

Children's narrative identity formation and Henri
Nouwen's praxis of pastoral care

J Botha
30271304

 <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-0245-8299>

Dissertation accepted in fulfilment of the requirements for the
degree **Magister Theologiae** in **Pastoral Studies** at the North-West
University

Supervisor: Dr Hannelie Yates
Co-supervisor: Prof Manitza Kotzé

Graduation: December 2022
Student number: 30271304

Acknowledgements

I would like to express my appreciation and thanks to the various people who played an important role in helping me complete this research study:

- Johan, my husband for his encouragement, patience and understanding. Thank you for making it possible for me to pursue my dreams!
- Sonia, Esmia, Hanru and Christo, my 4 children for their patience and their willingness to allow me time to fulfil my goals even when at times they had to endure my absence
- My extended family for their encouragement, love and support
- Dr. Hannelie Yates and Prof. Manitza Kotze, my supervisors, for their patience, guidance and support

Most importantly I want to thank my Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, who gave me the courage and the perseverance to finish what I started.

Abstract

This research study aims to address the narrative identity formation of children and the influence of adult-child relationships on the narrative of a child. The identity formation of all children is vulnerable to a culture of 'adultism'. The power adults have over children can expose them to abuse and neglect. Adultism thus has the potential to hinder life-giving identity formation in children. The aim of this research study is to determine how Henri Nouwen's praxis of pastoral care can be used to create awareness and educate adults about life-denying and life-giving ways of being present in the process of children's narrative identity formation. For the purpose of this study "children" is used as a relational concept. The focus will be more on children in relation to adults in the process of narrative identity formation than on children within their biological developmental stages. Narrative events inform a child's thought patterns, perspectives and behaviour, which will inform their narrative identities. The ability of a child to develop a personal life story directly contributes to the development of autobiographical reasoning, narrative identity, self-regulation, and social problem solving. Because life stories will give a child a sense of identity, a life story that testifies of oppression and discrimination as a result of adultism may lead to identity confusion. In this study unhealthy adult-child relations within the context of children's narrative identity formation will be identified and ways to bring it to salvation and healing will be proposed based on Henri Nouwen's praxis of pastoral care. The functions of pastoral care that are prominent in this study is that of consciousness raising, increasing awareness, education, advocacy and prophetic witness with regard to the harm that can be done to children if adults do not acknowledge and treat children in accordance with their God-given dignity.

Key words: Adultism; children; narrative identity formation; pastoral care; praxis

Clarification of key concepts

Adultism – Adultism is the systematic discrimination against and abuse of power over children by adults. Adultism can also be defined as a bias towards adults and the preference of the ideas, activities, and attitudes of adults above those of children (Fletcher, 2015:3 (Glossary)).

Children - For the purpose of this study “children” is used as a relational concept. The focus will be more on children in relation to adults in the process of narrative identity formation than on children within their biological developmental stages. According to De Beer and Yates (2019:1) placing too much emphasis on the biological developmental stages of childhood creates dominant understandings and norms for childhood which may lead to many children being stereotyped as inferior, deviant or even pathological.

Narrative Identity formation – This refers to the process whereby individuals form an identity through the integration of their life experiences into an assumed, developing story of the self; a story that offers the individual a sense of purpose in life (Mc Adams, 2001:110).

Pastoral care – Pastoral care is a process of meeting people where they are and journeying with them in their being functions “...with deep concern and sincere empathy” (Louw, 2014:69). Louw (2014:69) has identified various functions within different models of care and counselling which includes healing, sustaining, guiding, reconciling, nurturing, liberating, empowering and interpreting. In the context of this study the tasks of pastoral care will centre around that of consciousness raising, increasing awareness, education, advocacy and prophetic witness with regard to the harm that can be done to children if adults do not acknowledge and treat children in accordance with their God-given dignity. In this study pastoral care will have the task to identify unhealthy adult-child relations within the context of children’s narrative identity formation and to propose ways to bring it to salvation and healing, based on Henri Nouwen’s praxis of pastoral care.

Praxis – According to Louw (2014:51) praxis refers to “the intentional and meaning dimension of actions and being functions”. In this study Henri Nouwen’s praxis of pastoral care, put differently how Henri Nouwen has embodied the intentional actions of pastoral care in an authentic life before God, is brought in conversation with the question of adults’ being with children in their narrative identity formation.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgements	i
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION	1
1.1 Background to study	1
1.2 Preliminary Literature study	3
1.2.1 Narrative identity formation	3
1.2.2 A culture of adultism and its effect on children	4
1.2.3 Pastoral care in the context of adult-child relationships	5
1.3 Problem description and research question	5
1.4 Research aim and objectives	7
1.4.1 Research aim	7
1.4.2 Research objectives	7
1.5 Research methodology	8
1.6 The current body of knowledge and the value of the study	10
1.7 Preliminary classification of chapters	11
1.8 Ethical considerations	12
1.9 Chapter summary	12
CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE AND METHODOLOGY	14
2.1 Literature study	14
2.1.1 Life story narratives and narrative identity	14
2.1.2 The role of narratives in theology of praxis methodology	16
2.2 Feminist theology of praxis	18
2.2.1 The story of Denise Ackermann	18
2.1.1.1 The praxis of story- telling	19
2.1.1.2 The praxis of Gender analysis	20
2.1.1.3 The praxis of mutual relationship	20
2.1.1.4 Body of Christ praxis	21
2.1.1.5 Embodied praxis	22

2.3	Childism as an antidote to the culture of adultism	23
2.1.2	Childist narrative theology of praxis	24
2.1.2.1	Narrative praxis – children’s stories	24
2.1.2.2	The praxis of age-analysis	26
2.1.2.3	The praxis of gender-analysis	26
2.1.2.4	The praxis of adult-child relationships	27
2.1.2.5	Body of Christ praxis – a childist perspective	28
2.1.2.6	Embodied praxis - In the body of a child	30
2.4	Chapter summary	31
	CHAPTER 3: THE EFFECT OF ADULTISM ON IDENTITY FORMATION	32
3.1	Conceptualizing narrative identity	32
3.2	Fragments of children’s stories	33
3.2.1	A story of sexual abuse	33
3.2.2	A story of tenacious endurance	34
3.2.3	A story of neglect and abandonment	35
3.3	Age as a determining factor	36
3.4	Gender plays a role in the form and consequence of adultism	39
3.5	Adultism in the context of adult – child relationships	42
3.6	Body of Christ praxis	44
3.7	Embodied praxis – in the bodies of children	45
3.8	Chapter summary	50
	CHAPTER 4: HENRI NOUWEN AND PASTORAL CARE	52
4.1	Henri Nouwen’s narrative: A descriptive, interpretive perspective	53
4.2	Henri Nouwen’s narrative pastoral care	55
4.2.1	Spirituality in Henri Nouwen’s pastoral care	56
4.2.1.1	The Eucharist in Henri Nouwen’s pastoral care.	57
4.2.2	Woundedness and vulnerability in Henri Nouwen’s pastoral care	59
4.3	Henri Nouwen and a childist narrative theology of praxis	60
4.3.1	Narrative praxis – Henri Nouwen and the power of storytelling	60

4.3.2	Praxis of age-analysis - Henri Nouwen's perspective on children	61
4.3.3	Praxis of gender analysis – Henri Nouwen's gender identity confusion	63
4.3.4	Henri Nouwen's perspectives on adult-child relationships	65
4.3.5	Body of Christ praxis – Henri Nouwen on becoming the Beloved	66
4.3.6	Embodied praxis – Henri Nouwen's perspective of the body	68
4.4	Chapter summary	69
CHAPTER 5: DEALING WITH CHILDREN'S NARRATIVE IDENTITY FORMATION: A CHILDIST NARRATIVE THEOLOGY OF PRAXIS		70
5.1	African childhood as social construction	70
5.2	Childist narrative theology of praxis in pastoral care	73
5.2.1	Narrative praxis - Enabling narration	73
5.2.2	Praxis of age-analysis – Opposing discrimination	79
5.2.3	Paxis of gender-analysis - navigating gender-identity confusion	84
5.2.4	Paxis of adult-child relationships – cultivating loving relationships	86
5.2.5	Body of Christ Praxis – Placing children in the Body of Christ	91
5.2.6	Embodied praxis – Helping children befriend and love their bodies	98
5.3	Chapter summary	100
CHAPTER 6: FINDINGS		101
6.1	Current observations and the relevancy of the study	101
6.2	Research findings	103
6.3	Further areas for research	107
6.4	Concluding remarks	108
Bibliography		109

TABLE OF FIGURES

Figure 1: Feminist Theology of Praxis (Ackermann, 2006:230-239).....	104
Figure 2: Childist Narrative Theology of Praxis	105
Figure 3: Childist Narrative Theology of Praxis - Guidelines	107

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background to study

This study aims to investigate the role adults play in the narrative identity formation of children. The relationships between children and adults may contribute towards children becoming confident and happy adults who have a strong sense of identity and purpose. Unfortunately, many adult-child relationships may also lead to children who are insecure, fearful and who experience long-term identity crises. The following sections will describe the constructs of identity formation as well as the influence of adult's power in relation to children.

Identity formation

Identity formation may be conceptualized according to the view of Harter (1999:3-6) which states that the self-system is developed within three distinct and interrelated units. These units are self-knowledge (self-awareness), self-regulation (self-control) and self-evaluation (a perception of the self). Westbya and Culattab (2016:260) explain that this self-system is shaped by a person's life narrative, a narrative that integrates reconstructed past with perceived present and imagined future.

Narrative identity

Narrative events inform a child's thought patterns, perspectives and behaviour which will inform their narrative identities. The notion of narrative identity hypothesizes that individuals form an identity through the integration of their life experiences into an assumed, developing story of the self; a story that offers the individual a sense of purpose in life (Mc Adams, 2001:110). A part of developing an integrated life story is reflecting on how one's own characteristics, perceptions and behaviour have affected past events and actions (Westbya & Culattab, 2016:260). According to McAdams (2001:106) children at a young age do not naturally create integrative life stories that afford unity and purpose to their lives but they are still tacitly collecting material that will inform and shape their identities. Being able to recognize and express your identity is the chief task of adolescence. It is during adolescence that people confront the crises between identity and identity confusion (Papalia & Feldman, 2011:440). Younger children may however also engage in this task; children who lived through difficult circumstances may be impelled to reflect on things from a spiritual perspective sooner, than more privileged youngsters. Nye (2014:90) notes that:

“Those working with children who have a life-limiting illness often notice that they want to address the ‘big questions’ (what’s the point of life? who am I? what is death?) sooner in life”.

For many people the struggle to find their identity can continue throughout adulthood and some people never move beyond identity confusion. A person’s identity is of a dynamic nature, constantly adapting to changes in one’s context and environment, when a person is able to resolve their identity crises satisfactorily, they obtain a stable yet dynamic identity. A stable identity allows a person to understand and navigate themselves in a given context and situation. Adolescents who resolve their identity crises develop the virtue of fidelity, they have a sense of belonging and a sustained loyalty towards and faith in a system of beliefs (Papalia & Feldman, 2011:440). Dreyer *et al.* (2002:163) states that identity formation will always have a relational dimension. The adult-child relationships children experience will always have a profound influence on the formation of their narrative identity. The next section will discuss the adult-child relationship and the effect of the use of power in this fragile bond.

Power in relational contexts and the role of pastoral care

In the web of life, there are relationships that can be more fragile and vulnerable than other relationships - especially relationships where the value of people are underestimated and overlooked because of factors such as ethnicity, language, gender, religion, and age.

This underestimation and disregard for people’s human dignity can lead to the inappropriate use of power in relational contexts. The adult-child relationship can be indicative of constructive division of power, leading to confident children that feel safe, accepted, and valued. These children will have the confidence and ability to contribute to the society they live in, and they may most probably experience a sense of purpose in life. On the other hand, children and their contributions can be manipulated, dominated, undermined, or even overlooked because of their age. There are cultural beliefs and practices that may have an adverse effect on the identity formation of children. In South Africa there is a saying “children must be seen and not heard”. This saying clearly demonstrates how children’s contributions can be undermined and even discouraged within South African cultures. Furthermore, it is unfortunate that child abuse and neglect are becoming a proliferating norm in South Africa. The Optimus Study on Child Abuse, Violence and Neglect in South Africa testified that one in three respondents reported experiencing physical abuse and one fifth of respondents reported experiencing neglect (Centre for Justice and Crime Prevention, (2015:2). This study was representative of 15- to 17-year-old adolescents recruited nationally from schools as well as households. In order to be representative of the South African population, a multistage stratified sample was obtained with province, geographic area (urban/rural) and race group being used as stratification variables. All

these factors have a profound influence on the life stories of children and consequently on the formation of their narrative Identity.

Consciousness and awareness should be raised with regard to the harm being done to children. This may be the task of pastoral care. In the context of life-denying adult-child relationships, pastoral care has an educational task as well as that of advocacy and prophetic witness. Truter and Kotzé (2005:979) prefer a narrative approach to pastoral care. They explain that respect for people is the core of narrative therapy. A narrative approach to pastoral care should not emphasize a person's life-denying power, but rather their life-giving power and potential. People who have lived with oppression often do not recognize their own life-giving power and potential and it can only be revealed to them when they are treated with respect, love, and inclusion (Truter & Kotzé, 2005:979). When children are treated with respect, love, and inclusion in a life-giving adult-child relationship, they too can recognize their own life-giving power and potential. This study aims to advocate for the responsible use of power in adult-child relationships in the context of children's narrative identity formation.

In this study the life of one theologian and pastoral counsellor, Henri Nouwen will be investigated. His approach to pastoral care was narratively forged from his own suffering. As a child he did not experience a life-giving relationship with his father and as a result he struggled with his own identity. He felt unworthy and did not realize his own potential until much later in life. From his own pain and woundedness, Nouwen was able to bring healing and restoration to others through his praxis of pastoral care.

The next section will provide a preliminary literature review on narrative identity formation, adultism and narratives in theological praxis and pastoral care.

1.2 Preliminary Literature study

1.2.1 Narrative identity formation

One cannot discuss the concept of Narrative identity without referring to Paul Ricoeur, a French philosopher who wrote extensively on narrative. Ricoeur wrote on the interrelationship between human identity, time and narrative, from which he constructed the ethical concept of narrative identity first formulated in volume three of his book "Time and Narrative" (Crowley, 2003:1). Narrative identity is a dynamic concept that encompasses both change and perpetuity (Crowley, 2003:1). Ricoeur's theory of narrative identity strives to answer the question "Who?" (Crowley, 2003:1). According to Dreyer *et al.* (2002) Ricoeur began this quest by dividing the concept of identity from a narrative perspective into two dimensions; the temporal dimension and the

relational dimension. Within the temporal dimension one can distinguish between an *idem*-identity and an *ipse*-identity. They build their definitions of these constructs on Ricoeur's work explaining that "from the temporal perspective the distinction between idem-identity (with character as paradigm) and ipse-identity (with keeping of one's word or promise as paradigm) reflects a basic tension regarding identity, namely between stability and change" (Dreyer *et al.*, 2002:161). The *idem*-identity is stable and refer to the identity that develop as a product of genetics, a specific body, the acquired habits and the values that the person identify with. On the other hand, the *ipse*-identity embraces the possibility of change, looking to the future and committing oneself to transformation (Dreyer *et al.*, 2002:161). Ricoeur's theory of the internal dialectic of the human-self specify that the temporal perspective of personal identity will always reveal the tension between selfsameness (character) and self-constancy (Dreyer *et al.*, 2002:161). Furthermore Dreyer *et al.* (2002:163) explains that identity is a narrative accomplishment. Personal identity is constructed and shaped through the telling of stories and the listening of the stories of other people. Narrative identity is a dynamic construct shaped and reshaped by the stories of our lives that are recounted and reproduced (Dreyer *et al.*, 2002:164). The second dimension of narrative identity is its relational dimension. Personal identity is always formed in relation to other people. Our narrative identity is formed through not only remembering our own stories, but also listening to others who tell stories about us (Dreyer *et al.*, 2002:164). Stories about our birth and childhood may not form part of our memories, but it still significantly influence who we are and what we become. Dreyer *et al.* (2002:164) explains that the stories of our lives are never told in isolation; our stories are always entangled in the stories of other people and therefore narrative identity is relational; it always involves other people.

The work of Paul Ricoeur will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 2 of this study. The research conducted by Dan McAdams who outlined the first research agenda concerning narrative identity in 1985 will also be discussed in Chapter 2.

1.2.2 A culture of adultism and its effect on children

The nature of adult-child relationships within households, schools, churches, and communities can tend towards adultism and can have a considerable impact on the identity formation of children. Jeremy Roche states that children are habitually rendered silent and invisible by the attitudes and practices of adult society (Roche, 2004:270). All children are vulnerable to a culture of 'adultism'. Adultism is many times practiced for noble reasons and under the notion that children are not fully rational beings who still lack wisdom and who are unable to know their own best interests. Adultism can however also take on more extreme forms such as child abuse

and neglect. As stated previously, child abuse is a serious challenge in South Africa. Rice (2013:introductory chapter, paragraph 23) explains that children who grew up with abuse and neglect has a life story filled with feelings of fear, guilt, and alienation. These children want to gain safety, autonomy, and justice (revenge) by controlling their environment. She further explains that the thought patterns of these children produce rebellion and alienation, which lead to sinful behaviour that turn into unrelenting habits over time (Rice, 2013:introductory chapter, paragraph 23). These thought patterns and habits (behaviour) will inform and shape the life story of a child and in turn their identity. The distorted identity found in these children can be attributed to the destructive behaviour of adults; behaviour that originates with systemic discrimination against and abuse of power over children.

1.2.3 Pastoral care in the context of adult-child relationships

When children experience identity confusion directly because of the destructive behaviours of adults, pastoral care has the tasks of consciousness raising and increasing awareness. As previously stated, this study will investigate the life of one theologian and pastoral counsellor, Henri Nouwen. Nouwen openly confessed to his own brokenness. He confessed that at times he felt like he was losing his own identity (Ford, 2002:37-38). In his book *Gracias!*, Nouwen wrote about his longing for intimacy and his inability to perceive and receive simple friendship (Nouwen, 1993:131). In a letter to John Bamberger, Nouwen admitted that on a deep level he questioned whether God truly loved him (Higgins & Burns, 2012:59). The psychotherapist, Robert Jonas, a close friend of Nouwen, believed that Nouwen's relationship with his parents might have contributed to his feelings of self-doubt since it left him with many unmet needs (Moschella, 2016:76-77). In Nouwen's relationship with his father, he experienced a sense of unworthiness (Moschella, 2016:76-77). In his search for his own identity, Nouwen was able to develop a meaningful approach to pastoral care based on helping others to heal from one's own woundedness.

Chapter two of this research study will elaborate more on narrative theological praxis. The next section will provide a detailed description of the problem.

1.3 Problem description and research question

Nouwen (1992:33) explains that identity is not something that is imposed from the outside of one's life; it cannot be discovered through an internalized process of trial and error where identity is "tried on" and "taken off" if it doesn't fit. We discover our identity when we hear the

sacred voice that calls us the Beloved; the core truth of our existence is expressed in being the Beloved (Nouwen, 1992:33).

When children experience identity confusion, it can often be ascribed to destructive behaviour of adults – as was also the case in the life of Henri Nouwen. Consciousness should be raised, and awareness should be increased about adultism as a culture where systemic discrimination against and abuse of power in adult-child relations do harm to children's narrative identity construction. In practical theological research, academic attention is given to children with the intention to participate in an interdisciplinary scholarly attempt, in which all people, regardless of age, are treated with care and dignity.

Pastoral care involves the hermeneutical task to identify unhealthy – in theological terms life-denying practices – within particular situations and contexts and to propose ways to bring that to salvation and healing. The point of departure in pastoral care is God as the source, giver and sustainer of life. In pastoral care the field of study centres around how our understanding of God informs our being human before God and in relation with others, the self, and the cosmos. Adults who are not fully aware of this departure point for an authentic life before God, can intentionally or unintentionally do harm to themselves and others. It is argued in this study that if children are harmed because of adults who uncritically absorb destructive cultural thinking patterns and attitudes and abuse power in adult-child spaces, it belongs to the agenda of pastoral care.

In order to respond to the question of adults' being and doing in children's narrative identity formation process, Henri Nouwen's praxis of pastoral care, or put differently, how Henri Nouwen has embodied the intentional actions of pastoral care in an authentic life before God, is utilized as a source for theological and ethical interpretation.

Research question

This research study aims to respond to the following primary research question:

How can the theological praxis of Henri Nouwen's pastoral care be used to create awareness and educate adults about life-denying and life-giving ways of being and doing in the process of children's narrative identity formation?

The following sub research questions must be answered:

1. Why is the methodological choice being made for a narrative theology of praxis to raise awareness of adults' life-denying and life-giving involvement in children's narrative identity formation?

2. How does power in a relational context determine adults' influence in the lives of children and what is the effect of adultism on children's identity formation?
3. How can Henri Nouwen's praxis of theology inform life-giving identity formation in children?
4. How can the theological praxis of Nouwen's pastoral care be used to create awareness and educate adults about life-denying and life-giving ways of being and doing in the process of children's narrative identity formation?

1.4 Research aim and objectives

1.4.1 Research aim

This research study aims to determine how the theological praxis of Henri Nouwen's pastoral care can be used to create awareness and educate adults about life-denying and life-giving ways of being and doing in the process of children's narrative identity formation.

1.4.2 Research objectives

The objectives of this research study are as follow:

1. To describe and justify the methodological choice of a narrative theology of praxis to raise awareness of adults' life-denying and life-giving involvement in children's narrative identity formation. Design a suitable methodology by drawing on existing literature.
2. To explore and describe power as a relational factor that determines adults' influence in the narrative identity formation of children. This will be accomplished by conceptualizing narrative identity formation and utilizing the designed methodology to reflect on the effect of inappropriate use of power in the adult-child relationship.
3. Determine how Nouwen's praxis of pastoral care can inform the formation of children's narrative identity. This objective will be reached by elaborating on Nouwen's own life narrative and how it informed his praxis of pastoral care.
4. Determine how the praxis of Nouwen's pastoral care can be used to create awareness and educate adults about life-denying and life-giving ways of being and doing in the process of children's narrative identity formation. This goal will be achieved by combining the praxis of Nouwen's pastoral care with other literature and applying it to the relational interactions between children and adults. Praxis guidelines are then formulated to among other things, promote the affirmation of children's God-given dignity and to

acknowledge children's voices, agency and lived experiences in their narrative identity formation.

1.5 Research methodology

This study falls within the scientific field of Practical theology that seeks to transform life-denying conditions into possibilities of human flourishing. The research question and objective determine that a literature review will be suitable to gather the kind of information that is needed to come up with a valid outcome and findings. An explorative and descriptive literature review will be conducted. The formulation of the research question and objective indicate that empirical data is not needed for the purposes of this study.

This study aims to follow a *childist* theology of praxis methodology that is aligned with the primary question and objective of the research. This methodology can be formulated by adapting the methodology of Denise Ackermann (2006) called "feminist theology of praxis" to focus on children. The principles of feminist theory are applicable to the social position of children precisely because it is about the liberation of the oppressed, whether it is women or children. Ackerman's methodology falls within a theological framework that permits interdisciplinary work and interpretation of experience within the context of societies. It can therefore effectively be adapted to focus on children who are exposed to oppression and discrimination within their society based on age and as a result of adultism. John Wall's work will be used to illuminate the terms "childist" and "childism" as hermeneutical lenses. Wall (2019:1) explains that "childism" provides the critical context needed to challenge and deconstruct adultism in the world of research, but also within social conceptions in order to create a more inclusive environment for children. In order to formulate the selected methodology, this section will elaborate more on Ackermann's methodology. As mentioned previously, Ackermann (2006:226) explains that Christian praxis is based on the willingness to be God's hands in this world and to bring deliverance and relief to those who are oppressed. Christian praxis aims to form communities of people who have endurance and hope, people who have a new understanding of how to thrive despite their circumstances. Christian praxis constitutes the actions that can be taken to transform conditions of oppression into possibilities of human flourishing (Chopp, 1996:221). Ackermann (2006:231) further explains that narratives are a vital part of theological praxis. This research study focuses on the narrative identity formation of children and therefore the use of narratives will be the main concern in the theological praxis described in this research study. A childist theology of praxis will be employed to address the primary research question, as it can provide normative perspectives from the life of Henri

Nouwen and in particular his praxis of pastoral care. The intention of a childist theology of praxis is that it seeks to raise consciousness and awareness of life-denying and life-giving ways of being present in children's narrative identity formation. The empowerment of adults affects their relationship with children and the appreciation of the human dignity of children in turn affects their relationship with adults.

In short, the methodological choice will imply that the practical theological interpretation process will be employed in various phases. First, the interpretive lenses of practical theology, feminist theology, as well as feminist and childist theology of praxis will be discussed through which to critically reflect on the influence of adult-child relations on children's narrative identity formation. A childist narrative theology of praxis will be designed, which will provide a framework in which the following phases will be executed.

Phase 2 begins by conceptualizing narrative identity formation and providing fragments of children's lives and their experiences of suffering and thriving. It then seeks to theoretically explore the use of power in adult-child relationships and narrative identity formation in children within the framework of a childist narrative theology of praxis.

Phase 3 explores Nouwen's praxis of theology and pastoral care by elaborating on Nouwen's own life narrative. This phase will explore how Henri Nouwen's pastoral care can inform identity formation in children by applying his theology and perspectives on pastoral care on a childist narrative theology of praxis. This phase serves as groundwork for determining transformative pastoral responses in relation to children's narrative identity formation.

Finally, phase 4 seeks to engage the contextual situation of children's narrative identity formation with the theological praxis of Nouwen's pastoral care in order to encourage children's and adults' relational flourishing in life. This phase will imply the formulation of praxis guidelines for creating awareness about life-denying and life-giving ways of being and doing in the process of children's narrative identity formation.

This methodological choice with its focus on shaping Christian praxis around normative resources (in the case of this study the identity-shaping ethical norms of Henri Nouwen and how he had embodied it in his practices, narratives, and relationships) is in the words of Ackermann (2006:227) "...undergirded by the belief that such theology is done in service of furthering God's reign on earth".

The methodology will be discussed in detail in Chapter 2 of this research study.

1.6 The current body of knowledge and the value of the study

The current body of knowledge in relation to the key concepts identified for this study, was explored to determine the potential significance and value of the study.

An extensive electronic search was done on the NWU's library website, by using the NEXUS database; EBSCOhost; SAePublications; and ProQuest. The key concepts of "identity", "identity formation", "Christian identity", "narrative identity", "pastoral care", "Henri Nouwen", "children", "childist" and "childism" were used in different combinations.

From the electronic search, the following observations were made:

- Pastoral care is identified by Malan Nel in his recent book publication, *Youth Ministry: An inclusive Missional Approach* (2018), as the most neglected ministry pertaining to children and youth.
- When attention is given to children in the field of pastoral studies, it is mostly on the micro level of aftercare with individual children and not that much on pro-active and preventative care on macro level (relational and community care).
- Research affirms the relational nature of identity and faith and therefore the value of authenticity and integrity in relational spaces. It seems that there is a need to give scholarly attention to those relationships that tend to be subjected to power abuse because of factors such as ethnicity, gender, social-economic status, and age.
- Recently, more attention is given to the concepts of childist and childism to be used as critical lenses in interdisciplinary scholarly attempts to transform dehumanising and life-denying spaces in society. Childist scholarship are already acknowledged in the field of Biblical Studies and childism in the interdisciplinary field of Philosophy, Religion and Childhood Studies.
- The work of Henri Nouwen is widely used in the field of pastoral care as seen in the work of Yolanda Dreyer. Henri Nouwen's contribution to the discourse and praxis of pastoral care is closely connected to spirituality as core theological ethical principles and values undergirding the mediation of God-human encounter, such as hospitality, vulnerability, woundedness, reciprocity, grace, love, wholeness, compassion, community, intimacy, and solidarity with people. It seems from the data searches that there exists a need to bring the pastoral scholarly work and praxis of Henri Nouwen in conversation with how adults relate to children and to what extent their living presence in being and doing is informed and guided by God as source and sustainer of life.
- The theology of praxis methodology is primarily associated with a feminist approach to a theology of praxis as seen in the work of the South African practical and systematic

theologian Prof Denise Ackermann.

From these searches it seems that there is a need in current research to employ a theology of praxis methodology, with a childist focus, in understanding adults' being and doing in children's narrative identity formation process. The value of this study rests in the fact that it is different from other studies in Practical Theology because it is a study that will employ a theology of praxis methodology with a focus on harm that is done to children. The use of Henri Nouwen's praxis of pastoral care as a source for reflecting theologically and ethically about adults' life-denying and life-giving presence in children's narrative identity construction is a topical and methodological choice informed by the extensive electronic search that was done to understand the current body of knowledge.

The significance of this study lies in the fact that the pastoral functions of consciousness and awareness raising and education will be explored and described in relation to adult-child relations. By investigating these pastoral functions emphasis will be put on the proactive, preventative, and systemic nature of pastoral care in relation to children. This research study will formulate guiding principles of how the theological praxis of Nouwen's pastoral care can be used to create awareness and educate adults about life-denying and life-giving ways of being and doing in the process of children's narrative identity formation.

1.7 Preliminary classification of chapters

Chapter 1 provides a complete proposal including the problem statement, research aim and objectives, research methodology, and ethical considerations.

Chapter 2 describes and justifies the methodological choice of a narrative theology of praxis to raise awareness of adults' life-denying and life-giving involvement in children's narrative identity formation. Design a *childist narrative theology of praxis* by drawing on existing feminist and childist methodologies.

Chapter 3 explores adults' influence in the narrative identity formation of children through the ethical lens of childism. This will be accomplished by conceptualizing narrative identity formation and utilizing the designed methodology to reflect on the use of adults' power in the narrative identity formation of children.

Chapter 4 explores Nouwen's praxis of theology and pastoral care by elaborating on Nouwen's own life narrative. This chapter will explore how Henri Nouwen's pastoral care can

inform identity formation in children by applying his theology and perspectives on pastoral care on a childist narrative theology of praxis.

Chapter 5 determines how the theological praxis of Nouwen's pastoral care can be used to create awareness and educate adults about life-denying and life-giving ways of being present in the process of children's narrative identity formation. This goal will be achieved by combining the theological praxis of Nouwen's pastoral care with other literature and applying it to the relational interactions between children and adults through the formulation of praxis guidelines.

Chapter 6 provides a summary as well as the findings of the research study.

1.8 Ethical considerations

Although this research does not include empirical data gathering, the researcher will follow all the ethical guidelines outlined by the North-West University with regard to obtaining literary data. In addition, the literature will be fairly presented, also when dealing with opposing viewpoints. There is minimal risk in this research since it is a literature study. The following ethical consideration detailed by Mouton (2016:240) is also applicable:

- The research will strive to maintain integrity. The research will at all times report all findings truthfully and without misrepresentation. Information will never be fabricated or falsified.
- The researcher will at any time be able to disclose details of the methodology used.
- Ethical practices will be followed in the writing of the dissertation and all forms of plagiarism will be rejected. All the sources used for this study will be acknowledged through proper referencing. The researcher will follow all the ethical guidelines outlined by the North-West University about obtaining literary data. In addition, the literature will be fairly presented, also when dealing with opposing viewpoints.
- The methodological constraints that determine the validity of findings as well as the limitation of the findings will be disclosed.

1.9 Chapter summary

This chapter described the importance of narrative identity formation in children. The main research question of this study is:

How can the theological praxis of Henri Nouwen's pastoral care be used to create awareness and educate adults about life-denying and life-giving ways of being present in the process of children's narrative identity formation?

Feminist and childist theology of praxis were introduced as interpretive lenses through which to critically reflect on the influence of adult-child relations on children's narrative identity formation. This chapter proposes that a childist narrative theology of praxis be employed to address the primary research question, as it can provide normative perspectives from the life of Henri Nouwen and in particular his praxis of pastoral care.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE AND METHODOLOGY

2.1 Literature study

2.1.1 Life story narratives and narrative identity

The first sub-research question of this study is:

Why is the methodological choice being made for a narrative theology of praxis to raise awareness of adults' life-denying and life-giving involvement in children's narrative identity formation?

In order to motivate the choice for a narrative approach, it is vital to understand the importance of narratives for identity formation in children. This section will elaborate on the notion of narrative identity, by firstly referring the work of Paul Ricoeur but primarily to the work of Dan McAdams and also Westbya and Culattab.

Chapter one referred to the work of Paul Ricoeur. Ricoeur (1991:73) defines two major uses of the concept of identity; identity-of-sameness (*idem*) and identity as self (*ipse*). He explains that when these two concepts are not distinguished from each other, difficulties arise which obscure the question of personal identity (Ricoeur, 1991:73). Identity-of-sameness (*idem*) is a numerical identity where the same thing occurs at two different times and is designated by an invariable name, but it remains one and the same thing. Identity in this sense is unique although there is a re-identification of the same thing (Ricoeur, 1991:74). An example of *idem* identity as it pertains to personal identity is the same person at two different times in history; during the first occurrence the person may be a child but are then re-identified as an adult at a later time, therefore two different occurrences but still one and the same thing. Ricoeur (1991:74) further explains that *idem* identity requires the idea of extreme resemblance as well as uninterrupted continuity. For example the same person at two different times still resemble each other and there is continuity, meaning that it is still the same being but there was continuous development between the different occurrences across time (Ricoeur, 1991:74). For example the person is still the same from birth to death, from foetus to old age although there has been change (Ricoeur, 1991:74). Furthermore there is a 4th sense of identity-of-sameness called permanence over time that helps us to affirm the identity of a thing such as an animal or a human being over time (Ricoeur, 1991:74). Ricoeur (1991: 75) continues to describe the notion of identity as self (*ipse*). The notion of ipseity answers the question "who?" (Ricoeur, 1991:75). Ricoeur (1991:75) explains:

“The notion of ipseity is to look into the nature of the question to which the self constitutes a response, or a range of responses. This question is the question who, distinct from the question what. It is the question we preferentially pose in the domain of action when, in searching for the agent, the author of the action, we ask, “who did this or that?””

Crowley (2003:2) by referring to the work of Ricoeur explains that *ipse*-identity describes selfhood and addresses the change that takes place within personal identity. It is directly related to narrative identity in that it involves the narrating and appraisal of a life story. This life story includes both factual and fictional elements and leads to a dynamic identity filled with new awareness and understanding about the self.

Although Ricoeur’s work on narrative identity is useful and worth mentioning, the concept of narrative identity is better explained by the person who proposed the first full theoretical model of this concept. Dan McAdams outlined the first research agenda concerning narrative identity in 1985 (McAdams, 1985). More than 2 decades later he provides a comprehensive definition for the construct (McAdams, 2011:99):

“Narrative identity is the internalized and evolving story of the self that a person constructs to make sense and meaning out of his or her life. The story is a selective reconstruction of the autobiographical past and a narrative anticipation of the imagined future that serves to explain, for the self and others, how the person came to be and where his or her life may be going.”

The ability of a child to develop a personal life story directly contributes to the development of autobiographical reasoning, narrative identity, self-regulation, and social problem solving (Westbya & Culattab, 2016:260). Children are taught to comprehend and read fictional stories in school. During this process the ability of a child to produce fictional narratives is developed. Teaching children to reflect on and compile their own personal narratives are often lacking. According to Westbya and Culattab (2016:260), the ability of a child to reflect on and develop a personal life story relates to social, as well as academic success. Autobiographical reasoning is the ability to establish coherence among the many events throughout one’s life in order to create an integrated and meaningful life story (Westbya & Culattab, 2016:260). These integrated life stories may not reflect the objective truth of what happened, but rather what the child perceived to have happened and will be closely linked to the thought pattern of the child. Westbya and Culattab (2016:268) state that it is essential for children to reflect and connect their experiences; this process of reflection can help them to identify possible themes.

McAdams (2001:104) takes it even further by saying that it is important for individuals to integrate their past events with present concerns and future goals when they develop their life story. Being able to comprehend one's own personal narrative contributes towards providing life with a degree of unity and purpose (McAdams & McLean, 2013:233). Furthermore, being competent in producing one's own personal narrative also relates to social and psychological well-being. However, if these personal narratives testify of oppression and discrimination as a result of adultism, the holistic wellbeing of the child will be compromised. It is argued that pastoral care can support and guide children in developing a personal narrative. The question is however, what approach will inform a meaningful pastoral engagement with children's narrative identity formation? The following section will elaborate on this topic.

2.1.2 The role of narratives in theology of praxis methodology

The aim of this section is to justify the methodological choice for a narrative approach and discuss the usefulness of a feminist theology of praxis

Narrative approaches to theology, also referred to as post-liberal theology, are a Christian theological movement that was developed in the late 20th century. According to Comstock (1987:687), the narrative approach to theology was introduced by Richard Niebuhr in *The story of our lives*, which he wrote in 1941. However it only became popular in the early 1970s. Borgman ([1999] 2003:379) states:

"A theologian has to find God in her or his biography: only then is a credible theology possible ... One's own biography must take the form of a theological autobiography. Theology is credible whenever theologians do not just talk about God but while speaking about God also speak about themselves, and while writing, (re)write their own life as a place where God comes to light".

The theology of Henri Nouwen is an excellent example of theology forged from life experience. According to Moschella (2016:72), Nouwen openly acknowledged his woundedness and wrote about his own suffering and joy. He experienced great anxiety and depression, but in the midst of his persistent pain, he also experienced great joy (Moschella, 2016:72). Nouwen's joy came from an awareness of God's presence and the knowledge that deep joy must assume great pain (Moschella, 2016:72). Pain and joy are intertwined as lived experiences and suffering will always be a part of human life. The key is to be able to embrace suffering and press through the pain in order to heal and once again experience joy (Moschella, 2016:72). In his search for his

own identity, Nouwen was able to develop a meaningful theological praxis to pastoral care based on helping others to heal from one's own woundedness.

Pastoral care traditionally focused on crisis and pathology and was concerned with solving a specific problem for individuals. Almost two decades ago Pattison (1993:204) argued that pastoral care is gradually changing towards a more holistic and preventative approach, an approach that is positive and nurturing; centred around obtaining corporate growth in the community. Truter and Kotzé (2005:975) explain:

"Pastoral Therapy is no longer attenuated to crisis pastorate and pathology instead it is extended to become holistic and preventative when it helps people whose lives are connected with one another to come to richer descriptions of their own situations."

Each person's situation is different and Frank (1991:48) explains that pastoral care must recognize these differences in people's narratives. Pastoral care must provide the opportunity for people to tell their stories. Ganzevoort (2011:216) explains that identity may be understood as a narrative structure. Identity is not some construct that must be uncovered; it is rather a person's reflective analysis of himself, one that he obtains through telling his story to a particular audience (Ganzevoort, 2011:216).

According to Truter and Kotzé (2005:975), each person's narrative must be judged within their specific life context, taking into account and respecting each person's uniqueness. Narrative therapy gives expression to contextual theology when people are allowed to tell their stories in their own context (Truter & Kotzé, 2005:980). Kotze (2002:30) states:

"The more we participate in such a way that the voices of all, especially those who have been previously silenced, can be heard, the more we can research and co-construct, in an ethical manner, an ethical, just and ecologically sound world to live in".

Ganzevoort (2011:218) states that narrative approaches have been very effective in giving a voice to marginalized groups. Feminist and postcolonial scholars have often used narrative approaches to highlight the contributions of individual stories towards challenging the dominant reasoning of an oppressive society. Denise Ackermann is one such scholar who challenges oppressive tendencies towards women. Ackerman (2006) follows a *feminist theology of praxis* methodology in her research on women's oppression and liberation. She explains that theological praxis is based on the willingness to be God's hands in this world and to bring

deliverance and relief to those who are oppressed (Ackermann, 2006:226). Feminist theology, as an expression of a contextual theology, has made a significant contribution to theological praxis. Feminist theology contributed to reintroducing respect and love for marginalized people (Truter & Kotzé, 2005:980). Ackermann (2006:226) describes feminist theology as a theology that pays special attention to the lives of women, their stories, their hopes for the future, their faith, and their experience of oppression and liberation. Christian feminist theology aims to make women's lives part of God's story. It aims to determine and describe how the Christian faith shapes and influences women's experience of hope, justice, and grace. It is also concerned with acknowledging and understanding women's experiences of oppression, sin, and evil. Ackermann (2006:231) further explains that narrative is the lifeblood of feminist theology of praxis. In the process of claiming our identity and finding impulses for hope, it is vital that we tell our stories. Ackermann (2006:231) states:

"The act of telling the story assists the narrator in making sense of her or his experience in an often chaotic world. Whether the stories are revealing in shaping identities or whether they are making sense of situations that call for understanding, they should be heard in churches."

As indicated in Chapter one, this study aims to follow a childist theology of praxis methodology that is aligned with the primary question and objective of the research. This methodology can be formulated by adapting the methodology of Denise Ackermann (2006) called "feminist theology of praxis" to focus on children. The next section will provide some background on the person of Denise Ackermann, as well as her feminist theology of praxis.

In the following sections, the interpretive lenses of feminist and childist theology of praxis will be discussed through which to critically reflect on the influence of adult-child relations on children's narrative identity formation.

2.2 Feminist theology of praxis

2.2.1 The story of Denise Ackermann

Denise Ackermann was born on 11 April 1935, as the daughter of a white ambassador. She grew up in the apartheid era in South Africa, at a time where the theology of white superiority prevailed (Douglass, 2019:266). Denise Ackermann grew up to become an Anglican theologian and professor of theology. She believed that her faith should culminate in everyday acts of love and that it cannot be separated from loving your neighbour. She could not ignore the suffering of those around her who were oppressed by the rulers of her time. Denise Ackermann strongly

opposed the apartheid regime and joined the Black Sash, an anti-apartheid organization of white women (Douglass, 2019:266). She also joined the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians and became an advocate for women's rights throughout her life (Douglass, 2019:266).

Ackermann's interest in feminist theology started in her third year of studies when she read Mary Daly's *The church and the second sex* in the UNISA library (Klein, 2008:41). Soon after that she read Letty Russell's *Human liberation from a feminist perspective* and she realized that she was called to become an advocate for the liberation of women (Klein, 2008:41). Ackermann realized that in situations of oppression, discrimination, and poverty, it is difficult to liberate people to live a life of dignity (Klein, 2008:42). She started writing on women's liberation and ended up doing her doctoral degree on feminist praxis in theology.

Decades later Ackermann describes feminist theologies as generally taking an interest in women, their lives, their beliefs, their hopes, their stories, and their experiences of liberation and oppression (Ackermann, 2006:225). Ackermann's feminist theology of praxis specifically explores how women's stories of hope, justice, and grace, but also their stories of oppression, evil, and sin can be grounded and transformed by the Christian message. Ackermann (2006:226) explains that her feminist theology of praxis also extends its concern to "include all people who find themselves on the margins of our society and who know the violating effects of discrimination...". Children are very much in danger of discrimination. Due to their position in society and the fact that they always fall under the authority of adults, all children are vulnerable to adultism. Ackermann's feminist theology of praxis can therefore be extended to address the marginalization and oppression of children since it can also raise awareness about "the nature of the interlocking of systems of domination that contributes to such oppression" (Ackermann, 2006:226).

The next five sections will discuss the fundamentals of feminist theology of praxis as defined by Ackermann (Ackermann, 2006:230-239).

2.1.1.1 The praxis of story- telling

Ackermann (2006:231-232) explains that in order to counteract silence, denials and stigma, the stories of those who are suffering and discriminated against must be heard. Faith Communities must offer the opportunity to those who are oppressed to share their stories while being treated with respect and compassion (Ackermann, 2006:231-232). The lifeblood of feminist theology of praxis is narratives, the articulation of one's experience (Ackermann, 2006:231-232). Ackermann (2006:231-232) explains that without the stories of women there is no feminist

theology. Ackermann (2006:231-232) specifically applied her feminist theology of praxis to HIV-positive women to illustrate how mere existence can be transformed into tenacious endurance. She explains that in the case of HIV-positive women, the status of being a victim is often thrust upon them. Through telling their stories they are able to claim and name a different identity and move beyond and away from their victim status (Ackermann, 2006:231-232). Telling their stories may provide them with impulses for hope and help them to discover their own potential and worth. When a person tells his or her story, they may be able to make sense of their experience. Stories are revealing in transforming identities (Ackermann, 2006:231-232). Storytelling requires the praxis of deliberate and empathetic listening, but at the same time, the listener should enter the conversation and through their own story affect the process of change (Ackermann, 2006:231-232).

2.1.1.2 The praxis of Gender analysis

Ackermann (2006:232) uses gender analysis as a tool to understand and counteract the effects of stigma. She explains that male-centred traditions and practices over millennia have discriminated against women and attributed to limited cultural identities to both men and women (Ackermann, 2006:232). These identities have stigmatized their abilities and roles in society. When a sexist understanding of human nature dominates traditions and practices in a community, it has dire consequences for the relationship between women and men. Ackermann (2006:232) uses gender analysis to understand how HIV/AIDS have affected women over the years. Discrimination against women has had dire effects for the pandemic especially with regard to its effects on poor rural women. These women who live in patriarchal communities where they receive little education, generally lack the authority and skills to negotiate for safe sex practices (Ackermann, 2006:233). When they become the victim of the pandemic they are rejected, abandoned, and excluded from the community leading to shame, guilt, and alienation. Gender discrimination has a significant influence on the identity formation of women. Gender discrimination may also play a role in the abuse and neglect of children. The role of gender analysis for identity formation in children will be discussed later in this chapter.

2.1.1.3 The praxis of mutual relationship

Ackermann defines relationships as follows:

“What is meant by relationship? Although relationship is central to our being and to our well-being, it is difficult to define. It is easier to say what relationship is not: it is not alienation or apathy, isolation or separation. We are not made to live alone. Relationship is what connects us to one another like the strands of a web, spinning out in ever

widening circles, fragile and easily damaged, yet filled with tensile strength. Relationships shape us as individuals and as members of our communities. In the words of ethicist Beverly Harrison, "relationality is at the heart of all things". (Ackermann, 1998:17)

Ackermann (2006:233) explains that relationship is the central concept of a feminist theology of praxis. She explains that the historical forms in which relationship has been realized must be critiqued and analyzed in order to identify inequality of power and unfair distribution of economic sharing and responsibilities (Ackermann, 2006:234). This study, which is centred on adult-child relationships, can benefit greatly from the praxis of mutual relationship. Ackermann (2006:233) explains that our interrelatedness carries with it a responsibility for each other. In order for us to sustain interdependent relations, it is important that we start with individuality; our individuality, our identity is tempered and shaped through our relationships with each other (Ackermann, 2006:234). We are connected, yet independent and we must find a balance between our need to be in relationship and the reality of our individuality by realizing that our identity can only be nurtured to grow through loving and accepting relationships (Ackermann, 2006:234). Without loving relationships, we will struggle to become more ourselves; we will struggle to accept and embrace who we are if we are not accepted and loved by those who have authority over us. The feminist theology of praxis defined by Ackermann proposes a new paradigm for human relationships. This paradigm is described by Margaret Farley (Ackermann, 2006:234) as "equality of power, mutuality of freedom and responsibility, love that is other-centered yet neither neglectful nor destructive of the self, and fidelity".

A healthy relationship can never be one-sided, a mutual interdependence must be present and both parties must be willing to work on the relationship in order for it to flourish. Ackermann (1998:18) states that the quality of relationships is tested against the touchstone of mutuality, which is concerned with rather focusing on the feelings and needs of the other. It is thus the opposite of egocentricity; it encompasses generosity, kindness, considerateness and forgiveness, and placing others before ourselves (Ackermann, 1998:18)

2.1.1.4 Body of Christ praxis

Ackermann (2006:236) explains that the Body of Christ has many limbs, and all of these limbs work together and function together as an integrated whole. When one of these limbs are shamed or stigmatized or even amputated, the body is no longer what it was destined to be and it cannot function effectively (Ackermann, 2006:236). In the context of HIV/AIDS, Ackermann (2006:236) states that the Body of Christ is a body infected with a deadly virus since many of its

members have contracted the disease. If these members are however shamed and judged, the true nature of the Church of Christ is diminished. Stigma, shame, and judgement should not characterize our relationships with one another, we should rather remember that Christ himself has taken us to be his bride (Ackermann, 2006:236). Christ, whose flesh was wounded, taught us how to treat each other. In the parable of the Good Samaritan he placed before us the greatest example of a loving relationship that promotes human flourishing. Ackermann (2006:236) explains that the parable of the Good Samaritan taught us that we need to act with compassion towards those that are afflicted. It provided us with a vision of what the reign of God's grace looks like. Instead of shaming and judging those in need, the church of God should attempt to hasten and mirror God's reign on earth. Within the Church of God are children truly acknowledged and cherished as equal members of the Body of Christ? I will attempt to answer this question in section 2.1.2.5 of this chapter.

2.1.1.5 Embodied praxis

Ackermann's feminist theology of praxis emphasizes the embodied nature of humanity. She explains that suffering, disease, and death all take place within the body (Ackermann, 2006:238). The totality of our human experience is encompassed by our bodies; it is within our bodies that we experience pain and pleasure and our memories, dreams, and also our beliefs and hopes are all part of our bodily reality (Ackermann, 2006:238). It is therefore necessary that we realize the church is also an embodied reality that must recognize and address the factors that leads to bodies of women and children being abused, rejected, and sexually exploited (Ackermann, 2006:238). The church must respond with embodied acts of love and care. Ackermann (2006:239) quotes Paula Cooley, who summarized embodied struggles as follow:

"Our share in the process of making up a Better World and making it real in the flesh begins with a mighty groan in protest against the violation of the body - it's starvation, it's malnutrition it's sexual and vocational exploitation, it's imprisonment and torture, it's murder and its use as a battleground for establishing the control over many by a few. For the body has served and still serves as a symbolic and actual focus for much that has been oppressive in patriarchy".

Ackermann (2006:238) explains that the church has a responsibility to engage in a properly constructed debate on what creates a moral community. Traditional Christian moral teaching must evolve to adequately address the challenges within our community and to raise awareness of the importance of the human body as a temple of the Holy Spirit.

Adults are in the position where they possess power and physical superiority over children's bodies. A child that is being subjected to adultism have no control over the situation, they cannot choose what happens to their own body. The next section will elaborate more on the culture of adultism and how this culture can be challenged.

2.3 Childism as an antidote to the culture of adultism

Adultism is many times practiced for noble reasons. Roche (2004:476-477) explains that adultism includes not seeing children as fully rational beings. They are mostly regarded as lacking wisdom and unable to know their own best interests. This assumption leads to most adults believing that children must have their needs met rather than their rights upheld, they must be protected, even from themselves and they are not recognized as respected social actors (Roche 2004:270-271). Adultism thus has the potential to hinder life-giving identity formation in children. Adultism can also take on more extreme forms. The power adults have over children can expose them to abuse and neglect.

Roche (2004:281-282) clearly explains what is meant by the liberation from a culture of 'adultism':

"It is about respecting and valuing the contribution children make and have to make to the world children and adults share: a world hitherto defined and imagined primarily in adult terms – it is about power. In order to be able to provide the kinds of support needed by children in different social locations adults will need to do things differently."

In recent years, the concept childism has developed as an interdisciplinary tool to challenge the historical marginalization of children, their voices, agency, and lived experiences. The concept childism is used across diverse research disciplines as critical lenses to challenge and transform structures and norms in scholarship and social and political life (Wall, 2010:3; Wall 2019). John Wall (2011) mobilized the term childism as a positive term that demands action against adultism, much like feminism challenged prejudice against women. Childism has however also been described as a negative phenomenon by Elisabeth Young-Bruehl that describes a prejudice towards children, much like the term racism describes a prejudice against a specific race. In her book *Childism*, Young-Bruehl (2012:5) explain that 'childism' is built into the very fibre of how a child is imagined not as a human being, but rather as a possession that serves adult needs. She defines 'childism' as "a prejudice that rationalizes and legitimates the maltreatment of children" (Young-Bruehl, 2012:6). Although the work of Young-Bruehl will be

utilized and referred to, this research study treats the word 'childism' as a positive term towards providing the critical context needed to challenge and deconstruct adultism in adult child relationships.

The fundamentals of feminist theology of praxis as defined by Ackermann (Ackermann, 2006:230-239) may be adapted towards a childist narrative theology of praxis that aims to use the lived experiences of children as a starting point towards informing adult-child interactions. The work of John Wall will be used to illuminate the term 'childism' as a hermeneutical lens.

2.1.2 Childist narrative theology of praxis

2.1.2.1 Narrative praxis – children's stories

Ackermann (2006:231-232) explains that stories are revealing in transforming identities. Stories are necessary in comprehending one's identity in the first place. A child must be able to comprehend his or her own life story to be able to name and claim their identities. Just as storytelling is at the heart of feminist praxis of theology, it must also take centre stage in a childist narrative theology of praxis. The notion of childism is an analogy to feminism. Feminism takes an interest in the stories and the experiences of women in order to understand their hopes and beliefs; it aims to liberate women from oppression and prejudice. In the same way, childism takes into account the experiences and concerns of children in order to liberate them from adultism and marginalization (Wall, 2007:52). The stories children tell will reveal these experiences and concerns. Wall (2007:59) explain that children will not be able to articulate their stories as fully as adults can, but it is vital that childism research do not depend on adult assumptions of children's stories, but rather ensure that these assumptions are overturned and replaced by the actual experiences of children told from their own point of view (Wall, 2007:65).

Wall (2010:79) discusses the concept of narrative expansion in his book *Ethics in light of Childhood*. He explains that the narrative aim must be understood as fully circular. Children should not only learn what it means to live in time, but also learn how to give meaning to time over time from birth to death. Wall (2010:79) defines narrative as "the creative interpretation of time over time". Meaning is created as time grows over time. Being able to tell one's own story is more than just expressing traditional culture or phases of one's lifecycle; it is a complex, ever-expanding interpretation of one's own disparate experiences of time into a wider story of meaning.

In explaining narrative expansion, Wall (2010:72-73) refers to Anne Frank, a Jewish girl who was hiding from the Nazis when she was thirteen years old until she was fifteen. In her diary she writes of her experiences in this time, demonstrating tremendous humanity as she struggles to

create meaning of her life in the context of broader complex concepts such as anti-Semitism and oppression. In her diary over time, it becomes clear that she gains a wider perspective on life. Her concerns about her self-image and her frustrations with family life grow over time until she also addresses the broader meaning of her situation. Anne presents us with an example of a child who was able to look beyond her circumstances. If a child can be guided to narratively expand their own life story, they will be able to move beyond their unfortunate circumstances. Wall (2010:73) states:

“There is in fact never a time in human life when telling one’s story becomes unproblematic. Each of us from birth to death is always already narrated by a vast, complex, and in many ways unfathomable history of evolution, historical era, culture, community, family, and much more. A child in a large city in China or in a remote village in Brazil is each the inheritor of diverse strands of culture, long and complex power struggles, particular and disputed family mores, changing economic realities, and diverse global dynamics. Such a history is always fragmented and distorted. It presents no one with a coherent story that is simply given to them...Children must struggle to interpret their complex surrounding worlds of meaning into their own particular narratives just as much as must adults.”

In the book *Interweaving, conversations between narrative therapy and the Christian faith* Cook and Alexander (2008) also discusses the importance of narratives in children’s lives. They provide a comprehensive overview of narrative therapy with children. They also provide practical guidelines towards helping children tell their narratives by including a chapter where expert counsellors shares their knowledge and experience of narrative pastoral care with children (Cook & Alexander, 2008:208-224). These guidelines will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter 5. Narrative pastoral care must also address the age-appropriate communication tools with which children can tell their stories. Children, especially young children, do not necessarily have the ability to communicate their thoughts and feelings effectively. The work of Cook and Alexander (2008), as well as Berryman (2009), may be useful in this regard. Berryman is the author of *Godly Play*, an approach that was developed to help children generate meaning from the interplay between their own life experiences and Biblical stories (Berryman, 2009:41). With this approach, children can be guided towards using Biblical stories to express their own stories, thoughts, and feelings. This approach will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 5.

Phase 2 of this research will begin with fragments of children’s lives and their experiences of suffering and thriving. The purpose of these stories will be to demonstrate how a child’s lived experiences moulds his/her identity. These fragments of children’s lives will also reveal how

adultism and particularly abuse of power in adult-child relations influences narrative identity formation.

2.1.2.2 The praxis of age-analysis

Children make up a third of all humanity. Yet they are often treated as undeveloped adults, they are often treated as adult's property, not yet fully human with very little rights of their own. Wall (2010:1) explains that children are often discriminated against solely based on their age. He states (Wall, 2010:1):

“Children are considered merely undeveloped adults, passive recipients of care, occupying a separate innocence, or, perhaps, in need of being civilized. Across diverse societies and cultures, and throughout history and today, serious questions of human being, purposes, and responsibilities have usually been considered chiefly from the point of view of adulthood.”

Throughout history adults have been seen as more advanced and their opinions and rights have enjoyed preference. This research will aim to challenge this phenomenon by creating awareness of the importance of children's lived experiences, not just towards their benefit, but for the good of all humanity. As Wall (2010:2) explains, “neglecting children diminishes the humanity of us all”. When children in a community are mal-treated, when their experiences are ignored and their worth is not valued, the complex webs of social relations within that community is impoverished and the ability to find meaning within such relations are compromised (Wall, 2010:2). In this study, ‘childism’ will be used in much the same way as feminism. Where feminism takes a special interest in the stories, struggles, hopes, and experiences of women, childism aims to address the marginalization of children, challenge the systemic culture of adultism, and critique current social norms that lead to the oppression of children based on their age (Wall, 2019:5). Childism takes a special interest in the diverse lived experiences of children with the aim to liberate and empower them. Childism aims to identify how adultist norms systemically marginalize children and how these norms can be challenged and positively transformed to not only lead to liberal inclusion, but rather to empowered inclusion of children in society (Wall, 2019:11-12).

2.1.2.3 The praxis of gender-analysis

The praxis of gender analysis is relevant for this particular study since gender plays such an important role in identity formation in children. The role of gender must also be considered when it comes to the sexual abuse of children. In her book on 'childism', Young-Bruehl (2012:239) explains that in households where adultism (she refers to it as childism) prevails and where

children are treated as a possession to serve the needs of the adults, children are forced to assume a specific role. These roles are linked to their gender, for example a girl may become daddy's little mistress-wife and a boy may become a little boyfriend-husband that must satisfy his mother's need for attention and support (Young-Bruehl, 2012:239). Sexual abuse in families include mother-son incest and more frequently, father-daughter incest, but sometimes the adult-child relations may also be homosexual (Young-Bruehl, 2012:239). In every form of sexual abuse, gender plays a defining role. The gender of a child will always influence adult-child relationships. The way in which gender is perceived within a household and the larger community will significantly influence the identity formation in children. Chapter 3 will elaborate more on this topic.

2.1.2.4 The praxis of adult-child relationships

As Ackermann (2006:234) explains, relationship is at the heart of identity formation. It is only through loving and accepting relationships that a child's identity will be nurtured to grow. If a child's relationship with his/her caretaker is characterized by abuse of power on the part of the adult, fear and guilt will distort that child's identity. As mentioned in Chapter one of this study, Rice (2013:introductory chapter, paragraph 23) explains that children who grew up with abuse and neglect has a life story filled with feelings of fear, guilt, and alienation. In contrast to such a destructive adultist relationship, Wall (2007:70) explains that a childist approach in adult-child relationships should be about demonstrating the Christian ethics of love. He states: "it should be, expansive, dynamic and socially transforming" (Wall, 2007:70). It is so much more than private affection or public justice; it is rather about creating an increasingly inclusive human world where those who are the most marginalized in society is actively welcomed (Wall, 2007:70). The adult-child relationship must be characterized by self-sacrificial love on the part of the adult (Wall, 2007:70). The adult must be willing to respond to the vulnerability and the acute needs of the child by opening themselves up to the perspectives and experiences of children (Wall, 2007:70). The reward of such self-sacrifice is described by Wall (2007:70) as: "the remarkable return of love that children give back and the longer-term realisation of children's potential that will make a meaningful difference in their world". The adult-child relationship can be indicative of constructive division of power or children and their contributions can be manipulated, dominated, undermined, or even overlooked because of their age. Ackermann explains that historical forms in which relationship has been realized must be critiqued and analyzed in order to identify inequality of power and unfair distribution of economic sharing and responsibilities (Ackermann, 2006:234). Feminist theology as defined by Ackermann in dialogue

with childism as defined by Wall presents us with important principles for a childist theology of praxis:

- Adults must engage in self-reflection, critique, and analysis of the meaning and praxis of relationships through the lenses of power and human responsibility.
- Mutual interdependence must be present and both parties must be willing to work on the relationship in order for it to flourish.
- Relationality must be built on constructive division of power and it must be expansive, dynamic, and socially transforming.
- Mutuality is the touchstone for relationships and is concerned with self-sacrificial love; rather focusing on the feelings and needs of the other.

Wall (2010:43) states that we as humans are not merely objects to each other, neither are we subjects isolated from each other. Humans interact with each other; their relationships are characterized with giving and receiving as they cross over into each other's worlds. This cycle of exchange is the true gift to humanity. Each human is born into this cycle of giving and receiving until death (Wall, 2010:43)

Children are very much dependent on their parents and are forced to stay in a relationship with them. Dependency without mutuality leads to abuse of power, which will ultimately render a child helpless, creating thoughts of insufficiency, fear, and guilt.

Chapter 3 will elaborate on the inappropriate use of power in the adult-child relationships and the influence thereof on the identity formation of children.

2.1.2.5 Body of Christ praxis – a childist perspective

As stated previously, Ackermann (2006:236) explains that the Body of Christ has many limbs and all of these limbs work together and function together as an integrated whole. The Body of Christ is a society of believers who work together to reflect God's reign on earth, each member was uniquely created by God, in His Image and plays a defining role in the Body. The question is: are children truly acknowledged and cherished as equal members of the Body of Christ? Nelson Mandela said: "There can be no keener revelation of a society's soul than the way they treat their children" (Mandela, 1995). Children should be treated with love, their gifts and

potential should be acknowledged, their contributions to society should be recognized and encouraged.

Before adults can truly embrace children as part of the Body of Christ, they need to have a proper understanding of the value of a child from a Biblical perspective. Grobbelaar (2020) provides important insights towards this end. He speaks about the emergence of 'Childist Theology' and explains that Biblical scholars recently started to place emphasis on reading the Bible from the perspective of children. Childhood is chosen as a point of departure. Childist theology has its roots in feminist theory, a feminist reading and interpretation of the Word has paved the way for a childist approach (Grobbelaar, 2020:2). Similar to feminist theology, childist theology seeks to provide a voice for a disadvantaged group of people. This group of people are children, who are habitually rendered silent and invisible by the attitudes and practices of adult society. Grobbelaar (2020:2) states:

"Childist theologians read the biblical texts in a child-centred way to give voice to the silent children of this world. A crucial factor in a childist reading of the Bible, as well as in doing child theology, is your theology of childhood. The critical question is 'how do I view children?' in other words, 'how do I see children, my hermeneutical lenses, through whom I read the Bible?'"

Wall (2010:83) also presents a childist view on religiosity, saying that childhood is the antidote to religious fundamentalism. He is of the opinion that religion may define a top-down approach, bending children's stories into a predefined narrative. He states that children should not be initiated into existing stories, but that they themselves must be welcomed as "images of the divine who bring to the world new capacities for narration". Religion from a childist perspective is stories told anew, forming part of a larger narrative always still unfolding (Wall, 2010:83). Each new child with his/her unique set of gifts and abilities will bring a new and unanticipated story into the world (Wall, 2010:83). This story will entangle with other stories and become an integral part of the larger narrative of God's children on this earth. Mahlangu (2016:4) states that each child has been uniquely designed by God as a bundle of potentiality. He believes that childhood is a time where family, friends and the society at large must nurture children's God-given gifts and abilities to help them discover the person God created them to be (Mahlangu, 2016:4).

Unfortunately, many children in South Africa will not have that kind of support, and instead they are facing issues such as gender discrimination, domestic violence, and sexual abuse (Mahlangu, 2016:4). These issues lead to children not realizing their own value and worth; instead of them embracing their own unique identity, they end up confused and feeling worthless. As seen in Chapter one, Nouwen (1992:33) explains that identity is not something

that is imposed from the outside of one's life; it cannot be discovered through an internalized process of trial and error where identity is "tried on" and "taken off" if it doesn't fit. We discover our identity when we hear the sacred voice that calls us the Beloved; the core truth of our existence is expressed in being the Beloved (Nouwen, 1992:33). This voice can be heard through adults when they affirm a child's value and acknowledge them as part of the Body of Christ.

Chapter 5 will provide a theological view of the child from the Bible and provide guidelines for adults towards applying this view in life-giving ways of being and doing with children.

2.1.2.6 Embodied praxis - In the body of a child

Wall (2010:74) explains that humans as embodied beings experience and interpret time most immediately as bodies. He explains that we are born into time in the flesh and in human bodily form we all participate in "times passage over time" (Wall, 2010:74). When the end of time comes for each person, death is also an embodied experience (Wall, 2010:74). The human body experience time as a lived experience and each person turns time into narrative as an embodied being. As our narrative expands with time, the meaning of our body being in the world also expands and as Wall explains, our body becomes our "autobiography's first, last and closest protagonist" (Wall, 2010:74 - 75). The body is also very important from a child's perspective. It is in their bodies that children first experience the world. Children begin their embodied experience, they grow and change and journey towards constructing their body's meaning in time (Wall, 2010:75). It is in embodied form that children will experience the meaning of being-in-the-world. Wall (2010:75) agrees that the body is not a mere object separate from the mind, it is never just a body, and it is always somebody's body. Children's identity will be influenced by their embodied experiences. Ackermann (2006:238) states that the totality of our human experience is encompassed by our bodies; it is within our bodies that we experience pain and pleasure and our memories, dreams, and also our beliefs and hopes are all part of our bodily reality. Children live in an embodied reality that will shape and define their narrative and ultimately their identity.

Mahlangu (2016:4) talks about the embodied pain of orphans. He quotes Matteson (2008:11): 'We did not know that a child can grieve. We thought they were too small to understand what happened. We did not know that children go grieving for a long period. I never used to understand the behaviour of orphans'. A grieving child feels the loss of a parent in their bodies, it is felt physically, and the emotional pain is demonstrated physically through their bodies. They may feel disconnected and isolated leading to thoughts of inadequacy. These thoughts shape the way in which children view themselves, their narrative, and their identity.

Mahlangu (2016:4) explains that the physical, cognitive, emotional, and psychological plight of orphans and vulnerable children in Africa has not been adequately addressed by existing programmes. He further argues that very little research has been done on the response of the church to the needs of these children (Mahlangu, 2016:4)

(Ackermann, 2006:239) explains that the church must respond with embodied acts of love and care. The church must reach out to children with embodied acts of love. In the context of this study these acts include consciousness raising, increasing awareness, education, advocacy, and prophetic witness with regard to the harm that can be done to children if adults do not acknowledge and treat children in accordance with their God-given dignity.

2.4 Chapter summary

This chapter justified the methodological choice of a narrative theology of praxis. The interpretive lenses of feminist and childist theology of praxis were discussed through which to critically reflect on the influence of adult-child relations on children's narrative identity formation. From these reflections, a childist narrative theology of praxis was developed as a framework towards creating awareness and educating adults about life-denying and life-giving ways of being and doing in the process of children's narrative identity formation.

CHAPTER 3: THE EFFECT OF ADULTISM ON IDENTITY FORMATION

This chapter will begin by briefly conceptualizing narrative identity formation and providing fragments of children's lives and their experiences of suffering and thriving. It then seeks to theoretically explore the use of power in adult-child relationships and narrative identity formation in children by utilizing a childist narrative theology of praxis designed in the previous section.

3.1 Conceptualizing narrative identity

According to Thompson et al. (2009:2), narrative scholars are in general agreement that identity is configured narratively. From a relatively young age children begin to recall certain events and experiences, they start telling themselves stories, interpreting and expressing themselves through these stories.

Gelişimi and Kimliği (2020:463) explain that a person answers the question "Who am I?" by narrating and conveying their interpretation of their life story. Narrative identities are therefore constructed by people through making use of their previous experiences and interactions (Gelişimi & Kimliği, 2020:463). "From this perspective, people use their experiences and life stories to attribute meaning to their dispositional traits, desires, feelings, and beliefs in order to develop identities" (Gelişimi & Kimliği, 2020:463). As also explained in Chapter 1 of this study, the notion of narrative identity hypothesizes that individuals form an identity through the integration of their life experiences into an assumed, developing story of the self; a story that offers the individual a sense of purpose in life (Mc Adams, 2001:110).

In Chapter two of this study, narrative identity was defined by referring to McAdams (2011:99), who states "narrative identity is the internalized and evolving story of the self that a person constructs to make sense and meaning out of his or her life". A part of developing an integrated life story is reflecting on how one's own characteristics, perceptions, and behaviour have affected past events and actions (Westbya & Culattab, 2016:260). Through these reflections people starts to interpret their own behaviour and start to understand their own characteristics leading to a sense of identity.

Children who have been abused and neglected tend to reflect back on their own negative experiences filled with anxiety and vulnerability. Their own behaviour during times of abuse may have been fuelled by fear and because they are so dependent on their abusers, their behaviour does not necessarily reflect their character. They may look back at their behaviour and experience feeling of shame and inadequacy. For children exposed to extreme forms of adultism, all of these factors lead to confusion in the process of constructing a narrative identity.

In order for children to develop a life-giving narrative identity, they need some help in redefining their story. Ricoeur (1986:129) explains that a person can turn to a psychoanalyst to help them discover bits of lived histories, conflicting episodes and “primitive scenes” but also dreams and pieces of fiction, not yet lived. People, including children can participate in analytic sessions where they can be motivated to draw out from their story bits and pieces that are both more bearable and intelligible (Ricoeur, 1986:129). It is from repressed stories that the story of life arises but it should be directed towards effective stories, stories that are constitutive of one’s personal identity, stories one can take responsibility for (Ricoeur, 1986:129). This study proposes that adults be guided towards becoming pastoral carers that can help children discover and re-define their life stories.

The next section will provide brief fragments of the life stories of children who were exposed to abuse and neglect.

3.2 Fragments of children’s stories

Narrative identity is a dynamic construct shaped and reshaped by the stories of our lives that are recounted and reproduced (Dreyer et al., 2002:164). When a child tells her story, she shapes and begins to transform the way in which she views herself, she begins to make sense of her past and start to create meaning of her being-in-this-world. This section will provide fragments of three stories; experiences of three children who were victims of adultist parents. Glimpses into the lives of these children may help us to imagine the reality of a child living with abuse, but more importantly, it may assist in demonstrating how adultism can influence the narrative identity of a child. In all three these stories the names were changed in order to protect the identity of the children.

3.2.1 A story of sexual abuse

After abuse was reported by a daycare, Cindy and Amelia were removed from their home and placed in a house of safety. Both sisters had a high fever with high infection. They had to go for treatment immediately. There were clear signs of sexual abuse. At that time, they were 3 and 4 years old respectively. Rachel became their foster parent; she was saddened by the condition of the girls and declares “They were so scared. They were very terrified. Amelia, then 4, trembled like a reed for 2 months when anyone approached her, especially adult men. Then she would start screaming “no!”, she also reacted this way to male doctors”. Amelia also struggled terribly with nightmares and would start crying and screaming when she heard footsteps or sounds. Cindy, the youngest sister, did not want to eat anything at the beginning; she would only drink

tea and milk formula. For the first week after the girls were removed, they constantly engaged in sexual behavior. They had to be well looked after. Cindy drew graphic pictures of her abuse. In one particular drawing, there is a grandmother just sitting in the corner reading a book. Cindy is very outspoken about what her father did to her and at times she described her abuse in detail. Amelia often confirmed Cindy's claims and once stated: "yes and it hurts a lot but then mommy brings ointments and syrups to help the pain go away". Despite all the physical evidence against the children's father, he still denied being guilty and his family supported him. The girls' mother was aware of the abuse and did nothing to stop it. This total abuse of power over these children had done great physical and emotional damage. The children both showed a lot of anger; they were insecure and unable to trust. Amelia, however, was quieter and recovered better emotionally. Cindy was removed from her sister at the age of 6. She was placed in another foster home, but she could not adjust here at all. It was during this time that Cindy experienced a different kind of abuse; verbal and emotional abuse. Cindy would at times just sit and rock herself back and forth without responding to anything. Her new foster mom was unable to cope with this behavior. She would at times scream at Cindy and even threw her with objects. As a result, Cindy's behavior became worse, it included tantrums and she even smashed her fists against the wall. It got so bad that her new foster mother took her back to Rachel, where her sister still lived. However, it took a long time to get Cindy emotionally stable again. She had very poor listening skills and struggled with concentration. She started to wet her bed again. After this, their conditions at Rachel were stable; they began to realize they were safe. With a lot of patience and love, they have now reached a point where they act like normal girls. Both girls are still receiving therapy and are currently doing well with their schoolwork; they also enjoy extracurricular activities such as dancing and sports.

3.2.2 A story of tenacious endurance

Joey was 6 months old when her father died in a car accident. Her mother couldn't cope with the loss of her husband. She turned to substance abuse to try and cope with the sadness she felt. She abandoned her daughter and Joey was raised by her grandparents until the age of 4. After this time her mother remarried, and Joey went to live with them. Joey's stepfather had 2 children from his previous marriage, a son and a daughter, both older than Joey. They were now three children in a house where both the mother and the father were alcoholics. Joey remembers many instances where her mother and stepfather fought until it got physical. They would scream at each other until her stepfather would end the fight using violence. "He was a good father when he was sober, but we always knew when evening came, he would start drinking. Then he would scream at us and become aggressive. I used to dread the evenings, not knowing if we would be saved from his outbursts". The violence continued throughout Joey's

childhood, and she struggled to cope with the fear she felt every time her stepfather started drinking, the powerlessness to protect her mother from his anger, the shame of growing up in a household of substance abuse and violence. Her stepfather struggled to keep a job and at times they lived in extreme poverty. When Joey was seven years old, her mother fell pregnant, it was a difficult pregnancy and her mother became very ill. Joey's sister was born, she was a healthy little girl, but her mother was diagnosed with a life-threatening disease. The circumstances surrounding her health forced Joey's mother to stop drinking. Unfortunately, her stepfather did not. The violence associated with his drinking became even worse and Joey remembers an instance where he threatened them with his pistol and even fired a few shots towards their dogs. In spite of all this, Joey had other adults in her life that loved her dearly. Her mother's health improved, she protected and supported her children although she felt like she couldn't leave her husband. She had no income and no way of supporting her children on her own. Joey's life was filled with uncertainty, happy times, and times of extreme fear. When her stepfather was sober, he was kind and loving but when he drank at night, he became a different person. Joey learned to live with his anger but had a deep resentment towards him. On the contrary she loved her mother very much. Joey felt like her mother was her biggest fan, always encouraging her to do her best. Her grandparents taught her that she can achieve anything she sets her mind to; they believed in her and had great expectations for her. Joey's grandmother spent a lot of time teaching her that God loved her and had a purpose for her life. She grew up to show tenacious endurance, she went to university and obtained multiple degrees, in the end helping other children who themselves were victims of abusive parents. Joey's story is a story of victory, in the midst of abuse, she was taught that she could change her story and that her story shaped and prepared her for what God had in mind for her. Although Joey was a victim of adultism, she was also exposed to the guidance of loving and supportive adults and that made all the difference.

3.2.3 A story of neglect and abandonment

Dillan recently started suffering from severe panic attacks and depression. He is 13 years old. He has threatened with suicide because he believes that he is unworthy and abandoned by everyone including God. In times of emotional breakdown he would claim: "God left me, He doesn't care for me. Why else would he allow these things to happen to me?" He refuses to go to school and would experience panic attacks, especially in the morning right before going to school. Dillan has a history of abandonment. He was conceived while his mother was addicted to heroin; she discovered she was pregnant while she attended rehab. After Dillan was born, his mother was able to stay clean for 4 years. Dillan's father disappeared from the scene after he was born, but he came back when Dillan was 4 years old, after which his parents decided to get

married. It went well for a few months, but unfortunately both his parents relapsed and started using drugs again, there were even reports of domestic violence. Dillan was taken away from his mother and went to live with his grandmother. After a few years, Dillan's father disappeared again and he lost all contact with him. For the last 9 years, his mother has been in and out of rehab multiple times, she's only been able to stay clean for a few months at a time. Dillan still have contact with his mother and she lives with them during the times she is sober. Unfortunately, these periods of time never last long. Recently she met another man, but he too is an addict. She left to go live with him, but their circumstances are less than ideal and they've slept on street corners many times. They both started using drugs again but have been sober for 2 months now. Dillan is unfortunately aware of his mother's circumstances, he feels she abandoned him again, choosing her boyfriend and drugs over him. All of this happened just before Dillan's panic attacks started.

3.3 Age as a determining factor

Sundhall (2017:165) states that children are many times treated differently and poorly because age is unfortunately a common and accepted reason to do so. Hierarchies and social order are created based on age where the adult has the power; the adult is at the top of the hierarchy. This social order includes discrimination, and children are being organized, excluded, and disciplined because of ideas and norms regarding age (Sundhall, 2017:165). There is a common believe that the life stages of children, the youth, and the elderly do not contribute to the survival of society; they are not adding resources but are merely consuming them. On the contrary, the life stage of adulthood, the time in which people are constructively contributing to the society by adding value and resources, are ascribed a higher status (Sundhall, 2017:165). Some adults may believe they own their children and have more rights than their children because of the fact that they provide for the household and the children merely consume. "Adding value" is many times wrongfully measured on the amount of money you can earn and because children, the youth, and the elderly cannot earn money, their value is undermined and their contributions are underestimated. Sundhall (2017:165) states:

"Adulthood is so fundamental to being seen as a full human that we view it as natural that children are considered not yet fully human. Thus, adulthood becomes naturalized and at the same time age becomes a legitimate power order when it comes to the age categorization of children, since children's subordination is regarded as something natural and often even desirable; children are viewed as "under development" and in need of adult protection and care."

Although all children are in need of adult protection and care, they also need to be recognized as fully human; their contributions must be recognized and valued. The fact that children may be more vulnerable does not legitimize adult superiority. When adults categorize and define the value of children based on their age, it may happen that they categorize and define their own value as dominant and supreme. In the same way, men have defined women as weak and emotionally unstable and colonizers have defined themselves as supreme over those they colonize (Sundhall, 2017:165). Women and entire population groups have become “the other” and in the same way children can become “the other”; the ones that do not belong, the ones that must be subordinated and controlled. Ackermann (1998:15) explains that there are three problematic responses to seeing a group of people as “the other”. Firstly, “the other” becomes people with no selfhood, no history, and no story. Secondly, they become exotic, romantic beings who are so different that they do not have to be taken seriously and thirdly, they become a threat that must be controlled and subordinated.

When children are being treated in this way as “the other” it will have a profound effect on their identity. A sense of belonging is vital for healthy identity development. Schachter and Ventura (2008:452) explain that identity development is dialectical, involving both the processes of differentiation and integration. In order for an adolescent to develop a healthy identity, they must be able to integrate with their society, this include the processes of “connecting, joining, and being recognized by adult society” (Schachter & Ventura, 2008:452). It is important for children to be recognized and valued by the adults in their lives, their stories and experiences must reflect a sense of belonging and worth.

Treating children as “the other” can take on extreme forms. As in the case of Amelia and Cindy, we perceive a parent who does not see his children as fully human beings who must be respected and valued, rather he sees them as his property; objects that can be used and played with. These two girls were treated as if they had no selfhood, no history, and no story; they were only faceless characters in their father’s story, born for the sole purpose of bringing him pleasure. They were treated as “the other” who had to be controlled and subordinated. This type of abuse has a significant influence on how children perceive themselves and their own sense of belonging. It is also these abusive experiences that make up a narrative, a life-story that will ultimately shape the child’s identity.

Despite of what parents may do wrong, they still remain an identity model to their children. As Schachter and Ventura (2008:450) state, parents are active co-participants in the identity formation of their children. Identity formation is also very much dependant on age. As stated in Section 1.1 of this study, McAdams (2001:106) argues that children at a young age do not naturally create integrative life stories that afford unity and purpose to their lives, but they are

still tacitly collecting material that will inform and shape their identities; identity development and the ability to recognize and express your identity is the chief task of adolescence. It is during adolescence that people confront the crises between identity and identity confusion (Papalia & Feldman, 2011:440). Younger children may however also engage in this task; children who lived through difficult circumstances may be impelled to reflect on their lives sooner (Nye, 2014:90). Children who are exposed to extreme forms of adultism have a lived reality filled with fear, rejection, guilt, and sadness. When they start to reflect on their lives during adolescence, a story emerges and the dominant themes or plots embedded in this story may be saturated with negative experiences and problems tacitly collected during their childhood. Theron (2006:449) explains that people tell themselves stories constructed of their lived experiences; they select certain events over others depending on what they deem to be important or true. The dominant themes in a person's life will also have a significant influence on the events they choose to form part of their narrative. If Dillan, for example, believes that he is unworthy of his mother's love, he will be reaffirmed in this conviction every time his mother chooses to leave him and it will be these experiences that link together in a sequence across time forming a central theme. Every time she relapses and starts using drugs, Dillan will feel rejected. Rejection becomes a dominant theme in Dillan's life, a theme strengthened by his perspective of reality even if it is not a true reflection of his mother's thoughts and feelings towards him. Amelia and Cindy, because of their age, were vulnerable little girls who might have put up a fight more than once to protect their own bodies, just to realize time and again that they are weak and helpless against their father's actions. Experiences of being hurt and unable to stop it became a dominant theme in their life-story. So much so that Amelia expected to be hurt; hence her continuing fear towards and reaction to all adult men even after she was in a safe environment. Abused children may lead their lives based on the theme of "being weak and helpless" because of their vulnerable age and their utter dependency on the adults in their lives. Kerig and Becker (2010) explain that abused children often suffer from cognitive problems such as hostile attribution, stigma, and alienation that can lead to moral disconnection because of the way they were treated by the adults who were supposed to care for them. Because of the fact that they grew up disconnected from their caregivers, they are unable to integrate with those around them. Children who have been abused tend to interpret signals in their environment negatively. They are very sensitive to rejection and because they expect rejection, they tend to overreact to conflict (Asscher *et al.*, 2015:215).

Abused children also in many cases do not have the ability to acknowledge risks, so they are also unable to evaluate the consequences of their actions beforehand and therefore they are more prone to aggression and violence (Asscher *et al.*, 2015:215). Children who come from violent backgrounds often defer to violence as a coping strategy (Asscher *et al.*, 2015:216). They deal with conflict by deferring to their own previous experiences. Experiences set in

negative relationships with their caregivers and harsh, violent parenting. Children who have been exposed to adultism may indeed have a problem-saturated narrative that translates to a distorted identity. Because of their age and their utter dependence on adults, they are many times rendered silent. Gilligan (2014:104) explains that we must become a society of listeners, actively listening to “the other”. We need to call forth the voice that has been held in silence. Many children’s voices are being held under adult constraint, they are held in silence and they must be encouraged to break the silence and to tell their stories. We as adults should perhaps stop trying to be a voice for children and start inspiring them to speak for themselves. As Gilligan (2014:104) says:

“Rather than putting ourselves in the shoes of the other, we would do better to put on our shoes and go to the other to learn from them about their place”

3.4 Gender plays a role in the form and consequence of adultism

Adultism may take on less serious forms where adults undermine the gifts, talents, and unique contributions of children. A mother may, for example, force her daughter to participate in activities that she doesn’t want to, trying to live out her own dreams and aspirations through her daughter. A father may expect excellent sportsmanship from his son, even though he has no natural talent for it. Parents tend to expect different things from either their son or daughter and their expectations may be very gender specific. Adultism in the form of unrealistic expectations may lead to children feeling like a failure and “not good enough”. More serious forms of adultism such as abuse and neglect have more extensive consequences for children’s identity formation. As discussed in Chapter 2, Young-Bruehl (2012:239) explains that in households where serious forms of adultism (she refers to it as childism) prevails and where children are treated as a possession to serve the needs of the adults, children are forced to assume a specific role. These roles are linked to their gender; for example, a girl may become daddy’s little mistress-wife and a boy may become a little boyfriend-husband that must satisfy his mother’s need for attention and support (Young-Bruehl, 2012:239). The story of Amelia and Cindy tells a story of two girls who became the possessions of their father; they were forced to assume the role of his little mistress-wives, a role that was very gender specific.

Asscher *et al.* (2015:216) confirms that there are differences in the prevalence of the type of abuse that girls and boys may experience. Boys are less likely than girls to experience sexual abuse, although this may be due to the fact that girls are more likely to substantiate or report their sexual abuse (Maikovich-Fonga & Jaffee, 2010:2). Sexual abuse of boys tends to go

unreported due to various reasons. Maikovich-Fonga and Jaffee (2010:2) list three possible reasons. Firstly, boys tend to hide their abuse if their offender is male because they fear they will be identified as gay if their abuse becomes public. Secondly, if the offender is a woman, boys, especially adolescent boys, may feel that they are supposed to feel lucky rather than victimized by their experience. Thirdly, when boys are the victims, offenders are more likely to use physical force and threats of violence to ensure the silence of the victim. Boys who were sexually abused by a male perpetrator are especially at risk and often report that they experience extreme confusion about their sexual identity coupled with extreme shame (Maikovich-Fonga & Jaffee, 2010:8). In some cases, these boys may conclude that they are gay, leading to a decision that will shape their identity for the rest of their lives.

Despite the fact that boys may underreport their sexual abuse, Asscher *et al.* (2015:216) still believe that girls are more likely to be sexually abused by a family member, while boys are more likely than girls to experience violent forms of physical abuse (Asscher *et al.*, 2015:216).

A study conducted by Thompson *et al.* (2004:602) was consistent with the fact that physical abuse in childhood was more prevalent among boys. The authors also state that health problems, and especially mental health problems, was strongly related to childhood abuse more so in women than in men (Thompson *et al.*, 2004:602). Some researchers have attempted to explain this phenomenon by speculating that women more often than men blame themselves for the abuse they suffered. The self-blame and shame they experience may increase their risk for mental illnesses (Thompson *et al.*, 2004:603). Although any form of child mal-treatment is emotionally harmful to both girls and boys, they may react differently to the stress it causes. Girls may tend to internalize stress symptoms, which usually lead to depression, while boys tend to externalize stress symptoms through aggressive behaviour (Thompson *et al.*, 2004:603). Although this may be true for the majority, the opposite is also possible. In the case of Cindy and Amelia, Cindy dealt with her emotional pain by becoming aggressive, slamming her fists in walls. While in the case of Dillan, we see a boy who internalizes his feeling, becoming severely depressed and anxious.

Delinquent behaviour is many times a consequence of child abuse. Asscher *et al.* (2015) presented a study that examines gender differences in the association between abuse and neglect during childhood, and sexual and violent offending in juvenile delinquents (Asscher *et al.*, 2015). In this study, the authors effectively revealed that child maltreatment may lead to a person being a perpetrator of child mal-treatment later in life, since this person has been taught that hurting others is normal (Asscher *et al.*, 2015:215). In fact there is empirical evidence showing that a child who has been abused is much more likely to become a juvenile delinquent (Asscher *et al.*, 2015:215). Children are likely to repeat the behaviour that has been modelled to them (Asscher *et al.*, 2015:215).

Children who have been abused may have a difficult time regulating their emotions, their emotions may be numbed leading to the inability to recognize and control their emotions. Chronic and pervasive abuse in children limits their capacity to regulate and process their emotions and this may cause increased irritability and impulsivity that in turn may lead to the development of delinquent behaviour (Asscher et al., 2015). This behaviour may be gender specific, there have been studies that revealed that child mal-treatment including neglect predicted juvenile delinquency only in males and not in females (Asscher et al., 2015:16). There is especially a strong relationship between childhood neglect and official offending; in fact juvenile boys who were victims of childhood neglect are four times more likely to be convicted for offending than juveniles who were not victims of neglect (Kazemian et al., 2011:65). It may be that delinquent tendencies are delayed in girls since child mal-treatment does predict delinquent behaviour in both adult men and women (Asscher et al., 2015:16). The study performed by Asscher *et al.* (2015:219) however indicate that females who do become juvenile offenders were more likely to have been victims of sexual and physical abuse than male juvenile delinquents and female offenders also more often had a history of childhood neglect. Asscher *et al.* (2015:221) also found that female juvenile offenders more often commit misdemeanour crimes against persons and participated in violence that were not included in criminal history, while male juvenile offenders more often participate in sexual and violent offences against persons. Female delinquents are much more likely to experience major depressive episodes, this may be because girls cope with childhood abuse through internalizing while boys tend to externalize (Asscher *et al.*, 2015:219). These findings are consistent with the research by Thompson *et al.* (2004:603) that was previously discussed in this section.

This research concludes that abuse, as well as the effects of abuse, is gender specific. Abuse may lead to persons associating their hurt and shame with their specific gender, they may even blame their abuse on their gender. Being a boy or being a girl may be linked to negative life-story events that may form an overarching theme leading to gender identity confusion. Furthermore, it is clear from the research presented in this section that abuse has a significant influence on the behaviour of the victim, behaviour, predicted differently depending on the gender of the victim. Behaviour will strongly influence narrative events and consequently narrative identity. In the following section, I will discuss troubled behaviour as a consequence of unhealthy adult-child relationships. The effect of behaviour on identity formation will also be discussed.

3.5 Adulthood in the context of adult – child relationships

Wall (2010:78) explains that all people are necessarily related to others. Everyone begins their life in relation to a mother at least. He states:

“No child thrives without caretakers. No adult can take part in cultures and societies without others in cultures and societies around them. In general, the human being is a social animal—as Aristotle long ago said—its meaning and story bound up with the meanings and stories of an unfathomable diversity of others” (Wall, 2010:78)

In the 1980's researchers actively started observing babies with their mothers trying to understand the bond between them. They made some very interesting observations, noting that babies not only long for and take part in the relationship but that they were also able to distinguish between a true relationship and the appearance of a relationship (Gilligan, 2014:90). A true relationship in this case is where the mother and child is in touch with each other, while the appearance of a relationship is one where they are out of touch, appearing to be mother and child but the mother is in fact detached from the infant (Gilligan, 2014:90). Infants are able to sense and recognize a caretaker's response towards them by scanning faces, making eye contact and by inviting a response from their primary caretaker. These observations changed the traditional view of development and new questions were raised. Gilligan (2014:90) explains this shift in perspective as follow:

“Rather than asking how do we gain the capacity to care, and how do we learn to take the point of view of the other and overcome the pursuit of self-interest, we are prompted to ask instead: how do we lose the capacity to care, what inhibits our ability to empathize with others and pick up the emotional climate, and how do we fail to register the difference between being in and out of touch? And most painfully, how do we lose the capacity to love?”

Gilligan (2014:90) further explains that we as human beings are relational, born to respond to each other while we desire true relationships that require love. We are born with the capacity to become functional citizens within a society. It is our first relationships during childhood that will either encourage and strengthen these desires and capacities or traumatize and distort them (Gilligan, 2014:90). When the first relationship young children experience is characterized with adulthood, they will likely have difficulty attaching to their primary caregiver. The one person who should provide them with love, protection, and care becomes a source of fear and harm. Such a situation has a major impact on the emotional and social development of the child. Abused

children may find it hard to trust anyone; as a result, when they are in distress they may experience persistent feelings of anxiety and anger (Australian Institute of Family Studies, 2014:3). They will struggle to communicate and their ability to form healthy relationships may be impaired throughout their life, including relationships with peers and romantic relationships (Australian Institute of Family Studies, 2014:3). Adult-child relationships are a key determining factor of identity formation in children. It can either contribute towards developing and confirming a child's God given identity or it can cause a child to feel rejected, unloved, unworthy, and powerless. Power as a relational factor can either empower a child or render them powerless and vulnerable without the ability to control what happens to them. The abuse of power and authority can strip a child of their confidence. Confidence and the conviction that you are able to be anything you want to be is vital for achieving success. We need to understand and believe that we can do all things through Christ who loves and strengthens us before we can take up our true God-given identity. The effects of adultism can be mitigated if there is one adult in the child's life that does love and support him. According to the Child Welfare Information Gateway (2015:6), a child may experience less of the effects of abuse if there was someone who still provided dependable nurturing to the child while the abuse happened. In the case of Joey, we see a little girl who was exposed to violence from an adult who was not necessarily the primary caregiver. Joey still had her mother and grandparents who shielded her from the abuse. She felt the fear that accompanied the abuse; she experienced the feeling of powerlessness to stop the abuse towards her mother. But she never felt helpless and alone, she never felt worthless, ashamed, or responsible for the abuse. Although her stepfather's words and insults may have caused some emotional damage, there were always adults present to bring things into perspective. Joey was exposed to the guidance of loving and supportive adults, who taught her she could do and be anything she sets her mind to and that made all the difference.

Children who were however repeatedly rendered powerless with no one to protect them and who could not control or choose what happens to them will struggle to believe that they can do all things. Chapple *et al.* (2005:39-40) explain some of the negative effects associated with childhood neglect and states: "neglected children experience limited parent-child interactions, which are often devoid of attention and caring, and subsequently are unlikely to have the ability to regulate their emotions, curb impulsivity, or choose appropriate peers"

Neglect is also a form of adultism that leads to criminal behaviour in adolescence (Asscher *et al.*, 2015:16). This may be because children are forced to care for themselves much sooner than they are able to. Consequently, boys may turn towards stealing and other criminal activity in order to obtain the basic necessities they need to survive, while girls may turn towards prostitution. Circumstances resulting from a lack of healthy adult-child relationships force these young people to participate in behaviour that will ultimately shape and distort their identity. They

identify themselves as criminals, prostitutes, outlaws in society, rejected and worthless. These negative views about themselves many times drive them to substance abuse in order to still the emptiness they feel. According to the Australian Institute of Family Studies (2014:3), people who were exposed to any form of child mal-treatment have a higher probability for substance abuse. They have an increased likelihood to become dependent on alcohol, marijuana, and other drugs. An additional study in the United States established that "28% of physically abused adolescents used drugs and 36% of physically abused adolescents also had high levels of alcohol use" (Australian Institute of Family Studies, 2014:4).

3.6 Body of Christ praxis

Kosarkova *et al.* (2020:8) performed a study to determine how victims of abuse view God. They found that victims of childhood trauma were less likely to describe God in positive terms; they were less likely to see Him as loving, always present, and forgiving. Those victims who struggled with anxiety and relationship problems were less likely to view God as forgiving and just. Respondents of the study, who were not religious, reported that they did not view God as fatherly or just, but rather critical or angry. Ross (2016:429) affirms these findings, stating that chronic childhood trauma commonly produce cognitive distortions about God. Kosarkova *et al.* (2020:8) argue that victims of abuse often had a negative self-perception, experienced feelings of shame, and felt unworthy. They often project these feelings to a spiritual dimension, concluding that they are not loved or accepted by God. They question God's love, but also His power and justice. Ross (2016:430) connects these thought tendencies to what she calls the locus-of-control shift. A child is wired to think of herself as at the centre of her universe, everything happening revolves around her and she has power to control her universe. When a child is abused, she receives the message "I am bad; I am causing the abuse; I deserve the abuse; I am unworthy and unlovable" (Ross, 2016:430). But because the young child needs to be in control, she shifts the locus-of-control from inside the perpetrator where it is, to inside herself. She then believes: "I am in charge; I am causing the abuse; the cause is contained within me; I can stop the abuse by deciding to be a good girl" (Ross, 2016:430). When she cannot stop the abuse, she believes that she deserved it because she couldn't be a good enough girl. The locus-of-control shift often help children to attach to their perpetrator, because now the badness is not contained within the abuser but within the child and the abuser is only punishing bad behaviour in a sort of tough love program (Ross, 2016:430). This attachment however remains insecure. Kosarkova's study, together with other studies, shows that insecure relationships with caregivers lead to negative perceptions of God (Granqvist *et al.*, 2012; Kosarkova *et al.*, 2020:8). Victims of abuse may attach to God in the same way they attach to their perpetrator, this attachment will then be insecure and associated with fear (Kosarkova *et*

al., 2020:8). The child will believe that God also wants to punish her "badness". This leads to a negative perception of God. Ross (2016:431) explains that the child often believes that God decided not to protect her, and that He did not deem her worthy of His love and therefore deliberately placed her in an abusive family. The child commonly believe that she was chosen, singled out and deliberately targeted by God for abuse, neglect, or abandonment (Ross, 2016:431). In the story of Dillan, this thought tendency is clearly demonstrated. Dillan believes that his father abandoned him because he was not worthy or special enough, he believes that his mother has chosen drugs over him because he was not good enough, she didn't love him enough. All of this makes him feel unworthy. He now attaches to God in the same way he attached to his parents; therefore, he believes that God does not love him enough and that God abandoned him. He also perceives God as the One who placed him within these circumstances, God specifically targeted him to be the child of two addicts, to be abandoned because he was not worthy of God's favour. Dillan has a negative perception of God; he is also severely depressed and suffers from anxiety.

Research have shown that if a victim of abuse changes their perceptions of God and are able to acquire a positive God image, it will help them significantly with the recovery process and enable them to cope with their history of abuse or neglect (Kosarkova *et al.*, 2020:8). There is also evidence showing that negative perceptions of God can prevent healing from depression and anxiety, while positive religious beliefs can help victims of abuse respond more favourably to therapy in the treatment of anxiety and depression (Ross, 2016:429).

3.7 Embodied praxis – in the bodies of children

All forms of adultism are felt within the body of the child. Physical abuse and neglect happens to the body of the child, a body that is still weak, many times small and fragile. Wall (2010:75) states that every person is an embodied being; our time in this world is time spent in a body. Children inhabit a body even before they are able to reflect upon themselves culturally or linguistically. Long before they can narrate their story, they are embodied. Wall (2010:75) explains that being in a body is a necessary condition for narration, a disembodied being cannot experience time and they cannot narrate. Wall (2010:75) speaks of the brain as the integral part of the body that "first marries passive conditions and active choice in my own synaptic creation of new meaning". He explains that although a person do not experience his brain as an object, he does fundamentally experience it as his experience of being able to experience at all (Wall, 2010:75). He explains it as follows:

“The brain is, in a sense, the record of my ongoing history of narrating. Starting as a late foetus and ending at brain death, it embodies my experiences of time itself. All human experience is at once already constructed by a surrounding world and newly constructed by a self. And this tension finds its most immediate expression in the narrative growth of connections in the brain” (Wall, 2010:75)

The brain is a vital organ that regulates our thoughts and feelings about who we are and are therefore vital in the formation of our identity. When children are abused and experience traumatic events, the development and healthy functioning of the brain may be compromised. Science has already proven that early experiences, relationships with caregivers and environmental threats have a significant developmental impact on the brain. According to Shonkoff and Phillips (2000:3), a child's environment and experiences influences virtually every aspect of early bodily development, from the brain's developing circuitry to the child's ability to show empathy. These experiences start in the prenatal period and then extend throughout early childhood.

The brain is made up of millions of neurons connected through billions of synapses. These synapses connect neurones but also control the direction and speed of the signals traveling through the neurons. When a baby is born very few synapses has already been formed. Only the ones that help to govern our bodily functions such as breathing, eating, and sleeping is fully developed (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2015:2). The rest is developed after birth and is very much dependant on the experiences of the child. Throughout childhood new synapses is developed and others are discarded in a process called pruning (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2015:2). A child's experience will determine whether synapses are strengthened and remain intact and whether it is pruned. Severe neglect and abuse can therefore permanently alter brain development (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2015:2). Children need nurturing and a healthy environment to stimulate healthy development of the brain, when a child is neglected or abused the child's brain development may be impaired because it will be adapted to that specific negative environment (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2015:4). An example of such an impairment is the inability to form healthy attachments and to react appropriately to love and care from another person. Smyke *et al.* (2010:1-2) explain that aberrant environmental conditions limit a young child's ability to form selective attachment. It is also believed that there is a sensitive period for the development of the attachment capability. Smyke *et al.* (2010) discuss a study done with children from Romanian institutions. This study showed that the sensitive period for attachment is from birth to the age of 24 months (Smyke *et al.*, 2010:1-2). Children who were placed in foster care and who received stable parenting before the age of 24

months were able to better attach to their caregivers than those children who stayed in the Romanian institutions (Smyke et al., 2010:1-2).

Our brains are wired in such a way as to ensure our survival, therefore when we are neglected or abused in early childhood our brain is developed to adapt and survive in those adverse circumstances. Our brains create memories of the abuse and neglect and influence our view of the world (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2015:4). When a child is abused or suffer a trauma, he or she may not be able to retain explicit memories of these stressful experiences, however the physical and emotional sensations accompanied with abuse and neglect may be retained within the child in the form of implicit memories (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2015:5). These implicit memories may produce nightmares, flashbacks, and uncontrollable reactions like shaking. Negative experiences accompanied with neglect or abuse will negatively influence brain development. The structure and chemical activity of the brain may be altered (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2015:5). Mc Crory *et al.* (2010:1083-1084) reported that adults who have been abused as children may have a reduced volume of the hippocampus and smaller volumes of the corpus callosum (which may lead to difficulties with language and emotional regulation). There are a strong correlation between child mal-treatment and poor academic achievement or learning difficulties (Australian Institute of Family Studies, 2014:3). When a child is abused, especially in the early years of childhood, it may have a profound effect on the development of speech and language capabilities. According to Gilbert et al. (2009:74), child mal-treatment may cause long-term deficits in academic achievement. Children who have been mal-treated consistently show lower academic achievement and the need for special education (Gilbert et al., 2009:74)

The cerebellum (which plays a role in executive functioning but also coordination of motor behaviour, as well as emotion processing and fear conditioning) is also impaired in children who have been maltreated (Mc Crory et al., 2010:1084). According to Mc Crory et al. (2010:1084-1085), some studies found a decreased volume of the prefrontal cortex in abused children while other studies determined a "reduction in grey matter volume in the left and right primary visual cortex of sexually abused females". A prefrontal cortex, cerebellum and visual cortices play a role in behaviour, cognition, and the regulation of emotions (Mc Crory et al., 2010:1084). Although most studies show that the amygdala is not influenced by maltreatment, one study did show increased volumes of the amygdala in maltreated adolescents, especially on the right side (Mc Crory et al., 2010:1083). Evaluating potential threatening situations, fear conditioning, and emotional regulating is all part of the functions of the amygdala (Mc Crory et al., 2010:1083).

These structural changes to a child's brain will have an influence on the behavioural and emotional functioning of the child, therefore a child that has been exposed to abuse or neglect may be over sensitive to stressful situations (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2015:5). A

child that grew up in an environment where they've been nurtured and cared for can easily respond to nurturing and kindness. A child that grew up in a threatening environment where the primary caretaker chronically responded with violence and abuse or where the caretaker did not respond at all may become hyper alert for danger. Their neuronal pathways are developed to cope with their negative circumstances and they will therefore have an impaired ability to respond to kindness and nurturing (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2015:5). The negative effects of maltreatment on the brain will depend on many different factors, such as (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2015:6):

- The child's age
- The severity of the maltreatment, and whether it was chronicle or a one-time event
- Whether the abuser was the parent or primary caretaker
- Whether there was intervention
- Whether there was someone who still provided dependable nurturing to the child while the abuse happened

The effect of adultism on the brain is something that happens behind the scenes and is not fully experienced by the child in the moment of abuse. Children do however experience the physical pain of abuse and they do experience the powerlessness of being smaller, weaker, and fully dependent. Adults are in the position where they possess power and physical superiority over children. A child that is being subjected to adultism have no control over the situation, thy cannot choose what happens to their own body. Reynaert (2015:194) explains that the perpetrator of child abuse uses the body of the child to satisfy his/her own needs. The child's body becomes an object in that moment on which the offender can vent his or her frustrations, whether it is anger or sexual frustration. Reynaert (2015:194) observed that sexual abuse perpetrators generally view the body of their victim as a toy, an object detached from the soul, something they can use or play with and something they can possess. When it comes to sexual abuse, the body of a child is at its most vulnerable. Such children have no control over what happens to their body and also no control over how their bodies react. Consequently, the effect of sexual abuse is far-reaching. A child will often feel ashamed of the reaction of his/her body which leads to self-blame and feelings of guilt. The child may start to perceive her own body as an object of hurt, shame, and humiliation. The after-effects of abuse may also cause the child to lose control of her body. Implicit memories may produce nightmares, flashbacks, and uncontrollable reactions like shaking (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2015:5). In the case of both Amelia and Cindy, we saw how their bodies went into episodes of uncontrollable shaking, they also experienced nightmares and flashbacks, and these are all reactions of their

bodies they cannot control, leading to further humiliation and shame. Reynaert (2015:194) explains:

“As a result of the sexual abuse, the child – and future adult – often has problems with his/her body. Survivors of sexual abuse at times express that they hate their body or that they want to destroy their body because of the pain they feel daily”.

The ordinary things in life may lose its appeal and victims of sexual abuse may even start to crave sexual activity as a way to cope with the emotional pain. In the story of Cindy and Amelia, it becomes clear that although the sexual abuse brought them tremendous pain, physically and emotionally, they both still engaged in sexual activity with themselves and each other even after they were removed from their perpetrator. They were not just taken from their father who hurt them, but also from their mother who ‘cared’ for them, they were removed from their home, their toys, and everything that was known to them. They were placed in a strange home with a person they didn’t know. In the midst of this new emotional trauma, they found comfort in sexual activity since it was known to them and can now be controlled by them. They had to learn that it caused even more pain and that there were different, healthier ways to cope with emotional pain. Another consequence of abuse is that the victim shut down mentally. Children may dissociate their bodies from “themselves”, turning off their feelings in order to protect themselves. Heggen (2006:37) quotes a victim of abuse who testified:

“The pain to my little body was excruciating when he abused me. The only way I survived was to learn to turn off my feelings”

Heggen (2006:37-38) explains that a victim of abuse may escape mentally when they cannot escape physically. He states a victim may, for example, state:

“I was too little to stop the abuse and protect my body. But I was determined he wouldn’t hurt the real me. So I learned how to float out of my body where he couldn’t get me”.

It is clear that both the perpetrator as well as the victim follows a dualist approach in their view of the body, perceiving the body as an object that is detached from the “real person”. Reynaert (2015:195) explains that the body is seen as unrelated to the soul. This view is problematic since it may encourage abuse of power on the side of the adult. This negative view of the body is also found within Christian tradition, where the view may be that the body is inferior to the spirit, sinful and must be kept under control (Reynaert, 2015:195). Christian tradition may mistakenly adopt a Hellenistic view that places the spiritual above the material. An appropriate

image of the body as portrayed by Scripture must be actively promoted to raise awareness on the importance and worth of the body.

3.8 Chapter summary

In this chapter narrative identity was defined as the evolving story a person adopt and tell themselves and others to make sense and meaning out of his or her life. These life-stories are constructed from previous experiences and interactions. Children who have been abused and neglected tend to reflect back on their own negative experiences and interactions, as well as their behaviour during these interactions and feel shame and inadequacy. These negative life-story events may lead to the development of an unhealthy narrative identity. This chapter furthermore discussed the adverse effects of adultism on children's narratives. From this chapter the following conclusions can be drawn with regard to children who have been exposed to adultism:

- They may struggle to process information and regulate their emotions.
- They may have an inability to form healthy attachments and to react appropriately to love and care from another person.
- They tend to be oversensitive to stressful situations.
- They may have an impaired ability to respond to kindness and nurturing.
- They are at higher risk for substance abuse.
- They may have poor academic achievement or learning difficulties.
- They are at higher risk to become a perpetrator of child maltreatment themselves later in life, since they have been taught that hurting others is normal.
- They may have a limited capacity to regulate and process their emotions and this may cause increased irritability and impulsivity that in turn may lead to the development of delinquent behaviour.
- They are very sensitive to rejection and because they expect rejection, they tend to overreact to conflict.
- They may be more inclined to suicidal behaviours.
- They may not have the ability to acknowledge risks, so they are also unable to evaluate the consequences of their actions beforehand and therefore they are more prone to aggression and violence.
- Boys who were sexually abused by a male perpetrator are especially at risk and often report that they experience extreme confusion about their sexual identity coupled with extreme shame (Maikovich-Fonga & Jaffee, 2010:8). In some cases, these boys may conclude that they are gay,

- Women more often than men blame themselves for the abuse they suffered. The self-blame and shame they experience may increase their risk for mental illnesses.
- Abused children may find it hard to trust anyone; as a result, when they are in distress they may experience persistent feelings of anxiety and anger.
- They will struggle to communicate and their ability to form healthy relationships may be impaired throughout their life, including relationships with peers and romantic relationships.
- The abuse of power and authority can strip a child of their confidence and they will lack the conviction that they are able to control their own lives and achieve success.
- Children who were victims of adultism may be less likely to see God as loving, always present, and forgiving.
- Victims who struggle with anxiety and relationship problems are less likely to view God as forgiving and just.
- They may question God's love but also his power and justice.
- They may believe that God wants to punish them.
- They may have negative perceptions of God that can prevent healing from depression and anxiety.
- They may believe that God decided not to protect them, and that He did not deem them worthy of His love and therefore deliberately placed them in an abusive family.
- They commonly believe that they were chosen, singled out and deliberately targeted by God for abuse, neglect or abandonment.
- They may perceive their own bodies as an object of hurt, shame and humiliation.
- They often have problems with their body. Survivors of sexual abuse at times express that they hate their body or that they want to destroy their body because of the pain they feel daily.

From these findings it is clear that adultism may have an extensive negative influence on the behaviour, feelings and beliefs (or thought patterns) of a child. Ultimately the behaviour of children as well as their feelings, dispositional traits, desires, and beliefs will influence the development of their narrative identity (Gelişimi & Kimliği, 2020:463). The following chapter will determine how Nouwen's praxis of theology and pastoral care can inform the narrative identity development of children. This objective will be reached by elaborating on Nouwen's own life narrative and how it informed his theological praxis of pastoral care.

CHAPTER 4: HENRI NOUWEN AND PASTORAL CARE

In the previous chapter it became apparent that children who have been abused and neglected tend to reflect back on their own negative experiences and interactions, as well as their behaviour during these interactions and feel shame and inadequacy. These negative feelings about their own story tend to lead to the development of an unhealthy narrative identity. It should be the goal of caregivers to help children reflect on their stories to create meaning and purpose that will shape their identity. Henri Nouwen, through his life and pastoral care, can provide valuable insights towards this goal. Nouwen (1992:33) believed that identity is not something that is imposed from the outside of one's life; it cannot be discovered through an internalized process of trial and error where identity is "tried on" and "taken off" if it doesn't fit. We discover our identity when we hear the sacred voice that calls us the Beloved; the core truth of our existence is expressed in being the Beloved (Nouwen, 1992:33). It is in "being the Beloved of God" that children will be able to discover their identity. Nouwen's own life story and pastoral care may contribute greatly towards creating awareness about the formation of children's narrative identity and the influence adults have on this formation. This chapter will therefore elaborate on the life of Henry Nouwen, as well as his approach to pastoral care.

Because Nouwen lived what he preached, his life-story is an inspiration, a challenge to the rest of us to live true Christianity (O'Laughlin, 2005:10). Nouwen's story can provide us with guidance in our struggle to help children find God and discover their own true identity in Christ. Although his nearly idyllic upbringing contrasts rather starkly with the childhoods of children who experienced harsh forms of adultism, Nouwen's life indicates the value of supportive and loving adults towards a child's identity formation. Nouwen's family and especially his grandmother contributed greatly towards Nouwen's sense of identity. At the same time he experienced a degree of uncertainty and shame in his relationship with his father who also added unintentionally towards his identity confusion. These diverse roles played by the adults in the life of Henri Nouwen may contribute towards creating awareness and educating adults about life-denying and life-giving ways of being and doing in the process of children's narrative identity formation. This chapter will therefore discuss fragments of the life of Henri Nouwen followed by a broad overview of Nouwen's pastoral care pertaining to narrative identity development. The methodology developed in Chapter 2, a childist narrative theology of praxis, will be utilized as a framework to further highlight certain aspects of Nouwen's pastoral care as it is relevant to the formation of children's narrative identity. These aspects are then precisely applicable to children's identity development as shaped by their story, age, gender, relationships with adults, relationship with God, and their embodied nature. The insights gained in this chapter may then be used in Chapter 5 to formulate praxis guidelines for creating awareness and educate adults

about life-denying and life-giving ways of being and doing in the process of children's narrative identity formation. Section one of this chapter will tell fragments of the story of Henri Nouwen.

4.1 Henri Nouwen's narrative: A descriptive, interpretive perspective

Nouwen grew up in the Netherlands, he was born in a small city called Nijkerk in 1932 (O'Laughlin, 2005:15). Nouwen had a well-protected and happy childhood. He was the oldest child of Laurent Nouwen and Maria Nouwen. His father enjoyed prestige in his community, he was respected and had an important job; he worked for the Government in the tax department (O'Laughlin, 2005:15). Nouwen's mother was a soft-hearted loving parent who worked part-time as a book keeper in her mother's large department store (Nouwen, 1996a:16). She used to take Henri with her, and he remembers running freely around the large store, playing hide and seek and riding the elevators (Nouwen, 1996a:16). Nouwen's family was a prominent family, they were well educated, cultured with an intellectual aptitude (O'Laughlin, 2005:15). The city they lived in was segregated based on religion where Catholics and Protestants did not mix (O'Laughlin, 2005:15). Nouwen grew up in a close knit Catholic community, where their Catholicism was entrenched in everything they did. O'Laughlin (2005:15) explain that the Catholic communities in Holland expressed their belief by adhering strictly to reading only Catholic newspapers, listening to only Catholic radio, they only dined in restaurants owned by Catholic community members, and they never accepted anything if it did not originate from a recognized Catholic source. In this way, the Catholic community maintained its own separate identity, an identity that became very much a part of Henri Nouwen's own identity. Nouwen too was raised in a Catholic family; he went to Catholic schools and related all his life only to other Roman Catholics. In his book "The inner voice of love" Henri describes his well-protected childhood:

"My life had been well-protected. I had grown up as in a beautifully kept garden surrounded by thick hedges. It was a garden of loving parental care, innocent boy scout experiences, daily mass and communion, long hours of study with very patient teachers, and many years of happy but very isolated seminary life. I came out of it all full of love for Jesus, and full of desire to bring the Gospel to the world, but without being fully aware that not everybody was waiting for me. I had only met—and that quite cautiously—a few Protestants, had never encountered an unbeliever, and certainly had no idea about other religions. Divorced people were unknown to me, and if there were any priests who had left the priesthood, they were kept away from me. The greatest "scandal" I had experienced was a friend leaving the seminary!" (Nouwen, 1996a:18).

O'Laughlin (2005:19) explains that relationships were very important in Nouwen's life. He had a very close relationship with his parents, but also his brothers, Paul and Laurent, and his sister, Laurien. As a child he experienced great happiness, but his relationship, especially with his father was also a source of uncertainty and shame (O'Laughlin, 2005:20). He was at times filled with doubts, very unsure if he truly measured up to his father's standards. He did not always feel accepted by his father for whom he was and felt unsure of his parents love for him. Nouwen explains:

"When I was a small child I kept asking my father and mother: "Do you love me?" I asked that question so often and so persistently that it became a source of irritation to my parents. Even though they assured me hundreds of times that they loved me I never seemed fully satisfied with their answers and kept asking the same question" (Nouwen, 1994:77-78)

Nouwen felt closer to his mother, she was gentle and always assured him that he was loved regardless of his successes and failures (O'Laughlin, 2005:20). Therefore, Nouwen felt more accepted by his mother. Because of Nouwen's sensitive temperament, affection and acceptance was very important to Nouwen and although his father loved him very much, he was not always able to communicate love in a way that Nouwen understood. His father seemed to have standards that Nouwen felt he will never be able to meet (O'Laughlin, 2005:21). Although Nouwen experienced an undercurrent of emotions when it came to his relationship with his parents, he was not an unhappy child, he had love and security and was later able to do many great things in his life because of the love he received as a child (O'Laughlin, 2005:21). Both Nouwen's parents were intellectuals. Nouwen's father was well-versed in many of the great topics of the day, while his mother was proficient in many European languages, she loved to read and write (O'Laughlin, 2005:21). Together his parents provided a very stimulating intellectual environment for the young Nouwen (O'Laughlin, 2005:21). During this safe and very much sheltered childhood, Nouwen received much affirmation and support, not just from his parents, but also other adults such as his Uncle Anton (O'Laughlin, 2005:16). Nouwen's uncle was a priest; Uncle Anton made a great impression on Henri, so much so that he wanted to follow in his footsteps. At the age of 6, Henri decided he wanted to become a priest (Nouwen, 1996a:16). Henri's maternal grandmother was an astute business woman who owned a large department store and when she realized Henri's great desire to become a priest, she ordered her carpenter to make him a child-sized altar, her seamstress made him all the necessary garments to wear so that he can truly play the role of priest (Nouwen, 1996a:16). Henri remembers converting their attic into a children's chapel and by the age of 8 he played mass and gave sermons to his relatives. As he grew older his dream to become a priest did not wither

and the adults in Henri's life supported him and encouraged him to follow his dreams. Henri says:

"life in the garden of my youth was quite beautiful and offered me invaluable gifts for the rest of my life: a joyful spirit, a deep devotion for Jesus and Mary, a true desire to pray, a great love for theology and spirituality, a good knowledge of contemporary languages, a serious interest in scripture and the early Christian writers, an enthusiasm about preaching, and a very strong sense of vocation. My maternal grandmother, my paternal grandparents, my parents, friends, and teachers all encouraged me to trust my desire to live a life with Jesus for others" (Nouwen, 1996a:17-18)

O'Laughlin (2005:17) explains that Henri's stable and sheltered childhood; his close-knit Catholic community and the love and support of the adults in his life gave him a moral standard to live by and a very strong sense of identity. An identity deeply rooted in religion and Catholicism. Nouwen's dream to become a priest only grew stronger and at age twelve he felt ready to join a minor seminary. His parents however did not agree, although they supported him, they felt Nouwen was not yet ready to make a final decision towards the priesthood. His father encouraged him to stay open minded and wanted him to go to a local gymnasium in their town (Nouwen, 1996a:17). Nouwen followed his parents' wishes. When Nouwen turned eighteen in 1950, he joined the seminary and started studying philosophy and theology. On the 21st day of July, 1957, Nouwen finally achieved his dream of becoming a priest (Nouwen, 1996a:17).

4.2 Henri Nouwen's narrative pastoral care

Henri Nouwen's approach to pastoral care was narratively forged; it was deeply embedded in his own life-story, his own experiences of suffering and joy. These experiences started in a conservative Catholic Community that was characterized by a strong sense of identity and separation from other religious groups. But during WWII Holland were invaded by the Nazis and the segregated communities of Holland suddenly faced a common enemy (O'Laughlin, 2005:33). Many of the Dutch Catholics were placed in concentration or work camps and they suddenly found themselves working and living alongside other Dutchmen; men they spend their whole lives avoiding (O'Laughlin, 2005:33). Catholics and Protestants had no choice but to unite against a common enemy and they found they had more in common than they ever thought possible. These events exposed the Catholics to new ways of thinking and lead to many ecclesiastical reforms (O'Laughlin, 2005:35). "New Catholicism" bloomed in the Netherlands and included a rediscovery of the Bible, a reformation of liturgy, more Christ-centred

observances and rituals, and a focus on philosophy and psychology (O'Laughlin, 2005:35). This theological transformation also had a great influence on Henri Nouwen and he participated eagerly. Nouwen believed that a personal relationship with Jesus Christ and a greater personal self-awareness was very important for a healthy faithful life (O'Laughlin, 2005:35). This belief was in line with the theological transformation taking place at that time and later became the basis for Nouwen's theology. From a very young age he was fascinated with the priesthood and the church (O'Laughlin, 2005:23). He fully embraced the religious life of his family. O'Laughlin explains that Nouwen gravitated towards his life's calling since he was five years old; it is as if he was magnetically pulled towards it (O'Laughlin, 2005:24). Nouwen experienced Christ's love from a very young age. It was his desire to share this love with others. It was this desire that drew Nouwen to the area of pastoral care. Nouwen had a great interest in human psychology and after his ordination he decided to pursue a Ph.D. in psychology, he went on to become a pastoral counsellor and wrote many books on the subject of human flourishing. In his long career as a pastoral carer Nouwen focused on spiritual care; the spiritual journey each of us travels towards our God-given identity. The next section will elaborate on the spirituality in Nouwen's pastoral care.

4.2.1 Spirituality in Henri Nouwen's pastoral care

In Nouwen's approach to pastoral care, Dreyer (2003:715) explains that he questioned the worth of psychological methods, although he did not dismiss them either. Nouwen was greatly influenced by Martin Heidegger who advocated a "hermeneutic of facticity" (Dreyer, 2003:715). According to Curt (1994:34), "By facticity, Heidegger meant the contingency of our being onto and into a world always, already there. Meaning comes from our temporality and contingency." Our "being in the world" is our *Dasein* and "what I am" is our *sein* (Dreyer, 2003:715). Our authentic identity is determined not just by *sein* but in relationship with God, myself and fellow human beings; identity is formed in the *Dasein*, in the "I-am-with-the-others" (Dreyer, 2003:716). Heidegger did not accept all the new psychological techniques and believed that some are useful insofar they serve our daily lives, but they must never claim our being and in this Nouwen followed suit (Dreyer, 2003:716). Nouwen did not base his pastoral care on the newest psychological techniques; he rather believed that pastoral care is more about spiritual care. Nouwen believed in the link between pastoral care and spirituality; providing care that helped people makes sense of their situation in the presence of God (Dreyer, 2003:716). Nouwen provided pastoral care from his own experiences. Therefore, Nouwen's pastoral care was deeply imbedded in his own struggles to make sense of his life in the presence of God. O'Laughlin (2005:10) explains that Nouwen's pastoral care was not derived from any psychological or philosophical theory; it was rather simply based on his own narrative; his

struggles to find God and his own identity. In his book *Life of the Beloved* Nouwen attempts to help a dear friend discover his own unique God-given identity. He explains that most of us are in touch with our psychological journey or our psychological “identity” (Nouwen, 1992:47). Because of the psychological age we live in, most people have learned to be articulate about their emotions; they’ve come to understand the relationship between their childhood experiences and their current behaviour. They are much more open and expressive about their sexual identities. They understand their fears and insecurities and know about the danger of projecting these onto other people (Nouwen, 1992:47). But not many people are so articulate about their spiritual journey (Nouwen, 1992:47). Yet it is our spiritual journey that defines our true God-given identity. An identity that is discovered when we hear the sacred voice that calls us the Beloved; being the Beloved of God is the core truth of our existence (Nouwen, 1992:33). Nouwen explains that our spiritual journey is encompassed in the process of becoming the Beloved of God and he asks the very important question: “Can we come into touch with that mysterious process of becoming the Beloved in the same specific way as we can come into touch with the ‘dynamics’ of our psyches?” (Nouwen, 1992:47). Our spiritual journey is all about the movements of the Spirit in our lives and Nouwen argues that these movements, although different from psychodynamics, in many ways intersect and connect with the dynamics of our psyches. (Nouwen, 1992:47). In the process of becoming the Beloved, the Spirit’s movements is expressed every day in our lives and in our struggles and we need to develop certain disciplines to recognize and respond to these movements (Nouwen, 1992:47). It is in developing these disciplines that Nouwen finds it useful to compare our spiritual journey to the Eucharist.

4.2.1.1 The Eucharist in Henri Nouwen’s pastoral care.

According to Robert Jonas, it was his fascination with the Eucharist that drew Nouwen into his boy-priest fantasy in the first place (O’Laughlin, 2005:24). O’Laughlin (2005:24) speaking about Nouwen, states: "Besides the writing of spiritual books, the Eucharist was to be his passion and his life's work, a holy ritual in which he would stand in communion with the world and with God". The Eucharist became a strong foundation for Nouwen's existence, and it became a dominant theme in many of his writings. In his book *Life of the Beloved*, Nouwen compares his own spiritual journey to the Eucharist. He explains:

“To identify the movements of the Spirit in our lives, I have found it helpful to use four words: taken, blessed, broken and given. These words summarise my life as a priest because each day, when I come together around the table with members of my community, I take bread, bless it, break it and give it. These words also summarise my life as a Christian because, as a Christian, I am called to become bread for the world: bread that is taken, blessed, broken and given. Most importantly, however, they

summarise my life as a human being because in every moment of my life somewhere, somehow the taking, the blessing, the breaking and the giving are happening. I must tell you at this point that these four words have become the most important words of my life. Only gradually has their meaning become known to me, and I feel that I won't ever know their full profundity. They are the most personal as well as the most universal words. They express the most spiritual as well as the most secular truth. They speak about the most divine as well as the most human behaviour. They reach high as well as low, embrace God as well as all people. They succinctly express the complexity of life and embrace its ever-unfolding mystery. They are the keys to understanding not only the lives of the great prophets of Israel and the life of Jesus of Nazareth, but also our own lives. I have chosen them not only because they are so deeply engraved in my being, but also because, through them, I have come into touch with the ways of becoming the Beloved of God.” (Nouwen, 1992:47-48)

Nouwen explains that if we are to respond to the call of becoming who we truly are, we need to claim the truth of being the Beloved (Nouwen, 1992:43). The process of becoming the Beloved is the process of discovering the fullness of love and truth and according to Nouwen (Nouwen, 1992:43) it is searching for something that to a degree one have already found. We cannot search for beauty, love, and truth if it was not already known to us in the deepest of our being. Nouwen states that deep down all of humankind have inner memories of the paradise we have lost. He states:

“We were innocent before we started feeling guilty; we were in the light before we entered into the darkness; we were at home before we started to search for a home. Deep in the recesses of our minds and hearts there lies hidden the treasure we seek. We know its preciousness, and we know that it holds the gift we most desire: a life stronger than death” (Nouwen, 1992:43)

The Eucharist in its fullness may provide a framework to understand and describe the spiritual journey of each person. Just as the bread is taken, blessed, broken, and given, so are each person taken (chosen) by God, blessed by God, broken by the world and the people around them, but always used by God and given to others for the benefit of God's Kingdom.

During the Eucharist, the cup is held, lifted, and drank from and in each person's spiritual journey, we must hold our lives, lift it up for all to see and drink it (Nouwen, 1996a:23). The story of the cup as the story of life is described by Nouwen in his book *Can you drink the cup?* In this book, Nouwen once again likens our spiritual journey to the Eucharist; he explains that the story of the cup is not just his story, but also the story of life (Nouwen, 1996a:23). Jesus asks his

friends John and James the sons of Zebedee "can you drink the cup that I am going to drink?" and Nouwen explains that it is a question that each of us must ask ourselves; can we drink the cup that Jesus drank? It is a spiritual challenge that will radically change our lives if taken seriously.

"Can you drink the cup? Can you empty it to the dregs? Can you taste all the sorrows and joys? Can you live your life to the full whatever it will bring?" (Nouwen, 1996a:23).

Nouwen believed that he should embrace his own sorrows and joys, it is his own brokenness that allows him to be divided among and given to others for the benefit of God's Kingdom. From this perspective, Nouwen based his pastoral care on helping others heal from his own woundedness.

4.2.2 Woundedness and vulnerability in Henri Nouwen's pastoral care

Nouwen openly confessed to his own brokenness. He confessed that at times he felt like he was losing his own identity (Ford, 2002:37-38). As discussed in Chapter one, Nouwen wrote about his longing for intimacy and his inability to perceive and receive simple friendship in his book *Gracias!* (Nouwen, 1993:131). In a letter to John Bamberger, Nouwen admitted that on a deep level he questioned whether God truly loved him (Higgins & Burns, 2012:59). The psychotherapist and close friend of Nouwen, Robert Jonas, believed that Nouwen's relationship with his parents might have contributed to his feelings of self-doubt, since it left him with many unmet needs (Moschella, 2016:76-77). In Nouwen's relationship with his father, he experienced a sense of unworthiness (Moschella, 2016:76-77). It was from this brokenness that Nouwen ministered to other "broken" people. While searching for his own identity, Nouwen was able to help others discover their identity. In counselling, Nouwen was able to effectively create a safe place for people's vulnerabilities, because he was so open about his own (Nouwen, 2016:8). He responded to people by drawing on his own lived experiences (Nouwen, 2016:9). Nouwen did not hide his own vulnerabilities and weaknesses, instead he used them to form a bond of solidarity with those he cared for (Nouwen, 2016:9). Nouwen openly revealed the source of his own vulnerability by referring to his relationship with his father which left him feeling uncertain and shameful, he felt like he didn't quite measure up to his father's standards (O'Laughlin, 2005:20).

In the next section I will discuss how Henri Nouwen's pastoral care can inform the formation of a child's narrative identity by discussing how his theology and perspectives on pastoral care pertain to a childist narrative theology of praxis.

4.3 Henri Nouwen and a childist narrative theology of praxis

This section will describe Nouwen's perspectives; the implications of these perspectives as they apply to a childist narrative theology of praxis will be discussed in Chapter 5, where praxis guidelines will be formulated.

4.3.1 Narrative praxis – Henri Nouwen and the power of storytelling

Nouwen strongly believed in the power of storytelling. He believed that it is important for us to reflect upon and tell our stories. In fact, Henri Nouwen's theology was deeply embedded in the narrative; he never concerned himself with theories of subjectivity or objectivity, he was more concerned with the personal (Ford, 2002:15). He contemplated his own life, he reflected on his own story, on what he was living, his experiences, and his feelings and then he made it available to others in his many writings. He states:

"Writing can be a creative and invigorating way to make our lives available to ourselves and to others. We have to trust that our stories deserve to be told – we may discover that the better we tell our stories, the better we will want to live them." (Henri Nouwen in Ford, 2002:15).

To the end of his life he believed even more strongly in the importance of personal stories. In some of his reflections from 1993 he says: "What mostly come to mind are stories. I know I have to write stories, not essays with arguments, quotes and analysis, but stories which are short and simple and give us a glimpse of God in the midst of our multi-faceted lives. But writing stories, real stories, human stories, God-given stories will ask the most of me" (Henri Nouwen in Ford, 2002:27). In his book *Can you drink the cup?* Nouwen explains that just as we hold the cup of the Eucharist, we must be able to hold our lives (Nouwen, 1996a:29). Holding our lives includes reflecting on it. It is never enough to just live; we must know what we are living. If we do not reflect upon our lives, our lives are not worth living. Every person must have an opinion on their own lives; they must contemplate, discuss, and evaluate their own lives (Nouwen, 1996a:29). Nouwen says: "The greatest joy as well as the greatest pain of living come not only from what

we live but even more from how we think and feel about what we are living" (Nouwen, 1996a:29).

From Nouwen's writings it becomes clear that he knew the importance of constructing a life story narrative, he was not just a Catholic priest, but also a psychologist and therefore he understood all about narrative identity and how important it was not just for psychological health, but also for our spiritual journey. In Chapter 2, a comprehensive definition was given for the construct of narrative identity (McAdams, 2011:99):

"Narrative identity is the internalized and evolving story of the self that a person constructs to make sense and meaning out of his or her life. The story is a selective reconstruction of the autobiographical past and a narrative anticipation of the imagined future that serves to explain, for the self and others, how the person came to be and where his or her life may be going"

The ability of a child to develop a personal life story directly contributes to the development of autobiographical reasoning, narrative identity, self-regulation, and social problem solving (Westbya & Culattab, 2016:260). As discussed in section 4.2.1.1, Nouwen established an effective framework in his books, "Can you drink the cup?" and "Life of the Beloved - Spiritual Living in a Secular World" that can guide us to reflect, contemplates and tell our own unique life story using spiritual imagery. A child's life story must be portrayed, reflected on, evaluated, and discussed. In order for a child to form a life-giving narrative identity, the child must first be encouraged and equipped to contemplate and tell his story by providing him with age-appropriate communication tools. Nouwen's spiritual imagery of the Eucharist may be useful in this regard to demonstrate spiritual concepts and provide a child with a tool with which he can contemplate and discuss his own spiritual journey. The value of the Eucharist for our spiritual journey is also discussed by Ackermann (1998) in her article "Becoming fully human". Chapter 5 will refer to the work of both Nouwen and Ackermann to elaborate more on the implications of the Eucharist for identity formation in children.

4.3.2 Praxis of age-analysis - Henri Nouwen's perspective on children

When writing about children in particular, Nouwen portrays children in two ways. First of all, he tells parents to view their children as guests, but also friends; children come to you, stay for a while, and then leave (Nouwen, 2006:94). They never belong to their parents, they must never be viewed as the property of their parents, they are human beings in their own right (Nouwen, 1994:159). Nouwen explains that children really are strangers who demand hospitality, they then become our good friends, just to leave again to carry on their journey (Nouwen, 1994:159).

Nouwen's perspective on children as friends may be reflected on by also referring to the work of Swinton (2000), who writes about friendship in community. Swinton (2000:105) discusses the prejudices of the church towards mentally disabled people and call for an inclusive community where the intellectually disabled people are not seen as objects of charity, but rather as friends. Swinton's perspectives can also be applied on children who are many times seen as lesser people with limited intellectual capabilities. Swinton quotes Jürgen Moltmann who said:

"Friendship unites affection with respect. In friendship we experience ourselves for what we are, respected and accepted in our own freedom. Through friendship we respect and accept people as people and as individual personalities" (Moltmann as cited in Swinton, 2000:105).

Swinton's work in conjunction with Nouwen's views will be further elaborated on in Chapter 5, where the aim is to provide guidelines to adults towards life-denying and life-giving ways of being and doing in the process of children's narrative identity formation.

Secondly, Nouwen views children as gifts. He explains that children are gifts from God, given to us (Nouwen, 1994:159). We are to offer them a loving and safe harbour where they can grow to inner and outer freedom. "They bring immense joy and immense sorrow precisely because they are gifts. And a good gift, as a proverb says, is "twice given." The gift we receive, we have to give again" (Nouwen, 1994:159). As gifts we must treasure our children in the knowledge that they belonged to God first and that we will be asked to return them when the time comes. The work of Bunge (2006) may be useful in Chapter 5 in order to further elaborate on children as gifts. Bunge (2006:561) explains:

"Children are depicted in a host of ways in the Bible, not only as ignorant, capricious, and in need of instruction and discipline, but also as gifts of God, signs of God's blessing, and models of faith. Moreover, the studies show that children have played more complex and diverse roles in families, communities, and religious life than has often been assumed. Although at times powerless and marginal, they nevertheless influence many aspects of community life"

In order for adults to truly appreciate the value of children, they must become aware of their thinking about the humanity of children and be able to abandon all prejudices against children. Children are often treated as undeveloped adults, they are often treated as adult's property, not yet fully human with very little rights of their own. Adults may be inclined to ignore their experiences or treat them as childish or immature. Adults may often think that children are too

immature to truly understand or make sense of their own experiences and feelings, therefore their stories may not have any merit. These thoughts are rooted in adultism and can be very harmful towards children's identity development. Children can become "the other"; the ones that do not belong, the ones that must be subordinated and controlled. Ackermann (1998:15) explains that there are problematic responses to seeing a group of people as "the other"; one of these is that "the other" becomes people with no selfhood, no history, and no story. Ackermann (1998:26) calls for a covenanted Eucharistic community that is united at the Lord's Table. Ackermann provides a somewhat different perspective on the Eucharist. Where Nouwen uses the sacrament to depict the spiritual journey and purpose of each person as seen in section 4.2.1.1, Ackermann uses the sacrament as a call for people to unite and let go of their prejudice against "the other". Ackermann (1998:27) states:

"For the Eucharist to have meaning in our lives, we need to feel its powerful pull to the radical activity of loving relationships with those who are different. The One who calls us to the table knows our differences. The One who issues the invitation and asks us to make peace with one another when we come, knows full well just how difficult that can be. The call to full humanity is nothing less than the call to grapple daily with the challenges, implications, and surprises of seeking to be in relationship with each other in all our difference and otherness, in the fullness of our humanity."

Chapter 5 will elaborate more on Ackermann's argument about the importance of relationships in "difference and otherness". She also highlights the potential of "difference and otherness" for life-giving relationships. On this topic Henri Nouwen also provides us with valuable insights. He explains that the hardest spiritual task for all of us is to be able to live without prejudices (Nouwen, 2006:95). The implications of Ackermann's research for children's identity formation will be brought into conversation with Nouwen's pastoral care towards formulating praxis guidelines in Chapter 5.

4.3.3 Praxis of gender analysis – Henri Nouwen's gender identity confusion

The life of Henri Nouwen can once again provide us with valuable insights on how to navigate the gender concerns children are currently facing. Henri Nouwen struggled with gender identity confusion. He felt like he didn't belong, and he experienced strong feelings of self-rejection because of his sexuality. Nouwen had a sensitive temperament; he was quite insecure and anxious, and he quickly picked up on subtle conflicts. Because of this, he experienced a sense of unworthiness where his father was concerned. Nouwen's father was an energetic, proud, and independent man who encouraged his boys to be strong and make it on their own (O'Laughlin, 2005:20). Yet Nouwen was a soft-hearted boy like his mother, he was smart and possessed

great social skills but he was terrible at sport, uncoordinated, and clumsy (O'Laughlin, 2005:20). He didn't feel like he fitted the traditional mould of being a man, he didn't feel like he belonged with other men, his interests and strengths were not typical of the male gender. This situation is typical of what many adolescents experience today. Yarhouse and Sadusky (2020:163) tell the story of Andi, who attended a youth conference. Andi sat together with other teenage girls and listened to the speaker talking about a myriad of common girl experiences. The speaker spoke about makeup, nails, hair, and boys. Most of the girls sitting next to Andi were able to relate to all these female topics, they laughed and applauded. All the while Andi could not relate to any of these topics, she felt like she didn't belong. Afterwards she was able to confess to one of the youth workers that she felt like an alien among the girls; she could not relate to any of their interests and she felt like she didn't belong. These feelings lead to Andi experiencing gender confusion. She went to that youth conference desperately looking for God, she knew that he loved her and she wanted to know him more. But she felt like she didn't fit in with the other girls, she didn't know where she fit in the Body of Christ. Her confusion about her gender terrified her and made her feel like she will never belong in the church. There are many stories similar to Andi's story where boys and girls feel like they don't fit into the narrow structures defined by the community and also by the church for a specific gender. Many boys and girls do not fit within the traditional mould leading to feelings of shame and rejection but also to gender confusion. Some of these teenagers will identify themselves as gay and some will consider becoming transgender. Children who have been sexually abused may also experience confusion with regard to their sexuality. As explained in Chapter 3, boys who were sexually abused by a male perpetrator are especially at risk of gender confusion and often report that they experience extreme confusion about their sexual identity coupled with extreme shame (Maikovich-Fonga & Jaffee, 2010:8). In some cases, these boys may conclude that they are gay. In other instances, children are forced to assume a specific role. As discussed in Chapter 2 these roles are linked to their gender, for example, a girl may become daddy's little mistress-wife and a boy may become a little boyfriend-husband that must satisfy his mother's need for attention and support (Young-Bruehl, 2012:239). Therefore, abuse may lead to a person associating his hurt and shame with his specific gender; he may even blame his abuse on the fact that he is a boy. Being a boy or being a girl may be linked to negative life-story events that may form an overarching theme leading to gender identity confusion.

Although Henri Nouwen did not experience abuse, he struggled with his sexuality. In fact much of Nouwen's suffering was connected to his own gender identity confusion. Ford (2002:prologue, xv) states that Henri Nouwen was a priest who was also gay. Yet Nouwen himself never admitted to being gay in any of his own writings. From a very young age he struggled to accept the painful knowledge of his sexuality, to him it was a handicap, a cross to

bear (Ford, 2002:141). Yet in his writings, Nouwen managed to think beyond the anguish it caused him; he always managed to think and write beyond what he himself could actually live (Ford, 2002:prologue, xv). Through his own books he reminded himself of how God wanted him to live. Nouwen was focused on his spiritual journey, he stayed celibate all his life and he gave his sexual struggles to God. Yarhouse and Sadusky (2020:165) explain how important it is to use the correct language when we help children navigate their gender confusion; the names we label them with will also create their reality. In the past people who identified themselves as gay or transgender was labelled an abomination in the church. Yarhouse and Sadusky (2020:165) states: "if we reduce a person to a word like *abomination*, we contribute to a reality and way of relating that is quite different than if we think about them as someone God wants to have a relationship with as his "beloved."" When we minister to children and youth who struggle with their sexuality we must remember that the names we use have important implications for ministry, these names are the reality we declare over youth who adopt various emerging gender identities (Yarhouse & Sadusky, 2020:165). Nouwen never placed a label on himself, he never called himself gay, and instead he labelled himself as the Beloved of God. Through his pastoral care, he also labelled other people "the Beloved of God". Nouwen's pastoral care offers us a new name, a new label, an identity that fits us all regardless of our gender; we are the Beloved of God.

4.3.4 Henri Nouwen's perspectives on adult-child relationships

As explained in Chapter 3, adult-child relationships are a key determining factor of identity formation in children. It can either contribute towards developing and confirming a child's God given identity or it can cause a child to feel rejected, unloved, unworthy, and powerless. Power as a relational factor can either empower a child or render them powerless and vulnerable without the ability to control what happens to them. Nouwen explains that adults have the tendency to see the children as their property and therefore they abuse their power over children, but in fact children should rather be viewed as strangers (Nouwen, 2006:94). Parents or guardians must desire to explore every facet of their children, get to know them as if they were strangers, then discover their strengths and weaknesses, their gifts and talents and guide them towards maturity while allowing them to make their own decisions and learn from their own mistakes (Nouwen, 2006:94). Nouwen must have learned a lot from his own parents and grandparents, who also strongly supported his gifts and his dreams. Throughout his childhood years his grandmother provided him with all sorts of priestly objects such as chalices and priestly robes in order to encourage him to reach his dreams, but she also encouraged him to a life of prayer and personal relationship with Jesus (Nouwen, 1996a:17). The adults in Nouwen's life fully supported his desire to become a priest and their encouragement contributed greatly to

Nouwen fulfilling this dream and living a life with Jesus for others (Nouwen, 1996a:17-18). The safe and loving environment Nouwen grew up in made it easier for him to truly discover his own God-given identity. Nouwen believed that all parents or caregivers must find a way to create an anxiety-free home for children to grow, helping them to cultivate confidence in who they are in order to enable them to live a life of freedom and to choose their own path (Nouwen, 2006:94). Nouwen also explains:

“Being a parent is like being a good host to a stranger! While we may think that our children are like us, we are continually surprised at how different they are. We can be gladdened by their intelligence, their artistic gifts, or their athletic prowess, or saddened by their slowness in learning, their lack of coordination, or their “odd” interests. In many ways we don’t know our children. We didn’t create our own children, nor do we own them. This is good news. We don’t need to blame ourselves for all their problems, nor should we claim for ourselves their successes. Children are gifts from God. They are given to us so that we can offer them a safe, loving place to grow to inner and outer freedom. They are like strangers who ask for hospitality, become good friends, and then leave again to continue their journey.” (Nouwen, 1994:92)

In his book *Life of the Beloved*, Henri Nouwen writes about the many children who never really feel welcome in this world, these are the children who ask the question "Am I really wanted?" (Nouwen, 1992:56). They mostly look for the answer in their broken relationships with their parents; parents whose words and attitudes often portray rejection and disappointment. Nouwen describes the innermost feelings of children whose relationship with their parents are characterized by a lack of affection and love; these feelings include low self-esteem leading to depression, despair, and even suicide (Nouwen, 1992:56). These feelings of low self-esteem can persist throughout life and can only be alleviated by the revelation that we are God's Beloved, chosen by Him long before we were known by our parents (Nouwen, 1992:56). This can only be revealed to children through loving adult-child relationships. The perspectives gained from this Chapter will be used in Chapter 5 to guide pastoral care with adults and children towards relationship wellness in adult-child spaces.

4.3.5 Body of Christ praxis – Henri Nouwen on becoming the Beloved

Henri Nouwen had a beautiful childhood with parents who loved him and supported him. From a very early age the adults in his life cultivated within him a joyful spirit, a deep devotion for Jesus, and a desire to pray (Nouwen, 1996a:17). Together with his parents and his grandmother, Nouwen studied the Word of God and learnt that everyone was uniquely designed by God to

fulfil a special purpose. From a very early age Nouwen was able to experience his own calling; a strong sense of vocation grew within him and he knew he wanted to be a priest at the age of 6 years old (Nouwen, 1996a:17). Nouwen is one of the few people who understood his role in the Body of Christ; even as a child he knew he had a specific purpose to fulfil. Within the Body of Christ he was uniquely chosen to preach and to live a life with Jesus for others (Nouwen, 1996a:17). Nouwen would have struggled to come to this realization without the adults in his life recognizing and supporting his God-given gifts and his calling. Nouwen felt that his grandmother was his biggest supporter, he explains that she discovered his budding vocation to the priesthood and then she encouraged him to follow his dream by providing him with all sorts of props such as a priestly robes, chalices, and plates to play the role of priest; the role she knew he would one day play in the Body of Christ. Nouwen's grandmother contributed greatly to shaping Nouwen's childhood narrative in such a way that the story of his childhood pointed towards the mission and calling of his life. The support of the adults in Nouwen's life strengthened his sense of identity and for the rest of his life, by staying true to his God-given identity; Nouwen was able to live a life that truly honoured God. Not every child is as privileged as Henri Nouwen. Some children grow up and feel cursed; cursed by God because of the abuse, losses, handicaps, and misfortunes that they suffered (Nouwen, 1996a:72). The immense suffering that they had to endure during their childhood may easily be understood as a sign of God's wrath and punishment (Nouwen, 1996a:72). Without the loving support of adults, children will find it very difficult to understand their role within the Body of Christ and they may not feel like they belong at all. They may think of God as fearful, punitive authority or as an empty, powerless nothing (Nouwen, 1994:16). But Nouwen explains that "Jesus' core message was that God is neither a powerless weakling nor a powerful boss, but a lover, whose only desire is to give us what our hearts most desire" (Nouwen, 1994:16). It is this message that children must hear. They need to realize that they too are the Beloved of God. They must not base their identity on other people's actions towards them, they are not what they do or achieve, and they are not a victim, a weakling, unworthy of love. This may be what the world wants them to believe but an identity based on worldly criteria is a false identity" (Nouwen, 1994:103). Jesus came to announce "You are not what the world makes you; but you are children of God." (Nouwen, 1994:103). Nouwen further states:

"The spiritual life requires a constant claiming of our true identity. Our true identity is that we are God's children, the beloved sons and daughters of our heavenly Father."

(Nouwen, 1994:104)

Only when we embrace the truth of our belovedness can we take our rightful place in the Body of Christ. When we embrace our belovedness, we become aware that no one is excluded but

that God loves all of us equally as his beloved children. Nouwen (1994:18) explains that this realization helps us to experience ever more fully the solidarity of being a part of the human family interminably bound by God who created us to take part, all of us, in the marvellous light of His Kingdom. As children of the same God, we belong to each other and we must help and love each other as brothers and sisters (Nouwen, 1994:18). A crucial part of helping and loving each other is sharing our unique God-given gifts and talents with each other, using our gifts to build up the Kingdom of God. Nouwen (1992:112) believed that each person has a unique set of talents and gifts, every person must explore their own uniqueness by asking themselves “What is my unique talent?” We must not just ask the question “What can we offer each other?” but also “Who can we be for each other?” (Nouwen, 1992:112). In asking these questions we must be freed from the voices who tried to convince us that we are worthless. These voices may have come from the abusive adults who played an important role during the formative years of our lives. Nouwen (1992:30-31) explains that the world is filled with voices telling us that we are no good, ugly, despicable and a nobody and when we believe them, we fall into the trap of self-rejection. But Nouwen states “Jesus wants to set us free, free from everything that prevents us from fully following our vocation, free also from everyone who prevents us from fully knowing God’s unconditional love” (Nouwen, 1994:88). Chapter 5 will elaborate on the unique gifts given to each child and provide guidelines towards cultivating the gifts of the Spirit in children.

4.3.6 Embodied praxis – Henri Nouwen’s perspective of the body

In chapter 3 it was explained that when it comes to child abuse, the victim as well as the perpetrator many times follow a dualist approach when it comes to how they view the body (Reynaert, 2015:195). The body is seen as detached from the soul; an object that is inferior to the soul and the spirit (Reynaert, 2015:195). Because the body is objectified, it may make it easier for the perpetrator to justify abuse of the body. In the history of Christian thought the perspective developed that the body is inferior to the spirit and sinful. This perspective is problematic since it may encourage abuse of power on the side of the adult (Reynaert, 2015:195). For this reason, it is very important that we rethink the way in which we view the body and start to promote an appropriate image of the body as portrayed by Scripture. Henri Nouwen’s view of the body may assist in creating a different perspective. Nouwen (1996b:28) states that we should bring our bodies home; this means that the body needs to be prepared for the resurrection. We must go beyond the body's superficial desires for love by moving towards integration and unity with our spirit (Nouwen, 1996b:28).

This view of the human body as portrayed by Henri Nouwen will be used in Chapter 5 to define a Christian perspective that promotes the worth of the body and the importance to respect the

body as the temple of the Holy Spirit. In many ways, our view of our own body plays a crucial role in identity formation. It is not just an object that must be fed and trained; it is deeply connected to our souls and to our spirit and must therefore be loved and respected.

4.4 Chapter summary

This chapter tells fragments of the story of Henri Nouwen. Nouwen grew up with loving adults who supported him and guided him towards his true identity in Christ. As a result, Nouwen lived what he preached; a life that honoured God. His life story is an inspiration and a challenge to the rest of us to live true Christianity. From this chapter it becomes clear that Nouwen's theology and his approach to pastoral care can greatly contribute towards the aim of this research study. His life story and theology provide many valuable perspectives towards life-giving identity development. This chapter provided a broad overview of Nouwen's pastoral care as it pertains to narrative identity development. The methodology developed in Chapter 2, a childist narrative theology of praxis, was utilized as a framework and further highlighted certain aspects of Nouwen's pastoral care that is relevant to the aspects that shape children's identity development, namely their narrative, age, gender, relationships with adults, relationship with God, and their embodied nature. The next chapter will determine how the theological praxis of Nouwen's pastoral care as discussed in this chapter can be used to create awareness and educate adults about life-denying and life-giving ways of being present in the process of children's narrative identity formation.

CHAPTER 5: DEALING WITH CHILDREN'S NARRATIVE IDENTITY FORMATION: A CHILDIST NARRATIVE THEOLOGY OF PRAXIS

The goal of this chapter is to formulate praxis guidelines for creating awareness and educate adults about life-denying and life-giving ways of being and doing in the process of children's narrative identity formation. This goal will be achieved by combining the theological praxis of Nouwen's pastoral care discussed in Chapter 4 with other literature in order to, among other things, promote the affirmation of children's God-given dignity and acknowledge children's voices, agency and lived experiences in their narrative identity formation.

This chapter will firstly aim to create awareness on the current treatment of children in Africa and South Africa. The next section will discuss how children are viewed and treated in African cultures.

5.1 African childhood as social construction

There are many diverse cultures across Africa and this section does not make any claim that these cultures are essentially the same. But referring to certain cultures as examples may aid in understanding the way in which many children are viewed in Africa and South Africa. This in turn may assist in raising awareness with regard to adultist practices towards children in Africa. Mahlangu (2016) writes about the place of a child in Africa, explaining that children occupy an important place in society in most African cultures. The birth of a child in Africa is not just a physical event but also has religious significance; indicating a great blessing (Mahlangu, 2016:1). In some African cultures, marriage is only recognized as fully legal after the birth of the first child; the birth of the first child validates the marriage (Mahlangu, 2016:2). In many rural African societies, children are seen as the glory of marriage and having many children is an important achievement (Uka, 1985:190). In fact having many children afforded a man a higher social standing (Uka, 1985:190). Mahlangu (2016:2) further explains that the birth of a child is an important event among the Northern South Sotho people of South Africa. The birth of a child means another member of community, but it also enhances the status of the new mother and father to parenthood, the only way of attaining the full status of a woman or man. The birth of a child is also a fulfilment of the duties of the mother's group to the father's group and it attests to the manhood of the father and preserves his lineage (Mahlangu, 2016:2). The rights connected with birth centres around the mother and the child, the mother is provided with a new status and the child is also given status as a new member of the group (Mahlangu, 2016:2). The place of children in Africa cannot be understood without understanding the African concept of personality and community. In African society a strong sense of community plays a very important role

(Mahlangu, 2016:3). A person does not exist as an individual, but rather as part of a family and community (Mahlangu, 2016:3). Every person is bound to the people around them and identity is rooted in community and defined by a person's contribution to community (Mahlangu, 2016:3). In Africa, a child's identity may be defined within a "string of kinships and relatedness in community relationships" (Mahlangu, 2016:3). Children are not seen as fully individual persons, but rather as an extension of their parents and families. Uka (1985:190) explain that in some African cultures, parents believe that children are an extension of their lives and that they immortalize their names. Where Western culture places great emphasis on individual interest and individual rights, the African culture places emphases on the collective interests of the community and the child is expected to forsake individual good in order to serve their families and larger community (Mahlangu, 2016:4). Mtata (2009) agrees with Mahlangu about how children are viewed in Africa and states that even theological reflection of the child in Africa is based on the communitarian construction of personhood (Mtata, 2009:85). Mtata (2009:85) however argues that this construction of personhood is inadequate when dealing with children and other people who tend to be marginalized. He states that "claiming that the African person is communitarian conceals the hierarchical construction of personhood which reduces children to less-than-full persons" (Mtata, 2009:85). He further argues that African theology tends to presuppose the person as an object rather than a subject (Mtata, 2009:86). In African thought, children may be viewed as property and they may be valued not for who they are but rather how they may benefit the adults in their families and communities. This faulty assumption of what constitutes a child's personhood many times lead to the marginalization of children since they may be considered lesser beings. Mahlangu (2016:4) refer to girls in Malawi as an example of this adultist view of the personhood of children. In the name of cultural practices, girls in Malawi face gender discrimination, domestic violence, sexual abuse, and more (Mahlangu, 2016:4). This problem is encountered throughout the African continent (Mahlangu, 2016:4). An article written by Molla (2018) affirms that children in Africa faces serious risk because of cultural community views and practices. Molla (2018:189) refers to children in Ethiopia and state that they face risk because of child trafficking, forced migration, illegal adoption, harmful traditional practices, vulnerability, orphanhood, and rape. All of these risk factors are part of a larger "social, economic, political, traditional, spiritual, religious, sexual, patriarchal and cultural problem" (Molla, 2018:189). According to Molla (2018:191) sexist, cultural, and traditional practices contributes the most to the risks that children are facing. Even the religious teaching in Ethiopia gives power to men in a patriarchal system that undermines the place of women and children contributing to female genital mutilation, premature marriage, and other damaging prenatal practices concerning children and their mothers (Molla, 2018:191). A communitarian view of personhood may be positive in that it stimulates the capacity within people to express compassion, dignity, harmony, reciprocity, justice, and humanity in order to strengthen

community (Mahlangu, 2016:3). At the same time, it may have fatal consequence for vulnerable groups such as children and women, as can be seen in Ethiopia. Young girls are expected to serve their family and community by getting married and bearing children at an early age. Molla (2018:192) explains that parents in Ethiopia often force their female children to get married at an early age in order to keep their name in the community and to maintain the economic stability of their families. Molla (2018:192) states:

"This form of patriarchy and sexism robs women of their voices from an early age. They do not have an equal voice in their married lives. Their primary role is reproduction. This patriarchal community makes decisions about female bodies, sexuality and fertility. The Ethiopian community caring system that is shaped by patriarchal and sexist norms and values exposes Ethiopian children to emotional, spiritual and physical risk".

Unfortunately, this problem is present throughout Africa and although cultures within South African is not necessarily similar to cultures in the rest of Africa, many children in South Africa are also subjected to cultural practises that undermine their value (Mahlangu, 2016:4). In Chapter one I explained that children and their contributions are often manipulated, dominated, undermined, or even overlooked because of their age. There are cultural believes and practices in South Africa that may have an adverse effect on the identity formation of children. In South Africa was and often still is a saying "children must be seen and not heard". This saying clearly demonstrates how children's contributions can be undermined and even discouraged within South African cultures. Furthermore, it is unfortunate that child abuse and neglect are becoming a proliferating norm in South Africa. What may be an alternative to this communitarian view of personhood? The individualistic view promoted elsewhere cannot be the answer since God created us to be in community and to love and serve each other. The key to helping children discover their personhood is to help them discover the person God created them to be (Mahlangu, 2016:4). Each child was created in the image and likeness of God; created with an abundance of potential. Each child was given God-given gifts and abilities with which to serve their greater community (Mahlangu, 2016:4). Mahlangu (2016:4) explains:

"childhood should be a special time for "nurturing children's God given gifts and abilities with the help and encouragement of family, friends and extended family members, children should find childhood a time to discover the person God created them to be"

The following sections will contribute praxis guidelines that may assist adults towards helping children discover their true God-given identity.

5.2 Childist narrative theology of praxis in pastoral care

Pastoral care with a focus on children's narrative identity formation will be discussed by referring to Nouwen's pastoral care and applying it to the relational interactions between children and adults

5.2.1 Narrative praxis - Enabling narration

The following section will discuss narrative praxis in pastoral care towards facilitating the narration of children's stories.

1. Encourage children to tell their stories from their own perspective

As seen previously, Henry likens our lives to the cup of the Eucharist; just as we hold the cup, we must also hold our lives, just as one may reflect on a glass of wine we must contemplate, discuss, and evaluate what we are living (Nouwen, 1996a:29). It is equally important for children to also reflect upon their own lives, especially if they are vulnerable to adultism and marginalization. The stories they tell can reveal their experiences and concerns, which in turn can liberate them (Wall, 2007:52). Wall (2007:52) explain that childism takes into account the experiences and concerns of children not from the point of view of an adult, but from children's own point of view. Therefore, it is very important to overturn adult assumptions about children's stories and ensure that the actual experiences of children are revealed through their stories. It is important when we encourage children to tell their stories that we listen intently and attentively without correcting or overruling them and without imposing our own view.

2. Observe and analyze the narrative process

Ganzevoort (2011:221) argues that within any narrative there should be six dimensions present. These dimensions can be kept in mind when guiding a child to tell their life story. Firstly, there must be some kind of structure when a child tells his or her story; there must be a sequential connection between the different elements included in the story. Such a structure may be highly coherent or it may consist of individual fragments that may not seem connected; yet as the story unfolds, a story line must emerge through causal, temporal, or thematic connections (Ganzevoort, 2011:221). This process of an emerging storyline is called emplotment. Secondly, the adult must listen closely to the perspective from which the story is told, the perspective will become clear through the narrator's selection and interpretation of specific events. According to Ganzevoort (2011:221), the perspective from which the story is told will help the adult to effectively evaluate the narrator position within their own story. The third dimension is tone. The

tone of the story will tell us whether it's a comedy, romance, tragedy, or irony. Through assessing the tone of the narration it can be determined whether the narrator is hopeful and committed to his or her story (Ganzevoort, 2011:221). The fourth dimension is role assignments, which will tell us the specific role and attributes the narrator assigns to him or herself and the other characters in the story. In other words, does the narrator view themselves as the hero or the heroine, the caregiver or the victim? (Ganzevoort, 2011:221) This role assignment is crucial for the development of the narrator's identity. Identifying the conflicts and dynamics between the different roles is a crucial part of narrative care. The Fifth Element is relational positioning, referring to the fact that the narrator always uses his or her story to establish and influence relationships. Ganzevoort (2011:221) states "A narrative approach to social and religious interaction sees actions and stories as performative rather than representative. The central question is what the narrator wants to accomplish in the relation by telling the story". In other words, when children tell their story, what do they hope to accomplish in terms of their relationship with the audience? The final dimension that must be taken into account is justification for an audience and this refers to how the narrator accounts for his or her life in front of significant others (Ganzevoort, 2011:221). It may be possible that the story changes with the audience; it may differ from one audience to another and the story may also be judged differently from one audience to another. Ganzevoort (2011:221) explains that the six dimensions may be useful in observing and analyzing the narrative process.

3. Share your own vulnerabilities – be a wounded healer

Henri Nouwen was famous for his title as 'wounded healer', while counselling others he was never afraid to reveal his own vulnerabilities and weaknesses. In fact, he drew on his own lived experiences and referred to his own weaknesses to form a bond of solidarity with those he cared for (Nouwen, 2016:9). Because he was so open about his own vulnerabilities, Nouwen was able to effectively create a safe place for people to also reveal their struggles. Ackermann (2006:231-232) states that the caregiver who listens to the story should always practice deliberate and empathetic listening, but at the same time they should enter the story and affect the process of change through sharing their own story. When adults are able to share their own struggles and vulnerabilities with children, they open the path for children to also freely share their experiences. In the book *Interweaving, conversations between narrative therapy and the Christian faith* expert counsellors share their knowledge and experience of narrative pastoral care with children (Cook & Alexander, 2008:208-224). One of these counsellors, Michelle, suggests that during the counselling process, the counsellor must never act as an expert but must rather take a collaborative role by respecting the child's knowledge about themselves. She states:

"Narrative ideas help us to be especially aware of the power dynamic. I tried to reduce the power differential by being transparent myself in a two-way process. So if we play a game, I reveal something of myself too. We might play emotional noughts and crosses where children have to identify a feeling and say when they felt like that. I'll play that too and I'll equally show examples from my current experience and from when I was a child so that they can identify with my emotions as well. I join in with dressing up and role play" (Cook & Alexander, 2008:220).

In the same way, every adult that finds themselves in the role of a caregiver to a child should open up and reveal their own struggles and insecurities. This will go a long way in stimulating a child's boldness to also open up and talk freely without feeling judged by the adult.

4. Nurture an alternative identity story through connection

Nouwen (2006:65) states:

"Care is something other than cure. Cure means "change." A doctor, a lawyer, a minister, a social worker—they all want to use their professional skills to bring about changes in people's lives. They get paid for whatever kind of cure they can bring about. But cure, desirable as it may be, can easily become violent, manipulative, and even destructive if it does not grow out of care. Care is being with, crying out with, suffering with, and feeling with. Care is compassion. It is claiming the truth that the other person is my brother or sister, human, mortal, vulnerable, like I am. When care is our first concern, cure can be received as a gift. Often we are not able to cure, but we are always able to care. To care is to be human".

Caring is especially important when working with children. Sue, an expert children's counsellor explains that counselling is a rope with three cords; the first cord is knowledge, the second is experience, but the third cord comes from the heart and consists of a spiritual connection - it is the love empathy and respect that you afford a child under your care (Cook & Alexander, 2008:210). These three cords of counselling is also applicable to pastoral care where adults not only counsel children but journey with them in their doing and being in this world. Children experience themselves differently when they experience nurturing love (Cook & Alexander, 2008:211). When a child realize that the adults listening to their story really likes them and is truly interested in how the story unfolds, they start to feel validated and experience themselves as likeable (Cook & Alexander, 2008:211). The most important praxis guideline to any adult interacting with children is to treat that child with love, respect, and empathy while listening to their lived experiences.

5. Affect change in the narrative through externalisation

The main goal of narrative pastoral care is to help a person rewrite their story. The stories people tell will define their identity, but narrative pastoral care effects changes in identity by helping people to tell their stories differently. When working with children in particular to help re-write their narrative, Michelle explains:

"Children who for example have been exposed to pornography or experienced abuse or witnessed domestic violence need us to open an alternative landscape to the dominant one they live in, while validating who they are within their current context. Their dominant context, while perhaps being normalised, is not necessarily the preferred one. The child may need support to realize this and to develop a different relationship to this difficult context" (Cook & Alexander, 2008:215).

One way in which to support the development of this different relationship is by externalizing the problematic experiences or feelings. A child must come to understand that their problems or feelings are not who they are, and they can separate it from their identity. Sue (Cook & Alexander, 2008:217) explains that God wants to free us from our problematic experiences and feelings, externalising these are very much a Biblical concept. She states:

"Because I see that He wants me to get free of the burdensome things I carry. I don't believe He just lifts it right off and you're all fancy free. But it means that who I am is not all that big bad pain. That separates the identity of me from the weight of what I carry. I can see the weight of things and the negative-ness of things that people carry as a result of experiences rather than as a result of being intrinsically at fault or being born like that. One of the big realisations for me was that God himself has created me and that is who I go back to" (Cook & Alexander, 2008:217)

Helping children to externalize their problems will go a long way towards helping them discover their God-given identity, which in turn will affect their behaviour. Instead of trying to change a child's behaviour, one must rather affect change at identity level (Cook & Alexander, 2008:218). it's about changing the way the child views themselves, when they for example no longer view themselves as shy or angry - because these feelings and problems have been externalized - they are more likely to stop acting shy or angry.

6. Explore age-appropriate tools to help children tell their story with more ease

Children sometimes struggle to communicate with words alone. Sometimes they do not have the available words, or they have insufficient words to explain what they think and feel. For this reason, games, art, and drama can be utilised to help children tell their story. Children can more easily express themselves through play, role play, art, and sand play (Cook & Alexander, 2008:208). Children counsellors make use of various props such as a whiteboard, for example giving the child the whiteboard pen and making them the boss of the whiteboard may encourage them to draw or write things that they have experienced. Children are able to express their feelings and experiences much easier through the use of tangible things such as magnets or puppets; they should be given the choice of things they want to use (Cook & Alexander, 2008:209). Another way in which children can express their stories is through the use of role play and dress up (Cook & Alexander, 2008:220). In this way drama helps children to express themselves and others as characters in their story. Games such as emotional noughts and crosses may help children to identify specific feelings that they may not have been able to express previously (Cook & Alexander, 2008:220). Another technique is the use of the child's imagination, for example asking the child: "If I was a butterfly sitting on the wall of your house, describe to me what I would see?" (Cook & Alexander, 2008:222). It is not the goal of this section to investigate these age-appropriate tools in detail; rather this praxis guideline merely aims to make adults aware of alternative ways to help children communicate.

7. Employ Biblical narratives and spiritual imagery to guide children in their narration process.

Cook and Alexander (2008:124) discuss the use of Biblical narratives within narrative pastoral care. They explain that there might be a tendency to avoid the use of the Bible during pastoral care due to overly directive and manipulative approaches that's been used in the past. They rather propose the use of Biblical narratives without imposing "overly propositional and narrowly-defined meanings to them" (Cook & Alexander, 2008:125). They elaborate on the narrative theology principle of "standing under scripture" where you expose yourself to Scripture with an understanding of what the Biblical narrative is saying about your particular circumstance (Cook & Alexander, 2008:125). When we invite a person to stand under a Biblical story, we allow this story to shape the view and experience of this person (Cook & Alexander, 2008:126). Although it is important to remain true to the original purpose of the Biblical narratives, this approach allows you to interpret and engage with the Bible in a range of possible ways through asking questions such as "as you consider this issue, is there a biblical story that really seems relevant or significant to you?" or "as you sit with this story what is it that stands out or seems important for you right now?" (Cook & Alexander, 2008:126). This narrative theology principle of

"standing under scripture" was effectively applied in Godly Play, an approach that was developed to help children generate meaning from the interplay between their own life experiences and the Biblical stories. Dillen (2020:154) explain that the aim of Godly play is to bring children together in a playful context where biblical stories and aspects of the Christian faith like the sacraments are shared. Godly play motivates children to go on their own quest, exploring biblical stories without adults imposing predetermined answers and truths (Dillen, 2020:154).

Berryman (2009:41), the founder of Godly Play and the author of *Teaching Godly Play*, explains:

"Godly play invites the children to make the journey of discovery for their personal theological meaning rather than memorizing concepts that others have discovered at their own arrival point. The importance of this participation in the discovery is that, for religious education, the art of how to make existential meaning with Christian language is what needs to be learnt - not simply what the meaning is. Why? The meaning needs to be as personal at the limits to our own knowing and being for it to be truly relevant." (Berryman, 2009:41)

Children are invited to contemplate the stories and share their own ideas and interpretations. Godly play is valuable because it offers children the chance to share their own thinking and bring their own contributions to the discussion (Dillen, 2020:154). Dillen (2020:154) also explains that Godly play provides children with a language and a traditional framework Berryman (2019:22) explains:

"If learning to be a Christian is like learning a language, then teaching children to speak Christian is more complicated than it used to be. Families don't go to church as much as they once did, and the culture does not naturally support Christian speech or Christian ways of thinking about the world. When children seldom hear the Christian language spoken fluently, they can't absorb its structure, function, and content. They learn only bits and pieces to carry with them into adolescence"

Teaching children the Christian language through Godly play can help them to relate to the suffering and pain of Bible characters, but it also brings hope and redemption, helping children to see the bigger picture, the good that can come from their suffering. Godly play includes reading a story from the Bible while the children sit in a circle. At the end of the story the children are invited to engage in a 'wondering process' (Berryman, 2019:23)

During the wondering process the storyteller sits back and invites the children to wonder along with him asking questions such as “I wonder what part of this story you liked best?” “I wonder what part is the most important part?” “I wonder where you are in the story?”” (Berryman, 2019:24). Other more specific questions can be asked for example, if the parable of the mustard seed was read, the wondering process may include questions such as “I wonder if the birds in the story have names? I wonder if the birds are happy? I wonder how the birds found their way to the great shrub? I wonder how they knew where to build their nests?” (Berryman, 2009:47). Through Godly play, children are invited to experience the presence and the mystery of God. Godly play also makes use of props such as for example a wooden ark and wooden animals to demonstrate the story of Noah. These tangible items together with the ‘wondering process’ provide children with appropriate communication tools to truly engage with the story. As children grow older the ‘wondering questions’ may become more applicable to their identity and their own story for example when reading the story of Elijah fleeing to Mount Sinai, one might ask: “Can you relate to how Elijah is feeling? Was there ever a time you felt like you wanted to die? What event or circumstances have made you feel like this?” In this way, through the use of Godly play, adults can make use of Biblical narratives to help children tell and make sense of their own narrative.

Henri Nouwen made use of spiritual imagery such as the Eucharist to help him make sense of and express his own life and identity. He refers to the bread of the Eucharist when he speaks about our brokenness (Nouwen, 1992:47-48). The dividing of the bread among the people of God helps us to make sense of our brokenness; there is now purpose in being broken. The wine of the Eucharist helps us to understand why we need to reflect on and evaluate our lives (Nouwen, 1996a:29). Spiritual imagery such as these may also be helpful in explaining certain important concepts to children, such as the purpose of enduring pain and suffering (being broken).

The next section will suggest praxis guidelines pertaining to the praxis of age analysis.

5.2.2 Praxis of age-analysis – Opposing discrimination

The following section creates awareness towards age-related discrimination and provides adults with guidelines towards avoiding adultism and treating children as “the other”.

1. Create a safe environment where children are guided to make their own choices

As seen in Chapter 3, Sundhall (2017:165) states that children are many times treated differently and poorly because age is unfortunately a common and accepted reason to do so. Hierarchies and social order are created based on age where the adult has the power; the adult is at the top of the hierarchy. This social order includes discrimination, and children are being organized, excluded, and disciplined because of ideas and norms regarding age (Sundhall, 2017:165). Children are often treated as undeveloped adults, they are often treated as adult's property, not yet fully human with very little rights of their own. This statement was clearly demonstrated in the story of Amelia and Cindy; their father viewed them as his property to do with as he pleased. Because of their age they were helpless to stop the abuse. On this point, Nouwen (1994) explains that we didn't create our own children and therefore we do not own them, they belong to God. When we look at our children, we should never feel like we have the right to force our own way or our own opinions onto our children. Our job is to offer our children a safe environment in which they can grow to inner and outer freedom, an environment where they are guided into making their own choices and finding their own way (Nouwen, 1994:159).

2. Forego all prejudices against children and confirm their dignity

As explained in Chapter 3 and 4, children can become "the other"; the ones that do not belong, the ones that must be subordinated and controlled. Cindy and Amelia are examples of children who were treated like "the other"; as if they had no selfhood, no history, and no story; they were only faceless characters in their father's story, born for the sole purpose of bringing him pleasure. When children are treated this way, it will have a profound effect on their identity.

Schachter and Ventura (2008:452) explain that children and especially adolescents must be able to integrate with their society in order to develop a healthy identity. This integration include the processes of "connecting, joining, and being recognized by adult society" (Schachter & Ventura, 2008:452). It is important for children to be recognized and valued by the adults in their lives, their stories and experiences must reflect a sense of belonging and worth. If we are to help children discover their own narrative identity, it is vital that we do not see them as "the other"; adults must be able to forego all their predefined ideas and prejudices against children. The first step towards foregoing our prejudice against children is to become aware, confess, and lament our own tendencies towards viewing and treating children as lesser human beings (Ackermann, 1998:22). Nouwen (2006:95) explains that the hardest spiritual task for all of us is to be able to live without prejudices. Many times we may not even be aware of our own prejudices against other people; we may believe that we see all people as equals. But it is in our

spontaneous thoughts, uncensored words and spur-of-the-moment reactions that our deeply rooted prejudices still surface (Nouwen, 2006:95).

"Strangers, people different from us, stir up fear, discomfort, suspicion, and hostility. They make us lose our sense of security just by being the "other." Only when we fully claim that God loves us in an unconditional way and look at "those other persons" as equally loved can we begin to discover that the great variety in humanity is an expression of the immense richness of God's heart. Then the need to prejudge people can gradually disappear" (Nouwen, 2006:95)

Ackermann (1998:24) explain that it is our stories that reveal our differences, but it is also our stories that will connect us in relationship. Children are different from adults, they do not think, talk, or act in the same way as adults but it is in their "otherness", in their being different that they are able to make a unique contribution to the world they live in.

When we can finally realize that this variety is part of the expression of God's heart, we will come to understand that God can reveal His purposes through the thoughts, words, and actions of children. Through children, God expresses a part of His own identity. We need to become aware of how our own spontaneous thoughts, uncensored words and spur-of-the-moment reactions reflect adultism towards children. Only then can we start developing life-giving ways of being and doing in the process of children's narrative identity formation. Children's God-given dignity must be acknowledged and affirmed. In our dealings with children, we must realize that they reflect something of the image of God; they are authentic human beings, they are fully human. One of the best ways to affirm a child's God-given dignity is to acknowledge their voices, agency and lived experiences. This brings us back to the importance of letting children tell their stories. Ackermann (1998:24) explain that it is our stories that reveal our differences, but it is also our stories that will connect us in relationship. When we are open and willing to hear each other's stories we are drawn towards relationship. Ackermann (1998:24) states: "Telling our stories, hearing the stories of others allows our stories to intersect. Sometimes they conflict, accuse and even diverge greatly; sometimes they attract, connect and confirm. As our stories touch one another, they change and we too are changed". When we allow children to tell their stories from their perspective without imposing our own predefined ideas, when we recognize and confirm children's lived experiences, it will contribute significantly towards life-giving ways of being and doing in the process of children's narrative identity formation.

3. Treat children as friends and create an inclusive community that permeates equality, acceptance and genuine valuing

Chapter 4 discussed Nouwen's pastoral care with regard to children. Nouwen (1994:159) suggested that children must be treated as friends; this perspective may be elaborated on by referring to the work of Swinton (2000). Swinton (2000:105) believe that friendship within community is the physical manifestation of God's love. Jesus was an example of someone who was willing to give sacrificial all-embracing friendship to the people around him regardless of their "differences and otherness". Swinton (2000:105) explain that friendship within the context of community permeates equality, acceptance, and genuine valuing. He provides three important elements that apply to a friendship with people with intellectual disabilities. These elements may also be relevant to friendship with children. Firstly, a friendship with "the other" must always be dependent on freedom and mutuality (Swinton, 2000:105). Friendship must be desired by both parties and children have the right, as all of us, to reject an offer of friendship. There may be valid reasons for a child to reject an offer of friendship and Swinton (2000:105) explains that it is very important to ensure that if this happens, their rejection of friendship should not become the source of their own rejection. Secondly, friendship to children must be based on a genuine commitment (Swinton, 2000:105). Friendship should not be developed out of pity or duty but from a genuine desire to know one another and share in each other's lives (Swinton, 2000:105).

"Only authentic sacrificial friendship will allow us truly to enter into the lives of others and allow them entry into our own lives. Authentic friendship also means transference and sharing of authority and power. Our friendships must be based on the concept of mutuality and the enablement of self-advocacy. We must move away from the conception that somehow 'we know best' and concentrate on developing ways of supporting the disabled individual as they struggle for their independence, even if this entails times of sadness, disappointment and defeat" (Swinton, 2000:105 - 106)

In the same way, when we develop a friendship with a child, we must establish a sharing of authority and power, children must be able to advocate for themselves, and be allowed to make their own choices (within reasonable boundaries and with the needed enabling measures), even when these choices lead to disappointment and defeat. Lastly, true authentic friendship with a child must aim for the preservation of the child's individual identity (Swinton, 2000:106). Friendship should come from a place of appreciation, of valuing the differences between one another. These differences should be acknowledged but never 'negativized' into difficulties (Swinton, 2000:106). In this way, acceptance and belonging can be cultivated. Swinton

(2000:106) states that the fresh perspective "the other" brings to our lives will encourage us to cultivate a community consisting of individual and diverse human beings, who respect one another's similarities and differences. In such a community people will flourish as a unified people, who respect, love, and accept each other. Swinton (2000:106) states that we should strive to build communities where "each person is valued for what they are and given their own space from which they can begin to experience the inclusive and limitless love of God and contribute to the development of his church".

4. Treat children as gifts from God, never losing sight of their God-given dignity

Nouwen (1994:159) viewed children as gifts from God and because they were given to us by God, they belonged to God first. Therefore we must treasure them and realize that we will have to return them when the time comes (Nouwen, 1994:159). Nouwen (1994:159) explains that it is important to provide children with a loving and safe home in which they can grow to inner and outer freedom. Bunge (2006) elaborates on this view of children as gifts. Because children were given to us as gifts from God, it is important to understand how God views children. The Bible depicts children in a variety of ways; in the past many Biblical scholars chose to only focus on children as sinful creatures (Bunge, 2006:563). John Calvin, for example, said that children are a 'seed of sin', John Arndt claimed that in children lies hidden and 'evil seed of the serpent', and Jonathan Edwards describe children as more hateful than vipers (Bunge, 2006:563-564). These destructive and negative views of children have led to harsh approaches to child rearing within the Christian tradition, which in some cases have led to child abuse and even death (Bunge, 2006:564). Thankfully, in recent years scholars have started to publish a wider range of Biblical perspectives on children; they have uncovered that children are not just sinful, but that they have potential for both good and evil (Bunge, 2006:561). Children are called to obey and honour their parents, but sometimes God's purpose for them is to deceive their parents and leave them behind (Bunge, 2006:561-562). The Bible tells the story of Jacob who deceived his father and left his parents in order for God's plans to be fulfilled. Although children are many times depicted as victims, they are also depicted as God's chosen agents (Bunge, 2006:562). Joseph was only 17 years old when God chose him to go to Egypt, David was still a youth when he was anointed God's chosen king, and Samuel was still a boy when God chose him as one of the greatest prophets. Jesus provide us with the best example of how we are supposed to speak about and treat children, even though children had very little worth in Jesus's time, he blessed them, welcomed them, embraced them, touched them, healed them, he laid his hands on them, and he prayed for them (Bunge, 2006:562). Jesus spoke highly of children as seen in Matthew 19:14 where he tells the people that the Kingdom of Heaven belongs to children. Jesus rebuked those who turned children away and portrayed children as models of faith (Bunge, 2006:562).

Furthermore, in Luke 9:48 Jesus tells his followers that everyone who welcomes a child in His name welcomes Jesus himself and God who sent him (Bunge, 2006:562). There are many different perspectives of children in the Bible that reminds us of the God-given dignity of children. Adults should strive to treat children as Jesus treated them; with respect love and dignity, always remembering that they were created in the image of God.

5.2.3 Praxis of gender-analysis - navigating gender-identity confusion

The following two sections will provide adults the praxis guidelines on helping children navigate their questions and concerns with regard to their gender.

1. Guide children towards accepting themselves as unique beloved children of God

As seen in Chapter 4, when it comes to helping children navigate gender-identity confusion, it is important not to place a label on a child such as calling them gay or transgender. Yarhouse and Sadusky (2020:165) explain that the names we label children with, will create their reality, it is therefore important to use the correct language when we help children navigate their gender confusion. Nouwen provides us with an effective language with which we can help children create a new reality, a new story. Through his pastoral care, he labelled people as “the Beloved of God”. Nouwen’s pastoral care offers us a new name, a new label, an identity that fits us all regardless of our gender; we are the Beloved of God. Therefore, cultivating a relationship between children and God must take prominence over correcting or judging their sexuality. A relationship with Jesus mediated by an authentic community is the best resource we can offer any confused child or adolescent navigating their gender identities (Yarhouse & Sadusky, 2020:164). The power of a personal relationship with Jesus should never be underestimated, it will have a profound influence on shaping an individual’s identity (Yarhouse & Sadusky, 2020:164). Therefore Yarhouse and Sadusky (2020:166) suggest that we offer a new name, a new identity to the children and the adolescents who struggle with their sexuality. They borrow this name from Henri Nouwen and suggest that we call them “the Beloved”. Yarhouse and Sadusky (2020:167) quote Henri Nouwen’s words in “The Return of the Prodigal Son: A Story of Homecoming”:

“All this time God has been trying to find me, to know me, and to love me. The question is not “How am I to find God?” but “How am I to let myself be found by him?” The question is not “How am I to know God?” but “How am I to let myself be known by God?” And, finally, the question is not “How am I to love God?” but “How am I to let myself be

loved by God?" God is looking into the distance for me, trying to find me, and longing to bring me home." (Henri Nouwen in Yarhouse & Sadusky, 2020:167)

Because of his struggles with his sexuality, Nouwen had a tendency to reject himself, but when he was able to proclaim his own belovedness, he was able to live a life that honoured God. In his book "Beyond the mirror", Nouwen shares his profound change in perception:

"My tendencies toward self-rejection and self-deprecation make it hard to hear these words truly and let them descend into the center of my heart. But once I have received these words fully, I am set free from my compulsion to prove myself to the world and can live in it without belonging to it. Once I have accepted the truth that I am God's beloved child, unconditionally loved, I can be sent into the world to speak and to act as Jesus did." (Nouwen, 2001:57-58)

Chapter 4 tells the story of Andi, who felt like she never belonged among children of her own gender. Children like Andi need to understand that they are the beloved of God, they are wanted, they too belong in God's Kingdom. It is through this truth that they will receive the conviction and the strength to live a life that honours God. Adults should aim to guide children towards accepting themselves as unique beloved children of God, they should not strive towards becoming something they are not, but should rather desire to be who God made them to be.

In some cases where children were abused their gender played an important role in the abuse. Girls are sometimes abused by their fathers because they are female. In the same way boys may be exposed to adultism from their mothers because they are male. As discussed in Chapter 2 and again in Chapter 3, Young-Bruehl (2012:239) explains that children are many times forced to assume a specific role. These roles are linked to their gender, for example, a girl may become daddy's little mistress-wife and a boy may become a little boyfriend-husband that must satisfy his mother's need for attention and support (Young-Bruehl, 2012:239). This tendency is clearly demonstrated by the story of Amelia and Cindy; they became the possessions of their father; they were forced to assume the role of his little mistress-wives, a role that was very gender specific. This may lead to self-rejection and the inability to love oneself. Adults must help children to accept that they were created as a female or male in the image of God. God did not make a mistake; they can accept themselves as unique beloved daughters and sons of God.

2. Speak in a way that is thoughtful, curious, and honouring of the dignity of people

Yarhouse and Sadusky (2020:135) explain that adults must become aware of how their faith responds to complicated matters such as gender-identity confusion and then they must be very careful about how they communicate this response to children. The way in which adults discuss these complicated issues with each other at home or at church will give children a very good indication of what the adults in their lives believe with regard to issues such as being gay or transgender (Yarhouse & Sadusky, 2020:135). Adults must always be aware of what they communicate and how they communicate. Our communication towards the children under our care will determine whether they can communicate openly and honestly with us. Yarhouse and Sadusky (2020:135) explain this principle effectively:

“The way you personally talk about transgender people will absolutely inform your teen’s level of comfort in sharing their journey with you. If you talk in a way that is mocking, condemning, or dismissive, your child will likely expect the same from you about their story. In many cases, they will refrain from asking you their questions or sharing that they wrestle with gender identity questions at all. If you talk in a way that is thoughtful, curious, honouring of the dignity of people, and dispassionate, you may find that they will trust you as a guided resource in their own questions”

5.2.4 Paxis of adult-child relationships – cultivating loving relationships

Chapter 3 discussed the influence of adultism on children and section 3.5 explained that when the first relationship a young child experience is characterized with adultism, this child may have difficulty attaching to his or her primary caretaker. In this case the primary caretaker becomes a source of fear and harm instead of love and protection, a situation that has an extensive impact on a child's emotional and social development and hence their narrative identity formation. When a child is abused, he or she may experience persistent feelings of anxiety and anger and may find it very hard to trust anyone. Furthermore, children who have been exposed to neglect may lack the ability to regulate their emotions and curb impulsivity. Adults who are in a relationship with children who have been previously exposed to adultism should expect difficult, explosive, and challenging behaviour. The question is how should a caring adult handle this type of behaviour? Cook and Alexander (2008:218) recommend that adults should not focus on changing behaviour but should rather aim to effect change at identity level; helping children to get a different sense of themselves. Helping children to identify and solve problems that causes difficult behaviour will help them to view themselves differently as able and confident individuals.

The following sections will provide adults with some guidelines towards life-giving ways of being and doing in their relationships with children.

1. Empathise by continually encouraging children to share their experiences without imposing your own view

In Section 2.1.2.4, feminist theology as defined by Ackermann in dialogue with childism as defined by Wall presented us with important principles for a childist theology of praxis. One of these principles included 'Mutuality is the touchstone for relationships and is concerned with self-sacrificial love; rather focusing on the feelings and needs of the other'. The adult-child relationship must be characterized by self-sacrificial love on the part of the adult (Wall, 2007:70). Adults must be willing to respond to the vulnerability and the acute needs of children by opening themselves up to the perspectives and experiences of these children (Wall, 2007:70). This principle is also reflected in the work of (Greene, 2014). The book written by Greene (2014), *The Explosive Child*, provides valuable insights towards understanding and parenting children with challenging behaviour. Greene (2014:9) explains that difficult, explosive children lack the skills to not be challenging; these skills include flexibility, adaptability, frustration tolerance, and problem solving. Greene (2014:82) recommends using a collaborative approach when working with explosive children. This approach should be focused on solving problems rather than trying to modify behaviour and these problems should be solved collaboratively rather than imposing the will of the adult. It is important to always identify the source of the challenging behaviour; what caused the behaviour? Then it is vital to address this cause, not in the heat of the moment but calmly before the behaviour arise (Greene, 2014:82). Green provides three steps towards helping children solve problems. The first step is well aligned with the mutuality principle; it is called the empathy step where the adult must gather information from the child. During this step adults must focus on the feelings, thoughts, and needs of children. Adults must be willing to sacrifice their own opinion and be willing to listen to children without imposing their own thoughts and ideas. Greene (2014:101-102) explains:

"Some adults have never thought it was especially important to gather information about and understand a kid's concern or perspective. That's why many kids-perhaps most, unfortunately-are accustomed to having their concerns ignored or dismissed by adults who have concerns of their own, or who feel that they already know what's getting in the kid's way on a given problem. Dismissing kids' concerns isn't ideal to begin with, but if you dismiss the concerns of a behaviourally challenging kid you're going to increase the likelihood of a challenging episode. Furthermore, kids who are accustomed to having their concerns dismissed tend to be far less receptive to hearing the concerns of others."

If you don't understand the concerns that are fuelling your kid's challenging episodes, then those concerns won't get addressed and the episodes will persist."

The next step is for the adult to define the problem and communicate his or her concern and perspective about the same problem back to the child (Greene, 2014:91). The third step is to then invite the child to discuss and agree on a solution that is realistic and mutually satisfactory (Greene, 2014:91). The last two steps will be discussed in following sections. This solution must address both the concerns of the adult and the child (Greene, 2014:91). With this approach, the adult helps the child to develop problem solving skills which will ultimately lead to a confident and happier child. Instead of just modifying behaviour, the adult affected change at identity level.

It seems like Nouwen also believed that adults should be careful to make assumptions about the feelings, thoughts, and actions of the children they interact with. As seen in Chapter 4, Nouwen (2006:94) explains that parents or guardians must desire to explore every facet of their children, get to know them as if they were strangers. Nouwen's suggestion to view children as strangers may be very effective when adults start gathering information from children. Viewing the child in that context as a stranger will help adults to not make assumptions about what the child is feeling or thinking and to not impose their own view on the situation. Refer to Section 5.2.1 for suggestions on age-appropriate tools that adults can use to gather information from children.

2. Reflect on and speak to children about their experiences while also engaging in self-reflection

Another principle established in Section 2.1.2.4 for a childist narrative theology of praxis is: 'Adults must engage in self-reflection, critique and analysis of the meaning and praxis of relationships through the lenses of power and human responsibility'. When adults start to engage in a conversation with children about their diverse experiences, it is important for adults to acknowledge that they too have experienced problems, they too have made mistakes. Greene (2014:91) suggests as a second step in the problem solving approach that the adult should define the problem (particular difficult or troubling experience) of the child and communicate his or her concern and perspective about the problem back to the child. This will also help the child to clarify the problem, which makes a solution easier. This step comes after empathizing with and listening to a child's experience. During this step it is helpful to follow Nouwen's advice. As also discussed in section 5.2.1.3, Nouwen (2016:9) advocated healing others by being open about his own vulnerabilities. He was willing to share his own struggles with the people under his care and by doing so he was able to create an environment where there is no shame and no judgement and where people felt free to share their own difficult

experiences. When adults are able to listen empathetically and then share their own struggles and vulnerabilities they open the path for children to also freely and without shame share their experiences (Ackermann, 2006:231-232). It is also important for adults to help children externalise their problematic experiences or feelings. A child must come to understand that their problems or feelings are not who they are, and they can separate it from their identity. Refer to Section 5.2.1.5 for more detailed discussion on externalization. Identifying the cause of troubling feelings, thoughts and behaviour is the first step towards helping children overcome these difficulties. A child must be able to overcome difficulties and struggles if they want to change their story from problem-saturated to being filled with victories.

3. Guide children through sharing authority and power and by enabling self-advocacy

Children must be guided towards solving the problems that cause negative experiences and troubling behaviour. This can only be done by someone who is in relationship with the child. This relationship can be guided by the relationality principle defined in Section 2.1.2.4, which states: 'Relationality must be built on constructive division of power and it must be expansive, dynamic and socially transforming'. Greene (2014:102) advocates a different use of authority. He explains that when an adult gather information, while understanding, and empathizing with that child, he/she does not lose any authority, rather, they gain a problem solving partner.

When guiding children towards solving the cause of their troubling experiences, it is important to let the child understand that you want to solve the problem with him rather than imposing your own solution (Greene, 2014:121). It is important to let children take responsibility for solving their own problems by giving them the opportunity to generate a solution. The key is to collaborate with the child under your care and not impose your own will. Here the final principle developed in Section 2.1.2.4 is applicable 'Mutual Interdependence must be present and both parties must be willing to work on the relationship in order for it to flourish'. In the same way, both parties must be willing to solve the problem in such a way that the concerns of both children and adults are addressed. Too often adults believe that the only person capable of coming up with a good solution is them. They hold on to the notion that children are not capable or mature enough to advocate for themselves, this may be true in some cases but not always (Greene, 2014:121). Either way, children must be guided towards self-advocacy; the only way this can be accomplished is by letting children think and speak for themselves. This study has often referred to pastoral care for guidance on life-giving and life-denying ways of being and doing in the process of children's narrative identity development. Therefore, every adult who interacts with children, by applying these guidelines, assumes the role of a pastoral carer. By referring to Henri Nouwen's pastoral care, Dreyer (2003:724) discusses the guiding function of

pastoral care and explains that when pastoral carers provide guidance, they must be sure to let people make their own choices by following their own convictions. It is not the place of the pastoral carer to impose his or her own convictions on people (Dreyer, 2003:724). Pastoral carers should help people to develop their independence by taking responsibility for their own problems (Dreyer, 2003:724). Also guiding someone is not an opportunity to patronize or exercise power over them; therefore guidance should not be coercive in any way (Dreyer, 2003:724). Although the pastoral carer is free to express their own convictions, they must leave space for people to come to their own unique understanding of their life situation and God. Dreyer (2003:724) states:

“The guiding function of pastoral care should be more than simply an analysis of the situation and mirroring it to the other. In this setting the credibility of the caregiver will be determined not only by his or her psychological competency, but by authenticity and the willingness to listen to and accept the stories of others”

In listening and accepting the stories of children, adults demonstrate that children are accepted for who they are. Children's stories and their perspectives on their experiences should not be dismissed and neither should their thoughts on solving their own problems. These thoughts and possible solutions should be valued, guided, and nurtured.

4. Create an accepting and anxiety-free environment for children to grow, helping them to discover who they are in Christ

Children must be accepted for who they are. Unfortunately, there are many children who ask the question “Am I really wanted?” These children don't feel welcome in the world because the words and the attitudes of the adults in their lives often portray rejection and disappointment (Nouwen, 1992:56). When children are rejected by the adults who are supposed to love them, they may easily develop low self-esteem leading to depression and despair. This research study has effectively established that the words and actions of adults will influence a child's narrative identity development. A child's identity is many times informed by an adult's opinion over the child's life. Nouwen (1992:56) explains that adults should teach children that their identity can only be informed by the One who created them. Children must understand that they are the Beloved of God and this can only be revealed to them through loving adult child relationships. Children should not just be accepted for who they are, but also for who they can become. In Nouwen's story we see how the adults in his life supported his gifts and his dreams. They not only recognized his gifts and God's purpose for his life, but they also encouraged Nouwen to pursue his gifts and his dreams. The story of Joey told in Chapter 3, Section 3.2.2 also

demonstrates that the support and encouragement of caring adults can make all the difference in a child's life. Joey was a little girl who was exposed to violence from her stepfather. Although Joey felt the fear that accompanied the abuse of her mother and she experienced the emotional abuse from her stepfather's words and insults towards her, there were always adults present to bring things into perspective, to remind her that she is loved and accepted. Joey was exposed to the guidance of loving and supportive adults and that made all the difference. Adults must be able to recognize children's unique gifts and talents and then support and encourage them. Nouwen believed it's the responsibility of every adult to create an anxiety free environment for children to grow; helping them to discover who they are and enabling them to choose their own path and live a life of freedom.

5.2.5 Body of Christ Praxis – Placing children in the Body of Christ

The following section will provide praxis guidelines towards helping children understand their role within the Body of Christ. These guidelines will attempt to address the issues identified in Section 3.6. Relevant literature together with Henri Nouwen's pastoral care as discussed in Section 4.3.5 will be applied in the formulation of the guidelines.

1. Guide children towards developing an appropriate and truthful image of God

In order for any child to understand their position within the Body of Christ they need to have an appropriate image of God. They need to understand that God loves them and that they have been chosen for a unique purpose, they are worthy and valuable. A child who has been abused may not have this image of God. As seen in Chapter 3, Section 3.6, Kosarkova *et al.* (2020:8) explain that children who have been exposed to childhood trauma are less likely to view God as loving, present, and forgiving. Childhood trauma may produce cognitive distortions about God (Ross, 2016:429). This may be due to the fact that children often project their feelings of shame and unworthiness to a spiritual dimension, concluding that they are not loved or accepted by God (Kosarkova *et al.*, 2020:8). These thought tendencies can be connected to the locus-of-control shift as discussed by Ross in Section 3.6. Ross (2016:430) explains:

"In families experiencing severe chronic trauma, with varying mixtures of sexual, physical and emotional abuse, neglect, family violence, chaos and loss of primary caretakers, a very different lesson is learned: I am bad; I am causing the abuse; I deserve the abuse; I am unworthy and unlovable. The child shifts the locus of control, from inside her parents, where it really is, to inside herself. This happens automatically because of how the child's mind processes information. Once the locus-of-control shift is in place, it creates an illusion of power, control and mastery: I am in charge; I am

causing the abuse; the cause is contained within me; I can stop the abuse by deciding to be a good girl".

When the child is then unable to stop the abuse, she blames herself and God. She becomes angry at herself and starts to project the image of her abuser on to God (Ross, 2016:432). Her image of God is based on her image of her abuser, this may be because she believes God could have stopped the abuse if he wanted to and he decided not to. When we engage in a conversation about God with children who have been exposed to adultism, we have to challenge the child's view of God. The following views must be challenged:

- I am bad and sinful and is or was being punished by God.
- I am not worthy of God's love.
- God singled me out for abuse and deliberately placed me in an abusive family.

These views can be challenged by providing concrete examples to the child of other children who have suffered, showing her that she was not singled out for abuse, but that there are many others who are victims of abuse (Ross, 2016:432). In our conversations with children, it is important not to impose our own view onto the child but rather to move the child from certainty about their view of God towards curiosity of who God really is. It is important to not be prescriptive but rather ask children questions to help guide them from certainty to wonder (Truter & Kotzé, 2005:979). Questions such as "do you think God loves some children and hate others?", and "does the Bible not teach us that God loves all His children?". It is important to teach children that God does not control our actions and that we were born with a free will. When we therefore make wrong choices, we have to live with the consequences of that choice. The consequences of our bad choices and behaviour will also have consequences for the people around us. God has given us a free will and therefore he will not limit or erase the consequence of our actions. These truths can be taught to children by asking them questions such as "do you think God is a puppeteer who controls His children like puppets?" This question can be asked while demonstrating to the child what it means to be a puppeteer, using puppets in this context can be a fun way to demonstrate the concept of freedom of choice. We can ask the child: "Does the truth of the Bible not teach us that God is a loving God?" We can then explain that because God loves us, He therefore gave us the gift of freedom of choice. It is important to keep asking questions in order to stimulate the child to think for herself. We may ask "do you like being free to do and say whatever you like?" and "do you agree then that freedom is a gift from God?" We can then identify the person who have abused the child either physically or emotionally, if this person for example is the child's father, we can start asking the child: "Do you think your father also received the gift of freedom of choice?", "Can you see that

your father decided to abuse you, it was his choice and God did not control his actions?", "When you got hurt, it was a consequence of your father's choices. Can you understand why God did not limit or erase those consequences?", "Can you understand that if God removed the consequence of your father's actions, he would have had to remove your father's gift of freedom of choice?", "Do you think the abuse you suffered is your father's fault because he chose to inflict the abuse? Is it therefore fair to say that God is not the one who punished and hurt you? That He did not want you to suffer the consequence of your father's choices?" and "Don't you think God felt sad when he saw what your father's choices did to you?" These questions may help a child to think differently about God's role in her abuse while creating a context in which the child can have a new experience of who God is. It is important to help children challenge their own thinking (Ross, 2016:434). Ross (2016:435) explains that it is important that an adult do not impose their own belief system on a child, but to rather point out the contradictions and implications of the child's distorted view of God. The story of Dillan told in Section 3.2.3 demonstrates clearly how a child can form a distorted view of God based on the adultism he faced. Dillan believes that God does not love him, that God deliberately singled him out to be a child of an addict. He believes God is punishing him through his mother's actions. But Dillan needs to change his negative perception of God; he needs to understand that his history of abandonment was not punishment from God, but rather the consequence of his parent's actions. Pastoral therapy may assist in reversing the locus-of-control, shifting it from Dillan and God to Dillan's parents. Dillan's past was not a product of God's punishment, but a product of his parent's free will and their own bad choices. Therefore, Dillan's future will not be a product of God's punishment or "hate" for him, but rather a product of Dillan's own free will and his choices.

2. Develop an appropriate view of childhood and be willing to learn from children

This section aims to create awareness about an appropriate theological view of children. Adults must be aware of Biblical views of children before they can truly understand the place of a child in the Body of Christ. For this section it is important to refer back to Chapter 2, section 2.1.2.5 where the work of Wall (2010), Grobbelaar (2020) and Mahlangu (2016) were discussed. This section will specifically elaborate on the work of Grobbelaar (2020). Grobbelaar (2020:2) refers to the work of Berryman, who provides two different views of children in the Bible, he calls it the low and the high view. Firstly, the low view sees children as objects that must be taught and purified, this view dismisses children and do not see them as spiritually mature (Grobbelaar, 2020:2). This view is based on Paul's reference to children in 1 Corinthians where Paul calls on the believers to stop being like children, to stop acting in a childish way. In this metaphorical reference to children, childhood is compared to spiritual immaturity (Grobbelaar, 2020:2). Although 1 Corinthians may provide us with a good indication of how Paul viewed children,

Grobbelaar (2020:2) states that "Paul's language and ideas about childhood are more complex and nuanced than his metaphorical use of childhood in 1 Corinthians". It will therefore be an irresponsible use of Scripture to build a perspective on children and their place in the Body of Christ based on Paul's metaphors. Secondly, the high view of the child is based on Jesus' own teachings about children in the Synoptic Gospels. Grobbelaar (2020:2) explains that where Paul urged believers to stop being like children, the Gospels call on believers to become like children. Through His words and actions Jesus reveals His own perspective of children. Jesus taught that the Kingdom of God belongs to children, children are models and believers should imitate them, become like them (Grobbelaar, 2020:6). Jesus points adults towards children. Grobbelaar (2020:6) states: "In using a child, Jesus turned the usual views of childhood, the relationship between children and adults, and the roles they play in the surrounding context, upside down". Jesus teaches His disciples to become like children, giving children a high spiritual status. This view of children emphasize children's role as "teacher", Jesus acknowledges children's ability to teach adults to become who God wants them to be; it is children who changes adults into mature followers of Christ (Grobbelaar, 2020:7). This view radically transforms how adults usually view children. If adults want to help children discover their place in the Body of Christ, they must become aware of children's spiritual agency in the adult-child relationship. Adults must become willing to not only listen to stories of children but to learn from the experiences of children. (Bunge, 2012:11) states:

"The Bible, the Christian tradition, and common experience reveal that children are not just students of adults. They can also be moral witnesses, models of faith for adults, sources or vehicles of revelation and inspiration, and representatives of Jesus. They can nurture, deepen, and challenge the faith of adults"

Adults who want to help children discover their place in the Body of Christ must always be willing to become students themselves and learn from children.

3. Guide children towards understanding and embracing their Belovedness and God-given gifts

Children must be guided towards understanding their place in the Body of Christ and this includes helping children become the Beloved of God. Nouwen (1992:30) explains:

"There is that voice, the voice that speaks from above and from within and that whispers softly or declares loudly: 'You are my Beloved, on you my favour rests.' It certainly is not easy to hear that voice in a world filled with voices that shout: 'You are no good, you are ugly; you are worthless; you are despicable, you are nobody – unless you can demonstrate the opposite.'"

Helping children to become the Beloved means adults must become this voice of God telling children they are loved and favoured, they are accepted, they are unique, and chosen by God. Truly becoming the Beloved of God is about being able to identify and respond to the movement of the Spirit in our Lives. Nouwen (1992:48) describes how the Spirit of love manifests Himself in our daily struggles by using four words: taken, blessed, broken, and given. These four words can also be used to guide children towards understanding their own spiritual journey. Firstly children must understand that they are taken; they are chosen by God regardless of their circumstance. Nouwen (1992:56) states:

"Some young people even hear their mothers say 'I hadn't really expected you but once I found out I was pregnant I decided to have you anyway... You were sort of an accident' words or attitude such as these do nothing to make a person feel chosen. Our world is full of people who question whether it would have been better had they not been born. When we do not feel loved by those who gave us life we often suffer our whole life long from a low self-esteem that can lead easily to depression despair and even suicide"

It is the work of the adult to help a child reclaim the truth that they are God's chosen ones, even if the world does not choose them, they are chosen by the One who loves them with an everlasting love; a love that existed from all eternity and will last throughout eternity. These truths must be repeated to children. Scripture that speaks about our being chosen must be read to children so that they believe the truth; they have been chosen by God for a unique purpose. Secondly, children need to know that God wants to bless them. Most of the time people do not feel blessed, they rather feel cursed (Nouwen, 1992:75). A child who has suffered abuse and adultism may feel especially cursed. But loving adults can convince them of the truth of their blessedness. Nouwen (1992:75) provides two ways in which we can claim our blessedness; prayer and presence. Nouwen (1992:75) suggests that we become silent and listen to the voice that says good things about us. Scripture talks about how special and unique God has made all of us, how he longs to bless us, how he promises to protect us. We can teach children to pray by meditating on these Scripture verses, helping them to understand that God also meant these blessings for them (Nouwen, 1992:78). Secondly, we can experience God's blessings through presence; being attentive to the blessings that we receive every day (Nouwen, 1992:79). Children must be taught to recognize and receive the small blessings they receive every day. Nouwen (1992:79) explains:

"Often people say good things about us but we brush them aside with remarks such as 'Oh, don't mention it, forget about it, it's nothing...' and so on. These remarks may seem

to be expressions of humility but they are in fact signs that we are not truly present to receive the blessings that are given. It is not easy for us busy people to truly receive a blessing"

We must teach our children that they are worthy of these blessings and that they must learn to receive them. We must guide children towards what Nouwen (1992:81) calls 'attentive presence'. Attentive presence helps us to see all the blessings available for us to receive; the kind words from another person, the blessings of a blossoming tree and fresh flowers telling us of new life, the blessing of nature, music, and art (Nouwen, 1992:81). When children can be taught to truly see and receive these blessings, they will start to feel blessed. The third word Nouwen (1992) uses to describe our spiritual journey is 'brokenness'. Our brokenness is unique, it is an expression of our individuality and it will become our testimony (Nouwen, 1992:87). Nouwen (1992:91) suggests two ways to respond to brokenness; befriending it and placing it under the blessing. The first step towards healing from brokenness is not to step away from the pain, but towards it (Nouwen, 1992:93). Nouwen (1992:93) explains:

"We have to find the courage to embrace our own brokenness to make our most feared enemy into a friend and to claim it as an intimate companion. I am convinced that healing is often so difficult because we don't want to know the pain."

We must guide children not towards forgetting their pain, but towards talking about it, reflecting on it, and evaluating the good and the bad that came from it. Secondly, we have to guide children towards placing their brokenness under the blessing. Our pain can easily become a curse to us, when we experience difficulties, we ask the question "Why me?" When we feel cursed it is so easy to answer this question with "Because I am bad, I am worthless, I am being punished" (Nouwen, 1992:96). But when we are able to accept that we are the Beloved of God, we can stop seeing our brokenness as an affirmation of our fears and worthlessness and start seeing it as an opportunity to purify and deepen the blessing upon us. Nouwen (1992:98) explains:

"Physical, mental or emotional pain lived under the blessing is experience in ways radically different from physical, mental or emotional pain lived under the curse. Even a small burden perceived as a sign of our worthlessness can lead us to deep depression, even suicide. However great and heavy burdens become light and easy when they are lived in the light of the blessing. What seemed intolerable becomes a challenge, what seemed a reason for depression becomes a source of purification what seemed

punishment becomes a gentle pruning, what seemed rejection becomes a way to deeper communion"

The good things that come from brokenness is the things that strengthen us. This brings us back to the importance of narrative pastoral care, helping children re-write their stories into stories of healing, restoration, and hope. Finally, Nouwen (1992:105) discusses the fourth aspect of the life of the Beloved; to be able to give oneself to others. Children must be guided towards understanding the true joy and happiness that comes from living a life for others. We only realize how much we have to give to others when we confront our own brokenness and place it under the blessing. When we place our brokenness under the blessing, it becomes a testimony to others. Children can be taught that their brokenness and restoration can bring hope to the lives of others. It is in this fourth aspect of the life of a Beloved, where they need to identify their own unique gifts. These gifts were given to them by God, but it was strengthened and cultivated through their brokenness. These are the gifts that we have to offer to each other. Nouwen (1992:113) explains that there is a difference between talents and gifts. Talents are those abilities that help us to do special things especially well. Talents determine what we can do, but our gifts tell us who we are. Our talents determine what we can offer each other but our gifts determine who we can be for each other (Nouwen, 1992:111). Nouwen (1992:113) states:

"We may have only a few talents, but we have many gifts. Our gifts are the many ways in which we express our humanity. They are part of who we are: friendship, kindness, patience, joy, peace, forgiveness, gentleness, love, hope, trust and many others. These are the true gifts we have to offer to each other."

The best way we can cultivate these gifts in our children is to model them, talk about them and apply them in our everyday lives. We must observe our children and ask God to reveal their special gifts to us, and then we have to help our children to become aware of these gifts and provide opportunities for them to serve each other with these gifts.

In the case of Dillan, it is important that adults guide him towards realizing that God loves all His children and have a unique calling and purpose for each one. Dillan can choose to accept being part of this Body of Christ where he too will have a unique purpose, where he too is valuable and worthy. As Wall (2010:83) stated, religion from a childist perspective is stories told anew, forming part of a larger narrative always still unfolding. Each new child with his/her unique set of gifts and abilities will bring a new and unanticipated story into the world (Wall, 2010:83). Dillan can be guided to change his story, or rather to tell it anew. He can be made aware of his unique set of gifts and abilities that can bring purpose and meaning to his story. He can be made aware

that he is broken in a unique way, and he can choose to share his life with others to bring blessing to their lives. His story is integrated with other stories of hope and restoration, woven together with the great story of God. This process of renewing his narrative will have a profound positive effect on his narrative identity, invoking a sense of acceptance and belonging.

5.2.6 Embodied praxis – Helping children befriend and love their bodies

All forms of adultism are embodied experiences. Children feel the pain of abuse in their bodies. The following sections will provide some guidelines towards helping children cope with the shame and humiliation they experience in and through their bodies.

1. Be aware of the effects of adultism on the body of a child and respond with patience and love

As seen in Chapter 3, Section 3.7, severe neglect and abuse can permanently alter brain development (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2015:2). Children need nurturing and a healthy environment to stimulate healthy development of the brain; when a child is neglected or abused the child's brain development may be impaired because it will be adapted to that specific negative environment (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2015:4). This leads to various difficulties as seen in Section 3.8, including the fact that they may perceive their own bodies as an object of hurt, shame, and humiliation. Children who have been exposed to physical and especially sexual abuse often have problems with their body. Survivors of sexual abuse at times express that they hate their body or that they want to destroy their body because of the pain they feel daily. Victims of sexual abuse may start to crave sexual activity as a way to cope with the emotional pain, these cravings then lead to further shame and humiliation. Chapter 3 tells the story of Cindy and Amelia who were sexually abused by their father. When they were removed from their home and placed in a house of safety, they experienced a new emotional trauma and they turned to sexual activity to find comfort. Although the sexual abuse brought them tremendous pain physically and emotionally, they still engaged in sexual activity with themselves and each other. They had to be taught that this behaviour caused them even more pain and there were healthier ways to cope with their emotional pain. Thankfully, they were placed with a loving and caring adult who taught them that their bodies were precious. Unfortunately, the adverse effects of abuse on the body have far-reaching effects. Children cannot control what happened to their bodies during abuse and in the same way they can't control how their bodies react to the abuse. It is very important for every adult who cares for children who has been exposed to adultism to be aware of the fact that the after effects of abuse may also cause the child to lose control of his body. For example, the child may have implicit memories that lead to nightmares, flashbacks, and uncontrollable reactions like shaking.

When Cindy experienced these uncontrollable reactions of her body the person who were supposed to care for her at that time were unable to cope with her behaviour, she screamed at Cindy and even threw her with objects. An adult caring for children who have been exposed to abuse must be aware of the fact that healing takes a lot of time, understanding, patience and love.

2. Teach children that God wants to love us in totality; our spirit and our body; therefore children must learn to befriend and love their bodies as the temple of the Spirit of love

As discussed in section 3.7, a victim of abuse many times disassociate her body from "herself"; she turns off her feelings in order to protect herself. Section 3.7 speaks about a girl who testified that she learnt how to float out of her body in times of abuse to a place where the perpetrator couldn't get to her; in this way she believed that her perpetrator couldn't hurt the real "her". This view is called a dualist view of the body; when the body is perceived as an object that is detached from the real person. In the Christian tradition the Hellenistic view has often been adopted; the body is then also seen as separate from the spirit and the spiritual is placed above the material. According to this view what happens to the body is of no importance; it is merely an object, separate from the mind. This view is problematic since the perpetrator often also views the body as an object, something he can possess and play with. The dualistic view of the body may encourage the abuse of power over children. Wall (2010:75) also discusses this Hellenistic view of the body, saying that it is not merely an object that is separate from the mind as Descartes thought. The body should rather be seen as portrayed by Gabriel Marcel, not just a body but always somebody's body; the body should not be objectified. Wall (2010:75) states for "both children and adults, the body is the most immediate experience of being-in-the-world, of living in time as an ingesting, feeling, acting, sharing, and becoming human being".

Nouwen's view of the body may provide an alternative, more appropriate view of the body. As seen in Section 4.3.6, Nouwen (1996b:28) explains that we should bring our bodies home. We must go beyond the body's superficial desires for love by moving towards integration and unity with our spirit (Nouwen, 1996b:28). Nouwen (1996b:28) explains that when Jesus came to earth, He took on human flesh; the Spirit of God came over Mary and in her all enmity was overcome between the spirit and the body. The Spirit of God was united with the human spirit but also with the human body (Nouwen, 1996b:28). Through Jesus who became flesh the body became the temple and through the resurrection it is destined to be lifted up into intimacy with God (Nouwen, 1996b:28). We can therefore bring our body home. Because of the incarnation our bodies belong eternally to the God who created it. Nouwen (1996b:28) further states that we may not feel completely safe within our bodies. This may be especially true for children who

have been physically abused. There may be a tendency to see the body as an enemy that must be conquered. But Nouwen (1996b:28) explains that God wants to love us in totality; our spirit and our body, therefore we must learn to befriend our body and claim it for everlasting life. Nouwen states:

“The body tells a spiritual story. The body is not just body, it’s an expression of the spirit of the human person and the real spiritual life is an enfleshed life. That’s why I believe in the incarnation. There is no divine life outside the body because God decided to dress himself in a body, to become body” (Henri Nouwen in Ford, 2002:27-28).

5.3 Chapter summary

Chapter 5 discussed African childhood as a social construction. Research has shown that the communitarian view of personhood is dominant in Africa. According to this view, children are not valued for who they are, but rather how they may benefit the adults in their families and communities. Children are many times considered lesser beings and they are vulnerable to the views and practices of their cultural community. These practices are harmful in many ways. The communitarian view of personhood is positive in that it stimulates the capacity within people to express compassion dignity, harmony, reciprocity, and humanity in order to strengthen community. But it may also have fatal consequences for vulnerable groups such as children and women, as seen for example in Ethiopia. In Ethiopia young girls are for example vulnerable to the cultural practice dictating that they must marry at a young age and bear children even if it is against their own wishes. Unfortunately, children in South Africa are also vulnerable to harmful cultural practices as discussed in Section 5.1. Chapter 5 attempts to promote a different view of children where children's personhood is associated with their God-given identity. Each child is created in the image and likeness of God; they are created with an abundance of potential. Adults have the power to help children discover their God-given identity. Using a childist narrative theology of praxis, this chapter attempts to provide adults with guidelines that, when followed, will promote the affirmation of children's God-given dignity and acknowledged children's voices, agencies, and lived experience in their narrative identity formation. These guidelines were formulated by combining the theological praxis of Nouwen's pastoral care with other literature referred to in previous chapters and applying it to the relational interactions between children and adults.

CHAPTER 6: FINDINGS

This research study discusses the influence of adult-child relationships on the narrative identity formation of children. Narrative identities are informed by narrative events that shape a child's thought patterns, perspectives and behaviour. A child's life experiences will integrate into an assumed developing story of the self, which will provide a child with a sense of who they are. Adults play a very important part in directing and shaping these life experiences. Unfortunately, in South Africa many adult-child relationships are characterized by manipulation, domination, and abuse. Studies have shown that a third of South African's children experience some form of abuse at the hands of adults (Centre for justice and Crime Prevention and The University of Capetown, 2015:2). This study was therefore aimed at creating awareness with regard to the impact of adult's actions on children, as well as provides guiding principles for adults towards treating children with respect, love, and inclusion.

6.1 Current observations and the relevancy of the study

This study on the identity formation of children is being researched at a time when some observations can be made in the practical theological fields of youth ministry and pastoral care, as well as the interdisciplinary fields of childhood studies. These observations include:

- In his recent book, Malan Nel (2018) noted that pastoral care is one of the most neglected ministries pertaining to children and youth
- Pastoral studies with relation to children mainly focuses on individual after care, studies with regard to proactive and preventative care is lacking
- Because of the importance of relationship in the formation of identity and faith in children, there is a need to address authenticity and integrity in relational spaces, especially in those relationships that are vulnerable to power abuse because of age such as the adult-child relationship
- The concepts of childist and childism recently emerged in the scholarly fields of philosophy, religion, and childhood studies as critical lenses to investigate the dehumanizing and life-denying spaces pertaining to children
- The work of Henri Nouwen is extensively used in the field of pastoral care, as seen in the work of Yolanda Dreyer. Henri Nouwen attributed greatly to the discourse and praxis of pastoral care in relation to spirituality as fundamental theological ethical principles and values undergirding the facilitation of God-human encounter, such as hospitality, vulnerability, woundedness, reciprocity, grace, love, wholeness, compassion,

community, intimacy, and solidarity with people. It seems from the literature study that there exists a need to bring the pastoral scholarly work and praxis of Henri Nouwen in dialog with how adults relate to children and to what extent their living presence in being and doing is informed and guided by God as source and sustainer of life

- The systematic theologian Professor Denise Ackerman introduced a feminist theology of praxis methodology with the aim to address discrimination towards women. From the research it seems that there may exist a need to employ a theology of praxis methodology that addresses systematic discrimination and power abuse towards children

This research dissertation is relevant at this time since practical theology in South Africa only recently started reflecting on children as individual agents (recognized for their contribution to society), rather than merely passive recipients (who depend on adult society). Therefore, this dissertation addresses two important emerging concepts; adultism and childism. Unfortunately, despite of the awareness created by the emerging childist scholarship in the field of philosophy, religion, and childhood studies, the nature of adult-child relationships within households, schools, churches, and communities still tends towards adultism. Therefore, this study is valuable since it contributes a childist narrative theology of praxis methodology that responds to the harm that is done to children through abuse and discrimination in adult-child relationships. Furthermore, the designed methodology creates awareness towards the influence of adults being and doing in the process of children's narrative identity formation with the aim to stimulate proactive and preventative care towards children.

After a literature study, Henri Nouwen's praxis of pastoral care was identified as a source for reflecting theologically and ethically about adults' presence in children's narrative identity formation.

The worth of this study lies in the fact that the pastoral functions of consciousness and awareness raising and education pertaining to adult's influence in children's narratives were investigated and described. By investigating these pastoral functions, emphasis was placed on the proactive, preventative, and systemic nature of pastoral care in relation to children. This research study formulated guiding principles based, among others, on the theological praxis of Nouwen's pastoral care. These guiding principles create awareness and educate adults about life-denying and life-giving ways of being and doing in the process of children's narrative identity formation.

6.2 Research findings

In order to achieve the above-mentioned outcomes, the following primary and secondary research questions had to be answered:

How can the theological praxis of Henri Nouwen's pastoral care be used to create awareness and educate adults about life-denying and life-giving ways of being and doing in the process of children's narrative identity formation?

Subsequently, the following sub research questions had to be answered:

1. Why is the methodological choice being made for a narrative theology of praxis to raise awareness of adults' life-denying and life-giving involvement in children's narrative identity formation?
2. How does power in a relational context determine adults' influence in the lives of children and what is the effect of adultism on children's identity formation?
3. How can Henri Nouwen's praxis of theology inform life-giving identity formation in children?
4. How can the theological praxis of Nouwen's pastoral care be used to create awareness and educate adults about life-denying and life-giving ways of being and doing in the process of children's narrative identity formation?

These questions were formulated in Chapter 1 of the study and answered in the following four chapters of this dissertation. I will now provide an overview of the findings of each of the chapters based on the research questions defined in Chapter 1.

Chapter 1 provided an introduction to the study including the problem statement, research aim and objectives, research methodology and ethical considerations.

Chapter 1 identified and described the concept of identity formation and narrative identity. During this chapter, it was explained that identity formation will always have a relational dimension and the adult-child relationship will have a profound impact on a child's narrative identity. This relationship can be suggestive of constructive division of power leading to self-assured children that feel safe, recognized, and cherished. On the other hand, children and their contributions can be manipulated, subjugated, undermined, or even disregarded because of their age, which in turn will affect their identity formation adversely. Chapter 1 included a preliminary literature study where the culture of adultism and its effects on children were investigated. Furthermore, this chapter introduced the story of Henri Nouwen and its relevancy to the study. In order to critically reflect on the influence of adult-child relationships on children's

identity formation, feminist and childist theologies of praxis were introduced as interpretive lenses. In conclusion, Chapter 1 suggested that a childist narrative theology of praxis be employed to address the primary research question, as it can provide normative perspectives from the life of Henri Nouwen and especially his praxis of pastoral care.

Chapter 2 *Justified the methodological choice of a narrative theology of praxis and designed a 'childist narrative theology of praxis' by drawing on existing feminist and childist methodologies*

In this chapter, I explained the importance of narratives and helping children to reflect on and connect their narrative experiences. Although young children may struggle to produce a personal narrative, meaningful pastoral engagement may help children to reflect on past experiences and integrate these experiences with present concerns. Furthermore, this chapter discussed the role of narratives in theology and pastoral care, and it became clear that pastoral care should no longer be attenuated to overcoming crisis. It should rather become holistic and preventative, helping people to come to richer and purpose filled descriptions of their own stories. This chapter therefore justified a narrative approach towards helping adults support children in their narrative identity formation. In order for adults to provide effective support to children, they must be able to overcome their tendencies towards adultism and any form of discrimination towards children. Denise Ackermann introduced a feminist theology of praxis methodology with the aim to address discrimination towards women which could affectively be applied towards addressing adultism towards children. Therefore, Chapter 2 told the story of Denise Ackerman and provided a detailed description of her feminist theology of praxis. The following diagram provides a summary of the fundamentals of feminist theology as defined by Ackermann (2006:230-239).

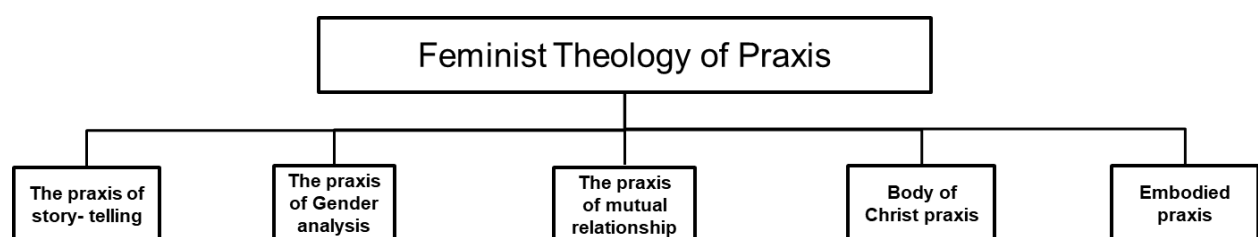


Figure 1: Feminist Theology of Praxis (Ackermann, 2006:230-239)

These fundamentals of feminist theology were utilized in the design of a childist narrative theology of praxis where the concept of childism, as defined by John Wall, was used as a hermeneutical lens. The following diagram provides the structure for a childist narrative theology of praxis.

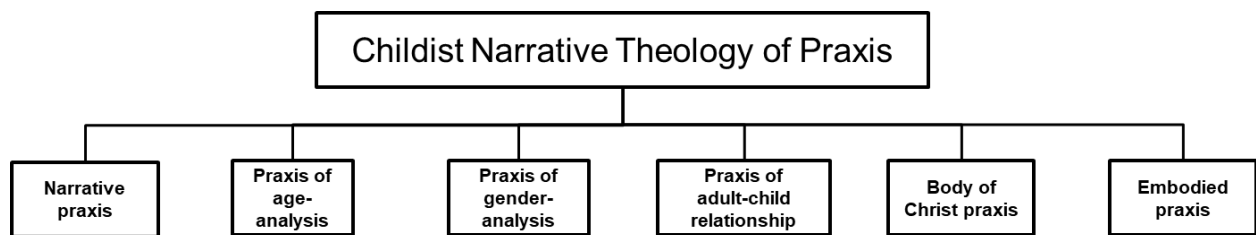


Figure 2: Childist Narrative Theology of Praxis

In conclusion, this chapter justified the methodological choice of a narrative theology of praxis. The informative lenses of feminist and childist theology of praxis were conversed and utilized to critically reflect on the impact of adult-child relations on children's narrative identity formation. From these considerations, a childist narrative theology of praxis was established as a framework towards creating awareness and educating adults about life-denying and life-giving ways of being and doing in the process of children's narrative identity formation.

Chapter 3 explored the use of power in a relational context and determined the effect of adultism on children's identity formation.

This chapter began by briefly conceptualizing narrative identity formation. Thereafter I provided fragments of children's lives and their experiences of suffering and thriving. Through these stories, the influence of adult's actions on children's identities was revealed. Chapter 3 continued to theoretically explore the use of power in adult-child relationships and narrative identity formation in children by utilizing a childist narrative theology of praxis designed in Chapter 2. Therefore, the effects of adultism were explored in terms of children's stories, age, gender, relationships with adults, their perspectives with regard to God, and their perspectives and feelings about their own bodies. These findings are summarized in the next paragraph.

Children who have been abused struggle to process information, they are not able to regulate their emotions and struggle to form healthy attachments. They tend to be oversensitive and have an impaired ability to respond to kindness. Furthermore, they are at a higher risk for learning disabilities and substance abuse. They may experience an increased irritability and impulsivity, which many times lead to delinquent behaviour. Children who have been abused are more inclined to suicidal behaviours and they are unable to evaluate the consequences of their actions beforehand. Victims of abuse find it hard to trust anyone and they experience persistent feelings of anxiety and anger. Victims of sexual abuse experience extreme confusion with regard to their sexual identity and they perceive their own bodies as an object of hurt, shame, and humiliation; they often have problems with their bodies. Children who have been subjected to adultism lack the confidence and conviction to achieve success. Furthermore, they

tend to question God's love for them and they believe God wants to punish them; they feel unworthy of his love.

From these findings, it is clear that adultism has an extensive negative influence on the behaviour, feelings, and beliefs (thought patterns) of children and all of these in turn will have an extensive influence on the development of a child's narrative identity.

Chapter 4 investigated Nouwen's pastoral care and explored the application thereof on a childist narrative theology of praxis in order to inform identity formation in children.

This chapter provided a descriptive, interpretive perspective on the life of Henri Nouwen. From Nouwen's story it is clear that his relationship with his parents, grandparents, and other adults in his life had an extensive influence on the man Nouwen became. Nouwen believed that his approach to pastoral care was rooted in his own life narrative. Chapter 4 explained that Nouwen's approach to pastoral care was narratively forged; it was deeply embedded in his own life story, his own experiences of suffering and joy. Through this approach Nouwen provides a valuable tool for adults to help them be vulnerable in the presence of children while they support them pastorally. Furthermore, Chapter 4 discussed various elements of Nouwen's pastoral care including narrativity, spirituality, the Eucharist, woundedness and vulnerability.

This chapter then utilized a childist narrative theology of praxis as a framework to further describe certain facets of Nouwen's pastoral care that is relevant to the aspects that outline children's identity development namely their narrative, age, gender, relationships with adults, relationship with God, and their embodied nature. From this chapter, it became clear that Nouwen's theology and his approach to pastoral care greatly contributed towards the aim of this research study. Nouwen's life story and theology offer many valuable perspectives towards creating awareness of and supporting life-giving identity development.

Chapter 5 determined how the Nouwen's pastoral care can be used to create awareness and educate adults about life-denying and life-giving ways of being present in the process of children's narrative identity formation.

This goal was achieved by combining Nouwen's pastoral care with other literature and applying it to the relational interactions between children and adults, using a childist narrative theology of praxis as a framework. Praxis guidelines were then formulated to among other things, promote the affirmation of children's God-given dignity and to acknowledge children's voices, agency, and lived experiences in their narrative identity formation.

The following figure provides an outline of the praxis guidelines formulated in this Chapter.

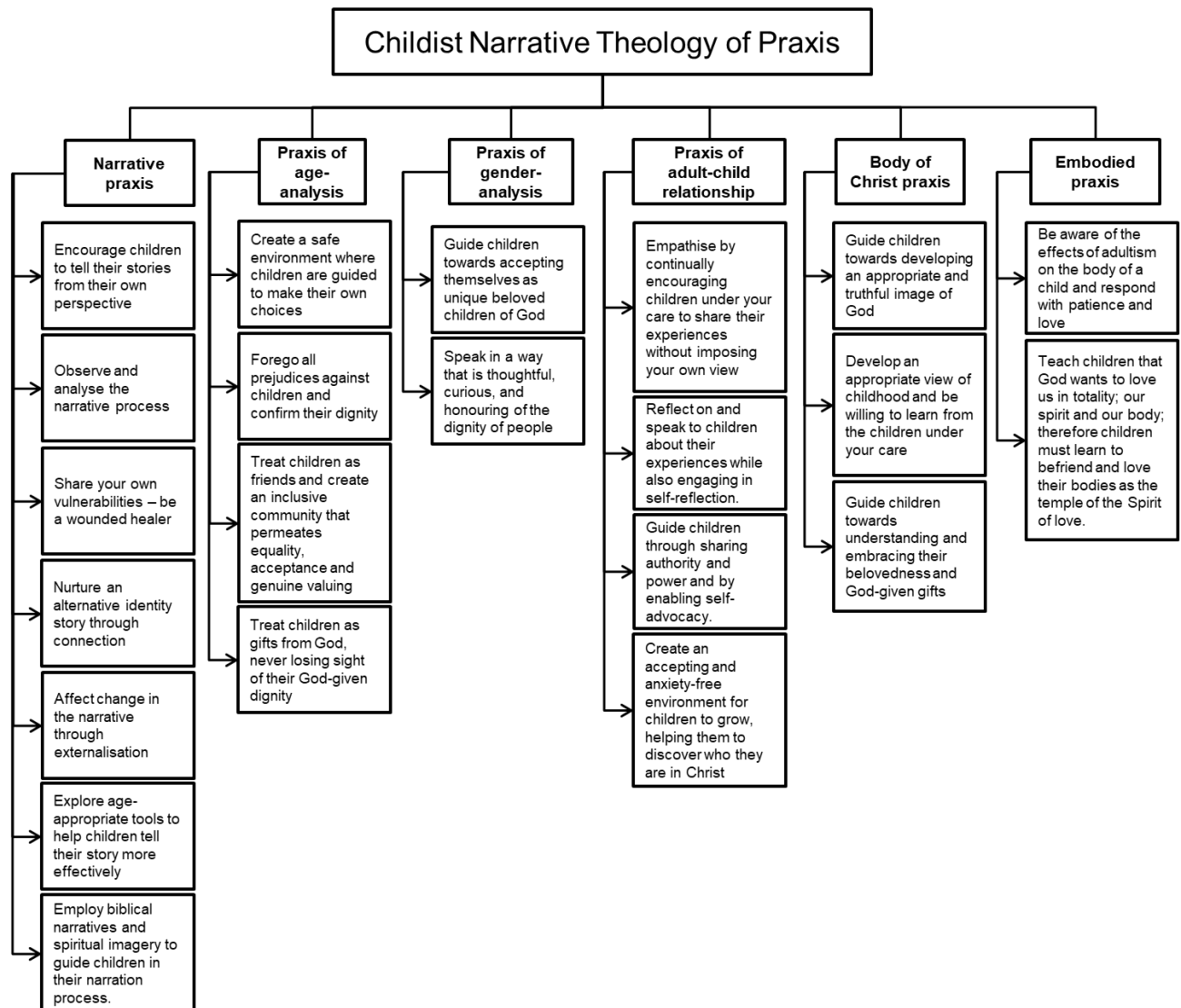


Figure 3: Childist Narrative Theology of Praxis - Guidelines

Chapter 5 also discussed African childhood as a social construction, where the communitarian view of personhood is dominant. Some children are therefore not valued for who they are, but rather for how they may benefit the adults in their families and communities. Unfortunately, as seen in Section 5.1 of this chapter, children in South Africa are also vulnerable to harmful cultural practices. Chapter 5 therefore attempted to endorse a different view of children where children's personhood is associated with their God-given identity.

6.3 Further areas for research

The aim of my broader research objective is to equip parents, foster parents, and caregivers to become an effective support system for children to not only discover their identity in Christ, but to also embrace their role as participating members of society who have dealt with their trauma

and moved beyond their past towards purpose and resiliency. People with a strong sense of identity and who know their purpose, are confident in their contributions to the Kingdom of God; they are able to show and experience love and kindness, build healthy relationships, and become loving parents themselves. Although this research study provided effective guiding principles to adults towards helping children in their narrative identity formation,

The following questions can be considered for future research purposes:

1. How can a childist narrative theology of praxis inform pastoral counselling and therapy with children exposed to complex trauma as a result of adultism?
2. How can faith communities guide families to co-construct life-giving family narratives in the midst of trauma events caused by a culture of adultism?

6.4 Concluding remarks

Each child is created in the image and likeness of God; they are created with a wealth of capabilities/strengths/qualities and potential. Adults have the power to help children discern their God-given identity. Using a childist narrative theology of praxis, this research study created awareness with regard to the impact of adult's words and actions towards children in the narrative identity formation of these children. Furthermore, it provided adults with guidelines that, when followed, will encourage the affirmation of children's God-given dignity and recognize children's voices, agencies, and lived experience in their narrative identity formation.

Bibliography

- Ackermann, D.M. 1998. Becoming fully human: An ethic of relationship in differences and otherness. *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa* 102:13-27.
- Ackermann, D.M. 2006. From mere existence to tenacious endurance: Stigma, HIV/AIDS and a feminist theology of praxis. (In Phiri, I.A. & Nadar, S., eds. African women, religion and health: Essays in honor of Mercy Amba Oduyoye Pietermaritzburg: Cluster Publications. p. 221-242).
- Asscher, J.J., Van der Put, C.E. & Stams, G.J.J.M. 2015. Gender Differences in the Impact of Abuse and Neglect Victimization on Adolescent Offending Behavior. *Journal of Family Violence*, 30(2):215-225.
- Australian Institute of Family Studies. 2014. Effects of child abuse and neglect for children and adolescents. Australia.
- Berryman, J.W. 2009. Teaching Godly Play, How to mentor the spiritual development of children. Denver: Morehouse Education Resources.
- Berryman, J.W. 2019. Helping children become fluent in faith. Holy story, sacred play. *Christian Century*:22-25.
- Borgman, E. [1999] 2003. Edward Schillebeeckx: A theologian in his history - Volume 1: A Catholic theology of culture (1914–1965). London: Transl. J. Bowden, Continuum.
- Bunge, M.J. 2006. The Child, Religion, and the Academy: Developing Robust Theological and Religious Understandings of Children and Childhood. *The Journal of Religion*, 86:549-579.
- Bunge, M.J. 2012. Biblical and theological perspectives and best practices for faith formation. (In Lawson, K.E., ed. Understanding children's spirituality: Theology, research, and practice. Eugene, OR.: Cascade Books. p. 4–25).
- Centre for justice and Crime Prevention and The University of Capetown. 2015. The Optimus Study on Child Abuse, Violence and Neglect in South Africa. Capetown.
- Chapple, C.L., Tyler, K.A. & Bersani, B.E. 2005. Child neglect and adolescent violence: Examining the effects of self-control and peer rejection. *Violence and Victims*, 20:39-53.
- Child Welfare Information Gateway. 2015. Understanding the Effects of Maltreatment on Brain Development. U.S.
- Chopp, R. 1996. "Praxis" in dictionaries of feminist theology. Louisville Kentucky: John Knox/ West Minster press.
- Comstock, G.L. 1987. Two Types of Narrative Theology. *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, 55(4):687-717.

- Cook, R. & Alexander, I. 2008. *Interweavings, Conversations between Narrative Therapy and the Christian faith*. North Charleston, USA: CreateSpace Books.
- Crowley, P. 2003. Paul Ricoeur: the Concept of Narrative Identity, the Trace of Autobiography. *Paragraph*, 26:1-12.
- Curt, B.C. 1994. *Textuality and tectonics: Troubling social and psychological science*. Buckingham, PA: Open University Press.
- Dillen, A. 2020. Children at the Center? Practical Theology by, about, and with Children. (In Dillen, A. & Gärtner, S., eds. *Discovering Practical Theology*. Peeters Publishers. p. 127-155).
- Douglass, R.M. 2019. Solidarity and the incarnation. A dialogue with Denise Ackermann and Allan Boesak. *Stellenbosch theological Journal*, 5:265-280.
- Dreyer, J., Pieterse, H. & Ven, J.A.v.d. 2002. Interreligious orientations among South African youth: expressions of religious identity. *IJER*, 3(2):158-178.
- Dreyer, Y. 2003. Beyond psychology: Spirituality in Henri Nouwen's pastoral care. *HTS*, 59.
- Ford, M. 2002. *Wounded Prophet: A Portrait of Henri J. M. Nouwen* Image publishers.
- Frank, A.W. 1991. *At the will of the body: Reflections on illness*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.
- Ganzevoort, R.R. 2011. Narrative Approaches. (In B.Miller-Mclemore, ed. *Wiley-Blackwell Companion to Practical Theology*. Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell. p. 214-223).
- Gelişimi, K. & Kimliği, A. 2020. Identity Development: Narrative Identity and Intergenerational Narrative Identity. *Current Approaches in Psychiatry*, 12:455-475.
- Gilbert, R., Widom, C.S., Browne, K., Fergusson, D., Webb, E. & Janson, S. 2009. Burden and consequences of child maltreatment in high-income countries. *Lancet*, 373:68-81.
- Gilligan, C. 2014. Moral Injury and the Ethic of Care: Reframing the Conversation about Differences. *Journal of social philosophy*, 45:89-106.
- Granqvist, P., Mikulincer, M., Gewirtz, V. & Shaver, P.R. 2012. Experimental Findings on God as an Attachment Figure: Normative Processes and Moderating Effects of Internal Working Models. *J. Pers. Soc. Psychol.*, 103:804–818.
- Greene, R.W. 2014. *The Explosive Child, a new approach for understanding and parenting easily frustrated, chronically inflexible children*. 5th: Harper Collins publishers.
- Grobbelaar, J. 2020. Doing theology with children: A childist reading of the childhood metaphor in 1 Corinthians and the Synoptic Gospels. *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies*, 76.
- Heggen, C.H. 2006. *Sexual abuse in Christian homes and churches*. Eugene, Oregon: Wipf & Stock Publishers.

- Higgins, M.W. & Burns, K. 2012. *Genius Born of Anguish: The Life & Legacy of Henri Nouwen*: Paulist Press.
- Kazemian, L., Widom, C.S. & Farrington, D.P. 2011. A prospective examination of the relationship between childhood neglect and juvenile delinquency in the Cambridge study in delinquent development. *International Journal of Child, Youth and Family Studies*, 1 & 2:65-82.
- Kerig, P.K. & Becker, S.P. 2010. From internalizing to externalizing: theoretical models of the processes linking PTSD to juvenile delinquency. (In Egan, S.J., ed. *Post-traumatic Stress Disorder*.
- Klein, B. 2008. On becoming and being a woman theologian in South Africa: In conversation with Denise Ackermann. *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa*, 118:40-52.
- Kosarkova, A., Malinakova, K., van Dijk, J.P. & Tavel, P. 2020. Childhood Trauma and Experience in Close Relationships are Associated with the God Image: Does Religiosity Make a Difference? *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 17, 8841:1-13.
- Kotzé, D.J. 2002. Doing participatory ethics, in Kotzé, D, Myburg, J & Roux, J, *Ethical ways of being*. Pretoria: *Ethics Alive*:1-34.
- Mahlangu, E. 2016. Theology disrupted: Doing theology with children in African contexts. *HTS Theologiese Studies/Theological Studies*, 72.
- Maikovich-Fonga, A.K. & Jaffee, S.R. 2010. Sex differences in childhood sexual abuse characteristics and victims' emotional and behavioral problems: Findings from a national sample of youth. *Child Abuse Negl.*, 34(6):429-437.
- Mandela, N. 1995. Nelson Mandela quotes about children.
<https://www.nelsonmandelachildrensfund.com/news/nelson-mandela-quotes-about-children>
 Date of access: 25 Maart 2021.
- Matteson, R.E. 2008. AIDS orphans in Zambia, shattered hearts. *Christian Century*, 125:11-13.
- Mc Adams, D.P. 2001. The psychology of life stories. *Review of general psychology*, 5(2):100-122.
- Mc Crory, E., De Brito, S.A. & Viding, E. 2010. Research review: The neurobiology and genetics of maltreatment and adversity. *Journal of Psychology and Psychiatry*, 51:1079–1095.
- McAdams, D.P. 1985. *Power, intimacy, and the life story: Personological inquiries into identity*. New York: Guilford Press.

- McAdams, D.P. 2011. Narrative identity. (In Schwartz, S.J., Luyckx, K. & Vignoles, V.L., eds. Handbook of identity theory and research. Springer Science + Business Media. p. 99-115).
- Molla, R.S. 2018. Pastoral care in the living web for at-risk children in Ethiopia. *Journal of Pastoral Theology*, 28:189-202.
- Moschella, M.C. 2016. Caring for Joy: Narrative, Theology, and Practice. Leiden/Boston: Brill.
- Mouton, J. 2016. How to succeed in your Master's and Doctoral Studies, A South African Guide and Resource Book. Pretoria: Van Schaik.
- Mtata, K. 2009. Theological Practices that matter. Vol. 5. Geneva, Switzerland: Lutheran University Press and the Lutheran World Federation.
- Nouwen, H. 1994. Here and now, Living in the Spirit. New York: Crossroad.
- Nouwen, H. 1996a. Can you drink the cup? Indiana: Ave Maria Press.
- Nouwen, H. 1996b. The inner voice of love: a journey through anguish to freedom: Doubleday, a division of Random House, Inc.
- Nouwen, H. 2001. Beyond the Mirror: Reflections on Life and Death: Crossroad; 59415th edition.
- Nouwen, H. 2006. Bread for the Journey - A Daybook of Wisdom and Faith: HarperOne; Illustrated edition.
- Nouwen, H.J.M. 1992. Life of the Beloved. Spiritual Living in a Secular World: Hodder faith.
- Nouwen, H.J.M. 1993. Gracias: A Latin American Journal: Orbis books.
- Nouwen, H.J.M. 2016. Love, Henri. Letters on the spiritual life. New York: Convergent books.
- Nye, R. 2014. Children's Spirituality: What it is and why it matters. London: Church House Publishing.
- O'Laughlin, M. 2005. Henri Nouwen, his life and mission. New York: Orbis Books.
- Papalia, D.E. & Feldman, R.D. 2011. A Child's World. Infancy through adolescence. 12th. New York: Mc Graw-Hill.
- Pattison, S. 1993. A critique of pastoral care. London: SCM.
- Reynaert, M. 2015. Sexual abuse of children as a form of power abuse and abuse of the body. *Acta Theologica* 35:189-200.
- Rice, L.J. 2013. Parenting the difficult child (Kindle edition): Seed Sown Press. Date of access: 20 July 2019.

- Ricoeur, P. 1986. Life: A Story in Search of a Narrator. (In Doeser, M.C. & Kraay, J.N., eds. Facts and Values. Dordrecht, The Netherlands: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers. p. 121–132).
- Ricoeur, P. 1991. Narrative Identity. *Philosophy Today*, 35:73-81.
- Roche, J. 2004. Children: Rights, participation and citizenship. (In Freeman, M.D.A., ed. Children's rights. England, Burlington: Ashgate/Dartmouth. p. 269 - 287).
- Ross, C.A. 2016. Talking about God with Trauma Survivors. *american Journal of psychotherapy*, 70.
- Schachter, E.P. & Ventura, J.J. 2008. Identity Agents: Parents as Active and Reflective Participants in Their Children's Identity Formation. *Journal of research on adolescence*, 18(3):449-476.
- Shonkoff, J.P. & Phillips, D.A. 2000. From neurons to neighborhoods: The science of early childhood development. Washington, D.C.: National Academy Press.
- Smyke, A.T., Zeanah, C.H., Fox, N.A., Nelson, C.A. & Guthrie, D. 2010. Placement in foster care enhances attachment among young children in institutions. *Child Development*, 81:212-223.
- Sundhall, J. 2017. A Political Space for Children? The Age Order and Children's Right to Participation. *Social Inclusion*, 5(3):164-171.
- Swinton, J. 2000. Friendship in community. Creating a space for love (1997). (In Willows, D. & Swinton, J., eds. Spiritual dimensions of pastoral care. Practical theology in a multidisciplinary context. United Kingdom, London: Jessica Kingsley publishers.
- Theron, H. 2006. Narrative Therapy. *CME*, 24:449 - 454.
- Thompson, B., Kellas, J., Soliz, J., Thompson, J., Epp, A. & Schrodtt, P. 2009. Family legacies: constructing individual and family identity through intergenerational storytelling. *Narrat Inq*, 19.
- Thompson, M.P., Kingree, J.B. & Desai, S. 2004. Gender Differences in Long-Term Health Consequences of Physical Abuse of Children: Data From a Nationally Representative Survey. *American Journal of Public Health*, 94(4):599-604.
- Truter, C.J. & Kotzé, D.J. 2005. Spirituality and health: A narrative pastoral approach. *HTS* 61(3).
- Uka, E.M. 1985. The African family and issues of infertility. *ATJ*, 20:189-200.
- Wall, J. 2007. Fatherhood, Childism, and the Creation of Society. *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, 75:52-76.
- Wall, J. 2010. Ethics in Light of Childhood. Washington, D.C. : Georgetown University Press.

Wall, J. 2019. From childhood studies to childism: Reconstructing the scholarly and social imaginations. *Children's Geographies*.

Westby, C. & Culattab, B. 2016. Telling Tales: Personal Event Narratives and Life Stories. *Language, Speech, and Hearing Services in Schools*, 47:260-282.

Yarhouse, M. & Sadusky, J. 2020. Emerging gender identities: Understanding the diverse experiences of today's youth: Brazos Press.

Young-Bruehl, E. 2012. Childism: confronting prejudice against children. New Haven and London: Yale University Press.