal descriptors: Sharon and Danny. On average, participants used more language matching internal state understandings compared with intentional state understandings (85% to 15%), but it can be seen from Table 9 that Sharon and Danny were at the lower end on the ratio of usage of internal versus intentional descriptors overall, when compared to the other participants. Sharon used 69% internal descriptors compared

to 31% intentional, and Danny 70% to 30%. Sharon used intentional descriptors in quite a different manner to other participants. A closer scrutiny reveals that both Sharon and Danny used only one subcategory of intentional descriptors, that of intent.

In the moving interview segment about her grandmother, Sharon spoke many times of the good intentions she ascribed to her grandmother, such as the following:

she didn't want me to be bitter

She wasn't shy in saying... "calling the kettle black"... like if she didn't think I was doing what I should be doing she would let me know. She was very direct and honest with me, but also very loving and supportive as well.

So I guess she was always in my corner, and she always believed there was better for me (wipes tears).

In a similar way, when speaking of God, Sharon ascribed intentions to Him as well, as in the following excerpt:

because I think I believe God to be compassionate and loving, like I don't think He'd see – He wouldn't list all my insecurities whereas I would. So I think He would probably see me as capable and loving. Um. You know, compassionate and kind I guess.

From Table 9 it can be seen that Danny used fewer descriptors overall (43) when compared to other participants, with only Jane and Marion using fewer (36 and 33 respectively). Danny used the majority of intentional descriptors when describing himself (eight intentional descriptors of self, one of others, one of God). Like Sharon, each instance of language matching intentional state understandings is an expression of intent, and in Danny's case, an intent closely matching the Christian calling, which Danny often captured using biblical language. For example, Danny said:

Table 9

Number and Proportion of Descriptors matching Internal and Intentional Understandings used for Self, Other and God

Participant Name	No. Descriptors												% Internal Descriptors of God
	Self			Other			God			% Internal Descriptors of Other	Intentional	Internal	
	Internal	Intentional	% Internal Descriptors of Self	Internal	Intentional	% Internal Descriptors of Other	Internal	Intentional	% Internal Descriptors of God				
Sharon	25	7	78	24	18	57	3	4	43	3	4	43	
Michelle	14	33	30	23	14	62	2	5	29	2	5	29	
Patricia	13	20	39	3	2	60	3	4	43	3	4	43	
Swanson	13	14	48	3	1	75	0	4	0	4	4	0	
Rachel	24	36	40	33	9	79	4	2	67	4	2	67	
Biggles	16	27	37	16	7	70	6	0	100	6	0	100	
Liz	52	21	71	30	8	79	6	2	75	6	2	75	
Bella	43	31	58	29	8	78	8	2	80	8	2	80	
Lily	52	29	64	27	10	73	6	4	60	6	4	60	
Vincent	60	42	59	64	5	93	11	8	58	11	8	58	
Taylor	23	14	62	14	4	78	2	1	67	2	1	67	
Katie	38	30	56	16	7	70	2	0	100	2	0	100	
Susan	10	16	38	17	1	94	2	1	67	2	1	67	
Jane	13	11	54	7	0	100	2	3	40	2	3	40	
Wayne	35	18	66	56	3	95	1	0	100	1	0	100	
Marion	14	4	78	8	0	100	6	1	86	6	1	86	
Danny	16	8	67	6	1	86	11	1	92	11	1	92	
Jennie	27	14	66	29	1	97	4	1	80	4	1	80	
Malcolm	36	3	92	10	3	77	4	1	80	4	1	80	
Bob	22	10	69	35	1	97	3	2	60	3	2	60	

Note. Cells with a markedly low proportion of internal descriptors compared to intentional descriptors have light shading and those with markedly high proportion have dark shading.

And we're called to witness to these people and it helps us to be able to witness to those people in a relating way, in a way which I suppose, doesn't make them feel uncomfortable, but a way that shows them that same love and that same gift of salvation could be theirs as well. And that's what we're called to do... to really shine our light upon the hill.

It is worth noting that even within this example is evidence of language matching internal state understandings, as when Danny spoke of “these people” and “those people.” It is possible to conclude that although Danny and Sharon used more descriptors matching with intentional state understandings than the average, that their framework of internal state understandings was still quite evident, even within these examples, and the intentional subcategory of intent fit readily with their understanding of Christian calling.

The interviews were semi-structured in the sense that all participants were asked the same 25 questions, some about self, some about others and some about God. Despite the fact that all were asked the same questions, the participants varied greatly in the number and proportion of references that they made to self, other and God. An analysis of the number of descriptors attributed to self, other and God was made, and the results can be found in Table 10.

Participants who used a high proportion of descriptors of self compared to others or God: Swanson, Katie, and Patricia. From Table 10 it is of interest that three participants, Swanson, Patricia and Katie, used descriptors of self far more than others, when compared with descriptors of others and God (77%, 73% and 73% respectively compared to the average of 59%). This usage takes into account descriptors matching both internal and intentional state understandings.

Considering that Swanson used the highest proportion of descriptors of self (77%), it was interesting to note the following comment he made during the interview; “some of

Table 10

Numbers and Proportion of Descriptors of Self, Other and God by Participant

Participant Name	No. Descriptors of self	% self	No. Descriptors of other	% other	No. Descriptors of God	% God
Katie	68	73	23	25	2	2
Liz	73	61	38	32	8	7
Bella	74	61	37	31	10	8
Lily	81	63	37	29	10	8
Michelle	47	52	37	41	7	8
Biggles	43	60	23	32	6	8
Sharon	32	40	42	52	7	9
Rachel	60	56	42	39	6	6
Vincent	102	54	69	36	19	10
Patricia	33	73	5	11	7	16
Swanson	27	77	4	11	4	11
Susan	26	55	18	38	3	6
Jane	24	67	7	19	5	14
Wayne	53	47	59	52	1	1
Taylor	37	64	18	31	3	5
Marion	18	55	8	24	7	21
Danny	24	56	7	16	12	28
Jennie	41	54	30	39	5	7
Malcolm	39	68	13	23	5	9
Bob	32	44	36	49	5	7

Note: Average percentage for descriptors of self was 59%, for other 32% and for God 9%

those questions were hard for me to answer because, it forces you to get into touch with yourself, and sometimes you tend not to do that too well, so, it was good (nodding).”

Clearly Swanson is not used to talking about himself, and while this was out of his comfort zone, he seemed from this statement to appreciate having made the effort for the sake of the interview, and with the help of the structure of the questions. The use of the pronoun “you” instead of “I” when is referring to himself, matched with his expressed reticence to think and talk about himself. Denborough (2008) noted that this use of the generalized second person in place of the expected first person is a common practice in Australian

society, and is suggestive that the experience is not unique to the person speaking.

Swanson notably used the lowest proportion of descriptors of others, alongside Patricia at 11%, when compared to the average of 32%. Of all the descriptors Swanson used, 11% were descriptors of God, close to the average of 9%. Swanson used a similar quantity of internal and intentional language in his use of self descriptors.

Katie made the comment, “I’m a talker,” in the interview. While both interviews with Katie were limited to one hour each as planned, it was clearly not onerous or difficult for Katie to talk about herself and her relationships, despite saying that she generally became quite nervous when she faced interviews in a professional setting. As Katie put it, “I enjoy talking to people but I don’t enjoy trying to make conversation about something I don’t know very well.” Katie described herself readily in language matching internal state understandings such as “motivated (p), independent (p), caring (p), intelligent (p), and tall (laughing), mother (p), wife (p).” Katie used a mix of language matching internal and intentional state understandings when she said: “I am quite disciplined when it comes to things. Like if I set my mind to something, and I know it's good for me, I can make myself do things.” While Katie was notably high on the proportion of her use of descriptors of self (73%), she was notably low on the proportion of usage of descriptors of God (2%) when compared to the average (9%), with the balance made up by her use of descriptors of others (25%). She was one of only three who used no intentional descriptors for God. She used language matching internal state understandings when she described God as a “caring slash loving, father figure, all knowing- seeing etc., everywhere, um, patient.”

It is evident from the transcript that Patricia had previously thought much about the concept of self, when she answered the question, “What is a self?” in this way:

For me self, or a self, interesting term... a self for me is – I look at it holistically, and it’s about fullness in terms of my physical being, my spiritual being, my

emotional being, social, sexual – it’s about the wholeness of the totality of who I am, and how I express that.

Patricia’s readiness to speak about self in general was matched by her readiness to speak openly about her self, and her expressed value of transparency was evident in the following statement:

there are times when I’ve been surprised by both a depth of myself and the shallowness of myself. There are issues that get raised sometimes in our conversations where – you raised the potential of confidence, where I suddenly find myself speaking with great confidence. Then there’ll be other issues where I realize that there are prejudices within me, there are aspects of my shadow side that are coming to the fore, because I haven’t really thought about issues, gone there, and in terms of my comments would, if I put a self evaluative process on it, could be quite shallow.

The way that Patricia was ready to speak about self in general and her self openly probably contributed to the increased proportion of descriptors of self in her interview. While her usage of descriptors of self was notably higher than average, her usage of descriptors of others was notably low at 11% when compared to the average (32%), and the balance was made up by a higher than average use of descriptors of God (16%). In speaking of herself, Patricia was unique in occasionally using the more formal style of pronouns “one” and “oneself” when speaking of herself, as in the following self descriptor: “One who has a gentle spirit that can be easily wounded.”

Participants who used a low proportion of descriptors of self compared to others or God: Wayne, Bob, Sharon. Sharon, Bob and Wayne were lower than the average (59%) in their use of descriptors of self at 40%, 44% and 47% when compared to use of descriptors of others and God. For all three participants, this lower use of self descriptors was matched by a higher than average (32%) use of descriptors of others, at 52% for Sharon, 49% for Bob and 52% for Wayne. Of the three only Wayne demonstrated a

significant variation in his rate of use of descriptors of God, which was lower, at 1%, when compared to the group average of 9%.

When speaking of self as a concept, Sharon's struggle to express herself came through in the following statement:

I guess (p) to me a self would be like an individual, the thing that makes up a person, so it would be the attributes they have, the belief systems they have, the thought processes. I don't know...

The way in which the excerpt trails off with "I don't know" at the end, is an indicator of her struggle to articulate her thoughts about self, and her lack of familiarity with these concepts. In answer to the question "What is your self?" Sharon replied,

I guess myself would be who I am as a person, how I perceive things... I guess, yeah... I guess what defines me (hands cupped) and what I do. Tsk. I think that's probably it.

In this statement it is possible to read a certain unfamiliarity and difficulty with the territory into which the questions are going. This lack of familiarity with the concepts of self could potentially suggest the reason for the relatively lower use of self descriptors (40%) in Sharon's interview when compared to usage of descriptors of others (52%) and God (9%).

During the interview, Wayne made the statement, "I've never been terribly confident of what I was or who I was." This statement suggests a possible reason for his lower proportion of use of self descriptors (56%) in favour of a higher use of descriptors of others (16%) and descriptors of God (28%). However, as the interview progressed, Wayne started to speak of some developments in his life, and he made the following statement: "I knew where I was, I knew what I was at, I knew I was doing the right thing, and I knew how I was really helping people." This statement suggested that confidence in himself had grown in recent times. The fact that Wayne was in favour of these new developments is

reflected in the following statement: “I’m reasonably content with my life the way it is at the present time. (Pause). And in that, I’m giving and not taking.” This quote about generosity and giving that is so important to Wayne hinted at a second possible reason why Wayne spoke more of others than himself.

During the interview, Bob made the following observation, when comparing himself with someone else, “I don’t, uh, I don’t sort of share too much.” This comment provided a possible explanation for the fact that, in comparison with the group, Bob spoke less of himself (44%) than others (49%) and God (7%), and is a reflection of this tendency of Bob to “bottle it up” (Bob’s words) rather than speak of himself and his own concerns. When Bob was speaking of his relationship with someone he mentors, he made the statement, “It’s very hard not to be intrusive.” This statement suggested that Bob holds a value that he does not like to be intrusive, which fits with his value of privacy, and lack of sharing. For someone who values privacy, it follows logically that they would speak less about self in comparison to others.

Participants who used a high proportion of descriptors of God when compared to self or other: Marion, Danny. The average usage of descriptors of God, when compared to descriptors of others and self for the group of participants was 9%. Danny and Marion were exceptional in their proportional use of descriptors of God, in that they used descriptors of God (28% and 21% respectively compared to a group average of 9%), while both had a close to average proportional usage of descriptors of other and self.

While these figures include both descriptors matching both internal and intentional state understandings, it has already been noted that Danny was exceptional in that he used a higher proportion than other participants of his use of intentional over internal language throughout the interviews (see Table 8). When looked at more closely, it is evident that Danny used language matching internal state understandings almost exclusively for God.

He said of God: “He is very personal,” “God is not dead... He's very much alive,” and “He is a very caring God.” There was only one intentional descriptor of God, and it was the following: “when Christ came into this world, He came to show us the personal nature of God and that God is interested in each and every one of us.” Within this statement of intent or purpose, which resulted in this statement being categorized as intentional, internal language elements can be seen within the statement, such as the reference to “the personal nature of God.” It was clear that throughout the interview Danny was comfortable and used to speaking about God. Danny had mentioned his public speaking and singing in the church context, and this may have contributed to his ease of speaking about God, and the higher proportion of statements about God in comparison with self and other.

Marion made the following statement early in the first interview: “I just find it hard to talk about myself, that’s all. I’d rather talk about other people. It’s one thing I’ve struggled with.” Despite this statement, she made the effort to talk about herself, and her proportional usage of descriptors of self was about average (55%). Like Danny, Marion used a higher proportion of descriptors of God (21%), in comparison to descriptors of self and other; however, the ratio of her use of internal to intentional state understandings was about average at 79%. Marion described God from an interesting range of perspectives. Marion spoke of God as “the creator” but also said: “And He’s, well, He’s a great friend, someone that you can turn to.” Marion then had this intriguing comment to say about Christ’s appearance:

You see certain paintings, which you think that the artists have drawn, and there are pictures that show Christ and what He’s like. But... I think He’s totally different to what I think. But I think that His eyes are very penetrating.

This intimate comment fits with the recently widowed Marion’s description of her commitment to an ongoing devotional relationship with God, which is captured in the following exchange:

Marion: My pattern is that as soon as I come home [from my walk] I have my quiet time with Him in the morning, and so that sets the day for me, so I know He's with me. And lastly before I go to bed, I do the same thing, to have the time with Him. So it's a relationship that I have as a friend as well as a saviour.

Interviewer: A friend as well as a saviour?

Marion: Hmm.

Interviewer: It sounds quite a significant relationship,

Marion: Oh – it is. It is all my life.

Interviewer: It's all your life.

Marion: Hm. And I guess sometimes... it's easier for me because I'm on my own.

Interviewer: How does that work that it's easy for you on your own?

Marion: Well, I can spend what time I want – my whole time can be devoted to that instead of worrying about him – fitting somebody else into that or into the day or into the plan. (Pause)

It is little wonder that Marion's proportional use of descriptors was high on descriptors of God, given this glimpse of a highly personal story of relationship with God, when it is matched by her reticence to talk about herself.

Participants who used a low proportion of descriptors of God when compared to self or other: Wayne, Katie. Wayne made only one statement about God, in which he endeavoured to portray a comprehensive picture of God. He said,

The way I envisage God is um, (p), Someone up there (RH lifted to head height) who created the world and created man. He's all powerful, all everything. I don't know all the right words to use (laughing).

In this statement, which was categorized as using primarily internal state understandings, Wayne was struggling to find the theological Latin terms often associated with descriptions of God – omniscient, omnipresent, omnipotent, and immanent, and he settled for the less challenging, anglicised versions, “all powerful,” “all knowing,” and Wayne's

creative original term “all-everything.” Along similar lines, in his interview, Malcolm claimed that the use of these words gives a “theological answer” to the question of a description of God. Malcolm used three Latin root words accurately, when he said this:

“I’ll give you wonderful theological answers... He is omnipotent, he’s omnipresent, he’s omniscient, he’s all knowing, all powerful, all present. And He is all of that and more. But if I was just talking to the average person, “God is love!” is what I would say.”

Lily and Katie also used some of these words, but the majority of participants did not use them. Their general absence suggests that in contemporary protestant churches, these theological terms are not in common use.

Alongside Wayne, Katie used no descriptors of God that were categorized as matching intentional state understandings. She used two descriptive statements about God, both of which used language fitting with internal state understandings. She described God as “omnipresent” and a “caring slash loving, father figure, all knowing- seeing etc., everywhere, um, patient.” And then she concluded, “yep, that’s all I’ve got at the moment.” Once again, like Wayne, Katie attempted to use theological language to describe God. Later on in the interview, Katie gave us a different take on her view of God when she was asked how she might see herself through God’s eyes, and she answered, “um, (p) probably as, like, one of His loving daughters who adores their father, and (p) who tries to obey, like obey their parents... like obey Him as a parent I should say”. In this interchange Katie managed to capture an intimate and relational aspect to her view of God and her relationship with Him.

Trinitarian References to God

In the interviews about relationship with God, it was noticeable that participants referred to God by use of many different names, including God, Father, Jesus, and Holy

Spirit. In order to explore how these Protestant Christians spoke about the influence of their reported relationship with God, an additional analysis of the language and names used by participants for God was done in context, in order to see whether there was any connection with internal or intentional state understandings. This analysis also offered the opportunity to explore the potential for the use of the social trinitarian model of God in the counselling context.

Only five of the 20 participants made explicit reference to the trinitarian nature of God. Patricia spoke extensively of the Trinity, and was the only participant to use the term “godhead,” a more technical theological trinitarian reference. On this topic, Wayne said,

I believe in the triune God, as they say, so whether you say God, Jesus, or the Holy Spirit, you’re always talking about the same thing, except we are supposed to be embodied with the Holy Spirit, and depend on God and Jesus as perhaps being in heaven. So that’s one way of looking at it.

Another participant, Swanson, expressed how he saw his relationship with the triune God when he said,

My relationship with God is through Jesus Christ, who I believe is God. Um. Part of the triune God – Trinity – God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit. So – yeah. I do believe I have a relationship with God through Jesus Christ.

While Susan did not use the word “Trinity” or “triune,” she made clear reference to the concept of the Trinity when she said of God, “I believe God is three persons in one, so He is Father, Son and Holy Spirit.” A further three participants, Michelle, Vincent and Danny, referred to all three members of the Trinity during the interview, but made no explicit reference to the term Trinity. In all, eight of the 20 participants made reference to the Trinity or to the three persons of the Trinity explicitly.

While all 20 participants spoke of “God” frequently when answering questions introduced by the interview format, 13 of the 20 participants spoke of the first person of

the Trinity by referring to him as “Father.” The term “father” used here to distinguish the first person of the Trinity has been discussed as a metaphor in the chapter on metaphor analysis (Chapter 6). A capital letter was used consistently in the transcripts when it was clear that the participant was referring to God when using the term “father” in order to distinguish this from the usage referring to a biological father. These 13 participants used reference to the “Father in heaven,” “heavenly Father,” “father-type figure,” and more uniquely, the “prodigal father.” Only Lily and Patricia made reference to the feminine or maternal nature of God in addition to the fatherhood of God. Lily spoke of the notion of a “female ‘Father’” in a book she had read recently, which she said had challenged her ideas about God. Patricia spoke in some detail about how she got in touch with “Mother God” in the following excerpt:

I was grieving the loss of my Mum. And writing in my journal, then I was aware of this, again this “being in touch,” the feminine, soft, EXTREMELY soft quality of the response, was a mother type response, and it took me SO much by surprise. And it wasn’t until, and I wrote in the journal, and I remember saying, “Father, I’ve never heard you as soft as this, I’ve never heard that, experienced that tender touch,” and then later, I had another discussion (laughing reflectively) in my journal, and said, “Was that really Mother God? Was that YOU, Mother God?”

Seventeen participants made reference to the second person of the Trinity, using terms such as “Jesus,” “Jesus Christ,” “the Lord Jesus Christ,” “the Son” and “Christ.” These terms were used many times during the interview, roughly twice as many times as the term Father, showing a clear preference to refer to the second person of the Trinity. When the term “Lord” was used, it was sometimes difficult to know whether participants were referring to the Lord God, who would be classified by theologians as the first person of the Trinity, or the Lord Jesus, the second person of the Trinity. In the analysis, the context was used to distinguish between these usages. Swanson made an interesting

comment about his language preference for God early in the conversation about relationship with God in the following excerpt:

Interviewer: Can you tell me a little about your relationship with God?

Swanson: OK. And again as I said... It started when I was 19 and going to university. Um, that's where my relationship with God began. Um. I believe that that relationship with God began when I asked Jesus Christ to come into my life and be my saviour and Lord. Um. I call myself a Christian. By that I mean I'm a follower of Jesus Christ. And John chapter 1 verses 1 to 14, um, says, beyond a shadow of a doubt that Jesus is God. So when you say, relationship with God, my relationship with God is through Jesus Christ, who I believe is God. Um. Part of the triune God – Trinity – God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit. So – yeah. I do believe I have a relationship with God through Jesus Christ.

Interviewer: So, are you saying that you generally like to think about the relationship more with Jesus than with God?

Swanson: Yes.

Interviewer: Just in your thinking?

Swanson: Yes.

Interviewer: Yes. OK.

Swanson: I would say yes.

Interviewer: I'll keep that in mind when we're talking about the questions, but if I say "with God" we'll, I'll know what you mean and I'll try and reword it.

So, although Swanson held a picture of God as a Trinity, he held a strong preference for referring to God by the second person of the Trinity, Jesus Christ.

While 13 participants used terms associate with the first person of the Trinity, and 17 used terms associated with the second person of the Trinity, 11 of the 20 participants referred to the Holy Spirit, the third person of the Trinity. Vincent defined the Holy Spirit in this statement, "that's the Holy Spirit, which is God within us." Some participants used the term as if it were interchangeable with God, but most used the term in the context of

receiving guidance or a communication from God. For example, Lily referred to a time when she had an intuition about something, and she went on to say, “I actually think that God is, the Holy Spirit is telling me what that is, so that I can work through it.” Michelle also made reference to the Holy Spirit revealing things to her, and in a similar vein, Malcolm made reference to “the promptings of the Spirit.” Danny explained his reliance on the Holy Spirit not only for guidance in this statement:

I know that we live in a materialistic world and we can sort of buy a lot of things, especially in the Western world but at the same time we need guidance and knowing what to do, and to be able to be part of a fellowship with others. It's important to have that relationship with God so that we can relate to other people, through the Spirit of God that works within us, and to be able to show that same love and care which Christ has given to each and everyone of us.

Both Vincent and Patricia referred to the “fruit” of the Spirit, a reference to Galatians 3: 22, 23, which states: “the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.”

Patricia told the following poignant story about how she came to a fuller acceptance of herself through her relationship with the triune God:

[The change in myself happened] when I really began to have a different type of relationship with triune God - Father, Son and Spirit. I have grown up in a denomination where the focus was on Jesus, so evangelical, and I had seen some whacky stuff with the Spirit, so I have negated the Spirit, and I wasn't sure about the Father, when I've had all my own journeying to do and my own healing to do with issues around my own father, so I very much had a relationship which I developed with Jesus.

Then I began to explore, through my own healing, healing the relationship with the Father, and then relationship with the Spirit, and I began to realize that whilst they are community, and there's a oneness, there's also a connectedness, and a relationship we can have with all three in the godhead. And as I grew in that, and came to develop that, and mature in that, and have a sense of a REAL relationship,

I began to understand myself and SEE myself better and receive a lot more and be able to receive from others as well as give. It was just a change in terms of, if you like, of moving from a fragmented – it's not the right word, but it's the closest that I can come, the fragmented kind of relationship with the Trinity that I really wasn't sure about, and felt disconnected from, to one that I really could embrace as friend, and that made a HUGE difference. Yeah. But it was a process, I think, a process of that developing relationship, where suddenly, I realized I had accepted myself.

An exploration of the transcripts revealed that trinitarian notions were evident in the interviews as participants sought to express the nature of their relationship with God and its influence on their understanding of self. While only five participants spoke explicitly of the notion of the Trinity per se, most participants spoke of God using one or more of the terms associated with the Trinity, implying an implicit understanding of the Trinity. The preference was to refer to God by the term used for the second person of the Trinity – Jesus, the Lord Jesus, or Jesus Christ.

Vincent spoke at length about his ideas about the interaction between the Divine and us, and his expressions hold suggestions of the notion of mutuality or *perichoresis*, a key notion associated with the social trinitarian model of God mentioned in the literature review (Chapter 2). Early in the interview Vincent said, “we shouldn't be so worried about how we fit God into our lives, it's how we fit into God's life. Totally different!” He expanded some of his thinking on his ideas about the relative roles of God and Jesus as part of the Trinity later in the interview when he said,

This being a Christian is just so unique, it's so... I wish I could have a magic pill like in the matrix, the red one, you actually see the reality, this is where the one thing, and the other areas, ... if you actual saw and were able to step out of your rose coloured goggles, and I think that's what conversion does, all of a sudden you see that it's so different because Christ comes and dwells in you! God comes and dwells in you and you see things for the first time how different being, doing, being... . It's like trying to build a lego block to the moon! You can make it high,

you can set world records one block on top of the other, but eventually you can't make it. ... It's a nice idea, but it's not practical. Whereas... He reaches out and pulls us to Him, which is so different. You can't build up to Him, but He can grab hold of you and bring you to Him.

When participants referred to relationship with God they used various names for God such as Father and creator; however, they mostly used terms associated with the Trinity, such as Father God, Lord, Jesus Christ, Holy Spirit. It was not possible to determine from the transcripts whether the context of these terms fit with internal or intentional state understandings with any validity, given that the use of these names could imply role, intentionality or essence. It was possible to observe, however, that one of the two participants who spoke with developed notions of the Trinity, Patricia, consistently used a relatively high proportion of descriptors matching intentional state understandings overall at 20%, where the range was 4% to 31%. The second participant Vincent, who spoke of developed notions of the Trinity, used descriptors matching intentional state understandings in a moderate range, 13% of the time. These findings are quite inconclusive and further exploration to find any potential connection between intentional state understandings and the social trinitarian model for God would be needed.

Conclusions

When participants used descriptors while speaking of self, other and God, they used descriptors matching internal state understandings as well as those matching intentional state understandings. It was abundantly clear from the results that there was a strong preference for the use of a framework that is consistent with internal state understandings. Participants used 40% more descriptors using internal state understandings when speaking of self, four times more descriptors matching internal state understandings when referring to others, and almost double the number of descriptors matching internal state understandings when referring to God. In general terms, this result confirmed White's

(2007) claim about the pervasive cultural dominance of internal state understandings, which match essentialist notions of self when he wrote: “it is now routinely believed that these... essences of the self are ever-present in people’s lives” (p. 102).

While there was strong evidence for the existence and preference for internal state understandings, there was also strong evidence for the co-existence of intentional state understandings, which all participants, without exception, used during the interviews. All participants used intentional language when talking about their self, 18 out of 20 used intentional language when speaking about others, and 17 out of 20 used it when speaking of God. This intentional language confirmed the co-existence of intentional understandings of the self. As mentioned in the Literature Review (Chapter 2) internal state understandings are considered therapeutically of limited benefit in narrative therapy because they are associated with the notion of an essential self that is potentially isolating and inflexible. By contrast, intentional state understandings are therapeutically more helpful because they provide the basis for intentionality, personal agency and the opportunity to develop a preferred sense of identity and actions in keeping with the person’s values, hopes and aspirations (White, 2007).

In the context of the research questions, this analysis has demonstrated clearly the co-existence of both internal state understandings and intentional state understandings of self for these participants. The smaller but significant presence of intentional state understandings opens the possibility for an understanding of self that is relationally constructed through relationship with other and relationship with God.

While only five participants made explicit reference to the trinitarian nature of God, most participants used terms for God matching the first, second and third persons of the Trinity, suggesting their familiarity with the concept. Two participants spoke extensively of their understanding of the Trinity and its direct influence on their

understanding of self. There was a strong preference for the use of the term “God” by all participants, while the next most common preference was to refer to God by terms fitting with the second person of the Trinity – “Jesus Christ,” “Christ,” “Jesus” or “the Son,” followed by the first person of the Trinity – “Father God,” “Father,” and less frequently “Mother.” Terms associated with the third person of the Trinity, “the Holy Spirit” were the least used, and were most often used in the context of communication from God. From this brief analysis, the social trinitarian model of God would seem to be a possible model with which to explore relationship with God. However, given the limited way in which these participants articulated their understanding of the Trinity, more exploration of these concepts is needed before it can be accepted as a model for human-human interaction as proposed by some (e.g., Balswick & Balswick, 2007; Cunningham, 1998; Deddo, 1999; Grenz, 2001; Gunton, 2003c).

The next chapter moves to an analysis of the metaphors that were used by participants during the interviews.

Chapter 6 Results - Metaphor Analysis

It has been noted that people often frame a description of their relationship with God with the use of metaphor (e.g., J. L. Griffith & Griffith, 2002; McFague, 1982; Prest & Keller, 1993). DesCamp and Sweetser (2005) went so far as to say that “one cannot speak of God without using metaphor” (p. 236). As explained in Chapter 3 (Research Design and Methodology), it was decided that three analyses would be performed: a narrative analysis (Chapter 4), a descriptor analysis (Chapter 5), and a metaphor analysis (this chapter). This chapter details the results of an analysis of the number and types of metaphors used by the participants. Overall, the prevalence of metaphors in the interviews, and the potential richness of meaning they brought to the conversation, were striking. The frequency and the categories of metaphors used by the participants were examined in an attempt to see what these metaphors might have contributed to an understanding of self, resulting from relationship with God and relationship with a significant other. Examples of metaphors from each category are given and participants who are exceptional in their use of metaphor were examined in more detail. The term metaphor has been used throughout this chapter to describe the tropes used, because it is the more familiar description for a figure of speech; however, it is acknowledged that some of the examples discussed are not technically metaphors, but could be more accurately described as metonymy, hyperbole, personification, simile, synecdoche or zeugma.

Metaphor is a prevalent linguistic device which people utilize in order to explain “less concrete experiences” in “more concrete,” comprehensible and “more highly structured experiences” (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980a, p. 486); or put more simply, metaphors have been described as a way of “understanding and experiencing one kind of thing in terms of another” (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980b, p. 5). Ricoeur (2003) defined metaphor as “a trope of resemblance,” which displaces and extends the meaning of words (p. 1). Lakoff

and Johnson (1980a) claimed that the use of metaphor must be considered for a complete and full understanding of communication, because our conceptual systems are “fundamentally metaphorical in nature” (p. 454). Lakoff’s (1993) revolutionary proposal was that metaphor was “the main mechanism through which we comprehend abstract concepts” whereby metaphor operates by conceptual and image mappings from a “source domain” to a “target domain,” in a way that is both “asymmetric and partial” (pp. 244-245).

Hoffman (1985) advocated strongly for the acknowledgment and legitimate use of metaphor, on the premise that it can give us “a richer understanding of human action, knowledge and language” (p. 327). This view was echoed more recently by Landau et al. (2011) who spoke of the promise that “metaphorically enriched perspectives have for better understanding the ways people come to know themselves” (p. 85), although McFague (1982, p. 16) argued that “metaphor *is* ordinary language” and cautioned that some metaphors have become bereft of meaning, or “dead” through overfamiliarity.

By their very nature, metaphors highlight the matching of certain aspects of a concept, but can never match the entire concept in totality. In the process of highlighting one aspect of a concept, a metaphor can potentially mask or hide other aspects of a concept (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980a). This tendency has been noted in the literature about the use of metaphor in the realm of speaking about God and spirituality. For example, J. L. Griffith and Griffith (2002) explained that while metaphors and other tropes are commonly used in describing the experience of relationship with God, metaphors about God can both enhance and constrain the relationship.

In this project it was decided to code and count significant, explicit and verbal metaphors as well as implicit nonverbal or performed metaphors. For example, when Liz spoke of her relationship with God as “a refuge against the storms” and Taylor spoke of

obeying God out of love, and “not because I’m ruled by an iron fist,” these were considered to be significant explicit verbal metaphors. When speaking about his identity, Taylor made the statement “all the pieces fitted in” whilst make miming motions of completing a jigsaw puzzle with his hands. This statement was coded as a metaphor because there was an explicit verbal metaphorical usage as well as a nonverbal performed metaphor. There were some less explicit miming actions unlinked to metaphorical language, that were also coded as metaphorical. An example of an implicit nonverbal metaphor was when Sharon spoke of defining herself and cupped her hands while saying, “who I am as a person... is what defines me.” There was a strong indication here that Sharon was using a metaphor of a container that held her identity, and this was therefore coded as a metaphor. In another example, Swanson said, “I kept getting this sense of – you know – (hands motion like rain falling down) the blessing of God.” Here also, there was an indication of the metaphor of blessing as rain falling, a metaphor not uncommon in the Christian community because of its biblical roots (Ezekiel 34:26). It could be considered that these mimed actions come into the realm of what J. L. Griffith and Griffith (2002) called the “performance of tropes.”

Reducing metaphoric usage to numbers introduces a limitation that needs to be considered, in that it was sometimes difficult to consider each usage of a metaphor equal and therefore comparable. To illustrate this, Taylor went on at length speaking of a metaphor about running on train tracks being analogous to living as God designed us to live. This was counted as one metaphor alongside a single reference by Jennie, who spoke succinctly of “shedding our skins” when she and her husband got together and chose to fore swear some bad habits and live differently than before. Despite this limitation, it was judged that it was more valid to count the number of metaphors used, rather than count the

number of words used to describe the metaphor, or somehow assign a measure of significance to the use of each metaphor.

Table 11 lists the number of metaphors and other tropes used by participants as they discussed relationship with God, relationship with other, and relationship with self. There is no overlap between the metaphors coded as God, other, or self; however, some statements were coded twice, when a statement was judged to contain more than one metaphor. For example, Liz's statement "not knowing who I am would mean a lot of disharmony from the inside and the outside, like, asynchrony" was counted twice in the domain of relationship with self because it contained two metaphors, a metaphor of a container with an interior and exterior, and a musical metaphor.

Table 11

Number of Metaphors used by Participants for God, Other and Self

Metaphor used in reference to	No. Participants	No. Metaphors
God	19	170
Other	18	91
Self	12	26

It is clear from Table 11 that participants frequently used metaphors when talking about their relationship with the Divine, as well as their relationship with others. Lakoff and Johnson's (1980a) claim that metaphors are "pervasive in our everyday thinking, speaking and acting" (p. 453) is validated by the fact that each of the 20 participants used at least one significant metaphor during the interviews, almost all participants (19) used metaphors when referring to God, 18 participant used metaphors when referring to their relationship with others, and 12 participants used metaphors when referring to the relationship with themselves. A major difference to note is that the number of metaphors used was significantly greater (170) when describing relationship with God compared to relationship with other (91), and relationship with self (26).

When compared by individual participant, it was evident that some participants demonstrated a preference for the use of metaphoric language, when speaking of relationships. Figure 3 illustrates the frequency with which participants used metaphoric language in the interviews. All participants used at least one metaphor in the interviews, and two participants, Vincent and Liz, used a considerable number of metaphors (31 and 26 respectively) compared to the other participants. At the other end of the spectrum, Marion used only one metaphor, and Biggles and Katie used only two.

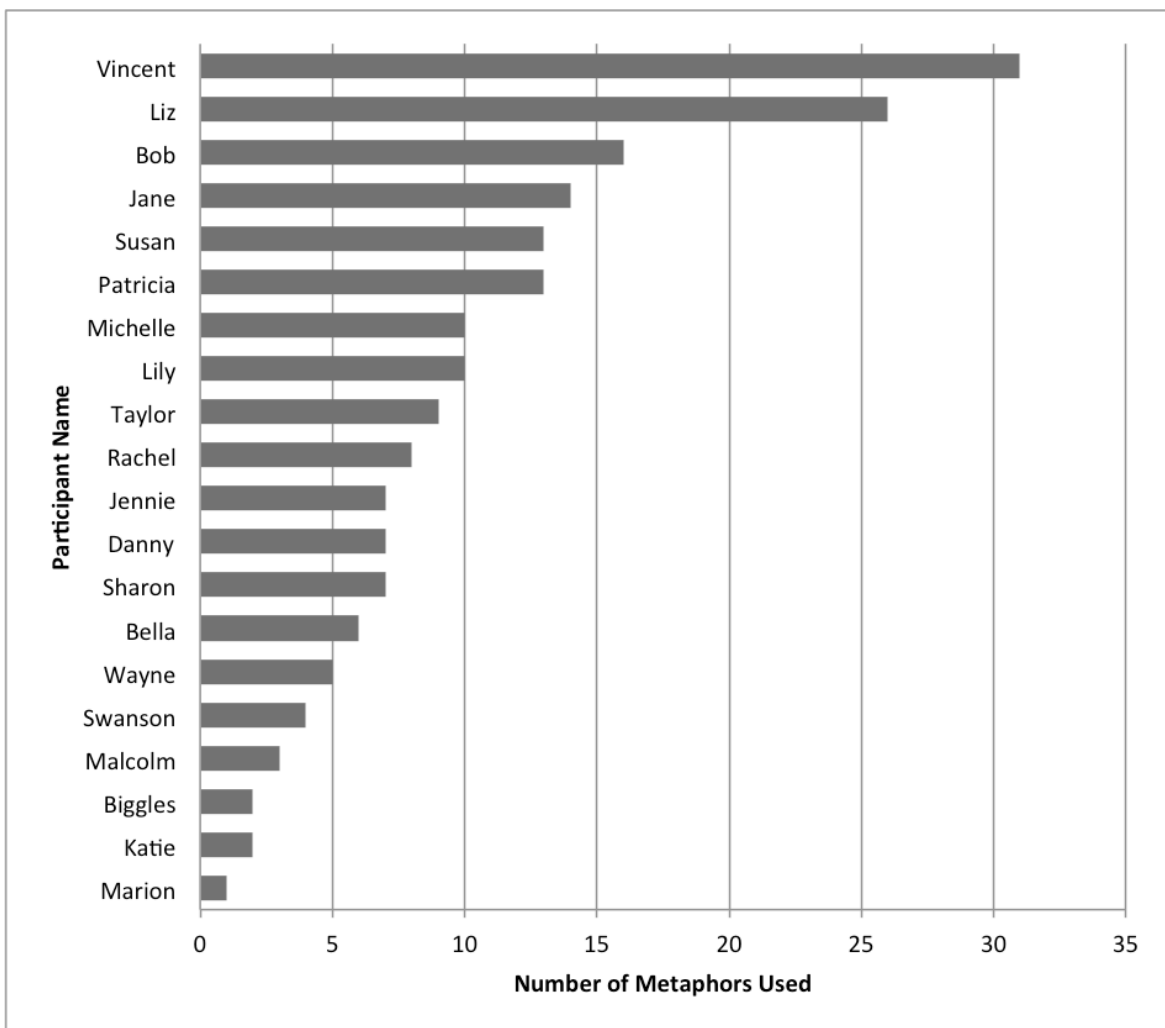


Figure 3. Metaphor usage by participant. Illustrates the number of metaphors used by each participant during the interviews.

Metaphor Categories about Relationship with God

It has been noted that in attempting to speak of the abstract and unspeakable, people frequently reach for a metaphor from the more graspable concrete realm (Fernandez, 1986; J. L. Griffith & Griffith, 2002; Prest & Keller, 1993). It was therefore in line with the literature about conversations about relationship with God, that most participants (19) used metaphors in seeking to describe their relationship with God. Figure 4 illustrates the metaphor usage when referring to relationship with God. Clearly Vincent used metaphors in seeking to describe his relationship with God far more than any other participant, and Liz was not far behind. Of the 20 participants, only Marion did not use a metaphor when talking about her relationship with God. Interestingly, when Marion spoke of her relationship with God, it was in terms of a natural and companionable relationship, with an inference of using a friendship metaphor, but the language was not considered sufficiently explicit to be coded as metaphorical usage. Katie and Malcolm only used one metaphor each.

The metaphors were placed into categories of metaphoric usage after reading the transcripts. While some statements might contain more than one metaphor, these categories were mutually exclusive categories, with each metaphor being counted in only one category. These were the resulting categories when participants spoke of their relationship with God, in order of the frequency of usage, with the numbers of metaphors in parentheses:

- Companionship metaphors (71),
- Authority figure metaphors (35),
- Helper metaphors (31),
- Maturity metaphors (16),
- Inspiration metaphors (10),

- Passing it on (6), and
- Unique (1).

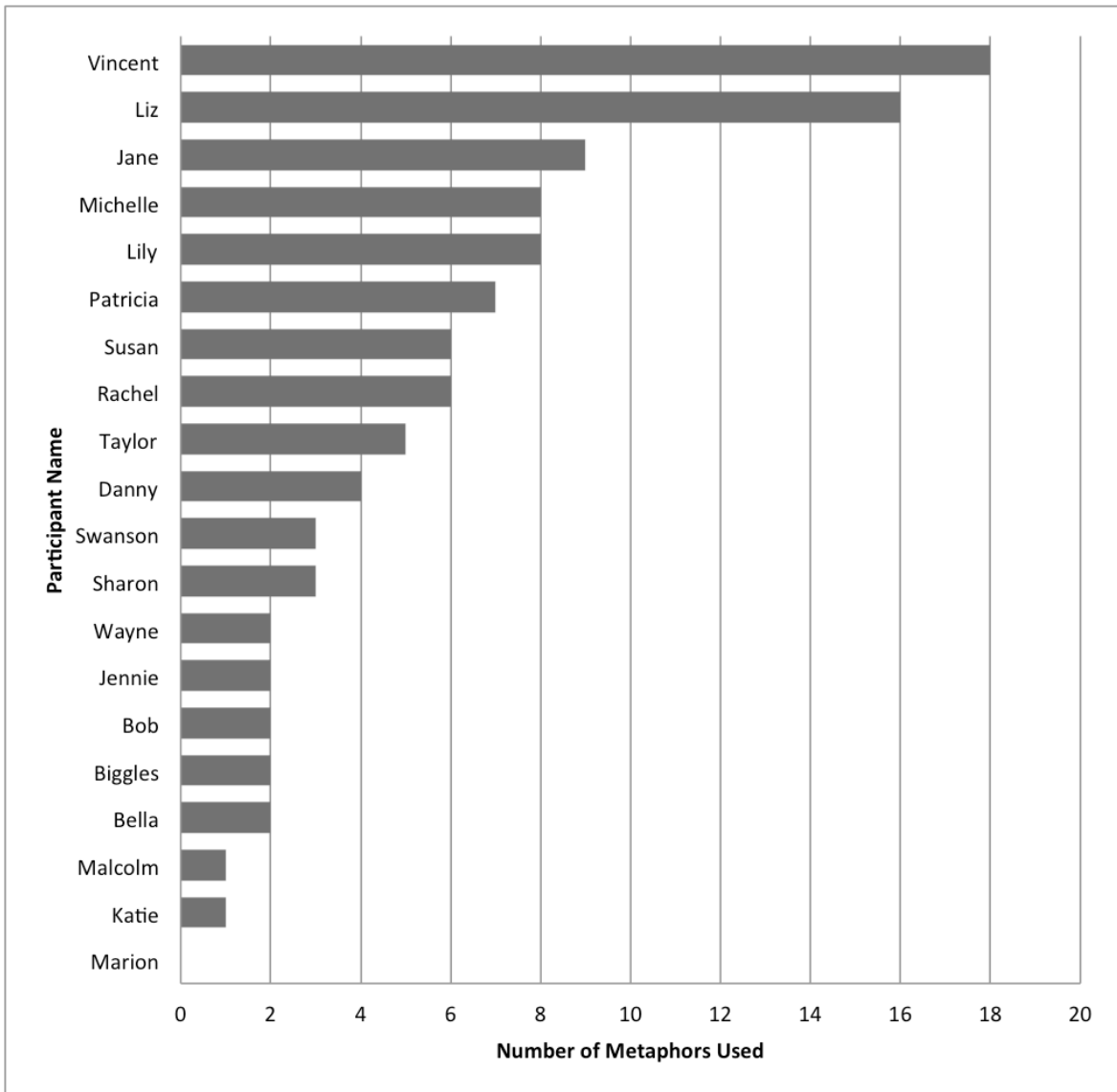


Figure 4. Metaphor usage by participant - Relationship with God. This figure illustrates the number of metaphors used by each of the participants when describing their relationship with God.

Companionship metaphors for relationship with God. This was the most populated category (71 metaphors) and included the subcategory of loosely related metaphors about the concept of being “with” God. These included those metaphors relating to being in a friendship relationship with God, the presence or absence of God, distance from God, intimacy with God, resting in God, being part of the Body of Christ,

being lost or finding God, the notion of God drawing people to Himself, being Christlike and the notion of God being a door. This subcategory included Bella's metaphoric description of relationship with God as "what you would picture your best friend to be." In a similar vein, Liz said that sometimes her relationship with God is like "having a chat with a friend," Susan said she relates conversationally to God, "just like with a friend," Jane said it was "just like a friendship"; Biggles said he and God were "buddies," and Patricia spoke of God as a "closest, trusted friend." Lily spoke of two long years of "wilderness" in her relationship with God, when it was like there was "a brass ceiling," implying that nothing she said got through to Him. Lily's use of the wilderness has biblical roots to the people of Israel wandering in the wilderness (Num. 21:5). This is a metaphor that has been taken up in both tradition and contemporary Christian writings.

Within this category of Companionship, two participants used metaphors related to intimacy. Vincent spoke poignantly of "beautiful days" when he can feel "close and intimate" with God. Katie developed a complex dating metaphor about relationship with God in the following excerpt:

If I equated it to dating, when you're first dating... everything's so exciting, you dress up to go out, and you always have make-up on, and then as you go on (both hands move together along table to the left), by the time you're married, you're in your trackie pants and happy to watch, Yeah, happy to be in tracksuit pants and watch a video and stay home. Rather than having to go out and do that exciting stuff. But you're still – because you're so comfortable with the person, that makes that acceptable. And that's how I feel, I guess, really, about my relationship with God at the moment.

This category of Companionship included two very different usages of the concept of a door, both taken from biblical imagery. When Liz told of how she persevered in "knocking on God's door" when she desperately needed His help, the image is strongly suggestive of the parable Jesus told of a friend who was commended for his persistence in

demanding help from a neighbour in Luke 11. In the following excerpt, Swanson tells of a highly developed, recurring image, in which he referred specifically to the biblical image of Jesus standing at the door and knocking. This biblical reference is from Revelation, and is the image that has been immortalised by pre-Raphaelite painter Holman Hunt, “The Light of the World.”

Swanson: I (both hands shaking back and forth) might tell you something from my experiences before I was a Christian... Um, tsk, I used to get this image in my mind. Now, where I come from is X [state] in the States.

It gets quite cold there in the wintertime. Lots of snow. VERY cold. I used to get this image of this, (hands held up in front of face forming a shape) like white house, nondescript kind of house, but when I came around one side of the house, there was this BEAUTIFUL window, large, (hands widen and round from top) like picture window, like these kind of curtains (touching fabric of curtains beside his chair), and I could see into the room there, and there was this nice cosy room, with a fire in the fireplace, and I kept thinking, “I’d really like to be in that room!”

And... but I couldn’t find the way in (using hand to show exploring motions), and um, um, after I became a Christian, and I forget the reference of the verse, Revelation 3:20, where it says, “Behold I stand at the door and knock and if any man hears my voice, and opens the door, I will come in to him.” I realized only AFTER I had made a decision for Christ, that CHRIST was the door into that room where I wanted to be. You know what I’m saying?

Interviewer: Yes. Yes.

Swanson: That’s – THAT was my realization. When I’m in worship, it’s the realization that Jesus IS the way into that place where I’ve always wanted to be. Does that make sense?

Interviewer: Uh-hm.

Swanson: And that most certainly I’d be in trouble without Him.

Interviewer: Hmm.

Swanson: And that, that realization (left hand near head) comes to me in a greater way when I'm at church, mostly on Sunday morning, but at other times as well, in worship.

Interviewer: Hm.

Swanson: The realization that (hands open), I'm lost without you. I need you.

Silence while writing notes.

Swanson: That's such a vivid picture of my life before I became a Christian.

Interviewer: Yes – that's sort of – a very clear picture.

Swanson: It wasn't just a one-off, it kept, I kept seeing it over and over and over and I thought, "How can I get into that room?"

Interviewer: Wow!

Swanson: It was only after I become a Christian and started reading the Bible, and read that verse, I go, "That's it! He is the door into the place I wanted to be."

Swanson's developed imagery of Christ as the door to a relationship with God was highly suggestive of many related concepts such as belonging, warmth, family, and acceptance.

There are a number of parables about being lost and found in the biblical narrative (e.g., Luke 15), and this metaphor was taken up by a few of the participants in this category of Companionship. Biggles said categorically, "I'd FOUND Him," and Rachel said, "I was searching. I think everybody is on a search for who they are and what life's about, and that sort of thing and I found the Lord."

This category of Companionship also included the metaphor of journeying together as a metaphor to describe the relationship with God. The metaphor of travelling a spiritual path has been used not just by the Christian communities, but across many spiritual communities (F. Vaughan, 2002). Patricia described herself as a "vulnerable traveller" with God, and other participants used the related metaphor of "walking with God," a metaphor used often throughout the Bible (e.g., Gen. 5:22, 6:9, Josh 22:5, Mic. 6:8). For example, Rachel said, "I'm seeking this deeper walk with God." Rachel immediately went

on to introduce two other biblical metaphors when she said, “Because, you know, I want to be salt and light and you know, I want to be USED of God. I really do, anywhere, any place.” Jesus had charged his followers to be “salt” and “light” (Matthew 5:13-14). These were metaphors of usefulness, and making a difference. Taylor spoke of mending a “broken” relationship with God, and went on to use a metaphor of change and growth, and the conceptual metaphor of a plateau, a place where change in the relationship can be integrated.

Other striking imagery in this category is that of being drawn towards God. Lily said God was “calling me back” after she had drifted away, and Sharon spoke of a certain incident which she interpreted as “God bringing me back.” Vincent used a variety of rich visual metaphors in this excerpt where he spoke of the futility of trying to reach God:

It's like trying to build a lego block to the moon! You can make it high, you can set world records one block on top of the other, but eventually you can't make it. The zero gravity effect will probably stop it. The earth's gravitation will probably stop that and the fact that the moon's going around - I don't think. It's a nice idea, but it's not practical. Whereas what God said, He reaches out and pulls us to Him, which is so different. You can't build up to Him, but He can grab hold of you and bring you to Him.

Authority figure metaphors for relationship with God. The category of Authority figures included 35 metaphors, and the subcategories of Father, Mother, creator, king and boss. Susan spoke happily of being a “servant of God,” a metaphor with biblical roots (e.g., Dan. 6:20, Rom. 1:1, 1 Cor. 4:1, Eph. 3:7), and Taylor spoke of obeying God out of love using unique language, when he said, “my obedience towards God is because I love him, because I want to BE that way, not because I'm being ruled by an iron fist.” Michelle used the metaphor of an authority figure in a surprisingly positive light when she said:

I love God. HE orders me around, but in a nice way. I LOVE that! I love knowing what is expected of me. ... Yes! If, if I see someone walking along the street that needs a ride, He tells me, "Pick 'em up!" He does! And I do it. I LOVE that. That is so empowering! It's great (nodding). Yeah.

Liz used an unusual but descriptive metaphor when she said, "my locus... has been child of God." Jennie said, "If I saw myself through God's eyes, He would describe me as 'my child who I love' (eyes tearing up a little)." Swanson referred to a time in his life when he had a "bit of a prodigal son experience," a reference to Jesus' parable of the prodigal son, who left his family home and spent all his inheritance but returned to find his father ready to welcome him home with open arms (Luke 15:11-32). Vincent imbued the image with different significance by referring to God as "the prodigal Father." Jane referred to God as "Daddy" as one point, and at another placed a kingly and a father metaphor together in the following delightful exchange:

Interviewer: If you saw yourself through God's eyes, how would you describe yourself?

Jane: Wow! (laughing). As lame as this might sound, maybe like a princess kind of thing, just because He's described as king so we are in that line of royalty, so to speak, and when you say that you are a son or a daughter of a king then you're a prince or a princess technically.

Interviewer: So He'd look at you as His princess.

Jane: Yeah I reckon (laughs).

Malcolm used comparison to highlight the difference between the creation metaphor, which highlighted God's distance, and a friend metaphor in these words: "while He IS the eternal creator of the universe, He is a friend." Patricia used the kingly metaphor as one she also linked to distance, when she said, "the king of the universe" in a reverential way, but she also described in detail a rare moment when she got in touch with what she termed "Mother God":

I had recently lost my mother, and I was grieving the loss of my Mum. And as I wrote in my journal, I was aware of ... the feminine, soft, EXTREMELY soft quality of the response - a mother type response, and it took me SO much by surprise... I wrote in the journal... "Was that really Mother God? Was that YOU, Mother God?"

There were 19 references in the transcripts to God as Father, and this was one of only two that made reference to the maternal or feminine nature of God. This more unique metaphor of "Mother" fit with the reported experience of J. L. Griffith and Griffith (2002), who found such references only when they reached beyond the culturally dominant metaphors to the unique metaphors, and they claimed that it was these metaphors that enabled them to work in a more meaningful manner with the spirituality of their clients.

DesCamp and Sweetser (2005) researched biblical metaphors for God in the Christian scriptures. Of 50 metaphors used, they found that two metaphors, "father" and "king," were the most rich and most complex, and matched up most closely with the biblical notions of God. DesCamp and Sweetser explained the absence of "mother" or "queen" metaphors culturally, since mothers and queens lacked power and the capacity to endow inheritance – requirements for a full understanding of the biblical image of God. DesCamp and Sweetser pointed out that to change metaphors for God would have powerful and "revolutionary" consequences (p. 236). They argued that "until 'mother' ... carries the same cultural weight and power that 'father' does, it will continue to be an inadequate substitute at the cognitive level" (p. 237). From a different perspective, the metaphor of God as Father has been judged by some feminists as evidence of patriarchalism in the Christian community, and hence this metaphor has hints of an oppressive authoritarian figure (McFague, 1982).

Helper metaphors for relationship with God. The 31 metaphors placed in the category of God as Helper included references to God as a benefactor, an encourager, a

guide, a protector, one who meets needs, and one who gives us power. In this category, Bella described her view of the relationship in this way:

Bella: God doesn't push. He shuffles. He shuffles people to where He wants them to be. He doesn't grab them by the throat and say "you must" or "you should." And I believe that that's what He's done with me. "Yeah, yeah, you got that right. Let's move on, a little bit more now" (laughs).

Interviewer: So that's how you see Him, just behind you?

Bella: Yep. Yep. Just behind me shuffling me along (hands in a shuffling forward motion). And when I get it wrong, He sort of goes, "No, no, this way! (one hand motioning towards one side). You're going the wrong way! Back! Back! Back!"

Jane spoke of a God who continuously encourages her, and overcomes her doubts about herself using this uniquely personal "mirror" metaphor:

Well I definitely think, you know, if you talk about standing in front of a mirror I would pick out all my imperfections, whereas if I was standing next to God He would pick out all of my perfections. So I think the difference between MY space and God's space is the view in which I see myself. Like when I go to God's space, He's always encouraging and very... "This is what I see in you and blah blah blah." And I'm like, "Really? Are you sure?"

Vincent used a number of different metaphors when he attempted to describe how the Bible and the Holy Spirit strengthen him in these words:

That's where the Bible comes in. You have such strength. You've got these verses which roll around (RH making rolling motions) and you say, this is what you have, the word of God is the power, the sword. Because through the Holy Spirit, He can capture it in your head.

The image of the word of God as a "sword" is a biblical metaphor (Eph. 6:17, Heb. 4:12). Having the verses "roll around" in his head and having the Holy Spirit "capture" the word of God in your head are unique metaphors, related to the generally used metaphor of "capturing" or "holding" an image in your head.

Maturity metaphors for relationship with God. The concepts of Maturity or personal growth through relationship with God brought 16 rich and varied metaphors drawn from biblical imagery and daily life into the conversations. Lily spoke of who God is “making me, moulding me to be,” possibly hinting at reference to the metaphor of God as a potter, mentioned first in Jeremiah 18 and later by the Apostle Paul in Romans 9. Lily also spoke of the “fire,” a reference to the biblical concept of the refining fire of God (Zech. 13:9, Mal. 3:2). It is worth noting that Metzner (1998) said that the metaphor of purification by fire was proposed as one of the 12 key metaphors which span time and culture. Vincent spoke of God as a sculptor like Michelangelo, and in the next breath as a doctor excising cancer cells from the body. Vincent concluded, “better to lose an arm than go into destruction.” This latter comment was possibly a tangential reference to Jesus’ injunction to His followers:

If your hand or your foot causes you to stumble, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life maimed or crippled than to have two hands or two feet and be thrown into eternal fire. (Matt. 18:8)

Inspiration metaphors for relationship with God. Some participants used the metaphorical concept of “better than” or “greater than” in an inspirational manner to describe their relationship with God by using comparison. Vincent used one of the six metaphors, when he dramatically compared his relationship with God with a number of other relationships in this excerpt:

My father isn't perfect, but I have a lovely relationship with him. It's close, and I love him very much, but it's even stronger than that. It's the mixture of my wife and my best times, my dad and my best times, my best friends and my best times, yet there's still that edge that if it's good for me... He allows those things to happen to strengthen me so that I can walk with Him, that I can know Him.

Passing it on metaphors for relationship with God. Five participants used metaphors about passing on God's love or encouragement to others, a concept that has biblical precedent. Lily used a physical channel metaphor when she said, "He is love, so the more our relationship with Him... the more attuned we are, and tapped into (p) Him, then we can channel through His love." Patricia used a related conceptual metaphor when she said, "my heart's desire is to have Christ flowing through my conversations or my counselling, such that there's less of me and more of Him."

Overall 19 of the 20 participants used metaphors when referring to their relationship with God. In the interviews, participants used both the publically available and culturally dominant metaphors they have heard used many times in their church setting, like "the walk of faith" and "Heavenly Father." Some of the metaphoric images used by participants were drawn from the vast array of biblical imagery. Curtis and Eldridge (1997) commented on what they saw as "a noticeable and breathtaking progression" (p. 96) of deepening intimacy in the range of metaphors for God in the Bible, from inanimate clay/potter, to sheep/shepherd, to servant/master, to child/father, to friendship and ultimately to the deeply intimate relationship metaphor of lovers. For these participants, the usage ranged from the least intimate imagery of being moulded by a tradesman like an inanimate object, through to the deepest intimacy of lovers. Some metaphors drew on unique private life and experience, such as Biggles' reference to God and himself being "buddies."

It is striking that many of the metaphors used in reference to relationship with God could be considered to explicitly or implicitly match with intentional state understandings, rather than internal state understandings. It was necessary to consider the overall context of the metaphor usage to make this judgement. For example, Liz's use of the metaphor "knocking on God's door" was about reaching out for communication with God, and

implied an intentional framework, despite a door being an inanimate object. Some statements gave explicit indications of how the relationship with God contributed to an understanding of self and thus was constructed with language matching intentional state understandings. An example is the delightful interchange with Liz, who surprised herself by the profundity of what she expressed:

Liz: It's not a shaky place. It's a secure... I think that IS one of the core needs for human beings, isn't it? You know? Being secure. Being significant and being secure. You know? Everybody is looking for it, but when you find it you know it's a diamond, you know? I've got this. I don't want to lose this. I love where I am. It doesn't mean that I would KNOW everything that comes to me that I will deal with it properly or something, but at least I KNOW that there is a safe place. You know? Yeah, I guess that's a safe place, you know, to be.

Interviewer: And this safe place to be is in this secure relationship with God?

Liz: Hmm. (nodding).

Interviewer: Knowing your identity.

Liz: Hm. Being in the refuge, being anchored. Knowing He is there, my Father and my friend, my companion, my refuge.

Interviewer: What a rich picture.

Liz: Hmm. Yeah. As I'm thinking more it sounds like a very – Oh my goodness! (laughing). It's just, you know, it sounds quite profound, I'm thinking! But I think it's what I'm living.

Metaphor Categories about Relationship with Other

Figure 5 displays visually those who used metaphors when describing relationship with a significant other. In this section it was Bob who had the highest frequency of use at 13 metaphors, closely followed by Vincent and Liz at 10 and 9 metaphors respectively. At the other end, Katie and Biggles used no metaphors, and Taylor, Swanson, Rachel, Marion, and Lily used only one metaphor when discussing their relationship with a

significant person in their life. One striking observation is that while Bob used the most metaphors while speaking of relationship with others, he was one of the participants who used very few metaphors (2) when speaking of his relationship with God. While the trend for people to use more metaphors when attempting to describe relationship with the Divine (J. L. Griffith & Griffith, 2002), it is clear from this result that such a generalization does not apply to every person.

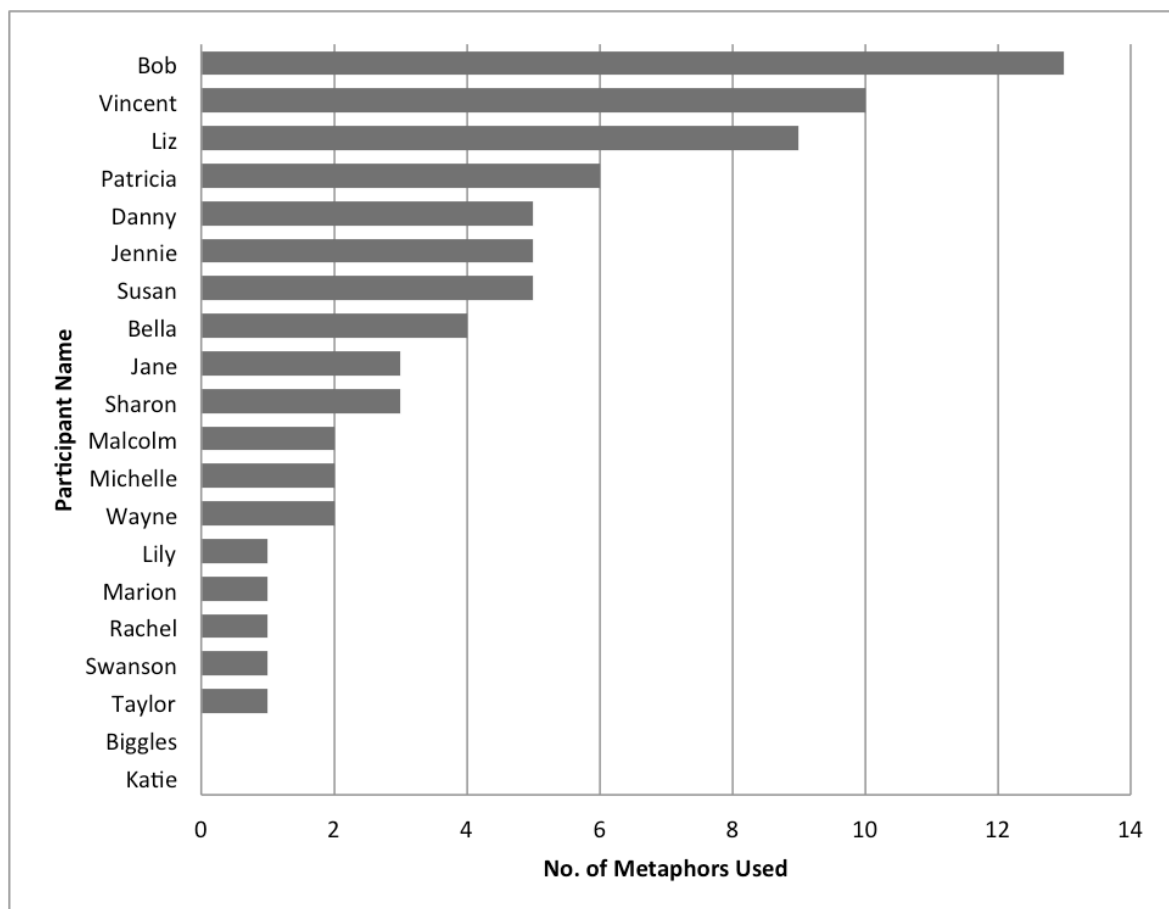


Figure 5. Metaphor usage by participant - Relationship with other. This figure illustrates the number of metaphors used by participants when describing their relationship with a significant other person.

As with the metaphors for relationship with God, the metaphors used for relationship with other were placed into categories that were mutually exclusive, with some statements being counted more than once if they contained more than one metaphor, but no metaphors being counted more than once. The following are the categories of

metaphor use when participants spoke about relationship with other, in order of frequency of use, with the numbers of metaphors in each category in parentheses:

- Unique metaphors (46),
- Companionship metaphors (24),
- Security metaphors (11),
- Family/Friend (9), and
- Passing it on metaphors (3).

Unique metaphors for relationship with other. The category of Unique metaphors included the more personal or idiosyncratic metaphors and this category was the most numerous in the domain of relationship with other at 46 metaphors. Included in this category was Sharon's reference to the "magical quality" of her grandmother, and Jennie's reference to how she and her partner decided to "shed our skins" by dropping bad habits and changing lifestyle. Another example of a metaphor in this category was Bob's reference as to how he needed to give the person he mentors "space" or "step back time." While M. E. Griffith (1995) maintained that these unique personal metaphors hold the potential to work with, develop and use in a counselling context, other researchers have demonstrated that commonly used metaphors as well as unique metaphors have been helpfully utilized in counselling (Levitt et al., 2000).

Companionship metaphors for relationship with other. Twenty four metaphors were categorized in this category of Companionship, with subgroupings of distance and closeness, and journey metaphors. This category included Vincent's decisive declaration about his friend Malcolm: "I am completed by having him in my life." Susan used multiple metaphors when she spoke eloquently based of her relationship with her husband Max:

Before I was in a relationship with Max, I was more unsettled and insecure in who I was. I felt like I was often out in the storms of life, anchored to some extent by my relationship with Jesus, but often battered by my interactions with others. By contrast, with Max, I feel as if I have come into a safe harbour where I am loved, appreciated, and to some extent sheltered from life's storms. I do still face difficulties in my life but I derive strength in the knowing that he is there.

Danny described his relationship with his pastor as “a comfortable friendship. I think because we're one in Christ (hands rolling one over the other), that's what connects us together, the fact that we can speak about spiritual things.” The metaphor “one in Christ” is a clear biblical reference to Paul’s countercultural challenge regarding equality and unity in the church community in Galatia when he said, “There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Gal. 3:27-29). The unspoken, enacted, or performance trope used by Danny here suggested the notion of a connection, by being rolled up together.

As previously noted, the subcategory of journey metaphors, which appeared in descriptions of the relationship with God, was included in the Companionship grouping. Once again, this subcategory was noted in the transcripts about relationship with other, and included in the Companionship grouping. Lily, for example, spoke of growing to the point in her relationship with recently married spouse Charles, when she could say confidently, “Charles is who he is, and I’m who I am, and we can walk together hand in hand through life, mutually supporting each other, without having to demand change or insist on our own way.” Swanson spoke of the possibilities for working in the community as a consequence of the “groundedness” he experienced from the relationship with his wife. He described this possibility as the “potential for a like-minded, all in harness (both hands motioning forward in parallel), going in the same direction.” This metaphor incorporated a journey metaphor and a harness metaphor, and is richly laden with meaning about unity, labouring together and making progress.

Security metaphors for relationship with other. A further grouping of 11 metaphors was labelled Security and included metaphors such as when Susan referred to her husband as a “rock,” offering stability, which in turn she said “brings out the more stable feeling characteristics of myself.” In a similar vein, Jennie spoke of her church “family” being supportive and substituting when her biological family failed to be sufficiently supportive. These metaphors had a similar flavour but a different quality to some of the biblically flavoured Helper category metaphors used about relationship with God, where He was referred to as “an anchor,” “a refuge,” and Someone who could “hide” Michelle “under His wings” (a Biblical metaphor from Psalm 91:4).

Family/friend metaphors for relationship with other. The category entitled Family/friend included nine relationship metaphors. For example, Liz described her relationship with her father in these words, “not just a daughter but also like a buddy along the journey” and Bella described her husband as “the best friend I wish I’d had when I was younger.” Along similar lines, Jane described her mentor as “the older sister I never had,” and Vincent described his friend Malcolm “like a big brother,” after saying, “I haven’t got a big brother.” At a later point in the story Vincent described how the relationship has moved on, and he could say to Malcolm, “You’re not looking after me; we’re looking after each other.” He went on to say, “we’ve grown up. Our relationship had gone from mentor/older brother to just brothers. It was very significant.”

Passing it on metaphors for relationship with other. This category included three metaphors such as Bob’s reference to mentoring being “dished out to him” in the same manner that he was now mentoring another politician. Later in the interview, Bob spoke about how friends have told him that he has had an influence on their movement towards God. Bob seemed to want to downplay that influence and playfully suggested that the influence had happened “by osmosis, by just absorbing the fact.” Danny was the

second participant who used a metaphor in this category, and he spoke in a similar way about how the love of God “just permeates” to others. There was a hint of humility in these descriptions, and a desire to downplay the direct significance of the influence these men were having on others.

The way metaphors were employed to describe relationship with a significant other in these interviews gave a glimpse of the nature of the relationship, particularly the use of those metaphors that were more idiosyncratic and private rather than the culturally dominant metaphors. From some metaphoric usage, it is possible to surmise how the view of self had been influenced by relationship with other. For example, Sharon used the metaphor of her grandmother “always in my corner” as she described how the relationship with her Nana confronted her view of herself as worthless and undeserving in the following excerpt:

Because I guess when my husband left me with two young kids that was really hard for me, and even the lead up to that sort of thing too was quite traumatic. But in saying that, she [Nana] always wanted me... Like I used to say, “No, I don’t want to be married again. This is it for me. This is it for me.” And she used to go, “No, you deserve better than that. And you deserve to be loved.” And all that sort of thing.

(Continues speaking tearfully). Even when I felt worthless and I didn’t deserve it, she was the one... she never got to meet my new husband, and I would have loved her to, but I know she would have really liked him too. So I guess *she was always in my corner*, and she always believed there was better for me (wipes tears).

The language associated with these metaphors about relationship with other matched with internal state understandings as well as intentional state understandings. For example, Sharon’s metaphor of the “magical quality” about her Nana suggested internal state understandings, while her description of her Nana being “always in her corner”, and

believing there was more and better for her, held tones that matched better with intentional state understandings of self.

Metaphor Categories about Relationship with Self

Although relationship with self was not a primary focus of the project, participants often spoke of relationship with self, and so it was considered worthy of note, because of what it might add to the discussion about the construction of self. For example, it was noted in Chapter 4 that some participants attributed change in self not to relationship with God or other but to factors such as time, maturity and change in attitude. It was noticeable that language used around metaphors about relationship with self matched consistently with internal state understandings. This was most noticeable around the use of metaphors categorized as Entity metaphors.

The metaphors employed in this domain of relationship with self were named and grouped as follows, with the numbers of metaphors listed in parentheses, as before. The categories are listed in order of numbers of uses of metaphor, noting once again, that some statements were counted in more than one category, if they contained more than one metaphor:

- Unique metaphors (16),
- Entity metaphors (4),
- Journey metaphors (2), and
- Maturity (3).

Figure 6 illustrates the 12 participants who used metaphors in this section, and their relative usage. Susan, Taylor and Vincent used the most metaphors when describing relationship with self at five, three and three metaphors respectively, and the remaining nine participants who used metaphors in this section used only one to two metaphors each.

Unique metaphors for relationship with self. Of the 26 metaphors coded in relationship with self, the majority (16) were coded in the Unique category. This catch-all grouping held some rich, varied and personal metaphors, and as already noted, it is the uniquely personal metaphor which holds promise for working with in counselling and can result in emancipation, if that is needed (J. L. Griffith & Griffith, 2002; Landau et al., 2011). Liz utilized a unique musical metaphor when she said, “not knowing who I am would mean a lot of disharmony from the inside and the outside. Like, asynchrony.” As this metaphor was also considered to imply the existence of an entity with an interior and

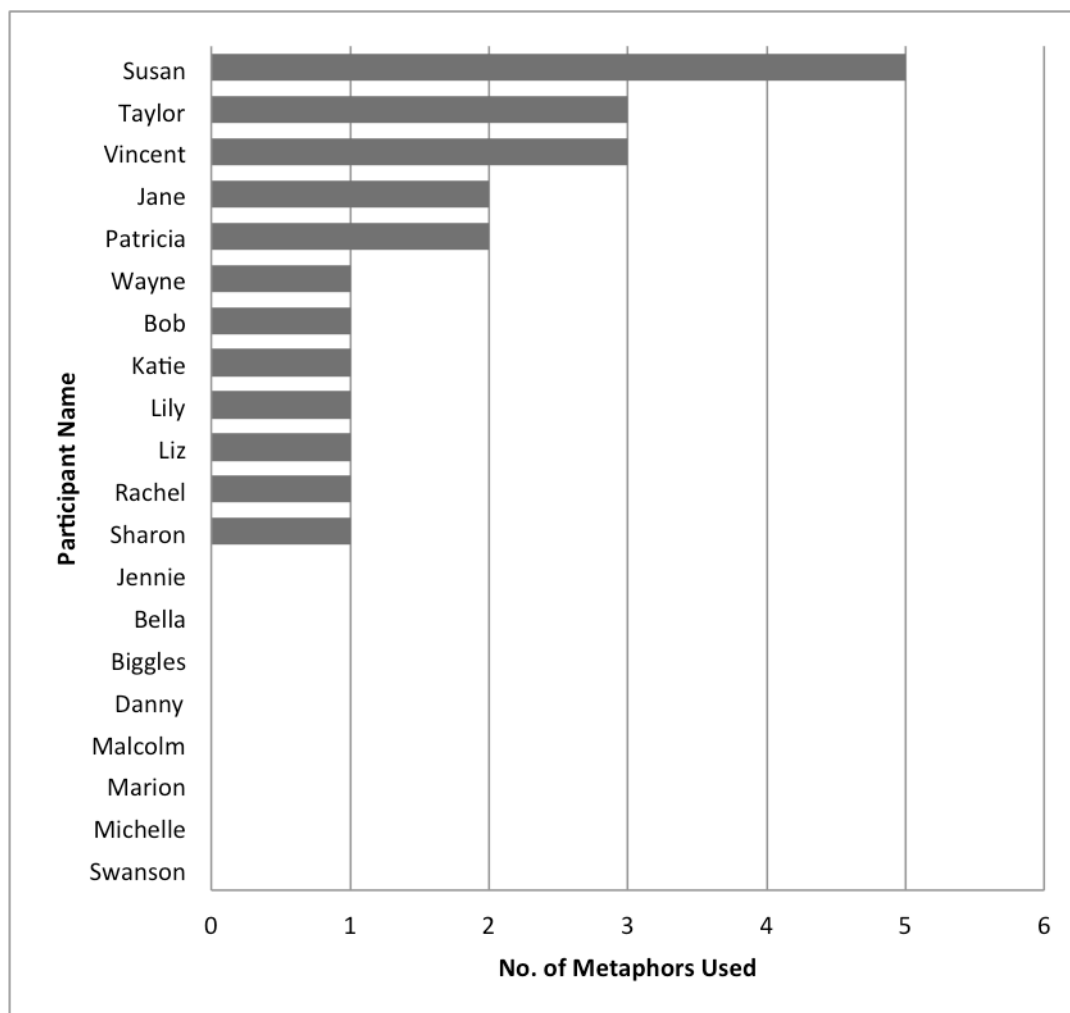


Figure 6. Metaphor usage by participant – Relationship with self. This figure illustrates the number of metaphors used by participants when describing their relationship with self.

an exterior, it was coded in two categories – Unique and Entity. Susan used a metaphor from nature when she explained how “I felt like I was often out in the storms of life, anchored to some extent by my relationship with Jesus, but often battered by my interactions with others.”

Entity metaphors for relationship with self. There were eight participants who used metaphors that have been grouped as Entity metaphors. These four metaphors matched intentional state understandings of self, where the self is considered an essence, or analogous to a discrete entity, and as such stood unique in the metaphor analysis. Landau et al. (2011) noted the commonplace practice of perceiving the intrinsic self as an entity, employing a metaphor such that people perceive their self as “a core-like entity embedded inside of an external casing or shell” (p. 79). Lakoff (1999) called this type of metaphor, “The Folk Theory of Essences,” which he claimed Kant encapsulated in the notion of reason (p. 419). Vincent’s metaphor captured this essence imagery well when he said, “there’s more harmony between who I am on the inside, and who I am on the outside.” At another point in the interview, Vincent used implied an Entity metaphor in the comment, “I know when I’m falling apart.” In like fashion, Marion used an Entity metaphor when she commented, “I think there are probably many sides to myself.” Susan described the significance of her relationship with God by the use of an Entity metaphor when she said:

But I could not actually think of myself as apart from my relationship with Jesus. That to me is the core of who I am (hands outstretched in front palms up). So to lose that is... (shoulders shrug, hands opening further sidewise) I couldn't describe myself.

Journey metaphors for relationship with self. Only Lily and Patricia used Journey metaphors when they spoke of the relationship with themselves. Lily said, “life’s a journey... you learn from your mistakes,” and Patricia proposed that: “it’s just the

fullness of realizing all of us are on a journey, and for whomever, wherever, it's honouring where they are, in the same way I am honouring myself."

Maturity metaphors for relationship with self. Three participants used metaphors that were categorized as Maturity metaphors. Taylor spoke of how "God can... get you in a position where He can grow you." Katie said, "It's like part of you wants to grow free". This metaphor is an example of one that was also counted twice, once for the "grow free" metaphor (Maturity category), and once for the "part of you" metaphor (Entity category). Vincent used a cloak, an armour, and butterfly metaphors in the following exchange, as he struggled to develop his ideas about change and at the same time keep within the constraints of his chosen metaphors. Metzner (1998) claimed that the metamorphosis metaphor which Vincent eventually settled on in the following excerpt, was "one of the most enduring symbols of human transformation" (p. 14).

Interviewer: The next question then, also based on this seeing yourself as an optimist with a true hope. Do you like seeing yourself in this way?

Vincent: Yes (nodding). Absolutely. More and more so actually. It's becoming a more comfortable cloak. Well not a cloak, it's not becoming a cloak. That's the thing! It's like... it's something that is coming from inside out (LH at chest height facing chest, fingers splayed). I can see it. It's not an armour that I'm putting on (hands motioning towards chest). It's something that's replacing (hands motioning outwards). I knew it! Butterfly! It's not the cocoon (hands almost touching in a cocoon shape). It's no longer (hands opening) and I don't care whether I'm a grub or a cocoon. I know at the end out of it will come a butterfly (hands opened further). It's an inside out, a changing.

Interviewer: Metamorphosis?

Vincent: That's the word! Metamorphosis. It's an inside change, not something that I'm putting on (hands motioning as if putting on something). That's why it's so comfortable, because it's not something, you don't have to change it, you don't have to mask it. You don't have to BE something when you're around someone.

Comparison between the metaphors used for relationship with God, relationship with other and relationship with self. Table 12 shows that the metaphors employed by the participants in relation to the self were fewer in number and categories than those employed by the participants to explain the relationship with God and an other person (26 compared with 170 and 91 respectively). While there was only one Unique metaphor for relationship with God, many metaphors were classified as Unique when participants were describing relationship with other (46) and relationship with self (16). It is possible to surmise that metaphors for God were readily available from the biblical imagery, and therefore there was less need for participants to uniquely craft metaphors.

Table 12

Comparison of Categories and Number of Metaphors used when describing Relationship with God, other and self.

Relationship with God		Relationship with other		Relationship with self	
Metaphor Categories	No.	Metaphor Categories	No.	Metaphor Categories	No.
Companionship	71	Unique	46	Unique	16
Authority Figures	35	Companionship	24	Entity	5
Helper	31	Security	11	Journey	2
Maturity	16	Family/friend	9	Maturity	3
Inspiration	10	Passing it on	3		
Passing it on	6				
Unique	1				

There were some similarities in the categories of metaphor used by participants when describing relationship with God, relationship with other and relationship with self. Aside from the grouping called Unique, Journey metaphors were the only group of metaphors present in all three domains of relationship with God, other and self. The journey metaphors were listed separately for relationship with self, but incorporated into as a subgrouping in the category of Companionship for the relationship with God and relationship with other domains.

The category of Helper metaphors in the domain of relationship with God was different but similar in some respects to the category of Security in the domain of relationship with other. The category of Helper in the domain of relationship with God included metaphors about God as protector, an element that was absent from the metaphor category of Security used in the domain of relationship with other. This is not too surprising, given that most people (15) chose to speak of an other relationship which was relatively equal in terms of power (10 chose a spouse and three a friend or sibling, one a daughter and one a mentoree), compared to a minority (5) who chose to speak of a relationship with someone who potentially had some power in the relationship (three chose a pastor or mentor, two chose a parent or grandparent). This Helper category was noticeably absent from the domain of relationship with self.

Some interviews included metaphors about the notion of Passing it on, where whatever gift or blessing has been given by God or by the other, is passed on, spread or shared with others. This is a culturally acceptable and prevalent metaphor used in the Christian community, is present in biblical imagery, and is perpetuated by hymns such as “Make me a channel of blessing,” and the popular song sung in churches, “Pass it on” (Kaiser, 1969). This notion appeared to fit as readily with relationship with God as it does with relationship with other, whether those relationships were socially “equal” or where there was a power or status imbalance.

Entity metaphors were uniquely present when participants spoke about relationship with self. This suggested that a framework matching internal state understandings of self was employed more often when conceiving relationship with self. This was striking when compared with the metaphors employed by participants when discussing relationship with God, where many of the metaphors used frameworks that matched best with intentional state understandings. The metaphors employed by participants when describing

relationship with other used a framework matching internal and intentional state understandings.

Conclusions

An analysis of metaphor usage in the interviews has confirmed the prevalence of metaphoric language in conversation, and more especially in conversation about relationship with the Divine. A close scrutiny of the metaphor choice has revealed that these participants used metaphors frequently available in society, metaphors common to the Christian community, as well as personal and unique metaphors. Metzner (1998) proposed that there are 12 recurring metaphors used across the ages and cultures, which are frequently used by people when speaking of the psychospiritual transformation of the self. Given that Metzner (1998) included the metaphor of journey in his list of 12 enduring metaphors, it is of interest that the journey metaphor was the only metaphor common to all three domains of relationship with God, relationship with other, and relationship with self.

The metaphors employed by the participants to describe their relationship with God revealed that the majority of metaphors employed to describe relationship with God matched with intentional state understandings of self. When participants spoke of the relationship with other, metaphors matching both internal and intentional state understandings were chosen. When participants described relationship with self, a significant number of entity metaphors that matched internal state understandings emerged for the first time. These results suggest that the relationship with God is potentially more influential in shaping the understanding of self of these participants, because when people hold to intentional state understandings of self there is more flexibility, increased personal agency, and increased potential for influence and change in self-understanding.

J. L. Griffith and Griffith (2002) maintained that “people are handed metaphors for the spiritual by their culture, family, or religion” (p. 72). They claimed that while some of

these inherited metaphors may be comfortable and helpful for certain people, other metaphors may need to be “unshackled” from the “manacles” of the culturally prescribed or “officially sanctioned metaphors” if they are to be free to grow and relate to God, others and themselves (pp. 72, 76). They encouraged the exploration of less accessible metaphors that are unique and private to the individual. While some feminists have expressed concerns about notions of patriarchy associated with the metaphor God as “Father”, patriarchal notions were not evident in the conversations with these Protestant Christian participants.

The next chapter will discuss the significance of the results of the metaphor analysis, alongside the results from the narrative analysis and descriptor analysis, and some applications of these results for counselling are addressed.

Chapter 7 Discussion and Application to Counselling

As outlined in the Literature Review (Chapter 2), postmodern writers have argued that the self is a social construction, influenced by relationship with others. For example, Bruner (2004) proposed, “there is no such thing as an intuitively obvious and essential self to know... Rather, we constantly construct and reconstruct our selves” (p. 4). Gergen (2009) described the construction of self in this way: “Through co-action we come into being as individual entities, but the process remains forever incomplete. At any moment there are multiple options, and self-identity remains in motion” (p. 44).

This project has demonstrated with clarity, through narrative and other analyses, the influence of a significant other person on the construction of self for these participants. More importantly, this project has extended the notion of the influence of relationship to include personal relationship with God, for those of Protestant Christian faith who conceptualize such a relationship. The striking similarities between the way that participants spoke of the influence of their relationship with God on self-understanding and relationship with other, as well as some differences, have been noted. The relative importance of the influence of this relationship with God on self-understanding, over and above relationship with a significant other person, for these participants, has been suggested by the results.

In seeking to explore the research questions, a study was conceived, conducted, and the results were analysed. The research questions were these:

1. How do people who identify as Protestant Christian speak about the influence of their personal relationship with God on their understanding of self?
2. How do people who identify as Protestant Christian speak about the influence of the relationship with a significant other person on their understanding of self?

3. What similarities can be seen in the ways that people who identify as Protestant Christian speak about the influence of relationship with God and relationship with other on their understanding of self? What differences can be seen?
4. Does the reported relationship with God seem to be more influential than the reported relationship with other in understanding of self?

Analysis of the results of this exploratory project was tackled from three main perspectives: a narrative analysis (Chapter 4), a descriptor analysis (Chapter 5), and a metaphor analysis (Chapter 6). Each of these analyses contributed significant findings in the search for answers to these research questions. In this chapter, the contribution to the literature and the application to counselling in the light of these results are discussed. In particular, the notions of internal and intentional state understandings of self in the light of the study are addressed with respect to narrative therapy in particular, and the unique contribution of the metaphor analysis is discussed. There is a brief reflection on the applicability of the social trinitarian model for God that has been proposed for human relationships, and some possible areas for further research emerging from these ideas. General implications for counselling from this project are discussed, with particular reference to welcoming conversations about God in the counselling room, and some attendant ethical issues of counsellor competence and confidence.

Implications of the Study

Because people from the Protestant Christian community conceptualize a personal relationship with God (e.g., Schaeffer, 1979), this project sought to explore the influence of this personal relationship with God on the construction of self. Participants who self-identified as Protestant Christian were invited, by means of a semi-structured interview, to describe their relationship with God, their understanding of self, and any influence that might have come from that relationship. This process was replicated for a person of choice

from their lives - a person who was significant to them in some way. From these interviews, there was strong support for the notion that the relationship with God had indeed influenced the understanding of self for these participants. There was equally strong support for the notion that relationship with a significant other person had made a contribution to the understanding of self. The way in which this influence from the relationship with God and the relationship with other was characterized in the interviews, differed from participant to participant. The unique nature of these stories was captured in the narrative analysis, in which 20 God stories and 20 other stories were developed from the interview transcripts.

The narrative analysis demonstrated with clarity that each participant could articulate to some degree the influence of the relationship with God on his or her understanding of self. For some the influence of relationship with God was a well-rehearsed and explicitly articulated influence. For other participants, the degree of influence was more subtle, or less clearly articulated, but nevertheless acknowledged. These stories of influence included narratives such as being “in a sweet spot” with God, finding a “locus as child of God” to be a stabilizing factor, feeling “12 foot tall and bulletproof” because of the relationship with the Divine, being “free to be who I am” and feeling “complete” by being in a relationship with God. One participant described that they considered themselves “infinitely valued” by God, another considered herself “a princess in His eyes” and a further participant spoke of being “alive” because of relationship with God. The influence on self from this relationship with God was a preferred development for all 20 participants, although for 2 participants there was a humbling period that culminated in a positive preferred development. It is not too surprising that the participants described the influence of relationship with God as a preferred development, given the

purposive sampling and the selection criteria which screened for people who considered their faith to be important or very important in their lives (see Appendix B).

The narrative analysis of interviews about relationship with a significant person in the lives of the participants resulted in a set of narratives in many ways not dissimilar to the God stories. Each participant articulated, with varying degrees of clarity, the influence of the chosen other on his or her understanding of self. The influence of relationship with a significant other described by participants was a preferred development in all cases, although that was not a surprising outcome, given the way in which the participants were invited to make a choice of “other.” The instruction had been to choose a person who had been a significant influence in the life of the participant, and while a negative influence was not explicitly excluded, there was an implicit expectation that it would be a preferred or positive influence, which may have been communicated unintentionally by the researcher. The stories of influence on the lives of the participants by an other significant person in their lives produced narratives with titles including the following: “having my own cheer squad,” “the apple of his eye,” “loved just as I am,” “appreciated as a woman,” “someone always in my corner,” “he holds a mirror to my soul,” and “like a big brother.”

Some participants expressed difficulty in isolating the degree to which they attributed the development of their self-understanding to relationship with God or relationship with a significant other. Some explained that it was difficult to identify and isolate the influence because both relationships were happening simultaneously. Some participants described a parallel process, in which their relationship with God was mirrored by relationship with other, or the influence of the one complemented the other. One participant described a circular process in which relationship with God influenced her, which in turn influenced her relationship with the other, and ultimately influenced relationship with God. Thus, for some participants, it was the confluence of these

relationships that needs to be considered as the source of influence on the understanding of self.

The degree to which various other people in their lives, other than the person they chose to be interviewed about, would each have contributed to their understanding of self must also be acknowledged. In this regard it was significant that a number of participants expressed difficulty in their choice of one person who is significant in their life for the purposes of the interview. The implication was that there were numbers of people who would be considered significant in their lives, and that multiple, different stories could be told about each of these relationships and their influence on understanding of self.

Some participants described factors other than relationship with God and relationship with other that had influenced their understanding of self: factors such as maturity, time, changes in attitude to life and behaviour, and life experience. All but one participant agreed that they had changed over time, and the remaining participant said that he had not changed but nevertheless he went on to describe an instance that had dramatically altered his values. This particular participant explained that he conceptualized change in self in a negative light, associated with lack of reliability, or openness to corruption. Some participants questioned whether change in self was possible at all, or whether it was considered a preferred development, although each and every participant could tell at least one story about a change in his or her life that they viewed as a preferred development.

One way in which commonalities and differences between the influence of relationship with God and relationship with other on self-understanding was explored was the analysis of the God stories and other stories according to coherent threads. When recurring threads or cohesive understandings were noted among the narratives, three threads common to God and other stories were found: a heightened awareness of

limitations, experiential responses, and a desire to respond, with an additional thread, a heightened awareness of sexuality, present only in the other stories. This analysis suggested that there were many commonalities in the ways that the participants spoke about the influence of relationship with God and relationship with other. The lack of a romantic component to the relationship with God when compared to relationship with other has been previously noted by attachment to God researchers (Kirkpatrick, 1994). The similarities found between the God stories and the other stories offer tentative support for Benner's (1998) claims that the processes governing relationship with God and other people are the same.

Another key research focus was the relative importance of relationship with God and relationship with significant other for these Protestant Christian participants. The first finding of relevance from the narrative analysis was that some of these participants struggled to isolate the effects of relationship with God from relationship with other in their God stories and other stories, as mentioned earlier. In the interviews, some participants spoke of a parallel development of relationship with God and other, while some participants conceived a circular or converging development. This finding suggests that the interweaving of relationship with God and relationship with other cannot be considered in isolation from one another and both must be considered in the counselling context.

When the transcripts of three preliminary questions about self were analysed, the number of references to relationship with God was found to be higher than references to the other, suggesting a greater importance for relationship with God in self-understanding. In an additional analysis, a straightforward tally of the number of references to God in the interview about the other was compared with the tally for references to the other when the participant was interviewed about God. This count showed a higher number of references

to God in the interview about the other when compared to references to the other in the interview about God, confirming the possibility that relationship with God is potentially more significant in self-understanding than a chosen significant person in their life. A further check for the relative importance was to note what participants said when asked directly what factors had influenced change in the self. Once again, relationship with God was mentioned more often than relationship with other. These three simple numerical tallies consistently pointed to the greater relative importance of relationship with God over relationship with a significant other in self-understanding. These findings raise the caution that to neglect relationship with God when counselling with clients of protestant Christian faith would be to neglect a significant part of their lives and story, and a significant opening for influence for change in self and self-understanding.

Despite coming from different theoretical perspectives, it is worthy of note that there were striking similarities in the narratives of these 20 participants with the narratives of the participants assigned to the category of people with a “secure-autonomous base” profile of attachment to God in Proctor et al.’s (2009) study. The participants in Proctor et al.’s study were people of Christian upbringing whose representation of God was “perceived as available, caring, supportive and responsive to the individual’s needs” (p. 250). The matching model of self of such individuals was described as those who “appreciate and value themselves; understanding that they are loved by God. Find a confidence in that knowledge that reassures and encourages them to continue to value themselves” (p. 250). This description of self would match in general terms with the description of self of many of the participants in this study. While the results of this study came from a poststructural paradigm, and Proctor et al.’s study came from a different paradigm, based on attachment theory, these two narrative analyses described sets or

subsets of Christians who produced narratives of a supportive God and a corresponding self-understanding including the experience of being loveable and valued by God.

In psychotherapy, the potential for change or transformation is a key construct. There are multiple theories of how change happens and the nature of the change that occurs, depending on the paradigm of the counselling approach (e.g., Bauer, McAdams, & Pals, 2006; Hayes, Laurenceau, Feldman, Strauss, & Cardaciotto, 2007; Lilgendahl & McAdams, 2011; Linley & Joseph, 2004; Mahoney, 1991; Muntigl, 2004a; Pals, 2006). In narrative therapy, change is conceived to occur as people review their relationship to the problems in their lives (White & Epston, 1990) and often involves the re-authoring of their lives, by re-negotiating the associations they have with the people in their lives, a practice called “re-membering” (Madigan, 2011; White, 2007). In this regard, White and Epston wrote: “we believe that persons generally ascribe meaning to their lives by plotting their experience into stories, and that these stories shape their lives and relationships” (p. 79). Because the focus here has been on relationships as the subject of the stories and re-authoring of lives, there is a suggestion in this quotation of a dual or even circular role for relationships, recognizing that relationships influence the self-understanding, and the resulting narratives in turn shape future relationships.

This project has demonstrated through the narrative analysis the way in which the participants have altered their self-understanding, or re-authored their lives, through the storying of their relationship with God and a significant other. The notion of the social or relational construction of self is a significantly helpful notion for describing this process of change in self, and the project has highlighted the need to consider the story of relationship with God as well as relationship with others in counselling conversations about self, selves and identity. This project has highlighted the possibilities of considering the relationship

with God alongside relationship with others in the practice of narrative therapy, especially when counselling with people of Protestant Christian faith.

Internal and Intentional State Understandings and Counselling

Bruner (1990) intimated the co-existence of both enduring and constructionist notions of the self when he proposed that the self “stand both as a guardian of permanence and a barometer responding to local cultural weather” (p. 110). White (2007) also acknowledged the co-existence of internal state understandings and intentional state understandings of self. He argued that the internal state understandings have significant limitations for counselling, because of the diminished personal agency, isolation, and a reduction in diversity inherent in this framework. Internal state understandings of self are not amenable to the development of alternative narratives of one’s life, and may therefore be inadequate to challenge or displace the dominant or problem story. White made the point that while these internal state understandings are not always unhelpful, they have limited usefulness for the development of alternative stories necessary for re-storying life. By contrast, White claimed that the existence of the intentional state understandings offers significant possibilities for therapeutic outcomes, because through these intentional notions, isolation is challenged and personal agency enhanced. In the context of narrative therapy, re-authoring conversations are designed to challenge the dominant, unhelpful and distressing identity conclusions, and for these conclusions to be replaced by more helpful identity conclusions based on new ways of thinking about self.

In order to explore the way in which the relationship with God and relationship with other had influenced the understanding of self, the extent to which participants utilized internal and intentional state understandings was investigated by means of an analysis of each of the interview transcripts, as described in Chapter 5 (Descriptor Analysis). A detailed accounting of all descriptors of self, other and God used during the

interviews was conducted for each participant. These descriptors were then categorized as “internal” or “intentional” according to whether they fit best with internal state understandings or intentional state understandings. The assumption made here was that the choice of language would give some indication of the framework the participants used in their self-understanding. The existence of intentional language would give an indication that the understanding of self might be said to be operating as a relational construction, based on an anti-foundational or poststructural framework. Alternatively, the existence of internal state understandings would indicate that participants were utilizing a framework that more closely matched an understanding of self that fits the fixed, enduring, autonomous notion of the foundational essential, or structural self.

The results of the analysis of descriptors of self, other and God demonstrated a clear preference of the participants for the use of internal state understandings over intentional state understandings in keeping with White’s (2007) assertion of the pervasive and enduring notion of an essential self in Western thinking. When referring to God, participants used twice the number of internal descriptors compared to intentional. When referring to other people, the preference for internal language over intentional was four times more. Interesting, when referring to self, there was an increase of only forty per cent for internal over intentional state understandings. Despite the strong preference for the use of internal state understandings, the substantial co-existence of intentional state understandings in these interviews indicated the possibility for a social or relational construction of self, at least in part, and must therefore not be overlooked.

Having acknowledged the influence of God and a significant other person on their lives in the narrative analysis, the presence of a substantial number of intentional state understandings in turn opened the possibility that the influence on the understanding of self had operated through the relational construction of self. It is therefore possible to

conclude that these participants who identified as Protestant Christian have a view of self that is, at least to some degree, constructed relationally through the human-Divine relationship. In addition, this group of people had an understanding of self that was socially or relationally constructed by the human-human relationship. For some at least, it was the confluence of these relationships that had contributed to the change in self-understanding.

In addition to evidence from the descriptor analysis (Chapter 5) there was evidence from the metaphor analysis (Chapter 6) regarding the co-existence of internal and intentional state understandings for these participants. Some metaphors strongly implied internal state understandings that matched an underlying essentialist framework of self-understanding. These were the group of metaphors categorized as Entity metaphors, and were used exclusively with reference to the relationship with self. This category included reference to a “core” and also to “who I am on the inside” in contrast to the “outside,” as well as making reference to “falling apart,” which implied the notion of a core, or an essence that is conceived of as the self. In the domain of relationship with God, there was an abundance of metaphoric language that matched with intentional state understandings. An example was the metaphor employed by one participant who described how he often dreamed of being left in the cold looking in on the picture of a cosy room warmed with a log fire, and how he came to find the Jesus was the key to the room, and to a much longed-for place of warmth and belonging. The fact that metaphors consistent with intentional state understandings were consistently used in the domain of relationship with God suggests the importance of this domain over and above the domain of relationship with other for construction and change in self-understanding for these participants.

It is possible to conclude from this project that people who self identify as Protestant Christian use internal state understandings alongside intentional state

understandings, in keeping with expectations from the literature (White, 2007). There are implications for counsellors to be aware of the notions of self they engage with and propagate in counselling conversations. As already pointed out, White has explained that narrative practitioners consciously choose to engage with the notions of intentional state understandings of self, because of the potential for increased personal agency and reduced isolation inherent in this model of self. In this regard, Russell (1999) exhorted the counselling profession to “have the courage and vision to broaden the concepts of self... it constructs and colludes with” (p. 349), and to consider interdependent models alongside the aspirational self-determined notions of the individualistic self more commonly seen in counselling discourses. Russell challenged the profession to consider ethical implications for this view of self that need to be considered. For example, she wrote of the challenge brought by Gilligan’s 1988 work, in which Gilligan challenged the male-white-dominated concept of selfhood as independent and autonomous, and raised the possibility of interdependence, care and justice being considered as important.

When McMillan (2008) researched the integrative challenges faced by Christian counsellors who employ narrative ideas, he identified the challenge of the notion of the social constructionist denial of an essential self, as second only to the challenge around the views about metanarratives. McMillan explained that many of the therapists and ultimately he himself worked through this integrative challenge regarding internal and intentional state understandings to settle on a biblical anthropology in which the internal state understandings self co-existed alongside intentional state understandings. The findings of this study have demonstrated clearly the co-existence of both internal and intentional state understandings in this group of participants. This finding takes away the need for a denial of the essential self, at the same time allowing for a therapist to consciously choose to

engage with the notion of intentional state understandings and the relational construction of self in narrative counselling conversations, as needed for therapeutic endeavours.

The Use of Metaphor in Counselling

Metaphors and other tropes have been demonstrated to be ever present in conversation (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980b). Metaphors have been employed intentionally and powerfully in the counselling context across many different counselling modalities (e.g., Angus, 1992; Briggs, 1992; Frame, 2003; J. L. Griffith & Griffith, 2002; Polster, 2006). Metaphors employed in counselling conversations bring with them the associations of the discourse from which they originate, and as such, the metaphors need to be considered, evaluated and taken up by the counsellor on the basis of their helpfulness for clients (White, 2007). It has been well demonstrated that it is important that therapist and client have a shared meaning of the metaphor in play in therapy, and that this is achieved best in a collaborative style of interaction in the counselling conversation (Angus & Rennie, 1988). In a blend of psychodrama and narrative practices, J. L. Griffith and Griffith (2002) proposed that “through the performance of tropes meaning becomes incarnate” (p. 63), and in working with metaphor, they encouraged clients to expand on their metaphor or trope by performing it in a form of psychodrama.

The metaphor of the “narrative” had been utilized more widely as a metaphor within the social sciences well before White (2007) adopted it for the specific purposes of talking about narrative therapy (Freedman & Combs, 1996). White attributed the metaphors of “narrative” or “story,” “maps” and “journey” to the earlier work of the psychologist Bruner. In this metaphoric framework, counsellors work with people to identify and “thicken” alternative narratives that do not support the oppressive problem story, and so help revise the relationship of the person with the problem. White (1997) made a clear distinction between the use of the terms “thick” and “thin” descriptions of the

self, derived from Geertz and Ryle, in preference to the more commonly used “surface” and “depth” metaphors that are more often associated with the self (Besley, 2002). Surface and depth metaphors fit with conceptualizations that match the essential self, including the associated notions of the subconscious and the unconscious, and human nature. By contrast, thick, rich story development fits naturally with the notion of intentional state understandings of the relational self, distinguished by notions of personal agency, values, intention and purpose (White, 2007). In the process of such rich story development, fresh possibilities, hopes and identity conclusions can be drawn from the new stories that emerge. It is recognized that each person could tell multiple stories or narratives of his or her life, and the intent in counselling is to draw out, or unearth alternative, more helpful stories that contribute to a preferred sense of self, where there is agency, and stories that fit better with the hopes, dreams and aspirations of the person (Freedman & Combs, 1996; Morgan, 2000; White, 2007). In this conceptualization, the self or agent of these preferred narratives is a social construction. As Freedman and Combs put it, “We think of a self not as a thing inside an individual, but as a process or activity that occurs in the space between people” (p. 34).

When describing relationship with God, in line with an expectation from the literature (J. L. Griffith & Griffith, 2002), metaphoric language was used by almost all participants, and used often. While most participants used metaphoric language, it was used less frequently (93 metaphors) when referring to others than when describing relationship with God (170 metaphors). When speaking about self, even fewer participants, with less frequency (26 metaphors), used metaphoric language. The type of metaphor and other tropes varied from participant to participant. In the domain of relationship with God, the metaphors were categorized into the following groupings in order of frequency: Companionship, Authority Figures, Helper, Maturity, Inspiration, Passing it on, and

Unique. In the domain of relationship with other, the groupings in order of frequency were: Unique, Companionship, Security, Family/friend, and Passing it on. In the domain of relationship with self, the categories in order of frequency were: Unique, Entity, Journey and Maturity. The metaphor analysis demonstrated that metaphors used included those commonly available in society, and those commonly available in the Christian community, as well as unique and personal metaphors. The journey metaphor, which was incorporated in the Companionship category from the relationship with God and relationship with other domains, was the only metaphor used consistently in conversations about relationship with God, other and self.

M. E. Griffith (1995) made the point that the language we use for God in conversations with clients may hold unhelpful or oppressive connotations, and counsellors need to be sensitive to the preferred language of clients, including the names by which they refer to God, and the metaphors they choose to take up and employ in the counselling conversation. With reference to using metaphors for God, DesCamp and Sweetser (2005) made the point that while the dominant biblical metaphor for God, that of “father,” is rich and complex, it could potentially bring a problem for people for whom the relationship with their father has been abusive or absent. They warned that mapping to a concept of God as either absent or abusive obviously brings a major problem to the relationship theologically and pastorally, as metaphors “actually constitute our relationship with God in crucial ways” (p. 236). McClung (1985) identified the struggle it is for those who have had a poor relationship with their father, and therefore struggle to use the term “Father God,” and how instead, they can learn to find in God the ideal father, and a source of healing and comfort. While there are similarities between the parental and divine relationships, it is important to be aware of the unique and perhaps alternative stories of relationship with God, and not be constrained by the metaphor of the parent. M. E. Griffith outlined the

following question which she used when exploring with clients the multiple and alternative stories of relationship with God: “Is there any other way you have experienced God, any way that surprised you?” (p. 134).

While 13 participants used the metaphor of “Father” when describing relationship with God, only two of the 20 participants spoke of relationship with God with reference to the maternal or feminine nature of God. This was not surprising, as the notion of a nurturing or maternal God is not as strongly evident in Protestant teaching, when compared to Catholic teaching, or some other religious traditions (Lakoff & Johnson, 1999). The existence of this notion of a nurturing God holds promise for counselling conversations with clients who need to find nurturance and comfort at certain times in their lives. McFague (1989) has argued that female metaphors for God should be employed on the basis of the fact that because we are made in the image of God (*imago dei*), then any concept of God should embrace both male and female. In general, the resistance to inclusive, gender-neutral language metaphor for God, which has been lamented by McFague and other feminist theologians (McFague, 1982, 1989), was explained in part by theologians DesCamp and Sweetser (2005), who argued that until the notions of mother and female hold the same cultural power and influence as father, they will be inadequate metaphors for God.

As mentioned previously in the metaphor analysis (Chapter 5), both commonly shared and unique metaphors have been demonstrated to be generally effective in counselling (Levitt et al., 2000). In the context of psycho-spirituality, M. E. Griffith (1995) challenged psychotherapists to move past the metaphors commonly used to describe relationship with God and to explore the use of unique and personal metaphors. One question she said that she often asks clients is this: “In those moments when God is most real to you, when you know you are with God, what do you hear or see or feel that tells

you what God is like?” (p. 130). This questioning has led to metaphors about God that are uniquely personal, rich with meaning and possibilities for conversation about relationship with God.

Trinitarian Reflections and Counselling

In recent years, the notion of a “social God” emerging from the concept of God as three persons, or the Trinity, has been offered by theologians and Christian counsellors alike as a model for human relationships (Balswick & Balswick, 2007; Deddo, 1999; Evans, 2005; Grenz, 2001; Gunton, 1993, 2003b, 2003c; Volf, 2002; Worthington & Berry, 2005). In particular the trinitarian notion of *perichoresis* or mutual co-existence of persons has been proposed as a model for family and other relationships (Balswick & Balswick, 2007; Cunningham, 1998; Deddo, 1999; Grenz, 2001; Gunton, 2003c). Balswick and Balswick explained that in this model, “As the three distinct persons—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—mutually indwell in a trinitarian fellowship, so are family members to mutually indwell in similar ways” (p. 19).

Because these trinitarian ideas have been recurring in the literature, the analysis of the interviews included an exploration of references by participants to trinitarian notions (Chapter 5). This analysis demonstrated that while most participants seemed familiar with a trinitarian framework, by referring to the names of God by the first, second and third persons of the Trinity, only five spoke explicitly of the notion of the Trinity when referring to God. The strongest preference was to speak generically of the Divine by using the term “God,” and secondarily to use terms associated with the second person of the Trinity, such as “Jesus” or “Jesus Christ,” and only infrequently use terms associated with the third person of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit. Only two participants, Patricia and Vincent, explicitly demonstrated a familiarity with a trinitarian understanding and how it had influenced their thinking about self. While this study was not designed to capture

trinitarian concepts per se, the emergence of some trinitarian notions was intriguing and holds promise for offering insights useful for counselling with clients who hold theistic, trinitarian views. These findings might tentatively offer support for Grenz's (2001) claim that "personhood... is bound up with relationality, and the fullness of relationality lies ultimately in relationality with the Triune God" (p. 98).

Without the balancing notion of the incarnation, humanity, created in the image of God, has no embodied existence. Emphasizing the importance of relationship, Deddo (1999) claimed that Barth's "trinitarian and incarnational theology critiques any false notions of individualism" (p. 367). In a similar vein, family therapist Anderson (2009) warned that "spirituality that is not embodied is in danger of drifting towards disembodied vagueness or unrestrained individualism" (p. 195). From the perspective of a theology of disability, Reynolds (2008) echoed these concerns, and concluded that a comprehensive understanding of God's expression of and purposes for human relationality must take into account our embodied existence. As he put it, "denying the body denies the God who lovingly sculpted it from the earth" (p. 181).

In a unique application of the model of the Trinity in counselling, Pembroke (2005) saw the novel possibility of a model for the narrative therapy counselling relationship or the therapeutic alliance as it is more commonly referred to (e.g., Ligiéro & Gelso, 2002; Martin, Garske, & Davis, 2000; Shumway & Waldo, 2012). He proposed that because in narrative therapy there is an encouragement to seek a supportive third party to be witness to the re-storying or re-authoring that is happening in the progress of the counselling (Madigan, 2011; Morgan, 2000; White, 2007), the notion of a triad in the counselling setting becomes a possible model for the therapeutic alliance.

This research project has supported the proposal that some people who self identify as Christian employ trinitarian notions either explicitly or implicitly in their thinking about

relationship with God. While trinitarian ideas, especially the notion of a social God and the notion of *perichoresis*, hold promise for the understanding and practice of counselling, more research is needed to explore the concepts people hold about the Trinity, and their applicability to social relationships. Alongside further exploration of trinitarian notions, the theological notion of incarnation, which takes human physicality seriously, could also be further explored.

Welcoming Conversations about God in the Counselling Room

As outlined in the literature review (Chapter 2), there has been a growing call for spiritual and religious concerns to be addressed in counselling conversations. This call has come from clients, practitioners and organizations, on the basis of addressing diversity, and from a concern to address clients from a wholistic framework (D'Souza, 2002, 2002; Frame, 2003; Paloutzian & Park, 2005; Pargament & Saunders, 2007; Plante, 2008; Richards & Bergin, 2005; S. R. Russell & Yarhouse, 2006; Worthington & Berry, 2005). In an attempt to include spirituality, there are some in this field who have proposed and described "spiritually sensitive" adaptations of psychotherapy from a wide range of traditional and contemporary theoretical frameworks (Richards & Bergin, 2005; Sperry & Shafranske, 2004). Such an approach seeks to take seriously the spirituality of clients, as client face crises in their lives, or are seeking meaning and purpose in the face of suffering and tragedy. Some practitioners have described and promoted specific spiritual interventions including such practices as prayer (Passmore, 2003; Plante, 2008; Walker & Moon, 2011) forgiveness (Hargrave, Froeschle, & Castillo, 2009; Plante, 2008; West, 2001; Worthington et al., 2011; Worthington, Mazzeo, & Canter, 2004), meditation, social justice, notions of vocation and calling, acceptance of self and others, journaling, use of Scripture, and numerous other practices (Aten, McMinn, & Worthington, 2011; Gale, 2009; Imber-Black, 2009; Kristeller, 2011; Plante, 2008; T. B. Smith, Bartz, & Scott

Richards, 2007; Weingarten, 2009; Wiggins, 2011). Tan (1996) categorized two integrative approaches for counsellors who hold spiritual or theistic worldviews as implicit and explicit integration approaches. Counsellors using an implicit integrative approach in this schema would be sensitive to spiritual issues but only address spiritual issues when raised by the client. A counsellor using an explicit integrative approach might introduce passages of Scripture, offer to pray, or use other spiritual interventions, and directly invite clients to discuss their relationship with God and the influence on the issues.

In order to research the benefit of such spiritually augmented therapy, L. Smith, Bartz and Richards (2007) conducted a meta-analysis of 31 studies, spanning over 20 years. Their results indicated that there was a statistically significant benefit for clients when spiritual adaptations to psychotherapy were used. The highest representations of clients across these studies were Christian (75%) and Muslim (24%), both theistic religions. A study, which was not included in this meta-analysis, investigated the spiritual enhancement of cognitive behaviour therapy (D'Souza & Rodrigo, 2004). The study demonstrated significant effectiveness in the treatment of patients when appropriate spiritual interventions were used.

Passmore (2003) proposed that the inclusion of psycho-spirituality as a diversity issue as well as a religious issue is important in the training and the professional development of counsellors in Australia. Despite the demand for an increasing scientific and empirically supported profession, in part driven by the political and funding agendas (Riessman & Speedy, 2007), there has been awareness of the minimal exploration of the contribution of religion and spirituality in the counselling profession in Australia. There are two peak counselling bodies at the national level in Australia, namely the Psychotherapy and Counselling Federation of Australia (PACFA) and the Australian Counsellors Association (ACA). Recently PACFA took steps to commission research in

the area of spiritual interventions (Psychotherapy and Counselling Federation of Australia, 2013b). The promotion of the September 2013 conference of the Australian Counsellors Association (ACA) revealed some minimal reference to spirituality, with the majority of those references relating to the Buddhist practices of meditation and mindfulness (Australian Counselling Association, 2013). The prevalence and emphasis on mindfulness has been growing in Australia, as it has around the globe in recent years, in parallel with the growth of interest in religion and spirituality (Germer, 2005; Kabat-Zinn, 2003). As one example, in the related field of social work, Israeli scholars Birnbaum and Birnbaum (2008) claimed that there has been a recent focus on the efficacy of various interventions such as mindfulness, and Birnbaum (2008), for example, promoted mindfulness training for social work students as an effective management tool for emotion regulation.

As mentioned in the literature review (Chapter 2), the notion of God as an attachment figure operating to some degree in a way similar to a parental attachment figure is one that has attracted much attention from researchers and writers in the field of psychology of religion (Beck & McDonald, 2004; Beck, 2006a; Granqvist et al., 2007; Granqvist & Kirkpatrick, 2008; Hall, Fujikawa, Halcrow, Hill, & Delaney, 2009; Kirkpatrick & Shaver, 1990; Kirkpatrick, 1992, 1994, 1998; Miner, 2009b, 2007; Proctor et al., 2009; Rowatt & Kirkpatrick, 2002). While this area holds promise for exploration of the relationship with God, it is important for counsellors working from a narrative therapy paradigm to hold these ideas loosely, due to the different philosophical assumptions behind this model.

There are significant ethical considerations that must be taken into account when welcoming conversations about God in the counselling room. After a review of the literature on the mostly positive effects of religious coping on clients, Koenig (2009) encouraged therapists to be aware of the religious and spiritual beliefs of their clients,

appreciate their value and learn to recognize when they are unhelpful. It is important for counsellors to respect the religious, spiritual and worldviews of all clients and in addition, learn to discern pathological manifestations from normative practices and beliefs of religious clients (Harris, Thoresen, & Lopez, 2007; Passmore, 2003). Along these lines, counselling ethical guidelines in Australia require practitioners to respect the religious and cultural views of clients, and not to exert influence directly or indirectly on the values or beliefs of clients.

Adequate training and supervision is required in order to know where and how to converse with clients comfortably and competently in the counselling room, to ask questions about spirituality, and to be prepared to process answers. There is evidence that until recently, such training and supervision opportunities have been lacking in counselling and mental health worker training programs around the globe and in Australia (Furness & Gilligan, 2010b; Horwath & Lees, 2010; Passmore, 2003; Plante, 2008; S. R. Russell & Yarhouse, 2006; Souza, 2002; Walker & Moon, 2011). Boyd-Franklin and Lockwood (2009) made the claim that it “is imperative that client needs and dilemmas concerning strong religious or spiritual beliefs be given the same importance in training programs as issues of gender, ethnicity, and race” (p. 153). Without an awareness of their own values, beliefs and attitudes in this potentially mystical area of religion and spirituality, there are dangers for the therapist and the client (Bartoli, 2007; Boyd-Franklin & Lockwood, 2009; Passmore, 2003; Walker & Moon, 2011; Walsh, 2009). Therapists need to be aware of the presence, and absence, of their religious and spiritual frameworks and attitudes, in order to be impartial and open to the beliefs, values and attitudes of the client. Of course, not all clients will want to discuss matters of religion and spirituality in the counselling room. While many counsellors are ready and skilled to do this, the research has shown that there are some who do not feel comfortable nor competent to do so (Lindgren & Coursey, 1995;

Souza, 2002). There have been calls for counsellors and therapists to be trained and prepared for this challenge (R. S. Anderson & Guernsey, 1985; J. L. Griffith & Griffith, 2002; M. E. Griffith, 1995; Passmore, 2003; Walsh, 2009).

Harris, Thoresen and Lopez (2007) have warned that counsellors need to be wary of practising beyond their competence in this area, of usurping religious authority, and of imposing religious or spiritual values on others. Passmore (2003) referred to some research demonstrating the reluctance of psychologists to find ways to collaborate with pastoral workers and clergy, or refer on to practitioners with more expertise and competence in this area. Passmore and others (e.g., J. L. Griffith & Griffith, 2002; Kamyra, 2009) encouraged psychologists and therapists to find ways to include religious leaders in their referral network and seek ways to collaborate with them for the benefit of clients. In a similar vein, Falot (2007) called on therapists in mental health services to become informed and attuned to spirituality, and to communicate from the earliest opportunity that the staff and services welcome discussions about spirituality, and are set up to make appropriate referrals and co-ordination with religious networks.

As already intimated in the literature review (Chapter 2), the realm of poststructuralism, situated as it is within the broader realm of postmodernism, has not always been a comfortable place for Christians to dwell (Brunsdon, 2010; Groothuis, 2000; Middleton & Walsh, 1995; J. K. A. Smith, 2006). The suspicion of metanarratives and the formulation of truth and truth claims can raise some challenging questions for those Christians or other theists who are attracted to narrative therapy as a psychotherapeutic orientation. Cook (2008) researched the influence on the faith of Christian counselling trainees being taught narrative therapy. While some struggled with a perceived dissonance of ideas, most students had worked to a point of integration where they were comfortable with the worldview of narrative therapy and their faith. Along

similar lines, Macmillan (2008) explored how Christian therapists employing narrative ideas might be finding this integrative challenge. The most significant challenge he identified for the therapists was the ontological challenge of truth claims, including the fundamental claim of the existence of God.

Conclusions

Down through the Christian ages, the crucial nature of the human-Divine relationship has reverberated from the fourteenth century mystic Julian of Norwich (2004) who penned from her sick bed, “He is enough for me” (p. 4) to the influential theologian Schaeffer (1979) who proclaimed to the twentieth century, “no human relationships are going to be finally sufficient. The finally sufficient relationship must be with God himself” (pp. 152, 161). Contemporary Christian songwriter Houston (2013) proclaimed his delight in God in these lyrics: “My joy is boundless, my soul knows its worth, in arms stretching wider than my heart could ever fall.”

The crucial importance of the relationship between Lover and beloved, Creator and created, Father and child, Saviour and saved has been captured and echoed again by the participants in this study with such expressions as: “I’m lost without you”, “I feel joy and a desire to sing”, “with God I am complete”, “I feel alive”, “still me, but the best me”, “free to be me”, “without Him life if not worth living”, and “closest trusted friend”. The participants in this study spoke of the intimate, personal and crucial role the relationship with God held for them - a role that substantially influenced their understanding of self, in addition to, and alongside a significant other person who had influenced the understanding of self. The descriptions of relationship with God were not dissimilar to descriptions of relationship with significant other people in the lives of participants, but were consistently self reported as more important and influential in the relational construction of the self.

The second major conclusion from this study is that the participants held predominantly internal state understandings of self, alongside intentional state understandings of self – not a surprising find, as it was in line with predictions from the literature. It was the substantial co-existence of the intentional state understandings of self held by these Protestant Christian participants that was the interesting finding in the light of counselling approaches like narrative therapy, where change is conceived to occur by the re-authoring the narrative of the lives of clients along relational lines (White & Epston, 1990; White, 2007). The implication is that it would be unwise to neglect the relationship with God, a relationship shown to be a key and influential. Just as each of these interviews with committed Protestant Christians resulted in the co-creation of unique stories of intimate, compelling, authentic, growing, or joyful relationship with God, each narrative counselling conversation offers the possibility for the client to re-author his or her life on the basis of this relationship. The relationship with God for these committed Protestant Christian clients could be described as a relationship that offers unconditional love, faithfulness, safety, security, intimacy, openness, and ongoing presence. What counsellor would choose to neglect such a key relationship, and potential resource for the client?

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Appendices

- A. Interview Schedule
- B. Background Questions
- C. Sample Participant Information Letter
- D. Sample Consent Forms
- E. Ethics Approval Form

Appendix A: Interview Schedule

Interview Questions **Name:**

Date:

Preliminary Questions (to be asked before the first interview).

1. What is a self?
2. What is your self? Can you describe your self?
3. Do you think your self has changed, and if so how?

A. Questions with respect to their relationship with a significant person in the person's present life

Instruction: **Identify someone from the present who you have come to know is a significant person in your life.**

4. Can you tell me a little about your relationship with this person?
5. What does this person most appreciate about you? (Or, What is one thing this person might say they appreciate about you?)
6. If you saw yourself through this person's eyes, how would you describe yourself?
7. What are you in touch with about yourself when you are in relationship with this person?
8. What does your being this way (the way you described in the answers to the above questions) contribute to your life? To this person's life?
9. How would you describe your way of being in this relationship?

Additional questions following this instruction: **Now imagine seeing yourself in this way (or, if you do, see yourself more fully in this way of being you have just described).**

10. Is this different from your usual view of your understanding of your self? Is so, how is it different?
11. Do you like seeing your self in this way? Why? Or why not?

12. What difference would it make in your life and ongoing interactions with others to keep this view alive?
13. What difference would it make to the communities in which you participate if you more fully embodied these things in your day-to-day life?

Comments:

B. Questions with respect to their relationship with God

Instruction: **I see from the survey that you consider that you consider your religious beliefs or personal faith as important or very important.**

14. What is the nature of God?
15. Can one have a personal relationship with God?
16. Can you tell me a little about your relationship with God?
17. What is one of the things you think God might appreciate about you?
18. If you saw yourself through this God's eyes, how would you describe yourself?
19. What are you in touch with about yourself when you are in relationship with God?
20. What does your being this way (the way you described in the answers to the above question) contribute to your life? What might it mean to God?
21. How would you describe your way of being in this relationship?

Additional questions following this instruction: **Now imagine seeing yourself in this way (or, if you do, see yourself more fully in this way of being you have just described).**

22. Is this different from your usual view of your self? If so, how is it different?
23. Do you like seeing yourself in this way? Why? Or why not?
24. What difference would it make in your life and ongoing interactions with others to keep this view alive?
25. What difference would it make to the communities in which you participate if you more fully embodied these things in your day-to-day life?

Comments:

Appendix B: Background Questions

Background Questions

Today's date

Sex Male Female

Age grouping < 18 18-25 26-40 31-55 56-70 >70

1. What is your religious affiliation or preference? (For example Baptist, Uniting Church, Anglican, Australian Christian Churches [previously AOG], Churches of Christ)

2. How many times in the last month have you attended a church function or a religious oriented activity?

3. Overall, how important are your religious beliefs or your personal faith in your life?
(circle one)
 - a. Very important
 - b. Quite Important
 - c. Important
 - d. Not at all important

4. Do you consider yourself to be a Christian?
 - a. Currently
 - b. Previously but not currently
 - c. Never

Thank you for your participation in Phase One of this study.

If you are willing to continue your participation in this study, which involves two audio video recorded conversations or interviews on two different days at a time and location convenient to you, please add your name and contact details on the next page so that you can be contacted directly by the researcher.

Contact Details

Full Name:

Email address (please write clearly):

Preferred phone contact (mobile or landline):

Postal address:

Appendix C: Sample Letter to Participants



Letter to Participants

TITLE OF PROJECT: Self as influenced by others and God

SUPERVISOR: Dr Eric Marx

STUDENT RESEARCHER: Ruth Thorne

PROGRAM IN WHICH ENROLLED: PhD (Counselling)

Dear Participant,

You are invited to take part a project which will explore how understanding of the self is influenced by other people and by God. This project is part of the requirements for a PhD degree in Counselling at the Australian Catholic University (ACU).

Adults over the age of 18 who are part of a church community are needed for this research, and your pastor has given me permission to invite you to participate. Phase One of this project is a short survey about Christian beliefs and practices and some background information. Some people who joined in Phase One will then be invited to participate in the second phase, which will be two interviews conducted by the researcher.

Phase One consists of answering a survey, which should together take no more than 10 minutes to complete. It includes:

- A few short questions about your Christian beliefs and practices
- Background information – some details about birth date, sex, and church involvement

Some people who complete Phase One will be invited to participate in Phase Two, which consists of two interviews. The first interview will be about your understanding of how you have been influenced by another significant person in your life, and the second interview will be about how your sense of self has

been influenced by your relationship with God. The interviews will take approximately 60 to 90 minutes, and can be scheduled at a time and place convenient to you. They will be video recorded and a transcript will be made of the interview. These interviews are planned for the early part of 2011.

The researcher is a Christian counsellor who is accredited as a graduate member with the Christian Counsellors Association of Australia (No. 17283), and she has worked in pastoral care and/or counselling for over 25 years. It is not anticipated that there would be any negative impact from participating in either Phase One or Two of the study. However, should any negative thoughts or feelings arise from your participation in either phase, a CCAA accredited counsellor will be available for you to meet with: Toni Neil, at Empower Psychology + Counselling (07 3354 4522).

The possible benefits of taking part in this study will include experiencing firsthand what it is like to participate in research. For those who join in Phase Two, it may also provide you with the opportunity to learn more about how others and God have contributed to your understanding of your sense of self. Because you will have the opportunity to read the joint write up which will include all 30 participants (without names), and comment on that write up, you will potentially gain a fuller appreciation and understanding of the contribution other people and God have made to the understanding of self. The report of this research will in turn contribute to a deeper understanding of the self for those people who counsel Christians, as well as for those who do pastoral care.

It is your right to refuse consent to take part in this study. If you choose to participate you are free to withdraw your consent and discontinue your involvement at any stage without giving a reason. Your decision will be accepted and supported by the researcher. As a participant in Phase Two you will have the opportunity to read and comment on the transcript of the interviews, and may edit, delete or add anything that you would like. When all the data is collated from the other interviews, you will have the opportunity to comment on the interpretation that is made of the interview material, and your comments may be included in the final report.

The confidentiality of participants will be protected at all times. Participants will be allocated a code and names on consent forms will be stored separately from surveys and video transcripts. It will not be possible to identify any individual who takes part in the research as only the joint results will be discussed in the write up.

You are encouraged to ask any questions you like about your possible involvement in this research before you decide whether or not to participate in this study. You may direct any questions to Dr Eric Marx on (07) 3623 7436 at the School of Psychology, McAuley Campus, ACU, 110 Nudgee Road, Banyo, 4014.

The researcher will be presenting the results of this study at a seminar that you are most welcome to attend. In addition you may let the researcher know if you would like her to send you a copy of the write up when it has been completed. Depending on the outcome of this study, the findings may be submitted for publication.

This research has been approved by the Human Research Ethics Committee of the ACU. At any time should you have concerns or grievances about how you have been treated during the study, or if you would like an answer to a question that the researcher has been unable to supply, you may write to:

Chair, Human Ethics Research Committee
C/- Research Services, Australian Catholic University
McAuley Campus
PO Box 456, Virginia QLD 4014
Tel: 07 3623 7429 Fax: 07 2623 7328

All complaints will be treated in confidence and will be fully investigated, and the participant will be informed of the outcome.

If you are prepared to participate in the study please sign both of the attached consent forms. One copy is for you to keep for your own records, and the other needs to be returned to the researcher or supervisor. Your participation in this research project will be greatly appreciated.

Yours sincerely,

.....

Ruth Thorne
Student Researcher

.....

Dr Eric Marx
Supervisor

Appendix D: Consent Forms



CONSENT FORM

Copy for Researcher to Keep

TITLE OF PROJECT: Relationship with God and other

SUPERVISOR: Dr Eric Marx

STUDENT RESEARCHER: Ruth Thorne

I..... *(the participant)* have read *(or, where appropriate, have had read to me)* and understood the information provided in the Letter to Participants. Any questions I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I agree to participate in this research project. I understand that the first phase will be a short survey which will take approximately three minutes to complete. I understand that after completion of these questions I may be invited to participate in the second phase of the research which will involve two 60-90 minute video-recorded interviews at a mutually convenient time and location. I understand that I can withdraw my consent at any time without comment or penalty and without affecting my relationship with the researcher. I agree that research data collected for the study may be published or may be provided to other researchers in a form that does not identify me in any way.

NAME OF PARTICIPANT:

SIGNATURE:

DATE:

SIGNATURE OF SUPERVISOR:

DATE:

SIGNATURE OF STUDENT RESEARCHER:

DATE:



CONSENT FORM

Copy for Participant to Keep

TITLE OF PROJECT: Relationship with God and other

SUPERVISOR: Dr Eric Marx

STUDENT RESEARCHER: Ruth Thorne

I..... (the participant) have read (or, where appropriate, have had read to me) and understood the information provided in the Letter to Participants. Any questions I have asked

have been answered to my satisfaction. I agree to participate in this research project. I understand that the first phase will be a short survey which will take approximately three minutes to complete. I understand that after completion of these questions I may be invited to participate in the second phase of the research which will involve two 60-90 minute video-recorded interviews at a mutually convenient time and location. I understand that I can withdraw my consent at any time without comment or penalty and without affecting my relationship with the researcher. I agree that research data collected for the study may be published or may be provided to other researchers in a form that does not identify me in any way.

NAME OF PARTICIPANT:

SIGNATURE:

DATE:

SIGNATURE OF SUPERVISOR:

DATE:

SIGNATURE OF STUDENT RESEARCHER:

DATE:

Appendix E: ACU Human Research Ethics Committee Approval Form



Human Research Ethics Committee

Committee Approval Form

Principal Investigator/Supervisor: Dr Eric Marx Brisbane Campus

Co-Investigators:

Student Researcher: Ruth P Thorne Brisbane Campus

Ethics approval has been granted for the following project:

Relationship with God and other: Relational construction of self. (Relationship with God and other)

for the period: 15 October 2010 to 31 December 2011

Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) Register Number: Q2010 47

The following standard conditions as stipulated in the *National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Research Involving Humans (2007)* apply:

- (i) that Principal Investigators / Supervisors provide, on the form supplied by the Human Research Ethics Committee, annual reports on matters such as:
 - security of records
 - compliance with approved consent procedures and documentation
 - compliance with special conditions, and
- (ii) that researchers report to the HREC immediately any matter that might affect the ethical acceptability of the protocol, such as:
 - proposed changes to the protocol
 - unforeseen circumstances or events
 - adverse effects on participants

The HREC will conduct an audit each year of all projects deemed to be of more than low risk. There will also be random audits of a sample of projects considered to be of negligible risk and low risk on all campuses each year.

Within one month of the conclusion of the project, researchers are required to complete a *Final Report Form* and submit it to the local Research Services Officer.

If the project continues for more than one year, researchers are required to complete an *Annual Progress Report Form* and submit it to the local Research Services Officer within one month of the anniversary date of the ethics approval.

Signed: Date: 15.10.2010
(Research Services Officer, McAuley Campus)