

**DECONSTRUCTING GAY DISCOURSE IN THE DUTCH REFORMED  
CHURCH**

by

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## DECLARATION

“I, Maria Petronella van Loggerenberg, declare that **Deconstructing gay discourse in the DRC** is my own work and that all the sources that I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.”

.....

29 February 2008

Signature

Date

*To my son*

**EBEN VAN LOGGERENBERG**

18/01/1979 - 28/04/2006

## **ABSTRACT**

This dissertation describes efforts to facilitate participation in deconstructing gay discourse in the Dutch Reformed Church (DRC). Gay discourse is challenged through the sharing of gay Christians' stories. While serving on the task team on homosexuality of the General Synod of the DRC a DVD on which gay people share their stories was produced and employed in order to facilitate participation.

In reflecting on my research journey I have learnt that participation, prejudice, dogma and context as dimensions of gay discourse lie on a continuum. These dimensions, and the two extreme positions on the continuum: radical exclusion/antagonist and radical inclusion/protagonist, are represented in my model of deconstructing gay discourse. In the process of discourse change, various positions on the continuum become possible. Shifts happened in the task team and General Synod (DRC), resulting in a more gay inclusive decision on the position of gay people in the DRC.

**Key terms:** Gay, homosexuality, Dutch Reformed Church, gay discourse, deconstructing gay discourse, task team on homosexuality, gay participation, gay prejudice, homophobia, dogma, Practical Theology, pastoral therapy

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## CHAPTER 1: CONTEXTUALISING RESEARCH AND HOMOSEXUALITY

*You are not required to complete the task,  
Yet you are not free to withdraw from it.  
– Talmud*

### 1.1 INTRODUCTION

*Don't shout. Just turn around slowly.*

These were the words of a hijacker on 1 February 2006 while holding the cold barrel of a pistol against my neck. I shivered, but nevertheless tried to delay the process of removing my jewelry (he already had my car keys). Then, from nowhere, I heard myself yelling. For a few seconds I could sense he was contemplating to shoot me and I was awaiting my exit from this world.

During those endless moments, I had two vivid thoughts. Firstly, I knew I was at peace with God, should I meet Him within the next moment, but the second thought put me into a state of panic. My work over the last five years with gay people would have less value, because very little of it had been formally documented. I had notes on hundreds of stories of gay Christians, not to mention the numerous efforts I had made to facilitate changing perceptions about them, especially in the Dutch Reformed Church (DRC). I had just returned from a three-day conference of the task team of the DRC on homosexuality with the DVD which the gays and I had made – the only tangible proof of our work together.

As yet I had not fulfilled my obligation towards the gay community to complete my dissertation. I realised that, should I survive the hijack, I could not delay this task any longer. The words of the hijacker resonated with the silencing efforts of individual church members who had initially tried to stop the onset of my journey with gay Christians. I had to "shout"; I could not just turn around slowly, walking away as if I did not hear the pain and the injustice.

This dissertation is about my journey as a married, heterosexual, white South African woman in a predominantly patriarchal society, a member of the DRC, as well as a member of the Reforming Church (gay church) in Pretoria, with gay people. Therefore, white Afrikaner Christian values and the perceptions of gays propagated by these two denominations primarily permeate my arguments and counter arguments on various gay issues.

## 1.2 BACKGROUND

Gay people are challenged by the socio-political realities that shape their daily living. Not only do they have to embark on the often difficult journey, due to internalised homophobia, of coming to terms with their own sexual orientation, but they also have to struggle through relationships with very little, if any, support from colleagues, friends and family members (Du Plessis 1999:21, 65). Although the South African Bill of Rights (The Constitution of the RSA 1996:7) protects gay people against unfair discrimination on the basis of their sexual orientation, discrimination is still taking place (Du Plessis 1999:21). Society and the church are still largely divided in their interpretations of homosexuality and in how ethical pastoral care and counseling should be done with gay people (Algemene Sinode [NGK] 2002:628; Algemene Sinode [NGK] 2004:433; Du Plessis 1999:64).

Homosexuality occurs among all races, nationalities, ethnic groups and classes in society, and in all periods in history (Du Plessis 1999:4; Boswell 1981:61). Du Plessis (1999:4, 5) reports the prevalence of homosexuality, based on the findings of the comprehensive research on sexuality done by Kinsey in 1948. According to those findings, almost 10% of the American population between the ages of 16 and 55 lived a predominantly gay lifestyle. Later research reports by Hunt (1970) and Janus (1993) confirmed those findings (cited in Du Plessis 1999:4, 5). Contrary to this, Myers and Scanzoni (2006:55) report results of surveys indicating closer to 3 or 4% of men and 1 to 2% of women being exclusively gay. According to Oberholzer (cited in Du Plessis 1999:5), an author of gay novels and previous editor of a local gay newspaper, *Exit*, the statistics in South Africa vary between 4% and 10%. In a study done during 1999 by the DRC Synod of the Western Cape (Anthonissen & Oberholzer 2001:41), 6% of the then serving ministers of the DRC indicated that they were gay. This underscores the extreme importance for the DRC to deal with the matter of homosexuality, as it involves not only many of its members, but also many of its own ministers.

Morton Kelsey (Wink 1999:63), an Episcopal priest, and Barbara Kelsey, a counselor, refer to Alfred Kinsey's comprehensive and pioneering work on sexuality. Kinsey points out that there are five overlapping but different common sexual adaptations found among human beings – heterosexual, homosexual, bisexual, celibate and asexual. In each of these adaptations there are many variations. These

are not distinct or separable categories, but they are more like a concentration of points on a multi-pointed scale (Wink 1999:63). Grey (1992:272) underscores this viewpoint when he warns against the arbitrary classification of people in a heterosexual and a homosexual group. Not all homosexuals behave homosexually, and not all those who behave homosexually have a primarily homosexual temperament. In reality, these groups show a considerable overlap, pointing to various degrees of bisexuality. Due to the limited scope of this dissertation, I will focus on homosexuality.

The word homosexual was only coined in 1869 by Benkert as a scientifically neutral medical description for the state of being exclusively or predominantly sexually attracted to persons of one's own sex (Grey 1992:xiii). It is derived from a Greek prefix *homo* and a Latin root *sexualis*, and means "of one sex". With reference to a relationship or sexual act, it would mean a sexual relation involving two parties "of one sex" (Boswell1981:41). Du Plessis (1999:1), a clinical and educational psychologist from Cape Town, emphasises that the term also includes love, as well as emotional attraction. Theologians Harris and Moran (cited in Wink 1999:74) argue for the ambiguity of the term "homosexuality". According to them, we should distinguish between sexual orientation and sexual behaviour, a view which Grey (1992:72) also asserts. If, for example, the term refers to sexual orientation, then prison rape between heterosexuals would not qualify as homosexuality. Should it refer to sexual behaviour, the above example would qualify as homosexuality (Wink 1999:74).

Generally speaking, the word "gay" is regularly used in English and numerous other modern languages (French, Dutch, Danish, Japanese, Swedish, Catalan and German) to indicate a person who is sexually attracted to members of his/her own gender (Boswell 1981:41). In South Africa the word "gay" is preferred by gay men, as well as by the majority of gay women. Du Plessis (1991:3) reports results from a survey done in 1995 by the local gay magazine *Outright*, where 54% of gay women in South Africa preferred the term "gay." Only 29% indicated a preference for the term "lesbian." In this dissertation the words "gay" and "homosexual" will be used interchangeably.

Piazza (1995:106), pastor of the Cathedral of Hope in Dallas, Texas, draws our attention to the detrimental effect of focusing only on the sexual aspect of homosexuality as if it is the only difference between homo- and heterosexual people:

The gender to whom we are sexually attracted is only one expression of some much more basic differences. Unfortunately, that one aspect of our lives seems to overshadow all of the other things about us that are distinctive. We were lesbian or gay long before we were sexually attracted to anyone. We can be lesbian or gay and be celibate. The differences that make us who we are go far beyond the realm of sex.

For many years, the causes of homosexuality and the subsequent correction thereof were considered points of departure in research on the subject (Gamson 2003:542). Throughout Western history there have been many conflicting theories trying to explain the aetiology of homosexuality. Some of the theories ascribed homosexuality to "perverse choice," seduction, smothering mothers and absent fathers, chance conditioning, traumatic heterosexual experiences and genetics (Du Plessis 1999:7). Throughout history the attitudes towards homosexuals also varied between tolerance and amusement to moral outrage and psychiatric classification as an "illness". Although psychiatry no longer views homosexuality as a mental illness and although our Constitution protects gay equality rights, many religions around the world still regard gays as "sinful" people (Wilson & Rahman 2005:9; Botha 2005:25). During the last couple of years, attitudes towards gays have been changing even in the DRC (Algemene Sinode [NGK] 2004:433). Since 1986, members of the DRC's commission on homosexuality have researched the issue of aetiology thoroughly. Findings from the biological and human sciences have been taken into consideration and constructed new discourse in the DRC, viz. being gay is not a choice (Algemene Sinode [NGK] 2004:433). Theories and attitudes on homosexuality thus develop and change over time because of the dominant social and cultural discourses of the specific period in history. Anderson and Goolishian (1991:3) view human systems as language-generating and meaning-generating systems, where communication and discourse define social organisation. Therefore, theories and attitudes on homosexuality could be seen as socially constructed in an inter-subjective way. They should not be seen as objective truths, but as fluid and changeable.

Based on this social constructionist viewpoint, this research focuses on changing societal positions, exploring from how to reverse sexual orientation to how to reverse prejudice.

### 1.3 MY COMMITMENT IN THE STUDY

In July 2000, my gay hairdresser, Francois, confronted me with the following question: *Am I going to hell because I am gay?* I believe the way to salvation and to heaven (Heyns 1988:216) is to accept Jesus Christ as your Saviour – something that Francois claims he has done. According to the Christian doctrine on salvation (Disciple's Study Bible 1988:1685; Berkhof 1941:269), as fruits of God's redemption of sin, redeemed human beings have to repent from their sinful ways to become true followers of the Lord. The practical problem to me was how to deal with this "sin" of homosexuality. That day I started to contemplate the possibility that repentance from the "sin" of homosexuality would neither make my hairdresser a better follower of Christ nor make him a heterosexual person. Berkhof, late professor in theology at Calvin Seminary, Grand Rapids (1941:231), regarded sin as a moral evil. I could not equate being homosexual with being immoral. At that stage, I sensed that Francois' homosexuality had nothing to do with sin, but I had no solid ground to stand on. Later, when Jackson, a reporter from *Beeld*, enquired about my viewpoint on the church's claim that gays should convert themselves, I answered with another question: *How do you convert yourself from the colour of your eyes?* (Jackson 2002:11). A few years later, Myers and Scanzoni (2006:57) affirmed this innateness of one's sexual orientation. They referred to a gay Christian woman who compared the statement that she has chosen her sexual orientation to telling her that she has chosen the colour of her eyes.

After my conversation with Francois, I knew that my way of thinking about gay people would never be the same again. For the first time I managed to look past his fancy clothes, the ring in his ear, the highlights in his hair and the amusing stories, and began to see a human being not unlike myself. I started to hear the pain and suffering, the anxiety, the struggle and the desperation. It then dawned upon me why it was possible for me to have kept myself shut off from gay people over all these years. I never really looked at them, I never listened to them, and I never heard them. Instead, I resorted to the confessional approach of practicing theology; apparently making it so easy to have all the ready-made answers about gay people. According to this approach to Practical Theology, the Bible is the core source and yardstick for doing theology (Wolfaardt 1992:6, 7). Context is taken into account only with regard to the application of the predetermined confessional truth from the Bible. I began to wonder how I could have been so deaf, so blind, and so indifferent. Could



it be that my interpretation of certain verses in the Bible kept me from fulfilling the biggest commandment, namely, Love? Cochrane, De Gruchy and Petersen (1991:17) refer to this locating of our pastoral responses in the lived experiences of individuals as the moment of insertion. I agree with Atwood (cited in Kotzé 2000:1) when he says:

There are definite moments, moments we use as references, because they break our sense of continuity, and they change the direction of time. We look at these events and we can say that after them things were never the same again.

That moment with Francois changed and enriched my life and, hopefully, also the lives of the people I have met since. Three years later, on 4 April 2003, when Francois called me late one night, desperate, crying and attempting to commit suicide after a failed relationship, his call for help confirmed the immeasurable value of my personal journey with gay people since the "moment of insertion".

After that incident, I embarked on an ongoing journey with gay people. Listening to their stories has convinced me that being gay is neither a choice nor an illness, but simply another form of sexual orientation. Therefore, my commitment in shaping this study is to co-create a context with gay people where they will feel safe and proud to realise their natural sexual orientation. In order to achieve this, homophobia and the resulting societal marginalisation should be exposed and deconstructed, enabling gay and straight people to experience freedom, not only in the sense of liberation, but also in the sense of resisting oppression. It has therefore become my ambition to change the position of society and, particularly, the Dutch Reformed Church, from wanting to change sexual orientation to changing discourse about gays. At the heart of this change of mind lies homophobia, or gay antagonistic attitudes. I am aware of the negative effect of tagging people (Botha 2005:7, 8); therefore I hoped to construct, with the help of people with gay antagonistic attitudes, another more acceptable term for the word "homophobia".

#### **1.4 GAY ANTAGONISTIC ATTITUDES AND THE DRC**

The current gay debate is mainly conducted from within the church (also the DRC), and is to a great extent maintained by the homophobic discourse of Christian doctrines and many church leaders (Botha 2005:25). Pronk (1993:viii) considers homophobia ("the rejection of homosexuality or of homosexual behaviour because of

some sense of fear surrounding the issue") to be widespread in cultures and in the majority of churches worldwide. Wink (1999:vii) confirms the homophobia in the church by writing: "Today the churches are undergoing fratricide over the issue of homosexuality, and the irony is that not just gays and lesbians, but the churches themselves, are likely to become the victims. The level of pure hatred, bitterness, close-mindedness, and disrespect is staggering ..."

The issue of homophobia is, among others, a moral issue. Some people regard homosexuality as immoral, while, at the same time, rejecting another human being also seems immoral. Christians could take homophobia to the core of biblical religion, namely to love thy God and love thy neighbour. If Christians fear gay people, it affects their ability to love their neighbour (Pronk 1993:viii, ix).

Although the South African Bill of Rights (The Constitution of the RSA 1996:7) protects gay people against discrimination, it is far removed from the individual gay person's daily life (Van der Westhuizen 2006:1). Many gay Christians, in particular the gay clergy, still live in fear of being discovered and losing their jobs. Furthermore, the DRC condemned gay relationships (4.4) thereby forcing gay relationships underground, where the relationships quite often dissolve due to unbearable emotional pressure. Sadly, often the only overt contacts with other gay people are at gay clubs, gay bars, recreational rooms, public toilets and parks. Driven by loneliness, guilt and fear, gay clergy often leave the ministry – some even the church – in order to free themselves from a life of lies. This enables them to live truthfully.

As was the case in 1984, the South African society is again pressing for a reviewed policy by the DRC on homosexuality. In 1984 the ministry of caring of the DRC requested Dr AH Botha of the ministry of caring of Southern Transvaal to prepare a presentation for the General Synod in 1986 (Algemene Sinode [NGK] 1986:672). At the time, church councils started to withdraw their support from the only church organisation rendering services to gay people, called Filadelfia in Christ (FIC). According to Kruger (interview 2001) from OUT, a gay organization in Pretoria, the aim of Filadelfia was to assist gay people to change their sexual orientation. Due to a lack of interest from the gay community, as well as due to a lack of success, this organisation was dissolved. To the church, it was of the utmost importance that any assistance to gay people should be Biblically accountable.

The 1986, the General Synod of the DRC accepted, *inter alia*, the recommendations that "[i]n the light of the Bible homosexuality should be seen as a deviate form of sexuality" and that "[g]ay practices and gay relationships should be disapproved of, because it is opposing the will of God" (Algemene Sinode [NGK] 1986: 672).

This position was changed in 2002 when the General Synod accepted the recommendations that stated that the General Synod could not "...identify themselves any longer with the 1986 Synod report [on homosexuality]" and apologised for the pain and suffering it caused as a result of its "... prejudices and loveless behaviour of the past in alienating gay people". This Synod acknowledged that there were significant differences of opinion within the church in respect of homosexuality and decided to postpone the formulation of a firm standpoint on homosexuality until the next General Synod of 2004 (Algemene Sinode [NGK] 2002:628).

At the General Synod of 2004, the recommendations were accepted that all people, irrespective of their sexual orientation, are included in the love of God and that gay members should be accepted as equal members of the church on the basis of their baptism. Even though, once again, the church apologised for the pain and suffering it had caused through its actions of the past, it still failed to take in any firm position on the issue of homosexuality and, in particular, on homophobia (Algemene Sinode [NGK] 2004:433). My perception at that point was that the DRC was in the process of changing positions. It had already accepted the innateness of a sexual orientation, but was not yet ready to stop fearing gay people and start loving them – not only through words, but also through their deeds.

This absence of a firm standpoint on homosexuality caused much confusion among members of the church and was exacerbated by many individual members and, worse, regional synods, distancing themselves from the decision of the General Synod of 2004 (NGK Sinode Hoëveld 2005; NGK Sinode KZN 2005; NGK Sinode Vrystaat 2005). Towards the end of 2005, the moderamen of the General Synod of the DRC appointed a task team to do further investigations on the issue of homosexuality and to serve the Synod of 2007 with a report. I was co-opted as member of the task team. The task team of 19 members consisted of a facilitator (Dr Herman Carelsen), a convener (Dr Ben du Toit), a scribe (DR Willie Botha) and people considered knowledgeable in the field of homosexuality. The sixteen

“knowledgeable” people formed two groups because of their opposing viewpoints on the topic. Although both groups were sympathetic towards gays, they differed as far as their conditions for acceptance of gays were concerned. The one group accepted monogamous gay relationships unconditionally, while the other group had reservations about gay relationships. Therefore I will for the sake of clarity refer to the one group as the “gay-conditional group” and to the other group as the “gay-unconditional group”. The two groups each had its own chairperson. Dr Jorrie Potgieter chaired the gay-conditional group, and Dr André Bartlett chaired the gay-unconditional group. These two terms, gay-conditional and gay-unconditional, were only negotiated towards the end of the writing up of the research.

## **1.5 THE RESEARCH PROBLEM**

It is clear from the above that significant differences in opinion on the issue of homosexuality exist in society. The debates in the DRC (and in many other churches of varying denominations globally) are indicative of these differences. What gives the church a central role in this debate is the fact that the church is a prime former of opinions in society, especially with regard to moral issues. Many individuals allow their moral opinions to be formulated by the church without giving the matter much thought of their own (Jamieson 2002:23; Fowler 1981:151).

In attempting to resolve the issue of homosexuality, two approaches are possible. The first approach is to resolve the origin of homosexuality: Why does it exist? Where does it come from? What causes it? How can it be changed? Inherent in this approach is the underlying belief that homosexuality is "not normal"; that it is a deviating form of sexuality that can be, and/or should be, corrected (Botha 2005:209, 211). The second approach is to treat homosexuality as a normal phenomenon and to focus on ways to change the entrenched perceptions and attitudes of society, especially members of the DRC, towards homosexuality. It seems that some members of the church community behave in loveless and insensitive ways towards gay people, due to the absence of close encounters with them. The aim of this approach would then be to transform a gay Christian community that is faceless to the members of the DRC into a community with names and faces, with histories and identities, with fathers and mothers and brothers and sisters within the church. This approach has the potential to turn the debate from a dogmatic issue to a relational

issue. Instead of judging people without even knowing them, the potential is there to move towards engaging with gay people. This would be following the example of Christ, because He, for example, did not judge Zacchaeus or the women caught in adultery. He entered into a relationship with them (Luke 6:37; Luke 19:1-9; John 8:1-11).

The first approach demands an unambiguous answer to the question of what causes homosexuality and if and how can it be corrected, and if not, how to live with "abnormal" people? This question has been studied over decades and the answer to it is still largely inconclusive (Myers & Scanzoni 2006:69-83). Even if an answer could be obtained, it still begs the question: Is there anything wrong with homosexuality? An analogy would be to claim that we fully understand why some people's eyes are blue; it still does not imply that there is anything wrong with having blue eyes. The hope of finding a satisfying resolution by using this approach seems to be futile.

The second approach seems to have much more scope for resolving the issue, namely to accept homosexuality as a normal sexual phenomenon and to change the perceptions of society towards homosexual people. The question is: How does one do this? Are there right and wrong ways to achieve this? What works better?

The problem addressed in this research is to explore ways of changing the perceptions of society on homosexuality. Central to this is the role of the church, in this case the DRC, as a main former of opinions.

The research questions asked were as follows:

**How could gay discourse due to homophobia be deconstructed in the DRC? More specifically, how could introducing members of the DRC to the stories of gay Christians be influential/invitational to deconstruct homophobia in the DRC? How could the stories of gay Christians invite moral responsibility for inclusion in the DRC? How could I facilitate participation with gay people as a prerequisite for discourse change?**

## 1.6 RESEARCH AIMS

The following research aims, which were used to investigate my research questions, emerged from my participatory journey with gay Christians and with members/leaders of the DRC:

- To do a literature review with regard to deconstructing gay discourse and re-authoring attitudes and perceptions towards gay people.
- To revisit the diversity of my journey with gay people. In doing this I wanted to identify how listening to gay people's stories have re-authored my own perceptions (discourse) about being gay. Furthermore, I wanted to identify how practices of introducing stories of gay people to members of the DRC, especially by showing them a DVD, which members of the gay community and I had made, brought about participation and subsequent perceptual or discourse change. This DVD consists of gay people's stories. The stories of gay people enabled me to participate with both gay Christians and members/leaders of the DRC.
- To explore how the use of narrative and social constructionist ideas facilitated processes whereby the narratives of gay Christians could transform perceptions of members of the DRC towards gay Christians.

## 1.7 CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

In this section, I introduce post-modern social construction discourse as epistemology, forming a broad conceptual framework for this study. I also indicate how contextual Practical Theology, as well as a Feminist Theology of *praxis*, guided the process of pastoral care that was practised in this research project. The above theoretical framework evolved from my practical work. However, it simultaneously provided me with a theoretical foundation to move from prescriptive ethics grounded in systems of "truth" to participatory ethics "located in discourse and praxis with the disempowered and marginalised" (Kotzé 2002:13, 18).

### **1.7.1 Discursive positioning**

The paradigm shift from modern to post-modern thinking signifies a move away from the pursuit of objective knowledge acquired through positivistic empirical observations to the social construction of subjective knowledge (Brueggemann 1993:4, 5). Post-modernists believe that the ability of humans to describe the universe in terms of precise, absolute, and universally applicable ways is limited. In post-modern thought there are no universal criteria of truth; claims to knowledge are always contextual (Jennings and Graham 1996:168). Contrary to modernistic thinking, which is concerned with facts and rules, post-modernists are concerned with meaning (Freedman & Combs 1996: 21).

Post-modern social construction discourse as epistemology provides an opportunity to look at the world from a number of different and possibly incompatible points of view. Looking at the world in this way provides an opportunity for "personal challenge, an acknowledgement and acceptance of difference, and a chance to experience professional growth" (Jennings & Graham 1996:165). Due to the sensitive, controversial and complex nature of the issue of homosexuality that was investigated, a post-modern epistemology helped to go about the issue more creatively and to defer premature closure, especially by acknowledging the inconclusive nature of "truth" and accepting that meaning is socially co-constructed.

### **1.7.2 Contextual Practical Theology**

Schleiermacher, the father of Practical Theology (Bons-Storm 1998:8; De Gruchy 1994:4), held the opinion that all theological studies (philosophy and history) should form an organic whole to guide the clergy in their task of doing Practical Theology. Unfortunately, theology was fragmented into sub-disciplines with Practical Theology as one of the sub-disciplines (De Gruchy 1994:4). Cochrane, De Gruchy and Peterson (1991:15-25) argue that no one does theology from a position of neutrality. Aspects like faith-commitments, moment of insertion, social-ecclesial analysis and theological reflection form part of a model of doing theology. In other words, we do theology from and through the context. Doing theology emerges from and is inspired by the context. Bons-Storm (1998:14) views Practical Theology as "the study of faith lived in context".

This leads practical theologians to ask: what does the gospel mean for the world today? Practical theologians working from a feminist perspective not only give more attention to the particularities of the contexts in which people live, but also to the differences in power among people (Bons-Storm 1998:16). Should these contexts consist of unjust social structures, the goal of contextual practical theologians would be to transform these structures, as well as transforming the attitudes and policies that perpetuate and reinforce them (Cochrane, De Gruchy & Peterson 1991:10). Since my own moment of insertion, I have become aware of injustices done towards gay people and I embarked on a journey to transform attitudes and policies that were perpetuating these injustices.

The main interlocutor of contextual Practical Theology is "the poor or the culturally marginalized" (Bosch 1991:423). In this study the gay Christian community as a culturally marginalised group, as well as members of the DRC, form my conversational partners within the context of contextual Practical Theology. The gays have been marginalised by dominant cultural discourses like homophobia, while the members of the DRC, being in a position of power, have not used their power to include gays as part of the body of Christ. This started to change gradually after the 2004 General Synod when the decision was taken to grant membership of the DRC to gay people solely on the grounds of their baptism (Algemene Sinode [NGK] 2004:433). In terms of Practical Theology, I thus stand on the side of inclusion. My position in the gay community, as well as my position as a pastoral therapist, especially on the task team, empowered me to include both gay people and members of the task team in a process of participation. After the initial listening to the painful stories of gay Christians, as well as evaluating the impact of the societal prejudice on them, we soon realised how necessary it was to make these stories heard. The stories could be silenced no longer. Kitzinger and Perkins (1993:188,192) view the personal as political, and, as such, it should be explicitly addressed in ethical and political terms. Our stories are constructed by the social and political contexts in which we live. If we want to alter people's perceptions or attitudes, we should change the social and political environment that perpetuates those perceptions. By letting members of the DRC experience the painful effect of their prejudices on gay people's lives, I invited them into a process of participation. This also served as an effort to try and change the social and political environments



of both gay people and members of the DRC, hoping that the changing of perceptions towards gay people would follow.

### **1.7.3 Pastoral care in the framework of a feminist theology of *praxis***

In South Africa, the dominant model for Practical Theology emanates from a male, reformed world where the voices of women, the poor, children and all marginalised groups [the gays] were not heard (Ackermann 1998:78, 79). Stories that capture the experiences of these groups raise issues that are sources for theorising on liberation and healing.

Ackermann (1998:80, 81) regards healing to be at the core of a feminist theology of praxis. According to her, healing should not merely take place on a personal level, but also on a political and a social level. The victims need time to grieve their losses, the opportunity to speak their pain and the right to justice. The perpetrators (in this case the DRC members) need healing from their homophobic ideologies, guilt and lost humanity through acts of acknowledgement, confession and repentance. This process has already started in the DRC with its apologies directed at the gay community during the 2004 Synod. A week after the Synod had ended, I arranged for Dr Kobus Gerber and Dr Willie Botha to offer, in person, the apologies of the DRC to members of the gay Christian community during a service of the Reforming Church in Pretoria. Rev André Muller accepted the apology on behalf of the gay community by handing letters from everyone who attended the service to Dr Gerber (see Appendix C for examples of the letters).

Healing can thus emerge both from the side of the oppressed and from the side of the oppressor, provided that they know and understand the origin of the oppression. Those with the privilege and power must be willing to hear the pain of the suffering of the "others" and to act in response. Quite often I found this to be a problem, because it seems that straight people are often not equipped to be confronted with the pain of the gay Christians. After I had shown a DVD with the stories of gay Christians to members of the task team, I got the impression that the gay-conditional group felt uncomfortable to meet with the gay-unconditional group in the same room. They actually started to have separate meetings. I was wondering whether they found it difficult to face the three gay people in the gay-unconditional group. Healing takes place in interaction between people, not only in words formulated at a synod meeting.

Daily living is not separate from the life of faith. As Ackermann (1998:83) puts it: "For healing *praxis* to be truly restorative, it has to be collaborative and sustained action for justice, reparation and liberation, based on accountability and empowered by love, hope and passion".

One action for justice that needs to be taken in order to sustain the healing *praxis* between gay Christians and the DRC, is to change the structures to accommodate gay clergy. Sampson (1989:6) holds the view that people can transform themselves by transforming the structures by which they are formed. At the DRC Synod of 2004 (Algemene Sinode [NGK] 2004:433), church membership was opened up to all, solely on the basis of their baptism. This implied that gay people could be ordained as ministers too. This is one of the points of consensus among the task team members that was entailed in the report to the 2007 General Synod (Algemene Sinode [NGK] 2007:141). What was a stumbling block in sustaining the healing process was the ban on gay relationships. Before the 2007 General Synod, the DRC had viewed gay relationships per se as promiscuous. At the 2007 Synod, the decision of how to handle gays and their relationships was handed over to congregations to deal with individually. With regard to gay relationships, the Synod only took a decision that required gay ministers to be celibate (see 4.3). According to Professor Strauss, the new moderator of the DRC Synod, the implication of this decision is that individual congregations could interpret the decision of the Synod in different ways (Oosthuizen 2007:2). This opened the possibility for gay members of the DRC to have loving, monogamous relationships.

Within a frame of a feminist theology of *praxis*, this study was guided by the need to acknowledge the pain and injustice done to gay people, as well as the longing of the human person (victims and perpetrators) for wholeness. Because I heard the pain, the injustice, the brokenness, as part of the body of Christ, I have an ethical responsibility to try and mend God's creation. In my journey with gay people, as well as my efforts to question the discourses that kept homophobia in the DRC alive, I kept in mind that any steps towards healing were practical, tentative and provisional, and therefore always demanded critical reflection (Ackermann 1998:84).

## **1.8 RESEARCH APPROACH**

In positioning myself as a researcher within a post-modern epistemology, I have moved away from a modern quantitative value-free research approach with, as its principal interest, "probabilistic certainty" (Denzin & Lincoln 1994:4; Sears 1992:65). I preferred to engage in qualitative research as an alternative research approach. The research project was, among others, a narrative inquiry (Clandinin & Connelly 1994:416) into the lives of gay Christians. Because I also wanted an egalitarian relationship between the researched and myself, I opted for a participatory action kind of research (McTaggart 1997:29).

### **1.8.1 Qualitative action research**

Denzin and Lincoln (1994:4) define qualitative research as:

...an emphasis on processes and meaning that are not rigorously examined or measured (if measured at all), in terms of quantity, amount, intensity, or frequency. Qualitative researchers stress the socially constructed nature of reality, the intimate relationship between the researcher and what is studied, and the situational constraints that shape inquiry. Such researchers emphasise the value-laden nature of enquiry. They seek answers to questions that stress how social experience is created and given meaning.

The above definition, especially its reference to values, is in line with what motivated my research enquiry: the value that I attach to justice. Already, after I had listened to only one gay person's story, I realised that this person's story and the stories about gay people informed by religious discourse contradicted each other. I considered it a huge injustice that members of the DRC could judge people whom they did not know as far as their morality and their relationship with Christ are concerned. In my participatory journey with gay Christians I realised they were bearing the fruits of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22). The question could be asked: What is more just? One could either stick to a traditional interpretation of a few Biblical texts without taking the context into consideration or one could love and do care with gay fellow Christians. I chose the latter option.

Sears (1992:65) views qualitative research as an enquiry into the personal worlds of others and, if one is fortunate, also as a journey into oneself. Researchers cannot expect to discover the Truth, but can aspire to convey the various truths held by

others. This calls for an interpretive paradigm, emphasising inter-subjective understanding of the multiple meanings of everyday life constructed by people within the context of their particular language and culture. In my journey with gay Christians I have, over many years, firstly tried to understand what it means to be gay. I spent many years sitting beside gay Christians, listening to their stories. I befriended them, went to their homes, invited them to mine, attended their church meetings and Bible study groups and eventually became a member of their church. Their pain became my pain, injustices done to them became injustices done to me, but their joys also became my joy. They accepted me as part of their community and the caring became an interactive process. When my son died in April of 2006, it was especially the gay Christian community who comforted our family.

Through this research project, I have moved from understanding gay people to conveying various truths held by gay people to members of the DRC. My view is to transform homophobia, through the stories of people suffering from the effects of homophobia, in order that members of the DRC should understand and accept gay people unconditionally. This required of me not only to free myself from objectivity, but also to manage my subjectivity.

With regard to the interaction between people in the social construction of meaning, Heshusius (1994:15-19) postulates that if we, as researchers, want to free ourselves from objectivity and want to manage subjectivity, we need to fundamentally reorder our understanding of the relation between self and other (and therefore, of reality) and turn toward a participatory mode of consciousness. This holds not only for my relationship with gay Christians, but also my relationship with homophobic people.

A participatory mode of consciousness results from the ability to temporarily let go of all preoccupation with the self and move into a state of complete attention. It is not about something or someone, but refers to "being with" something or someone. It requires an attitude of profound openness and receptivity. An awareness of a deeper level of kinship between the knower and the known exists. Boundaries constructing the perception of distance between self and other should be let go. A participatory mode of consciousness requires a total turning to the other, which leads not to a loss of the self, but to a heightened feeling of aliveness and awareness (Heshusius 1994:15-19). This approach helped me to understand gay Christians by moving beyond the mere subjective interpretation of the "truth." I take moral responsibility for

the co-constructed realities with the gay participants. This "being with" gay Christians empowered me to challenge the gay antagonistic discourses in the DRC.

### **1.8.2 Narrative inquiry**

The social sciences are founded on the study of experience (Clandinin & Connelly 1994:414-415). Experience is the stories people live. Through telling their stories, people reaffirm them, modify them and create new stories. Clandinin and Connelly (1994:416) distinguish between the story as a phenomenon and the method of inquiry into the experience of people's lives. The phenomenon is called the *story*, while the inquiry is called the *narrative*. People thus live storied lives, while narrative researchers describe such lives, collect and tell stories of them, and write narratives of experience. It is a difficult but important task to retell stories "that allow for growth and change" (Clandinin & Connelly 1994:418). Ballard (1994:22) considers stories as important, relevant, valid, meaningful and generalisable as any other writing that is referred to as research. During my research journey I have collected numerous stories of the lives of gay Christians. By doing care and counselling with them I helped them to reaffirm their stories, to modify them and to create new stories. I then used these stories, either through the DVD or by conveying them personally to members of the DRC, or by facilitating for a gay person to share his/her story with members of the DRC, to challenge some of the prevailing anti-gay discourses.

In the context of this research, the stories can be seen as what Derrida (Collins & Mayblin 2003:75, 77) called tools for deconstruction and *differance* (to defer meaning; undecidability). Deconstruction provides the action researcher with a useful tool to disrupt theory and to open up conflict for reconstruction (Jennings & Graham 1996:178). Conflict exists because of power relations in society. Foucault views power without resistance as an impossibility (Barker 1994:78). Power informs knowledge and produces discourses. As such, the action researcher with the knowledges gained through the stories of people creates new discourses. By unmasking subordination and silenced voices and the marginalisation of groups of people, the action researcher dictates the terms of discourse and the relations of power. In order to reconcile the goals of democracy [justice] on the one hand and the workings of power and oppression on the other, Kotzé (2002:8) considers it a matter of urgency that the researcher should keep on asking the following ethical

questions of accountability: Whose knowledges are these? For whose purposes are they applied? To whose benefit are these knowledges? Who is silenced or marginalised by these knowledges? Who suffers as a result of these knowledges?

### **1.8.3 Participatory action research**

McTaggart (1997:1, 2) views participatory action research as a merger between participatory research and action research. It denotes a reminder that "it is participants' own activities which are meant to be informed by the ongoing inquiry, not merely the future research directions of external researchers". This implies much more than mere involvement; it implies the participants taking ownership in the production of knowledge and the improvement of practice. It empowers participants by realising their everyday life experiences and feelings as major sources of knowledge (Reinharz 1992:182). Initially, during my journey with gay people, they were hesitant to accept this ownership, because many of them were disempowered and viewed themselves as less worthy than straight people and as such unable to contribute towards changing the status quo. Later, as we proceeded, especially after we started with the support group at the gay church, where gays could tell their stories, they gradually started to change. As they became more empowered and whole due to the group therapy, they began to take ownership and responsibility for changing perceptions about themselves. One evening a gay minister from the DRC who attended the group said: *Come on people, Marietjie can't do everything on her own. We have to help her.*

McTaggart (1997:27) refers to Kurt Lewin's description of action research as proceeding in a "spiral of steps," each consisting of planning, acting, observing and evaluating the result of the action. According to McTaggart, this approach recognises the need for flexibility in the process, as one can never anticipate everything that needs to be done. This is especially true of my research journey with gay people. I could never at the point of insertion anticipate what needed to be done and where that journey would lead me to in order to try and change gay antagonist discourse in the DRC. It started as a participatory journey, but through continuously planning ways to change, especially, members of the DRC's perceptions about gay Christians, followed by certain actions, observations and evaluations of the results of these actions, a research route within the participatory journey developed. Now, in

revisiting my journey through this research, I again proceed in "a spiral of steps". This provides me with a theoretical foundation for my research approach.

The issue of research is a sensitive issue in the gay community, because many gay people have the perception that research is being done *on* them instead of *with* them (McTaggart 1997:29). Participation rules out exploitation of the researched (McTaggart 1997:6). During my journey with gay people, they invited me to do research with them and declared themselves willing to participate. When I told the gay congregation one evening about my intent to make the DVD, they immediately paid the costs involved. This, to me, was proof of mutual trust and loyalty. There was no question of them being exploited, because they and I knew that all of us had already benefited from our mutual involvement. (See 6.2.4)

According to Reinharz (1992:181), in participatory action research the distinction between the researcher and the researched disappears. This happens when the researcher abandons control and adopts an approach of openness, mutual disclosure and shared risk. When, for example, addressing groups of church leaders, the gay people and I were taking the same risk of being ridiculed and rejected. This enhanced a feeling of collaboration instead of an "us" and "you" perception. To me it was also important that the members of the task team would be a team trying to solve a problem together. At some stage, the "you/us" feeling became extremely strong among the members of the task team. One day during lunch at Heron Bridge, where the task team stayed during a three-day workshop, I asked the the gay-conditional group whether I could sit at "their" table. I then disclosed my sadness because of the you/us situation that was developing. That had not been my expectation when I joined the task team. The members of the gay-conditional group at the table acknowledged my dream of standing together in trying to solve the problem of how to deal with the issue of homosexuality in the DRC. In practice, this proved to be a difficult step to take.

Participatory action research is also concerned with changing individuals, as well as the culture of the groups, institutions, and societies to which they belong (McTaggart 1997:31). It represents a repudiation of the status quo (Reinharz 1992:175). In this research study, the status quo was injustice and prejudice towards gay Christians practised by a homophobic society. This led to my research question, how to change discourse of the DRC leaders towards gay people? Within the context of participatory

action research, McTaggart's (1997:31) ideas on how the culture of a group can change guided me in my endeavours to change perceptions towards gay people. He considers the possibility for the culture of groups to change to be embedded in the changing of language patterns, the changing of patterns of social interaction and in the changing of patterns of relationships. This implies that the leaders of the DRC had to be made aware of the effect the language they used had on gay people, for example, when they were formulating proposals for the 2007 Synod report. They also had to be exposed to socialising with gay people and, hopefully, forming new relationships with gays.

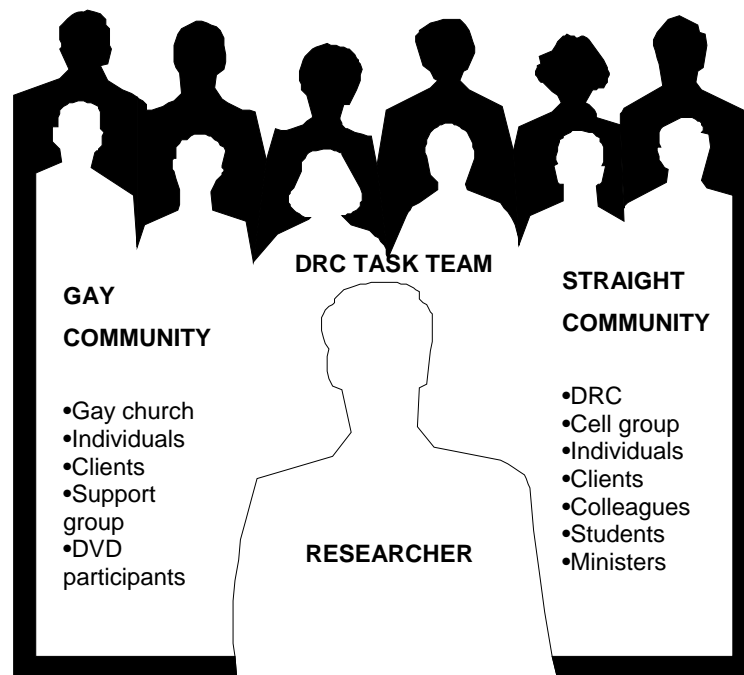
During the journey, the aim was to participate with members of the gay Christian community and with members/leaders of the DRC to explore whether transformation of perceptions was possible, as well as to heal and empower members of the gay Christian community and members of the DRC. A consequence was the transformation that I as the researcher underwent as the research aims were being pursued. As a straight member of the gay community my whole life was changed.

## **1.9 RESEARCH JOURNEY**

I did not plan the onset of any journey with gay people. On the contrary, when I realised I was on the same bumpy road with them, I planned on several occasions to end the journey. This happened long before I had to choose a research topic for my dissertation. The reason for this was that I was governed by numerous societal and theological discourses on homosexuality. Fear of rejection and marginalisation, coupled with a voice trying to convince me of my insignificance and my subsequent powerlessness to make a difference sometimes almost got the better of me. But the gay people themselves kept me on the road. This participatory journey with gay Christians and with members of the DRC eventually developed into a research route within the journey.

### *Step 1. Finding conversational participants*





**Figure 1 Conversational Participants**

At the time when I embarked on this journey, I was a student at the Institute for Therapeutic Development (ITD). As part of my practical training, ITD often referred clients to me for therapy. It just so happened that a few of these clients were gay people. Simultaneously with my studies at ITD, I also enrolled for a course in pastoral therapy at the *Coram Deo* Pastoral Care Centre at *Oosterlig* Dutch Reformed Church. The latter also referred people to me. Once I started doing therapy with gay people, the word spread that I did not want to "correct" their gayness and gay people started calling me. Soon I was overloaded with work and for a long time I completely forgot about doing research, just focusing on my own learning about being gay, as well as on the healing of the many wounds. This is in line with what many feminist researchers advocate: "Stop doing research and start doing something about the problem" (Reinharz 1992:178). Because of my experience at the point of insertion, I actively involved myself in the gay community over many years.

Although I started off by doing therapy with gay people, this action was already strongly research informed. While I was doing therapy I was also researching the gay discourse and in so doing I accumulated new knowledges and experience. It is only now, during the writing of my dissertation, that I have introduced a pertinent overt

research focus. This led to a temporary shift in my relationship with some of my gay co-travellers to include a research route in our journey and to contract them as participants in the research project. By that time, a relationship of trust was well established between me and individual members of the gay community, various gay congregations (mainly the Reforming Church's Pretoria and Johannesburg congregations and the Agalia Congregation in Pretoria), members of my support group, as well as participants in the DVD. They, while becoming as committed as I am to change the status quo, became one group of my conversational partners and co-researchers. McTaggart (1997:28) highlights the importance of group decision and commitment to improvement in the action research process. We adhered to these prerequisites.

Apart from my gay conversational partners, I had a second group of conversational partners. This group of participants included various members (especially leaders) of the DRC, members of the task team on homosexuality for the General Synod of the DRC, members of my DRC cell group, individual clients, a few DRC ministers, as well as colleagues and students from *Coram Deo* (a pastoral care centre where I currently lecture in Narrative Therapy). I am aware of the important role that churches play in forming opinions in society and realised that the perception of society in general would be impossible to change unless the views of churches are changed. The ideal would be to include as many denominations as possible in my research. Due to the limited scope of this dissertation and because of my involvement as a member of the DRC in two of the DRC's commissions on homosexuality (Southern Transvaal Synod and the General Synod), I have decided to exclude heterosexual members of other denominations as research partners.

### *Step 2. Proceeding in a spiral of steps*

In this section I revisited my diverse journey, continuously reflecting and evaluating the actions of my revisiting. I started with an account of the literature that had helped me to get an overview of how other authors in the field deconstructed discourses on homosexuality. The reader was also constantly introduced to some of the stories of gay Christians, indicating how their stories contributed to my own personal change towards gay people. The process of my personal perceptual change formed the basis

of various efforts to invite participation in order to change the perceptions of society, especially members of the DRC, of gay Christians. These efforts vary from the sharing of gay people's stories with members of the DRC, writing of letters to the DRC'S newspaper, *Kerkbode*, addressing various groups of members of the DRC, rewriting of a chapter on homosexuality in the senior catechism book of the DRC, introducing the topic of homosexuality in the senior students curriculum at *Coram Deo*, participating in a few radio programmes on the topic, addressing conferences, co-organising workshops for gays and their parents, and working as a member of the task team of the General Synod of the DRC's commission on homosexuality, to making a DVD where gays and a few heterosexuals share their viewpoints on various issues of homosexuality.

### *Step 3. Research agenda*

As part of my continuous reflection on and evaluation of my endeavours to invite participation, I formulated a few questions which I put to the members of the task team. The task team on homosexuality of the General Synod divided themselves in two groups, co-chaired by Drr Jorrie Potgieter and André Bartlett. The group under the chairmanship of Dr Potgieter (the gay-conditional group) referred to themselves as the group motivated from the Biblical-Christian tradition and represented an anti-gay relationships viewpoint – thus a more dogmatic approach. The group under the chairmanship of Dr Bartlett (the gay-unconditional group) did not refer to themselves in any specific way, but represented a viewpoint of accepting loving, monogamous gay relationships in the church – a more pastoral approach.

The following are questions for reflection put to the task team members:

- How did my journey with the task team affect you and your views on homosexuality?
- What in my journey with the task team affected you and your views on homosexuality?
- How do you understand Christ's law of love in connection with gay Christians?

#### *Step 4. Reflecting on my personal gay narrative*

Reinharz (1992:194) suggests that learning in any research project should occur on three levels, *viz.* the level of the person, of the problem and of the method. However, changing the researcher is not a common goal in feminist research, but rather a common consequence. In my journey with gay people, my own perceptual change preceded my research route. My own change led to a situation where I could start working on changing the perceptions of others. By getting to know gay Christians through their stories I could use aspects of my own journey to try and change gay discourse in the DRC.

I could, as participant observer and as participant artist of the conversation, in an inter-subjective way, assist in co-constructing meaning in the lives of others (Anderson & Goolishian 1988:384,385). By being allowed so intimately into the expert world of gay Christians, I, as the non-expert (Anderson & Goolishian 1992:28), have learnt a tremendous amount about what it means to be gay. I have also learnt a lot about myself, especially about the homophobic discourses which, for so long, have governed my perceptions about gay people. The disclosure of my own ignorance often filled me with disbelief, shame and sorrow, but it also helped me to have empathy and patience with a homophobic society. In reflecting on the effect the client has on the therapist, White (Wylie 1994:47) says: "Inevitably, we change each other's lives, often in ways that are hard to speak of... these interactions are life changing for me ..."

#### *Step 5. Reporting the research*

Reinharz (1992:211,112) compares feminist researchers to people embarking on important journeys. As the journey continues, the researcher draws on different methods or tools, determined by the "process of discovery". As researcher-traveler I have abandoned "disembodied objectivity", because I locate myself in time and space. This means that I acknowledge my own changes during the journey. The process format rejects the discourse of objectivity. The process becomes part of the

product, which becomes part of the process again as new discoveries are interwoven.

As the participants and I journeyed, we developed tools of reporting the research, depending on the discoveries made. Some tools or ways of reporting were fragments of conversations, letters, poems, drawings, speeches in drama form, diaries, interviews, etc. These forms of reporting reflect how the participants made sense of their experience of being gay or of being introduced to the stories of gay Christians.

In this research, I am embodied in the research as opposed to patriarchal research, where the researcher is detached and disembodied (Reinharz 1992:231). Therefore the research will be written up using the first person "I" or "we".

#### **1.10 LIMITATIONS OF THIS RESEARCH**

Sexuality, according to Wink (1999:63), lies on a continuum ranging from heterosexual to homosexual with many variations like bi-sexual and transgender in between these two extremes. This research focuses only on the stories of homosexual people and on changing the homophobic perceptions of members of the DRC towards them. I nevertheless acknowledge that similar problems may, for instance, be experienced by the bi-sexual and transgender community. This would, however, require another study and results from this study cannot simply be applied to other sexual orientations on the continuum.

Restricting my work to the DRC could be seen as a limitation. Gathering the perceptions of members from different denominations, and, if also homophobic by nature, trying to deconstruct and change them, would provide a broader scope of the situation. Due to the limited scope of this dissertation it was not possible. However, I am in the process of duplicating the DVD and distributing it to other denominations as well. Hopefully this limitation could thereby be overcome partially.

What could also be seen as a limitation is that I am heterosexual and am merely representing the gay community. I often found it difficult to recreate the context, the "sacred moments" that happened during therapy, in a way comprehensible to members of the DRC. In the end, the DVD proved a much better way of communicating, because the gay people could voice their own stories. However, in some instances, I detected a distance between members of the DRC and gay people

when in one another's company. Because I was standing in both worlds, it was then easier for me to help them bridge the gap. For example, one morning while we were shooting the DVD, the biology professor (straight) was standing next to André Muller (gay minister). I asked the professor whether he had ever spoken to a gay person personally. He replied in the negative. I then turned to André, touched his arm and said to the professor: *André is gay. You can speak to him. You have actually already spoken to him this morning. You can even touch him if you want to.* For a few moments the professor was flabbergasted. He then turned to André and gave him a hug. In situations like these, it seemed a benefit to be heterosexual, because it helped to form a bridge between gay and straight people.

### **1.11 RESEARCH REPORT STRUCTURE**

The research report is structured in the following chapters:

Chapter 1 contextualises the research by describing the background to the research, stating the problem and the aims, as well as the research approach. The discursive positioning, providing a broad conceptual framework for the study, is discussed. The guiding influence of contextual Practical Theology and pastoral care within a feminist theology of *praxis* is illuminated. A brief overview of the research journey justifies the research.

Chapter 2 describes the social construction of discourse on homosexuality, as well as practices of deconstructing gay antagonistic discourses by other researchers in the field.

Chapter 3 describes my personal transformation, as well as initial efforts to facilitate participation during my journey in order to change homophobic perceptions in the DRC. The reactions of both groups of participants to these efforts are also conveyed.

Chapter 4 briefly describes further endeavours towards deconstructing gay discourse through participation, and is permeated by the stories of gay Christians. It includes a description of the making of the DVD, as well as the impact it had on various members of the task team.

Chapter 5 entails feedback from members of my gay support group, and feedback from the task team members on my role in the task team. In this chapter a model of my journey to deconstruct gay discourse is also introduced. The model suggests relationships amongst four dimensions of gay discourse, viz. participation, context, dogma and prejudice.

Chapter 6 reflects on the research journey, the research approach and also on the model of deconstructing gay discourse. It also suggests possible implications for the training of DRC ministers, and for doing theology and pastoral care. The chapter ends with some suggestions for the road forward.

## CHAPTER 2: DECONSTRUCTING MYTHS AND DISCOURSES ON HOMOSEXUALITY

*Discourse about the world is not a reflection  
or map of the world but an artefact  
of communal interchange  
– Kenneth Gergen*

### 2.1 INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, I explore the social construction of homosexuality within the broader society, but also specifically within the context of the Dutch Reformed Church (DRC) in South Africa. Social construction takes place through discourse and power relationships by the use of language (Freedman & Combs 1996:23). As a member of the DRC, I explore the prevailing homophobic nature of gay beliefs within the DRC, as well as arguments from literature to deconstruct them. These arguments from literature guide me in my own endeavours to change homophobic discourse in the DRC. I thus explore how the use of narrative and social constructionist ideas facilitated processes whereby the narrative of Christian gays can transform perceptions of the DRC towards gay Christians.

Dawkins (2006:289) writes about atrocities committed against homosexuals by religious leaders in countries such as Afghanistan, Britain and America. He names atrocities like execution, chemical castration and comments like "AIDS is not just God's punishment for homosexuals; it is God's punishment for the society that tolerates homosexuals". In South Africa similar atrocities against gays are still taking place. On 12 July 2007, for example, a lesbian couple (Sigasa and Masooa) were executed in Soweto in what appears to have been "a hate crime committed by people who are intolerant of women and lesbians" (African Veil 2007:108). The ongoing heated debate in South Africa on homosexuality shows that societal attitudes about the topic vary between two sharply contrasting poles: from total acceptance to complete rejection, especially by church leaders. According to Professor Andrie du Toit (2007:281), renowned theologian in the DRC, the one pole starts with the *a priori* assumption that homosexuality is ethically wrong and that the Bible sanctions this position. This pole ignores or minimises the problem of constitutionally fixed homosexuality. The other pole denies the relevancy of those Biblical texts that were traditionally used to denounce homosexuality. Du Toit holds the opinion that these pronouncements should not merely be limited to either cultic sexual practices or to pederasty.



Regardless of where certain dominant church leaders position themselves with regard to the debate, they will influence the members of the church. As a powerful institution, the church determines the shape of the life narratives of its individual members. In any culture, some narratives will take dominance over others. These dominant narratives will specify the preferred ways of believing and of behaving in a specific culture. Sometimes this leads to the oppression of certain groups of believers. This happens when these narratives of the dominant cultural group are imposed on people of marginalised groups, like gay people (Freedman & Combs 1996:32). Stephen Parsons (2000:221), advisor on the ministry of Christian healing to the Bishop of Gloucester, affirms this when he writes about the different ways of understanding God's word and his will in particular churches. Certain parts of scripture are chosen in preference to other parts of scripture in the way the church is guided. According to Parsons, it is hard to see how the choices that are made will not, in some way, reflect the particular interests and concerns of those in leadership.

The current worldwide debate in churches with regard to homosexuality includes biological, psychological, social as well as religious discourses, and has the potential to cause division in and among churches worldwide. Wesley Granberg-Michaelsen (quoted in Myers & Scanzoni 2006:1) of the Reformed Church in America speaks for many denominational leaders when he says: "No issue today has as much potential to spawn divisiveness, mistrust, gossip, suspicion, and conflict in the church as this one". This potential of the gay issue to divide a church community became very vivid during the Anglican conferences at Kuala Lumpur in 1997 and at Lambeth in 1998 (Parsons 2000:137,138). Towards the end of the Lambeth conference, they decided not to debate the issue any further. A pastoral letter written by Ronald Haines, bishop of Washington, and signed by 182 delegates, expressed the need to continue "prayerful, respectful conversation", since "there is much we do not understand". The pastoral letter was a plea for humble seeking after truth as opposed to grasping it and codifying a certain "truth" in a non-negotiable way that might damage people. Rohr (foreword in Mattmann 2006:11) considers homosexuality as an emerging issue that institutional religion finds itself structurally most incapable of resolving. According to him, it reveals the limitations of managed religion. Since the 2002 DRC Synod this "humble seeking after truth" has also been the way chosen to deal with the issue of homosexuality, although it was difficult to prevent polarisation of opinions. The recent DRC task team's inability to come up with other than only a consensus and

differences report is a good example of the complexities of dealing with the issue of homosexuality. It could also be seen as the incapability of resolving the issue within institutional religion. Rohr (foreword in Mattmann 2006:12) ascribes this to the obligation of the denominations to please their constituencies and their donors in order to maintain religious credibility. Furthermore, he accuses the denominations of an inability to deal with mystery and to acknowledge it when they do not know.

Currently, the main argument of the debate in the DRC is about whether gay people should be unconditionally welcomed in the church as ministers, other officials as well as ordinary members of the congregation, by, among others, accepting their monogamous homosexual relationships. Or should they only be conditionally accepted, *viz.* if they remain celibate? (See 4.3) In other words, does homosexuality only become a sin when two people of the same sex enter into a sexual relationship with each other? What happens when this relationship between two gay people is a monogamous relationship of love and faithfulness, even a marital relationship? When does a relationship become sexual? Underlying these arguments are the differences in exegesis and hermeneutics of the few so-called "gay texts" in the Bible. Often the debate becomes so dry and academic that in the heat of the debate, the lived experiences of gay people as human beings in the church are completely forgotten (Hunt 1997:36).

The dominant gay narrative of the church has, for a long time, been problem-saturated, due to reiterated Biblical and cultural ideas or discourses. Many of these discourses were constructed in a patriarchal society and are homophobic by nature. Rich (cited in Poling 1996:128) defines patriarchy as the power of the fathers; a familial-social, ideological political system in which men determine what part women shall or shall not play. Women were thus put in an inferior position to men in society. The biggest humiliation for a man was to be treated like a woman. Due to the relationship between power and knowledge, many heterosexual Christians accept these Biblical discourses as "the truth" and subsequently reject gay Christians and their relationships. On the same basis, many gay Christians have internalised these patriarchal and homophobic ideas, which resulted in tremendously painful struggles within themselves, with society and with God. These struggles usually entail issues like their identity, religion, beliefs and relationships with fellow humans and with God. But how does it happen that these issues get socially constructed within a particular cultural context?

## **SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION DISCOURSE AND UNDERSTANDING OF GAYNESS**

The main premise of social constructionist thinking is that the beliefs, values, customs, laws, institutions, labels, divisions of labour, etc., that make up our social realities are culturally constructed from generation to generation and from day to day (Freedman & Combs 1996:16).

Paré (in Freedman & Combs 1996:20) says that the realities which we inhabit are those we negotiate with one another. According to Hoffman (1990:4), these realities will form the "lenses" through which members of a certain society will interpret the world. Social constructionist thinking thus cautions us to be critical towards our taken-for-granted ways of understanding ourselves and the world and to be suspicious of our assumptions about how the world appears to be (Burr 1995:3, 4, 64). It views knowledge (and what we regard as "truth") to be constructed through interactions between people in relations of power and to be historically and culturally relative.

Within this paradigm, it is of critical importance to understand that how we view gayness is also socially constructed. Even the fundamentalist viewpoints on homosexuality are only social constructs. Freedman and Combs (1996:23) consider a post-modern, narrative, social constructionist worldview to consist of ideas about how power, knowledge, and "truth" are negotiated within families and cultures. They view realities to be socially constructed through language, to be organised and maintained through narratives and to contain no essential truths.

This becomes clear through the narrative of a straight friend of mine (60 years old) regarding his perception about gay men. He made the statement that all gay men were child molesters. I asked him what he meant by the term "child molester" and how this idea of his had developed. He told me that during his standard eight year (1961) there was a standard nine gay boy in the same hostel where he stayed, who molested a young standard eight boy in the shower. *Did you witness it?* I asked him. *No*, he replied, *but there were stories. What stories?* I asked. *Stories that this older boy (standard nine) was masturbating in front of the younger boy*, he said. *How do you know both were not gay? Or how do you know that both were not straight, but were just exploring their sexuality by masturbating?* I asked him. *Or how do you*

*know the story was true? Can this story really qualify as child molesting?* He replied: *You're right. I don't know.*

I then asked him whether he knew any other gay men, upon which he answered that, since those days, he had ignored gay men as far as he could. He constructed a narrative about gay men and the societal discourse that gay men molest young boys kept that narrative alive. This narrative does not contain essential truths – a view that is fundamental in the narrative therapeutic approach.

The narrative approach in therapy developed from the idea that meaning is constructed socially within particular contexts through the use of language. Thus, in the context of our social history, by shaping stories about the groups we belong to and about how we came to be who, what and where we are, we make sense of our world and constitute something of our identity. These narratives come about within the social context of various discourses within a society that has a constitutive effect on the narrative process (Kotzé & Kotzé 1996:6). Sometimes people may feel that, instead of shaping the stories about their lives, the stories are shaping them. This feeling of loss of control quite often results in people seeking therapy (Monk et al. 1996:34, 35). Gay people often experience societal discourses prescribing to them how they should or should not be, what their identities as men or women should look like and whom they should fall in love with and whom they should not love.

The question could be asked whether social constructionism allows us any sense of personal agency and whether it denies our ability to reflect, to resist and to make choices. Does it abdicate our responsibility to determine the course of our own lives, including how we view ourselves, to the power of discourses? According to Burr (1995:89), this would be a very extreme viewpoint and is denied by many social constructionists, because it would exclude the possibility of change. Burr (1995:90) indicates that even Foucault allowed for some kind of personal agency. Although the person is "constituted by discourse, he/she is still capable of critical historical reflection and is able to exercise some choice with respect to the discourses and practices that it takes up for its own use".

Gergen (1985:266) emphasises that social constructionism views discourse about the world, not as a reflection or map of the world, but as an artefact of communal interchange. According to Burr (1995:90), this communal interchange entails that a

person becomes a "discourse-user" by referring to Gergen's idea of "warranting voice". Gergen (1989:7) believes people are motivated by the desire to give their own version of events against competing notions. We are all competing for 'voice,' or to be heard. As our voices gain power and the legitimate right to reality, other voices or discourses are subverted. A person then exists in a state of continuous construction and reconstruction: "Each reality of self gives way to reflexive questioning, irony, and ultimately the playful probing of yet another reality." I believe it is in this ongoing process of critical reflection and construction and reconstruction that personal agency plays a significant role. When we, for example, understand gay beliefs from an epistemological position as social constructions, it opens possibilities to link our own understanding not only to external given truths, but also to take responsibility for our own "taken for granted truths" and even to challenge them. Then we do not defend "the truth", but we seek "a truth".

## **2.2 POWER, DISCOURSE AND KNOWLEDGE AND UNDERSTANDING OF GAYNESS**

Poling (1991:12) views power as a complex issue with personal, social and religious connotations. According to Poling, all persons have some power, as well as an inner drive to use this power. Due to oppression, some are denied the chance to exercise their power, while others use their power in a destructive way. Society dictates how power is distributed, while institutions and ideologies determine who has the privilege to dominate and who will be dominated. According to Poling (1991:13), it is the responsibility of religious leaders to "choose whether to collude with the dominant culture as sanctioning agents of abusive power or to be prophetic critics of the way power is distributed and defined". I have invited moral responsibility for inclusivity in the DRC instead of domination and exclusion of gay Christians. When this happens, religious leaders of the DRC will become prophetic critics of the way power is distributed and defined.

According to Barker (1993:78), Foucault views power not as an object that can be possessed, but as something that is exercised, and which only exists in action. Foucault (1982:217) suggests that "power as such does not exist ... it is exerted over things and gives the ability to modify, use, consume, or destroy them ..." Poling (1991:24, 25) believes that power is synonymous with life itself. To live is to desire

power to relate to others. It is not a one-way effect on others, but relative in terms of our relation to other persons. Power is seen as the energy sustaining internal relationships. Poling (1991:24) describes ideal power as being aware of people's vulnerability, but also of the creative energy power can produce. When you take responsibility for your side of the relation, this will keep you from abusing your power when someone else is vulnerable. In my journey with gay Christians in the DRC I have often experienced the gay ministers and other gay clergy to be exceptionally vulnerable, forever anxiously peeping over their shoulders, guarding every word and every action in an effort to conceal their sexual orientation. Sadly, it is also often in these situations that the abuse of power is rife. Gay ministers and gay clergy have shared with me that it sometimes happens that they resort to substance abuse in order to cope with the constant anxiety. Sometimes, in their situation of vulnerability, they entrust their "secrets" to a "trusted" colleague. What often happens next is that they become victims of constructive dismissal. Once, even while a client of mine - a gay youth worker- was in a rehabilitation centre receiving treatment for her addiction, the DRC minister, his lawyer and the chairman of the church council visited her. They had a letter which she had to sign as acceptance of the ending of her contract. The gay issue never got mentioned, but the coincidence just seemed too big (see Appendix E).

According to Barker (1993:78), Foucault is of the opinion that there are no relations of power without resistances. Foucault (1982:221) argues that power is exercised only over free subjects; in the case of slavery, the relationship is rather one of constraint. He considers the resistance of the will and the irreconcilability of freedom to be at the heart of the power relationship. Poling (1991:33) draws an analogy between human resistance to the abuse of power and Jesus' resistance to the power and principalities of his time. For many victims standing up against the abuse of power, Jesus has become an inspiring figure of hope in the midst of evil. In listening to the stories of gay Christians and witnessing their courageous actions to overcome rejection and humiliation in the church, I have seen the redemption of God's power. Their stories, as Poling (1991:33) puts it, are "testimony to the resilient God who has been revealed in Jesus Christ".

Barker (1993:78) considers a consequence of Foucault's view of power to be his notion that "Truth" cannot be separated from its production within power/knowledge relations. According to Foucault (1982:212), the way in which knowledge circulates

and functions should be questioned. Flaskas and Humphreys (1993) emphasise Foucault's notion of "...the productive potential of power...", because it creates discourses and knowledge. Foucault (1989:28) views a discourse as the "repressive presence of what it does not say," because it has the power to determine what is permitted to be said and what should remain "not-said". Power thus has an influence on how knowledge is created and on the marginalisation of "alternative" knowledges (Kotzé & Kotzé 1996:10). Monk et al. (1996:35) view a discourse as a set of more or less coherent stories or statements about the way we should be. Therefore it often has a prescriptive function. Parker (1989:61) underscores Foucault's argument that what counts as true knowledge is defined by the individual, but what is permitted to count is defined by discourse. What is spoken and who may speak are issues of power. Discourses organise and exclude forms of knowledge and help organise interpersonal relations as power relations. What is considered to be coherent or meaningful depends very much on power relations. These relations have the potential to be unequal, because of the suppression of certain knowledges.

Poling (1991:29) refers to the effects of social power inequalities as follows: "[It] becomes occasions for the abuse of power. Those who are powerful can organise societies in such a way that those who are vulnerable are denied the full resources that life has to offer".

It was the injustice of these power inequalities that struck me and which motivated me to embark on this journey with gay people. When we as Christians exclude gay people from the church and from the kingdom of heaven, we play God and deny them the full resources a child of the King of Kings should enjoy. We create, among others, a discourse that God has entered into an eternal covenant with straight people only. But within a social constructionist epistemology, this discourse on knowledge about gay people that upholds the abuse of power can change.

According to Anderson and Goolishian (1991), knowledge is the social construction of people in their attempt to live together in this world. It is negotiated meaning within the context of linguistic interaction (Kotzé & Kotzé 1996:3). This implied changeable nature of meanings and their relation to the complex webbing of power in social interactions is fundamental to narrative therapy (Monk et al. 1996:38). The meanings that we give to events do not occur in a vacuum: The stories of our lives are always formed within a certain context. This context contributes to how we interpret and give

meaning to events. The meanings are not neutral in their effects on our lives, but shape and constitute our stories about our past, present and future. "We are always negotiating and interpreting our experiences" (Morgan 2000:8, 9). This started to happen when I asked my friend about the validity of his story about gays who molest younger boys. These questions were actually deconstructing or undoing this "truth" of his about gay men. But what do we mean by the term "deconstruction" and how can it be applied to change gay discourse?

### **2.3 DECONSTRUCTION AND ITS USE TO CHANGE GAY DISCOURSE**

Deconstruction was a rarely used French word, meaning the grammatical re-arrangement of words in a sentence, or as a verb, meaning to dis-assemble a machine. Jacques Derrida, a French philosopher, used the term to designate a double movement: both dis-ordering, or dis-arrangement, and also re-arranging (cited in Collins & Mayblin 1996:91). Derrida's term "deconstruct" refers to attempts to undo, not to destroy, the traditional Western structuralist thinking on hierarchies of binary oppositions founded on the core identity theory (Sampson 1989:7). Derrida uses the concepts that he wants to undo to explain what he means. He does this by placing a term under erasure (*sous rature*), telling us that we need the term in order to understand the points being made. Simultaneously, we should not use the term. In other words, we cross a word out because it is incorrect, but because it is necessary, it remains legible. This strategy enables Derrida to employ the familiar and commonly known in order to deconstruct the familiar and commonly known. For example, if a gay person in therapy should present his/her problem as not being good enough, we should use the term *not good enough* to understand the points being made. We attempt to undo the term and because the term is not correct, we cross it out, putting it under erasure in order not to use the term again.

Another term, *differance*, which captures the deconstructive process in a single word, is a neologism created by Derrida (cited in Collins & Mayblin 1996:75). The term embraces two meanings: difference and deferral (the lapse between absence and presence). According to Collins and Mayblin (1996:48), Derrida defines presence through absence, which means that self-consciousness is an indirect and mediated experience. This is why social and historical traces can enter and can structure the experience of self, even as they are unavailable to presence and awareness. This



idea puts ideology at the core of personhood; it constitutes the person. The person as a subject of study is constructed in and through a symbolic system that fixes the subject in place, yet remains beyond the person's mastery. Ideology is an aspect of the symbolic universe that fixes the subject in service of cultural/institutional requirements and practices. The symbolic order is governed by an endless process of *differance*. Both meanings of the term, difference and deferral or undecidability, disrupt or destabilise binarism and thus metaphysical thinking. Heterosexuality can only be understood in the absence of heterosexuality or in the presence of homosexuality and vice versa. The subject can change the "fixings" and so accomplishes a structural change. Therefore, if ideology and the symbolic order about homosexuality change, societal and cultural prescriptions about homosexuality will also change.

According to Derrida (Collins & Mayblin 1996:92, 93), the term "deconstruction" cannot be defined, but is better described as a *suspicion against thinking "what is the essence of?"* In challenging the core identity theory, Derrida's logic of the supplement seeks to discover within the meaning of any single term its opposite member, for example, A and not-A. A is both A and not-A: each term contains both itself and its other. In using the term "homosexuality", its meaning would then contain itself and its other, whether that is not-homosexuality or heterosexuality. By defining everything by what it is not, it makes it impossible to see entities/ideas in opposition with one another, but one rather sees them as being different from one another. This complies with social constructionist thinking, questioning ideas about absolute *truths* and efforts to define concepts (or people) in simplistic ways according to their *essences*. This could be one of the problems with the church and homosexuality: some of the church leaders are trying to get to the essence of the homosexual person by working with binary oppositions, instead of acknowledging the complexity of personhood and by moving across and between the metaphysical opposites (Collins & Mayblin 1996:94). According to Sampson (1989:4), society constitutes and inhabits the very core of whatever passes as personhood: each is interpenetrated by its other. This constitution of personhood takes place in and through language (Sampson 1989:8).

Burr (1995:164) views deconstruction as the taking apart of texts in order to see how they are constructed in such a way as to present particular images of people and their actions. In terms of how Derrida would see deconstruction, this would mean

looking at texts in a particular discipline, revealing their hidden contradictions and making the absent or repressed meanings present for the reader, showing how we are led by the text into accepting the assumptions it contains. White (1991:29) focuses on the effects of this unmasking of assumptions by referring to people experiencing a separation and alienation in relation to assumptions which used to rule their lives. This opens up a new space for "alternative and preferred knowledge of who the person might be". Gay people are often ruled by assumptions or discourses about their personhood, for example, they are sinful, or they are rejected by God, or they have chosen to be gay, or they should try and change their sexual orientation. Once these assumptions are unmasked, it opens up new space for alternative knowledges about the person's identity, for example, every part of him/her was created by God, carefully put together in his/her mother's womb by God (Ps 139: 13, 15), or values like honesty, sensitivity and creativity start to emerge as new discourses in the space of the dominant discourses.

In this study, the focus is on the deconstruction of gay discourse. It is therefore important first to discuss how some of the discourses on sexuality, and then, more specifically, on homosexuality, were constructed.

## **2.4 SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF DISCOURSES ON SEXUALITY**

Foucault (1986:22) considers sexuality to be socially constructed. Through history Christian theologians have regarded sexuality as problematic. Human sexuality was viewed as a threat to the spiritual life and practice of a Christian. To protect the Christian soul from the danger of sexuality, strategies like celibacy and the restriction of sexual practice within narrow bounds were devised (Stuart 1997:178). In the Modern Age, the truths of life are thought to reside in the depth of the human being. According to this discourse, these truths could be released through confession (the religious and the psychoanalytic are the paradigmatic examples). This resulted in a myth about sexual repression and liberation. According to this myth, the Victorian age was known for the suppression of sexuality. Foucault (cited in Parker 1989:61) considers this discourse as dangerous, because the very discourse which is supposed to bring about liberation causes "a condition of a more insidious oppression". Discourses that relate sexuality to personal self-definitions produce an armoury of categories and labels which typify sexual minorities against a norm.

As the above example shows, our identity is constructed out of discourses socially available to us. Burr (1995:51, 52) asserts that people's identities are constructed by a subtle interweaving of many different "threads". There is, for example, a thread for age, gender, race, social orientation, etc. Each of these "threads", woven together, forms a person's identity and is constructed through a limited number of discourses available in his or her culture. The discourses of sexuality that are on offer in our culture offer a restricted menu for the creation of sexual identity. Some newer discourses, like gay discourses, are gaining ground. However, two well established discourses on sexuality call us to identify ourselves with respect to them. The one is "normal" sexuality (natural, morally right, heterosexual, etc.) and the other is "perverted" sexuality (unnatural, immoral, homosexual, etc.). Gergen (1985:268) reminds us that the definition of morality "floats on a sea of social interchange".

Stuart (1997:179) considers the South African churches to be deeply divided on issues of human sexuality and Christian ethics and morality, due to a reappraisal by theologians of the inherited discourses on sexuality and their related practices. Human sexuality has more recently been regarded as both potentially positive (as a gift from God to be enjoyed) and potentially harmful (if this gift is abused, if it dehumanises and manipulates). The traditional preoccupation with trying to control human sexuality to safeguard the soul, where celibacy was the ideal and marriage the alternative next best option, is now reversed. Marriage is now the ideal and celibacy an alternative option. On 1 December 2006, this option of marriage also became possible for the gay community in South Africa when the Civil Union Act was endorsed by the President (Republic of South Africa 2006). Unfortunately, at this stage the DRC does not condone gay relationships, let alone gay marriages. This was one of the proposals in one part of the report of the task team put to the General Synod of the DRC on 6 June 2007.

#### **2.4.1 Social construction of discourses on homosexuality**

Hendrik Hart (foreword in Pronk 1993:vii) considers the core of the issue of homosexuality in our culture to be the importance all of us attach to our sex and our gender and the effect of these on our self-identity. Sex and gender respectively refer to our reproductive roles and our socialisation of them. Although gays are capable of playing the same reproductive role and are socially similar to heterosexuals, we need

a third category, namely sexual orientation, to deal with them adequately. Sometimes gays accept certain gender traits not traditionally associated with their sex. This often confuses and threatens heterosexuals, whether emotionally, socially, morally, religiously, or even more deeply in the core of their personhood. In our culture manhood is often connected with issues of power and domination. Anything that tends to undermine this power can be perceived as threatening. Gay men are often viewed as feminine, and the idea that gay men are still men in the full sense of the word confuses men's sense of manhood, because men should be different from all that is womanly (Pronk 1993:viii).

This fear and feeling of being threatened in some way is called homophobia. According to Hart (foreword in Pronk 1993:viii), the term does not mean hatred towards gays, but rather a feeling of anxiety to fully accept them. Homophobia often results in the rejection of homosexuals. Often gay people themselves develop homophobia towards other gays. Cilliers (1999:68) describes how he internalised this feeling of anxiety and self-hatred because of himself being gay to such an extent that he started to portray it to other gays. The thought of accepting himself as gay became so overwhelming that he too became homophobic. Although internalised homophobia does prevail among some gay people, Kitzinger (1993:101) warns therapists doing counselling with gay people not to ascribe *other problems* which clients may seek therapy for as having their origins in internalised homophobia. A typical example would be if a client has an eating disorder and the therapist ascribes the causes of the eating disorder to the client being rejected because she is gay.

Homophobia has very painful effects on gay people and their families. According to Kitzinger (1993:75), it could mean rejection by parents, children and siblings. It could mean losing a job or losing one's children. It could mean being mocked, ridiculed, or physically assaulted. Suzy Stiles (cited in White & Denborough 2005:27, 28) reports about the continual self-policing of gays at work or in public places, namely: *Do they know? What will they think? Is this the right time to say it? Will they reject me? Will I still get that job? Can we hold hands? Is it safe here? Will they stare? Will they attack?* According to Stiles, working out when to hide and when not consumes a lot of energy. On the other hand, she shares how good it feels if this energy is released in a safe environment, such as when heterosexual people acknowledge and learn more about the problem of homophobia and the pain it causes, and accept their own responsibility in the matter. Her reaction to the latter was one of anger, gratefulness,

pride, shock that people were actually listening with respect to her stories, fear to expose too much, relief that she could, and, at times, being moved to tears by such a "tumultuous stew." During some of our sessions at the task team, the one gay theologian, Judy, was also very emotional from time to time. I now wonder whether it could have been because of some of the above factors. She told me that she had actually "come out" in church circles in the presence of the task team members.

As far as the effect of homophobia on families is concerned, I was moved by the story of a mother in our support group for parents of gay children at the Reforming Church. This mother explained why she had left the DRC after her son came out. According to her, it was the loneliest time in her life. She experienced existential loneliness. After 30 years of having been an active member of the DRC, there was nobody she could turn to with regard to her son's homosexuality, least of all her minister. It was probably homophobia which kept her from exposing her son and herself. Or maybe it was homophobiaphobia – a fear of homophobians – which initially kept her "in the closet".

Hart (foreword in Pronk 1993:viii) views homophobia as a moral issue, because rejecting another human being is immoral, but accepting homosexuals and their behaviour is also considered immoral on Biblical and religious grounds. A conflict of guilt develops: guilt towards gays and guilt towards God. This conflict is what led a straight theologian in the task team to say to a gay theologian on the task team: "I don't sleep well at night due to the hurt I'm causing you through my viewpoint on homosexuality, but the Bible does not allow me to have a different viewpoint" (Muller 2007:15). Poling (1996:110) considers these claims to virtue, love, and justice as masks, sanctioning evil through religion. His definition of evil is worth mentioning:

Genuine evil is the abuse of power that destroys bodies and spirits, evil is produced by personal actions and intentions which are denied and dissociated by individuals, evil is organized by economic forces, institutions and ideologies, but mystified by appeals to necessity and truth, evil is sanctioned by religion, but masked by claims to virtue, love and justice.

Peck (1990:49) stresses that healing is the result of love. Where there is no healing, there is no love, but there is evil. This resonates with what one of the task team members who is also gay (see 5.3.2) remarked about one's reaction to love: "If there is true love, there will be healing of wounds, not deeper wounds". Peck (1990:49)

confirms this when adding to his description of the result of love: "[where there is love] there will be warmth and light and laughter, and spontaneity and joy, and service and human caring".

When I reflect on the conflict of guilt in the task team theologian referred to above, I need to consider the possibility that he probably still feels safer within the dominant discourse, *viz.* the Bible says to be gay is wrong. But because this discourse is not neatly packed and sealed in a box, it could be that his heart is already accepting the alternative discourse. This corresponds to comments from another member of the task team (see 5.3.2) who complained that he experienced conflicting viewpoints in the gay-conditional group. According to him, he experienced a strong tendency among his own task team members not to make bold statements on, for example, reorientation. They were rather careful in that respect. Could it be that more of the task team members have already become uncomfortable in the dominant discourse on homosexuality? Nevertheless I would not like to imprison anyone in the dominant discourse.

During our journey of almost two years as members of the task team, it seems to me that the focus was very much on whether the Bible condones homosexuality and the various aspects surrounding the matter, especially how gays should be accommodated in the church. Stuart (1997:184) considers the real issue to be addressed not how gays and lesbians are to be accommodated in the churches and whether the Bible really condemns homosexuality: "Since the Bible itself is innocent of the conceptions of heterosexuality and homosexuality, the real issues ... are what is a heterosexual and ... what is a homosexual?" To ask these questions is to open up an enquiry into the origins of, especially, the constructions of homosexuality. It will also disclose the complicity of the churches (along with lawyers, policemen, medical practitioners, psychologists and psychiatrists) in the process of their construction.

I believe that the socially constructed categories and labels typifying negative perceptions or discourses on homosexuality referred to above act as hurdles in the process of the DRC understanding and embracing gay Christians as members of the body of Christ. In the same way, deconstructing these negative categories and reconstructing alternative discourses could lead to a better understanding of gays and of accepting gay Christians unconditionally in the church. Therefore I would like

to discuss the social construction and reconstruction of some of these discourses in more detail.

#### **2.4.1.1 The term "homosexuality" and/or "gayness"**

I have already described the origin of the term "homosexual" in chapter 1 (1.2). Grey (1992:xiii) considers the term "gay" to have become an essentially political statement as the chosen self-description of men who are open and unapologetic about their homosexuality. Du Plessis (1999:1) indicates that "gay" has become an alternative term for homosexuality, although it is not always an accurate term to describe the lives of homosexuals in a predominantly heterosexual society. Many gays are not "gay", due to the constant humiliation and rejection they experience. Some gay women prefer the word "lesbian." This word is deduced from the Greek island Lesbos, where the famous poet Sappho lived in 7 BC and where she ran a school for girls. A survey done by a local gay magazine, *Outright*, points to 54% of South African homosexual women preferring the term "gay" to "lesbian." Only 29% preferred the term "lesbian" (Du Plessis 1999:3).

Homosexuality or being gay does not only refer to the sexual attraction to persons of one's own sex. According to Anthonissen and Oberholzer (2001:35), as well as Du Plessis (1999:1), it refers to the love, emotional involvement and sexual attraction and behaviour between people of the same sex.

However, Du Plessis (1999:2) underscores the notion that both hetero- and homosexuals may engage in sexual activity contrary to their sexual orientation. This happens when a gay person, for example, enters into a relationship with a person of the opposite sex or when a heterosexual person enters into a relationship with someone of the same sex. Such experiences could leave the person physically satisfied, but not emotionally and psychologically. It often happens that gay people who are married to heterosexual people get involved in extra-marital affairs with people of the same sex. This can be seen as proof of the yearning for their own kind.

A 32-year-old gay woman married to a man once explained it to me: *when a gay person is married to a straight person, it is like two souls longing to meet, but who just cannot make the spiritual connection.*

#### **2.4.1.2 The development of a gay orientation**

Many conflicting theories on how a gay orientation is formed developed throughout history. These theories include a perverse choice, seduction by older gays, being raised by smothering mothers and absent fathers, chance conditioning, traumatic early heterosexual experiences, and genetics (Wilson & Rahman 2005:9). Societal attitudes also varied from tolerance and amusement to moral outrage and psychiatric classification as a mental illness. Most religions around the world regard being gay as sinful and consider it as being against God's divine plan. Research on the causes of homosexuality began at a time when being gay was pathologised (Wilson & Rahman 2005:9).

Wilson and Rahman (2005:10), a psychiatrist and a psycho-biologist, have combined their own research findings on the origin of sexual orientation and of homosexuality with the available quantifiable research. These two researchers came to the following conclusion: "Modern scientific research indicates that sexual orientation is largely determined by the time of birth, partly by genetics, but more specifically by hormonal activity in the womb arising from various sources".

The research findings of the group researchers at the Karolinska University Hospital in Sweden (2005) are especially valuable in supporting the notion that biology plays a part in the sexual attraction between people. Savic, Berglund and Lindström (2005:7356) determined that our brain reacts differently to the two putative pheromones (testosterone and estrogen), compared with common odours, and suggest a link between sexual orientation and hypothalamic neuronal processes.

Du Plessis (1999:7) considers that merely asking the question: "What causes homosexuality?" presupposes the assumption that all people are born with the predisposition to be heterosexual. It creates the idea that homosexuality is a deviant form of sexuality and that something went wrong with that person's development. Gamson (2003:544) points out how even liberal researchers often tended to share the taken for granted picture of homosexuals as sick, dangerous or criminal. After the growth of the feminist and lesbian movements in the 1960s and 1970s, sexuality studies tried to redress the pathologised and stigmatised status of homosexuals. Although primarily conducted by sex researchers trained in medicine and natural sciences and working from a positivist model, searching for objective truths, these



studies often began with the assumption that homosexuality is a deviation from the normal. Their aim was more often than not to decipher the roots of pathology. As Gamson (2003:544) puts it:

That homosexuality officially remained a psychiatric disorder until 1973, when it was removed from the American Psychiatric Association's Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders after much struggle, captures the political link between "scientific" study of homosexuality and the stigmatized, pathologized social status of homosexuals.

Instead of perpetuating the pathologising status of homosexuals, Du Plessis argues that one should rather ask: "what causes sexual orientation as such?". That would open up the possibility that homosexuality is just a normal variant of sexuality and that both hetero- and homosexuality originate from the same origin (Du Plessis 1999:7).

Spong (2001:6) does not believe that homosexual people are abnormal, mentally sick, or morally depraved. He regards any sacred text that suggests otherwise as being both wrong and ill-informed. According to Spong, sexuality itself, including all sexual orientations, is morally neutral and can be lived out either morally or immorally. He regards the spectrum of human sexuality as broad. On this spectrum, some percentage of the human population is at all times oriented toward people of their own gender. This is how life is. Not to accept this is to participate in practices of prejudiced ignorance.

Spong (2001:14) refers to those in the Christian Right in America who still define homosexuality as a choice made by people who are mentally ill or morally depraved. If mentally ill, these victims should seek a cure; if morally depraved, they should seek conversion and end their sinful ways. Spong considers those supporting these viewpoints as not only being ignorant, but as being fraudulent. According to him, this mentality is countered by the overwhelming medical, scientific, and psychological data. The latter suggest that homosexuality is more like left-handedness.

One of the most common misperceptions about a gay orientation is that it is a choice. Every gay person I have spoken to in this regard has asked me the question: "Who would choose to be gay, who would choose to be rejected by society and the church? Who will choose to be gay if he/she knows that a lifetime of humiliation and rejection is awaiting him or her?" In figure 2 is a drawing by a young gay male client

of mine showing the agony felt due to his realisation that he is gay. The drawing pictures him as being voiceless, both as a child and as a young man. Who would choose so much agony? This is supported by a 19-year-old boy who came to see me shortly after another school boy on his bicycle had shouted at him: "*Hi you f... queer!*" It was just the last straw. He was suicidal. If it had been a choice, would it have had such an effect on this young boy? His story is described in chapter 4 (see 4.2.1).



**Figure 2. Drawing by a male gay client**

According to Du Plessis (1999:7), to be gay only becomes a question of choice in the case of bisexuality. Bisexual people often find it extremely difficult to make that choice. A bisexual lady commented to me one evening: "*I find it extremely difficult to choose whether I should be with the woman I love or with the man I love. Either way it doesn't work.*" For the real gay person, the choice is only between acceptance and rejection of himself or herself as a gay person.

Stereotypes from the sixties about the origin of a gay orientation refer to family dynamics. Domineering or strong mothers and absent or weak fathers (Cilliers 1999:59, Du Plessis 1999:7), seduction of young boys or learnt behaviour (Mussen, Conger & Kagan 1969:637, 697) were considered to be some of the causes of homosexuality. The stereotype that being gay is caused by domineering mothers and absent fathers has developed in a general discourse, viz. gay children become gay because of something the parents have done wrong.

#### **2.4.1.3 Gayness is caused by something the parents have done wrong**

During the sixties, people often referred to family dynamics in order to explain the origin of homosexuality (Du Plessis 1999:7; Pallotta-Chiarolli 2005:47). Many of the early studies were done with clients of counsellors instead of researching with happy and healthy families. Du Plessis (1999:7) debunks the theory of dominating mothers and weak fathers, because too many heterosexual children were exposed to the same family dynamics. The belief that parents have done something wrong amplifies the voice of guilt in parent's ears. Like one mother of a gay son told me: *In matric my son was involved with a girl. I did not approve of the relationship, because he had to study. Maybe I came on too strong. If only I did not ...*

On 31 July 2007, the Rev André Muller and I started a support group for parents of gay children at the Reforming Church in Pretoria. At the very first meeting it struck me how guilt and self-blaming tried to get the better of these parents. As one mother put it: *You never stop asking yourself what you had done wrong, what you should have done differently in bringing up your child. You blame yourself, your husband, everybody and everything.*

I question this belief due to the many stories revealing good relationships between parents and children. Many letters I have received from parents and children written to each other confirm this, like, *I have sent this letter to my dad this morning: Out of the blue my heart is filled with thankfulness that the Lord gave me a dad who understands my sensitive nature. Thank you very much for that. Love, D.* Or, a letter written by a mother after her son, a gay minister, had come out to her:

*My dearest son*

*Life does not always work out according to plan. God always has a purpose with our lives. He does not make mistakes. Stay as you are, work for the Lord, no one will ever snatch you out of His hands. I've got peace in my heart, God's peace, which is far beyond human understanding. To me you remain the same child who sat on my lap and who lives in my heart and who wanted to become a minister from a very young age. I love you and pray for you."*

Wilson and Rahman (2005:36) consider efforts to blame parents or teachers for a child's homosexuality as futile and unjust. If parental influences on sexual orientation were strong, then children raised by gay parents should also be gay. Studies by J. Michael Bailey and associates (Wilson & Rahman 2005:36) on 55 gay men and their 82 sons (from previous heterosexual relationships) show that 91% of the sons were heterosexual and only 9% were gay. Research done by Golombok and Tasker (1996) on the children of lesbian mothers concurs with the findings from Bailey's group (Wilson and Rahman 2005:37). This corresponds to research findings that about 10% of the general population is gay.

Another stereotype about the development of a gay orientation is that it is learnt behaviour and that gay people can be reorientated.

#### **2.4.1.4 It is learnt behaviour and thus gay people can be re-orientated**

Du Plessis (1999:8) reports about a pastoral therapist of the DRC who described homosexuality as learnt behaviour. The therapist tried to explain homosexuality by linking it to parent-child relationships and to educational patterns. The implication thereof is that homosexuality can, just like any other learnt behaviour, be unlearned with the right assistance. According to Du Plessis, this outdated idea can do great harm, especially when it is offered from a position of authority, coupled with Christian love and care. This is illustrated in the following story.

One evening at 10 pm, my phone rang. It was a mother of a gay son crying hysterically, pleading on the one hand and demanding on the other hand to change her son's sexual orientation. She said that a minister had told her that homosexuality could be reversed. I tried to calm her down in order to get her name and telephone number and to try and understand what the voice of Fear was trying to convince her

of. After a while she calmed down a bit and made an appointment for the following day. This call made a huge impression on me, mainly because it made me aware of the immense pain and anxiety a mother can experience when she realises that her child is gay. The prejudice from society, as well as the fear of rejection by friends, family and the church, was so big in this mother's case that she would rather see her son dead than gay. Although I was in pain with her, I could not even begin to understand what it was like for a mother in this country to "come out" with her child. This strengthened my resistance to the injustices of society and the church against gay people.

When one considers behavioural change in the context of homosexuality, one needs to differentiate between a gay orientation and homosexual behaviour (Steyn 2007:198, 199). The latter refers to sexual behaviour between persons of the same sex which can be executed by both hetero- and homosexuals (in loving relationships, clubs, one-night stands, prisons, hostels, etc.). A gay orientation refers to a disposition where a person has a physical, emotional and spiritual yearning for members of the same sex. A person can be aware of his/her homosexual orientation without a sexual encounter with a person of the same sex. When a heterosexual person in prison, for example, resort to homosexual behaviour, but changes to his normal heterosexual behaviour once he is out of prison, it cannot be said that this person changed his sexual orientation, because his orientation had been heterosexual from the beginning.

The fear of rejection and the desire to be loved are universal needs. Nearly all people want their friends and family members to be proud of them. Sometimes they resort to desperate measures to do so, like when gays who are rejected try to change their sexual orientation. Reparative therapists and the ex-gay ministries offer false hope and magic cures to desperate people (Besen 2000:6).

There are various movements that have as their aim to change homosexuals to become heterosexuals. Exodus International is one such movement. It is a Christian group "dedicated to equipping and uniting agencies and individuals to effectively communicate the message of liberation from homosexuality" (Ponticelli 2005:155-160). Unlike religions that condemn homosexuals, they proclaim homosexuality as a sin from which one can be converted and healed by breaking sin's power. Generally lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender communities malign the ex-gay movement,

but those who find it difficult to accept themselves are drawn to this option and promise to change. What makes the Exodus option even more appealing to stay with is the affirmation of an infinite and imperfect process which could last a lifetime until "Jesus returns". The progression to "wholeness" may never end.

Furthermore, any individual can profess a willingness and devotion to engage in a personal struggle "out of the lifestyle". Unfortunately, only the individual gay person will know what he or she truly thinks, believes, feels and desires. Because freedom from homosexuality encompasses more than mere behavioural change, it becomes almost impossible to determine success or failure. In September 2000, *Exodus International* was given a huge blow when their manager of *Focus on the Family's homosexuality and gender* division, John Paulk, was photographed while visiting a gay bar. *Exodus International* removed him as chairperson of the Board. According to Besen (2003:15, 16), despite Paulk's public protestations he never changed his sexual orientation. John Paulk has become "living proof" that changing sexual orientation is highly unlikely and is certainly not through the ex-gay movement or through reparative therapy.

Cilliers (1999:60) explains how a psychologist tried to "heal" him through the use of aversion or shock therapy. After two years of giving it his all, he realised that he was still gay. That invited depression back into his life. Many reparative therapists today no longer use methods like shock or aversion therapy, but abusive methods are still employed more often than most will admit (Besen 2003:140). One Thursday morning the gay son of a minister told me about his struggle with his gay identity and how it eventually progressed to a struggle with God. A psychologist/therapist told him to write all his thoughts about men in a booklet and to replace them with similar thoughts about women, while praying non-stop to the Lord to change him. He only tried to do it for two days, because it did not work. For six years he went from psychologist to therapist, but could not change.

Eventually he realised that all his prayers and efforts to change had invited depression into his life and distanced him from God. It felt as if God had forsaken him, because there was never any change. He became so despondent. Today he believes that God made him so, but he ignores the seven so-called gay texts in the Bible. Another client told me how a psychologist told him in 2001 to imagine standing

at a train station. He had to "put" his homosexuality on the train, allowing the train to leave with his homosexuality. Needless to say, when the train left, he was still gay.

According to Besen (2003:140), the most common abuse by reparative therapists like Nicolosi is the "sin of omission." Therapists would, for example, lie to their patients by telling them that there is no such thing as a happy homosexual. Nicolosi writes in his book, *Reparative therapy of male homosexuality* (1997:149): "I do not believe that any man can ever be truly at peace in living out a homosexual orientation". This is an absurd statement, especially to millions of openly gay and lesbian men and women who have led fulfilling lives. I have personally journeyed with hundreds of gay people who took control back from their dominant problem-saturated stories of depression and anxiety and of not being good enough, by re-authoring their life stories as happy, fulfilled and worthy human beings. This usually happens when they experience that they are accepted as normal human beings with their identities as gay people in Christ.

About four years ago, I started doing care with a young gay man who has been on a course at *Living Waters* (a Christian denomination) for a year to try changing his orientation. Subsequently, he had also undergone exorcism at another denomination. Nothing helped to change him. One evening he told me: *In the mornings I humiliate, I humble myself before the Lord. I see and experience Him as I have never done before. I plead with Him to change me, but it seems as if He does not want to. I still believe He will eventually. I just cannot be gay. My parents are hurting too much. I feel extremely vulnerable.* Two years ago he shared the following incident with me:

*Tuesday my ex-boyfriend and I went for breakfast. At the table next to us a mother was sitting, holding her baby on her shoulder. It looked so completely vulnerable. At that moment I heard the Lord's voice saying to me: "This is how I feel about you. I know that you are vulnerable under these circumstances and that you cannot help yourself very well at the moment. It is okay with Me."*

Today, four years after our initial appointment, he has accepted the fact that he is gay. He is a member of the Reforming Church and participates in the praise and worship in the church. He lives a happy and fulfilled life. All his broken relationships with his parents and family members who rejected him initially have been restored. He is still not in a relationship, but is now praying and trusting in the Lord to help him find the right life partner.

The book, *Finally Free* (Besen 2000:6) contains stories of ex-ex gays. In his introduction to the book, Besen writes:

All these stories are true. They are about real people across America who gave up years of their lives and suffered through grave psychological trauma because they bought the lie that being gay made them defective and less than whole human beings. A common thread in each essay ... is how desperately these individuals tried to conform and reject their sexual orientation. Methods of change included all-night prayer sessions, exorcisms, fasting, lipstick application seminars for lesbians and endless, expensive sessions with so-called "reparative" therapists.

*Finally Free* is dedicated to Stuart Mathis, who committed suicide because he could not change his sexual orientation. In his suicide note he wrote:

The church has no idea that as I type this letter, there are surely boys and girls on their callused knees imploring God to free them from this pain. They hate themselves. They retire to their beds with their fingers pointed to their heads in the form of a gun. I am now free. I am no longer in pain and I no longer hate myself. As it turns out, God never intended me to be straight. Perhaps my death might be a catalyst for some good. (Besen 2000:2)

Hopefully, we, as the church, can learn something from the above event and let it serve some good.

#### **2.4.1.5 Gay people are promiscuous and only in this lifestyle to satisfy their lust without entering into loving relationships**

"Gay people are promiscuous and are only in this lifestyle to satisfy their lust without entering into loving relationships" is another dominant discourse. This discourse is created through a lack of compassion for gay people, but also through ignorance of the loving, committed and enduring relationships that exist in gay communities.

Due to discrimination and the need for secrecy, a gay subculture developed where gays meet at bars, clubs, discos, etc. Often this leads to the development of an atmosphere where gays behave in promiscuous ways. However, there is no proof that gay people are more promiscuous than their heterosexual counterparts (Du Plessis 1999:73). Of course, what one does with one's sexual orientation depends on the individual. Quite often gay people who are controlled by promiscuous behaviour do so in order to counteract the years of rejection and humiliation (Du Plessis 1999:72-73). For a short while they feel accepted. This is learnt behaviour and can



be unlearned when the discourses feeding the behaviour are deconstructed. As soon as new narratives of acceptance and of worthiness about the person's identity emerge, the behaviour is not needed anymore and the chances are good that it will stop.

A gay client commented after he had stopped being promiscuous: *I feel so free, as if I have wings. The shackles which tied me down are broken. Thank the Lord!* The shackles he was talking about was the need to be empowered at all cost, to be freed from the anger caused by years of domination, humiliation and rejection by his father, teachers, fellow pupils, employers, etc. He was tricked into believing that he would be empowered by one-night stands. This behaviour only perpetuated the feeling of abuse and of disempowerment. It was only when he acknowledged his need to belong and to be in a loving relationship where power could be shared respectfully that he started to break away from his addiction.

We humans have a deeply rooted need to belong. We thrive in close, supportive, committed relationships (Myers & Scanzoni 2006:11). Gay people are also people of flesh and blood and fall in and out of love just like straight people. Homosexuals are often depicted as unhappy individuals who are unsuccessful in developing enduring same-sex relationships, drifting from one sexual liaison to another, ending up old and alone. According to Myers and Scanzoni (2006:105), existing data sharply contradict this stereotype. They report an account of an essayist, Richard Rodriguez, while visiting San Francisco City Hall in early 2004. Rodriguez was deeply moved when he spoke on PBS's *NewsHour: Homosexual couples lined up around the block, thousands of them, waiting for a word on a certificate: 'Marriage' ... [These same-sex partners] wanted to be recognised by the community as promising fidelity to one another ...*

I can confirm this need of homosexual people to be in a steady relationship and to get married. Since the legalisation of gay marriages in South Africa in 2006, a gay minister in Pretoria, Rev André Muller, has solemnised more than 160 gay marriages. These were mostly couples who had been in long-standing relationships of 10 years and longer. In a documentary programme on the life of Rev Muller, which was compiled by SABC 2 and broadcast on 7 October 2007 (*Issues of faith*), both Rev

Muller and Grethie Coetzee confirmed the positive and stabilising influence of the new Civil Union Act of 2006 1 (SA, 2006) on gay relationships.

Studies of homosexuals' attitudes about relationships find that most gays say that they very much want to have enduring close relationships (Bell & Weinberg 1978:86). Other studies have investigated the extent to which gays are successful in establishing intimate relationships. In surveys of gay men, about half of the men questioned were involved in a steady relationship (Bell & Weinberg 1978:82, 89; Peplau & Cochran 1990:325). Between 45% and 80% of the women surveyed were currently in a steady relationship. As far as the length of the relationships is concerned, the lack of marriage records made the judgment about how long "typical" homosexual relationships last, difficult. With the new Act, it will, at least in South Africa, become easier to determine the longevity of gay marriages.

Parsons (2000:139,140) recalls listening to a Christian speaker at the Lambeth conference reflecting on her attitude towards the issue of homosexuality. The speaker said that, before she had met a gay person, she had all the evangelical answers ready: it was wrong; it could be changed through prayer; it was against what the Bible says. Then she heard a gay person speak about his relationship. What he said about his loving relationship with his friend moved her and taught her things about commitment she had never heard before. This opened her eyes to the depths of love and commitment. She could not regard the issue as being open-and-shut any more.

Initially, when I listened to gay people's stories, I was taken aback by the innocence of the onset of some of their relationships. This was in stark contrast to the discourse of lust and lack of loving relationships. The following two extracts from letters serve to support this:

Peter wrote me a letter about his new relationship.

*Dear Marietjie*

---

<sup>1</sup> The Civil Union Act, 2006 (Act No. 17 of 2006) accords same-sex couples the same rights and status as heterosexual married couples. The Act ensures and respects the equality and the dignity of same-sex people in South African society.

*I write this letter with joy in my heart. I have met somebody on the internet. He is a lecturer at Tuks. We share the same interests. After six weeks of writing e-mails we eventually had enough courage to meet for a cup of coffee. This meeting lasted for 4 hours. We just could not stop talking.*

James writes about his first kiss that did not happen.

*Dear Marietjie*

*My friend and I are together for 1 month now. Last night I knew both of us wanted to kiss. But it is not so easy. A man needs a lot of confidence. Eventually I made the first move and asked him to kiss me. All of a sudden he did not want to kiss anymore. What on earth did I do wrong? I was so disappointed. It would have been my first kiss."*

During my journey with gay Christians, I often had the privilege of sharing special times on a spiritual level with couples who had been in a relationship for a long time. For example, one evening during Easter 2007, 24 of us (23 gay Christian males and I) belonging to two Bible study groups (cell groups) of the Reforming Church were sitting outside in an enclosed Pretoria townhouse garden. Among the gay men were at least six couples, five of whom were married at the end of December 2006. The length of these couples' relationships varied from 12, 15, 20, 22 and 23 to 25 years respectively. The cell members represented various occupations, like IT managers, estate agents, one agricultural expert, a manager of a huge pharmaceutical company, medical specialists, etc. The hosts for the Biblical supper spread out red Persian carpets on the lawn, offering enough space for everyone to sit down comfortably. It was just after sunset and the autumn air was on the verge of becoming chilly. A happy, reverent atmosphere prevailed. The few small tables contained glasses for wine or juice, cutlery, as well as for the food for supper: olives, grapes, unleavened bread, etc. In the centre of the one table was a huge cross made of flowers, symbolising the time in the religious calendar: Easter. One of the three ministers of the Reforming Church (gay church) present, Rev Eric Stander, read from John 17. He emphasised that we were in Christ and Christ in us and that we were members of one body, the body of Christ. No one of us was less or more valuable, but was necessary for the body of Christ to function optimally. After a short sermon, he served Holy Communion to us all. He then read the words of Jesus during the

last supper with His disciples: "Take it [the bread], this is my body." And: "This is my blood [the wine] which is poured out for many, my blood which seals God's covenant" (Mark. 14:22, 23). The night became holy while everybody was served with bread and the wine, praying silently. I prayed to God, thanking Him for this special occasion and for the privilege of knowing these children of his and for his grace of having saved all of us through his death at the cross. During these moments the world out there, especially the DRC, condemning gay relationships, seemed far removed. It was as if we were enjoying an emotional and spiritual safety we had created for ourselves, a space in which we could survive as children of God without any form of persecution; a breathing place.

The above event reminded me of a passage written by Cilliers (1999:191) when he participated in Holy Communion for the first time after ten years of abstaining from it. He wrote:

Cautiously I took a piece of bread from the plate. I waited for the feeling of guilt. It stayed away. This time the bread did not become dry in my mouth and I swallowed it thankfully. I took the mug from the deacon with both hands. The silver was cold and the smell of wine sweet. For the first time I drank from it without fear. The liberating feeling was intoxicating. The circle was completed.

During a session with my supervisor, Dr Dirk Kotzé, I shared the event of the Biblical supper with him. While doing so, I became emotional. He asked me what was causing the lump in my throat. I explained it was my lived experience which I was sharing. It contrasted the "truth" of the gay Christians with the "truth" of many members of the DRC about gay Christians. It made me aware anew of the injustices against which I was trying to stand up to. It was just not fair that these Christians had to be rejected because they also want to be in fulfilling and loving monogamous relationships. The aversion with which they are often treated hurt me on their behalf. During my discussion with my supervisor, I realised that this was the continual challenge for me in my work: I had to find ways in which I could share my lived experience from the gay world with homophobic people in order to touch their hearts as well. I continually had to invite participation from straight people in the lives of gay people. This is one of the reasons why I eventually decided to make the DVD. On the DVD, the gay people themselves tell their stories. It becomes near experience knowledge to those who watch it.

Another aspect in my journey with gay people which struck me is that they seem so ordinary, so normal. Rodriguez (in Myers & Scanzoni 2006:105) also reports on how "ordinary" the gay couples in the queues seemed. Contrary to these observations there is still a strong perception in society that being gay is abnormal and against nature.

#### **2.4.1.6 It is abnormal or against nature**

In Lev. 18:22 it is written: "No man is to have sexual relations with another man; God hates that". In Lev 20:13 it is written: "If a man has sexual relations with another man, they have done a disgusting thing, and both shall be put to death. They are responsible for their own death". In Romans 1:26,27 it is written: "Because they do this, God has given them over to shameful passions. Even the women pervert the natural use of their sex by unnatural acts. In the same way the men give up natural sexual relations with women and burn with passion for each other. Men do shameful things with each other, and as a result they bring upon themselves the punishment they deserve for their wrongdoing".

Pronk (1993:27) considers the *contra naturam* argument in the church to have originated when Thomas Aquinas wrote in the thirteenth century that homosexuality is *against the order of nature*. Aquinas differentiated between natural and unnatural sins. He considered homosexuality as unnatural, because it excludes the possibility of procreation. After World War II, Aalders added to this viewpoint by supporting his ethical judgment with a reference to the medical standpoint of the time, *viz.* homosexuality is perverse and pathological. To Aalders (Pronk 1993:11), homosexuality should be condemned and is thus not a problem that should be discussed, because, according to him, the Bible (Rom 1:26, 27) supports his *contra naturam* argument.

Tolsma (in Pronk 1993:12), a Protestant psychiatrist, considers homosexual behaviour as pathological, because it lacks a congenital rootedness. If a homosexual person is guided by his instincts, it is undeniably pathological. As a spiritual being, he should be able to rise above these instincts. When he no longer does this, he is sick. This would mean that heterosexuals are not guided by their instincts, but have a divine form of sexual orientation. Tolsma also dismissed the appeal to homosexual love, because he saw the purpose of this love as always sexual and thus morally

wrong. The immorality to Tolsma lies within the unnatural use of sex organs and in the unnatural use of a fellow human being. Love was lacking. Kinsey (1948:201,666) pleaded for a relaxation of the prevailing moral and legal norms, because he considered homosexual behaviour as belonging to the "basic capacities of the human animal".

Bishop David Russell (2004:21) points out that, for the writer of Leviticus, homosexual behaviour was "unnatural, contrary to the way God made us, and therefore against his will and sinful". According to Russell, this assumption about homosexuality is being questioned today. To gay people, their sexual desire is as natural to them as sexual desire is to people of a different orientation. Gay people experience it as hurtful, unjust and wrong to regard their sexual orientation as unnatural. The church should respect the testimonies of gay Christians who regard loving, committed same-sex relationships as removed from these Biblical passages of condemnation.

Du Toit (2007:284) considers Romans 1:26, 27 as the *locus classicus* for the Biblical evaluation of homosexuality. In Rom 1:18-3:20 Paul describes how all humanity stands guilty before God. In Rom 3:21-4:25 Paul explains how God pardons sinners through faith on the basis of Christ's death. According to Du Toit (2007:285), in Rom 1:18-23, Paul shows how the nations rebelled against God and substituted Him for the idols, while Rom 1:24-32 describes God's reaction to this rebellion. The key words to properly understand the function of the homosexual references in these passages lie in the language of inversion. The inversion takes place on three levels, viz. the cognitive (they exchanged the truth of God for the lie), the devotional (v 23) and the moral (vv 24-32). Man's exchange of God for idols leads to a radical moral inversion. Although the process of decay is inevitable, the personal judgement of God is included in the process of decay in that He "hands the nations over" to their own sinful passions. Du Toit (2007:288) views the mentioning of homosexuality in this context because it serves as such a good example of the inversion process. Initially, when Du Toit wrote this article (2003), he took a strong stance with regard to Paul's inclusion of both constitutional gays and heterosexuals who engaged in homosexual activities. When Paul condemns homosexuality, the terms "natural" and "unnatural" play a crucial role. According to Du Toit's initial understanding of these passages, Paul considered homosexuality also as "against nature."

Gay men and women tell me it is against their respective natures to be with a woman or with a man. In this *contra naturam* argument, it seems as if we may rightfully ask: against whose nature? In the closing statement of his article, Du Toit (2007:295,296) writes how his mind has changed on the hermeneutics of Rom 1:26, 27:

After critically reconsidering my position on this sensitive matter for quite a number of years, I can still endorse the essence of the foregoing article today. It seems, however, advisable to modify my strong stance on the inclusive nature of Paul's indictment. A key question would be whether his first-century Roman readers would not spontaneously have understood the reference to people who acted "against nature" as implicating (or in the first instance implicating) heterosexuals who engaged in homosexual activities, since these were the obvious people who inverted their natural disposition. A positive answer would imply that we should at least be more modest in our expectations to exactly determine the scope of Paul's censure.

#### **2.4.1.7 The Bible says being gay is a sin and gay people are going to hell**

*I am a born-again Christian and sought help through prayer and the church, but I am still gay. Could it be possible that God accepts me as I am?*

The above question comes as no surprise when a person's roots are grounded in a heritage that quite rightly emphasises the Bible as the Word of God. Thumma (2005:67) considers a homosexual lifestyle and a conservative religious identity to be simply incompatible for many Evangelical Christians. Towards the end of 2003, the Afrikaans gospel singer, Danie Botha, a gospel singer, pronounced in a church service of a DRC congregation in Pretoria that homosexuals would not see the Kingdom of God. *They will go to hell: It is not I who say this. It is written in the Bible.* In an interview with the singer, journalist Hannelie Booyens confronted him with her own personal burning question while her Christian gay brother was dying of Aids: *Danie, is my brother going to hell?* Danie answered her: *You should go to his bed and guide him to convert himself. This is the only way* (Booyens 2004:10.22).

According to Du Plessis (1999:7), people who consider homosexuality as a sin consider it to be a choice or an act of will, thereby disregarding the latest scientific research findings as well as the stories of gay Christians.

During the DRC General Synods of 2002 and 2004, this discourse was no longer seen as official policy of the church (Algemene Sinode NGK 2002:628; Algemene Sinode NGK 2004:433). According to the AKLAS (general commission of the DRC

for doctrine and current affairs) report on homosexuality put to the 2004 General Synod of the DRC (2004:13), that task team considered yet another question to be asked, namely: *what is the message of salvation in theory and in practice?* At its core, the question: *who is God to you?* was at stake (see 4.2.5.1). Although there was consensus about the question, the answers differed. To some it had to do with the holiness and righteousness of God, while others focussed on the loving, merciful God. What was also imperative from the 2004 report was that not only the Bible, but also the social sciences, as well as listening to the stories of gay people themselves, should be taken very seriously in doing further research. Unfortunately, the task team for the 2007 General Synod did not pay much attention to stories by gays and their parents. Apart from the three gays and the one ex-gay on the task team, the members of the task team were exposed to stories of gay Christians only through the DVD.

Although the official policy of the DRC does not consider being gay per se as sinful, there are still various congregations within the DRC (like Moreletapark with its H2O "homosexuality to overcome" programme) that propagate a policy that gays should change their sexual orientation. If a congregation adopts a policy that gay people should be cured from their homosexual lifestyles through conversion, the underlying discourse is still one of sinfulness and unsaved lives (compare the proposed model of Group B of the task team, Algemene Sinode [NGK] 2007:165-225). Kate Hunt (1997:37) refers to an event where the preacher exhorted the congregation to "bring the love of God to those [gay] people who are living in despair and sin and who, along with prostitutes and drug dealers, will be eternally separated from God unless they speak to them of the gospel of Christ". According to Hunt (1997:37), it had obviously not crossed the preacher's mind that some of "those people" might be present in the congregation; God-loving people leading happy, stable Christian lives while loving a member of the same sex.

Such a man attended my support group at the Reforming Church during 2006. He had just moved to Pretoria from Kathu and he had been traumatised by the condemnation of gays during a church service in one of the DRC congregations in Kathu in 2006. According to this person, the minister said gays should be hung upside down. Sometimes gay Christians are accused of being possessed by demons, which demonstrates their sinfulness. Recently a mother was sitting in my study with her gay daughter. The mother could hardly look at her daughter. She



spoke to me and asked me: *Can't you feel the demons in this room because of my daughter's presence? The hair on my arms stands on end when I just look at her.* Another client, at the time still married to a straight man, sent me the following SMS on 12 December 2006: *My husband says I have a demon. There is no place for gays in the Word of God. I am possessed by a destructive spirit that is going to kill me. I have to convert myself.*

Initially, I was also governed by the discourse that being gay is a sin. After Francois had confronted me, I was confused until I discovered the option of reading the Bible in context. After studying the few texts in their cultural and historical contexts, I realised that the Biblical texts could actually be interpreted as referring to perversion, rape, inhospitality, pederasty, abuse of power, temple prostitution and heterosexual men and women wanting to act against their nature by participating in homosexual activity. Bishop David Russell (2004:21) views the homosexual behaviour they were aware of in the Old Testament tradition as strongly associated with idolatrous and promiscuous practices of the surrounding cultures and religions. According to Russell, Paul and the Christian community shared this outlook. Paul's teaching on homosexuality is both reflected by and confirmed in his letters to the Christians in Rome and Corinth. Arguments in favour of change in the traditional position of the church point out that the kind of behaviour that is condemned in the Old Testament and by Paul seems to have very little to do with the faithful and caring same-sex relationships that sincere Christians refer to today.

Apart from interpreting the Bible in its cultural and historical contexts, it is necessary to try and understand what is meant by the notion "sin". To say being gay is a sin does not make sense, because sin, as far as I am concerned, has everything to do with a relationship between man and God. The Bible teaches us that sin means not to love, to turn away from God. The gay Christians whom I have met are committed children of the Lord, in a loving relationship with Him. Heyward (in Isherwood & McEwan 1996:218) defines sin as "the violation of right relations". She views "right relations" as those that are mutually empowering. According to Heyward, sin occurs whenever a person or group use or abuse an individual or a group for their own purposes, thereby disempowering, degrading and often destroying who or what was used. In this sense, when one considers the relationship between gays and the church, it would seem that the church is committing sin against the gays, because the latter is the group being used (often as organists), but who are also

disempowered and who are often also destroyed (feelings of worthlessness, suicide, etc.).

#### **2.4.1.8 Gay people are paedophiles**

This discourse originated from Biblical texts (1 Corinthians 6) and is based on times in Greek history when pederasty was practised. Foucault (1986:195) reports on the custom to have a relationship between an older male who had finished his education and a younger male who had not yet achieved his definitive status and who was in need of assistance, advice and support. The older male was expected to play the socially, morally and sexually active role.

To love boys was a free practice amongst the Greeks and was not only accepted by the law, but was also permitted by opinion (Foucault 1986:190,191). It was supported by institutions like the military and education, had religious guarantees in rites and festivals and was a cultural practice, as echoed in Greek literature. It also seems that this practice was surrounded by a diversity of positive and negative judgements.

According to Foucault (1986:187), the Greeks did not see love for one's own sex and love for the other sex as opposites. The dividing line is between the loves which "the baser sort of men feels" – its object is both women and boys; it only looks at the act itself – and the more ancient, nobler, and "more reasonable" love. The latter was considered to have more vigour and intelligence and refers to love between two male adults.

Herek (1991:140) considers the discourse that homosexuals are more likely to molest children than heterosexuals as a myth. According to Herek, gay people have often been accused of preying on children. He believes this to be a general cultural tendency to portray disliked minority groups (e.g. Jews, Blacks) as a threat to the dominant society's most vulnerable members. Herek (1991:141) emphasises the difficulty in doing empirical research on child molestation. Two problematic areas in empirical research that he mentions are sampling biases and terminology. Most empirical studies have been conducted with convicted perpetrators, thereby excluding those who were not prosecuted or convicted. This causes the results to not necessarily reflect societal patterns. The problem with terminology is that, according

to Herek (1991:141), studies with sexual offenders against male children use the term "homosexual paedophile" (Fisher 1969; Fischer & Howell 1970). Marshall (1988:273) refers in a similar way to the males in his sample who molested boys as "homosexual molesters". Although the men's behaviour manifested in homosexual behaviour, Marshall admitted that only three of the seven men in his sample could possibly have a homosexual orientation. All fourteen of the men in his sample who molested girls were heterosexual.

Of course, any sexual activity with a boy (or a girl, for that matter) is something that cannot be condoned. According to gay men, it is actually the maturity, the perfection of the adult male body that attracts them. After hundreds of sessions with gay people where only one was guilty of molesting a young high school boy while he was a young teacher, fresh from college, it was easy to construct a different belief about gayness and child molesting. In my practice, it seems that child molesting is perhaps more a crime of heterosexuals than of homosexuals. This is confirmed by Newton (1978:29-43), who concluded from his review of relevant literature that gay men are no more likely to molest children than heterosexual men. Groth and Birnbaum (1978:180) found that, in their sample of 175 adult males convicted in Massachusetts of sexual assault against children, none had an exclusively homosexual adult sexual orientation. It seems that no credible new data has been published since 1978 that contradicts the conclusions of Newton (1978) or Groth and Birnbaum (1978).

#### **2.4.2 Reflective summary**

It thus seems that sexual orientation is largely determined by a complex combination of genetics, but more specifically by hormonal activity in the womb arising from various sources, as well as by societal and educational influences. It also seems that there are various myths about homosexuality that are societal constructions, often based on disinformation, which can be changed. This disinformation also refers to Biblical texts that are not interpreted in a specific context. It seems that the Bible has very little to say about same-sex sexual expression. The few verses referring to same-sex acts must be seen in their context and in relation to the condemnation of idolatry, lust, promiscuity and exploitation. Scripture does not speak of loving, committed homosexual relationships.

According to Myers and Scanzoni (2006:103), Jesus is not recorded as having said anything at all about homosexuality. He did, however, say much about loving our neighbour, humility, non-judgmentalism, and caring about people who were hurting and regarded as outcasts.

After having discussed various beliefs pertaining to gayness, I consider it appropriate to briefly look at the example set by Jesus Christ and how He challenged the beliefs of purity and of exclusion in His time. This has served as an inspiration for my commitment to facilitate participation with gay people.

## **2.5 JESUS AS RELIGIOUS RESISTOR**

Jesus can be seen as a religious resister because of his deliberate and sustained challenge to the religious categories of exclusion of his time (Germond 1997:204; Poling 1996:157). The purity system of old Israel was largely a system of exclusion, for each degree of holiness meant the exclusion or inclusion of a particular category of person. The gospels highlight Jesus' intimate association with the marginalised, the outcasts and the ritually impure. In doing this, Jesus included the excluded.

His most consistent way of showing that He included everyone was through the act of touch (Germond 1997:205). He was constantly touching and being pressed on by crowds of sick, unclean people. He deliberately touched lepers, the blind and corpses and let impure menstruating woman touch Him – acts that automatically rendered Him unclean.

He also showed His compassion by eating with the tax collectors and sinners (Germond 1997:206). Eating was seen as a very intimate form of association. The acts of Jesus were a clear indication that He rejected the total system of ritual purity and the categories that formed part of the system.

According to Germond (1997:206,207) Jesus is presented in the Gospel of Mark as the one rejecting the purity system based on the temple cult; the one who replaces it with forgiveness of sins independent of sacrificial offerings. The culmination of Jesus' message was at the moment of His death, when the curtain to the holy of holies was torn from top to bottom. Mark saw this as an indication that the death of Jesus laid open the way into God's presence for all. The system of exclusion had been destroyed by the death of Jesus. He includes the excluded in the new community of

faith. If He did that, why can we not include the gays unconditionally in the new community of faith? Poling (1996:158) views Jesus' own suffering, death and resurrection as the outcome of a just life lived in resistance to an unjust world. He remained faithful to the marginalised, maintaining his solidarity with the suffering and with the victims of domination.

Fortunately Jesus did not take notice of social constraints like being normative, not eating with the sinners, not talking to women, etc. Rohrs (in Mattmann 2006:12,13) emphasises his ability to speak the truth to each person as they needed it, when they needed it and in a way they could hear it, because he wanted to lead them into union with God. According to Rohrs, if we know that this is also our only goal, the process of dealing with homosexuality becomes less controlling, less paranoid and much more hopeful.

## **2.6 SUMMARY**

In exploring the social construction of homosexuality, especially in the DRC, the roles of power, discourse and language and the subsequent construction of knowledge were highlighted. The knowledge that people in power positions in the DRC possess about homosexuality is taken for granted "truth". When this knowledge of those in positions of power is deconstructed and changed, the "truth" about homosexuality will also change. This chapter should then also be seen as an endeavour to change the knowledge about homosexuality through deconstructing and reconstructing discourses, by referring to literature, as well as to the narratives of gay Christians.

Within the social constructionist paradigm it is of critical importance to understand that the manner in which we view gayness is socially constructed. Even the fundamentalist viewpoints on homosexuality are only social constructs. Because of the diverse views of reality and of truth, the issue of homosexuality has been made a complex and often a very emotional issue. These have thus not been easy times for the church, but certainly also not for gay Christians and their families. Bishop David Russell (2004:36) considers the only way forward to be with Jesus. Jesus told us not to be afraid (Matt 14:7). God will continue to look after his church. We should carry on engaging in "real and respectful dialogue, across our present divides, listening and seeking to understand". I believe that "listening and seeking to understand" can only take place through what Heshusius (1994:15) calls a participatory mode of

consciousness. The latter involves a somatic or bodily, non-verbal quality of attention where the focus is not on the self. At the core of a participatory mode of consciousness is the recognition of kinship and of ethics. According to Maturana and Poerksen (2004:208), the "possibility of ethics and of being touched arises only when the other human being is seen as a legitimate other, and when the possible consequences of one's actions for that other's well-being are reflected". In the next chapter I discuss my own journey, during which my thinking about homosexuality was deconstructed and changed. This journey was a prerequisite for achieving the research aims formulated in Chapter 1, because it further guided me in my endeavours to invite an ethical form of participation in order to deconstruct the myths about homosexuality discussed in Chapter 2.

## CHAPTER 3: JOURNAL OF MY PERSONAL TRANSFORMATION

*Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it is the only thing that ever has.*  
- Dr Margaret Mead, anthropologist

### 3.1 INTRODUCTION

I believe my own transformation process through participation with gay Christians was a prerequisite for my efforts to deconstruct gay discourse in the DRC. The mandate which I acquired from the gay community in this way to represent them could be seen as the first step to invite participation by members of the DRC in the lives of gay Christians. Therefore I consider it important to revisit my own process of transformation and participation. It also reminded me of the difficulty in making a paradigm shift, especially with regards to the gay cause.

*Wikipedia* (2007 [online]) describes transformation as a metamorphosis, a changing of shape, a change of outward appearances, and a qualitative change. Of course, the context the transformation refers to will influence the description and the meaning. Webster's Comprehensive Reference Dictionary and Encyclopaedia (1954:551) adds a change of character and conversion to its definition. Hunter (1990:228) describes conversion as to turn, turn again and to return. In a religious sense, these turnings connote the alterations in people's thoughts, feelings, and actions as they turn from idols to the true God. In my situation, I experienced these "turnings" as turning from my old ways of thinking about homosexuality to new ways of thinking about and understanding homosexuality. However, within a social constructionist paradigm I cannot delimit my transformation to a single definition, because I perceive it as an ongoing process, bringing about change on various levels and from day to day.

Hunter (1990:228) views conversion or transformation as a process consisting of seven different stages. His model, adapted from the work of Tippet (1977) and Lofland and Stark (1965), helps to organise research findings and provides a framework for the interpretation of the transformation. The seven stages Hunter refers to are context, crisis, quest, encounter, interaction, commitment and consequences. In this chapter, I will give an account of my transformation journey,

using these stages as a framework. I believe it is important to view these stages as interwoven and not linear or necessarily chronological by nature.

### **3.2 CULTURAL, SOCIAL AND RELIGIOUS CONTEXT**

Hunter (1990:228) considers the cultural, social and religious settings to have the potential to facilitate and to obstruct the change process. They can influence the form and the content of the myths, rituals and symbols that are options for people in different settings. These factors also influence the identity and the consciousness of the individual in the process of change.

At the beginning of 2001, I knew no gay people on a personal level. The gay community is a much closed community, due to the rejection they experience from society. Because they have been hurt so often, they don't trust easily, especially when they hear that you are "from the church". I was thus regarded with much suspicion when I first started to attend services at the Reforming Church. Rev André Muller once remarked: *We carefully watched you and waited for you to leave, but you didn't. You kept on coming until we knew that you were sincere.* Today, six years later, they have completely accepted me as one of them. They know I am here to stay. But it was a long journey to get to this point.

My first in-depth encounter with a gay person was with Francois, my hairdresser. I introduced him in Chapter 1. It was only after my moment of insertion with Francois that I understood the full implications of God's grace, as given to us in Col. 1:22: "But now, by the physical death of his Son, God has made you his friends, in order to bring you, holy, pure, and faultless, into his presence".

I stopped wondering what God sees when he looks down on Francois as a gay Christian. I knew He sees him as a faultless person, as somebody who has never done anything wrong. A year after this incident, I started with my studies in Pastoral Therapy at the Institute for Therapeutic Development (ITD). Not only did these studies help me to develop my thinking about gay people, but they also gave me an opportunity to start doing counselling with gay Christians. When I started talking with gay Christians, I realised that a preferred way of being would be a contextual one where the context plays a dominant role in doing theology (Wolfaardt 1992:12).



During 2001, while I was doing my internship at ITD, it just so happened that almost every client of mine was gay. Although my thinking about gay people started to change, I was still far from either understanding gay people or having internalised my new thinking. Talking with gay clients left me confused. I increasingly felt that the perception of gay people created by the Bible, as I used to interpret it, did not correlate with the special people sitting in front of me, sharing their painful stories. On the other hand, my strong evangelical background made the door wide open to Guilt and Shame trying to trick me into believing that I was on the wrong road, busy doing care with people who are rejected by the Bible. It was as if I were torn apart. I struggled to balance the opposites.

In **May 2001**, at a DRC Bible study meeting at my house, I shared my intention to do research with gay people. One member's reaction of, *Oh no, sies, what are you keeping yourself busy with?* not only shocked me, but also made me aware that I had to be more careful about to whom and where I could safely "come out of the closet". I had a small glimpse of the fear of rejection that tries to govern gay people's lives. The Bible study group had no experience of contact with gay people, and, although somewhat antagonistic, some of them asked questions to which I did not really have the answers.

I started immersing myself in literature on homosexuality, initially focusing on theological interpretations of the so-called "gay texts" in the Bible. I gained much insight from contextual interpretations of the Bible, but this contextual approach to interpreting the Bible seemed to be problematic to some of the people around me. Quite a few church ministers visited me or called me, trying to persuade me to change my research topic. One accused me of having lost perspective and of looking at the gay people only through the lenses of love. Although I considered that that was exactly what Christ would want us to do, the many visits and calls, and sometimes the lack of calls from friends, as well as anonymous letters in my mailbox, casted a shadow of doubt on my endeavours. I considered ending the journey. My social, cultural and religious context was trying to obstruct my process of change.

Just as I had decided to end my journey with gay people, Francois, my hairdresser, made an appointment to come for therapy. That was in July 2001. I could not refuse to see him. Initially, I was moved by his painful stories of rejection and sexual abuse. He started storying his childhood experiences, but after the third interview, the level

of his childhood abuse and heartache became so intense that I found it almost unbearable. Years later when members of the task team found watching the DVD which the gays and I have made almost unbearable (see 4.2.5.2) I remembered my own initial reaction to Francois' stories. This increased my understanding of the gay-conditional group). My conservative upbringing and my lack of experience in counselling almost put a definite end to my journey with gays. After a discussion with one of my colleagues, I decided to change my research topic. What a relief. But I carried on seeing Francois. I don't know why...

On Thursday, **16 August 2001**, after a session with Francois, one of our local ministers paid me a visit. We started talking about gay people and he was very adamant: he does not reject gay people, he loves the sinners, but they must stop with their sinful practices. He could never condone it on Biblical grounds. I agreed with him. Or did I? Fortunately, I was now free of the burden of my gay research. Or was I?

### **3.3 CRISES THAT DISRUPTED MY THINKING**

Hunter (1990:228) considers a crisis to be an important stage in the conversion process. A crisis takes people out of their normal routines, disrupts their lives and opens them to new options. This disruption is a painful experience where the status quo is perceived as ineffective and inauthentic. Change becomes existentially imperative.

Apart from my initial turning point with Francois, there were also two other events that disrupted my thinking about homosexuality and which caused a state of disequilibrium in my mind. To me, the only way to restore equilibrium was to change the existing discourses on homosexuality, especially in the DRC.

My very first client at ITD was Simon, a young 29-year-old man. During our first few interviews, he wore a cap and sunglasses, his "shield against society", as he later put it. He had been referred to ITD by FAMSA (Family and Marriage Council of South Africa) because of his schizophrenic episodes. He already had an appointment with a psychiatrist at Weskoppies (a psychiatric institution in Pretoria) scheduled for the following month. His dominant problem-saturated story (Morgan 2000:7) was one of power relations with depression, anxiety and suicide, where he was increasingly

losing the upper hand. Because of all the medication he was taking, he described himself as being in a "dwaal", or confused, for most of the time. This caused him not to be able to concentrate for long enough to hold a job.

From the first moment, Simon and I bonded. My first impression was that he seemed perfectly normal, but I had not had any experience with people who had schizophrenic episodes. Therefore, I was very careful not to advise him to stop with the medication. He said he was willing to be locked up in Weskoppies for the rest of his life. He was so tired of living. During our second interview, he asked me in a whisper: *Are there any microphones in this office?* When I asked why, he said he wanted to tell me something he had never told anyone before. There were no microphones. He then told me, still whispering: *I think I'm gay.* At that point, he had no experience of a gay lifestyle, and he had not had any relationships with straight girlfriends. Later in the session he actually said to me he knew he was gay. He was just not sure how I would react to it. In the following sessions I helped him to accept his gay orientation. A few sessions later he arrived without his normal shield. I wrote him the following letter:

*25 June 2001*

*Dear Simon*

*When you entered the office last Wednesday, 20 June, I hardly recognised you! Apart from the different attire, the cap was gone. In front of me was a very handsome young man who had decided not to hide behind his shield anymore. Your transformation was obvious. Your whole appearance was shouting: look at me, I have taken control. This prepared me for your announcement: "I am a bit scared to say it, but I feel cured. The depression and the anxiety are gone! I feel normal, I feel wonderful. I am not in a "dwaal" (confused) anymore; I can hear and respond to you in a normal, intelligent way. The feeling of depersonalisation, of being detached from reality is gone. The drowsiness and diarrhoea have stopped. The person you've been talking to was not the real me. It's only now that you can really start knowing me".*

Simon cancelled his appointment at Weskoppies. Gradually, with the help of his general physician, he tapered his anti-depressants and the Xanor that he was taking for the anxiety attacks. I helped him to compile a *curriculum vitae*. After six months, we ended the therapy, because he had taken such control of the depression and

anxiety that he could start working again. This journey with Simon created the following question within me: *What society have we created that a person would be willing to have him permanently locked up in a psychiatric institution just because he was not allowed to live according to his gay orientation?*

The other person who played a profound role in disturbing my original thinking about gays was Johan van Zyl. I met him on Friday, 24 August 2001, when Francois introduced me to this handsome, intelligent young gay man, working as receptionist at the hairdressing salon. It must have been the absolute downtrodden look in his eyes that urged me to stand by his side. He was an ex-minister of the *Hervormde Kerk* who had been asked to resign when he revealed his sexual orientation. He told me how he had held three part-time jobs simultaneously while he was completing his theological studies at the University of Pretoria. He obtained three degrees, all of them *cum laude*. At school he was head prefect, as well as *dux* learner in his matric year. He had been married to a woman church minister for seven years. After his divorce and five jobless and homeless months, he was grateful for his new job. At the counter, I invited him to assist me with my research. Although I did not want to carry on with my "gay" research, it seemed as if the research would not let me go. I became aware of a feeling of anger developing in me. I knew I could not let this injustice remain untold and not be reversed. We made an appointment to see each other on 13 September 2001.

### **3.4 QUEST FOR NEW WAYS OF THINKING**

According to Hunter (1990:229), during this stage, people seek new ways of thinking, feeling and behaving. They may experiment with all sorts of new groups or religious denominations. In my case, I tried to get to know more gay people and to obtain as much information as possible about homosexuality. This affirms Hunter's idea that people are often active participants in their own conversion.

It was difficult for me to get to know gay people. This was also something which I had to keep in mind when inviting members of the DRC to participation. Apart from one or two whom I had met through the therapy or through Francois, I still did not know many gay people. On **Sunday, 26 August 2001**, I received a call from my supervisor, inviting me to attend a service of the Reformed Church in Hatfield. What an experience! Two separate services were held, catering mainly for female and

male gay people, respectively. I attended the earlier service for the females. The message was one of love and forgiveness, away from rejection. The minister served Holy Communion. After the service, members of the congregation heartily welcomed me and invited me for tea. There I met Christine, a gay minister, as well as her partner, Jeanette, a blind gay woman.

The exposure was necessary, but I was in doubt again. I felt weird; not at home. When I left, I had to walk past the men waiting for their service to start. It was an eerie feeling when I realised that not one of the men was even looking at me! I was socially constructed to expect men to pay at least some attention to me when I walked past them. When I returned home, I told my husband that there really exists something like a gay man. I started reading Romans 1 and struggled with the contents. I started thinking I should perhaps change my research topic. I saw images of myself on TV, defending my research and gay rights. I saw newspaper headings of this previous EE3 evangelist put under censorship by the church. I saw eternal life passing me by, because I misinterpreted Romans 1. I stood under the same curse as those committing the sins spoken of in Romans 1. I read Pieter Cilliers' book, *'n Kas is vir Klere (A closet is for clothes)*, and saw how he also struggled with Romans 1. I could not sleep for long periods of time. Usually I would use the time praying, pleading with God to guide me as to what I should do. Fear and loneliness became my fellow-travellers. I could not return to my old ways of thinking, but the future looked trackless and scary. Besides, the voices of injustice became louder and louder.

In **September 2001** I watched a TV programme on gays and the Report of the Southern Transvaal Synod of the Dutch Reformed Church. The chairperson of the report, Dr André Bartlett, Irna van Zyl, the editor of *Insig* magazine (published monthly reporting on current affairs), and Dr Justus Tsungu, a church minister and presenter at Radio Pulpit, participated. Dr Tsungu represented the view that homosexuality is a terrible sin in the eyes of the Lord and something to be ashamed of. Irna vehemently opposed his viewpoint, while Dr Bartlett handled the matter in a very calm way. When Dr Tsungu said gays were ill, Dr Bartlett replied that he had interviewed quite a number of gay people for his report and that none seemed ill to him. Because Dr Bartlett is a personal friend of mine, I hoped to find a partner in him. I called him, but there was no answer. Later I would learn that the family was on

holiday at the time; he only flew back to Johannesburg for the programme. This must be a serious matter to him, I thought.

In order to get to know more gay people, I got the idea to look up the word "gay" in the telephone directory. Fortunately, "OUT" was then still called "Gay and Lesbian Organisation". I made an appointment and went to see Tony Kruger on Monday, 8 October 2001. The purpose of the meeting was to network and to gain more information on support for gay people.

Tony was the first gay woman I had an in-depth conversation with. I was pleasantly surprised. I had not been sure what to expect, but I certainly did not expect the feminine, highly intelligent and well-read researcher whom I met. We talked for three hours. She told me about her research on community work in Mamelodi, a primarily black township in Pretoria. We also had a long discussion on our respective ideas of why people become gay, as well as on the prejudice from society and the church. Tony was in a relationship with a gay minister of the Reformed Church, Janine. We promised to keep in touch and I left with stacks of reading material.

The value of this meeting for me was the deconstruction of discourses about gay women, which were still trying to govern my thinking. Just as gay males don't want to become females, gay females also don't want to become males; they love their femininity.

Over and above my efforts to meet individual gay people, I also tried to gain as much information as I could absorb about homosexuality. This information I got from books, but also from attending conferences and seminars on the topic. During 2002, I attended three such events (UNISA, *Skuilkrans* DRC congregation in Pretoria and *Driehoek* DRC congregation in Vanderbijlpark). I obtained a great deal of information at those conferences and seminars. What stuck with me most were the stories gay Christians told about their struggle to deny and to change their homosexuality, until they reached a stage where they could no longer suppress it. Then they told of their "coming out" and of the tremendous relief and freedom they experienced afterwards. Strangely enough, their relationship with God improved after their acceptance of their homosexuality. These stories helped to convince me that I was on the right track by trying to deconstruct gay discourse.

### 3.5 ENCOUNTER WITH AN ADVOCATE

Hunter (1990:229) views the following stage as one where seekers are focusing on finding a person (an advocate) or a group of people who will respond to their new way of thinking. Seekers will form relationships with the advocate and the group, widening their possibilities for meaning in life. This encounter often takes place through kinship and friendship networks. I, however, experienced that my existing friends cooled down their friendships, due to differences of opinion on the gay issue. Apart from the knowledge that I would possibly find an ally in Dr Bartlett, I initially had no one I could turn to.

On **Friday, 21 September 2001**, a friendly visit by a friend and her husband changed into a hectic debate about homosexuality. I was beginning to put serious arguments on the table in favour of the normality of homosexuality. I shared Johan van Zyl's story, as well as those of Francois and Simon. Everybody was upset. My friend said she was discontented with my research and my contextual interpretation of the Bible. I was alone, lonely and scared, but I had crossed the boundary. In agreement with Maturana and Varela (1998:245), who claimed that "once we know that we know, we cannot deny to ourselves or others that we know," I could never again say I did not know, and neither could I think as I had thought before (see 5.4.1). I had moved from a modern to a post-modern paradigm of thinking about reality (see 1.7.1).

At least I knew that I did not know much about homosexuality, and that gay people, the true experts, had a different version of "the truth" than the one I initially had. Hopefully my new thinking will still develop and expand and change, but I could never be as fundamentalist in my thinking as before I started my journey with gays. After that evening, my friend avoided me for almost a year before we could resume our friendship. That hurt a lot. I shared my pain with my gay clients and they comforted me. I realised I had to make new friends in order to facilitate the persuasion process.

**Sunday evening, 30 September 2001.** The report on homosexuality had served before the Southern Transvaal Synod and most of the recommendations had been accepted. I decided to call Dr André Bartlett, who was delighted when I told him about my research and of my changed opinion about homosexuality. The following morning he had a meeting in Pretoria with Neels Jackson of *Beeld* (a daily

*newspaper distributed in Gauteng area*), and he immediately made an appointment with me for that afternoon.

**Monday, 1 October, 2001.** Dr André Bartlett stayed for three hours. It was the first time that I could talk to somebody (apart from my supervisor) who was really on the same wavelength as I was. We were both excited and discussed how we could help each other in our joint passion to eliminate the injustices against gay people. I was inspired and the discussion put me a huge step ahead in my thinking.

**Friday, 5 October 2001.** My brother and his wife came to visit us. I told them about my research. They were very interested, but held the view of "love the sinner but hate the sin". I asked them: *How could something be a sin if it was part of your being? How could it be a sin to have blue eyes or to be left-handed?* My late son, who listened to the conversation, was initially also very upset about his mom's "distortion" of the Bible and my (according to him) efforts to "make the Bible irrelevant". He did not have a problem with me counselling gay people, *as long as I just tell them to change*. When I asked him whether he thought someone like our hairdresser, Francois, could be anything but gay, he started to understand the absurdity of his statement. Francois was part of my son's lived experience and that made him realise that there was another reality than his own.

The following day I was in doubt again. Was my son's statement really absurd? What if I was busy distorting the truth because I felt sorry for the gay people in my consultation room? This type of reflection served me well, because I always had to answer to myself, as well as to my clients. In order to be transparent, I at least had to be honest to myself. The strangest thing was happening to me. I started to believe something which, initially, I had not wanted to believe.

I was puzzled. Something did not make sense. I believe the Bible, but if somebody like Johan van Zyl sits in front of me, I believe him. Why would he choose to be gay? Why would he choose to lose his wife whom he loved dearly, his job as a minister, which was his life, his car, his house, his dog, his friends? Why would he choose to hurt his beloved parents? He does not look like a masochist to me. On the contrary; he seems to be very sensitive, soft-spoken and intelligent, and he loves the Lord very much.



### 3.6 INTERACTION TO ADDRESS SPECIFIC NEEDS

Hunter (1990:229) considers interaction with the advocate and the group as being ways used by potential converts to address specific needs. There are typically four categories of needs that are addressed during this period, *viz.* the need for an intellectual system of meaning; the need for an emotional sense of belonging; the need for new modes of action or specific guidelines and methods for living in accordance with the values of the new way of thinking; and, in many cases, the need for a leader who embodies the ideals and who mobilises the vision of the group.

My needs were similar to the needs mentioned above and were initially partially met by various people, like Dr André Bartlett, Rev André Muller, my supervisor at the time (Dr Elmarie Kotzé) and various clients from the gay community. One such client was Grethie Coetzee. She was the wife of a minister in the DRC and was on the verge of coming out. She also had intellectual and emotional needs and therefore needed more information about being gay, as well as contact with gay people. Before coming out of the closet, she first wanted to meet other gay women, as well as gay people in situations similar to hers. Her therapist in Vanderbijlpark, Dr Johann Roux, was also a lecturer at ITD. On Thursday, 14 March 2002, Johan van Zyl, I, Johann Roux and Grethie Coetzee met at ITD.

During the meeting it was mostly Johan van Zyl and Grethie who shared their stories with each other. I listened attentively. Johann Roux also made valuable contributions, deconstructing various Biblical discourses on homosexuality. At the end of the meeting, Grethie again expressed her need to meet other gay women, and on Wednesday, 27 March 2002, I arranged a meeting between Grethie and Cuzette, a female gay colleague of mine. Cuzette was in a longstanding monogamous relationship with another woman.

On the day of our meeting, Grethie bought me a book by Max Lucado, *You are Special*, which she read to the two of us during our visit. She read herself deep into my heart. Although it was a children's story, it conveyed the message of our uniqueness before the Lord so vividly. It also exposed how easily discourses on certain groups of people can be developed. The morning was special, because a sense of love and care and loyalty was established between the three of us. The morning's discussion helped Grethie to accept the fact that she was a gay woman.

According to her, it also gave her courage to take the bold decision of coming out to her husband and her congregation – an event that reached the front page of *Beeld* (Van der Westhuizen 2002:1). She viewed this step as her first step to freedom from living a lie to living an abundant life in Christ.

Although Grethie and I became friends, she lived in Vanderbijlpark at the time and I needed a friend closer by. My friendship with Johan van Zyl developed to such an extent that it fulfilled most of my needs at the time. He was clever, creative in his thinking, a warm person to talk to, had a wonderful sense of humour and he was a gay person who knew the pain of rejection by the church first hand. We started e-mailing on a daily basis and we became best friends.

### **3.7 COMMITMENT TO A NEW WAY OF LIFE**

According to Hunter (1990:229), this is the stage where the new convert breaks with the past because he/she considers the new way of thinking superior to the old.

#### **Thursday, 13 September, 2001**

Johan van Zyl came to see me. Listening to his story, I became aware of how I was increasingly turning my back on prejudice and doubt. Towards the end of the session, he asked me what I believed about the aetiology of gay people. I answered without hesitation: *It is part of their being, like the colour of their eyes. Nobody chooses to be gay. I don't believe a poor relationship with somebody's father or sexual abuse per se can be the cause of somebody's homosexuality.*

This was an important moment, because it was the first time that I verbalised my newly developing ideas about homosexuality. I was shocked by my own words. After I had spoken, it felt as if I had lied to him. It was as if my mind was lying, but my heart was speaking the truth. What was happening to me? Was I saying things I didn't believe? I was afraid of what I was starting to believe. What about the Bible and the church? What would people say? What would the people at EE3 and the ministers of our congregation think? I was the editor of our local church magazine. My husband, my children, my family, my friends, God – what would they say? It was impossible to stop my journey. I would be a traitor. A traitor to whom, I wondered. A traitor to the gay community, or to the Bible, or to my own Christianity? I started to understand more and more of the fear, the anxiety, the uncertainty, the struggle, the shame, the

rejection that gay people experience when they decide to come out of the closet. I was becoming one with them and instinctively knew that the next step would be to defend them in public, whatever the cost might be.

Johan van Zyl had a profound influence on my life and my work. He made me realise that the gay people who were visiting me were voiceless and that my journey with them held the possibility of empowering them and of helping them regain their voices. Turning back would deprive them of the hope many were starting to hold onto. If we could travel in what Heshusius (1994:15) calls a symbiotic, participatory consciousness way, doing hope and care and theology (Ackermann 1994:197,199) together, we could empower and envoice each other towards healing and liberation. But I also sensed that journeying with gays could hold the possibility of a thorny, slippery road with many obstacles to overcome. The direction to take was unclear and the destination unknown, but the beginning too far behind me to turn back. Besides, the challenge was enormous and the commitment well established.

Although I was still confused and scared, my hope to change gay discourse started to form a shield against homophobic remarks by people from the church and the broader community. Initially, I could not even define therapeutic success, but when love, care and embracement became abundant, all of us knew we were rubbing success on each other's lives. I was really starting to understand more about homosexuality. This set me free from the exhaustion the continuous doubt had brought me. There was so much work to be done. Nothing could change me into a salt pillar anymore. Instead of looking back all the time, I was focusing much more on the present and the future.

On **Wednesday, 19 September 2001**, I read Romans 1-3 attentively. Suddenly I understood how I should journey with gay people, as well as with straight people who commit injustices against gays: I should journey respectfully and non-judgementally. I should always remember that, just like those of any other sinner, both the gay Christians' and the straight Christians' trespasses have been forgiven through the grace of God and the sacrifice of Jesus at the cross. Apart from understanding the gay Christians better, my own struggle also enabled me to stay connected to parents of gay children, as well as to other members of the community, especially within the DRC. It helped me not to judge the injustices levelled against gay people, but to understand these within a particular context. I understood that people who commit

injustices against gay people do so because prevailing discourses and knowledges about homosexuality prescribe certain behaviour to them, while obscuring different discourses and "truths" about gay people (Foucault 1989:28). My journey with straight people with regard to the gay issue should thus not be one of condemnation, but rather one of participation and of attentive listening in order to break through the power of the discourses. It should be an ethical journey (Heshusius 1994:15).

The following day, one of the ministers from my local congregation paid me a visit. I shared my idea that one should always read Romans 1, 2 and 3 together. These chapters refer to all sins, but also state very clearly that nobody can abide by the law one hundred percent. Therefore, we are set free through the grace of God alone. He reacted by accusing me of looking through the lenses of love alone and said that those lenses determined how I interpreted Romans 1. I could not understand how I could look at anyone in a different way. Is that not what Christ came to teach us? I realised that I was moving away from a dogmatic approach to a more ethical or relational and pastoral approach with regards to the gay issue.

### **3.8 CONSEQUENCES OF MY NEW WAY OF THINKING**

Hunter (1990:229) points to the fact that consequences may differ from convert to convert. However, it seems that the experiences of a new way of life and a sense of power consolidate the new beliefs and behaviour. During the journey there should be a continual process of growth and renewal of the new beliefs. In my case, this process of growth and renewal of my new beliefs were enhanced by my continuous reflection on and evaluation of new information and new experiences. My new beliefs were also further inculcated by groups of people as well as by my advocate (Dr Bartlett), who gave me guidance and emotional and intellectual support, and who provided proper pastoral care when I questioned the validity of my new way of thinking.

#### **3.8.1 Experience expanded**

One of the first consequences of my transformation was that it became known among the gay people that there was actually a straight Christian therapist who did not reject gay people. This led to many more gay people coming to me for therapy. I was exposed to many situations resulting from the gay issue, for example, on

Tuesday, 26 March 2002, I had the privilege to witness a gay father, already divorced from his wife, conveying the news that he was gay to his teenage daughter. What made the biggest impression on me was the relief of both father and daughter that the secret was out. The living of lies had ended. The lies that had kept her father away from her had lost their power over them as a family. Both were looking forward to a much closer relationship where the father could fulfil his role as father of his children again. Experiences like this speeded up my learning process and affirmed my transformation.

### **3.8.2 Freedom from fear**

During one of my sessions with Johan van Zyl, I realised that it was only a matter of time before I would be defending gay people in public. This happened in April 2002. As the editor of our local church magazine, I reviewed *The truth shall set you free* by Sally Lowe Whitehead. It was the first time that anything about gay people was ever written or spoken of in our congregation. The church council and some members of the congregation were more than upset. One of our ministers called me and asked me never to publish anything about homosexuality again. His words, *you have to keep quiet*, almost silenced me. For the first time, I was confronted with the possibility of conflict with the church. Fear almost got the better of me, because, at that stage, I saw God very much as being equal to the church. I wondered what my husband, my children and my other family members and friends would say if I were to be banned from the church. It was now no longer only a gay issue; it was resisting the authority of the church.

But I could not stop. I had listened to too many stories and I had witnessed too much pain and injustice to be submissive to the church. Like Ken Sehested, executive director of the Baptist Peace Fellowship of North America (Wink 1999:53), I could not remain silent, because it would involve me in a profound level of hypocrisy. For the first time, I realised that God is bigger than the church. This realisation set me free from guilt and from the obligation to honour the DRC's viewpoint on homosexuality. I felt empowered by the freedom from guilt, but also by the freedom to serve the Lord without certain prescriptive boundaries that hindered my relationship with Him.

A gay man responded to the book review and wrote how reading the book had helped him to come out of the closet. I had to publish his letter the following month.

Again, I got a call from my local minister please to stop writing about gay people. Apparently, the church council was not very pleased with me. They asked where I had got the mandate from to tackle the issue in the congregation. This created a lot of tension in me.

I called Dr André Bartlett, chairperson of the Southern Transvaal Synod Commission, who promised to support me. He assured me that the gay issue was very relevant at the time, since it was on the agenda of the following General Synod, in October 2002. I also told him about the Bible study meeting to be held on 17 April 2002, where gay people and straight people could make eye contact with each other. He undertook to arrange an interview for me with Neels Jackson of *Beeld*.

I decided that from now on fear would no longer have any power over me. I knew who I was. I knew who the marginalised people were and what at least some of the injustices were that we were resisting. There was only one way to go, and that was forward.

### **3.8.3 Becoming bolder**

I had belonged to a DRC Bible study group for twelve years. We met on a weekly basis at various members' homes. The next meeting, on 17 April 2002, was at our house and I planned to invite Johan van Zyl, a gay ex-minister, to share his story with the group. This was my first attempt to invite participation between members of the DRC and a gay person in a direct way. The theme to be discussed was homosexuality. Because I expected about 25 people, I requested the use of a venue from my local church. This was denied, because the feeling was that the church council would not be comfortable with that. Thus, the Bible study group gathered at my house. Twenty-two people listened to Johan sharing his story with us. Quite a number of them were my colleagues from ITD. I was scared of a possible negative reaction and had invited them for cognitive and emotional support. There was also a minister from our local congregation who attended the meeting in a kind of supervisory capacity.

Johan was an eloquent orator and his story touched people's hearts. Apart from one man who said he was confused about what to do with the texts in the Bible, the rest of the Bible study group said their attitudes had changed after listening to Johan's

story. There was consensus that their empathy and understanding of gay people increased and their judging of gays disappeared, while their acceptance of gay people's *bona fides* increased. One person said he had grown up with the story of Sodom and Gomorrah and he would like to discuss it with somebody like Dr Ben du Toit, well-known theologian in the DRC, but also a friend of his. It was a new perspective to him to view this story in terms of inhospitality and gang rape. He could also accept that the context of Johan's story differed from those of the Biblical stories. One woman said that, although her empathy had increased, she still did not understand at all why people were gay. She did, however, understand that the contexts of the stories differed. Although she was convinced that the Bible condemned homosexuality, it was unclear to her where the lived experience of man and the Biblical perspective, as she understood it, would meet. She realised that parts of the Old Testament, such as Leviticus, were no longer relevant today, but what about the New Testament texts condemning homosexuality? One man was deeply moved by Johan's story of rejection by the church and asked him: *How on earth did you manage to keep your faith?* Johan answered: *I know I am saved by the grace of God through the death of his son Jesus Christ alone. Rejection by the church does not equate rejection by God.*

Towards the end of the meeting, I requested the supervisory minister to close with prayer. He was so overwhelmed with emotion that he asked me for a few moments just to pull him together again. Before he prayed, he asked all the gay people and their families whom he had hurt during his years of ministry for forgiveness. Since then, the two of us have become great friends and he supports me tremendously. The change in him was amazing, if one takes into account that he was the minister who told me to "keep quiet". I realised that the changes in perceptions towards gay people that occurred that evening took place due to participation between gays and straights. This motivated me to facilitate more participation between the two groups.

Apart from the value this event had for the Bible study group, it was also valuable to somebody like Johan. For the first time he had a voice. He could tell his story, which was not only a story of suffering and loss, but also a story of faith and victory and hope. This is in accord with how Ackermann (1994:1999) views the aims of feminist theology, namely that "all people's humanity [will be] affirmed in just, loving, liberating and healing praxis".

The following day he reported having had nightmares the night before, caused by the fear of rejection by the Bible study group. This story of rejection and of not being good enough for society and the church had become so dominant in his life that he struggled to control it. However, the success of the evening helped him to stand up against the voice of rejection. The effect that evening had on different people empowered me to carry on with my endeavours.

#### **3.8.4 Envoicing gays and their families**

The following day, Thursday 18 April 2002, Neels Jackson of *Beeld* interviewed me on my ideas on homosexuality (Jackson 2002:11). We also arranged an interview between Neels and Johan van Zyl (Jackson 2002:11). Later, with my client Sandra's permission, I sent Neels a letter written by her, which was also published under her initial, "S", in *Beeld* (S 2002:11). She was married to a gay man and in the letter she honoured her husband for the special person he is. She also accused the homophobic society and the church for her husband's painful journey as a gay man in a heterosexual marriage. Both Sandra and Johan van Zyl later told me that they felt empowered by reading their own stories in the newspaper. They both reported a sense of having a voice and that, at long last, other people were listening to them.

Pieter Cilliers (2002:15) responded to Johan's article by accusing the *Hervormde Kerk* of insensitivity in dealing with Johan van Zyl and his wife, Sanrie. Cilliers warned that the rigidity, the prescriptiveness and the unapproachable attitude of the church would gradually reduce it to an irrelevant organisation. This feedback increased my realisation of the importance for marginalised people to have a voice, because it places them in a position where they can also exert power. Reading the stories of Johan and Sandra in *Beeld* at first evoked a sense of wonderment and disbelief in me. Then it gradually dawned on me that, together, we could exert power to the benefit of gay people and those affected by homosexuality. The realisation that our concerted efforts towards participation and changing gay discourse were already having an impact on, at least, gay people and their families filled me with energy and courage for the road ahead.



### 3.8.5 Doing care and counselling with parents

As I was progressing on my journey with gay people, I became more aware of specific needs they had. For example, on Thursday, 13 June 2002, one of my clients, Renier, and I discussed the need to start a support group for parents of gay children. However, at that stage it seemed as if the parents preferred to visit me alone, because of fear of rejection by society and the church, and because of the emotionally laden situation. To Renier's astonishment, his father (Piet) accompanied his mother (Luna) to come and see me. Luna is a computer specialist and Piet a general practitioner. We had a very successful counselling session during which many of their discourses on homosexuality were deconstructed. The session was very important to me, because it gave me much more insight into what it is like for a parent to have a gay child. I thanked them for coming. After the initial getting to know each other, I asked them what it was like to have a gay son.

*Luna: It is very painful.*

*Marietjie: May I ask what is it that makes it so painful?*

*Luna: As a parent, I had so many dreams and ideals for my child and now there is nothing. Also, on behalf of my child I feel sorry for him that he has to live a life of rejection. The church, as well as society rejects gay people. They are outcasts, freaks, abnormal.*

*Marietjie: I hear that care is part of your attire. Yours, as well as your husband's, him being a general practitioner.*

*Luna: Yes, we both love our son very much.*

*Marietjie: Are gay people really abnormal, or are they considered to be abnormal judged by a society with a different sexual orientation?*

*Luna: They are not normal.*

*Marietjie: Luna, you spoke about your dreams for Renier. Would you like to share some of these dreams with me?*

*Luna: I wanted my child to be happily married, to have children of his own, to be successful in his work. I wanted him to be normal. And now everything is shattered.*

*Marietjie: Don't you think he is happy with his partner at the moment?*

*Luna: He is happy, but it is not normal. And he will never have children of his own. We won't have grandchildren.*

*Marietjie: I hear your sorrow about grandchildren who will never be born. I agree that it is very sad. Quite often, this is something big to gay people. I wonder what Renier's views are on this issue? Does he also experience sadness? Have you asked him about it?*

*Piet: No, I don't talk to him about the matter. You can't even talk to your friends about your child. You can't tell them anything, because you are always afraid this thing will come out. It's a shame. A while ago, my father, aged 91, who doesn't know about his grandson being gay, commented on another grandson of his staying with his girlfriend. He said: "Ag, you know, it's not the end of the world. Everybody does that today. We should be thankful that he is not living with another man." It hurt; it cut through my heart. Nobody knows; I can't blame him, but comments like these make me withdraw more and more.*

*Marietjie: What will happen if it comes out?*

*Piet: No, but that worries me. It seems that he is happy to be gay.*

*Marietjie: Do you think it is fair towards him to try and decide on his behalf what his happiness should look like? Don't you think there is a possibility that he has already worked things out for himself?*

*Piet: No, I guess it is not fair. Maybe he has worked things out for himself, but that worries me. He seems so content with his situation. It seems as if he doesn't want to change. I can't accept it. I just pray that the Holy Spirit will guide me through this. (He started crying. I stood up and gave both him and his wife a hug.)*

*I waited a while and began in a very soft voice.*

*Marietjie: I can see that it hurts a lot. I care for you and I care for your son.*

*Marietjie: I heard you say to be gay is a mindset. It is something that can be changed. Do you think it is fair to assume what it is like to be gay on behalf of your son?*

*Piet: No, you're right. But if I only knew whether he tried to change. I am filled with aversion if I think of the sex part.*

*Marietjie: I'm pretty sure he tried to change, but perhaps, because he was born gay, he could not change. Does it make it better to know that he is in a monogamous relationship, that he is not a pervert?*

*Piet: Yes, at least that is something to be thankful for. I have nothing against Rudie.*

*Marietjie: Can you only think of sex when you think of Renier, or is there more to him than sex? If we were to make two lists, the one describing his sexual activities and the other the other qualities, which would be longer?*

*Luna: Definitely the other one. He is highly intelligent, successful at his work, a serious person who cares about people. He is very handy in mending things, he is very responsible.*

*Piet: He can handle a firearm extremely well. He is a tough guy on the farm. We used to have so much fun together, especially on the farm.*

*Marietjie: Do you still engage in some of these activities together?*

*Piet: I don't know how to put it, but it is as if there is a distance between Renier and myself. It is as if we can't communicate any more. I don't have anything against Rudie. It is just that I feel uneasy and irritated when he is with us. I never get a chance to speak to Renier alone. And even if I should get a chance, I wouldn't know what to say.*

*Marietjie: What do you think is trying to stand in the way of communicating with your son?*

*Piet: It is this thing. It is not his friend; it is his being gay. I had expectations and he disappointed me. I don't have words to express my feelings. I feel cheated. I brought him up in a way I thought was proper. I was totally unprepared for this. Being gay is not normal. I have feelings of aversion if I think about my son being in a relationship with another man. It is not natural.*

*Marietjie: I am really trying to understand how you are feeling now. But I know I will never be able to know exactly what it is like to be in your position. Before I started*

*doing research with gay people, I also had different ideas and feelings about them. Then I started to listen to their stories. I started hearing their pain, their suffering, their struggle to change. I have not heard one gay person saying to me that he deliberately chose the gay lifestyle.*

*Piet: To be gay is a sin. I will never accept that lifestyle for my son. Today people want the Bible to adapt to their ideas instead of them adapting to what is written in the Bible.*

*Marietjie: Yes, I agree with you that people are taking the context more into consideration when trying to interpret the Bible. I wonder how I could exclude my personal experience, my emotions, my baggage and my preferences when I read the Bible? Do you think it is possible? And what about the preferences of the persons who wrote the Bible? Don't you think one should take these into consideration when we really try to understand the Bible? Do you think the cultural historical context should be taken into account when we try to interpret the Bible? Did you know that the word "homosexuality" was only coined in the nineteenth century? Bible writers like Paul wouldn't even understand the meaning of the word today.*

*Piet: Yes. I think we should take the cultural historical context of the Bible into consideration.*

*Marietjie: If you read the texts referring to homosexuality carefully, you will realise that they actually are written in the context of heterosexual people wanting to execute homosexual acts out of pure lust, against their nature. But for a gay person like your son it is natural to be with a man, because it is against his nature to be with a woman.*

*Piet: Hmmm.*

*Piet: Sometimes I do think about what I could have done wrong. I remember how I used to take my two boys to the farm in the Bushveld, how the three of us used to do men things. We used to go on game drives, to play, to braai, to have fun together. I did take them there often without my wife. I thought we were bonding. But I know I was also absent from home a lot.*

*Marietjie: There are many theories on why people become gay. However, none of these is watertight. There are just too many exceptions. I can assure you nothing that you have done could have made Renier gay.*

*Luna: I often think about how I raised him and about possible mistakes. I know I made a mistake to forbid him to play rugby, but I did not want him to get hurt, to break his neck. But he was never a feminine type of person. He is very handy; he can fix things. His first word was "machine." He always wanted to work with his father's tools. He was never in the kitchen and never wanted to do female stuff.*

*Marietjie: Some big and strong rugby players are gay. So, letting him play rugby would not change his sexual orientation.*

*Piet: If only I could determine what caused his gayness. There is nobody in the family who is gay.*

*Marietjie: As I have said, there are all these theories, but, in practice, they have been proved to be unreliable. There are too many exceptions. May I ask you: do you ever think about you being heterosexual?*

*Piet & Luna: No, never. It is so normal. We have been born like this.*

*Marietjie: I wonder whether you could try and start to consider that Renier could also be born gay and that being gay could be normal to him?*

*Piet/Luna: Hmmm.*

*Marietjie: But does it really matter why somebody is gay? The fact is: he is gay now and where do we go from here? Are we going to reject him and make his struggle worse, or are we going to try and support him?*

*Luna: We must support him as best as we can.*

*Marietjie: I wonder what support would look like to you?*

*Luna: I would like to embrace my child with love, accepting him for who he is.*

*Marietjie: According to Jesus, the biggest commandment is love. Don't you think we have double standards when we apply the laws in the Bible, especially in the Old*

*Testament? Why do we select some of the laws not to be applicable to us anymore like about menstruating women, or mixing of materials, or about women not covering their heads anymore when they go to church, or about cutting hair? Why is the sin of homosexuality singled out as the biggest sin, while we establish support groups for people who are, for example, divorced or who are governed by alcohol or any other substance, etc, etc?*

*Piet: Yes, I agree with you. Everybody with a problem gets support from the church, but the gays are rejected and seen as these big sinners. One sin is not bigger than the other.*

*Marietjie: So, do you think we, as Christians, have a responsibility towards gay people in general, but also to Renier and Rudie, in particular?*

*Luna: I think we should give them all the support we can. We should not be judgemental, but rather be thankful for the beautiful relationship they have. I don't want my child to commit suicide because he feels rejected.*

*Piet: Yes, I agree. I understand that I should try and open up the communication for my child's sake. And my own sake. I love my son very much. I don't want to lose him. He is a very special son. At the moment I still don't want to read anything about gays, but if you find anything interesting on the genetic origin of being gay, will you please forward it to me?*

*Marietjie: Most certainly. I am just wondering: How would it be if you were to arrange a trip to the farm with Renier like in the olden days? Maybe he also longs to talk to you alone. What would it be like to tell Renier some of the things you have told me tonight?*

*Piet/Luna: That's a good idea. We'll give it some serious thought.*

The following day I received a phone call from Luna, thanking me for the previous evening. According to her, she had not seen her husband opening up to the extent of the previous evening for a long time. She could not believe that he was talking about his feelings so openly and so honestly. Even their relationship improved after the previous evening. Both of them felt lighter, as if a big burden had been lifted from their shoulders. Apparently, her husband, when their younger son enquired about the

evening, said: That woman talks a lot of sense. As Luna said, that was his way of saying he enjoyed the evening.

I shared with her a brief conversation I had with Renier a few days before the appointment. I thanked him for entrusting me with his parents. Upon which he replied: *Marietjie, if there is one person who will be able to get my father to open up, it will be you.* Luna said: *He was absolutely right.* I used this to strengthen the value of her son's judgement by asking: *So, do you think your son had good judgement in choosing a therapist for you? I wonder what made you rely on his judgement? Is there any other situation in which you think you could also rely on his judgement? For example, in choosing a life partner?* Luna replied: *I guess I can. You know, I am very fond of Rudie. I talk to him on the phone quite often, and I really don't have a problem with him* (see 3.8.7).

On Monday, 1 July 2002, the parents of another gay client came to see me. The mother was very adamant that their son could not be gay and she seriously pleaded with me to change him. I tried to deconstruct some of the discourses that controlled the mother's thinking about gay people, but it was as if she was in shock. Although she participated in the conversation, she was very heart sore. The week before, I had a conversation with her son and he was so happy to be gay. He was so relieved to be out of the closet, also to his parents, and the last thing he wanted was to become straight. All his efforts in the past to change his sexual orientation had been to no avail. He had now come to a point where he not only accepted, but also celebrated his homosexuality (Egertson 1999:27-30). This strengthens my belief that gay people do not choose to be gay and are happy when they can accept their gayness.

### **3.8.6 Coming out more and more**

Another rather unexpected consequence of my transformation and consequent journey with gay people resulted in an interview with David Epston, a major proponent of narrative therapy from New Zealand. On Saturday, 10 August 2002, during a workshop held with the ITD students, David interviewed me on my research. I had a chance to share my experiences with everybody in the hall. By that time, I was so passionate about my work that everybody could see my transformation. Fortunately, it was a safe environment, because the ITD students were well trained in the post-modern paradigm of viewing truth and reality. Although I was not yet sure

about the direction of my research, it affirmed the relevancy of my efforts to try and deconstruct gay discourse.

My first public exposure to a possible hostile audience occurred on 20 August 2002. Dr Willie Botha addressed the women of Monumentpark DRC congregation on the proposed report on homosexuality, which was to serve at the October 2002 synod of the Dutch Reformed Church. He asked me if I would assist him with practical examples. Dr Willie's address was very sympathetic towards gay people. He spoke from a Biblical perspective and introduced the audience to a contextual reading of the Bible. I tried to convey some of the problems gay people are confronted with every day. I also shared some of their stories with the audience. Although a few people from extremely fundamentalist backgrounds asked questions like: *Why it is that so many gay people molest young children?* the overall spirit of the group was empathetic. One woman in the audience started sobbing. She came to talk to me after the discussion and made an appointment for the following day.

It turned out that her son had been gay, but had committed suicide ten years ago. For all these years, she had been controlled by Guilt trying to convince her that she had made her son gay. The discourse that parents can make children gay was reiterated in her by a psychologist she consulted just after her son's death. She only came to me for one consultation, and was crying tears of relief when she left.

A week later, on 27 August 2002, Dr Willie Botha, the then secretary of Doctrine and Current Affairs of the DRC, invited me to lunch. He wanted to listen to whatever I could tell him about gay people. Our discussion and lunch lasted for four hours, during which a number of gay people called me on my cell phone. He could overhear the conversations and was touched by the agony in these people's lives. I told him how gay people were increasingly leaving the church, because of prejudice and rejection by the church. *Will gay people be willing to wait another four years for the church?* he asked me. *I doubt it, I'm not sure*, I answered. The church had already started losing its relevance for many gay people. Even if the church should change its viewpoint at the 2002 October Synod meeting, it could be a long process to regain the trust of gay people. (This was actually reiterated by Dr Jean du Plessis, a gay clinical psychologist, during his address at the 2007 synod of the DRC.)



Towards the end of our discussion, I asked Dr Botha to share his impressions of our conversation with me. He replied: *I perceived a non-judgemental attitude of love and respect, not only towards the gay people, but also towards people from inside the church who were acting viciously against gay people. I have never doubted your faith in Christ, but, after today, I wonder whether we are not overlooking something which you might have observed in your journey with gay people.* Dr Botha added that after our conversation he had a better understanding of gay people and of the problems that are continuously trying to take control of their lives.

During our conversation, I became very much aware that I was re-presenting gay people and that no re-presentation is authentic. It is only partial. I asked myself questions like: *What gives you the right to do it? How can you do it in an ethical way?* I realised that, instead of striving for authenticity, I should merely try to be honest; taking up my responsibility to represent people whose difference destabilised me and my notions of "natural, good, normal". The biggest challenge of interpreting these stories is to re-create the context to such an extent that both the listener and the reader would have some sort of understanding of the translated language in which I try to convey the message. At the same time, the owners of the stories should become envoiced and empowered through my representation.

According to Amanda Kemp, a visiting graduate student from the USA to South Africa during 1993, the honesty in my re-presentation can be enhanced when I acknowledge that I am crossing boundaries and that I have a certain privilege to cross these boundaries. Furthermore, I have a responsibility to use the power as re-presenter to critique the imbalance of power. I also need to recognise my points of difference and limitations, as well as allowing my co-travellers to indicate the limitations of my knowledge, language and experiences (Kemp 1996:27, 28).

An opportunity to critique the imbalance of power presented itself on 2 October 2002. I participated in a telephone conversation with Dr Willie Botha and Dr André Bartlett for Radio Pulpit. The main topic of discussion was the proposed Report of AKLAS, to serve before the Synod meeting on 16 October 2002. I asked the person conducting the conversation whether he should not get gay people to participate too. This could invite participation by a large number of listeners. Before the programme was broadcasted, they requested me to arrange a few of my clients whom they could also

interview. Three clients participated: a mother of a young gay man, a gay woman and a gay man.

To hear their own voices on the radio, expressing their own opinion in public, had a tremendous effect on these three people. They felt proud of who they were. They experienced themselves as people who could speak their minds in public. While the voices of Shame and Fear and Guilt were silenced during the therapeutic journey, speaking over the radio was almost like "coming out" publicly. They were also aware of their role in helping other people who might be struggling with the same problems. The effect it had on them also affected me. It motivated me to carry on with my work, because I could experience how people benefited when they become enoiced and empowered.

### **3.8.7 Rewriting of chapter in catechism book**

On Tuesday, 15 October 2002, I attended the General Synod meeting of the Dutch Reformed Church with Rudie, a gay student in his second year of theological studies (see 3.8.5). I warned Rudie that attending the Synod with me could create the impression that he was gay. I wanted to take great care that he would not be exposed or forced to "come out" before he was ready. He assured me that he did not view that as a problem. He was ready and being with me would give him the opportunity he was waiting for. While we waited for the discussion on gay issues to begin, Dr Louis Dressel, the then secretary of the Youth Committee, was doing the final proofreading for the new catechism textbook for final-year learners. Dr Dawie Theron, the then secretary of the Ministry of Caring, who knew about the research I was doing, asked me whether I would be prepared to have my telephone number printed in the book in order for gay learners in crisis to have a help number. I asked to read the chapter on homosexuality first before I made my number available. The chapter still contained outdated ideas on homosexuality, which I conveyed to Dr Dressel. Dr Dressel asked me whether I would be prepared to rewrite the short chapter that evening, because he had to have it by the following morning. I agreed, and with the help of Dr Dirk Kotzé (my supervisor), who edited it at five o'clock the following morning, the contribution was eventually included in the new textbook. This ensured that at least Grade 11 learners in the DRC across the country would be able to read a different viewpoint on homosexuality.

### 3.8.8 DRC Synod, 16 October 2002

After a long day's wait at the Synod, the discussion started. At some stage, one person proposed an amendment to the report by the Commission on Doctrine and Current Affairs of Dr Willie Botha. His amendment not only appeared on a huge screen, but was also amplified in the Synod hall. It contained the following devastating content:

- Homosexuality is punishment for sin.
- It is a sin and therefore gay people are going to hell.
- Gay people do not have the Holy Spirit in them.
- We don't need to talk with gay people when we want to make decisions concerning them.

I was sitting next to this young, courageous gay man, Rudie. He loves the Lord dearly and does not live a promiscuous life. In fact, he wants to become a minister and works part-time to pay for his studies. I was in shock and I was worried about how this amendment would affect him. I could not believe that somebody could still be so uncaring, so rude. I called out to the Lord and said to Him: *Lord, this is not fair, it is not justice, where is the grace and the love from the church, from your children?*

Before we left, Dr Ben du Toit from Communications of the DRC asked me to introduce him to Rudie. Rudie told his story to Dr du Toit, who arranged with a journalist from the *Sinode Bode* ( a daily newspaper only published during General Synod meetings of the DRC), Jean Oosthuizen, to interview Rudie. They took a photo of him and it was placed with the article on the front page of the following morning's *Sinode Bode* (Oosthuizen 2002:1). I was delighted, because Rudie got a voice. He "came out" at the General Synod; he did not want to live a lie at the Faculty of Theology anymore. His courage to resist the resistance of the church and society against gay people will be long remembered. He could breathe, because he was free. The publication of his story led everyone at the Synod who read it to participate in his life story.

When we left the hall late that evening, my whole body was shivering, because of the affect of the amplification of the amendment on me. It was as if I pre-empted the

pain of the gay people. I started crying. Rudie put his arm around me and said: *You are sacrificing your whole life for us. Please don't be so sad. I am OK. I am used to these kinds of words and treatment from society. It does not affect me at all.* However, the following afternoon, he called me and was crying too. It was only during the night that the effect of the harsh, insensitive and loveless words had started to manifest. He just had to speak to me. I managed to calm him down by holding on to hope for a positive outcome during the final debate and the voting of the Friday session.

That evening I told both Dr Bartlett and Dr Willie Botha about the effect of the Synod debates on us. Both showed a great deal of empathy. A special bond had formed between Rudie and me. It was a strong, unspoken commitment of love and care and embracement. We knew we were journeying together. The togetherness formed an umbrella of hope over us – hope and faith that the suffering would soon be over.

The final report accepted by the Synod of 2002 was more positive than negative. We were disappointed that no decision was taken about gay ministers and other clergy as far as monogamous relationships are concerned. At least there was a general attitude of apology and of "reaching out in love". I take it as our responsibility to provide a face to this "reaching out in love". We are also the church.

### **3.8.9 First publications**

In January 2003, a client of mine asked me to respond to the decisions taken by the *Gereformeerde Kerke van Suid-Afrika* (GKSA). On 31 January 2003, I wrote an article, *Why doesn't the church make eye contact with gay people?*, as a response and it was published on [gay@litnet](mailto:gay@litnet). A friend's response to this publication was: *Why do you publish here? Do you realise you are public now?* Going public and risking rejection is a small price to pay in order to help envoicing gay people and to help freeing them from injustice and prejudice, as well as from exclusion from God's love and grace and embracement.

On 7 February 2003, a letter I had written after attending the gay Christmas service was published in *Kerkbode* (official newspaper of the DRC). The purpose of this letter was to show how easily "reaching out in love" could be done with gay people. Rev André Muller of the Reforming Church called me and thanked me for the positive

letter. According to him, it made many people aware of the existence of the Reforming Church.

### **3.8.10 Learning to deal with pain from the church**

At the beginning of 2002, Trevor, a minister in the DRC, came to me for counselling. He was gay and suffocating in the closet. He was also very lonely. After a while, I introduced him to Johan van Zyl. It was love at first sight. They were both ministers, of the same age and a perfect match. The only problem was that Johan was already out of the closet, while Trevor could not take any risks or he would lose his job. After the December holidays of 2002, I sensed a bit of tension and restlessness in the relationship between Johan and Trevor. On 18 February 2003, Trevor told me that one of his church members had seen Johan and him together while on holiday. Although they had not been holding hands, Trevor had to explain to his co-minister what was going on. He suggested that Johan should be introduced to the congregation as Trevor's friend and Trevor's case should be made an example for the Synod to see how they would deal with him. This invited tremendous fear, because Trevor could lose his job.

Trevor and I gained advice from a senior advocate who offered his services free of charge in support of the gay issue. He advised us on what Trevor's constitutional rights would be if he should be tagged as gay. According to the advocate, he could have a chance in court, as long as he denied his relationship with Johan. This calmed him down a bit, but Johan was still governed by fear. His own experience of being abandoned by the church was still too fresh in his memory.

After three weeks of counselling sessions and intense tension, Johan ended his relationship with Trevor. He could no longer breathe in the damp environment of the closet, to which he had to return to if he wanted to be with Trevor. Fear was trying to convince him that the church was going to control his life again. He said: *I have paid for being gay before. I have lost everything. If I go through with this relationship, I am going to stand trial again. I don't want to run the risk of losing everything again. Or how many times do I then have to pay?*

They were both devastated, but the fear of losing his freedom, of having to suppress his identity again, was bigger than his desire for this relationship to work. As he

remarked at one stage: *I feel alone in the big ocean while the Titanic has just sunk, but I am free. I am an eagle now. Trevor is still a swan. We don't fly equally high, but that should not do any harm to our individual enchantment. I cannot become a swan again. I will drown.*

I was overwhelmed by sadness, because both had conveyed to me how much this relationship meant to them. Questions I kept asking myself were: *Is this fair? Is this justice? How come that institutions like the church have so much power over individual lives? Is this what God wants?* Here we have two people in a loving, monogamous relationship, harming nobody, working hard, worshipping God, doing Bible study together, but the pressures from society and the restrictions from the church have just become too much to sustain their relationship. They could never go anywhere together, not even on holiday. They could not live together, they could not attend church together, they could not hold hands, and they were not allowed to let a relationship develop. They were denied to love each other, because they were always afraid. And another two years before the next Synod meeting were just too far away.

Each called me and asked me to comfort and to do care with the other one – which I was already doing. They then hated the church. The church had won again.

I conveyed their story to a few leaders in the DRC as a way of inviting them, albeit in an indirect way, to participation. This story made an impact on the leaders but would they still remember it during the next General Synod in 2004?

### **3.9 REFLECTING ON MY TRANSFORMATION PROCESS**

When I reread this chapter, I thought how silly it all sounds: my fear, my endless decisions to stop the journey with gay people, forever wanting to turn back, resisting the conversion process, the turning around. I wondered why it had been so difficult for me. Could it have been because of my conservative upbringing? Could it have something to do with the internalised "truths" bestowed on me within the patriarchal society in which I grew up?

For many years, to be gay was stigmatised. To some extent, that is still the case today. Initially I did not expect to be stigmatised too and I was totally taken aback by people's reactions towards me. When people started isolating and threatening me, I

feared rejection and loneliness. I feared that I was also going to hell with the gay people. Today I realise that it resonated with the fear, rejection and isolation that gay people and their families experience, although I believe their rejection is experienced more existentially.

Remembering my fear and hesitation helps me to have more patience and empathy with other people's journeys: the journeys of gay people and their families, but also of straight people in the DRC who are at a different place than I am in their journeys. It also helps me to forgive my friend who initially deserted me, but who, after a year, invited me back into her life. In the meantime, she had read a lot about homosexuality. She had also witnessed a gay couple baptising their child in a congregation of the DRC and had become much more open to listening to the stories of gay Christians. At first, I was suspicious of her motives, and it took me a long time to trust her again. Now, I realise that I then held a position of moral highness, and did not respect the pace and the direction of her journey of transformation. She, like many others who crossed my path, as well as I myself, was just *en route* to making a very difficult epistemological shift. For most people this is a lonely road.

I cannot but wonder when we will reach a stage in the church and in society where we will be bold and humble enough to cut through all the insignificant issues. When will we be ready to accept our vulnerability and let go of the suffocating power play in which we so often entangle ourselves? When will we be willing to really get to know gay Christians? When will we not only see and hear their stories, but also let these stories touch our hearts and our souls?

### **3.10 SUMMARY**

This chapter gave an account of my own transformation process over the past five years. The seven stages of my transformation process were described. I started with almost no knowledge of gay people, and was governed by stereotypical discourses about gays. My cultural, social and religious contexts constructed and upheld these discourses. At a certain point, I was confronted with the reality of homosexuality, which caused a crisis within me. I could never be the same again or think how I had thought about gays before. In order to restore the disequilibrium in my thinking, I embarked on my quest for new ways of thinking about gays. The old ways of thinking could not solve the problems I now had to face. In this chapter, I also described how

my commitment emerged, as well as what some of the consequences of my transformation were.

My quest led me to various encounters with people and groups who were experiencing the same discomfort as I with regard to stereotypical discourses on homosexuality and who were struggling with the same issues. It also brought me into direct contact with gay Christians, their parents and other members of their families. My years of listening to their pain caused by societal rejection and degradation as human beings, as well as my own participation in their committed Christian lives, facilitated my own transformation. During this process, I lost old friends, but gained many new ones. Because the process of making a paradigm shift often takes one along a lonely road, I developed certain cognitive and emotional needs. I had to understand how to read the Bible in context in order to restore the disequilibrium, which had initially been created when I started listening to gay people's stories. But I also had the need to be cared for and to be supported emotionally. These needs were met through interaction with my "advocate" and with certain groups, as well as friends and family members. I was fortunate to have found an advocate or leader in the person of Dr André Bartlett who "embodies the ideals and mobilises the vision of the group" (Hunter 1990:229). He played a huge role (especially through the report that served at the Southern Transvaal Synod in 2004) in deconstructing my own religious discourses with regard to homosexuality.

In the following chapter, I will focus more on deliberate attempts to facilitate participation in order to deconstruct gay discourse in the DRC.



## CHAPTER 4: EFFORTS TO FACILITATE PARTICIPATION IN ORDER TO DECONSTRUCT GAY DISCOURSE IN THE DRC

*Paradigm shifts are ...expressions of resistance  
against unethical and unjust practices  
shaped by dominant discourses ...  
- Kotzé, Myburgh, Roux & Ass.*

### 4.1 INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, I focus on some of my efforts over the past five years to deconstruct gay discourse in the DRC by inviting the church to participate with gay people. Participation was done directly or indirectly through the stories of gay people. Often these participatory efforts were threatening to members of the church. Stephan Joubert (2007:12) writes that reform in the church is never threatening to those who have been written off: the poor, the broken, the lost, the forgotten, the vulnerable, the seekers or the helpless. It only threatens the "safe" church traditions and "holy" institutions. According to Joubert, reformers have the courage to risk making eye contact with the world while sharing a new vision of the mercy of God.

### 4.2 EFFORTS TO FACILITATE PARTICIPATION

Due to the limited scope of this dissertation, I will briefly refer to some of my efforts, while focusing in more detail only on a few of my endeavours to invite participation and to bring about change. Brueggemann (1993:24, 25) is of the opinion that people do not change because of doctrinal argument or sheer cognitive or moral appeal. According to Brueggemann, people change by the "offer of new models, images, and pictures of how the pieces of life fit together". These models, images, and pictures are carried by particular narratives. The slow, steady process of transformation invites each other into a counter story about God, world, neighbour, and self. This involves the "unlearning and disengaging from a story we find no longer to be credible or adequate". For example, when I declared my love towards gay people in a letter to *Kerkbode* (2003:11), I provided the readers with a new model or presentation of reality with regard to gay Christians. In that specific letter, I defended my love towards gays on the basis of my experience that God and they are on the same side. They are not God's enemies, as a previous letter writer (Kriel 2003:11) had suggested, but his friends. At the time, a person from Potchefstroom called me and commented on the letter. He thanked me and said that he had never before thought

that one could love a gay person. He had only thought they were despicable and should be removed from society and from the church. For the first time, his eyes were opened to the love and mercy of God, also towards the gay people. The letter was thus instrumental in unlearning a story in this man's life about gay people.

The first event at which a gay ex-minister of the *Hervormde Kerk* (Johan van Zyl) shared his story of rejection by the church with members of my DRC Bible study group (see 3.8.3) initiated a number of efforts to introduce members of society, especially of the DRC, to the narratives of gay people. Many of the efforts were not so much pre-planned as emerging from a situation upon which I acted, like the overnight rewriting of a chapter on homosexuality in the senior catechism book during the 2002 Synod of the DRC (see 3.8.7). Sometimes I reacted to invitations like addressing DRC cell groups or groups of ministers from a congregation or from a circuit. Because my focus was to invite participation in order to change perceptions about gay people, I always tried to involve gay persons on my journey. I would, for example, always suggest that I take a gay Christian (often Rev André Muller) with me whenever I received an invitation to address a group of ministers on the gay issue. Rev Muller would then get an opportunity to address the group by sharing his story, but also by leading the discussion from a theological point of view. Just to experience listening to Rev Muller was normally a deconstructing process in itself, because, to most people, it was their first encounter with a gay Christian.

#### **4.2.1 Participation through Andrew's story**

During one such an invitation to address a group of church members in Centurion, I decided to present the talk in the form of a psychodrama. This form of storytelling created a different perspective on being gay. The story of Andrew is a representation of his authentic story, but the interviews are a product of the imagination, trying to put reality "under negotiation" (Brueggemann 1993:17). According to Brueggemann, if we can use our imagination to construct reality from a different, creative perspective, "the world can be construed differently". The speech delivered in 2004 reads as follows:

*Good evening, friends! Over the past three years my life has changed dramatically, because I decided to side with gay people against injustice. This mainly happened because I realised that I don't possess the absolute truth about many things, especially not about homosexuality.*

Recently Johan van Zyl, a friend of mine, showed me something which John Berger, a renowned British author and art critic wrote in his book, *Ways of seeing*. He wrote: "You only see what you look at, and looking is an act of choice". To me, this implies that one can choose where you want to look, keeping in mind that there will always be something that you will not see. What you choose to look at will, in its turn, again be influenced by the lens through which you look. This lens is usually coloured by your culture or by the time in history or by your position in society. I would like to illustrate what I mean by sharing with you a story that took place two weeks ago.

Most stories consist of more than one character. I would like to tell this from the perspectives of four different characters. Please keep in mind that I am merely representing them here and, as you probably know, no representation is authentic. What you are about to hear is thus only my story of their stories.

"One Saturday morning, Andrew, a gay boy in Grade 12, was sitting on the stoep of their house somewhere in Johannesburg, lost in meditation and staring at the street. His parents were divorced because alcohol got the better of his father, a DRC minister. A few months previously, his father passed away and his mom and he moved to a new environment. This also meant attending a new school. Loneliness and despondency tried to trick him into believing that life was not worth much. His subject choices did not work out, he did not have friends, and, on top of everything, he had told his mom the previous week that he was gay. Ever since he could remember, he had known that he was different. For many years, he prayed to God and pleaded with him to be changed, but he remained gay. He is at his wits' end, because his friends, as well as God, have rejected him. On top of that, the only friend he had at the previous school, a gay girl, had recently committed suicide.

Nobody understands him. His mother hopes it is only a phase that will pass. During break at school he sits alone. He is eighteen and is increasingly aware of the rejection that is coupled with him being gay. He tries so hard to think of girls, but he is attracted only to boys.

While sitting on the stoep, he saw a schoolboy passing on his bicycle. He was preparing to greet the guy, when the latter shouted out loud: "Hi, you f... moffie!" That was the last straw. Andrew got up, walked to the safe, took out the revolver he had inherited from his dad, and put the barrel against his head. At that moment, his

*mother "coincidentally" entered the room. She persuaded him to put down the revolver, and called a family member in Pretoria who "coincidentally" knew me. His mother called me and we made an immediate appointment.*

*An hour later, Andrew, still catatonic, sat in my office. He could not speak and his body was stiff from the tension. I stood up. With his permission, I pulled his slender, shivering body towards mine and held him for a while, allowing my own heartbeat to calm him down. He struggled to formulate his words. I listened to his many heart-breaking stories. Only after about an hour did he manage to share the story of the guy on the bicycle with me.*

*I want to end the story as seen from Andrew's perspective here and proceed to interviews I conducted with three other characters in the story.*

*My first interview was with the boy on the bicycle.*

*M: "Do you know Andrew, the gay boy on the stoep?"*

*B: "Yes, well, no. He's a new guy in our school. He doesn't talk much. People talk about him ..."*

*M: "Who taught you that it was okay to address a gay person like that?"*

*B: "Ag, you know, everybody speaks like that. My teachers warn us against gays. My dad makes jokes ..."*

*M: "What do you think was the effect of your language on the boy on the stoep?"*

*B: "I don't know. I have never thought about that ..."*

*Then I interviewed the church.*

*M: "Do you know Andrew, the gay boy on the stoep?"*

*C: "We don't know his name, but they're all the same. We have read books on gay people. In our regional synods, we have listened to a few stories told by gays. Sometimes we think we don't know."*

*M: "What stands between the church and unconditional acceptance of this boy?"*

C: *"Serious differences in the exegesis of the few texts. Fear of church division. The honour of God's being must be protected. Gays are welcome in the church as long as they don't have relationships."*

M: *"If they are welcome in the church, what directives have you given to your members on how to include them in the body of Christ after years of rejection?"*

C: *"None. We ourselves don't know how to interact with gay people."*

*Lastly, I interviewed God.*

M: *"Dear Lord, do you know Andrew, the gay boy on the stoep?"*

G: *"Please read Ps 139. I know him, because I have made him. He was wonderfully made in his mother's womb. My fingerprints are on him. I love him profoundly."*

M: *"Is your mercy then also meant for him?"*

G: *"Of course. The full implication of my Son's death and resurrection is that I look upon this boy and see someone who has never done anything wrong (Col 1:22). Through Jesus' death at the Cross, he stands pure and faultless in front of me. He accepted Jesus as his Saviour and is therefore precious to me."*

M: *"Father, what about the honour of your being?"*

G: *"Nobody needs to defend Me. I am. My honour equals your love for your neighbour. Love this boy. He is your neighbour. You should embrace him, take care of his wounds, put new clothes on his body, and new shoes on his feet. You should respect him; validate him as a human being, as my creation. When you honour him, you honour Me."*

*Friends, now that you have listened to different perspectives of the story, I want to ask you a few questions.*

*Firstly: What in the stories touched you?*

*Secondly: Was there something in the stories that resonated with a story in your own life?*

*Thirdly: Why?*

*Fourthly: What are you going to do about it?*

*I thank you*

People from the audience reacted very emotionally. A straight minister who initially had difficulty controlling his emotions told a story from his own childhood, when he was ridiculed by his friends. The effect was that he grew up often feeling like the outsider. He said he had not realised that gay people felt the same. He solemnly pledged to help stop discrimination against gay people. The effect of the psychodrama was that it provided people in the audience with a different perspective. It invited them to participate in the story of Andrew and to weave their own stories with the story of Andrew. Instead of just being regarded as a "f... moffie", he became a human being, created and loved by God; a person with a face and a name and with human worth and dignity. This psychodrama also created the opportunity for derogatory language to change to more respectful language when talking to or about gays (see 1.8.3; 6.3.2).

#### **4.2.2 Inviting participation through *Kerkbode* and *Coram Deo***

The gay debate in the DRC was especially conducted via *Kerkbode*, the national newspaper of the DRC. I decided to write more letters to *Kerkbode* sharing stories of gay Christians. As a lecturer at *Coram Deo*, a pastoral care centre at *Oosterlig*, a DRC congregation, I was also successful in requesting inclusion of the subject of homosexuality in the curriculum. The students were introduced to the topic of homosexuality through reading material, as well as through letting them listen to the stories of gay Christians. During one lecture at *Coram Deo*, I invited a gay paraplegic person to the class. This facilitated participation between the students and the gay Christian man. For the first time, the students had an opportunity to listen to a gay Christian's story. Each of the students reported how they were touched by his story and how their prejudices against and perceptions of gays had been changed. I also arranged an open day at *Coram Deo*, which everybody could attend. During that occasion, I invited Grethie Coetzee and Rev André Muller to share their stories with

the audience. Learners at *Coram Deo* were confronted with the stories of these two gay Christians. While listening to the questions and the remarks of the audience before the meeting was adjourned, I realised how deeply they were touched by the stories of these two. Ryna Grobbelaar, the CEO of the pastoral care centre and a good friend and colleague of mine, was instrumental in achieving this after her views on homosexuality had also been transformed. She (Grobbelaar 2006:155) wrote in her thesis on friendship that my mission with gay people had inspired her own devotion to gays, but also to any person who is different from her. According to Grobbelaar, the stories I told about gay people invited her to re-evaluate her own values and beliefs. On reading that, as well as by feedback that I received from the above events, I was humbled, but also encouraged to pursue my mission.

#### **4.2.3 Inviting two DRC ministers to personally convey the 2004 Synod's apology**

An event that encouraged participation and which had an impact on at least two DRC ministers, as well as on gay people's perception of the DRC, was when two ministers of the DRC personally conveyed the apology of the 2004 General Synod to the Reforming Church, a gay congregation in Pretoria. On 9 November 2004, I had a meeting with Dr Kobus Gerber. I asked him if he, as the new general secretary of the DRC, should not personally convey the apology by the DRC to the gay community. He thought it was a good idea, upon which I asked his permission to call Rev André Muller immediately in order to arrange a date for this event.

We set a date for the Sunday evening of 21 November 2004. Dr Kobus Gerber and Dr Willie Botha, the outgoing secretary of the Commission of Doctrine and Current Affairs of the DRC, attended the special service at the Reforming Church. While the congregation was singing, Dr Gerber, sitting in the front row, looked back at the singing congregation, and then whispered to Dr Botha: *Willie, there is no way that we (the DRC) can send these people to hell*. I was sitting between the two DRC ministers and could hear distinctly what Dr Gerber was saying. They personally conveyed the apology by the General Synod of the DRC (Jackson 2004:4) to Rev Muller, upon which Rev Muller handed letters of acceptance of the apology (De Beer 2004:11) to Dr Gerber (see Appendix C). This was an important display of the change in discourse on the side of the DRC – something which, perhaps, would not

have taken place if I had not facilitated the participation between the two groups. Everyone present was thankful and overwhelmed by the importance of the event. Dr Gerber confirmed the perceptual change that had occurred in him during that evening in a documentary programme about Rev Muller, when he referred to this event on national television (SABC 2007).

During 2005, I also had the privilege to serve on the Southern Transvaal Commission for Homosexuality under the leadership of Dr André Bartlett.

#### **4.2.4 Serving on the Commission for Homosexuality of the Southern Transvaal Synod**

While serving on the Southern Transvaal Synod Commission for Homosexuality, I was involved in organising two separate workshops at the *Aasvoëlkop* congregation of the DRC: one for Christian gays and one for parents of Christian gays. More than a hundred gay people turned up at the first workshop – a first ever for the DRC. A few of the gay people reported that they were scared to attend the workshop, because they did not know what to expect. Some even reported nightmares and a feeling of "this is too good to be true". The workshops were conducted in a relaxed and safe environment where everybody's identity was kept away from the press. The two groups experienced their respective workshops extremely positively.

During the first workshop Christian gays for the first time got the opportunity not only to share their stories with members of the DRC, but also to participate in debate about the report on homosexuality which served at the Southern Transvaal Synod. This was empowering to the gays and a learning experience to members of the DRC. During the second workshop for parents of gay children a mother of a gay son (she is also the wife of one of the DRC ministers) told her story of how they experienced their son's "coming out". Thereafter a discussion session followed where parents could also comment on the report mentioned above. It was also the first time that parents of gay children could voice their opinions and their lived experiences of having a gay child, while being a member of the DRC.

During the evaluation session, some of the parents commented that the DRC does not believe that gay Christians are normal, trustworthy and exemplary people, but rather believes that gays are under the influence of Satan. Parents also accused the



DRC of holding the position that gays are a threat to morality in the church, thereby intimidating gays to live a life of secrecy. Consequently, we get the so-called ex-gays, promiscuity and direct or indirect discrimination. The attitude of the DRC towards gays causes tremendous suffering to families and friends of gays. The parents pleaded with the church to re-evaluate its general attitude and behaviour towards gays; to determine whether being gay is right or wrong and to provide guidelines with practical examples, based on the Bible, of what such attitudes and behaviours should be.

The parents also experienced that the workshop set them free in the sense that they could verbalise their very painful and difficult-to-formulate emotions in an audible way. This led to much better bonding between parents and their gay children. At last, they felt they also had a voice in the church. For the first time, they had some hope that the church would start listening to them.

During these two workshops participation between gays, as well as their parents and other members of the DRC was facilitated on a scale unknown in the DRC. It was again the sharing of stories and the making of eye contact, of learning to know gays as people with names and faces and hearts, which moved the members who attended the workshop. The aim with these workshops was not primarily to change perceptions of the DRC, but rather to empower and to envoice gay Christians and their parents. Gays and their parents reported the workshops to have been a healing experience.

Towards the end of 2005 due to my involvement as a therapist in the gay community I was co-opted on the task team of the Commission for Homosexuality, to report at the 2007 General Synod.

#### **4.2.5 Serving on the task team for homosexuality of the General Synod of the DRC 2007**

Our first meeting took place on 21 September 2005 at the General Synod offices in Pretoria. At that meeting, everyone had to give a short introduction of his/her view with regard to the problem of homosexuality, as well as his/her expectations of what should be done to solve the problem. During the week before the first meeting, I discussed this matter with two of the gay ministers at the Reforming Church. They

were both concerned that the debate would be conducted on a very intellectual level, while the stories of gays are seldom heard and few straight members of the DRC have had contact with gay people. I tried to convey this concern in my introductory presentation.

#### **4.2.5.1 My introductory presentation at the task team**

In our preparation for this first task team meeting, each of us had to prepare a contribution on our views on homosexuality, as well as on what we thought the church should do with regard to the gay issue. In my preparation, I conferred with the gay ministers at the Reforming Church. When it was my turn, I started by clearly stating that I was representing the gay community, but that I was also willing to listen to other people's viewpoints. I then briefly referred to some of the terminology, specifically pointing out the difference between *homosexuality* (the absolutised form of homosexuality) and *homosexuality*. I proposed that we either use the word homosexuality or preferably the word *gay*, because it removes unfair focus on the sexual act, since being gay also embraces the emotional and spiritual faculties of being human.

As my purpose was to facilitate participation between gays and members of the task team who were not well exposed to gays, it seems that representation with a mandate could be seen as one of the first levels of participation. My mandate from the gay community opened up possibilities to move between the two groups of participants. It gave me access to the stories of gays, but it also gave me an authentic voice within the task team. I could for example share not only my own view, but also the views of the gay ministers on what we considered the problem with regard to homosexuality to be. The views of the gay ministers were initially conveyed in an indirect way through me. We considered the problem to exist on two levels. On the one level, the two differing parties (pro- and anti-gay, mostly straight people) are conducting a debate on ontological, epistemological, theological, anthropological, etc. grounds. The debate is hectic, because two paradigms are in conflict with each other. According to Thomas Kühn (as quoted by Van Gelder 1996:B7), it takes time for one paradigm to replace another paradigm. "Frameworks must be lived with and explored before they can be broken. The new paradigm cannot build on the one that precedes it. It can only supplant it. The two are incommensurable." Kühn (Van

Gelder 1996:B7) also says that all existing paradigms explain reality only partially, which corresponds with a post-modern world view of reality (Anderson 1997:36).

If we accept Kuhn's ideas on paradigm shifts, it cautions us not to make hasty conclusions about "the truth" about homosexuality. We should rather be much more humble with the knowledge we have. Jackson (2003:19) refers to an important slogan in the reformed churches' tradition, used to solve difficult questions, viz. *Sola Scriptura* – only the Scriptures. He highlights the disastrous consequences in the past, when hasty conclusions about "the truth" based on *Biblical* (my italics) interpretations were made. In the case of Galileo Galilei, this led to the Pope putting Galileo in jail because Galileo was convinced that the sun, and not the earth, was the centre of the solar system. This was done because of the way the church interpreted the *Bible* (Jackson's italics) at that time.

At the end of the next General Synod, in 2007, we should hope to have answers on whether being gay and having a monogamous, loving gay relationship are sinful, etc. This will depend on "the right exegesis" and "the right" interpretation of the texts. This will again depend on the paradigm one is working from.

On the second level, the problem is how the church should react towards gay Christians (and gay non-Christians). I am of the opinion that, to address this problem, I will have to ask myself who God is for me (see 2.5.1.7), and what I see when I look at my gay neighbour. The answers to these questions will determine my reactions to gay people. If I view God as a "harsh and cruel governor" (Ezek 34:4) who wants to punish sins, I will have to wait until the DRC has taken a decision to know whether being gay is considered a sin before I can react. Should I view a gay person who is in a relationship as someone committing an abomination, I would also have to wait until the DRC has taken a decision to see whether my interpretation of the texts was correct, before I can react. If correct, I will have to try and convert the gay person from his sinful ways and thus try to change him into living a straight lifestyle. If I view God as a loving shepherd taking care of his flock, gathering those who are lost, healing the sick and the wounded, showing his love and mercy in Christ to the utmost to his sheep, then I have only one option, namely to love my gay neighbours unconditionally. Then I will embrace them by taking care of their wounds and by looking at them as people who are in a covenant with God. Then I will also start to take their stories of faith to heart.

What should the church do now? I am of the opinion that the church should focus on the gay person and not so much on the debate. The debate is important, but secondary. The church should move from trying to understand and reverse gay orientation to changing its gay discourse. The church should rather teach its straight members how to love its gay members. The church should make it safe for the gay members to be identified as gay within the church, thereby stopping the victimisation of gays. Practices whereby suspicion is cast should be unmasked and homophobic discourses and myths with regard to gayness should be deconstructed. Furthermore, congregations should get to know the hearts of gay Christians through personal contact, documentary videos and DVDs. This would give the gay issue a human face and would be instrumental in deconstructing people's fears.

Thus, I proposed that everyone on the commission should be involved in a process of gay engagement by, for example, attending a service in one of the gay congregations or attending a meeting of a gay support group – also of gays who claim that they have changed. All the above measures should only be seen as interim steps to integrate gay Christians completely on the grounds of their baptism (General Synod 2004) in the community of faith.

It was important to me that the task team members should know what my viewpoint was right from the start, but also that I was willing to participate by listening to other people's viewpoints. This was confirmed by various members during the evaluation of my role on the task team (see 4.3.2). On various occasions, I invited the task team members to participate, especially by attending a service in the gay church or to attend one of our support group meetings. Although I did experience that they were listening to me at our meetings, none of the members of the gay-conditionalist group accepted these invitations during the almost two years of the task team's existence. Of course, some of the members were not often in Pretoria, which made attendance more difficult. On the other hand, many of the gay-unconditionalist group, even those from Cape Town and Vanderbijlpark, accepted these invitations. (See 5.4.2.4 The difficulty in facilitating participation).

#### **4.2.5.2 The DVD as my second presentation at the task team**

For my presentation at one of the task team's workshops at Heron Bridge, the gay people and I decided to make a DVD where gays could tell their stories themselves.

It was a well-planned effort to bring the gay Christians to the workshop at Heron Bridge via a different medium. This can be seen as a next level of participation because I have progressed from a mandate to tell their stories indirectly to where they could speak directly, but still in an impersonal way via the DVD.

Exactly two weeks before our workshop, I woke up one night just knowing that I had to make a plan to let the task team members hear gay people's stories. I could not take the gay people to Heron Bridge. Therefore, a DVD on which they could tell their stories seemed an appropriate alternative. The next morning I called Rev André Muller and Rev Barry van Rensburg, a minister in the DRC, but also a freelance film producer. We met the following day at the offices of the General Synod. Rev van Rensburg told us it would be impossible to make a DVD in such a short time. The logistics of getting everybody together would just be too much for me to handle. On top of that, I had to get money for the production. He also asked me what exactly I wanted to achieve on a cognitive, affective and practical level. Rev Muller and I sat together for the rest of the day and the night, taking into consideration the ideas of members of my gay support group. The support group consists of members of the Reforming (gay) Church in Pretoria, whom we had also consulted in the meantime. We wrote down the goals we planned to achieve through the DVD, as well as all the logistics with regard to who would do what, when and where. This document we took to Johannesburg, where we met Rev van Rensburg the following morning.

#### **4.2.5.2.1 Why I made the DVD**

Initially, of course, I made it for my presentation to the task team. But perhaps I made it especially for somebody else as well. Perhaps I made the DVD for Francois, my hairdresser. One Sunday evening, when he attended church for the first time in seven years, I realised that. We held each other's hands, while he wiped his eyes throughout the service. Rev André Muller spoke about the meaning of being chosen by God. For many years, Francois had felt rejected by the church and by God, but the bond between him and God was so strong that he went back to church, resisting all the strongholds that had kept him away in the past: the depression, the loneliness, the shyness, the humiliation, the anger, the fear. Although Francois did not participate in the making of the DVD, I made it for him, because he was the first gay person who, seven years ago, had had the guts to confront me about my position on homosexuality and Christianity.

As previously mentioned, the direct impetus for making the DVD was to use it as my presentation at a workshop of the task team on homosexuality of the General Synod of the DRC. The support group, Rev Muller and I negotiated a number of goals that we wished to achieve through the stories on the DVD. These goals lay on three different levels of experience.

Firstly, on a cognitive level, we wanted the task team members to understand that the Synod decisions impact on real people, as in the case of the first woman speaking on the DVD. It was also important to convey the message that being gay is not a choice and that gay people are normal believers who bear the fruit of the Holy Spirit. Another big issue in the debate is gay relationships. Thus, we wanted to show that loving gay relationships exist and can last as long as straight relationships.

Secondly, on an affective level, we wanted the task team members to experience that the church is hurting gay people and that its treatment of them in the past had been inhumane, degrading and humiliating. We also wanted the task team members to experience that the church is causing divisions between parents and children, as well as what the effect of the above is on gay people, that is, their struggle to be accepted by God, often through efforts to change themselves by trying in vain to become straight.

Thirdly, on a practical level, we hoped to set the task team in motion. We hoped to change their actions, their behaviour, and their interactions with gay people. Perhaps we just wanted them to fulfill the greatest commandment of Jesus, namely to start loving their gay neighbour.

Rev van Rensburg was surprised, impressed and satisfied. He gave us the go-ahead. We had less than two weeks left. One of the participants, Professor Willie van Aardt, had to come from Potchefstroom; another participant, Johann Reiners, from Durban. Fortunately, the others who participated were all from Pretoria. We had only two days of shooting, because Rev van Rensburg had to hire a very expensive camera at a daily fee. The Sunday and the Tuesday seemed the best two days. Everyone I called to speak on the DVD agreed. The participants were hundred percent cooperative. Even Professor van Aardt from Potchefstroom was willing to drive to Pretoria at his own cost. Dr Martin Lazenby, a renowned theologian from the DRC who has a gay son and who was also willing to tell his story on the DVD, made

his church building available for shooting during the Tuesday morning. This saved a lot of time because more than one person could be videotaped there. Rev Muller suggested that we ask the gay community for financial support. That Sunday, during the evening service, he explained to the congregation what we were planning to do and how much money we needed for the project. Before the last hymn, we had double the amount we needed in the form of cheques and pledges. I was overwhelmed by the trust placed in me by the gay community. The DVD became a project of the Reforming Church. Everything went according to plan, and the Monday morning at Heron Bridge, when we started with our workshop, Rev van Rensburg brought me the first copy of the DVD. We showed it after supper. Nobody at the task team had known about the DVD, so it was a surprise to everyone.

The immediate reactions of some of the members of the gay-conditional group at the task team were comments such as: *If I want to call myself a Christian, I cannot deny that the DVD moved me, and: Previously I did not know many of the things that I have heard on the DVD. The one message I have heard is that the church is hurting people.* After the initial release of the DVD, there were many requests from congregations to watch it. Before the 2007 General Synod of the DRC, we duplicated the DVD and sent it to most of the delegates to the Synod. Even after the Synod meeting, we still receive regular calls from people congratulating and thanking us for the DVD.

#### **4.2.5.3 Daily invitation to participation at Heron Bridge**

During the four three day workshops which we have held at Heron Bridge I had to make use of every opportunity to invite participation between members of the task team and the gay Christian community. I did that by genuinely befriending my fellow task team members and by establishing a relationship of trust between us. It meant that I had to uphold high ethical standards even in the absence of the gay-conditionalist group members. I believe integrity builds trust. This led to many individual conversations with most of the members, resulting in a mutual caring with each other. I honestly tried to listen attentively to their stories and their arguments which again created opportunities for me to share stories of gay Christians in return. In my interaction with the task team members I tried to be respectful and non-judgemental, while I deliberately tried to avoid premature closure when confronted with a different opinion. I could accomplish this by constantly reminding myself of the

power of religious and societal discourses. The stories of gays provided me with a tool to deconstruct these discourses (see 2.3) by unmasking assumptions and contradictions in gay-conditionalists “truths” about gays. This approach of mine enabled me to bridge the gap which developed between the two groups at one stage. During supper one evening with almost no contact between the two groups I asked members of the antagonist group whether I could sit at their table. In a transparent way I told them about my sadness due to the prevailing situation. I listened to their views on what caused the break-up in communication and conveyed what I believed caused the break-up. This played a role in breaking the silence between the two groups, because others also started to interact again. My transparency also opened up opportunities for sharing what I have witnessed in the gay community, thereby enabling people at the table to participate, albeit indirectly, in the lives of gay Christians.

The issue of homosexuality debated amongst task team members was a sensitive and highly emotional one. My near experience knowledge of doing therapy with hundreds of gay people, their parents and family members helped me to stay calm and to keep on listening to other people’s stories. Apart from that, I remained conscious of the mandate from the gay community to represent them. I had to be a worthy envoy. Their future was to an extent at stake. Harsh remarks hurt me, but conveying my hurt to others contributed to establish a relationship of knowing, trust and of authority. The lack of aggression on my side kept the conversational channels between the members of the task team and me open. It also created an emotionally safe space where they could talk without the fear of being rejected or ridiculed. Instead of aggression I would sometimes use humour and celebration to lighten up a situation. For example the champagne which I provided one evening to celebrate one of our gay member’s marriage after he and his partner have been together for more than thirty years.

#### **4.3 GENERAL SYNOD OF THE DRC 2007: DECISION ON HOMOSEXUALITY**

The atmosphere during the gay debate was tense (Jackson 2007:7), but people in the task team learnt to respect one another. Both the tension and the respect were transferred to the debate on homosexuality at the General Synod of 2007. The language in the gay debate at the Synod was different from previous Synod



meetings, the consideration for other viewpoints was refreshing and the knowledge about homosexuality and the empathy towards gay Christians had increased. Dr Burger (2007:14) confirmed this when he wrote in *Beeld* that the empathy was palpable.

It was the day before Laurie Gaum's (a gay ex-DRC minister who was dismissed) appeal case against his dismissal as gay minister would serve, and there was a general idea that the outcome of the gay report would have an influence on Laurie's fate the following day. The two co-chairpersons (Dr André Bartlett and Dr Jorrie Potgieter) of the task team jointly presented the consensus part of the report, after which each briefly presented his side of the differences part in the report. A series of excellent arguments for both sides of the differences part in the report by various speakers followed. The one group mainly argued for gay relationships and the other group against them. Eventually, the ten moderators of the regional synods worked out a compromise proposal (Jackson 2007:1) overnight, which was accepted by the General Synod the following day.

The compromise proposal entailed a combination of the two reports and led to the following decisions with regard to homosexuality being taken at the 2007 General Synod of the DRC (Algemene Sinode [NGK] 2007b:8 – my translation from Afrikaans):

1. The Bible is our point of departure and in reflecting on homosexuality we are sincerely looking at ways to interpret Biblical values meaningfully within the context.
2. We accept the love of Christ as the only valid basis for relationships within the community of believers. All people are created in the image of God; the salvation in Christ is for all people and the Spirit was poured out on all believers. Thus we accept the human dignity of all people.
3. All people, regardless of their sexual orientation, are included in God's love. They are, on the grounds of their baptism and their faith, accepted as members of the church of Christ. With membership we understand access to the sacraments, access to the incumbency and submission to the church discipline.
4. The General Synod reaffirms the decision of 2004 that, according to our understanding of the Bible, only the unity between one man and one woman can be seen as a marriage.
5. The General Synod also affirms the decision of 2004 that both heterosexual and homosexual promiscuity should be condemned in the strongest terms.

6. The General Synod decides that, with the light that we currently have, homosexual unities and marriages cannot be accepted as an alternative for the marriage.
7. The granting of ministership is a function of the General Synod. The Synod decides that homosexual legitimates who lead a life of celibacy be granted ministership.
8. The General Synod acknowledges the discretion of local church councils to handle the differences on homosexuality in congregations in a spirit of Christian love.

Jan-Jan Joubert (2007:11) called point eight a "master move," because, for the first time in the DRC, the discretion of church councils was acknowledged and they were allowed to decide, in a spirit of Christian love, how to handle differences with regard to homosexuality. When Anton Pienaar (2007:3) asked a few people about their reaction to the Synod decision, the majority replied that they were relieved. I remarked (Pienaar 2007:3) that I felt proud to be a member of the DRC. In my opinion, the human dignity of gay people was restored, because the church showed its product, *viz.* mercy and love, to the world. Carien Fourie of *Rapport* (2007:14) quoted me when I said it was as if the church "came out of the closet" – a phrase I used in 2004 during an interview with a journalist from *Insig* magazine as our mission: to get the church out of the closet (Cronjé 2004:41).

Hopefully, after this groundbreaking decision which opens space for different interpretations of the handling of gay people by church councils within the DRC (Oosthuizen 2007:2; Jackson 2007:1), the client who wrote me the following poem will have the freedom to come out of "jail" and to live a respectable, fearless life as a gay man in the embrace of the DRC:

### **Jail**

The darkness ...  
 Filling all the left spaces.  
 The thick, black-coated bars...  
 The unopenable gate...  
 Locked ... till the day  
 When this long-lost cell  
 Will be found again.  
 WHY?  
 Years ... months ... weeks...  
 Days and hours have gone by.  
 All marked ... and forgotten...  
 WHY ME?  
 One two-legged bed ...

And the wall. On the other side.  
A flat mattress, and rotten blankets.  
No water.  
If I could only wash myself.  
Get away from these dirty thoughts  
And rusted memories.  
The silence ...  
The loneliness ...  
All trapped in the same room.  
Covering each word ...  
Each thought, in its own way.  
WHY?  
Once a day ... six times a week ...  
As I stretch out my shivering hand.  
To take ... to eat ... and later  
TO DIE

**EJ Scherman**

#### **4.4 SUMMARY**

When I re-read this chapter, I realised that a great deal of work had gone into making a small contribution towards the changes that have taken place over the past few years in the DRC with regard to the handling of gay Christians in the church. Fortunately, I was not alone in this quest. My co-travellers in the gay community played a major role in helping with the workshops for gays and for parents of gay Christians. Without them, I would also not have been able to make the DVD. That is why the DVD belongs to the gay church and its members.

Over and above the gay community, I was also fortunate to be guided and accompanied by a group of committed straight Christians, especially Dr Bartlett and all those members on the task team who also showed their sincere desire to remove the injustice done to gay Christians by the church. During the almost two years that we worked as a task team to draw up a report for the General Synod, I was under the impression that, although the two groups differed in opinion, most of the members of the gay-conditional group were seriously in conflict between how they interpret the Bible, on the one hand, and the reality of homosexuality, on the other hand. I always try to keep in mind that the process of changing from one paradigm to another is a slow process, because the discourses maintaining the one paradigm are often hard to deconstruct. Nevertheless, it saddens me to think that it was so difficult to help the

church to, as Joubert (2007:12) puts it, acquire the courage to risk making eye contact with gay people while sharing a new vision of the mercy and the love of God.

The next chapter gives an account of the reflections from the gay participants and of the task team members. It also introduces the model of my journey to deconstruct gay discourse.

## **CHAPTER 5: FEEDBACK FROM PARTICIPANTS TOWARDS A MODEL OF DECONSTRUCTING GAY DISCOURSE**

*Participation of all is a primary commitment if in anyway we aspire to being ethical*  
- Dirk Kotzé

### **5.1 INTRODUCTION**

An integral part of my research was continuous evaluation and reflection in order to invite participation (see 1.9). In doing participatory action research it is important that participants should take ownership in the production of knowledge. It empowers participants by realising their everyday life experiences and feelings as major sources of knowledge (see 1.8.3). I consider their feedback as a way of sharing their experiences and feelings with me and as such participating in the process of creating new knowledges. While, for example, the feedback of the gay participants gives account of their empowerment it equally becomes part of their empowerment. The feedback of the task team members, for example, helped me to realise whether their gay discourse was in the process of being deconstructed and if so, to what degree. These various feedbacks contributed to the development of a model of my journey to deconstruct gay discourse.

### **5.2 THE PARTICIPANTS' RESPONSES AND REFLECTIONS ON THEIR RESPONSES**

The reason for including this section in this chapter is amongst others to richly describe the relationship of trust which developed between the gay community and me. It also portrays something of the pastoral route I have taken with gays. Without mutual trust this whole research journey would not have been possible. They would not have shared their stories with me and they would not have risked participating on the DVD. The pastoral route of healing and empowerment of gays was also of critical importance to answer my research question of how to change gay discourse. For the sake of changing gay discourse I had to facilitate participation between gays and members of the DRC. In order to achieve this it was my pastoral responsibility to empower gay people by facilitating their healing processes. Their stories equally empowered me to pursue my aim of changing gay discourse.

I have asked two gay participants at the beginning and two at the end of my journey, as well as members of my support group who participated on the DVD to reflect on my journey with the gay community.

### **5.2.1 Reflections from two gay participants at the beginning of my journey**

During February 2003 I asked Johan van Zyl and Kobus, a copy writer at *Beeld*, how they realised that my commitment towards gays was genuine. Their answers then helped me in my endeavours to invite participation in order to change gay discourse.

**Johan van Zyl** said after the *Hervormde Kerk* asked him to resign as minister he was so heart broken, his self image was broken, while everything else was in disarray like scrambled eggs before they are baked. According to him my commitment became visible when I put my words into deeds by making time to stop at and to listen to Johan-from-the-hair-salon.

*None of my colleagues were prepared to relinquish their professional distance by getting involved with me. When your eyes are red from crying you don't look when someone says: 'my door is always open to you.' If someone really wants to help you in this situation, he/she should take your hand, walk you to the door and show you that it is open. You did this. My colleagues often let me feel as if I was sitting in shit. Every now and then they would stir with a loooong stick to make sure that your stench doesn't stick to them. Maybe sometimes I was like them when I was a minister. But I do know sometimes, when I would sit down with a poor old lady, drinking coffee at her kitchen table, then I was a little like you are with the gays. This is the only way to touch a person's sore heart - with a soft hand.*

**Kobus** pointed to gays' hyper-sensitivity towards judgemental behaviour, rejection and preconceived ideas about being gay.

*With you I experienced total acceptance. I did not feel as if I had to change or start working at something before our therapeutic relationship could become valid. My previous therapist made me feel as if he continuously tried to catch me out on having done something wrong. It was like an inquisition. It stole my energy. With you I felt relief, acceptance, transparency, honesty, respect ...and I immediately started to feel better and to gain hope with regards to my situation. Your unconditional love and*

*understanding empowered me and took away the fear. Although it's risky to open oneself up with you, you gave me strength to also open up at other places and to be myself. These were my first steps on the road to becoming whole again.*

It is of significance to realise that when Kobus became “whole” again, he was empowered enough to take up the responsibility of coming out and as such resisting prejudice. This is in line with Foucault’s notion (cited in Halperin 1995:29) that the closet is the product of complex relations of power. To be in the closet protects oneself from all sorts of social disqualifications. At the same time it is also a way of submitting to the social imperative imposed on gays by gays who don’t want to be identified as gays to shield the latter from the necessity of acknowledging the knowledge of their homosexuality. Foucault (cited in Halperin 1995:30) also does not see coming out as a pure liberating experience, freeing oneself from power relations. On the contrary:

To come out is precisely to expose oneself to a different set of dangers and constraints, to make oneself into a convenient screen onto which straight people can project all the fantasies they routinely entertain about gay people, and to suffer one’s every gesture, statement, expression, and opinion to be totally and irrevocably marked by the overwhelming social significance of one’s openly acknowledged homosexual identity. If to come out is to release oneself from a state of unfreedom, that is not because coming out constitutes an escape from the reach of power to a place outside of power: rather, coming out puts into play a different set of power relations and alters the dynamics of personal and political struggle. Coming out is an act of freedom, then, not in the sense of liberation but in the sense of resistance.

Kobus’ action of taking responsibility for changing discourse against gays resonated with what the gay minister from the DRC meant when he said *Marietjie can’t do everything alone* (see 1.7.3). The implication is that the responsibility to change discourse is much wider than just that of a few straight people. It also belongs to gays themselves, ministers, family members of gays, etc.

### **5.2.2 Reflections from two gay participants at the end of my journey**

I asked two gay people (Grethie Coetzee and Rev André Muller) who have journeyed with me from almost the beginning till today whether they think that my involvement in the gay community, as well as my efforts to deconstruct homophobia in the DRC did make a difference, and if, why?

**Rev André Muller** emphasised that I am a telling example of how the continued commitment of just one person eventually had a ripple effect on a large part of the South African society. He considers me to be a true bridge builder between the gay community and the DRC. According to Rev Muller I deserved a mandate to become a bridge builder, due to the fact that I did not look at gays in stereotypical ways, but treated every individual gay person as a unique person with a unique life story. Rev Muller views the biggest reason for my success in changing perceptions about gay people to be found in the open way in which I accept gays. Two aspects which are very dear to Rev Muller are that I do not hesitate to associate with gays and that I treat them just as I would treat any other person. He calls this the love of Christ which emanates from my actions. This made me feel humble, because I know that I was just being obedient to God and without His mercy and guidance this journey would not have been possible. But this also disturbed me. It was as if I experienced the injustice and the pain and the anger again and again and again. Is it not the Christian thing to do: to treat a person *like you would treat any other person*? Why should it be necessary for anyone to remark about that and to feel special when treated *like anybody else*?

When I asked André whether he did not get the impression that I was working on my own, he vehemently denied it by recalling numerous incidents where I have facilitated in order that gay people's voices could also be heard. He mentioned the many occasions where the two of us addressed DRC ministers. Normally I would be invited, but I would then suggest that André accompany me *to make the event more authentic*. André also referred to radio talks where I would suggest that gays should also form part of the discussion group. Lastly he reminded me of the many times that we had discussions in the support group about what and how I should convey to the task team members.

The narrative approach is a very respectful, non-judgemental approach to therapy (Morgan 2000:4). I was always curious (and a bit worried) about the incident which took place while we were shooting for the DVD (see 1.9) when I asked professor Van Aardt to talk to André and to touch him – the first gay person he has knowingly spoken to and actually hugged. So I asked André how he perceived the event. Was he embarrassed or too exposed or humiliated, or maybe he experienced it differently?



He replied that in the context he perceived it very positive. André proposed the reason for this to be twofold: firstly, many years of having had to defend who he is, made him less sensitive to possible rejection. He was also armed with a firm theological knowledge base which helped him to grow and to become strong enough to take certain risks. Secondly, he and I already had a long trusting relationship. He knew my motives were genuine and he felt safe with me. He has experienced my love for him on so many occasions; therefore this was a pleasant experience to him. I was not ashamed to affirm and to acknowledge in public, especially to a renowned researcher like Professor van Aardt, that I love him and that I accept him unconditionally. This incident increased his self worth and human dignity. According to Professor van Aardt this also helped him to move from understanding gays from a theoretical point of view, to physically touching a gay person, thus deconstructing his own fear of gays. This became a moment of insertion to him (Cochrane, de Gruchy & Petersen 1991:17), because thereafter his pastoral responses became located in his lived experiences. He shifted from “being right to doing right” (Rossouw 1993:903).

**Grethie Coetzee** and I met about six years ago while she was still the wife of a DRC minister, but already considering her “coming out” as a gay woman. She considers many of the changes in attitude in the DRC to be ascribed to my involvement in representing the gay person in the DRC. I need to put this comment into perspective, because there were many people apart from me in the DRC working towards changing of perceptions towards gays. I have for example great appreciation for the work of Dr André Bartlett and the task team members, but also for those people like Prof Elna Mouton, Dr James Kirkpatrick, Dr Julian Muller and others who bravely presented brilliant theological, but also ethical arguments at the 2007 General Synod. Nevertheless, I also acknowledge Grethie’s truth and accept it in a humble way.

According to Grethie, representing the straight community, I conveyed an attitude of unconditional love and acceptance. What struck her about my approach was that I did hope with her (and many others) and helped her to accept herself as someone worthy of love. According to Grethie she learnt in our journey together that it wasn’t God who rejected her, but individual members from the church. Grethie emphasised the participatory role which I play in the gay community in so far as I journeyed not only with the gays, but also with their husbands and wives, their children, their

parents and other family members. I share in their pain, their joys, their anxieties, etc. I laugh and I cry with them. What Grethie also appreciates is what she calls my ability to listen and to keep on listening and my boldness to keep on sharing stories on behalf of the gay people. According to Grethie I *helped gay people to stand up for their rights and to fight for their little places in the sun*. Maybe this is what Weingarten (2000:393) meant when she spoke about the risk you take when you become a witness to other people's trauma. According to Weingarten the risk of the witness is not only to try and grasp the experience of the other, but also to stay with the other and to risk the attempt to share what one has learnt from a perspective which is your own, but also the other person's perspective.

Another aspect which Grethie touched on is the risk I took in associating publicly with gays. She wrote about my rejection conveyed through looks, hate mail, hate calls, the loss of friendships, the questioning of my motives and my own sexual orientation thereby exposing my marriage, as well as my children and family members. Weingarten (2000:393) underscores this when she writes: "Those who attempt to describe the atrocities that they have witnessed also risk their own credibility. To speak publicly about one's knowledge of atrocities is to invite the stigma that attaches to victims." I was initially taken aback and hurt by the rejection from members from the straight community, but as my journey progressed I knew I had to stand up for gays. I experienced it as a calling from God.

### **5.2.3 Reflections from members of the gay support group at the Reforming Church.**

At the end of 2003 Rev André Muller and I discussed the need for a support group at the Reforming Church in Pretoria. It should be an emotionally safe place where gays could tell their stories without the fear of being ridiculed or rejected. Anderson and Foley (2001:4) consider part of the power of story telling that it enables us to make deep human connections that transcend unfamiliarity in locale and experience. André asked me whether I would be interested in starting such a group. Of course I was honoured, although I was also aware of the huge responsibility. We decided on a fortnightly schedule on Tuesday evenings, seven o'clock. Since the beginning of 2004 these meetings have been taking place on a regular basis. During July 2007, we added a group for parents of gay children to the existing group. This was a risk

we were taking, because normally these two groups are separated due to the emotionally laden content of the discussions. I thought it could serve as a powerful deconstructing agent (see 6.4), because parents were listening to the stories of gay children other than their own and *vice versa*. This created space for listening in an atmosphere of less emotional turbulence, but close enough to hear, often for the first time, what the other person's experience is. In this way the stories were also authentic, not me representing them and their stories. This facilitating participation in an indirect way is an example of a *praxis* on the continuum of challenging prejudice as proposed in the model of discourse change (see 5.4). When the challenge comes across too strong, participation will not take place. Challenging of prejudices can thus be seen as a *praxis* for prejudice change, but not the only *praxis*. Sometimes ignorance is also a *praxis* in the facilitation of transformation.

Before we incorporated the parents with the group, I was curious as to whether participation with the group facilitated healing and empowerment. This was necessary prerequisites for sharing their stories on the DVD through which their private pain, by making it public, could help others to benefit too. I wanted to know whether the group members have through the narratives become spiritual travelers, who, after two years of weaving their stories have experienced "a sense of movement and process in individual and communal life "(Anderson and Foley 2001:4). I received the following feedback in written form, affirming my expectations.

Juan Klopper

*When you stand in front of the door and the bolts frighten you – how do you break through? The group opened the bolts of my door in order that we could look inside the rooms of my heart. This could only happen the moment when I could also look into other gay people's hearts and when I could share in their sorrows, but also in the joys of breaking through into an open and a transparent life.*

Pieter Badenhorst

*By listening to everybody else's pain I realized my problems were not so huge. I also realised there is a God who listens. Through the group I managed to move much closer to God. In the past it was as if I was peeping in from outside.*

*Here in the group I became more aware of other people's struggle to be accepted by society and the church. I learnt how to accept myself for who I am and that God loves me for the human being I am, regardless of my sexual orientation. In the group I get an opportunity to listen to other people's problems and together we try to help each other. Many people have been assisted through their problems here in this group.*

Wim Griebenouw

*To me the group was an oasis in the desert, life giving water which feeds and strengthens. Here I could feel at home and was allowed to be myself – through and through. The life changing power which is created through the storying of each person's journey as an "alien" in a straight world, the pain and rejection, the feeling of exclusion, but then also the recognition of your own story and aspects thereof in someone else's story is healing and sets you free. The interaction with other in the group is dynamic and stimulating and gives me a voice to describe who I am and that I also have a place and a right like each of God's creations. To me this group was a practical experience of the text in John 8 – "you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.'*

Aubrey Theron

*After my five fold heart bypass operation in 2005 I felt despondent and ready to die. My overwhelming experience was the lack of purpose of my life here on earth. During January 2006 I decided to move out of my isolation and ended up at the Reforming Church, where I met Schalk Naudé. He introduced me to Marietjie who invited me to the group. In the group I became aware of all the difficult journeys of every other person who attended the meetings. As time passed my negativity started to dissolve. Although I still feel useless from time to time, I was touched by the loving support and acceptance of everyone here. To me every second Tuesday evening has become a highlight in my life.*

Elize Thornburn

*To become quiet for a moment in my own chaotic life and just to sit and listen to the stories of other people brings a sense of purpose back into my life. Everything can be OK again, because there are people with stories like mine.*

Ingrid Swanepoel

*For the first time since my late husband and I joined AA twenty years ago I experienced true warmth with the group. For the first time I experienced warmth with a group of people outside your normal group of friends. I experienced true warmth and care. Gradually I became proud to be gay and to be a member of the special subculture. Previously I was not ashamed to be gay. It was just a fact. Now I have become really proud to be part of a very special crowd.*

Rev André Muller

*To me as a reverend of the gay congregation the forming of this group was the beginning of a deepening of the mutual communion of the congregation. In the group people shared their deepest pain and struggle, but also their highlights with each other. Therefore we got to know each other intimately. Together we laughed and cried. Almost everyone in the group is also part of another action or group in the congregation, like the youth group, singles, choir, etc. There in these other groups they transferred this deeper knowing and care to other members of the congregation.*

*In one sentence: the group was instrumental for a deeper spiritual atmosphere in the congregation.*

Schalk Naudé

*With my first entrance at our gay support group I as a DRC minister experienced for the first time what it meant to be “church.” Perhaps this happened because here you don’t need to suffer from the “tyranny of respectability” (Kobus Anthonissen). Here the one binding factor was that you could be who you really are, without masks and fears. You could also experience that your story links up with a bigger story of gay stories with the same theme: “Please, accept me!!”*

*Gradually you became stronger and manage to start confronting the church and society in a critical way. I don’t see the group as a goal in itself, but as a resting place or a support oasis for the life journey of a gay person – always progressing forward.*

### **5.3 EVALUATION OF MY INVOLVEMENT AS A TASK TEAM MEMBER**

An integral part of my research journey was a continuous reflection and evaluation of my efforts to invite participation in order to deconstruct gay discourse. My participation on the task team provided me with an excellent opportunity where my efforts could be evaluated by a group of people with whom I had worked very closely for the past two years.

#### **5.3.1 Information sheet and letter of consent**

During the task team's last three-day workshop at Heron Bridge, I asked the members' permission to hand out an information sheet (Appendix A) about my research, as well as a letter of consent (Appendix B), should any of them be willing to assist me in my research project. The information sheet consisted of information on the purpose of my research. It also contained the following three questions, which I had formulated in order to evaluate my contribution on the task team, but also to evaluate their perception of God's love towards gay people:

1. How did my journey with the task team affect you and your views on homosexuality?
2. What in my journey with the task team affected you and your views on homosexuality?
3. How do you understand Christ's law of love in connection with gay Christians?

Participation was optional. Those who participated filled out the letter of consent, giving me permission to use their contributions in my research. The task team meetings were stressful and members were overloaded with work. Therefore, I felt uneasy to bother the task team members with an additional burden. Fortunately, all but two were willing to participate. In the end, we ran out of time, but I did manage to get the contributions of quite a number of the members. We were 18 members, and nine gave me their comments. It was of much value to me that four of the members who differed from me actually made time to answer the questions. Two of them preferred to write their answers. The other two were kind enough to grant me an interview during the following month (one in person and one telephonically). The rest were all willing to answer the questions during individual interviews with me at Heron

Bridge. Although I put three questions to them, it seemed that the answers to the first two questions overlapped. Some of the interviews were recorded, while some of the respondents preferred me to take notes.

### **5.3.2 Feedback from the task team members**

#### **Dr Willie Botha, scribe of the task team and secretary of Doctrine and Current Affairs of the DRC**

##### **Questions 1 and 2. How did my journey on the task team affect you?**

*The DVD impressed me. The impact of the DVD on task team members, as well as on me personally, was huge. People realised that the stories were authentic, the participants were not acting; it was their life stories being told. Even critical homophobic members on the task team had to admit that if they want to call themselves Christians, they had to admit that they were moved and had lots of food for thought. The fact that you used well-known people in the DRC, like Dr Martin Lazenby, enhanced the reputation of the DVD. I believe that you achieved your aim, viz. to deconstruct homophobia through the DVD. This makes the money and effort in the production thereof worthwhile. By sending it to most of the delegates to the General Synod, it certainly contributed to the creation of and change in spirit of respect and care and reconciliation at the 2007 Synod. This different spirit at the Synod eventually also led to a much more moderate decision – a compromise between the two parts of the report from the task team.*

*On a personal level, your contribution was greatly as a diplomat. You shuttled between people, ate with various members on both sides of the debate, and listened to them while also sharing gay people's stories with them. Because you gained everybody's respect, they were willing to listen to what you had to say. Your influence was really valuable in conflict situations when you had a calming effect on people of both groups, trying to help people to understand why a person held a specific viewpoint. Eventually, this helped to soften reactions that would otherwise be much harsher.*

*You also maintained a high ethical standard in as far as you never made negative remarks about people who differed from you behind their backs. This enhanced the respect and trust people put in you.*

*Another value added was to have you as a professional therapist on the task team. It safeguarded our group from being misled as far as scientific research quoted out of context is concerned. You also showed courage in challenging homophobic viewpoints without being aggressive. In this regard, your practical experience in doing therapy with gay people was indispensable. You were a reputable witness on the task team.*

**Question 3. How do you understand Christ's law of love in connection with gay people?**

*I understand Christ's law of love in connection with gay Christians just as I understand it with straight Christians. He loves us all unconditionally.*

**Jorrie Potgieter, co-chairperson of the gay-conditionalist group**

**Questions 1 and 2. How did my journey on the task team affect you?**

*You are the only one from your group who did not reject us. Yes, we did experience rejection from your group. You opened up to us, you visited us where we met, and you sat at our table and ate with us. Your stories and your DVD certainly had an impact. Because you listened to us without rejecting us, we could also listen to you. Although I have already listened to gay people's stories at the Eastern Transvaal Synod, by listening to you, my empathy towards gays was heightened. This was reflected in our part of the report to the General Synod in as far as our report speaks of empathy towards gays without rejecting them. However, this increase in empathy increases the tension, because I become more and more aware of their pain, while I remain in bondage by my conscience. One evening you came and sat at our table, sharing a touching story with us. You told us how you invited a gay young man with Aids back into the church and how you embraced him after a gay Christmas carol service, affirming the love of Jesus to him. This changed the young man's life. That evening you were not even aware of the fact that you preached to us theologians. I respect you, because I can hear that you hear the pain of the gay people.*

*The stories you told us about gays who were molested by people from the church, often by church leaders themselves, helped us to realise that the church needs to take responsibility for these actions. Therefore, we should not reject gays, but*



*embrace them and invite them lovingly into the church. But we need to tell them that gay relationships are against our policy and against the Word of God. The gay relationship is not promiscuous per se, but it is against the Bible. We cannot adapt the Bible to suit our own needs. I know that when I ask gay people to remain celibate, I ask something from gay people that I cannot do myself. Thereafter we leave it there. Then it's up to their conscience how they conduct their lives. We acknowledge that they have relationships. Should two men or two women live together, the church should not ask whether they are in a sexual relationship. The church should encourage them to be celibate within a friendship relationship.*

**Question 3. How do you understand Christ's law of love in connection with gay people?**

*The big thing with the love of Jesus was his inclusivity. Jesus accepted everybody, but he did not approve of everything they did. Jesus must have known about the ban on homosexual practices of his time, but he did not lift the ban. In the time of Jesus, when you did not agree with something, you would say so. Therefore we cannot say that he would have approved of it today just because of his silence on homosexuality. Sexual behaviour was not more important than obedience to the law. The law said "love thy neighbour", which meant that one should be loyal and responsible to the group you belong to. For example, gays would also have a responsibility to the group they belong to. If a homosexual relationship is against the norms and values of the group, the gay person either has to adhere to these norms and values or leave the group. But then it is not the group who reject him; he chooses to leave the group. I don't know of any gay person who was kicked out of the church. They resigned of their own accord.*

**Anonymous male gay DRC minister, married to a woman**

**Questions 1 and 2. How did my journey on the task team affect you?**

*I knew you before the task team; therefore I perceived your contribution as extremely positive. You have lots of experience with gay people. When I talk to you, I know I am talking to someone who knows gay people – it is not a theoretical discussion. At the 2004 Synod at Hartenbos, already, I realised that you have spoken to hundreds of*

gay people. Every day at the task team your contribution, in my opinion, was that of a support system. I am also exposed to a certain degree. It was good to know you were here. It was nice to know that you understood me. Thank you for defending me that day when one of the other group members asked me personal questions. What impressed me was your constant challenging of issues that some of the team members took for granted. You would often ask questions such as "Have you listened to gay people's stories? Is that how a gay person would perceive this? Have you taken the gay person into consideration or is this just some theoretical idea? Have you had contact with gay people? With whom? Where?" By asking these questions, you have often unmasked people's ignorance about gay people. The effect of this on the rest of the task team was always that here is somebody who is really talking from experience. It challenged the members to continuously ask: "Can I really say these things unless I have had contact with gay people?".

Your DVD impressed me. It also refreshed my memories about the injustices towards gay people. I was not shocked, because I know the stories. It was also not so much the injustice that touched me, as the positive stories about people who have been together for so many years, sharing their lives. For many years, I have come into contact with the difficulties of being gay. It is only recently that I met a couple who have been together for a long time and who drew my attention on the more positive aspects of being gay. The positive side of the DVD to me is that it shows scenes of love in action, like the two women who have adopted the black babies. What was also clear on the DVD was the interaction between couples who have been together for a long time. You could see the love and respect for each other in the way they spoke to each other. Their stories of shared hardship are a witness of their love for each other.

Members of the gay-conditionalist group say they love me too. It is important to realise that the experience of love does not become real when I say "I love you", but only from your response as reaction to my declaration of my love for you. What you experience as love is not necessarily love to me. On the contrary, it could be like a dagger stabbing me through my heart. This is how I perceive their kind of love.

**Question 3. How do you understand Christ's law of love in connection with gay people?**

*I think God loves gay people just as He loves any other person. Not more and not less. I don't think He has sympathy with them. To say that God loves gay people more because they are marginalised actually marginalises gay people. When gays are marginalised, it is because society marginalises them. I don't think God first determines whether you are gay or straight before He decides to love you. The statement "God loves the sinner but hates the sin" presupposes that what gays do is sinful. Theologically this is not a sound statement; because when God says He hates something He calls it by the name, for example, divorce. We distinguish too easily between the sinner and the sin. When you sin, you are a sinner. This is splitting on a personal level, which falls outside my frame of reference.*

**Judy Kotze, a gay proponent and in a loving monogamous relationship during the existence of the task team, now married to her female partner.**

**Questions 1 and 2. How did my journey on the task team affect you?**

*My first impression of you was that I was glad there was another woman on the task team, but also that you, as a pastoral therapist doing counselling with gay people, were willing to share your experience with us. I still remember how your first presentation and your openness as to why you were on the task team moved me that day. Shortly after you spoke, it was my turn and you encouraged me on my first official coming out at the church. To me it was important that the process should be as important as the finely nuanced arguments that developed as we went along. In my opinion you made an enormous contribution as far as the process was concerned, because, as a narrative therapist, you constantly expressed the issue of homosexuality in various ways. It was important to you that we should constantly be reminded that we talk with people like Jeanne and me and not about people. You provided the gay people with faces, like with the DVD. People's lives and the emotional impact on them and their families are at stake. This is what motivates you to be here. You had a service to deliver. Sometimes you did show your frustration when we paid too much attention to irrelevant issues and were, according to you, wasting precious time. Every time you made it visible that you were here.*

*Your natural sensitivity to do certain things, like the evening when you brought the bottles of champagne to celebrate Jean's marriage to his partner of 35 years wasn't*

*just a bright idea. It brought healing to me, as well as to other members of the group. It brought us together as a mixed group that evening. Francois and Jorrie also joined us. You actually cared for us all in a pastoral way. I would like to take this aspect of you to church councils. I would like to make this a part of the process; I mean the importance of pastoral care of people. It was not always easy to stay in the process. What I appreciated about you was your contact with members of the other group as well. I view your frustration as part of your responsibility, because you represented people outside. It was as if you had a constituency. You could embody something by often conveying that there are people outside – gays, parents and friends – depending on the outcome of this report. What would the impact on these people be, should the Synod decide this or that? You made a valuable supportive contribution.*

*As far as the DVD is concerned, I was impressed with your creativity as well as the short time within which you managed to put it all together. Also, how did you manage to get so many people to talk with so much confidence? Your DVD was actually congruent with what your mission was. It showed how committed you were to giving gay people a face and to having their stories told. You made the DVD because you felt there were not enough stories in the process. I don't think the DVD caused the separate meetings of the two groups as much as that the arguments became too emotional. And we had to restore trust between the two groups at that stage. Maybe the DVD contributed to an overload of emotional exposure at that stage, but the distrust was already there. We had to listen to each other's stories to restore the trust. That was a painful and almost unbearable experience.*

**Question 3. How do you understand Christ's law of love in connection with gay people?**

*The law of love is something I get emotional about, because it not only affects me, but all of us. The challenge is to love as Christ has loved us. We should take up our cross and follow Him. The challenge is to learn what it means to believe all, to hope all, and to endure all. Love is not a concept; it happens in relationships. It is an act of will, an experience, a demand. It confronts us every day. Especially here at the task team, us as gay Christians. Love asks us to journey much longer with people, to embrace our own pain and suffering lovingly, and, in spite of our rejection, we should learn how to love through an act of will. I should witness through my words and deeds in such a way that love wants to endure, that it wants to hope and to believe*

*something. To me, there is a bigger self-sacrifice that is asked – like a long breath of somebody tracking a spoor. Although we don't experience the end result, we should want to live in this way through the Spirit in Christ, even if we are still in a broken world. Love also means to have compassion with oneself. This sets me free to love others.*

*At the task team, I received ostrich eggs full of water at unexpected places in the desert. I am not sure whether we were always grateful enough. Maybe we could be more appreciative from both sides. Sometimes we tried to show the other side where the little bit of water was, like one day, during the trip from the airport to Heron Bridge, one of the members from the other group said: "I am prepared to be convinced if you understand the New Testament differently from how I understand it". I never went to talk to him again. That was showing me where the water was. There were many examples. The 28 pages of our report, written by people who affirm who I am, are precious to me. I want to put it under my pillow when I go to bed tonight. The knowledge that this is going to be sent out to others in the church is overwhelming. Here we have a product; there was enlightenment at Synod level for the first time (the consensus points and the differences). That is love. I don't think we have reached the stage at the task team where we know how we have to continue from here. With all the new developments (gay marriages) in the country, I think the church has missed the bus.*

**Francois Wessels, DRC minister in the Western Cape and member of the gay-conditionalist group**

**Questions 1 and 2. How did my journey on the task team affect you?**

*Your presence constantly reminded me of the pain many gay people experience – and that this pain is often caused by church-going Christians giving gays the impression that they are rejected.*

*The video that you showed about gay Christians made a powerful impact.*

*The extra effort you made to communicate with the others on the task team who did not share your point of view, the time you took to listen to our views and the reasons*

*for those views had an impact on me. It showed respect and made me more open to listen to your stories.*

**Question 3. How do you understand Christ's law of love in connection with gay people?**

*Firstly, that Christ's law of love compels me to assure gay Christians with whom I interact that they are included in the body of Christ, and that the fact that I am convinced that homosexual behaviour cannot be approved as a valid Christian alternative should not be understood as a rejection of homosexual people as fellow human beings and brothers and sisters in Christ.*

*Secondly, that ordinary Christians, many of whom tend to show homophobic attitudes, should be guided to understand that that is wrong.*

**Francois Tolmie, professor in New Testament Theology at Free State University and member of the gay-conditionalist group**

**Questions 1 and 2. How did my journey on the task team affect you?**

*Before I became a member of the task team, I had already read a number of books on homosexuality written by homosexual people. I was therefore already aware of how they perceive their homosexuality. The DVD you showed just underscored it further.*

*My viewpoint on homosexuality did not change by being a member of this task team. To be honest, nobody who was a member of the task team changed his/her viewpoint. However, you did make an impact – through your DVD and through your behaviour. Two aspects of you impressed me: 1) The fact that you were one of the few members of the task team who never lost your temper and that you were always open, honest and friendly towards me. 2) The fact that you sometimes told stories about the personal trauma of gay people.*

*Why didn't the above change my viewpoint? Because the way I think about Biblical ethics means that the Bible (as I interpret it) will always be the overriding principle in my thinking. All secondary considerations will always be guided by my understanding*

*of Scripture. The fact that you are not a theologian thus unfortunately means that your inputs in my frame of reference will always be less important than my understanding of Scripture.*

**Question 3. How do you understand Christ's law of love in connection with gay people?**

*It means that I will love all people unconditionally and that I will respect their choices and their interpretations of the Bible. This does not mean that all other views are necessarily correct.*

**Jeanne du Plessis, gay clinical psychologist and author**

**Questions 1 and 2. How did my journey on the task team affect you?**

*Our contact did not change my views on homosexuality, but it affirmed them. It was affirming and encouraging getting to know another psychologist who shares one's views and who approaches the situation along similar lines. As a gay psychologist, it was a wonderful experience to get to know a straight woman who has such profound insight into and empathy for the existential problems encountered by gay people, and, especially, by gay Christians. Our contact was enriching and truly a growth experience for me. It gave me more peace of mind about the situation of gay people in the Pretoria area, because I now know that they have a resource available who will not fail them.*

*Having Marietjie on the task team made a big contribution towards creating a safe space for the discussion of contentious issues. She set an example in talking about issues in a comfortable manner. Having someone else with such similar experience and such similar views on various aspects enhanced one's own courage in coming out boldly with what you believe in. The DVD Marietjie produced made a strong impact and certainly made the anti-gay group very uncomfortable. However, it brought the reality of the effect of the policy of the church on people's lives home quite forcefully.*

**Question 3. How do you understand Christ's law of love in connection with gay people?**

*Christ's law of love applies equally to all people, regardless of their sexual orientation.*

**Julian Muller, professor in Practical Theology at the University of Pretoria and member of the gay-unconditionalist group**

**Questions 1 and 2. How did my journey on the task team affect you?**

*You succeeded in heightening the integrity of the group by representing the human experience of gay people time and again. You were a good and trustworthy witness because you used good and trustworthy arguments. This was especially confirmed by your DVD. However, the DVD was not based on innocent arguments. Your script had an agenda, but the fact that you did it with love, with empathy and with softness caused your opponents to have respect for your viewpoint.*

*Furthermore, you were the only person from our group who really succeeded in having meaningful interaction with the other group. Although you had a definite point of view and although nobody ever doubted that, it was actually your honesty and your transparency that instilled trust, also in the other group. Your role on the task team was to be a voice for the voiceless. I was deeply touched by your DVD. Although it did not bring me to new insights, I was deep under the impression of the authenticity, but also the vulnerability of all who spoke on the DVD. It was not window-dressing, not witnessing, but people sharing their stories.*

**Question 3. How do you understand Christ's law of love in connection with gay people?**

*To me love is an honest and deliberate effort to stand next to somebody else. I look at gay people and see people who are completely created in the image of God. Just like me, they also have a calling; they also have desires, needs, fears and dreams. Their different sexual orientation is just one aspect of their being. I try to communicate something of acceptance to gays and to make a contribution to the normalising of gay relationships. In the crisis pastorate, the gay person often finds himself/herself in conflict with parents, partners or the church. Especially with parents, we often have to deal with theological perceptions. I try to change these perceptions with regard to theology and judgmentalism. On the academic and public*



*levels I view it as my contribution to opening the road for gay Christians. I consider this to be in line with the love of Christ. After I had been accused by the students, it became easier for me to publish books and articles. I use this privilege also in the interest of gays.*

### **Anonymous member of the gay-conditionalist group**

#### **Questions 1 and 2. How did my journey on the task team affect you?**

*You made it very difficult for me at the task team. I have much appreciation for your empathy with gay people. The fact that we held opposing viewpoints made it very difficult for me, because I could relate to your passion with gay people. It is positive that you reach out to them. I could see that you live the love of Christ to the full. I tip my hat to you. Your attitude is: people have pain; they struggle to find their place in society; how can we help them? I envy your service to the gays. Your empathy made a huge impression on me. I agree 100% with you. It is just a pity that you have the wrong approach. You should accept the gay person unconditionally, but should tell him it is not necessary to remain gay. You can break away from your gayness. I don't say to be gay is an act of will, but I say this is a journey which the gay person should undertake with the therapist, provided that he/she doesn't want to be gay. Telling the gay person to change is a difficult process. I could never accompany a gay person on the road to accepting his/her gayness.*

*Your DVD touched me as a Christian. It made me aware of the fact that a large number of gay people suffer because of their struggle. Although the DVD did make a contribution, it was a one-sided contribution. It gave the impression that there is only one solution to the problem, viz. acceptance. To be honest, I don't actually know of people who have changed. I know of one young man who came to see me because he had homosexual needs. I referred him, because I did not know what to do to help him. Later I heard that he got married to a woman, but I don't know what happened to him after that.*

#### **Question 3. How do you understand Christ's law of love in connection with gay people?**

*I understand Christ's love to gays in the sense that they can be healed. With healing I mean they should become heterosexual, because this is how God made human beings. He does not make people gay. If you ask me why God doesn't change them, then I cannot deduce from that that it is God's will to have gay people on earth.*

*Being gay is a delusion in the sense that gay people mislead themselves. They say to themselves that God is satisfied with them just as they are. Once they get involved in a spiritual struggle, they realise that it is not the will of God to be gay. Even within my group I have experienced resistance because of my viewpoint. There is a tendency not to give a strong opinion with regard to the possibility of change. People are cautious about the matter. According to the organisation at Moreletapark DRC congregation (H2O – homosexuality to overcome), they have changed 70% of the 250 gay people who came for counselling. I cannot judge the validity of this claim.*

*Christians have a commission to sanctification. Sometimes you succeed; other times you fail. It is not a simplistic matter. I had not believed that it is possible for gay people to change, but after I read a lot about it, I know it is possible to change.*

The feedback which I have received from my participants guided my reflection on the possibilities for Practical Theology and pastoral care.

## **5.4 POSSIBILITIES FOR PRACTICAL THEOLOGY AND PASTORAL CARE**

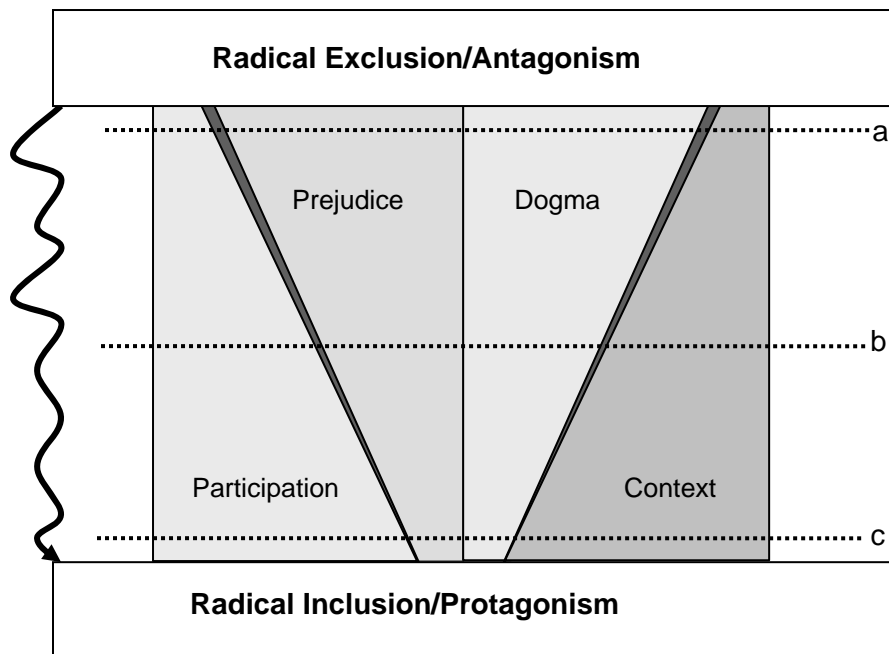
In this section I am reflecting on what I consider to be the possible contributions of my research journey to the field of Practical Theology and pastoral care. In my reflection I was guided by the feedback from my gay participants, especially members of my support group, and also by feedback from my straight participants, especially the task team members. In order to explain and describe the contributions of my research I have developed a graphic model to guide me and to serve as a representation of what I have learnt from my research.

### **5.4.1 Model of my journey to deconstruct gay discourse**

In reflecting on my journey with gay Christians and my efforts to facilitate participation in order to deconstruct gay discourse in the DRC, I have learnt that especially four dominant dimensions affect gay discourse. These are participation, prejudice,

context and dogma. These dimensions are in relationships with one another. Their respective relationships affect possible gay discourse positions lying on a continuum. On the one extreme of the continuum lies radical exclusion and antagonism. On the other end lies radical inclusion and protagonism. Between these extreme positions on the continuum lie a diversity of positions. It seems that when participation is increased gay prejudice decreases and *vice versa*. The more gay people's stories are heard, the less prejudiced people become towards them and the more discrimination against them decreases. The more exposure to a person's context the less entangled he/she becomes in the rules and regulations of dogma. As the shift in the direction of protagonism and inclusion increases the more dogma is reduced to one single rule: Love. The effect is that prescribing shifts to inscribing, scribing life in participation with gay people. Anderson and Goolishian (1988:380) refer to Hans Lipps who states that any linguistic account carries with it a "circle of the unexpressed." This means that no communicative account, no word, is complete, clear, and univocal.

A model representing the relationship between participation, prejudice, dogma and context is portrayed in figure 3.



**Fig. 3. Model of my journey to deconstruct gay discourse**

In the model the respective triangles represent the various relationships amongst four dimensions, *viz.* participation, dogma, prejudice and context. Between participation

and dogma, as well as between participation and prejudice the relationship is inversed, meaning that as the one increases the other decreases. This is also the case between context and dogma, as well as between context and prejudice. The relationship between participation and context, as well as between dogma and prejudice is suggested as symbiotic, meaning that as the one increases the other will increase accordingly. The model also portrays the relationship between the four dimensions at any position between the two extreme positions. A person can assume any position towards gays between the two extremes of radical exclusion and antagonism (at the top of the model) and a position of radical inclusion and protagonism towards gays (at the bottom of the model). The radical exclusive position is seen as representing fundamental beliefs while the radical inclusive position is seen as representing participatory beliefs. Between these extreme positions on the continuum lies a diversity of positions. The dotted lines *a*, *b* and *c* show three possible positions between the two extreme positions and suggests that there will be a certain ratio between the four dimensions at any given position. The curved arrow indicates the preferred direction of a possible shift in positions. It also suggests that the process of shifting positions is neither a linear process, nor does it have to cover the entire journey from the one to the other extreme. Each person's journey is unique and although the preferred direction is in the direction of the arrow, this does not necessarily always have to be the case. The thickness of the lines shows the division between prejudice and participation, as well as between dogma and context. Towards a position of radical inclusion and protagonism the gradual fading of the lines is indicative of the gradual fading of the boundaries between different dimensions. As dogma and prejudice decreases relative to the increase in participation and context the radical boundaries become gradually more diffused.

Position *a* indicates a fundamentalist position of radical exclusion and gay antagonism. Very little participation with gays is taking place at this position; the commitment to dogma is relatively large in relation to participation and context. The effect is much prejudice, discrimination and antagonism towards gays.

People holding a fundamentalist position could be seen as operating from within a specific paradigm portraying a closed confessional dogmatic system. Their dogmatic commitment embedded in a confessional theological approach provides them with the lenses through which they look at gay people. Their knowledge of "the truth" (see 5.3.2) guides them to be prescriptive in ethical matters. They hardly risk the first step

of witnessing as Weingarten (2000:393) describes it by momentarily becoming one with a gay person through listening to his/her story. They are unaware that their dogmatic lenses have become handcuffs binding them from the freedom to reach out and participate with gays and to love them unconditionally, thus fulfilling the commandment of love.

This position provides little room for context, because of the overwhelming power of dogma. There is thus no tension due to the domination of dogma in comparison to context. The interpretation of the Bible results in the Bible being seen as a detailed roadmap which is followed regardless of the context. Right and wrong is black and white with no provision made for any grey ethical areas – a binary worldview (see 2.3). People holding these positions are convinced that they “know”; they claim that they have the “truth”. They have read books on homosexuality and have done research on the internet on the topic and know how gays think and feel. In doing pastoral care they would either refer gays (see 5.3.2) or would tell them for example that they should undergo therapy to reverse their orientation (see 5.3.2).

How I understand this is that the territory or the context is forced to fit the map, even if the map does not fit with the territory or the context. Prejudice can change; sexual orientation cannot (only in exceptional cases – see 2.4.1.4). The dilemma is we try to change sexual orientation because our prejudice cannot change. What I consider to be important in this context is to listen to someone’s story when he/she expresses the need to become straight and that he/she wants to change his/her sexual orientation. Often stories of extreme trauma, sexual abuse, rape, etc are told. Depending on the context the person’s needs and wishes should be respected and he/she should be accompanied on a journey of pastoral care.

It is of significance to note that gays who radically exclude straights and who are unwilling to participate with straights (because they too operate from a specific fundamentalist paradigm) also hold this position, because they operate from a specific fundamentalist paradigm. Gays who take in this position on the continuum are often gay radicalists who have experienced extreme rejection and humiliation from society and the church and who have therefore become gay activists. It is imperative that their stories should be heard too. Careful participation in an atmosphere of safety, trust, love and respect may also move their position on the

continuum. It could then change from prejudice and antagonism towards more participation and protagonism.

Position *b* indicates a position halfway between the two extremes of radical exclusion and radical inclusion. This position would correspond with the position of a few of the members from the gay-conditional group on the task team. Once a person is exposed to more context for example through listening to stories of gays, or by watching the DVD or by meeting gay Christians personally their increased participation could result in them also moving down on the continuum of prejudice towards a position of less prejudice. However, the more such a person is still bound by dogma, the bigger the conflict between their dogmatic conscience and the new reality revealed to them through participation (see 5.3.2) will be. This reminds of Foucault's ideas (Dreyfuss and Rabinow 1982:188, 189) about panopticism, a technique through which disciplinary power is able to function for it relies on surveillance where the subject disciplines him/herself. Panopticism is derived from a ring shaped prison designed by an architect, Bentham. It allowed for continuous observation of the prisoners, while few supervisory resources were necessary. The source of power (behind one direction glass) was invisible. The inmates were subjected to normalising judgment, because they accepted that they were constantly observed. Thus they internalised "the gaze" and disciplined themselves. According to Foucault discourses function like the panopticon. They exert invisible power and lead individuals to embrace their own subjugation through the influence of certain truths. In this context dogma could be seen as acting as the internalised "gaze" or the watchdog controlling the person's behaviour.

People holding this position view the Bible (especially the few "gay texts") as the only way that God reveals Himself to man without having discovered that through Christ's death and resurrection He has come to live also in gays and gays in Him. Therefore they find it difficult to accept gay people's stories of faith as also part of God's word. But the exposure to gays normally starts to deconstruct some of the myths about homosexuality and this causes confusion and tension. Although initially this shift in position on the continuum results in great empathy towards gays, their position remains conditional and for example in pastoral care with gays they would propose celibacy. If, for example, they would realise that a gay couple in their congregation does not live a life of celibacy, they would share their viewpoint with the

couple and then turn a blind eye. Their exposure to gays will prevent them from proposing reparative therapy or conversion (see 5.3.2).

If I consider the DRC Synods' decisions over the past twenty-one years it could be said that the DRC has shifted her position from radical exclusion of gays to at least a position in between the two extremes, like gay-conditional (see 1.2). Much more participation through the stories of gays shared at Regional and even at General Synod level, conferences, the DVD which was distributed to all delegates to the 2007 General Synod, etc., took place. Because there was more context, the influence of dogma was reduced, which led to a decrease in prejudice and a shift towards greater inclusion. In 1986 the General Synod decided that being gay was a deviate form of sexuality. The 2002 General Synod proclaimed the impossibility to identify with the 1986 Synod decision. The 2002 General Synod also asked forgiveness for pain done to gays and their families. At the General Synod of 2004 this forgiveness was repeated. The General Synod of 2004 decided that being gay is not a choice. At this Synod the unconditional inclusion of gays as members of the DRC just on the grounds of their baptism was also approved. During the General Synod of 2007 it was decided that gays could be ministers as long as they remain celibate. As long as gays are not ministers in the DRC, the Synod decision can also be interpreted that they can be in loving, monogamous relationships. These are clearly shifts away from antagonism and prejudice towards protagonism and inclusion, although the DRC still holds a position of conditional acceptance of gays, especially gay ministers. The next issue for discussion should logically be the celibacy of gay ministers, and gay marriages. However, formal decisions taken by Synod do not necessarily represent the dominant discourse of the church. It could potentially be a long journey shifting from judging dogmatically to a position of inclusion in practice. This has implications for the pastoral task of the church, ministers and theological training: How do we implement decisions taken by Synod in practice?

When I look at the model of discourse change I realise how much the DRC has already moved in the direction of radical inclusion. This gives me hope, because I am sure that the DRC, hopefully will never reverse her decisions with regards to gays. Once you know that you know gays you can never deny their pain and humanity. This is what cultivates participation in the DRC: the fact that they now know that they know gay people. Maturana and Varela (1998:245) explain the phenomenon of cognition by referring to the transformation of Adam and Eve into

different beings after they knew that they knew they were naked. Equally the DRC will never be able to return to her initial innocence of mere knowing. She now possesses knowledge of knowledge compelling her to see that the world everyone sees is not *the* world, but *a* world which we construct with others. This knowledge compels the church to move away from her known certainty about gays towards a participatory ethics with gays.

Position *c* indicates a protagonist position of radical inclusion. I consider a protagonist position of inclusion and participation as the preferred position because I have to consider an ethical question: What is life giving? In other words, at what position is everyone benefiting most? Where is the suffering least? What position safeguards that some are not privileged to the detriment of others? What position would guide us towards doing theology with gays in an ethical way? Kotzé (2002:7, 8) reminds us of the power/knowledge connection (Foucault 1980:141) and that knowledge has the power to subjugate and to dominate. While we cannot escape the effects of power the ethical challenge of accountability is to critique our practices and to reflect on the knowledges that we participate in and that shape our lives. It seems that the position of radical inclusion of gays help me to answer these ethical questions best.

People holding this position on the continuum operate within a paradigm that there are many ‘truths’ and are continuously seeking ‘a truth’ instead of ‘the truth’. Although the Bible is still very important to them, they are not bound by dogmatic rules and regulations. They don’t interpret the Bible as a detailed road map, but as a compass. Context plays a bigger role than dogma. This position does not imply the absence of dogma and more specifically of ethics. However, it implies that dogma, which houses prejudice, disappears. Here no ethical tension exists between dogma and life. In my model dogma becomes a dimension which in participation moves and turns and changes in a symbiotic relationship with the context.

People holding this position does theology from and through the context. Insertion in the context has changed to immersion in the context. In participating with gays they are not-knowing, never assuming the gay person’s truth, while they maintain participatory non-prescriptive ethics. Meaning is socially and inter-subjectively constructed through negotiation, instead of being prescribed. This negotiation of meaning takes place in a respectful way where power is deconstructed. In doing



pastoral care with gays they will journey with them in order to help them to accept and to celebrate their orientation.

## **5.5 SUMMARY**

The feedback from my gay participants has affirmed the importance of participation in their lives. Participation is not only necessary for the benefit of those who write reports on gays, but the gay people need participation too. The value of a support group where they can “be themselves”, where they are accepted unconditionally, where they can share the effects of pain caused by rejection of the church and society became clear in their feedback. But the gays also need a place where they can worship without fear of being ridiculed or dehumanised.

The feedback from the task team members made me realise that there are extremes as far as prejudice against gays and gay inclusion and exclusion are concerned. Between the two extremes of antagonism and protagonism on the continuum lies a diversity of positions. A person can assume any position towards gays between these two extreme positions. This motivated me to develop a model of my journey of gay prejudice change, graphically representing various possibilities and conditions for change in prejudice against gays. In the model the respective triangles represent the various relationships amongst four dimensions, *viz.* participation, dogma, prejudice and context. The relationship between these four dimensions will determine the position, and the direction of change.

In the next chapter I will reflect on various aspects of my research journey with gays. I will pay special attention to my research approach, and to the model of my participatory journey of prejudice change against gays. Possible implications of the research journey for the training of DRC ministers and for doing theology and pastoral care will be discussed. A few suggestions for the road forward are also explored.

## CHAPTER 6: REFLECTIONS ON THE RESEARCH JOURNEY

*To whose benefit are these knowledges?  
Who is silenced or marginalised by these knowledges?  
Who suffers as a result of these knowledges?  
- Dirk Kotzé*

### 6.1 INTRODUCTION

In this final chapter I reflect on my journey with gay Christians, and on my efforts to invite participation from the straight community, especially from the DRC, in order to deconstruct gay discourse. In my reflection I tried to be conscious of the resistance of discourses to self-analysis when I question my own motives and my efforts.

Jennings and Graham (1996:171) highlight the difficulty in the reflection stage to change taken-for-granted assumptions that become obscured in our observational data. Foucault (1989:28) shows how objects of knowledge are ordered or constructed by discourses which determine what is “seeable” and “sayable”. In the reflection stage of action research, as we begin to uncover the ideological underpinnings of belief systems inherent in the data we are examining, we ourselves are likely to be engaging in some form of discourse (Jennings and Graham 1996:172).

According to Gee (cited in Jennings and Graham 1996:172) it should be kept in mind during this phase that discourses are resistant to self-analysis and value concepts and viewpoints at the expense of others. Winter (1997:18) considers one of the most important questions in social research to be asked is whether the researcher is less biased than those being researched. I could thus ask whether I was less biased than, for example, the task team members from the gay-conditionalist group. According to Winter (1997:18) research is worthwhile only if it offers the possibility to go beyond competing ideologies in order that change in our thinking practices may occur. I perceived the gay debate to be taking place on a dogmatic level, varying from a closed, prescriptive point of view to an open, interpretive point of view. The two opposing ideologies constantly got stuck when competing with each other. I tried to move the debate beyond these competing ideologies to a different level of relational ethics and pastoral care (see 1.5). The latter was thus my bias.

## 6.2 MY REFLECTIONS ON THE RESEARCH JOURNEY

### 6.2.1 Challenges of the study

In my research journey I encountered various challenges. Initially, because I did not know gay people, let alone understand anything about homosexuality, I realised it would be unethical to do research about people without having built relationships with them. This would have been another form of abuse. I had to know and understand more about gay people and earn their respect and their trust before I could write up their stories. Soon the research became secondary and the care with gay Christians became my first priority. I started witnessing their painful stories.

One of my first challenges was the question whether my voice was an authentic voice. *Did I have a mandate to challenge the injustices against gay people?* Although I participated with the gay community, I am not gay; neither is my husband nor my children. Heshusius and Ballard (1996:104) put my questions to rest because of their notion that on issues of oppression and disempowerment researchers are as much part of the social transformation as the oppressed and the disempowered. Researchers thus play a role in challenging marginalizing theories and practices. This corresponds with Kemp's idea (3.8.6) that the researcher has a responsibility to critique the imbalance of power. As such my voice can be seen as an authentic voice. Apart from the latter owing to my participation in the gay community my gay participants gave me a mandate to share their stories at the task team and wherever I needed to do so. This also contributed in making my voice an authentic voice. It was actually my participation as a therapist with the gay community which led to my invitation by the moderamen of the General Synod of the DRC to serve on the task team. As such I also had a mandate to challenge the church leaders and other members of society by challenging what Anderson and Foley (2001:31) call "the mythical possibility of mediation and reconciliation" through also embracing the parabolic discords and admitting the painful in our interactions.

Another challenge was my positivistic paradigm at the onset of my journey. My own paradigm shift from knowing "the truth" to acknowledging "various truths" on gayness permeated my journey. When I described my discursive position in chapter one, I had to keep in mind that behind this lies a period of painful change of my personal world view. I also had to keep in mind that my world view is not stagnant and

could/would change the more I enter into dialogue on the issue of homosexuality. Remembering my own process of change (described in chapter 3) became especially important when I tried to invite members from the DRC to participate with gay Christians. Initially I was angered by straight people's seemingly obliviousness towards gay people's pain and humiliation due to rejection by the church and members of the straight community. Later I developed the skill to be more patient and to respect the tempo of the individual journeys of members of the straight community.

A third challenge was the big number of participants, and the hundreds of stories of gay people which I had to take into consideration. It almost overwhelmed me when I changed the focus of my personal journey to a research journey. This complicated the process of writing up the research, because I did not know where to start and what to include and what to leave out. As soon as I had a focus point, *viz.* how to invite participation in order to change perceptions about gays, it became easier to select relevant information.

During the onset of my journey I was a witness, listening to the stories of gay people. Later my "being with" gay Christians empowered me to challenge gay antagonist discourses and to invite participation in order to bring about transformation in the DRC. According to Heshusius (1994:19) participatory consciousness is to merge with the person you are with, momentarily becoming that person. It often happens that I spoke spontaneously of "us/we" when referring to the gay community. This indicates that I have dissolved the distance between them and me, at least by momentarily becoming a gay Christian.

My participation in the lives of gay Christians helped me to change my own gay discourse, as well as those of others. Hopefully the DVD contributed to realise some of Heshusius' ideas of participatory consciousness by creating space for straight people to be "with" gay people.

## **6.2.2 Reflections about the research approach**

### **6.2.2.1 Qualitative action research**

In pursuing my research journey I chose to be guided by the criteria for qualitative research as defined by Denzin and Lincoln (1.8.1). Firstly I did not focus on the deconstructing processes in terms of measurement, quantity or frequency, etc, but rather on meaning which was constructed in an inter-subjective way. Geertz (cited in Denzin and Lincoln 1994:122) defines the analysis of human action as an “interpretive science in search of meaning”. These attempts to meaning making led to my continuous awareness of the growing relationship of trust between the gay and the straight participants and me. This growing relationship of trust created the space and gave me the entitlement to challenge various discourses. In my efforts to understand homosexuality, homophobia and the various discourses which have an impact on the issue, I emphasised the social construction of these discourses presenting themselves as “the truth.” In deconstructing these discourses I tried to ask value-laden questions like *What is more just? Who benefits? What will the effect be?* Apart from deconstructing these discourses I tried to “instruct” members of the DRC about gay human beings. They started to meet real people about whom the discourses were constructed and about whom the debate was being conducted. They met the people in the discourse. In other words, the gay people in real life started replacing the gay people in the discourse. The effect was members of the DRC started to realise that the people in real life and the people in the discourse were not the same. Then those in real life replaced those in the discourse.

### **6.2.2.2 Narrative inquiry**

I started my journey with gay Christians, because from the onset I was captured by their stories. I became curious to know more about their experiences, decisions, motives, joy, and their pain. In an interview with Cathy Maree (1999:42) the renowned author, André Brink, comments on the value of stories. He says: “In order to grapple with the world we transform it into stories...we can only manage the world once it has been *storified*”. Ballard (1996:101) emphasises how observing others helps us to know and understand more about ourselves. Through constructing and reconstructing ourselves we learn how to be with people, especially with those who are different from us. After initially hearing the injustices done to gay Christians, I

wanted to act on these social problems. It was actually the stories which helped me to understand the nature of these problems, especially when individual participants described, analysed and interpreted their experiences in their own way. This was empowering not only to me, but also to the individual story teller. Through the stories I became aware of, for example, many gays' struggle with God. Often their fear of rejection by God took them to places of isolation like Hawaii Island where they could work solely for God in order to earn his acceptance. They also hoped that being "away from the world" would take the gayness away. In none of the cases did it happen. Through their stories I learnt what their needs were. In the example above it was a deep desire to be accepted by God. Normally when I asked them whether it was God who rejected them or individuals in the church and from society, they started to realise that God and the church and individual human beings were not the same. In our interaction they also started to understand that religious discourses were socially created because Biblical texts were interpreted out of context in relationships of power. Their stories helped them to realise that they allowed people of ignorance about the gay issue to exert power over them. It was empowering to gays when they realised that they were the true experts of their own lives and that people who did not participate in their lives did not have the knowledge or the right to prescribe to them how they should live their lives. Their stories revealed their own realities to themselves. But their stories also became the way through which their realities could be made visible, understandable, audible and tangible to the gay-inexperienced participants.

The challenge to me was often how to convey these stories and their meanings to members of the DRC. The best way would be by the gay people themselves. This would require personal contact between gays and people who are unacquainted with gays. However, this often proved to be too much too soon for the gay-unacquainted, as well as too much exposure to further pain and humiliation for the gays themselves. It then becomes an ethical issue. How does one prepare the two sides to engage with each other? According to Janesick (1994:215) the researcher must find the most effective way to tell the story in order to convince the audience. This is why I chose to use the form of a psychodrama in chapter four (4.2.1) to tell the story of Andrew. Through the imaginative interviews with the other characters, e.g. with God, the impact of the story was increased, while I also created a safe distance for Andrew, as well as for the audience. It was also used as what Derrida (1.8.2) called

a tool to deconstruct societal and religious discourses like “gays are going to hell” and “everyone has the right to treat gays with disrespect”. The same effect was created through the DVD, although it seemed that merely watching the DVD was almost too confrontational for some members of the task team.

### **6.2.2.3 Participatory action research**

In order to implement my research methodology of meaning making in an inter-subjective way through narrative enquiry, I had to resort to participatory action research. Ballard (1996:103) considers participatory strategies in research to be driven by the need for personal contact with those we want to understand. He quotes Heshusius who expressed it as “a need for experience of real people, real lives, and real knowledge”.

Over many years I have built a relationship of trust with members of the gay community. A similar relationship of trust was built over a long period of time with various members of the DRC. The research idea only became a reality later after the gay community had asked me to document aspects of my work with them. It seems that authentic participatory action research should preferably be done within an existing relationship of trust. The research then becomes part of what already exists in the relationship instead of such a relationship being created for the sake of research. The participants then truly become co-researchers. It raises the question whether someone can truly only be a researcher/visiting researcher or does participatory action research only become authentic when the researcher is also a practitioner in the field? I have often encountered people who considered themselves expert researchers in the field of homosexuality by referring to a book they have read or internet searches they have done or even by referring to a single gay person’s story which was told at a DRC Regional Synod meeting. Such superficial interaction does not qualify as “merging” or immersion with the gay participant, and could thus be seen as unethical research. When I asked a gay person what he would include in his story if he was to talk at a Regional Synod he answered: *I would be so scared and so exposed. I would share the bare minimum.*

Participatory action research thus raises the question of kinship and ethics. Heshusius (1994:19) proposes the question of merging with your participants to be: “Could I imagine such a life for myself?” According to Heshusius it is only when I

could start seeing their lives as worthy for myself, or for my children, that I could really become fully attentive, moving into a state of merging, a mode of participatory consciousness (also see 6.2.1). I must admit: I will never know what it is like to be gay or to have a gay child. Parents have often confronted me with this fact. Often a mother would say to me: *I wish my son was dead. I wish I were you, because your son is dead. I would rather prefer a dead son than a gay son.* From my own lived experience I would much rather have a living, gay son than a dead son, but because we have different lived experiences we will never be able to understand each other's pain completely. Fortunately Heshusius (1994:19) guides us in this regard. She says through authentic participation we can at least be *with* each other and even momentarily become each other (Heshusius 1994:19), provided that we become willing to let go of the self. "When one forgets the self and becomes embedded in what one wants to understand, there is an affirmative quality of kinship that no longer allows for privileged status." The other who you are studying is no longer someone you can "bombard with questions", but just someone who may "beckon you near".

According to Heshusius (1994:20) when the researcher gains knowledge by managing to let go of egocentric concerns, unequal power relations are resolved. Then we don't firstly ask epistemological questions like "are my results correct" which result in a form of prescriptive ethics and a model of morality which is not bound by time or context, but where morality is seen as "a compact cluster of beliefs" (Kotzé 2002:13). Then we rather start by asking epistemological questions borne from and resulting in participatory ethics and an interpretive, contextual and co-constructed morality like *what kind of a person am I or do I become? Or what kind of a society do we have or are we constructing?* (See also 3.3). The question could be asked whether the absence of authentic participation in the lives of gay people explain why some members of the DRC were initially more concerned with epistemological questions like *why are people gay? Or how can they become heterosexual?* Could the change in the questions or the remarks directly after members of the task team have watched the DVD then be ascribed to momentary participation in the lives of gay Christians? (See 4.2.5.2.1). Can we ascribe the stance of the hardliners on the task team (those who did not want to watch the DVD and who did not want to participate in my research project) to efforts to manage their subjectivity by "resisting the undue influence of values and emotions" (Heshusius 1994:18)? According to Kotzé (2002:14) ethics situated within prescriptive truth discourses makes the



distinction between “right” and “wrong” much clearer. However, there are always exceptions to the rule which need to be taken into account. In resisting the influences of values and emotions, Heshusius (1994:18) warns about the danger to cut oneself off from the real “feeling/knowing,” a sensitivity which she considers to be more important than anything else in order to relate to the world. I wonder what was standing between the hardliners and participation. What kept them from opening themselves to “feeling/knowing/?” Was it stories untold/unheard? What could I have done to create a safe space (see 6.4) for them in which they could participate more freely? What “weed” and “stones” could I have removed for an intimate change of heart to develop from within?

### **6.2.3 Reflections on my research route**

#### **6.2.3.1 Finding conversational participants**

I accumulated my conversational partners over a period of more than five years. Although I started off by doing therapy, my actions were already strongly research informed. My long journey with gays enabled me to research the gay discourse and to gain experience and new knowledges. When I started writing up the research I formally asked members of the gay community whether they would be my participants in the research project. It happened one evening during one of our support group meetings. For a few moments there was an emotional silence during which we merged spiritually and became one in the knowledge that we are all standing up against oppression and injustice. I believe this was possible because of the relationship of trust which already existed between us at that stage. It was also only at the onset of the last meeting of the task team at Heron Bridge when I asked the members to participate in my research project. At this point in time I had also established a relationship of trust with my fellow task team members.

#### **6.2.3.2 Proceeding in a spiral of steps**

Continuous reflection and evaluation formed an integral part of my research journey. After I have read a book or spoken to someone on the gay issue it was my reflection on what I have read or heard which helped me to internalise new knowledges, but also to plan for future actions. The evaluation from my participants not only humbled me, but also helped me to put my actions into perspective. It made me realise how

important participatory consciousness is in listening to other people's stories. Grethie's evaluation (5.2.2) highlighted the importance of narrative principles like respect and non-judging when she expressed her appreciation that I actually answered her sms messages, etc. The participants' evaluations also helped me to do self-reflection and to acknowledge that I could listen more and better to especially the stories of straight people, trying to understand the discourses better which helped to construct these stories. For example during the task team meetings I could have put in an even better effort to listen to the two members from the gay-conditionalist group who did not watch the DVD. At the time when I showed the DVD they were not present at the meeting, but later they turned down my offer to watch it. Although from the onset of my journey with all the members of the task team I treated everyone with respect and never ridiculed any person's opinions, the limited time and the absence of some of the members at some of the meetings reduced the opportunity to facilitate participation through, for example, the sharing of more stories of gay Christians.

### **6.2.3.3 My research agenda**

As part of my continuous reflection and evaluation process I formulated a few open ended questions which I put to the task team members in writing on my information sheet (Appendix A). Their comments were conveyed in 5.3.2. These questions were formulated in order to help me to understand what - if any - of my efforts helped to facilitate participation and consequent perceptual change amongst members of the DRC. In other words I wanted them to co-construct answers to my research questions (1.5).

It seems that the DVD made a significant impression on most of the task team members. The gay people's stories of rejection by the church and the pain it caused to them touched most task team members' hearts. This underscores the importance of lived experiences and participation in co-constructing new knowledges while doing ethics with gay Christians (Kotzé 2002:22). According to Kotzé (2002:21) "[t]ogether we have to negotiate what is a good life for all participants in each and every situation." When the co-chairperson from the gay-conditionalist group described his own struggle between the pain of gay Christians and the bondage of his own conscience it could be seen as a step towards ethicising by acknowledging another truth apart from his own. Later he showed a similar response when he opened up

space for gay people's consciences, instead of enforcing his conscience down upon them. While listening to this person's story I realised the importance of listening to the stories of the gay-conditionalist group as well. Perhaps we should make another DVD with their stories. It would be interesting to observe gay people's reaction to such a DVD.

Dr Willie Botha referred to the importance of well-known people in the DRC, like Dr Martin Lazenby participating in the DVD. It resonated with my searching for an advocate (3.5). Could it be that Dr Lazenby served as an advocate to Dr Botha, because they were already friends, but now they were also thinking along similar lines with regards to homosexuality?

An anonymous gay member of the task team remarked about the positive aspects of the DVD, viz. the long standing gay relationships, as well as the two women who have adopted black orphans. This is according to him love in action. I believe that the inclusion of these stories in the DVD helped to deconstruct discourses about the normality of gay relationships. Hopefully this enhanced the facilitation of perceptual changes. Gay people seem to be less human and gayer to straight people and as such they are often disembodied and dehumanised. It seems that the DVD helped to introduce gays to straights as ordinary human beings with names and faces having needs, morals and values. In this regard the sharing of stories, especially also through personal contact with gay people, could play a positive role in the humanising of gays to straight, but gay-ignorant members of the DRC.

Dr Willie Botha remarked about the high ethical standard which I maintained throughout the task team's existence by for example, not ridiculing the gay-conditionalist group behind their backs. This was an action of permanently and consistently showing respect to those with whom I differed in opinion. I believe this was important for the establishment of a relationship of trust. Maybe this was also because I honestly tried to hear their viewpoints and their concerns. This facilitated participation - something which was underscored by the co-chairperson from the gay-conditionalist group when he remarked about his group's feeling of being rejected by the gay-unconditionalist group. The fact that I tried to establish a relationship of trust between the gay-conditionalist group and myself changed the feeling of rejection to one of being accepted by me. This not only caused them to open up to me, but also to listen to my viewpoints. Although I listened to their viewpoints, I definitely had an

agenda which I made clear from the outset. The DVD, for example, and the discourses which I tried to deconstruct through the selection of stories, were well planned. However, after they have watched the DVD I enquired about their perception of the DVD. Initially reactions varied from shock to pain and remorse. Later someone remarked that it was unbalanced because I did not include the stories of ex-gays. I acknowledged this, but also explained that I was unable to find a single ex-gay who was willing to appear on the DVD. They already knew the story of the ex-gay person who was a member of the task team. I phoned two other persons who said they have changed, but they were unwilling to expose themselves on the DVD. This conversation helped to increase the relationship of trust and respect. While there was never any doubt about my own position, I also made it clear that I respect someone who claims to have changed his sexual orientation.

Professor Julian Muller emphasised this when he remarked that the DVD was *not innocent*. This resonates with Kotzé's (2002:26) notion that participating ethicising accepts that the search for new knowledges is not innocent, but impacts on people's lives. Although I tried to keep reminding the task team members about the possible impact our decisions might have on members of the gay society and their families, I did not pay enough attention to the impact it might have on members from the gay-conditionalist group. Possible emotions like anger, fear, hopelessness and feelings of betraying God and the Bible, should have been attended to more. This would have been true ethicising in a participatory way.

Judith Kotzé remarked about my courage to challenge in a non-aggressive way. I have often experienced in the task team that when people differ they become aggressive towards each other. I also sometimes became frustrated. However, it seems that the way in which you challenge people whose opinions differ from yours, determines whether you will be attended to and heard. I remember one day when a person from another denomination addressed the task team on the gay issue. He concluded with a statement: *There is according to our view not a place for gays in the presence of God*. During question time I asked him in a very friendly non-aggressive way the following question: *How do you manage to keep God away from the gays?* His answer was a simple: *You've got me there. I haven't given it a thought*. My question generated new possibilities, because it did not have an answer. This corresponds with Roux and Kotzé's (2002:146) notion that if the question had an answer, it would have been a statement in disguise, or even an interrogation. They

see questions as generative actions. According to them questions are generative when we dare to live “in the space between the possible and the impossible”. Questions which are statements in disguise reflect power imbalances and as such can be seen as questions living in the “possibility of the unethical”. Questions generated by a longing for the impossible or the not-yet-thought-of “live in the impossibility of the ethical”. The unending searching and finding of answers and generating of new questions opens up possibilities for new ideas about the impossible (Roux and Kotzé 2002:146, 147).

#### **6.2.3.4 My personal gay narrative**

Participatory action research is amongst other things concerned with changing individuals, especially also the researcher (McTaggart 1997:1, 2). My journey with gays reminds me of Andrew Lloyd Webber’s song *Love changes everything*. When I started to love gays unconditionally everything in my relationship with gays changed. Some of the most painful questions straight people often asked me are: *Do you touch them? Or, What do you say to them?* These questions reflect how straight people often degrade and dehumanise gay people. Gays have taught me how to love and how to put your love and your care into action. Instead of saying to someone in pain: *My door is always open to you* rather take his hand and guide him inside your house/heart.

The narrative principle of not-knowing got a deepened meaning to me. Anderson and Goolishian (1992:31) show how a not-knowing position in therapy avoids the premature closure to interpreting and understanding meaning as a result of a pre-planned outcome of meaning. My journey with gays led me never to assume any meaning, but rather to ask and to negotiate meaning with my fellow travellers. This is for example how I learnt about the nature of the pain of rejection to a specific gay man. One day when I asked him what it is like to be rejected because of your whole being, he answered: *It is damn sore (Afrikaans: bliksemseer). It is like poison which permeates your whole body. You are forever found wanting.* According to Anderson and Goolishian (1990:31) inherent to this dialogical approach to therapy is the assumption that “meaning changes for both the client and the therapist”. When meaning changed for me, my story, my perception and my discourses about gays changed.

My journey with gays also led me to listen to other people in such a way that I could let go of the self, becoming one with other people. I could let go of judging other people who differ from me and instead made respect and validation of other people's opinions part of my attire. This helped me in understanding and acknowledging my own vulnerability. I realised that I also need acceptance and physical contact and love. In my journey towards participation and transformation I could identify with Welch (1990:135) who said transformative relationships occur where "there is power of empathy and compassion, of delight in otherness, and strength in the solidarity of listening to others, bearing together stories of pain and resistance".

#### **6.2.3.5 Reporting the research**

A while after I had started my journey with gay Christians I increasingly developed a feeling that I could not write what I was witnessing. In a way I could identify with Antjie Krog (1999:48), poet and parliamentary editor for South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC), who covered the Truth and Reconciliation hearings for the SABC, when she writes about the "infinite web of sorrow" woven around the people who were telling their stories. Like Krog (1999:74) I felt by writing anything down of what I was witnessing I would exploit and betray the gay community. I found it impossible to translate the interaction with gay Christians into words which would convey the meaning which was created between us. It was as if the pain of rejection which permeated their stories destructed my language. But should I not write what I was witnessing I would also be unfaithful to the gay community. When I read Krog's (1999:64) views on the power of words and of how writing gave her control over the pain, enabling her to manoeuvre the words I realised that this was what I had to do. I could however only really start with the writing when the gays asked me to do so. This action from their side contributed in helping me to move from what Weingarten (2000:396) calls a position from being an aware, but disempowered witness to a position of being an aware and empowered witness. My experience of being hijacked (see 1.1) further made the writing a matter of urgency.

When I eventually started to write up the research, I was on the one hand engulfed by the various possibilities at hand, viz. stories, speeches, dramas, poetry, drawings, DVD, etc. On the other hand I was caught up in the academic norm for research reports, as Winter (1997:25) refers to the sequence of literature review, methodology, findings and conclusions. However, it seems that the history of writing presents itself

as a continuous process of experimentation. Winter (1997:25, 26) reminds us that, because action research emerges from a different set of relationships, the way in which we write up the research should also be different, with the narrative format forming the basis of action research.

In writing up the research I also encountered problems with regards to what language to use which would not offend anybody. I tried to find another word for the term “homophobia”, but that seemed to be in vain. Neither my participants nor I could find a suitable replacement for the word. In my struggle to find distinctive terms which would be acceptable to both groups of the task team when referring to them respectively I considered a number of terms. Some of these terms were: pro-gay/anti-gay; go-gay/no-gay; pro-gay sex/anti-gay sex; gay tolerant/gay intolerant, etc. Eventually I decided to use the terms gay-conditional/gay-unconditional, because to me that indicated the core difference between the two groups. The one group accepted gays unconditionally, while the other group accepted them on certain conditions, which could differ enormously.

#### **6.2.4 Reflecting on the ethics of power and knowledge**

Knowledge is created within relationships of power. Towards the end of my research journey it is important to reflect on the ethics of power and knowledge of my participants and of myself.

##### **6.2.4.1 Challenging prescriptive ethics**

During my journey, while exerting efforts to change perceptions about gay Christians, I was often confronted by participants within a pre-modern or modern orientation towards religion and science. These participants grounded their deductive reasoning in systems of “truth,” resulting in what Kotzé (2002:13) calls “prescriptive ethics.” Kotzé (2002:14) regards thinking along this line of ethics as a position where distinctions between “right” and wrong is much clearer, provided that one has privileged access to religious and judicial truths. One of my participants on the task team, for example, believed that only qualified theologians had access to the “truth” as prescribed by the Bible. The question should be asked here: “who benefited from these prescriptive ethics,” because dominant power/knowledges are not innocent. As Kotzé (2002:15) puts it: “...they privilege those they serve, whilst oppressing

those that differ or resist.” Did the theologian and his ideas about homosexuality benefit by reducing my influence as a narrative pastoral therapist in his thinking about homosexuality? Was there an effort to marginalise my knowledge and the knowledges of the gay people about themselves? Kotzé (2002:13) asks how ethical prescriptive ethics are when based upon a model of morality which is timeless and without context? In my efforts towards change I often had to unmask these “truth” discourses by sharing stories of gay Christians, for example various stories of church going gay Christians doing Bible study and living exemplary lives. Sharing these stories also by means of the DVD was a powerful attempt to interpret knowledge as a social construction process within a specific time frame, as well as contextualising it.

#### **6.2.4.2 Challenging my participatory ethics**

My journey with gays and the knowledges which I have gained through the intense participation with the gay community enabled me to exert power towards the DRC with regards to the issue of homosexuality. Questions like the following could now be asked: *What did I do that was different from what they/the church did? Who is benefiting now? Is anyone suffering by what I did? Am I now in a position of moral highness as opposed to those struggling with their conscience?* The many individual talks I had with task team members helped me to balance the power relationships and to remain ethical in my participation also with straight participants. For example, initially I was convinced that a specific person on the task team did not love gay people. When him and I had a discussion I honestly realised that he was hurt by my perception. I am still in conflict about his meaning attached to love and whether gays will experience this as love and as to how they will react to it. But I am also contemplating the idea that I cannot judge the quality or the sincerity of his love for gays. This would put me as a narrative therapist in a position contrary to the principles of my profession (Morgan 2000:4). However; we could talk about the effects of each other’s love or practices of loving gays. I wanted him to listen more and more to gay people’s stories; therefore I had to give him enough opportunity to tell his own “gay” stories. If a paradigm/discourse contains half truths (Van Gelder 1996:7) I realise I could put in more effort to listen to the stories of straight people on homosexuality containing at least their truth.



#### **6.2.4.3 Can participatory ethics also become prescriptive ethics?**

We can never escape the influence of power and its relationship to the creation of knowledge and subsequently of discourses. Discourses have the nature to subjugate and to dominate, to reveal and to conceal. For example, on the issue of changing prejudices a gay ex-minister from the *Hervormde Kerk* asked me if I want all the members of the church and society to accept gays, was I not using my power and knowledge to prescribe to other people what to do? It is a valid question. The difference between my approach and that of the church and society, is that I did not view myself as using power and knowledge without participatory ethics, while also acknowledging other possibilities of interpreting the whole gay issue. Transparency was part of my participatory action. I understand and accept that I also don't have the whole and only truth with regards to gay people's narratives. I am prepared to admit that the truth that I have today could be changed or expanded tomorrow. I am not withholding information from society and the church deliberately. On the contrary, because I also included stories of gays who have or who attempted to change, I tried to give as broad a picture as possible of gay Christian narratives. It was not so much my responsibility to convince people of the injustices against gays. The gay stories should convince people. I therefore considered it as important that people should listen to gay people's stories. They should participate with gays; they should experience them first hand.

#### **6.2.4.4 How did I personally benefit?**

A remark from a friend about me making *lots of pink money* led me to reflect on my motives with this journey. *Did I really do this journey only for the benefit of gay Christians or was it also for personal gain as a therapist?* I never charged fees from gays (or straights) who have lost their jobs, especially gay ministers who have lost their jobs due to discrimination by the church or any other organization like the Department of Education or any Christian organisations who are not gay friendly. I am also offering my services for free to the support group at the Reforming (gay) Church. But yes, I did benefit, because I have hundreds of gay clients (but also straight clients) who were referred to me because of my visibility due to the gay cause. I consider my involvement with the support group actually as *a giving back to the gay community* for them to benefit too.

## 6.2.5 The difficulty in facilitating participation

In facilitating participation I was confronted with various obstacles, like my own fears (see 3.8.2), as well as the fears of my participants. At the onset of my journey with gays I could not imagine that I would end up on the task team of the General Synod of the DRC - an experience which was initially intimidating to me. Fortunately the members of the task team soon accepted me as one of them and as someone who shared a specific kind of knowledge about gay Christians. In chapter four (4.2.5) the challenge of being on the task team, as well as various members' views on my contribution, is described.

During the first meeting of the task team I was nervous. It was quite intimidating to sit at the huge wooden synod conference table with 18 theologians of the DRC listening to me, all hand-picked for this task and most of them having doctorates. Then I remembered a conversation I had with my friend, Ryna, who reminded me that I was also hand-picked and that I had an advantage over most of these theologians because I knew the hearts of gay Christians. This conversation, plus keeping in mind that the gays relied on me to be their voice on the task team, gave me courage and made me bold, while the enormous responsibility also humbled me. This corresponds with what Wadell (2002:73) writes when he says our friends help us to have courage and to persevere when faced with hardships, and sometimes they keep us humble.

During our workshops at Heron Bridge I realised that I should not further promote the polarisation between the two groups, even amidst a confrontational atmosphere. This would destroy participation. I tried to accomplish this through a respectful and non-judgemental attitude. The chairperson of the gay-conditional group affirmed this (see also 5.3.2) when he commented: *You are the only one from your group who did not reject us. Yes, we did experience rejection from your group. You opened up to us, you visited us where we met, and you sat at our table and ate with us. Your stories and your DVD certainly had an impact. Because you listened to us without rejecting us, we could also listen to you.* After listening to their stories I started to share stories of gays, first in an indirect way, but later through the DVD in a more direct but still impersonal way. It helped me to look at prejudice as lying on a continuum (see 5.4.1), because I realised challenging the prejudices through participation also takes place on a continuum. Maybe the direct sharing of the stories of the gay members on the task team was too much participation too soon.

I should thus ask the question whether I took the difficulty in making paradigm shifts enough into consideration? Did I have enough understanding and patience with church leaders who are governed by a different paradigm than I? If I think of my friend (see 3.6) I realise that this was also a process of growth for me. I had to learn that different people change in different ways and at different paces. It was comforting to read the feedback of the task team members who were of the opinion that I listened to them and respected them. *Have I always been ethical with certain information about gays, or did I sometimes embarrass a gay person by asking him or her to speak on the DVD or to tell her story to a group of straight people? Have I been sensitive enough towards the discourses about straight people governing gay people?* I never exposed a gay person to talk in public before empowering him/her in therapy through deconstructing religious and societal gay discourses. Of course, I would never force someone into telling his/her story if he/she was not ready or willing to do so. Seldom would I go alone to congregational meetings, because I used to take Rev André Muller with. Even if he was not invited I would most of the times challenge the minister or the person who invited me to invite a gay person, like Rev André Muller, with. My motive was always to give these people a chance to meet a Christian gay person and to hear his story in an authentic way.

Another question which I should ask is whether I always managed to acknowledge the fears of straight people? The next incident serves as an example of the fears of a minister with regards to the gay issue:

It is the first Sunday of the new year, 2008. I am listening to the minister in my local congregation inspiring us to make 2008 a year in which we will reach out to the marginalised people in society. All of a sudden my attention became heightened, because he started to mention examples of marginalised groups. Is it going to happen at long last that the unmentionable word “gay” is going to be mentioned from the pulpit of my local congregation? The minister started by mentioning the poor, but then he stopped and said “etcetera”. Fear was still keeping him from referring to the gays as a marginalised group of people. After the service I told him about my expectations. He replied: *You know, Marietjie, these things are complicated. You cannot simply confront the congregation with the word ‘gay.’*

Maybe this was an example where I did not act not-knowingly, but rather prescriptively as far as this minister’s changing of prejudice is concerned. I wonder

whether I have always been not-knowing as far as for example the people from the gay-conditionalist group on the task team and their stories and principles and beliefs were concerned. Or did I also have pre-conceived ideas about what they believe and of their ability/motivation to change? *Did I acknowledge their honest struggles and their fears and uncertainties enough? What more could I have done to deconstruct their anxieties? What knowledges have I concealed for the sake of transformation?* I think of people's fear about child molestation by gay men: although I had only one gay person who came for therapy because of guilt that he had a relationship with a grade 12 pupil while he was a young teacher. The grade 12 pupil was under age and it could be seen as child molesting. But I cannot remember that I shared this story or knowledge with members of the task team. Maybe fear was also controlling me at the stage, because I wanted justice for gays so badly, that in this instance, I could have lost perspective.

Another aspect of gay stories which I seldom revealed was the issue of gay promiscuity. Although the gay Christians I have met are mostly in monogamous relationships, many of them acknowledged that they have in general been together for less than a month before they had sex together. Before December 2006 gays never had a vision/hope of getting married. It seems as if this aspect did play a role in early sexual activities between two gays. It should be taken into consideration that we, firstly, don't have accurate information about straight Christians' behaviour when they start dating. We don't know how long straight Christians take to end up having sex. Secondly, from my practice it seems that sex before marriage is becoming more and more the norm in society. Nowadays it seems that it is the exception when a straight couple waits until they are married before they have sex. Thirdly, the fact that we are mainly talking about two men having sex (as opposed to sex between a male and female) combined with the fact that there is no possibility of an unwanted pregnancy may also play a role in the perceived relative short period of time before engaging in sexual activity.

#### **6.2.6 Reflecting on the feedback from gay participants**

What was highlighted in the feedback from these gay participants was the devastating effect of rejection by society and the church on gay Christians. They underscored the need to be unconditionally accepted for who they are as opposed to

the inhumane treatment they often receive. It was actually my respect, my love and my unconditional acceptance towards them which formed a catalyst for the special relationship between us. This special relationship enabled this research journey to be undertaken.

The discourse often exists about gays that they are a homogeneous, close-knit community. My journey with gays made me realise that the dominant gay discourse leaves gay people alone in the world with only a few people close to them. There is thus no cohesion, but rather fragmentation due to the dominant discourse. These small groups of people have little or no contact with each other. It seems that the participation through the support group started to break down this fragmentation and brought about a bigger cohesion among the various groups. This feeling of belonging facilitated self-acceptance and the urge to remove prejudice, something which was empowering and which motivated members of this group to participate on the DVD.

With the permission of the members of the support group, I have invited all the members of the task team to attend these group meetings. Up till now a few of the gay-unconditionalist group of the task team have attended, but none of the gay-conditionalist group could fit it into their schedules. The same invitation has gone out to attend the huge gay Christmas carols service held annually at either the Pretoria City Hall or the St Alban's Cathedral. Up till now none of the gay-conditionalist group attended this joyous occasion. This was unfortunate, because of the opportunities it offered for participation.

### **6.3 REFLECTING ON THE MODEL OF MY JOURNEY TO DECONSTRUCT GAY DISCOURSE**

I believe this model could be applied much wider than just to the gay discourse. Antagonism applies to any cause, like gays, straights, race, women, etc. The same applies to protagonism. In my research it applies equally to gays and straights. My intension is to end any discrimination which lies at the position of exclusion, for example race, gender, sexual orientation, etc. What I have learnt is that the more one listens to the discriminated, the more one participates with them. The more one participates the more the prejudice, the pre-scription, the discrimination and the antagonism shifts to inclusion and protagonism. The more one participates the less

one is handcuffed by one's dogmatic commitment and more directed by an ethical commitment of love. Guiding us with regards to less dogma and much love is Jesus himself who led by example when he answered the Pharisees: *It is kindness I want, not animal sacrifices* (Matt 12:7). In Matt 22 Jesus warns against the teachers of the law and the Pharisees and condemns their hypocrisy, because they did not practice what they preached. Jesus reduced the detailed Jewish laws to one law: love. He was also a bold participator with the marginalised for example when He called Levi (Mark 2:14) and when He spoke to the Samaritan woman (John 4:9). The more one listens to the one against whom you are discriminating, thus making room for the context, the less one can discriminate and antagonise. The less one antagonises the more one can include and accept and protagonise. The more one include the less conditional your acceptance and your love become.

The challenge during my journey was how to accomplish a move away from the position of radical exclusion to a position of radical inclusion. I wanted gays to be loved and accepted as human beings of worth and dignity created in the image of God. Various participatory practices as described in this research, like the sharing of stories in a direct or indirect, personal or impersonal way (see 4.2.5.2), as well as the forming of friendly relationships with gay people helped me and others to move from one position of radical exclusion through different positions on the continuum to radical inclusion. Some completed the journey while others managed only a few paces along the way.

This was illustrated during one evening at Heron Bridge when the gay-unconditional group of the task team celebrated a gay member's wedding. Those members from the gay-conditional group who were willing to participate and had become less prejudiced, also attended the celebrations. They shared with us in a lighthearted way why it was difficult for them to attend, but also why they resisted their fears. I believe it is imperative that the stories of the gay antagonists should equally be heard. Acknowledging their stories and their fears could open up the possibility of participation with gays. Sometimes a moment of insertion, like someone close to the person coming out of the closet as gay provides enough context for small steps or movement on the continuum of prejudice change to begin. Sometimes it is something small, like a glass of champagne that can make a difference.

If one uses the model to reflect on gender, in other words the place of women in the church, then we (the DRC) have moved a long way on the continuum of this prejudice model. How we use and interpret the Bible has shifted enormously. This had implications for how we re-authored our perceptions about race. Will gay prejudice follow suit? The more we listen to those against whom we discriminate, the more difficult it becomes to use the Bible with extended dogmas as a stick. The more we listen the more we reduce the Biblical prescriptions to what Jesus reduced the law, namely, love.

It seems that my research journey and what I have learnt could have implications for the training of DRC ministers, as well as for doing theology and pastoral care.

### **6.3.1 Implications for the training of DRC ministers**

De Gruchy (1994:9) considers one of the dangers of theology as a science to be the implicit assumption that all theological systems are universal. This assumption led to the confessional approach of doing Practical Theology where the Bible is seen as the core source and yardstick of doing theology (see 1.3). Little interpreting of the Gospel in terms of people's context is taking place. The way the gay debate was conducted by many DRC ministers displayed the confessional approach of doing theology in their training. This research journey where I started with the context and interpreted the Bible in terms of the context of gay Christians puts confessional theology under suspicion. In this sense the 2007 Synod decision to acknowledge the discretion of local church councils to handle the differences on homosexuality (see 4.3) could be seen as leading the Faculties of Theology in a more contextual approach of doing theology. This decision from Synod opened up the opportunity for ways and means to grow organically from local congregations depending on the context instead of being enforced from the top. The challenge is: how can the DRC develop a contextual model for Practical Theology? This could imply that much more attention should be paid to training of students in pastoral care and counseling based on the ideas of contextual theologies, such as liberation theology and feminist theology. Should the focus of the training of students in theology be primarily to study many years how to understand the Bible "correctly" or to facilitate lived experiences to students on how to do theology with fellow human beings, especially with marginalised groups like gays?

Although it was not the focus of my research I believe a recommendation for Practical Theological research and the training of ministers should be to develop participatory pastoral therapeutic practices with gay people. Too many DRC ministers are governed by fear or ignorance when the issue of homosexuality is introduced.

### **6.3.2 Implications for doing theology and pastoral care**

My research question: *How to facilitate participation in order to deconstruct gay discourse* would be impossible to be researched without me doing theology and pastoral care with gays. Therefore it is just that the implications of this aspect of my research, although it was not my main focus, should be reflected on as well. In doing theology and pastoral care with gays it is important to create a healthy pastoral context by accepting the gay person unconditionally as image bearer of God. This would start the healing process of the gay person. Ackermann (see 1.7.3) regards healing at the core of a feminist theology of *praxis*. Healing was experienced by the gay community due to empowerment through participation on various levels. For example when Johan van Zyl (see 3.8.3) told his story to my DRC cell group he experienced for the first time that he had a voice. He could tell his story not only as a story of suffering and loss, but also as a story of faith and victory and hope.

Another aspect of doing theology and pastoral care concerns language (see 1.8.3). When I started my journey with gays I became aware of derogatory language used by many straights about gays (sometimes deliberately and sometimes out of ignorance), as well as self-harming language used by gays. Foucault (Freedman and Combs 1996:37) considers language as an instrument of power and knowledge. Because this study was a participatory journey, gays and straights could participate in creating new knowledges by using a new language. This new language was a language of listening to and sharing of our respective stories. It was a language of respect and of acceptance of gays as worthy human beings, worthy of the love of God. Through sharing of stories, indirectly or directly like through the DVD, members of the DRC gained an awareness of gay people's struggle and pain. This, amongst others, led to a shift in which truth was standing in the centre: the truth of the doctrines shifted to the truth of experience. Professed truth shifted to lived truth, which resulted in a change in language, and thus in a change in discourse about



gays. This is illustrated in the report of the gay-conditional group on pastoral care to gay people (Algemene Sinode [NGK] 2007a: 224) which served at the General Synod, 2007:

With some homosexual people sexual abuse by people in positions of power played a significant role. Even in the church there are members (sometimes even clergy) who are co-responsible for the development of a homosexual orientation. It is the task of the church not to protect these people, but to call them to book.

It seems a challenge for the pastorate is assisting gays to come out of the closet. At the same time, the challenge is to assist straight people to enter the room where gays are hiding inside and standing in front of the closets in order that everyone could eventually inhabit the house harmoniously. The question is whether our training of church ministers is facilitating this or are our dogmatic preferences closing the closet doors, locking it from outside so that those inside cannot escape even if they want to?

#### **6.4 SUGGESTIONS FOR THE ROAD FORWARD**

I have to end my research journey here, but fortunately my journey with gay Christians, as well as my journey with the DRC is an ongoing one. In fact, I consider myself as inextricably part of the Christian gay community, as well as part of the DRC. As such I will always have hope for more perceptual change towards gays and their parents and other family members. Some of the pressing issues to some of the participants and me are, for example, groups for parents of gay children, a study into the viability of celibacy as an option for gay DRC ministers as decided by the 2007 General Synod, the implementation of the 2007 General Synod decision with regards to individual church councils taking responsibility for decisions about the gays in their congregations, as well as the issue of gay relationships and gay marriages in the DRC.

The issues mentioned above offer various kinds of research challenges for Practical Theology like the handling of ethical dilemmas in some gay relationships. For example: *What about gays who are due to religious and societal discourses married to straight people, but who, because of family or job commitments, can't get out of the marriage? Should they involve themselves in extramarital gay affairs or should they sacrifice their true identity for the sake of others? What will the effect of this be*

*on everybody involved?* These are difficult ethical questions to which there are no simple answers. Answers should be negotiated with every individual client according to his/her own situation. A confessional approach with its inability to tackle the complexity of ethical dilemmas will have a silencing effect, while a contextual approach opens up much more possibilities for meaning making and solving of ethical complexities.

Another research challenge is the consequences for family members once a gay person comes out of the closet. Unfortunately I have started only recently with the group for parents of gay children to invite them on the whole duration of my research journey. Some of them have shared some of their needs, like making another DVD where the needs of children of gay parents are discussed, as well as some of the problems which emerge when parents get divorced because one of the parents is gay. Very little has been done to comfort parents of gay children in our country. Very little is known about the trials and tribulations of parents of gay children. The difficulties they and their grandchildren often encounter, like financial constraints, ridicule, confusion, fear of rejection, etc should be researched in order to create a caring community for these marginalised groups too. All these difficulties form part of the gay story through which not only gays should be assisted, but also those with little or no knowledge of gays. These stories could help the latter to make contact with gays and to change their perceptions about gays.

One evening a parent from the parent group called me, telling me how relieved she was after she started to come to the group. *It is as if a whole burden has fallen from my shoulders*, she remarked. All of a sudden she understood being gay much better. She learnt that gays are ordinary people, Christians, suffering because of misperceptions by society. In just two group sessions her prejudice towards gays has changed completely. She also felt much empathy towards other gays in the group. She wanted to get more involved, like invite some of these youngsters to her home, just to chat with them and to provide a home for them, especially to those who still fear their parents' reaction or to those who have been rejected by their parents and other family. While I was listening to her and especially hearing the transformation she has undergone after just two meetings with the group, I felt sad that members of the task team could not see their way open to come and attend one of our group meetings. The deconstruction of discourses during such an evening happens so naturally and is much more powerful than my individual efforts. It is my view that

more exposure to gays by not only the task team members, but the whole of the DRC, would lead to a better understanding of the nature of gays and the importance of their relationships to them. This brings to the fore the whole issue of celibacy.

A burning issue for further research is also the aspect of gay celibacy in the DRC. During the General Synod of the DRC (2007:8) it was decided that gays could be legitimated as ministers provided that they remain celibate. This could be called selective celibacy and probably a last trait of Catholicism in Protestantism. Catholicism approved of sexual relationships in marriage which existed for procreation and not for recreation (Sullivan 1997:52). This viewpoint of the General Synod could thus be seen as a remnant of this idea about sex. Gaum (Oosthuizen 2007:[3]) supports this idea by considering this to be a Roman Catholic tradition, not part of the reformed tradition and discriminatory against certain people. According to Gaum celibacy cannot be expected from everybody. Scripture also supports this in Matt 19 and 1 Cor 7:37. (See also 2.4.1.6). This aspect was also entailed in the report which was discussed by the General Church Meeting of the *Hervormde Kerk* in 2007 (Jackson 2007:13). They asked the question whether gays should remain celibate or whether further investigation should be done as to how gays can live in meaningful relationships. To me this seems a fruitful exercise to be executed in the DRC too during the following four years before the next General Synod in 2011. Maybe the result of these exercises would be similar to those about women wearing a hat which the DRC executed during the eighties.

Another aspect which needs attention is how to assist the DRC and her various church councils in handling gays in their respective congregations. A workshop to discuss this issue was held in Cape Town during August 2007 (Oberholzer 2007). This workshop is to be replicated in Gauteng during 2008. Delegates to the workshop could negotiate how to facilitate participation between gays and straights in the respective congregations, expanding on some of the foundations for participation to reverse prejudice laid down in this research study.

The work done at the Morelettapark DRC congregation by the H2O group (homosexuality to overcome) could also be a valuable study to undertake. The 250 gays (see 2.4.1.4) who have been treated to change their sexual orientation could be interviewed a year after their reparative course. The DRC could learn a lot from these people, for example when is change possible and under what circumstances?

When is it difficult to remain straight and what makes it so difficult? What do they understand under “healing” or “change”?

From the above it seems that there is still a lot to be done with regards to the gay issue in the DRC. I truly hope to remain part of the process of facilitating participation in order to deconstruct homophobia and to counteract injustices levelled against gays. In the end it remains the responsibility of the DRC (I am also a member of the DRC) to change her prejudice against gays. This is not the responsibility of the gay community. In perpetuating my mission I hope to always act within God’s will, which is, according to Hans Kung (1977: 251) “man’s [sic] well-being”.

On Sunday, 30 September 2007, Johan van Zyl, gay ex-minister of the *Hervormde Kerk* and currently organist in a *Hervormde Kerk* congregation in Johannesburg, resigned from his position as organist (Jackson 2007:5). This happened just after the decision of the General Church meeting that being gay is still considered as a sin by the *Hervormde Kerk*. When I asked him what made him resign he said: *I have decided that I did not want to be part of a church where so much injustice against gays is still prevailing*. He sounded cheerful when I called him, but I had a gut feeling that sadness could again try to get the better of him. Therefore I sent him the following sms:

*Do you realise how different everything is this time? You have a voice. You have the power to decide. They need you. They did not ask you to resign. You could resist the injustice by choosing to resign. In doing so you reclaimed your self-respect and dignity as a human being. The sadness, the pain is still there, but perhaps you have more control over these emotions now? Maybe you have more control because you know who you are. And maybe because you know that I love you deeply.* He replied as follows: *Thank you very much! At the moment I am reading all the letters in the Beeld archives again and was on the verge of getting heartsore. Then your sms came through which reminded me of how much has happened over these past five years. Thank you for your giant share in it.*

This made me realise that my participation did make a difference in Johan’s life, but also in other people’s lives. I have touched them on a very deep level. They have touched me on an equally deep level. We have changed one another’s lives. There

is still so much pain and sadness, but together we have done hope and will continue to do hope with one another, while inviting the church into participation. In doing this I will remember Henri Nouwen's (1975:53) ideas when he writes about converting hostility into hospitality by creating a friendly empty space where we can "reach out" to others and invite them to a new relationship. He says:

This conversion is an inner event that cannot be manipulated but must develop from within. Just as we cannot force a plant to grow but can take away the weeds and stones which prevent its development, so we cannot force anyone to such a personal and intimate change of heart, but we can offer the space where such a change can take place.

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## **APPENDIX A: INFORMATION SHEET**

### **DECONSTRUCTING GAY DISCOURSE IN THE DUTCH REFORMED CHURCH (DRC)**

#### **INFORMATION SHEET FOR PARTICIPATING MEMBERS OF THE TASK TEAM ON HOMOSEXUALITY OF THE GENERAL SYNOD OF THE DRC**

Thank you for your interest in this research project about practices to deconstruct homophobia in the Dutch Reformed Church. With the term “homophobia” I mean an irrational fear of gay people, but also in a broader sense a general anti-gay attitude. I am aware that the term “homophobia” might create strong reactions, especially with people who are more conservative in their viewpoints on homosexuality. I therefore hope to negotiate a more suitable term whilst conducting the interviews with you. Please read this information sheet carefully before deciding to participate. If you decide to participate, I thank you. If you decide not to participate, there will be no disadvantage to you of any kind.

#### **The aim of the research project**

This research project is being undertaken as part of the requirements for a Masters degree in Practical Theology – with specialization in Pastoral Therapy. The aims of the project are:

- To do a literature review with regards to re-authoring attitudes and perceptions towards gay people.
- To revisit the diversity of my journey with gay people. In doing this I want to identify how listening to gay people’s stories have re-authored my own perceptions about being gay. Furthermore I want to identify if and how practices of introducing stories of gay people to members of the DRC, especially by showing them a DVD which members of the gay community and I have made, have brought about perceptual change. This DVD consists of gay people’s stories. The stories of gay people enabled me to participate with both gay Christians, as well as with members/leaders of the DRC.
- To explore how the use of narrative and social constructionist ideas facilitated processes whereby the narratives of gay Christians can transform perceptions of members of the DRC towards gay Christians.

What will be required of the participants?

Should you decide to take part in the research project, I will:

- \* ask you to give consent for the information obtained during the interviews to be used in the dissertation.
- \* expect from you to comment on the following three questions:
  1. How did my journey with the task team affect you and your views on homosexuality?
  2. What in my journey with the task team affected you and your views on homosexuality?
  3. How do you understand Christ’s law of love in connection with gay Christians?
- \* request you to read parts of the dissertation where your viewpoints are portrayed and to comment on or change anything related to you or your viewpoints.

#### **Results of the study**

You are most welcome to request a copy of the results of the study should you wish to do so. Should you decide to participate, please also read the consent form carefully, before signing it.

I thank you in anticipation.

Marietjie van Loggerenberg

## APPENDIX B: CONSENT FORM

### DECONSTRUCTING GAY DISCOURSE IN THE DUTCH REFORMED CHURCH

#### CONSENT FORM FOR PARTICIPANTS

I have been informed about the project and I understand what the project is all about. All my questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I understand that I am free to request further information at any stage.

I know that:

1. My participation in the research study is voluntary.
2. I am free to talk only about what I feel comfortable with.
3. I agree to the way of data capturing, viz. tape recording and procedural notes.
4. I am free to withdraw from the research study if I wish.
5. I am aware that my viewpoints will be written down as part of an MTh dissertation.
6. Should I want to review my responses to questions before submission, these reviewed responses will be included in the dissertation.
7. I will receive no payment for participating in the research study.
8. All my viewpoints will be treated confidentially.
9. I choose to use my own name/ pseudonym .....
10. I am aware that the supervisors of the study will have permission to read the material.
11. I know that by participating in this study I will contribute to the gay discourse.

.....  
(Signature of participant)                      Date

.....  
(Name of participant)                      (Signature of witness)

For any further information or concerns feel free to contact:

Marietjie van Loggerenberg

Tel: 012- 3476393

Cell: 082 3243 726

Or my supervisors, Dr Dirk Kotzé, at the Institute for Therapeutic Development

Tel: 012-460 6704 and Prof Jaco Dreyer at UNISA tel: 012-4294040.

This research study has been reviewed and approved by the Department of Practical Theology, UNISA and by the Institute for Therapeutic Development.

**APPENDIX C: EXAMPLES OF LETTERS OF ACCEPTANCE**

**NG Kerk vra alle gays om verskoning: My persoonlike antwoord.**

Ek neem kennis dat die NG Kerk se sinode my om verskoning vra vir enige leed wat ek deur die kerk aagedoen is.

In die media is berig: "NG Kerk vra alle gays en hulle familie om verskoning vir elke geval waar die kerk hulle in die verlede seergemaak en verontreg het."

My antwoord aan die NG Kerk:

EK DANK GOD VIR DIT. DANKIE VIR GOD SE  
ONBEZINDIGE GROOT LIEFDE. TOE DR. ANDRÉ MULLER  
GEPRAAT HET <sup>HET</sup> WAT ONSE GAY MENSE AL BELIEF HET, DIE  
VERDOORDELINGS, VERWERPINGS EN WEGWYSINGS HET  
TOE, HET MY TRANE GEVLOEI. NATUURLIK VERGEEF  
EK DIE KERK-MENSE WAT DIT GEDOEN HET. EK IS  
LIEF VIR HUL. ALMAL HET IN MY HART. GENEET GOD SE

(Indien meer spasie benodig word, gebruik asseblief die agterkant) LIEFDE IS GROTER AS DIT  
WAT NÁ MY UITGESTRAAL IS

My naam: [redacted] OF: Ek verkies om anoniem te bly

Ek wil betrek word by toekomstige gesprekke met die NG Kerk rakende sy gay lidmate: JA / ~~NEE~~

Indien JA: My kontakbesonderhede: (Telefoon, sel, e-posadres)

BEL MY ASB. IN DIE  
VERBAND

**NG Kerk vra alle gays om verskoning: My persoonlike antwoord.**

Ek neem kennis dat die NG Kerk se sinode my om verskoning vra vir enige leed wat ek deur die kerk aagedoen is.

In die media is berig: "NG Kerk vra alle gays en hulle familie om verskoning vir elke geval waar die kerk hulle in die verlede seergemaak en verontreg het."

My antwoord aan die NG Kerk:

ANKIE!!!

GAY KIND VAN DIE HERE

(Indien meer spasie benodig word, gebruik asseblief die agterkant)

My naam: [redacted] OF: Ek verkies om anoniem te bly

Ek wil betrek word by toekomstige gesprekke met die NG Kerk rakende sy gay lidmate: JA / NEE

Indien JA: My kontakbesonderhede: (Telefoon, sel, e-posadres)

## APPENDIX D: DVD



## APPENDIX E: CORRESPONDENCE WITH YOUTH WORKER

18 Augustus 2003

Die Jeugwerker  
Heleen Heydenreich  
XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX  
XXXXXXXXXX  
XXXXXXXXXX  
XXXX

Geagte Me Heydenreich

### **POSOMSKRYWING (MEEGAANDE) EN VERGOEDINGSPAKKET VIR JEUGWERKER M.I.V. 1 JANUARIE 2004**

Die Kerkraad maak hiermee 'n aanbod aan jou ten opsigte van die Jeugwerkerspos wat met ingang 1 Januarie 2004 'n permanente pos in die gemeente is.

Hiermee gaan ook die volledige posoms krywing waarin alle verantwoordelikhede en pligte uitgespel is.

#### **1. WERKSURE**

Daar word van die Jeugwerker verwag om minstens **45 uur** per week te werk op sodanige wyse dat alle pligte van die pos nagekom word (soos uiteengesit in posoms krywing) en by die gemeente se roetines inpas. Aangesien die aktiwiteite van die gemeente hoofsaaklik oor naweke en in aande plaasvind, word die bogenoemde ure op 'n skiktydgrondslag gewerk.

#### **2. VERLOF**

Die Jeugwerker kwalifiseer vir **30 kalenderdae** betaalde vakansieverlof wat **gedurende skoolvakansies** geneem moet word, na goedkeuring deur die Kerkraad en is nie ooploopbaar en uitbetaalbaar na diensbeëindiging nie. Dit word aanvaar dat die Jeugwerker selfs tydens skoolvakansies wanneer daar nie amptelike vakansieverlof en/of siekteverlof geneem word nie, ook beskikbaar moet wees vir pastorale begeleiding en/of ondersteuning al is daar geen gemeentelike jeugaksies tydens skoolvakansies nie.

**Siekteverlof:** 12 dae per jaar met staving van 'n mediese sertifikaat.

**Afnaweek:** een afnaweek per kwartaal welke naweek geneem word tydens 'n katagese afnaweek of langnaweek na goedkeuring van die Kerkraad.

**Afdag:** Een afdag per week word slegs toegestaan tydens die skoolkwartaal en aan die diskresie van die Jeugwerker oorgelaat, maar 'n afdag mag onder geen omstandighede enige jeugwerksaamhede aan bande lê of verhinder nie; die dag waarop 'n afdag geneem word, moet aan die leraar en Jeugkommissie deurgegee word vir kennisame.

#### **3. VERGOEDINGSPAKKET**

- 3.1 **Salaris:** R5351,50
- 3.2 **Dertiende tjek** gelykstaande aan een maand se salaries
- 3.3 **Telfoontoelaag:** R400,00
- 3.4 **Pensioenfonds:** Die Kerkraad betaal 10% van basiese salaris per jaar en die jeugwerker betaal 6% van die basiese salaris per jaar.
- 3.5 **Mediesefonds:** Die Kerkraad betaal twee derdes van die maandelikse premie tot op 'n maksimum van R400,00 per maand en die jeugwerker betaal een derde van die maandelikse premie.
- 3.6 Ten opsigte van **items in 3.4 and 3.5** hierbo genoem verkies die Kerkraad om genoemde bedrae self direk aan die instansie waarop ooreengekom is met die jeugwerker, te betaal. Indien die jeugwerker verkies om self reelings te tref vir 'n pensioen en mediese fonds moet hy/sy **skriftelike bewyse aan die Kerkraad voorle ter staving van lidmaatskap.**

#### **4. TEN SLOTTE**

Die Kerkraad versoek jou om skriftelik te reageer op heidrei aanbod voor die Kerkraad se vergadering, **D.V. Woensdag, 20 Augustus 2003 om 18:30.**

Vriendelike groete

19 September 2003

Mej. Heleen Heydenreich  
Stabilis  
PRETORIA

Faksnommer: 021 – 3337702

Geagte Heleen

**INSAKE: DIENSKONTRAK JOUSELF/KERKRAAD NED Geref KERK XXXXXX**

Ons verwys na die samesprekings met jou op 18 September 2003 en bevestig dat die volgende ooreenkoms met jou bereik is:

1. Die dienskontrak tussen jouself en die Kerkraad beëindig word met onmiddellike effek.
2. Jy sal egter geregtig wees op jou volle vergoeding en voordele wat jy tans van die Kerkraad ontvang op 'n maandelikse basis tot en met 31 Desember 2003.
3. Die Kerkraad skeld jou studieskuld van R1864,42 kwyt.
4. Die Kerkraad onderneem om die bedrag van R150,00 wat xxxxxxxx maandeliks tot jou salaris bygedra het, te betaal tot 31 Desember 2003.
5. Jy word vrygestel van enige diensverpligtinge by die Kerkraad vanaf datum van ondertekening van hierdie ooreenkoms en staan dit jou vry om 'n ander diensbtrekking te aanvaar te enige tyd sonder verlies van enige voordele hierin vermeld.

Die Kerkraad betuig sy waardering vir jou werk onder die jongmense in die gemeente.

Jy word versoek om hierdie skrywe te onderteken en aan ons so spoedig moontlik terug te faks.

Namens die Kerkraad.

Ek bevestig dat voormelde ooreenkoms bereik is en deur my aanvaar is.

GETEKEN te PRETORIA op hierdie 19<sup>de</sup> dag van SEPTEMBER 2003.  
AS GETUIES:

- 1.
- 2.

19 September 2003  
Mej. Heleen Heydenreich  
Stabilis  
PRETORIA

Faksnommer: (012) 3337702

**INSAKE: DIENSKONTRAK JOUSELF/KERKRAAD NED. Geref. KERK XXXXX**

Ons faks van 19 September 2003 het betrekking.

Aanvullend to die ooreenkoms wat jy onderteken het, wys ons net daarop dat daar geen verdere eise uit hierdie ooreenkoms mag spruit nie.

Alle skryfbehoeftes, boeke, CD's, dvd's en ander jeugmateriaal wat deur jou op onkoste van die Kerkraad aangekoop is, moet so spoedig moontlik by die kerkkantoor ingelewer word.

Die telefoon wat deur die Kerkraad geïnstalleer is, se dienste is vandag beëindig.