TITLE: The Social Construction of Agape Healing Community

By

Lee Reeve Buchanan

Dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of

MA PSYCH

IN THE

DEPARTMENT OF PSYCHOLOGY

FACULTY OF HUMANITIES

AT THE

UNIVERSITY OF JOHANNESBURG

SUPERVISOR

Ms N.B. Radebe

CO-SUPERVISOR

Mrs E. Jordaan

May 2008
DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this dissertation is my own work and that it has not been submitted for a degree at any other university.

L. R. Buchanan
DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to all the members of Agape Healing Community.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Brenda  
Thank you for your encouragement and your wisdom. 
For tirelessly going over and over this work. For the 
intuition to say to me that I needed to let this research go, 
that it was time to release it to the universe.

Elsabe  
Thank you for being prepared to be a part of this research 
and for your strength and clarity; for shining a light in the 
darkness when I couldn’t ‘see’ this thesis anymore.

Solly  
Thank you for teaching me about being safe and 
belonging.

Olga  
Thank you for being part of this research. Even though 
you no longer walk on this plane, your indomitable spirit 
and your courage stays with me.

Susan  
Thank you for teaching me about wholeness.

Rose &  
Thank you for teaching me that when you look with fear 
Rachel  
at some of the people who walk the streets of Mamelodi 
township, you miss those with smiling faces.

Andrew  
Thank you for being a part of the Agape I have known. 
No morning ndoro would be complete without your 
wonderful greeting to all: “Hello weee!”

The Members of  
The Senior  
Your birthday greeting in song will stay with me forever.

Citizens Club
Sam  Thank you for allowing me to see Agape and Mamelodi through your eyes. You teach me about uniqueness and show me the richness of Africa.

Emma, Refilwe & Rosemary  Thank you for sharing your ideas and experiences and for making this research possible.

Esther  Thank you for being part of this research, for your ideas, your wisdom and help in giving form to it. Thank you also for your friendship.

Stan  Thank you for teaching me that real love, even if felt for only a moment, can last a lifetime.

Corinne  Thank you for your depth, wisdom and intuition. Thank you for guiding me, for asking more of me and for opening another way of seeing for me.

Hank  Thank you for helping me to find the father within. Thank you for teaching me to receive the gifts that people are able to bring with grace, gratitude and humility.

Robert  Thank you for sharing Agape with me. You teach me about believing in myself and to appreciate the gifts that I bring.

Mike  Thank you for your love, for allowing me to depend on you, for your input and for your tireless giving that made this work possible. I could not have done it without you. You are my partner and friend and have taught me more than you will ever know. Thank you also for encouraging me and for believing in me even when I didn’t.
Val

Thank you for your love, for being a rock on which I could depend, for your feedback and input, for the depth of your reflections and for reminding me that my thinking needs to go ever deeper and higher.

Mom

Thank you for your wisdom, depth and strength. You are my spiritual guide and in your own patient and kind way, point me always to what matters, to the things of real consequence and timeless meaning. Thank you for walking beside me on this journey of life, for offering an arm of support when needed, without dishonouring my own sense of competence and knowing.

Kate

Thank you for your companionship and love, for walking beside me too. Together we have journeyed to places that have no words and only we will understand. You teach me of courage and to believe in myself and the gifts that I bring. You have an amazing ability to conceptualise the complex and abstract and to put it forward in a way that is digestible to others. Your input on these pages is no exception and I thank you for that, especially since I had long ago lost the plot which you gave back to me in your own inimitable way.

Cuan & Morgan

Thank you for allowing me to see Agape through your open and receptive little beings and the joy with which you heard the music and harmony of it.

Steve

Thank you for the integrity, diligence and courage that you are. You inspire me in your insightful, steadfast and indomitable way, and bring a strength that upholds all around you. Your taking on the sizeable task of proof-reading and the printing of this study is deeply appreciated.
Savanna Thank you for sharing Agape with me. For your generosity, your patience, your innocence, your companionship and your love. You teach me about loving myself.

Roan Thank you for sharing Agape with me and for the continued space for talking we found there. Thank you for your depth and your spirituality. You are my guiding light: I have always known that you came to teach and to lead me, rather than the other way around.

Cameron Thank you for coming into my life. You have taught me that each child brings immeasurable blessing to a family and that they have all they need already within them. You teach me about abundance and wealth in all the ways that matter.
ABSTRACT

The aim of this study was to examine how the members of Agape came to construct themselves as a healing community. An ecosystemic epistemology and social constructionism were used as a lens by which to view the events unfolding at Agape Healing Community and to illuminate how meanings, expressed through language and ritual, are negotiated and shared. Discourse analysis was used as an analytical tool to infer meaning from the participants’ speaking and to locate these discourses in the fabric that constitutes South African society.
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 BACKGROUND

This research focuses particularly on the community located in Mamelodi East and on a community outreach programme within the community, Agape Healing Community. As part of my studies at the University of Johannesburg (UJ), I have worked at Agape Healing Community, which is a programme aimed at addressing some of the issues arising out of our former political dispensation. Themes running through the community are those of poverty, crime and violence. This community was formed around 1954 under the former Group Areas Act and is a result of the subjugating apartheid regime of the day. Twelve years after our country’s first democratic election and current African National Congress governmental regime, the scars remain and the legacy of apartheid is still in evidence.

Agape Healing Community was started approximately ten years ago on the grounds of the Young Men’s Christian Association, and next to the SOS Children’s Village in the Mamelodi township. The outreach project is run by Professor Stan Lifschitz and Dr Corinne Oosthuizen. Every year, approximately ten masters’ students work at Agape (from the University of South Africa and UJ), in order to contribute to the endeavour, and are supervised by Professor Lifschitz and Dr Oosthuizen.
Agape Healing Community consists of open, curved walls encompassing an open area of ground, which is flanked by a big blue gumtree and a small rhus tree. A thatch roof covers one of the half-circle walls; the other roof was burned in a fire.

Numerous substantial changes have taken place in our country since 1954 when Mamelodi East came into being, but many people still live in unbearable conditions of abject poverty. In addition to this, psychology, practiced under the former dispensation, and to some extent today, has drawn criticism for being elitist, embedded in the political ideology and “decontextualised and ethnocentric” in nature (Mjoli, 1987; Rappaport & Seidman, 2004). There has however been a recent attempt in psychology to include communities and their members as a focus of urgent and much-needed attention and intervention.

1.2 MOTIVATION FOR THE STUDY

During the first year of studying masters at the University of Johannesburg, my fellow students and I were required to design, carry out and write up a report on a community intervention. My placement was at Agape Healing Community for the year. In attempting subsequently to write a report capturing in words what had transpired at Agape Healing Community and, in addition, to critique this outreach programme in terms of certain detailed criteria customarily used in academia to assess its efficacy, I found myself at
a loss for words. Using the traditionally accepted community intervention
criteria, (the ‘measuring stick’, or instrumentation) to measure Agape Healing
Community rendered it “invisible”. What had for me (and some of my
colleagues and fellow members of Agape Healing Community) been one of
the most profoundly healing and transformative experiences, looked like a
failure or non-event, when seen through the lens of academia. Was Agape
Healing Community, as an outreach programme, therefore a failure, or was
the measuring instrument not adequate to measure Agape? This study
therefore had as its aim to question exactly what Agape Healing Community
is, through the eyes and speaking of its participants, and to ask what exactly
has been healing about being part of that community.

1.3 AN EXAMINATION OF THE CONSTRUCT OF COMMUNITY

Community can be seen as a group of people who live in the same proximity
or who have something in common. The word community comes from the
Latin word *communis*, which means “shared” (Berns, 2004, p. 391). The idea
of sharing, instead of being seen in material terms such as in sharing
resources, can also refer to values, customs, beliefs, shared hardships and
responsibility. Community ecology can be defined as “the psychological and
practical relationships between those people, and their social and physical
environments” (Berns, 2004, p. 391).
In theorising about community work, however, one can insulate oneself and, by definition, see oneself as apart from, and an objective observer of, the community one is working in. The term ‘community’ can become reified as an entity that is static and knowable, but what exactly is ‘community’? Butchart and Seedat (1990) and Price (1989) question the uncritical use of the term ‘community’ and point out that one can unwittingly perpetuate existing inequalities within South African society when the idea of what community is informed by an unquestioned political and perhaps subjugating discourse. Butchart and Seedat (1990) point out that our unquestioned beliefs and “political discourse work as an ideological transmission belt to articulate social and subjective factors and reproduce amongst people the values, attitudes, and life-styles which are integral to the maintenance and reproduction of a particular social formation” (p.1094). Butchart and Seedat (1990) and Serrano-Garcia, Lopez and Rivera-Medina (1987) make the important point that communities are socially constructed and exist within history and the ideological underpinnings of our land. When we try to empower or reform the communities which exist as a result of the society within which they are embedded, this becomes tautological. What needs reform in fact is the society and epistemology which created these ‘communities’ in the first place.

Butchart and Seedat (1990) take such attempts at redressing the injustices under the former apartheid regime to a higher level of recursion, and point out that socio-political transformation and establishment of equitable health and
education systems needs to encompass a concomitant shift in epistemological stance as well. When communities are seen as disempowered and in need of assistance, the discourse of fragmentation is unwittingly perpetuated in the very statements and actions carried out to undermine such disempowerment and disconnection. This is an example of how paradoxical an intervention can become when it employs the same structures and language that were used to create the fragmentation and brought about the disempowerment in the first place (Rissel, 1994). This study proposes that an opportunity for deep questioning of how we, as individuals, choose to narrate our lives, and of how we have come to construct a community between us, can bring about reform and a sense of hope that each one of us can indeed make a difference.

Maiello (1999) speaks of being concerned with “the individual’s capacity to create culture more than with the individual being created by culture” (p.219). In the sense of affinity we have, or can find, with each other, we find our community.

Thomas and Weinrach (1998) point out that although an appreciation of diversity is the foundation on which all forms of human advancement are built, “the dialogue should also include diversity of ideas, values, beliefs, interests, personalities, and abilities, and should not be limited to one’s racial, gender, or ethnic characteristics” (p.116). It is this construct that informs this research project.
In terms of the epistemology of ecosystemics that this study embraces, and
social constructionism within it, “it is not possible for us to interpret our
experience without access to some frame of intelligibility, one that provides a
context for our experience” (White, 1995, p.13). The discourse and the
received narrative of oppression can come to be elevated to the status of a
dictator, with the individuals divested of their sense of self agency (Freedman,
1996; Weisbord, 1990). If a person is informed by, for example, a narrative of
oppression and helplessness, these can come to exist as reality for them. In
exploring communities and community work from an alternative perspective,
this study strives to open a space to explore the possibility of negotiating a
different reality by which to live, should the participants wish to do so.

Through perusal of the current literature on community outreach projects, it is
noted that there is very little written about a social constructionist approach to
community work and it is believed that approaching an outreach project using
social constructionism as a lens could make a valuable contribution to the
literature on community work.

1.5 AIMS OF THE STUDY

The study is qualitative and descriptive and aims to gain a detailed account of
the research participants’ experiences of being part of a community outreach
project, Agape Healing Community, in Mamelodi East. The study does not
aim to generalise to the population at large, but to give a voice to the
individual experiences the participants have had which have led up to them
constructing themselves as a healing community. The reasoning employed in this study is therefore inductive and strives to build ideas using a bottom-up approach instead of top-down (Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 1999). The researcher will be a participant-observer, thus experiencing Agape Healing Community first hand. In addition, the researcher will make use of a collaborative approach and include the speaking of members of the community, with each participant thus accorded a voice.

1.6 PROBLEM STATEMENTS

The problem statements for this study are ‘What are the experiences that have lead the individuals at Agape Healing Community to construct themselves as part of a healing community?’ and ‘What are the discourses that are constituent of, and inform, this community?’ This study aims to examine whether the way in which community is experienced, for example as an unquestioned and therefore subjugating narrative, can constitute an enslavement to such a constructed reality.

1.7 PRESENTATION OF THE STUDY

Chapter 2 expounds upon the social constructionist epistemology giving structure and form to this study.
Chapter 3 contains a review of pertinent literature relating to community work that has been carried out, some of which can be located in the traditional,
Newtonian epistemology, while other writings fall under the umbrella of social
constructionism.

Chapter 4 outlines the methodology to be employed in this study.

Chapter 5 contains the results of the research and illuminates the discourses
implicit to and informing the Mamelodi East residents and those who form part
of the Agape Healing Community. These discourses are located within the
fabric of South African society as well.

Chapter 6 comprises a discussion of the findings of this study, as well as
recommendations for possible future studies of a similar nature.

In the next chapter, the epistemological stance which informs this study will be
explored.
CHAPTER 2

EPISTEMOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS

In this chapter epistemology is defined. A discussion of the shift from modernism to postmodernism follows, including an elucidation of first order cybernetics, or systems theory and second order cybernetics, or ecosystemics, as illustrative markers of this shift. Lastly, social constructionism, as an outcome of postmodernism, is discussed.

Epistemology, according to Berns (2004), is a term derived from two Greek words, ‘epistemé’ meaning knowledge, and ‘logos’, meaning reasoning. Epistemology therefore means a way of knowing, or denotes a particular stance from which we view reality, or ontology, and the rules and constructs we believe to be informing and forming such a reality. Vorster (2003) describes epistemology as “a set of analytical and critical techniques that define the boundaries for the process of knowing” (p.17). Denzin and Lincoln (2000) point out that “[e]pistemology asks, how do I know the world? What is the relationship between enquirer and the known? Every epistemology… implies an ethical – moral stance towards the world and the self of the researcher” (p.157).

In this study therefore, epistemology, and in particular, a postmodern stance, is understood as the framework informing the researcher’s knowing and thus
guiding and informing the decisions, design, implementation and interpretation of the research.

2.1 THE MODERNISTIC OR NEWTONIAN EPISTEMOLOGY

The modernistic or Newtonian epistemology instructs us to view reality and knowledge as objective, generalisable and universal truth. In terms of this way of understanding reality, there is a knowable and incontrovertible reality which we all may encounter in the same way through a process of discovery and illumination (Fourie, 1998). Constructs used to aid such a process of discovery are reductionism, linear causality and neutral objectivity.

2.1.1 Reductionism

In terms of the construct of reductionism, breaking a phenomenon up into its constituent parts allows measurement and comprehension of it and this process is guided by the goal, ultimately, of prediction and control thereof. In striving to understand the whole from a coagulate of its parts, the aim, according to Becvar and Becvar (2000), is to “uncover the laws according to which the world operates” (p. 4). This yields logically an ability to control or to effect change in a known and desired direction.

In context of community work then, a community would begin as parts which can be overtly known and measured and then put together in a collage to allow an objective knowing of a reified and static entity called ‘community’. Against this known construct, a strategy or intervention can be devised and
effected and the changes, as observed, noted, with a particular view to measure the success or failure of the intervention, using as a point of reference how closely the strategy brought about change in the direction predicted at the outset.

### 2.1.2 Linear Causality

Leading on from the idea of effecting change in a particular direction is the construct of linear causality. Simply stated, an intervention (cause), when exercised on the objectively known and reified construct of ‘community’, will result in a particular outcome (effect). One part of the whole therefore causes the other (Becvar & Becvar, 2000). The question guiding this process, and to be answered, is ‘why?’ When this question is answered, one has come a step closer to gaining understanding of the community and of the success or failure of the particular intervention. Importantly, this knowledge is then believed to be transferable to other ‘communities’ in other contexts and can be expected to have a similar course and outcome. This reasoning is therefore used in the future design and implementation of ‘community’ solutions geared towards eliminating ‘community problems’ as if they exist in the same way across all contexts. The aim is to make the community more ‘functional’. This is what Durrheim (1997) refers to as a “utopian vision of modern psychology” which uses modernist premises “planned to predict and control human development” (p.175).
2.1.3 Neutral Objectivity

Neutral objectivity refers to the idea that one is able to stand outside of, and hence to make objective observations about, the reality one perceives (Becvar & Becvar, 2000). Here, reality stands apart from the observer as a reified, static construct and remains a universal and ultimate truth awaiting discovery. The observer's mind is seen to exist in a realm apart from the reality observed, which allows observation of this reality without influencing it in any way during the act of observing it (Becvar & Becvar, 2000).

In community work, then, a researcher or worker using his or her objectivity is able to discern community, to see its 'rightness' or 'wrongness', 'goodness' or 'badness'; assess its functionality according to a preselected norm and therefore to declare its relative health or pathology in accordance therewith. Having discerned the community's dysfunction, the researcher may plan and implement an intervention to correct the dysfunction and to thereby bring the community closer to what has been pre-emptively defined as 'healthy' or 'functional'. The researcher, throughout this process, has employed an epistemology and chosen an intervention in a process governed by objectivity and is assumed to have remained exempt from personal values or from a subjective conceptualisation of the reality he or she is observing. In keeping with this, the researcher is further believed to have been able to introduce and effect the particular strategies chosen in an objective and more or less uninvolved manner.
In accordance with the philosophy of the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century, and in order to inject some empirical and scientific validity to the so-called ‘soft sciences’ of human functioning, psychology as a discipline embraced the Newtonian, modernistic epistemology in which a value-free and objective, scientific focus was afforded a place (Becvar & Becvar, 2000). As the twentieth century progressed, there existed a growing dissatisfaction with the latter among prominent modernist physicists, inter alia, Einstein, Planck and Heisenberg, who found a shortfall in the scientific instrumentation in measuring the complex and dynamic aspects of human functioning (Auerswald in Fourie, 1998). These scientists thus began to draw attention to the “interconnected dynamic system of relationships”, leading to a reconceptualisation of the way in which people are to be ‘observed’, ‘measured’ and ‘understood’ (Fourie, 1998, p.12).

2.2 SYSTEMS THEORY AND FIRST-ORDER CYBERNETICS

A shift away from modernism brought about a space for acknowledging the interconnectedness between individuals and of a discernment of patterns at play in their interacting. Context was brought into consideration as a means of colouring and orienting the researcher or observer to the environment in which communication was occurring, and an acknowledgment of the observer’s own subjectivity, was accorded attention for the first time. A questioning of the construct of an objective and neutral observer was thereby made possible and marked the beginning of a shift in thought or epistemology.
The first part of this shift is known as systems theory or simple, first-order cybernetics. The term ‘cybernetics’ denotes self-correcting systems and refers to the science of communication and control (Becvar & Becvar, 2000). The term ‘systems’ refers to the idea that individuals, rather than existing in a linear, cause and effect realm, reciprocally influence each other, so that we have individuals plus their interaction as well as the context in which such communication is taking place, as constituent and equally valid parts of what is observed.

In simple cybernetics, such an observed system is seen to exist apart from an observer, who stands outside of the system in order to observe the system under investigation. This is what Becvar and Becvar (2000) refer to as a ‘bird’s eye view’ and it is from this stance that an observer may note the relative health or pathology of the system he or she is observing, and from where perhaps to instigate necessary helpful interventions.

Several constructs provide the structure of the theory of simple cybernetics. These include recursion, feedback, homeostasis, morphostasis and morphogenesis, rules and boundaries, open or closed systems, entropy and negentropy, equifinality and potentiality; and a focus on communication and information processing.
2.2.1 Recursion

One of the ontological premises of systems theory is the construct of recursion, where individuals and events are seen in context of mutual influence and interaction. Meaning is derived from the relationship between individuals and the elements of the system as each part impacts upon and helps define the other (Becvar & Becvar, 2000).

2.2.2 Feedback

Feedback is the aspect of recursion that involves self-correction and is the process whereby information regarding past or present behaviour is fed back into the system in a circular manner (Becvar & Becvar, 2000).

Feedback can be positive or negative. Negative feedback refers to the idea that no change has occurred in the system and a state of dynamic equilibrium, or homeostasis, is being maintained. Positive feedback refers to a response of acceptance of change in the system. Feedback processes indicate variations and fluctuations that increase the probability of survival of the system. It is important to note that there should be a balance between change and stability. To this end, the constructs morphogenesis and morphostasis become relevant (Becvar & Becvar, 2000).

2.2.3 Morphostasis and Morphogenesis

Morphostasis is a system’s tendency towards stability, a state of dynamic equilibrium, and morphogenesis refers to system-enhancing behaviour that allows for growth, creativity and change (Becvar & Becvar, 2000).
Keeney (1979) points out that systems theory puts forward the idea that change cannot be found without a roof of stability over its head. Similarly, stability will always be related to underlying processes of change.

2.2.4 Rules and Boundaries

The rules according to which a system operates are made up of the characteristic relationship patterns within the system and express the values of the system and therefore delineate appropriate behaviour within that particular system (Becvar & Becvar, 2000). The rules may be said to form the boundaries of the system. These rules are at the outset not explicit nor empirically visible to an observer and must instead be inferred from the repeated and observed patterns of interacting within the system. The system’s boundary, as given form by its rules, acts as a gatekeeper for the entry of information into and out of the system (Becvar & Becvar, 2000).

2.2.5 Open and Closed Systems

In accordance with how open or closed a system is, or in other words, how rigid or spongy the system’s boundaries are, the system will either allow or disallow the entry of information. An open system will allow input of new information and is able to respond in some manner to the information received. Boundaries can delineate different systems or subsystems within systems and, if rigid, can impose disengagement within or between systems. Such a system is said to be closed and will often evidence members who are isolated from one another. This isolation may also extend to systems in the larger community of which the system is a part (Becvar & Becvar, 2000).
Again, a balance between being too open or too closed is desirable and the appropriate balance cannot be determined apart from the context in which the system exists. To this end, the constructs of entropy and negentropy are important.

### 2.2.6 Entropy and Negentropy

Entropy is said to define a system that is either too open or too closed and describes a system under threat of survival. Negentropy defines a system with a healthy balance between openness and closedness (Becvar & Becvar, 2000).

### 2.2.7 Equifinality and Equipotentiality

Equifinality refers to a system’s propensity to repeat interactional patterns so that from different points of beginning the same final state is always accomplished. Equipotentiality refers to a system that is able to arrive at different end points although its starting point has been the same, or that different systems, in responding to the same stressor, may arrive at completely different end points (Becvar & Becvar, 2000).

### 2.2.8 Communication and Information Processing

Communication and information processing are central constructs in systems theory. There are three aspects to communication, namely verbal (the digital aspect of communication), or the actual words spoken; nonverbal (the analogue aspect of communication), which includes aspects such as
intonation of the voice, body posture and gestures or the kinaesthetic part of sending one’s message across to another. It is important to note that the digital and analogue aspects of communication may contradict, and therefore serve to disqualify, each other.

The third aspect of communication is context, which sets a tone and brings rules governing what type of behaviour and relating is appropriate in the particular situation. Context can also be placed in the analogue dimension of communication and along with non-verbal communication, can be seen to yield a picture of the process at play in the communication exchange.

Becvar and Becvar (2000, p. 73) expound on three tenets in relation to the act of communication: “(1) one cannot not behave; (2) one cannot not communicate; (3) the meaning of a given behaviour is not the ‘true’ meaning of the behaviour; it is however the personal truth for the person who has given it a particular meaning” (Watzlawick, 1967).

Another important aspect to communication is that “the whole is greater than the sum of its parts” (Becvar & Becvar, 2000, p. 75). Here we have, for instance, two individuals plus their interacting, as well as the ecology within which such interacting is occurring, as a focus for attention. This reminds us that individuals are not static beings who will always act and react in the same manner, no matter who they are with and under what circumstances communication is occurring. It is a belief within systems theory that different selves are elicited, depending on who we are with or where we are in
ourselves on any given day, and that this cannot be divorced from the environment or ecology within which we find ourselves at that point. In focusing on the whole and on the interconnectedness of the members of the system, we can see how a change in one part of the system affects all other parts of the system as well. This leads to the idea of fit or of how we meet with and give each other form in the relational space between us. This is a second-order cybernetics construct and leads us therefore to a discussion of cybernetics of cybernetics.

2.3 CYBERNETICS OF CYBERNETICS

Cybernetics of cybernetics can be used interchangeably with the term second-order cybernetics and falls under the epistemological umbrella of postmodernism. Here we move to a higher level of abstraction so that we are no longer outside of the system we are observing (Becvar & Becvar, 2000). The observer becomes part of, or participant in, that which is observed. The focus here shifts from a behaviour analysis based on inputs and outputs with an emphasis on the environment, to a recursive analysis that emphasises the internal structure of the system and mutual connectedness of the observer and observed. Becvar and Becvar (2000), quote Dell as saying “[a]ll attributions of purpose are made by an observer who is interpreting the behaviour in question” and go on to say that “.we can only invent and state the purpose of a system according to our own perceptions as outsiders looking in”(p. 77). However, to suppose a system’s output or interactional behaviour is purposeful in achieving some end, is a linear supposition which is
not in keeping with the epistemology of systems theory. Becvar and Becvar (2000) have this to say: “if the best definition of the system is itself, the only logical claim we can make is that the system exists in order to exist, or to do what it does” and that to infer a goal “..requires someone outside the system to do so, an activity that is legitimate only at the level of simple cybernetics” (p. 77).

Second-order cybernetics, as an expansion upon first-order cybernetics, sees an observing system where the observer is part of the system he or she is observing. Becvar and Becvar (2000) point out that “first order consensual domains are those we study. Second-order consensual domains are those of which we are a part” (p. 84). In the process of observing, we are “inevitably interacting with and helping create the reality of the consensual domain we are attempting to observe” (p. 84). Instead of thinking about interventions, one thinks in terms of a stance or posture of mind (Hoffman, 1985).

In accordance with the epistemology of second-order cybernetics, the idea that meaning comes from outside of a person is fallacious. Varela and Johnson (in Becvar & Becvar, 2000) point out that everything that is going on is entirely self-referential: “whatever you see reflects your properties” (p.78). The distinctions we make come from our own frame of reference, and we “punctuate reality according to these epistemological premises” (Becvar & Becvar, 2000, p. 79). Keeney (in Becvar & Becvar, 2000) points out that “we should never forget that the cybernetic system we discern is a consequence of the distinctions we happen to draw” (p. 79). Rappaport (in Becvar & Becvar,
2000) says that the “ecological systems in which man participates are likely to be so complex that he may never have sufficient comprehension of their content” and that “comprehension of the whole is impossible and would require what Bronowski has called “a God’s-eye view”” (p. 66).

Another construct in cybernetics of cybernetics is that of autonomous systems. An autonomous system refers to the highest order of recursion and the range of deviation or level of stability maintained is that of the organisation of the whole. Autonomous systems are interactive and changes may occur at this level, but changes at this level involve structure, or the way in which the organisation of the whole is maintained. Therefore interactions at the level of autonomy must be referred to as perturbations rather than as inputs coming into the system from an external environment.

2.3.1 Structural Determinism

Becvar and Becvar (2000) discuss the idea of structural determinism where “what each [system] does or can do is determined by its specific structure” (p.82). Therefore, what a system does is always correct, because “the system does only what its structure determines it can do. Only from the perspective of an observer can we define the action of a system as an error” (p. 82).
The structure of a system refers to the relations between the parts, as well as
the identity of the parts, that constitute the whole. A cybernetic construct that
can be usefully employed here is that of autopoiesis. Becvar and Becvar
(2000) explain that an autopoietic system “becomes distinct from its
environment through its own dynamics” (p. 80). In terms of this construct, it is
the way parts relate, rather than the nature of the parts, that generates a unity
with particular properties by means of which we define that unity. It is
therefore the way a family system is organised (hierarchically) and how they
relate, rather than the identity of the individual parts, that makes it a family. “It
is the way the parts relate, rather than the nature of the parts, that generates
a unity with particular properties by means of which we define that unity”
(Becvar & Becvar, 2000, p. 80).

At the level of autonomy, we can say that systems are structurally determined.
Maturana and Varela explain that a system can be perturbed by a certain
event, but the actual change the system might undergo as a result of a
perturbation results from the properties of its constitution, regardless of the
nature of the perturbation (Maturana & Varela, 1980). Thus, the system itself
determines the range of structural variations it can accept without loss of
identity. The system is limited, by virtue of its structure, to what it can and
cannot do.

2.3.2 Structural Coupling and Nonpurposeful Drift

In terms of structural determinism, therefore, what a system does is always
correct because the system does only what its structure determines it can do.
Only from the perspective of an observer can we define the action of a system
as an error. However, systems do exist within a medium that includes other systems and observers. The degree to which these systems are able to coexist is defined by the concept of structural coupling. According to this concept, organisms survive by fitting with one another and with other aspects of their context and will die if that fit is insufficient.

2.3.3 An Epistemology of Participation

In terms of structural coupling, we cannot define progress as a quest for greater accuracy or truth, as we try to understand our world. We can instead say that we create new and different ways to coordinate our actions with one another (Efran & Clarfield, 1992). We cannot act as observers who delineate more accurate representations of reality. This is known as an ‘epistemology of participation where “observer and the observed are inextricably bound up with each other and objectivity, as we normally understand it, is impossible”’ (Becvar & Becvar, 2000, p. 83).

Becvar and Becvar (2000) point out that the therapist who fails to acknowledge personal membership in the context within which a family exists and problems are defined, and who therefore treats families, does not operate differently from the therapist who chooses to see problems residing within the minds of individuals and therefore treats patients. Events have no explanatory power relative to an understanding of the whole from the perspective of a so-called objective outsider. Rather, understanding is possible only from the perspective of the subject who is doing the questioning, describing or explaining.
2.3.4 Multiple Realities

The difference between first- and second-order cybernetics lies in the way each conceives of reality. First-order cybernetics puts forward the idea that within a family, there are many different views of the same family system. By contrast, second-order cybernetics postulates that, in reality, there is no ‘one’ family. Maturana (in Becvar & Becvar, 2000) explains that “there is no absolute, objective family… for each member there is a different family, and that each of these is absolutely valid” (p. 85). From this it follows that we can no longer talk about a universe, but rather a multiverse (Becvar & Becvar, 2000). There is no one way the universe is, but many conceptions of it, hence the term ‘multiverse’. Perception therefore constructs reality. Becvar and Becvar (2000) state that we “create our reality, our world, by assimilating and accommodating input via our conceptual structures or personal world view” and that it then becomes “exceedingly important to understand the presuppositions and assumptions according to which we perceive or construct reality” (p.85).

2.4 SOCIAL CONSTRUCTIONISM

Social constructionism instructs us to include the context of language and its creation and ramifications. Language is not a reporting device for our experiences, or representationalism. According to Gergen (1992), representationalism is an assumption that there is a determinant, or fixed relationship between words and the world at large. Language instead provides a defining framework. Therefore a change in language equals a change in experience because reality can only be experienced, and according to McNamee and Gergen (1993), the “reality” experienced is “inseparable from the prepackaged thoughts of society, or the forestructures of understanding” (p. 26). Here the focus shifts from a focus on mind and the constructions of individuals to the world of intersubjectively shared meaning-making. Social constructionism calls on therapists to place greater emphasis on context, on the social constructions of individuals and problems, and on the creation of narratives, with the understanding that ours is a storied reality. Two of the main constructs of social constructionism are societal context and the role language or discourse plays in the construction of meaning. Owen (2006) says, “the claim and viewpoint that the content of our consciousness, and the mode of relating we have to others, is taught by our culture and society: All the metaphysical qualities we take for granted are learned from others around us” (p. 386). In this way we can understand reality to be socially negotiated meaning or shared truth. In terms of this epistemology then, the aim for a researcher would be to illuminate meaning through “an understanding of how ideas and attitudes are developed over time within a social, community context” (Dickerson & Zimmerman, 1996, p. 80). Beliefs, values and even the way we remember events (through choosing to store
information subjectively perceived to be noteworthy) are socially constructed phenomena. Owen (2006) points out that knowledge is located in the social processes of symbolism, interaction and exchange, rather than in the minds of individuals. Knowledge or a conceptualisation therefore becomes a “world of intersubjectively shared meaning making” (Becvar & Becvar, 2000, p. 92).

This has important implications for the researcher working from a social constructionist perspective. Firstly, implicit is an acknowledgement that the researcher is not separate from the reality or phenomenon he or she is observing. It is acknowledged that even the act of observing a system changes that system, and that when the researcher joins a system to observe it, it is no longer the same system. The researcher therefore guards against forcing his or her account of reality on the system or on the reader of his or her research. A conversational space can instead be created with both researcher and researched accorded a voice and an opportunity to learn from the experience. The setting is approached in openness, the researcher’s process remains as transparent as his or her participants’, and the aim is, instead of imposing a view or theory on that which is observed, to build theory using the inductive, bottom-up approach to building knowledge, while all the time negotiating and renegotiating the meanings elicited from the study.

Another important aspect to social constructionism is its conceptualisation of power. Firstly, knowledge is seen as power. Secondly, power is never intrinsic to a person but is relative to another and is negotiated in the social space between them. Thirdly, different realities are not equal in power and
thus do not share the same status or influence. Remembering that meanings are socially negotiated, those with power through so-called knowledge or who go along with a socially acknowledged and preferred reality may exert influence over those seemingly lacking such power. Discourses are socially shared, usually unquestioned beliefs, and when they are used in society to silence others or to negate their perhaps quieter or less widely held beliefs, a form of subjugation can occur. These are known as dominant discourses or “grand narratives” which are “supported by the weight of numbers, traditions, and firmly entrenched power structures” in a society (Doan, 1997, p. 130). White and Epston (in Becvar & Becvar, 2000) point out that the “particular meanings we impose on behaviour are dictated and organised by whatever ‘dominating analogies or interpretive frameworks’ are currently available” (p. 303).

Doan (1997) goes on to point out that individuals are “communities of selves” and that each one “contains a multitude of voices with varying points of view” (p.130). In keeping with the social constructionist epistemology, this statement acknowledges that we have multiple selves which are elicited differently depending on the context or the particular ecology of thought, ideology and circumstance in which we find ourselves at any particular moment in time. An aim, perhaps, then of research carried out under the social constructionist banner would be to hear the voices of those who may have found themselves silenced within the dominant discourses of the society in which they live. In this way, new understandings and new meanings can emerge.
2.4.1 Language

Language is seen as a pivotal aspect of social constructionism as it is the means by which we encounter, interact with and negotiate shared meanings. Anderson and Goolishian (in Hart, 1995) point out that “we live with each other in a world of conversational narrative, and we understand ourselves and others through changing stories of self descriptions” (p.184).

Thus reality can be understood to “exist within the conversation between knower and known” (Janowski, Clark & Ivey, 2000, p. 242). Here knower and known are mutually dependent and reciprocally influence each other through the process of interacting and of finding a common language.

Languaging and available discourses about communities orientate us to experience communities in a certain way and therefore exert a powerful influence on our experiences within communities. In addition to this, the manner in which we language our experiences impacts on the sense of identity we form and how we come to know ourselves in context of society.

2.4.2 The Role of Social Context

In terms of social constructionism, the community and context in which one lives has values, attitudes, customs and beliefs as part of its structure. These colour and give form to the members of a community and thereby inform their experience of themselves in that context. When members of a community
come together and can reach consensus about an aspect of reality, they can be said to have co-constructed meaning and made a space for socially constructed, shared beliefs to emerge.

This process is of necessity strongly influenced and perhaps proscribed by a country’s historical and political ideology. This social climate and the unquestioned and implicit narratives or discourses that result can be said to emanate from and perhaps even to protect the sense of reality held by the majority, or by those who possess power relative to others. It is these unquestioned, reified and often subjugating narratives that this study hopes to illuminate and question and also to give an ear to the quieter, and more silenced narratives where, it is believed, the authenticity and the hope of transformation resides.

Dickerson and Zimmerman (1996) echo this thinking, and ask us to question a single account of reality, as this is the climate in which problems germinate. Often the personal stories or narratives of individuals do not have a place within society’s dominant discourses or belief systems, and this can silence, and sometimes serve to pathologise, those who do not fit into the prescribed norms. It is important therefore to “honour and respect the community of voices inherent in each individual and how these accounts can be respected in a particular system” (Doan, 1997, p. 13). Narratives that exist at the expense of others, or seek to silence another’s sense of reality, affect relationships negatively and may be said to be “stories in collision” (Doan, 1997, p. 131). The aim of social constructionism, then, is to deconstruct those
narratives that silence or dominate others, which in turn allows for the
discovery of alternative voices. What becomes privileged as a result is a
person’s “lived experience” rather than so-called “expert knowledge”, and
leads ultimately to an experience of personal agency (Doan, 1997, p.130). A
questioning of the socio-political discourses allows us to question the political
status quo and possibly some of the subjugating or disqualifying belief
systems that inform the ideology prevalent in our land.

In this chapter, the epistemology informing this study was examined with
particular reference to the shift from Newtonian assumptions of ontology to
Systems, or First Order Cybernetics, epistemology. Cybernetics of
Cybernetics, or Second-Order Cybernetics, was then expounded upon, which
was followed by an examination of Social Constructionism.

Next, the current literature pertaining to community interventions is critically
examined.
CHAPTER 3

THEORETICAL CONSIDERATIONS PERTAINING TO COMMUNITY INTERVENTIONS

In this chapter, current literature pertaining to community work is critically examined in context of this study and what it hopes to achieve.

3.1 INTRODUCTION

Against the backdrop of post-apartheid South Africa, there still exists a high percentage of our population that lives in abject poverty. In rural parts of our country, inhabitants live in housing made from steel sheeting, or sometimes bricks, and have limited access to social services such as community centres, amenities, education and health care. Under the former political dispensation, citizens of South Africa were allocated land by the Group Areas Act and lived there in dire conditions. An excerpt from The 60th Annual Report of the Alexandra Health Care Centre and University Clinic (cited in Butchart & Seedat (1990, p.1096) states

The appalling housing and the lack of basic services are the direct result of 75 years of racially discriminatory legislation and official neglect.

Surrounded by some of the wealthiest “white” suburbs in the world, the 140,000 people, who, because they are black, are crammed into the one square mile that is Alex, are still forced to live with piles of refuse, open drains, impassable roads and stinking bucket latrines… But Alexandra is not a beaten or degraded community. The people have a long and relatively successful history of refusing to be pushed around, whether by a
bus company, by gangsters or by government. There is a strong sense of community.

Many changes have taken place in our country since then, but many people still live in such unbearable conditions.

3.2 THE CONSTRUCT OF COMMUNITY

Butchart and Seedat (1990) question the uncritical use of the term ‘community’ and go on to examine how unwittingly existing inequalities within South African society can be perpetuated, when the idea of what community is is informed by an unquestioned political and perhaps subjugating discourse. Butchart and Seedat (1990) point out that common sense, or our unconscious, unquestioned beliefs, and “political discourse work as an ideological transmission belt to articulate social and subjective factors and reproduce amongst people the values, attitudes, and life-styles which are integral to the maintenance and reproduction of a particular social formation” (p.1094).

John Donne (1572-1631) wrote, “No man is an island entire of itself; every man is a piece of the continent; a part of the main” (in Berns, 2004, p. 391). Community can be seen as a group of people who live in the same proximity or who have something in common. The word community comes from the Latin word communis, which means “shared” (Berns, 2004, p.391). The idea of sharing, instead of being seen in material terms such as in sharing
resources, can also refer to values, customs, beliefs, shared hardships and responsibility. Community is a microsystem within which the processes of socialisation and development can occur and represents an extension of family and friendship ties, or a ‘sense of community’. Community ecology can be defined as “the psychological and practical relationships between those people, and their social and physical environments” (Berns, 2004, p.391).

An exploration of the literature brings to light that most of the research carried out with regard to community work is informed by a positivist and empirical epistemological stance. Many of the studies appeared to have as their goal the production of conclusive evidence and the data was then generalised to the larger population.

In theorising about community work, however, one can insulate oneself and, by definition, see oneself as apart from, and an objective observer of, the community one is working in. The term ‘community’ can become reified as an entity that is static and knowable, but what exactly is ‘community’? Is it a particular geographic location? (Lewis et al., 1998; Morris, 1994). Is it a particular group of people? Is it sharing symbols? Systems of knowledge? Yes, in some ways of knowing. Yet it is so much more than that. The World Book Dictionary (Barnhart, Nault, Zeleny & Ludgin, 1974) defines community as “a number of people having common ties or interests, living in the same place and subject to the same laws; ownership together; a sharing together: a community of idea; likeness; similarity; identity; community of interests causes people to work together. Affinity” (p. 426).
McMillan and Chavis (1986) define community as “a feeling that members have of belonging, a feeling that members matter to one another and to the group, and a shared faith that members’ needs will be met through their commitment to be together” (p. 9). Individuals share a universal drive to belong to some form of community. Germain (1991) points out that this drive stems from the need to establish a sense of community with others whereby individuals become better able to satisfy both their emotional and instrumental needs. This sense of interdependence determines one’s sense of personal well-being (Gilligan, 1982; Jordan, Kaplan, Miller, Stiver & Surrey, 1991).

Bhatia and Ram (2001) warn that we should not be tempted to see community as homogeneous, or that it has the same meaning for all members within it. Although communities have a shared cultural background and history, they are complex and diverse (Hermans & Kempen, 1998).

### 3.3 Community as an Ecology

Ecology, according to Bronfenbrenner and Morris (in Berns, 2004), can be defined as “the science of interrelationships between organisms and their environments; for humans, it involves the consequent biological, psychological, social, and cultural processes that develop over time” (p.3). The country’s politics, the environment, social groups, community belonging and family all intermingle to inform an individual’s socialisation. This is in turn fed back into society by individuals in the present, which colours what the
future holds in store for the community members, collectively and individually. A focus on the process of socialisation within communities highlights the aspects detailed below.

### 3.4 THE PROCESS OF SOCIALISATION WITHIN COMMUNITIES

Socialisation is the process by which individuals learn the skills to cope and to participate in society (Berns, 2004). Socialisation, instead of being seen as linear, is in fact a reciprocal process where individuals mutually influence each other and are both producers as well as the products of this interacting (Zimmerman, 2002).

Through the process of socialisation, an individual comes to form a sense of self. This self reflects the attitudes of others and can be termed the “looking-glass self” (Berns, 2004, p. 36). Mead called this sense of self, which matures and changes over time, the “generalised other” and holds the concepts, standards and opinions others hold of the person, as well as his or her experiences of how others relate to him or her.

#### 3.4.1 The Impact of Crime

In a South African context, discussions about the effects of violence refer to political violence in the form of riots and the subjugations of people opposing the apartheid regime. The crime rate in townships is very high, as are other social problems like violence, alcoholism, conflict and neglect of children. These problems, because of pervasive and unrelenting poverty, are the
backdrop against which political violence in our country erupted. Township dwellers are exposed to violence from an early age (Freeman, 1993; Gibson, 1993; Ramsden, 1994; Stevens & Lockhart, 1997, Straker, et al., 1992; Straker, et al., 1996; Turton, Straker & Moosa, 1990). This violence manifests in the form of rape, sexual assault, incest, physical assault and robbery.

Women and children are most often the victims of such crimes. According to Herman (1992) exposure to trauma in adulthood erodes the structure of the personality already formed, and goes on to say that trauma experienced in childhood can form and even deform the personality. Factors that may have protected members of society from the effects of violence and would perhaps have allowed space for alternatives to aggressive attitudes and violence, have been undermined by many years of colonialism and apartheid (Robertson, 1988; Sonn, et al 1999; Stavron, 1998). In looking at society for a moment through the eyes of a child, one must ask: where are the safe havens? Fathers or patriarchs behave violently, streets and schools manifest ubiquitous violence; even figures of authority are often complicit in and encourage violent activities.

Gamezy (in Straker, 1989) points out that supportive family networks, inner constitutional factors and external support systems can serve as mitigating factors to the effects of a criminogenic environment. Stavron (1998) points out that social support helps mitigate the effects of a stressful environment. Support from friends, family, neighbours, teachers and other significant individuals helps buffer an individual from stress and trauma. Being able to
call on someone for help, especially after being a victim of a violent act, allows one to regain a sense of coping and some measure of control, which is an important factor in the recovery of a trauma (Jones, 2004).

3.4.2 The Impact of High Population Density

In townships there is high population density with a very large number of people occupying a relatively small piece of land. According to Etzioni (in Berns, 2004), high population density can positively affect relationships, and a sense of community in that social interaction is an integral and nourishing part of daily life. However, high population density can also have the negative effect of social contact that is in excess of what is desired, can cause a lack of privacy, reduced freedom to do the things one wishes to, personal space violations, and the all too common resultant scarcity of resources (Mulroy & Lauber, 2004). Rodin (in Berns, 2004) has shown a positively correlated relationship between high population density and a susceptibility to ‘learned helplessness’, which exists where individual members of a community have, through circumstance, derived the idea that they are powerless to exert control over their lives (Owen, 2006). A sense of helplessness and apathy abounds (Rappaport, 1987; 1985; 1984). Limber and Nation (in Berns, 2004) have also found a correlation between high population density and violence and crime. Continual exposure to violence and crime, in turn, can feed a sense of helplessness in community members, rendering them powerless to effect positive changes in their lives (Shulman, 2005).
3.4.3 The Impact of Poverty

Poverty in rural areas also plays a huge role in individuals’ lives in that it has been shown that lack of finances and a sense of economic well-being renders parents less able not only to meet their children’s material needs, but their intellectual and emotional needs as well (Berns, 2004). The consequences of lack of funds and unemployment so ubiquitous in townships, are higher rates of crime and delinquency, substance abuse, truancy from and failure at school, higher rates of child abuse and neglect, and malnourished children, to name a few (Rappaport, 1984). Ward (in Berns, 2004) points out that “the child, like the adult, learns the art and technique of citizenship, not through admonitions or through lectures, but from involvement in real issues” (p.403).

Jackson and Haley (in Vorster, 2003) reason that a symptom is a way of dealing with a relationship, or can be seen as a metaphor for the relationships amongst members of a system. Conversely, the opportunity for healing also lies within this system and can, with the right opportunity, provide a context for change (Guteman, 2005). This then points to the importance of a focus on one’s environment and on the individuals responsible for socializing children.

3.4.4 A Feeling of Belonging within the Community

According to Stevens and Fiske (1996) all motivation can be looked at in terms of “maintaining relatedness to others in the social group” (p.116). Leakey (in Stevens & Fiske., 1996) says “group membership is essential to human physical survival from infancy onward” (p.116) In this regard many
theorists in both psychology and sociology have argued that it is a person’s subjective experience that he or she belongs secretly to a group that is correlated strongly with his or her survival and well-being. People are likely to feel anxious when their subjective experience of belonging to a group and their skills to remain as members of a group are threatened. In order for persons to feel securely part of a group they also need to feel “competent, good and worthy” (Stevens & Fiske, 1996, p.116). Continuous feelings of powerlessness may influence the manner in which persons evaluate themselves, which may in turn impact on their self-esteem and also influence their perception of the world.

Royal and Rossi (1996) point out that awareness or our experience of self is not a direct, unmediated experience. Instead, our experience of self is mediated through socio-historical language systems that colour the experience of selfhood. In this way, self is deconstructed as a static, isolated construct and is instead open-ended and given form within a specific socio-cultural symbolic order.

3.4.5 The Social Transmission of Values

In the broader ideological context, the values held by individuals and families are mirrored in the wider ideology of the South African people. Apartheid taught us the language of fragmentation and that some individuals were ‘superior’ to or more privileged than others. A post-apartheid South Africa needs therefore to uphold values of respect for human rights and the dignity
of all South Africans in order for us to begin to heal the tear in the fabric of our society (Wade, 1997).

According to Herman (1992), the essential aspects of trauma and, it can be argued, of the legacy of apartheid, are disempowerment and disconnection from others. The experience or threat of violence, in addition to being aversive, can threaten one’s ability to cope and of feeling safe (Stavron, 1998; Straker, et al., 1992). Recovery, Herman postulates, is empowerment in the forming of new connections. These connections are formed in context of relationships and can give a chance at forming new ways of being together where we can reform psychological faculties that were damaged by traumatic experiences. Specifically, these faculties are the capacities for trust, autonomy, initiative, competence and intimacy. These faculties are usually elicited and formed in our relating to others. Therefore, healing lies in a different experience of relating to others; one which provides a space for healing (O’Connor, 1997).

3.5 THE CULTURE OF PSYCHOLOGY

In terms of individualistic culture, principles of self-determination, enlightened self-interest, autonomy, independence, freedom, political moderation and democracy for all, are uppermost. Principles at the core of collectivistic cultures are those of sharing, helping one another, connectedness – ‘ubuntu’ or striving for the greater good of everyone.
As consultants, we also belong to the ‘culture’ of psychology, which can be seen to embrace the values of compassion, empathy, humility, generosity, caring and helpful intervention (Altman & Rogoff, 1984). Yet even within this subculture, it is unlikely that these principles will be embraced equally by everyone. Historically, the counselling profession has made use of a helping paradigm and employed one to one interview strategies that have as their focus the client’s intrapsychic experiences. The aim is to facilitate change in individuals rather than in their environments. Even though research has shown a pressing need for a model that addresses the nation’s mental health needs, this individualistic stance to counselling has dominated the field (Lewis, Lewis, Daniels & D’Andrea, 1998). Lewis, et al. (1998) go on to point out that as counsellors we need to reconsider our roles when working with diverse client populations. Psychology, practised under the former dispensation, and to some extent today, has drawn criticism for being elitist, embedded in the political ideology and “decontextualised and ethnocentric” in nature (Mjoli, 1987).

Specifically, we need to increase our awareness of contextual (Steenberger, 1991), ecological (Germain, 1991) and systems theories (von Bertalanffy, 1968), the rise of multiculturalism (Locke, 1992; Sue & Sue, 1990) and the emergence of postmodern thinking (Gergen, 1992).

3.6 THE FACILITATOR AS A RESOURCE FOR THE COMMUNITY
In practice, work in communities seldom sees a linear relationship and it is often not clear who it is that needs more help, the helper or the community, on any given day (Keys, Bemak, Carpenter & King-Sears, 1998). Zimmerman (2004) points out that help is seldom unidirectional and that the language of professionals ‘limits the discovery of indigenous resources and reduces the likelihood of people helping each other’ (p. 44). He suggests that the words ‘client’ and ‘expert’ be replaced by ‘participant’ and ‘collaborator’. The role of the collaborator, rather than bestowing his or her knowledge on the community, then becomes one of facilitating an awareness of what is already there and therefore “works with the participants instead of advocating for them” (Zimmerman, 2004, p. 44; Glidewell, 1984). In this way, the facilitator becomes a resource for the community (Speedy, et al., 2005).

3.7 THE CONSTRUCT OF EMPOWERMENT

One’s understanding of empowerment is informed by a theoretical orientation that defines the process of exerting control and being able to influence the decisions that affect one’s life. The Cornell Empowerment Group (cited in Zimmerman, 2004), using an ecological construction of empowerment, defines empowerment thus, “Empowerment is an intentional, ongoing process centred in the local community, involving mutual respect, critical reflection, caring, and group participation, through which people lacking an equal share of valued resources gain greater access to and control over those resources” (p. 43).
Kelly (in Zimmerman, 2004) puts forward the idea of creating an ‘eco-identity’ which means the collaborator identifies with the community in which he or she works and allows a space for learning about and acknowledging the context and its value system as well. Collaboration implies parity amongst all involved. Weisbord (1990) points out that a less obvious, but vital component in this process is the establishment of trust between consultants and the members of the community they are working with.

An examination of the literature on community work brings to light varied approaches to community outreaches.

3.8 CONSIDERATION OF COMMUNITY INTERVENTIONS

Rappaport (1981) places us at the beginning point of defining the nature of social problem solving and of what exactly ‘societal change’ is. He points out that achieving a social change that is meaningful needs to negotiate several obstacles. The greater the importance of the needed social change, the more difficult it is to accomplish in its particular society because, by definition, important problems tend to involve more people, more money and more vested interests of the stakeholders within that community. Furthermore, there is an inverse relationship between the size of the proposed intervention, the size of its impact and then how likely it is to be feasible. Another aspect he brings to light is that interventions concordant with the beliefs and structures of the system in which they are implemented are in one view hypothesised to be most effective, yet paradoxically it is that very quality
that can be its biggest flaw, since the intervention may then not be different enough to have any impact at all. Is the answer then to ‘think small’? Or would such thinking likewise create an intervention that is too small to be felt? Would some things (perhaps superficial things) change, leaving the problem-generating ideologies and structures functionally the same? Rappaport (1981) asserts that the converse of ‘thinking big’ would certainly avoid the problem, but can be to some extent unrealistic if the goal is short-term change, since the envisaged structures and ideologies are not present to support a radical change.

A further aspect to be examined in community work is the role of values and of valuing (Fisher, Sonn & Bishop, 2002). All community work holds an implicit set of values and what becomes important is that these values are explicitly stated. As a result, a space for questioning which values are implicit and perhaps which have utilitarian capacity in context of one’s working, and therefore need to be or are included in the intervention, is made possible. One germaine aspect to be ascertained is whether the study is to be of a descriptive or of a prescriptive nature. Prescriptive approaches advocate the primacy of values like egalitarian justice. Descriptive approaches, conversely, reflect the values held by one or more stakeholders or groups with no pretensions that those values are best. To this end, community interventions must, asserts Rappaport (1981), be informed by the entire array of relevant values if they are to represent, and ultimately play a role in, the political process. To take a linear, reductionistic view is the surest way to avoid looking at arguments that influence an issue. This is not an argument for
value-free science, but rather for explicit consideration of a plausible set of values so that one’s own values do not dominate the research and limit its utility (Altman & Rogoff, 1984; Bhatia & Ram, 2001; McMillan & Chavis, 1986).

An examination of the some of the specific and current approaches to community work follows.

3.8.1 Kurpius, Fuqua and Rozecki’s Community Intervention Model

Kurpius, Fuqua and Rozecki (1993) put forward ideas for the planning and implementation of a community intervention project. An intervention can run in a planned sequence but seldom proceeds in a ‘textbook’ manner and the way the intervention unfolds is often a circular or ‘recycling’ process.

Kurpius, et al. (1993) point out that it is important for the consultants to self-reflect and to begin to assess their ability to help in the community setting. A consultant can readily be perceived as one who has special abilities to both define a problem and then to solve it for a particular person or group. While it is true that the consultants have training and supervision in this regard, it is important to remember that no one person can define a problem as it exists for another or others. A process of collaboration or mutual defining of the problems to be addressed is of benefit because otherwise, the facilitators can easily and unwittingly behave in a way that can be experienced as disempowering by the members of the community. Kurpius, et al. (1993) also point out that it is “possible to both underestimate and overestimate one’s
potential to be helpful” (p. 601). A consultant needs to remain self-reflective during the process of theoretical conceptualisation of the community setting and the participants of the project, as well as to maintain an awareness that the particular theoretical paradigm he or she uses to understand those around him or her, is but one chosen way to view reality, and not necessarily the only way to construct events.

The consultant should maintain an awareness, for instance, of his or her beliefs and values and the way in which s/he perceives individuals, programmes, groups or organisations to bring about, solve or avoid difficulties. Thomas and Weinrach (1998) point out that our worldview should influence, but not necessarily determine, our professional worldview. They add that although an appreciation of diversity is the foundation on which all forms of human advancement are built, “the dialogue should also include diversity of ideas, values, beliefs, interests, personalities, and abilities, and should not be limited to one’s racial, gender, or ethnic characteristics” (1998, p.116).

Kurpius et al. (1993) go on to say that community work encompasses an initial point of contact with the community site, as well as the actions that lead up to the problem exploration and, as a result, to determining a feasible and practicable intervention or ‘contract’. This stage of consultation with the members of the system and contracting a plan of action is vital to the success of the programme. The consultant needs to make clear the key principles and areas needing exploration and discussion before drafting a contract. For instance, what are the problem areas to be addressed by the community
members, how long has the problem existed, who is involved and have there been any prior attempts at solving the problem? Another aspect to be considered is understanding the forces for and against change, or the degree of openness or closedness of the system within which the problem exists. In a system that is closed, a homeostasis exists where stability is maintained over change so that the system remains informationally closed and no adjustment is evidenced. A system that is open is able to respond to information in such a way that change is afforded a place without threatening the stability of the system. Assessing the system’s readiness for change is an important aspect during contracting as well as throughout the process of community intervention itself.

The consultants will make use of their preferred theoretical paradigm in order to conceptualise the community setting and intervention. However, during this early concept-formation, it is probably most useful to embrace a collaborative stance once again, and to involve the community members as far as possible in order to gain a rich description and understanding of problems to be addressed within the particular context in which they exist.

Another aspect to community work outlined by Kurpius et al. (1993) is that of information gathering, problem confirmation and goal setting. Important at this stage is to gather data in order to define, as clearly as possible, where the problem exists, and what form it takes in order to select a meaningful and appropriate intervention to solve the problem. In order to do this, quantitative data, in the form of measurable constructs, as well as qualitative data,
including participant observation on the part of the consultants and in-depth interviewing of community members, need to be collated into a meaningful whole.

When the problem has thus been clearly defined, the next step is to reach consensus on ownership of the problem. To this end, attribution theory can be meaningfully employed. One of the constructs in attribution theory is “errors in attribution” whereby the problem is erroneously attributed to persons or situations that often are beyond the person’s control or conscious volition. A finding within this theory is that individuals can be inclined to attribute their own problems to ‘the system’ or to forces outside of themselves, but others’ problems are construed to have an internal cause and which therefore are, by their nature, under the other person’s conscious control (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Chavis & Newborough, 1986). In line with this thinking, it can be seen that there is a risk of the members within the setting attributing the problem to ‘outside forces’ with the result that nobody is willing to take responsibility for it. The converse of this line of thinking is when an over-responsibility is taken for difficulties that arise in one’s environment. Instead of “confronting the context of oppression and exploitation, [individuals] locate the origins of social distress within individuals and the ‘community’, so defining themselves as patients in need of cure” (Butchart & Seedat, 1990, p. 1099).

Kurpius, et al. (1993) point out that in the solution searching and intervention selection stage of community work, consultants should not to rush into a solution, as solution and intervention selection are as important as good data
and accurate problem definition is to the success of the community intervention. Argis provides an operational definition of intervention: “To intervene is to enter into an ongoing system of relationships, to come between or among persons, groups, or objects for the purpose of helping them” (in Kurpius, et al., 1993, p. 604). D’Angelli (in Kurpius, et al., 1993, p. 604) states that an intervention is “at a specific level of analysis” and that it pursues “a goal or intent using a technique or strategy”. Carkhuff offers this definition (in Kurpius, et al., 1993)

An intervention is both a response and an initiative. It is a response to a situation that defines a need. It is a response to a deficit or to what is not present. At the same time, it is an initiative to influence that situation to fill in what is not present, to transform the deficits into assets. In short, an intervention is an attempt to make a difference (p. 605).

During this process, it is again important to use a collaborative approach, with the consultants and community members both accorded a voice (Berry, 1998; Glynn, 1981; Rubin & Rubin, 1995). In determining the best solution to be implemented, worth considering is the level at which the intervention is to be carried out. Caplan (in Kurpius, et al. 1993) puts forward three types of helping, namely primary, secondary and tertiary interventions. On a primary level, intervention is aimed at either reducing the problem or attempting to prevent its occurrence in the future; on a secondary level, intervention is to treat or to shorten the duration of an already existing problem; and on a tertiary level, the primary goal is support of the client since problem resolution
is not an anticipated option (Hunter & Riger, 1986; Kingston, Mitchell, Florin & Stevenson, 1999).

Evaluation, according to Worthen and Sanders (in Kurpius, et al., 1993) is a “more applied form of enquiry, and is targeted more on understanding a specific case of observations than on producing knowledge that can be generalised” (p. 605). In this stage one needs to ask whether the goals for intervention have been met and to what end they were accomplished. Is there a necessity for further intervention? Have there been unexpected or serendipitous findings? Has the intervention been to the greater good of the community in which it was carried out? Was it well and usefully received? What can be done to ensure the project’s sustainability?

Evaluation does not necessarily occur in a step-wise fashion at the end of the intervention and should in fact be part of the on-going process as it plays out in situ. Information about the success of specific techniques and strategies can in this way be fed back into the system as the intervention progresses and can thus lead to effective changes, where necessary, as the project goes along.

A final aspect to a community outreach programme is to ascertain its sustainability after the participants have left the setting (Kurpius, et al., 1993). Systems, for instance, that provide family assistance in terms of spousal or child abuse, family counselling and vocational guidance. Economic assistance is also important and can be provided by both governmental and
private social agencies (should they exist) within the community. It should be ascertained whether there exist any child care or child protection units within the township or local towns (Lysaker, 2006). These could help children at risk and provide an educational function for those most vulnerable members of society (Clough, 2006).

Another aspect to ascertaining a project’s sustainability is to issue a survey to community members in order to determine their response to the intervention and whether they feel it can be improved in any way.

What follows is an examination of Beer’s community intervention model. Beer (in Kurpius, et al., 1993), instead of conceptualising community work in terms of specific stages, uses the diagnostic, individual, process and structural dimensions to define community work.

### 3.8.2 Beer’s Community Intervention Model

Another dimension to interventions is put forward by Beer (in Kurpius et al., 1993) who established four categories by which to classify change strategies. These are a) diagnostic, b) individual, c) process and d) structural. Diagnostic interventions are used to learn more about people or systems and communities. Individual interventions focus on the facilitation of a higher level of functionality within people and groups, usually through the use of workshops or similar educational applications and can include one-on-one work within these groups. Interventions on a process level focus on an examination of the problem and the facilitation of a clearer understanding of its workings within each member, guided by the idea that each person
possesses the innate ability to solve their own problems and merely lacks the insight to do so. Structural interventions involve a change in the structure of the system’s organisation, which then effects a change in the individuals within it (Manowski & Rappaport, 1995; Rappaport, 1995; Sonn & Fisher, 2000). Kurpius, et al. (1993) caution against defining most problems as caused by human factors and likewise overemphasising systemic structural properties as causative. Instead of using an either/or approach, a both/and conceptualisation should ideally be embraced, with neither aspect of the situation given more importance.

Next Zimmerman’s Community Intervention Model, which focuses on different levels of intervention; namely those on an individual, organisational and community level, will be examined.

3.8.3 Zimmerman’s Community Intervention Model

Zimmerman (2004) proposes three levels of intervention; namely individual, organisational and community levels. On an individual level, one is seeking to facilitate a critical awareness and sense of control or ability to act, as well as decision-making skills within the individual members of the community setting. On an organisational level, intervention is aimed at taking a shared responsibility and leadership amongst the participants, a sharing of resources and networking with other existing organisations within the community (Straker, Mendelsohn, Moosa & Tudin, 1996; Straker, Moosa, Becker & Nkwale, 1992). On a community level, the facilitator looks at access to resources, is facilitative of a tolerance for diversity and tries to encourage all
members’ participation in the project. Thus, according to Kieffer (in Zimmerman, 2004) on a community level, empowerment can be defined as follows:

empowerment encompasses the development of participatory competence that is composed of a positive sense of competence and self-concept, construction of an analytical understanding of the social and political environment, and cultivation of personal and collective resources for social action (Zimmerman, 2004, p. 49).

An examination of Kingsly-Westergaard and Kelly’s (1990) Ecological model yields the idea that in order to understand systems or communities and the individuals within them, one needs to include the larger societal context in which they exist. In so doing, we move towards a second-order cybernetics epistemology which is an open approach that acknowledges the recursive process in community work. Kingsly-Westergaard and Kelly’s Ecological Model and Keeney’s work are illustrative of a second-order epistemological approach to community work.

3.8.4 The Ecological Model of Kingsly-Westergaard and Kelly

The ecological approach put forward by Kingsly-Westergaard and Kelly (1990) defines the relationship between the observer and observed as the source for the construction of meaning about the phenomenon studied. Systems and the individuals within them become understandable when they are seen as part of a multi-level, multi-structural, multi-determined social context. They point out that in the complexity of articulating and defining
people and systems in such a multi-faceted way, they may seem less tangible. However, failure to define systems that way may serve to capture only part of what they are in their richness of depth and dynamically interwoven, multi-layered processes. Furthermore, as observers we ourselves are not only impacted by, but recursively interact with, others in the context where these very observations are taking place. To this end, relationships and settings are reciprocal: persons affect settings, individuals affect other individuals, and one setting affects another setting. “Person-setting transactions in one setting indirectly produce tangible effects for the interactions of other persons in other settings” (Kingsley-Westergaard & Kelly, 1990, p. 28). What becomes central in the ecological approach therefore is occurrences and social factors that affect the context in which one is working.

A requirement for initiating a construction of their own context is that the researcher and participants must invest themselves in the ambiguity of the discovery process. What will emerge then is a conceptualisation of the problem to be addressed that makes explicit its socio-political and spatiotemporal context. This collaborative style then yields hypotheses that come to light in context of a working together, on a shared understanding of the operation of social structures, roles and norms as they occur in that particular context. It is thought that this collaborative style will enhance the authenticity, the validity and therefore the usefulness of any resultant research. The epistemological significance of the collaborative or ecological approach is that it can occur in a context in which ideas, in a recursive process, are tested, elaborated, redefined, examined, re-examined and thus
evolved. This approach thus becomes a social structure in which the process of discovery and understanding can occur.

Lewis, et al. (1998) bring in the argument that contextualism can be seen as a metatheory because it operates at a higher level of abstraction than traditional counselling theories do. There are many theories that include a contextualist worldview but, they assert, only theories of a systems nature truly qualify as contextualist. This is because many well-known theories in counselling limit their consideration of context to a single domain, including interactional-interpersonal, cultural (Sue & Sue, 1990); and ecological contexts. Our traditional theories of development have been seen to artificially constrain the range of possible developmental outcomes, limiting their explanatory utility. The broader view now is that development is inherently multi-contextual, affected by overlapping biological, psychological, social, cultural and historical contexts. A contextually-oriented counsellor views change, not growth, as the fundamental developmental event needing facilitation. This view complements the postmodern notion that individuals construct various meanings out of their life experiences, resulting in the creation of multiple realities.

A focus on the ecology or environment distinguishes community work from other approaches. Whereas before, the attitude, behaviour or feelings of an individual were what needed to shift, there is now instead an acknowledgement that the obstacles hindering progress may in fact also be in an individual’s environment. Importantly, though, even if environmental
factors have been clearly contributing to the development of the problem, it is important to separate responsibility for the etiology of the problem from the responsibility for the resolution of the problem. Otherwise the result can be feelings of passivity, helplessness and immobilisation, if individuals are seen as victims of economic and social circumstances beyond their control. Brickman (1982) asserts that while individuals should not be blamed for their predicaments, they should be encouraged to take effective action to resolve them.

There are four fundamental aspects to the ecological model (Mann, 1978; Trickett, 1984). These are interdependence, adaptation, cycling of resources and succession. In terms of interdependence, it is understood that a change in one part of the system affects the whole system. There is a recursive relationship between individuals and between settings, and interventions can be viewed not only in terms of changes in the immediate environment, but also in terms of how these changes reverberate throughout the entire system. While the principle of interdependence focuses on the interconnectedness between individuals and systems, the principle of adaptation focuses on the context of the setting. If an organism is to survive, it must be able to adapt to changes in the environment. What are the environmental norms providing opportunities for individuals as well as proscribing their behaviour? The construct of cycling resources examines aspects of a setting that can be used to facilitate change. The assumption is that the community already has all the resources with which to deal with the problem. The focus, instead of being problem-based, is on resources already present. The construct of succession
is taken from biology and the evolution and diversification of plant communities. At any point in time, a community, like an individual, is a product of its history. The present is affected by the past and in turn will affect the future. It is important to locate individuals within the context of space and time.

Communities have or can develop capacities to deal with their own problems. This is in line with the belief that many competencies are already present or that given the necessary opportunities for growth, these can be learned, and that such learning occurs in context of living life rather than being told what to do by ‘experts’ (Brodsky & Marx, 2001; Dalton, Elias & Wandersman, 2001; Fisher & Sonn, 1999; Hill, 1996; Newborough, 1992). Furthermore, postulates Rappaport (1981), people will resist changes if these changes are forced upon them. In addition to this, self-determined changes have been found to be more meaningful and permanent. A consultative, democratic process involving all stakeholders is vital (Puddifoot, 1996). Collaboration is more likely to occur if there is a continuous sharing of ideas and support of intrinsic creativity among all members involved.

An examination of Keeney’s writings brings out the importance of a balance between stability and change.

3.8.5 Keeney’s Focus on a Balance Between Stability and Change

Keeney (1983) brings in the aspect of the need for stability, yet stability can only be maintained in context of or where an allowance is made for change.
Accordingly, we can see how we form a sense of self within communities, and that that sense of self is both maintained and changed within that context. When a community is stuck in a sense of sameness or of sacrificing change in order to maintain that status quo, we may say that the system or community is dysfunctional. Certainly this has been the case in South Africa for many years and community psychology is striving to confront this. There was a suffocating narrative of separateness and fragmentation within our land. This is an example of a system stuck in a cybernetic cycle of redundant (and toxic) patterns of interaction that no longer (and arguably has never) worked for the system.

The survival of the system depends on the relations between the various parts of it. In essence, the “others” can in this way be seen as elements of the individual’s own selfhood. One can therefore reconceptualise the traditional view of self as not within people but as existing instead between them. This can be likened to Burr’s (1995) idea of a dance which occurs between people who are participant in a dynamic process of responding to each other’s rhythm. We are in an ever-changing social construction that is created moment by moment between people. Our relating or interactions are not a reified or static concept one can study and ‘know’ from one context to another or even from one encounter to another. Burr (1995) further speaks of how we interweave many different themes of culturally available discourses to produce the fabric of identity.
Family structures and the roles that parents or siblings play in families can mimic social structures in such a way that some of the family members' basic needs and authentic selves may be threatened as they are placed in a powerless position in relation to other family members. The person may then experience a sense of voicelessness and, as a result, can feel isolated. This and the formation of identity brought out by Burr (1995) are important aspects to be considered and perhaps addressed in the planning and implementation of community work.

A community intervention, in the face of the atrocities many South Africans have had to endure, can be conceptualised as a chance at re-socialisation and an opportunity, however small, to make atonement for past injustices.

3.9 CONCLUSION

Butchart and Seedat (1990) and Serrano-Garcia, Lopez and Rivera-Medina (1987) make the important point that communities are socially constructed and exist within history and the ideological underpinnings of our land. When we try to empower or reform the communities which exist as a result of the society within which they are embedded, this becomes tautological. What needs reform in fact is the society and epistemology which created these ‘communities’ in the first place. When communities are seen as disempowered and in need of assistance, the discourse of fragmentation is unwittingly perpetuated in the very statements and actions carried out to undermine such disempowerment and disconnection. This is an example of
how paradoxical an intervention can become when it employs the same structures and language that were used to create the fragmentation that brought about the disempowerment in the first place. This is an example of first-order change, where one tries to make something right using the same structure and similar, but slightly different thought patterns. Second-order change, by contrast, denotes a shift in perception, thinking ‘outside of the box’ and a deep questioning of one’s epistemological stance and understanding of what one is seeing and experiencing, as well as of unquestioned ‘truths’ about the society in which we live and in particular the diverse cultures and individuals within it. In this way, we ask about what each of us believes community to be and how we, as a nation, have come to where we are today.

In this chapter, the construct of community was elucidated and the process of socialisation within communities was addressed with reference specifically to the impact of crime, of high population density, and that of poverty on community members. Various approaches to community work were put forward with particular emphasis on how these might be employed to right the atrocities endured by the citizens of South Africa under the former political dispensation.

In this chapter, current literature on communities, community work and specific interventions was critically examined. The concept of community was defined and the literature relevant to the aims of this study expanded upon.
In the next chapter, an examination of the research methodology to be employed in this study will be furnished.
CHAPTER 4

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

4.1 INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, research methodology is discussed with a particular focus on qualitative research, its congruence within a social constructionist epistemology highlighted, and a discussion of discourse analysis, as the chosen manner in which to analyse the data, will follow.

Research methodology is informed by one’s ontological premises and therefore becomes a record of that reality. Using social constructionism as a lens, making the use of a qualitative study rather than a quantitative one, is suggested. Quantitative research belongs more to the modernistic, Newtonian epistemology which seeks to document, measure and ultimately to control, objectively known and quantifiable data. The technique is empirical and favours generalisability to a larger body of pre-existing knowledge that the study either strives to reiterate or possibly to supplement.

Qualitative research sees the researcher immersing him or herself in the research setting in order rather than to control, to describe what he or she is seeing and experiencing. The setting is approached from a position of enquiry rather than to prove facts, and allows the gathering of rich and in-depth data which yields a detailed picture of the setting or phenomenon being
studied, as well as including a sensitivity to situating the research setting in its larger ecology. Qualitative research is therefore more in keeping with a postmodern epistemology.

The added dimension of social constructionism locates the researcher within the system he or she is observing and acknowledges that the act of observing or joining with the system changes the system that is being observed. Also that what the researcher may observe reflects his or her own properties or is a product of the inferences he or she happens to draw.

Appropriate techniques used within the social constructionist epistemology would therefore be interviewing, with an acknowledgement of the interviewer’s part in what he or she sees, documents, elicits and interprets. This is research carried out from the stance of participant observation where the researcher becomes part of the ecology he or she reports on. Research can thus be co-created between the participants in the setting and acknowledges that “reality consists of a fluid and variable set of social constructions” (Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 1999, p. 6).

In qualitative research, the aim, rather than to prove universal truths, is to seek understanding, to describe “human experience from within the context and perspective of human experience” (Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 1999, p. 398). The aim of this research, rather than providing statistical norms, is to obtain a better understanding of respondents’ experiences of Agape Healing Community and what particularly has made it healing for them.
The researcher in qualitative research is said to become the tool or instrument in the research process. He or she must observe and give an account of what he or she is seeing and experiencing. To this end, he or she would need to be able to think “reflectively and historically as well as biographically” and to draw upon his or her “own experiences as a resource” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, p.367). What becomes important then is an openness on the part of the researcher, and a transparency regarding his or her own process and an accountability of how this has impacted on the study, and on his or her accounts of reality. The researcher’s voice, rather than one of authority or of having the final say over any other party, becomes instead a voice that is added to, within, and emanating from, the Healing Community of Agape.

4.2 ETHICS

This research had as its aim to uphold the University of Johannesburg’s Code of Ethics for Research on Human Subjects. As such, the interests of participants were primary.

In terms of transparency in this study, the participants were informed of the rationale for the study and given a detailed description of the research. Confidentiality was discussed with the participants and they were assured that should they wish to remain anonymous, that at no time would their identity or personal information be disclosed to any third party or other, and that no identifying data would be referred to in the report or the transcripts. None of the participants wished to remain anonymous however, and as a result, their
first names were used in the transcripts. Informed consent was obtained, firstly for participation in the study, and secondly for recording and transcribing the interviews where this was necessary.

Voluntary participation in the study was discussed with the participants and upheld, whereby the interviewees were free to discontinue participation in the research at any time. None of the participants expressed a need to be debriefed after the research was completed and all participants gave positive feedback as a result of having been a part of the research.

4.3 VALIDITY

The construct of validity refers to the degree to which interpretive outcomes from the study are sound. It is important to distinguish between validity in a quantitative study and validity in a qualitative study. Validity in context of a quantitative study looks at the ability of the research instrumentation to measure what it set out to measure. What the study measures is quantifiable, objective, stable and pre-emptively stated reality or fact. Extraneous factors irrelevant to the variables being measured are seen as nuisance factors and ones which might confound research results, and would therefore need to be isolated or eliminated from the study first. In this way, a better and more accurate understanding of reality is gained (Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 1999).

In qualitative research, by contrast, ‘nuisance’ variables are included in the field of study as part of the ‘real-world setting’ and add a richness and often
serendipitous aspect to the research. It is acknowledged that the researcher cannot control such factors and that they pose no threat to the validity of the research, since controlling any aspect during a natural and open enquiry means that it would no longer be an open and natural enquiry at all.

The study, then, rather than being accurate according to some pre-existing theory, would instead need to be credible or to have construct validity where the research instrumentation is measuring or recording that which it set out to record. To this end, the researcher needs to remain open and reflexive during the process of researching so that he or she can look for discrepancies which may influence the presentation of a “rich and credible account” of that which is being studied (Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 1999, p. 63). The researcher also needs to continuously describe and explain how he or she came to his or her interpretations, or how he or she undertook to carry out the research as the study progressed.

Various methods exist to aid in this process. They include coherence, uncovering, testimonial validity, catalytic validity and reflexive validity (Rapmund, 2000).

### 4.3.1 Coherence

Coherence refers to a congruence between the epistemology or ontological stance and the particular interpretations that are put forward from the study. Is the data, for instance, analysed from a reflexive postmodern stance?
4.3.2 Uncovering

Uncovering refers to the researcher’s inclusion of his or her own process and has made transparent his or her construction of the experiences he or she has had and brought to bear upon the study, as well as resulting from it. Has the study moved or changed the researcher in any way?

4.3.3 Testimonial validity

Testimonial validity refers to the manner in which the study was explained to participants and that the way in which the study was implemented was in a valid manner. Was the actual experience of being a part of the study congruent with the way in which it was prefaced by the researcher?

4.3.4 Catalytic validity

Catalytic validity refers to whether the participants have been impacted in some way by the research. Have the participants experienced a positive or negative impact from being part of the research? Have the participants grown, recoiled or perhaps gained insight through being a part of the study?

4.3.5 Reflexive validity

Reflexive validity refers to the extent to which the researcher’s thinking has been challenged or extended as a result of being a part of the study.
4.4 RELIABILITY

According to Rapmund (2000) reliability refers to how trustworthy the researcher’s observations in the research setting have been. It is important again to distinguish between reliability in context of quantitative research and also in qualitative research, as the meaning of the term alters depending on the paradigm employed.

In context of quantitative research, reliability refers to the ability of the research instrumentation to accurately and consistently measure the same constructs across time (Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 1999). When instrumentation is reliable, it will therefore consistently measure the objective stable and incontrovertible truth it set out to measure. A change in people, day or context also therefore needs to be controlled for, as these discrepancies may in fact confound results and impinge upon the reliability of the study.

In qualitative research, data cannot be separated from context or from ‘fluctuations’ in the individuals within them. Qualitative researchers “do not assume that they are investigating a stable and unchanging reality and therefore do not expect to find the same results repeatedly” (Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 1999, p.64). Changes in contexts and people influence individuals’ experience of themselves within communities. Agape Healing Community is never a static, reified entity that stays the same across contexts. It is formed and reformed each time its members meet and no two days or groupings or
the experiences that come to exist between members are ever the same. Stiles (in Rapmund, 2000) provides constructs to aid in reliability in a qualitative study. These are disclosure of orientation, society and cultural contexts, internal processes of investigation, engaging with the information, iteration, grounding interpretations and asking questions in context.

4.4.1 Disclosure of orientation
Disclosure of orientation refers to an inclusion of the researcher’s own thinking, his or her values, theoretical stance, and his or her explicit expectations for the study.

4.4.2 The social and cultural context
The social and cultural context of the study needs to be expounded upon.

4.4.3 Internal processes of investigation
The internal processes of investigation refers to the impact the research has had on the researcher and whether this is made explicit in the study.

4.4.4 Engaging with the information
The manner in which the researcher engages with the information, and in particular an acknowledgement of the relationship between participant, researcher and information is important in the study. In a social constructionist approach to research, it is important to maintain an awareness that reality is subjective, that the researcher and participant may therefore perceive it differently; that they reciprocally influence each other and that
reality is therefore co-constructed between them. To this end, the researcher needs to remain aware that during the process of interviewing the participants, he or she is co-constructing a reality with them and would need to remain reflexively open to the idea that the inferences he or she happens to draw about the data are influenced by his or her own ontological assumptions and preconceived ideas and life experiences.

To this end, the researcher plans to take her analysis of the data back to her participants and to ask for their feedback and input in an open and co-constructive way.

4.4.5 Iteration
Iteration refers to the connection between the interpretations allowed by the theoretical stance of the study in terms of their match to the ecology within which the community is embedded.

4.4.6 Dependability
Dependability is instead what holds importance in qualitative research and is “the degree to which the reader can be convinced that the findings did indeed occur as the researcher says they did”, and can be achieved through rich and detailed descriptions that show how certain actions and opinions are rooted and develop out of contextual interaction” (Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 1999, p.64). In this study, rather than gain an overarching, factual account of what transpires at Agape, the researcher aims to give a transparent and unguarded account of her experiences at Agape and will strive to portray such an
account of her participants’ stories too, insofar as they are prepared to share and to articulate their experience of Agape Healing Community.

4.4.7 The Focus of Inquiry and Sampling

This construct refers to ‘who’ or ‘what’ will be the focus of the study and can include “cases, or instances of phenomena, or social processes” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, p.369). According to Denzin and Lincoln (2000), research that focuses on a number of cases is known as a collective case appointment, and in this study will be selected purposively in accordance with the criteria of a) their having been or being a member of Agape Healing Community; b) their willingness, and thus informed consent to be a part of the study. Purposive sampling is in this way employed and is congruent with social constructionist research where, commonly, researchers will “seek out groups, settings and individuals where and for whom the processes being studied are most likely to occur” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, p.370).

4.4.8 Sample Size

In this study, a sample of ten adults (over the age of eighteen years) was selected for inclusion. Selection requirements were that the interviewee be a member of Agape Healing Community and that he or she be willing to be participant in the research. Of the ten participants, two were psychology masters students, one was a professor of psychology, and seven were members residing in the Mamelodi township. The participants were as follows:
• Stan
Professor of Psychology at the University of South Africa, and the founder of Agape Healing Community.

• Sam
A tailor, resident of Mamelodi East township and long-standing member of Agape Healing Community.

• Emma
A teacher and Honours student of Psychology, resident of Mamelodi East township and long-standing member of Agape Healing Community.

• Olga
A bead-maker, resident of Mamelodi East township and member of Agape Healing Community for over ten years. Tragically, since participating in the study, Olga has passed away. She leaves a two-year old son.

• Rosemary
Unemployed, resident of Mamelodi East township and fairly recent member of Agape Healing Community.

• Solly
Unemployed, resident of Mamelodi East township and long-standing member of Agape Healing Community.

• Andrew
Unemployed, resident of Mamelodi East township and long-standing member of Agape Healing Community.
• Esther
  Masters student and member of Agape Healing Community, member of Agape Healing Community for three years.
• Refilwe
  Involved in social work, resident of Mamelodi East township and long-standing member of Agape Healing Community.

Rather than aiming to generalize findings of this study to a larger population, or even to generalize one person’s experience of Agape to anyone else, each one’s voice and unique experience of Agape was honoured. As Denzin and Lincoln (2000) point out, the goal is not an abstract or empirical generalisation; rather the aim is “concerned with providing analyses that meet the criteria of unique adequacy” and should be “uniquely adequate” for that particular phenomenon (p. 371).

4.4.9 In-depth Interviewing

In-depth interviewing was used in this study, using a semi-structured approach which allowed the researcher flexibility in terms of probing and documenting serendipitous or unexpected information as it unfolds. In order to richly capture, in as natural a manner as possible, the speaking of the members of Agape Healing Community, the researcher allowed participants to relate events and experiences in their own unique way with minimal guidance. Certain questions remained the same for all of the participants, but it was believed that minimal structuring of interviews by the researcher would yield the most in-depth and authentic information.
Group and individual interviews were recorded and transcribed. The researcher’s own process notes were used as another source of information, as another voice that was a part of Agape Healing Community. In addition to this the transcripts as well as their interpretations, from the researcher’s frame of reference, were given to the participants for their comments and input. It is important to state that the reader and the interpreter of written texts are as involved in the process of constructing reality as the text-writer him or herself. Reality is thus constructed through the process of textualising. This then becomes the researcher’s and participants’ chosen version of reality during the process of interpretation and is by no means an unchangeable construal of events. In this way, the research is co-constructed in a circular manner, which may further help to create a sense of community and sharing in the creation of this study, as well as being therapeutic.

4.4.10 Analysis of Data

Terre Blanche and Durrheim (1999) point out that an important aspect of analysis of data in qualitative research is to “stay close to the data, to interpret it from a position of empathic understanding” (p.139).

In this study, data was analysed using discourse analysis.

4.5 DISCOURSE ANALYSIS

It is interesting to examine some of the discourses relevant to this community outreach project.
Discourse can be defined as the entirety of social interactions occurring in a particular context or domain (Wodak, 1996). Brunner and Graefen define discourse thus: “by discourses are to be understood units and forms of speech, and interaction, which can be part of everyday linguistic behaviour” (in Wodak, 1996, p.13). Discourse also includes the co-presence of listener and speaker. Discourse, according to Parker (in Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 1999) is “a system of statements which constructs an object” and Collins describes discourses as “narratives that organise meaning so as to produces what then show up as facts” (p.160). Discourses construct particular truths.

Discourse analysis looks at how narrative devices or particular ways of speaking achieve certain results within a particular context (Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 1999). Narratives arise not only from particular interactions, but are also located in social, cultural and institutional discourses. Discourse analysis is in keeping with the epistemology of social constructionism because it acknowledges that language, instead of describing reality, “systematically form[s] the object of which [it] speak[s]” (Unisa, 2002, p.19; Watzlawick, 1983). Discourse analysis fits with social constructionism because it has to do with broader patterns of social meaning encoded in language. Ferdinand de Saussure (in Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 1999) uses the constructs of langue (the system of the language) and parole (its use in situations), and makes the important distinction that while we use language (parole) to construe meaning, we are limited in so doing by the range of meanings made available to us by language (langue).
The project and article does not aim to generalise to the population, but to give a voice to the individual experiences the participants have had which have led up to their constructing themselves as a community. The way of approaching this project is therefore inductive and strives to build ideas using a bottom-up approach instead of top-down.

Our worldview is located in the discourses we have come to view as relevant and constructive of reality (Burr, 1995; Reissman, 1993). Looking at discourses requires a stance of distance from the culture in which the participant resides (Coulthard, 1985; Stillar, 1998; Wodak, 1996). Parker calls this “striking a critical distance from the text” and entails a shift from “living in culture to reflecting on culture” (Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 1999, p.158).

Discourse analysis addresses the issue of power and how language is used to exert influence over others or to perpetuate power imbalances in society. In particular, we come back to the adage that knowledge is power. Do the erudite elite, through their linguistic prowess, hold the decision-making veto? Does their access to a more refined frame of intelligibility give them access to power to which the less learned have no access and are thus in the process rendered mute?

Discourse analysis specifically examines the narrative devices used to perpetuate these imbalances in power and also at how in particular social values, myths and cultural beliefs are expressed, disseminated and reified by the ‘authority’ behind the transmitters of this information.
Discourse analysis explores discursive negotiation and how this contributes to the formation and regulation of relationships. For instance, in friendship, certain important social rituals and rules come into play, especially in terms of politeness, closeness, which forms of address become appropriate, and so on.

Wodak (1996) points out that “every perception is dependent on the conceptual apparatus which makes it possible and meaningful, as this conceptual apparatus is inscribed in language” (p.8). It is further understood that “talk and writing are thus much more than the means of expression of individual meanings” and each perception is connected to a larger system of meaning (Wodak, 1996, p.8). It can therefore be understood that speaking and writing; the transfer of information, is epistemic.

Van Dijk (in Wodak, 1996) defines discourse as “text in context” and adds the idea that discourse should be understood as an action, and says discourse is both a “specific form of language use, and as a specific form of social interaction, interpreted as a communicative event in a social situation” (p.14).

Wodak (1996) points out that discourse is the use of language in both spoken and written form and is part of a social exchange. The social exchange aspect allows for a conceptualization of discourse as a dialectical relationship within “a particular discursive event and the situation, institution and social structure that frame it; the discursive event is shaped by them, but it also
shapes them” (p.15). Discourse can be seen as an aspect of reciprocal recursion and is constitutive both in the sense that it helps sustain and reproduce the social status quo, and in the sense that it contributes to transforming it.

If communities are socially created and maintained, discourse analysis can be seen to be a suitable tool with which to examine how social discourses have been employed to create the subjugation and unequal distribution of power we are trying to interrupt on a social level in South Africa. Discourse analysis will allow for a critical examination of the manner in which we talk, the ways in which information is transmitted and the power relations implicit in our talking with one another. Being a part of Agape provides the opportunity to go within and to deeply question one’s motives, to connect with one’s inner struggle and to locate oneself in the discourses which form part of the ideological fabric of the Mamelodi community. In so doing, a bridge is created; one which connects us as human beings. No longer then does one unquestioningly meet with others at either poles of ‘haves’ and ‘have nots’, ‘skilled’ and ‘unskilled’, or ‘learned’ and ‘uneducated’. Being thus alerted and aware would hopefully interrupt the idea that the ‘skilled’ (‘haves’) have come to help the ‘unskilled’ or ‘have nots’ in order to ‘give’ them something they don’t have, which unwittingly reiterates the one-down position of helpless hopelessness one is trying to ‘fix’ in the first place. In this way, a community intervention can become tautological and ineffective in its superficiality and level of insufficient depth and insightfulness.
As stated before, it is never clear on any given day at Agape who is in need of help – the so-called ‘helper’ or the community members. This was seen at Agape Healing Community to shift, and indeed sometimes included both. For example, instead of seeing helplessness in another, one could instead engage in the discourse of helplessness both on a larger (societal) level and on a smaller (personal) level. One could ask oneself if one has accepted the invitation to feel helpless today; maybe to ask if one is or has perpetuated a dialogue of helplessness with those around one as part of the ideological ‘knowing’ of certain pre-emptively labeled persons in our land. To this end, Wodak (1996) points out that “every instance of language use makes its own contribution to reproducing or transforming culture and society, including power relations” (p.18).

The way in which we language events determines how we experience them. If we can shift the way we language our experiences at community level, and individually within that, this can be profoundly transformative.

Through a thorough investigation of context, a text or a discourse can be located in its social ideology, and includes within that, an examination of the implicit power relationships that may be present. In this way, a text or a discourse is deconstructed. It is important to note that such an interpretation is never really finished or a final stamp on a social situation, which, by definition, remains an open and dynamic process.
Cicourel (in Wodak, 1996) points out that an assumption is often made that the observer can or does describe “everything about a context” (p.16). In terms of a social constructionist epistemology, this is not possible since, as has been previously stated, what an observer sees is subjective and therefore self-referential. Cicourel (in Wodak, 1996) points out that no-one could claim to have specified all of the local and larger socio-cultural aspects of a context (p.22).

Discourse analysis looks therefore at expanding our subjective view. Through examining discourses, our view is widened and we can create a dialogue and an awareness of how a cultural ideology can (and is) impacting us.

Specifically, discourse analysis entails selecting a piece of text or dialogue and critically analyzing it, looking at the implicit assumptions, worldview or knowledge base from which it stems or of which it is a part. The latter is what Gee (1999) refers to as situated meanings within a text or dialogue and which will determine how we perceive and hence experience an interaction or particular situation. The constructs Gee (1999) uses to illuminate situated meanings are

4.5.1 **Semiotic building** or the way we use language and chosen descriptors and vocabulary to give form to what we are experiencing.

4.5.2 **World building** which examines the ontological assumptions one has made about reality, which in turn defines what is here and now; what is real and not real, and thus what is possible and impossible in any give situation.
4.5.3 **Activity building** which looks at the specific actions and activities occurring.

4.5.4 **Socioculturally-situated identity and relationship building** where the focus is on the socio-cultural meaning systems and the people with which one interacts in context of how these have informed one’s sense of identity.

4.5.5 **Political building**, which examines the political ideology within which interaction unfolds, and looks at constructs such as power, subjugation, oppression and fragmentation on a social level, as these relate to power imbalances in society.

4.5.6 **Connection building** where an examination is carried out scrutinizing the assumptions one might have about the past and future of an interaction. Once a piece of text or dialogue has been selected, it is critically analysed, looking for situated meanings. This is done by examining key words or phrases, which are selected for relevance to a pertinent issue or question arising from the research. Thus selected, these key words or phrases are then linked back into the context or social milieu in which it exists. One can then ask which cultural discourses the text relates to and illuminates. How is the situation under examination informed or formed by the cultural discourses or ideological fabric of its larger context and, in keeping with the construct of recursion, does the excerpt in turn inform and maintain, or undermine the discourses present in the larger context?

Next, one can reflect on how the text relates to Gee’s (1999) steps in defining the situated meanings of the text selected; namely looking at the semiotic or language building, the world and activity building, the political and connection
building and the socio-culturally situated identity and relationship building. Ask how each of these steps might shed light on or uncover implicit meanings and perhaps unquestioned discourses within one’s chosen text. The next step is to relate these situated meanings to themes or questions arising from the research and examine whether they relate to or run counter to these questions or themes. In response to this process, revise the themes or questions in an ongoing process of recursion. Finally, set out the critical analysis so that the findings illustrate the themes that have arisen from the research and that have been chosen to be addressed.

When carrying out discourse analysis, themes are selected and the tendency, commonly, warn Terre Blanche and Durrheim (1999), is to generalize across situations. In so doing, one can overlook contextual differences in the things being compared and, in so doing, overlook their uniqueness or the subtle nuances of the situations. The way to forestall such an attribution bias is to allow one’s analysis to shift both from the particular to the general and, in turn, from the general to the particular on the hermeneutic circle. In this way, the resultant analysis and interpretation is more likely to provide an illumination of the context that focuses both on the context at hand and allows a shift across contexts as well (Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 1999).

During analysis of data, one’s interpretive framework, or selected discourses, may be decided beforehand, in which case the data is used to fill out the details of the chosen discourses. Conversely, one can approach the analysis in a more phenomenological manner, inferring the discourses from the
contextual material gathered. The discourses thus selected then embody a subjective account of what has been seen and experienced in the setting and must include therefore an acknowledgement of such by the analyst. What lends further validity and reliability to such a study is the added dimension of social constructionism, where meanings and interpretations are co-constructed during the research process and in the analysis thereof. Certainly that is the aim of this research, and once analysis is carried out, the feedback from participants about the resultant analysis of data will be incorporated into the study in a recursive process.

In terms of research that strives to build theory out of contextual information, as is the case in ground theory, the ideal approach, according to Terre Blanche and Durrheim (1999), is to create a balance between one’s theoretical scaffolding, allowing it to give form to one’s study, and also maintaining an openness to new themes or discourses emerging.

Phenomenological studies highlight habitual ways in which participants relate to different situations at different times. A discourse analytic study strives to illuminate regularities in the way language is used to achieve certain effects. Terre Blanche and Durrheim (1999) recommend approaching the data from an inductive stance, where the data is interrogated to try to discern the organizing principles intrinsically contained therein.

Discourse looks at the ‘something’ that underlies our experiences and belief systems; the resultant largely unquestioned ‘reality’ which is then reproduced
in or language and transformed into slogan and cliché. Social constructionism is an approach that looks at how signs and images have created particular representations of what we see around us; that indeed forms our experience thereof.

Social constructionist research then is concerned with social or shared meaning-making, and unlike research in the interpretive tradition, which is constrained by the subjective understanding and experiences of individuals or groups, strives to include a consideration of how the former is derived from, and recursively fed into the larger societal discourses. In other words, social constructionism includes the stance that individuals’ thoughts, feelings and experiences are the products of systems of meaning that exist at a social rather than individual level. The pivotal point therefore is ontological: does what we know come from within us, a product solely of our subjectivity; or from the wider social ecology with which we are in a recursive relationship and thus inevitably colours and gives form to our subjectivity?

Constructionism is concerned with broader patterns of social meaning-making, which is encoded in the language we use to describe our world. We maintain these patterns of social meaning in our talking as well as in our habitual patterns of behaviour. In this way, we reproduce discourses daily as we re-enact established relational patterns.

In constructionist research, whatever meanings elicited are assumed to be the product of a co-created process; both between interviewer and interviewee;
and between them and the larger societal context for which they act as relayers.

Constructionist analysis has as its aim to reveal the cultural material from which our speaking, interactions and events have been constructed. Discourses, according to Terre Blanche and Durrheim (1999) can be defined as broad patterns of talking, systems of statements which can be inferred from conversations, or in this case, from interview transcripts. These transcripts are read closely and interrogated for the presence of discourses operating within the text and, conversely, how the text draws on, or is informed by, these discourses.

Discourse analysis is made possible by immersing oneself in the particular culture, in case Agape Healing Community, which provides a landscape of ways of speaking, of cultural practices and ontological assumptions that, through analysis, one can see, read and dialogue with. This dialoguing, while made possible by our immersion in the culture in which it is occurring, also requires an ability in the analyst to shift from living in the particular culture to reflecting on it. In other words, the participants conversed with the interviewer from a particular discursive frame. In analysis, the analyst(s) need(s) to reflect on the text in order to identify and thus to illuminate the discourse the interviewee is employing in his or her way of speaking. This process was carried out with each participant involved in the process of analysis and their input noted in the co-construction of this research.
Terre Blanche and Durrheim (1999) put forward the idea of examining the binary opposites of the discourses selected as a way of adding a richness and further depth and breadth to the analysis. Most of ten binary opposites are implicit in a dialogue, as only one side of the discourse is expounded upon. Secondly, to aid in a discourse analysis, one can look for recurrent terms, phrases and metaphors present in the text, as these may bring to light further discourses inhabiting the transcript. Thirdly, one can consider the subjects that are spoken of in the dialogue. Often there are subjects implicit in the text and informing the dialogue, but not explicitly stated. For instance, the discourses of ‘Home’ and ‘Parenting’ running through all of the participants’ transcripts lead, by implication, to the discourses of ‘Not Belonging’ and of ‘Feeling Lost’, as well as to the discourse of ‘Love’.

The analysis then takes the stance of critically evaluating why it is that those particular binary opposites are there, why those metaphors and phrases are used; what subjects exist silently alongside the explicit ones; and how these feature collate for achieve their particular effects. In this way, the effects of discourse can be identified, which is in fact pivotal in discourse analysis as it is these aspects that limit or prohibit certain actions while enabling others.

What is empowering about social constructionism is the idea that we can question discourses. Through our becoming aware of, and having the opportunity to critically engage with discourses, they lose their power over us to silence or to subjugate us.
A technique used to this end, and falling under the umbrella of social constructionism, is narrative therapy.

4.6 NARRATIVE THERAPY

In terms of narrative therapy, authorship is given back to the individual from the point of view of choosing the narratives by which to live one’s life. Through becoming aware of the social aspect of the process of forming a self and hence our experience of ourselves, as well as the cultural fabric and ecology of which one is a part, one is freed in that awareness to choose another narrative by which to live. This relates to the idea that while we are tremendously impacted by the ecology in which we are embedded, there is also a dynamic and changing quality to that so that there is not one way one has to be, one way to conceptualise reality, one way to experience ourselves in a community, or even one to experience oneself as a South African.

In terms of carrying out a study, Cicourel (in Wodak, 1996) claims that what becomes important is for observers to make explicit, as a result of one’s theoretical orientation, methodology employed and the goals for research; what has been included or excluded from our knowing, and which relates directly to the consistency or convincingness of one’s analysis of what one observes.

Foucault (in Wodak, 1996) points out that certain strategies regulate the construction and maintenance of discourse. These are “principles of
exclusion and reduction, in which the most visible and familiar [procedure] is
the prohibition” (p. 25). Wodak (1996) goes on to say that important
conventions of discourse are established by prohibition, meaning that it simply
is not possible to speak about (or indeed to notice) everything on every
occasion, and also that everyone in a given situation is not called upon to
speak, thereby contributing their conceptualization of the situation in order
that a fuller, more complex and inclusive understanding may be gained of the
situation. For reason of closing the many possible construals of reality and for
expedience perhaps, the speaking of the dominant voices comes to be taken
as the way things are. In this way, discourse appears to become injected with
power and speaks by defining reality for all present. Habberman (in Wodak,
1996) calls this “systematically distorted communication” and argues that
through a process of, in this instance, a capitalist society; that consensus is
thus accomplished through legitimation, and the generalisable interests have
become “subordinated to the needs of the elites” through a process of “power
and domination” (p. 23). In this process, other conceptualizations of reality
are silenced and other ways of perceiving reality are thus excluded.
Further, silence can imply complicity with what is becoming a dominant
discourse, and the process of society and multi-level reification of the
discourse as having authority over everyone, of speaking for them all, can run
its course.

While the aforementioned discusses the exclusionary and reductionary
aspects of discourse which can have a pernicious and perhaps subjugating
effect, these aspects, including the apparent power invested in a discourse,
may not always constitute an oppression, and may instead be productively transformed, or transforming. An illustrative example is of a setting that is clearly defined, such as a hospital or clinic and which is governed, inter alia, by specific linguistic rules and conventions. The principles of exclusion and prohibition here form a communicative framework, which may be defined as altogether functional and highly effective, specifically as a diagnostic tool.

This has important implications, for instance, when we look at the existing information on community interventions by employing an authoritative and quantitative stance. The idea of a correct or incorrect way to apply community work is implied. This brings with it the exclusions and prohibitions spoken of by Foucault. This can result in our missing other perhaps less prescriptive or formalized methods such as those employed at Agape Healing Community. For instance, in studying existing literature, most of what occurs at Agape Healing Community is missed, since it falls into what has been prohibited or excluded by the discourses used to explicate the moral, formal and linear ways of working in communities. This is an example of how, since a way of speaking proscribes and prohibits the additional aspect of another way of working, or perceiving, it would seem not to exist, or at best to hold little significance in the light of the more dominant discourse at hand. This research therefore aims to make a space for language and occurrences at Agape Healing Community by documenting the voices and experiences of members within Agape and how they have come to construct themselves as a healing community and, in particular, what those healing aspects are. In the spirit of inclusion which social constructionism embraces, and rather than
prohibition and exclusion, this study does not strive to prove that the chosen way of working is superior to or should replace other ways of working.

Instead, what is asked is whether this community’s way of working and existing can be included in what we know? Can the speaking and voices of the members of Agape Healing Community be received and added to the voices already heard?

Burr (1995) explains that we need to impose structure on our experiences, particularly in the form of stories. But what if the stories we choose miss who we are? Restrict us? Limit other narratives we could choose to live by?

Agape Healing Community makes a healing narrative space, a co-constructed story that is formed by and with all the members, and is a story that runs counter to old subjugating voices of the past. To this end, Lax (1992) points out that “we shape the world in which we live, thereby creating our own reality within a context of community with others” (p. 71). Lax points out that we can change the stories or narratives by which we live over time as we develop insight into ourselves through living in context with others. Through this process, we can reinterpret and add to our life history and the history of South Africa. In this way, a dialogue may be created with ‘history’, and rather than perceiving it as a static and reified concept that has silenced, subjugated and which ultimately separates all. This allows for a space for the recreation of the narrative and a different, perhaps more constructive way to walk forward through the process of mutual communication and co-construction.
Lax (1992) goes on to say that when we develop narratives about life events, this can cause us to feel limited and ‘stuck’ in them. There can exist a narrowness in thought that precludes other ways of being together. Agape Healing Community provided a chance not only to reauthor one’s own life story and sense of self, but also to construct and relate to oneself differently in relation to those around one.

In this chapter, the research methodology employed in this study was discussed. The choice of a qualitative rather than a quantitative approach was interrogated, as well as a discussion of the ethics, validity, and reliability pertinent to this research. Data collection and analysis was expounded upon and a critical examination of Discourse Analysis was provided, as well as a rationale for employing this particular method of analysis, with specific reference to how it coheres with the epistemology of Social Construction at the heart of this study.

The next chapter provides an examination of the discourses in and around Agape Healing Community.
CHAPTER 5

RESULTS: AN EXAMINATION OF THE DISCOURSES IN AND AROUND AGAPE HEALING COMMUNITY

Come... Come to my feast of bread and water
Where we will break the bread
And anoint ourselves with inner light
We will dance within our joy.

Anon.

A poem written on the walls of Agape Healing Community.

5.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter includes an examination of some of the societal discourses that have informed who we are as a community and of how our experiences in turn feed back into, and hence undermine or further reify, these discourses. Many times individual members of Agape would portray or give a voice to the larger societal discourses playing out on an individual micro-system level, the ideology, the pedagogy and epistemology of the larger societal domain, or macro-system. Specific attention was given to how the members of Agape have come to construct themselves as a healing community, with reference to the particular aspects that have felt healing.
The discourses expounded upon in this chapter were discerned from the participants’ transcripts and emerged as a result of being part of Agape Healing Community, rather than being imposed on the research at the outset.

In many instances, the binary opposites to the dominant societal discourses were experienced by members of Agape, these opposites then arguably constituting a transformative experience both on an individual and ultimately on a societal level.

It is important to make note of the fact that the discourses selected for inclusion are a record of the inferences that the researcher and her participants have drawn in the recursive process of co-constructing this research. By no means is this analysis meant to be generalised to another context, nor is it a reified construction of events. That said, it is not precluded that we cannot learn from this research, but that is up to each one present, including the reader of this text. In reading this manuscript, it is acknowledged that the reader becomes participant in the co-construction of the research and constructs reality as he or she chooses to let what is read colour, inform, reiterate, undermine or reify his or her already existing but ever-changing ontological assumptions and epistemological stance.

Excerpts from the participants’ transcripts, and illustrative of the discourses selected for discussion, have been placed in the analysis so that the reader might encounter the scripts for him or herself, and also in an attempt to weave
the interviewees’ speaking into the tapestry that forms Agape Healing Community.

The discourses that came to light and which are discussed below are those of Fragmentation and Disconnection, Connectedness, Errant Parenting, Feeling Lost or of Not Belonging, Home, Malnutrition, Lack of Immunity and Suffering, Academia, Simplicity, Sustainability, Finding One’s Voice, Resourcefulness, Courage, Healing.

5.2 The Discourse of Fragmentation and Disconnection

The discourse of fragmentation and disconnection is a part of our country’s history, under the former political dispensation. The fabric of society has been torn and there exists still today a disconnection from each other which is the legacy left by apartheid. Sam explains how a black person could say to a white person, “You are a regime. I hate you for what you are.” Stan speaks of the milieu in which Agape Healing Community was formed: “If one looks at the history of South Africa, in terms of apartheid, Agape presented a different option for people. To get mental health help one had to cross political lines. We had to cross under barbed wire and borders kept in place by guns. Agape, against this backdrop, presented a safe place.”

In my own process, I reflect on how “many of the cases I worked with at Agape are illustrative of the discourses of pain, loss and fragmentation
running through the community. These clients gave a voice to a larger pain; the crying out from the community that shares their pain.”

It was easy to see an oppressed community, but a transformative shift occurred in me, where I saw how I too had known oppression: “I came to Agape expecting to have more than those around me and to ‘help’ those previously disadvantaged in our country under the oppressive former political regime. I am not sure any more who was oppressed. This seems now to be a linear, one-dimensional idea. In some ways, the people around me have had a history of oppression under a fragmented political dispensation. Yet what exactly has been oppressed? I do not see oppressed people before me. I ask myself: Do I know nothing of being oppressed myself?”

Furthermore, “I came to Agape Healing Community to try to make [some of the injustices endured by the ‘disadvantaged’] right in some small way. To my amazement, I found that the sense of fragmentation and disconnection resided in me. It was there that it needed to be mended and healed before I could hope to effect such a feat outside of myself and in the spaces between the people that come to Agape Healing Community.”

Many of the participants echoed the feeling of being disconnected, both from themselves and those around them. Agape Healing Community seemed to constitute opportunities of connectedness rather than of the ubiquitous disconnection and fragmentation present in the South African society, and in particular, the Mamelodi East township.
5.3 The Discourse of Connectedness

Agape Healing Community is about finding members’ points of connection. Members of Agape, such as the students, often come from communities and cultures different from that of Mamelodi East, and can at first feel very removed from the Mamelodi community. Yet in peeling back the layers, in stripping down to our cores, we find in our humanity that we are connected. When our masks are removed, our comfort taken away, nobody is ‘immune’; and our humanness is what remains. This runs counter to the discourses of fragmentation and disconnection that have torn the fabric of our society.

Esther speaks of how, through being a member of Agape Healing Community, she had felt a sense of being connected to others and states, “You can invite whoever you want to be there with you, maybe also people who are far away from you. You somehow miss them less when you have been able to be with them in that way.”

Emma spoke of people visiting Agape Healing Community from all over the world and of finding a welcoming space there. In my own process, I saw how, in the humility of ‘not knowing’, I could join with my own humanness and was in this way then able to connect with those around me. Stan spoke of the connections being healing, “Our work is to get into those connections with each other because that is where the healing is.” He goes on to say that, “…the articulation of our own struggle is the connection between us and within and between the members of the community we form.”
Stan explained that using the different languages of drumming, acting and dancing allowed alternate forms of relating and that connections could be formed that way. Once these connections are formed, we can, as fellow citizens, face together the struggles of our land, not only the psychological but the physical as well. He states, “It is through the “one-leggedness” of people that connections form; …in the connection through our own humanness with others is where I believe healing lies.”

5.4 The Discourse of Errant Parenting

When the members of Agape Healing Community show courage and humility in sharing what it is that we as individuals bring to Agape, sometimes to share, sometimes for healing, this teaches us to make time to let our voices form and to receive what comes with the utmost patience and without fear. One way of construing this is that it is about being re-parented. Members of Agape Healing Community can represent mothering or fathering and can also act as catalysts, awakening a sense of mothering and fathering within each of us, which, when there is an absence thereof outwardly, can lie dormant, an untapped resource (Freedman, 1996; McNamee & Gergen, 1993; White, 1995; White & Epston, 1990).

Many of the participants spoke of Stan and Corinne as the mother and father of Agape and of Agape Healing Community as a family. Refilwe says of Stan, “He is the father of healers and the brother of healers, and is together with the
Stan pointed out that “community work profoundly addresses the issue of family which has been fragmented and hurt, ruptured by apartheid. 
Agape provided a counterpoint which imitated family which was loving and therefore healing. Stan adds that in order for Agape to be a healing place, the healer, the father, needs to show fallibility in the process of healing others. He says, “I therefore become the flawed father, and Agape takes the role of conserving family, community.”

5.5 The Discourse of Feeling Lost or of Not Belonging

The experience of feeling lost or of not belonging is something many citizens of South Africa can relate to. The growing phenomenon of orphans and of child-headed homes in our country brings with it many children growing up without parents or a sense of belonging within a parental home. That said, the presence of parents and a home to live in does not preclude the experience of feeling lost and alone.

Emma speaks of how moved she has been to see the love and concern in Stan and Corinne’s eyes for herself and for the members of Agape, and of how that has made her feel valued, as if she matters to them.

In my own process, I reflect on a sense of belonging at Agape Healing Community: “What does not wash away in the water of my bath... is the longing for such a family, such a sense of sharing or communion.” Solly describes Agape Healing Community as the place where he has a safe place.
Agape Healing Community runs counter to the discourse of not belonging and would seem to provide a safe place, a place where individuals feel they have a home. This is echoed in Olga’s comment: “It's my home.”

It is a place where individuals feel celebrated, as seen in my reflection on the celebration, in song, at Agape Healing Community, of my birthday: “I was sung to that day as I never have been before. The sincerity and generosity of the people will stay with me forever.”

5.6 The Discourse of Home

Many of the participants speak of Agape as home. This runs counter to the ubiquitous homelessness in the Mamelodi East township and in our country at large. The number of orphans and child-headed homes is an incremental statistic staring us in the face. At Agape Healing Community, the members speak of being re-parented and of how this is a chance at healing, of choosing a different narrative by which to live. The construction of Agape Healing Community using the discourse of ‘Home’ provides for its members an experience, perhaps, of at times being loved and parented by a mother and father; at other times of being the mother or father to others. This is an experience that serves to undermine or to ‘rewrite’ the discourse of homelessness or lovelessness running through the community.
5.7 The Discourse of Malnutrition

Another discourse in the community is that of being malnourished. The majority of the residents of Mamelodi East township live below the breadline and are not able to maintain adequate nutrition.

Agape Healing Community, in contradistinction to this community narrative or discourse, provided a place of nourishment. In my own process, experiences at Agape prompted me to wonder what people in the community were starving for. Agape Healing Community provided a chance of feeding one’s soul and of acknowledging oneself and those around one. In the face of abject poverty, barrenness and the resultant malnutrition, I was able to experience abundance and nourishment. After attending a birthday celebration of some of the elderly members of Mamelodi East township, the following became clear to me: “What struck me was the abject poverty all around us, the barrenness, yet behind us we left a room full of abundance and wealth, abundance in human spirit and sharing of everything that matters. Again I walked away humbled and knowing that it was I who had come to learn from them, to share in their bounty.”

5.8 The Discourse of Lack of Immunity and Suffering

Many of the participants Agape Healing Community would speak of coming home from Agape and stripping off dust-coated clothes in the doorway and melting into a warm and cleansing bath. This hints at another discourse
woven into the tapestry that is Agape. That of contamination. Yet what is it we wish to be immune to? The hardship we see around us? The poverty? The suffering?

In my own reflections, I see how, through holding ourselves immune to the suffering and hardship around us, we ultimately keep ourselves sterile from that which gives way to warmth and compassion and the courage to be fully present, first with ourselves, and then with those around us.

5.9 The Discourse of Academia

The students and Stan and Corinne, as well as many of the visitors to Agape Healing Community, have an advanced tertiary education. This is juxtaposed against the stark lack of education so ubiquitous in our country, and to which Mamelodi East township is no exception. It is easy to assume that those who have not had a formal education would benefit from schooling, but it was so often the students themselves who had come to Mamelodi to learn.

In my own reflections, I state, “The narratives of psychiatry, institutionalisation, being sane versus being insane, were all in evidence here. Yet it was I who was ‘institutionalised’ and locked into one way of thinking.” Esther felt that the academic theory she had learned from her studies at university came alive for her at Agape Healing Community.

Sam speaks of how he has felt subdued and judged by “white peers” who seemed to require “degrees or certificates” to count him as an equal.
5.10 The Discourse of Simplicity

In my own process, I speak of the complexity of academia thus: “I see how words and theories can insulate us from ourselves and those around us. How theorising can complexify things, weaving a web behind which we can safely hide.” In the face of the sometimes over-complexity of academia, Agape Healing Community offers a place of utter simplicity. Members, stripped of all comforts, will sit under the bluegum tree, share a sandwich, laugh, cry, or peacefully pass the time without words. In this way, we are placed in contact with our essence, stripped of all pretence. Esther speaks about how special it was just sitting in the sand under the bluegum tree. Rosemary, Andrew and Solly speak about how healing it was to talk and laugh together.

In the simplicity and humility of not knowing lies wisdom and understanding. In the simplicity there is a letting go, an unguardedness and a surrendering. There is a nakedness there, a rawness; feeling exposed, which is echoed in the dusty, harsh and unforgiving physical environment.

5.11 The Discourse of Sustainability

Is this community intervention sustainable? Each individual brings to Agape something unique and shares according to what he or she has to offer and feels able to give of him/herself. Agape is constructed by and made up of the individuals who are there on any particular day or in any given year and no two days or years are ever the same. Is part of the sustainability of this community outreach its ability to form and re-form in this manner? That
whoever is able to be there, whether as client or helper, or both, is received openly and without judgement? The ‘Agape family’ is a space held open for whoever has joined with it at that time. The project has been in effect for well over twenty years, which bears witness to its sustainability, in one sense of the word.

Stan reflects: “I feel concern over the stage when I will retire and the universities ask why the students have to go to Agape. To write more about Agape won’t help. I would rather be there because that is what helps. Agape is like a Navaho sand painting. It forms and re-forms each time we come together and no days are ever the same. The series of meetings are recorded and remembered in your body and go with you in all you do.”

Esther states, “Something close to living, close to the earth is something I have inherited from them.” Could it be that from another way of looking, Agape Healing Community is sustained through the healing effects we each of us take with us and spread to the citizens of South Africa? That what we have ‘inherited’, instead of a poisonous pedagogy, a discourse of disconnection, hatred and fragmentation, is a narrative of hope and an experience of having been loved?

5.12 The Discourse of Finding One’s Voice

Many members of Agape Healing Community have related how profoundly healing it has been to find one’s voice within the community and to let it be
heard. This process begins with hearing one’s own voice first; by letting it form, receiving it without judgement or censure. This runs counter to the subjugating discourses of being silenced, of not being heard or seen, or of screaming to be heard.

Esther speaks about Stan and Corinne enabling others to talk through their own speaking, and of how the members’ sharing of different perceptions and approaches to the world make it extraordinary for her. This process allowed Esther and other members to live more consciously.

Many of the participants speak about learning the capacity to hear others, and of how holding a space open for talking, both for themselves and others, of speaking the unspeakable, was profoundly healing. Specific instances were related where people who before were holding their pain in silence were able to find their voices. Rosemary’s statement is illustrative: “At first I was not able to talk, but I have learned how to talk now. Agape changed my life.”

When one finds a place for hearing the speaking of another, even if the words need to come out in anger, this can be transformative. In my own process, I speak about how we “…walk together striving to honour the loud and the soft voices within us and between us, and the nuances we bring to bear in the therapeutic setting.” Furthermore, when Agape Healing Community was first opened, the founders were dismayed to find derogatory and angry words painted on the walls. After careful thought, it was decided that rather than paint the words away, they should be left there, since “Agape was after all
intended to be a place where such angry feelings and pain could be expressed – and received.” Below the angry words, at some later stage, somebody wrote “I see you, I hear you, I AM you.” The walls of Agape thus have provided a space for an ongoing dialogue between and amongst its participants, whoever they may be at any one time.

5.13 The Discourse of Resourcefulness

In the utter barrenness of the dusty ground and searing heat or biting cold, we are reminded of our own barrenness, emptiness, our poverty. To find an inner resourcefulness in the midst of seeming nothingness or desolation runs counter to the discourse of hopelessness and helplessness that stalks many members of the community.

Olga explains that it helped her to be a part of Agape Healing Community and that, “some people can love you at Agape and you can have the strength to carry on when life is hard.”

Esther talks about Agape Healing Community having taught her that she is not ‘the saviour’, and goes on to say that “In some way, it gave me the tools to decide which burdens to leave there under the bluegum tree after every Wednesday, and which to carry with me. It’s an ‘equals’ position.”

Sam speaks of how he has seen that members of Agape Healing Community do not need to be protected or rescued, and that they instead need to see
their own inner resourcefulness: “… it is not for me to see them healed. It is up to them to see they are free or healed and maybe they will say thank you and do what I told them. The main thing to learn is to depend on self, not others.”

5.14 The Discourse of Humility

The discourse of humility is about relinquishing power. Is this a struggle within one? Is it about the former political regime and therefore on a societal level? Have the struggles of our land informed our sense of who we are as people, individually?

Stan speaks of how “One of the most important goals I had was to shed some of the assumptions which I carried from my training. Some of it was about power and being the one in charge. Over time, this moved to a stance of ‘I don’t know’ or ‘I have failed’.”

5.15 The Discourse of Courage

Agape Healing Community began at a time when white people in a black township created a crisis for community members and it required courage from Agape members to continue to attend. Stan explains: “We had been hopeful enough and daring enough to go into the township in 1986 in the political milieu of the time. This ecology was verbalized nonverbally in unexpressed ways through each of us.”
Courage is a discourse that runs through Agape Healing Community still today with members showing courage in facing their challenges, courage in facing themselves. Stan says, “I was giving up an international career and the security of all that I had been taught, yet it constitutes a hiding behind a mask and one’s intellect.” The discourse of courage is in contradistinction to the discourse of cowardice, of hiding away, of not facing things and dulling one’s pain in a haze of alcohol and drugs or in the use of violence on others. Olga says of Agape Healing Community that it “took me from the weakness to the braveness. I am a fighter. I am strong.”

In my own process, “It was I who needed to have the courage to reach out and join with my inner self, to see the parts of me in pain and so long forgotten. The oppressed, silenced and disadvantaged parts of me were illuminated and, with courage, brought for healing.” In further exploration of this discourse, Stan speaks of the ‘talking stick’, used as part of the ritual of Agape Healing Community: “The talking stick was a less conscious reaching for a symbol. The culture in South Africa has been one of using sticks to announce their role. Healers would often carry a stick to announce their position. It is also protective. We felt unsafe here in Mamelodi often. When used in the ndoro, the talking stick would allow people an honourable space which others could allow and hold for each other.”
5.16 The Discourse of Healing

Agape is described as a healing community and runs counter to the discourse of disease that spreads like a plague throughout our land. Healing implies wholeness, freedom, life. The discourse of disease can be addressed also on the deeper level of an ailing psyche. Members of Agape Healing Community relate instances of having felt healed on a deeper level through talking to and feeling supported by those around them.

This research set out to illuminate the specific aspects of Agape Healing Community that members have found to be healing. An examination of the specific experiences the participants pinpointed as healing follows.

Esther recalls: “Bomber healed me a lot in terms of my grandfather. He reminded me so of my grandfather. I experienced him as the grandfather, the overseer of Agape. I spent many hours with Bomber under the bluegum, not doing much but gaining more than I can ever explain… There was healing there for me.”

Sam states, “I think it’s about sharing… speaking of difficulties that’s inside and also outside… the unspeakable. In the past, people who shared here and people felt we needed a programme where we can share, tell tales and that no-one else listens to… to tell the pains I have seen and felt. Just by seeing and hearing others talk… If I was an author I would write a book about it’s not about talking, it’s about creating trust… sharing our burdens. People
who work in communities create healing through counseling... and differences develop that members can use and take into the community.”

Refilwe speaks about Agape Healing Community having helped her to achieve her goals. When one feels overwhelmed, Agape makes possible a dialogue with, and an understanding of, oneself that “there is life after any kind of issue” and that problems, big and small alike, can indeed be solved.

Solly explains how Agape Healing Community has felt healing for him: “Agape helped me to cope well and spiritually by building my morale. I feel affirmed and acknowledged. It has helped someone with paranoia... helped me to take my medication... helps me to stay better. It’s where I am getting talking healing, healing talk... feeling supported.”

Emma says that what she has seen “is that to be healed, you need to feel loved, to feel touched, stroked... for someone to see your glowing face... then you can manage with your crisis.” In my own process: “I have come to this place to help those who lack, but that is not what I see. I arrive in the location ready to give, yet I receive. I feel almost selfish. Am I getting more than I give? I am learning about sharing and a community that is enriching me, not the other way around. Slowly what is revealed to me is that it is I who have come to Agape to be healed. And I am.”

Stan shares what his perception is about healing: “In the connection through our own humanness with others is where I believe healing lies. The process
of life has its own seeds of transformation and conservation. In the crises, in the fights we have... if we allow it to happen and don't feel the need to fix it, then you are holding the pain and this then becomes a healing space. It is not necessary to take the pain and suffering away. It has a purpose.” He goes on to say, “Healing is a powerful human process of living in connection with others. The title ‘healer’ isn’t a rank, it happens between us... you are trying to read between the lines... beyond academia is the healing... between the lines of a theory, healing, in one word, is love. It’s a big word... it is so complex... in the moment of the ndoro... and that love can last a lifetime, you take it in your body.”

Stan says, “Healing is also for the healer and that became our ethic. What the healer is saying is the struggle of the community. In the articulation is the forming of community. My hope is that some generations of therapists will take with them from Agape the love and that they will in turn recreate a loving community which breaches boundaries and defies prejudices of community.”

5.17 CONCLUSION

Agape Healing Community is a healing space that is created by each person present there on any given day. Each one is embraced, even if one has seemed to come as a ‘healer’ or as a ‘giver’. Many times members would leave Agape having received infinitely more than they had given and have found healing when they felt it was others who were not whole.
Agape Healing Community seems like a desert, a dry and dusty piece of ground. Yet with a little ‘rain’, or an experience of being accepted and of being able to walk through a crisis, the seeds that have lain dormant can germinate, a sense of self can be allowed to grow and flourish.

Each of us has within us the discourses of Agape and their converse. Nobody is either all good or all bad: neither all goodness nor all badness belongs to anyone. In a place where criticism and blame have informed our history and societal behaviour, Agape Healing Community offers a haven, a sharing of kindness, giving and of acceptance – a sharing of good. As dry and dusty as Agape is, it’s a place of being washed clean.

The next chapter will provide a discussion of the research results, together with recommendations for further research and an outline of the study’s limitations.
CHAPTER 6

DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The aim of this chapter is to critically engage with and integrate the theory with the results obtained from this research. This is accomplished by reflecting on the constructs discussed in the literature review and by juxtaposing them with the discourses discussed in the previous chapter. Possible implications arising from the research process, together with recommendations for future research, as well as the specific limitations of this study, will be explored.

In evaluating and discussing this study, let us turn back to the literature and constructs reviewed in chapter 3.

6.1 INTRODUCTION

In accordance with John Donne’s statement that “No man is an island entire of itself; every man is a piece of the continent; a part of the main” (in Berns, 2004, p. 391), it becomes apparent that at Agape Healing Community no one person is ‘the leader’ or ‘the healed’. Each member collectively forms the community of Agape and the healing space is formed and held between them. This is illustrated in Stan’s description of Agape being formed and re-formed each time like a Navaho sand painting.
6.2 REVISITING THE CONSTRUCTS OF COMMUNITY

Bronfenbrenner and Morris (in Berns, 2004) point out that the environment and individuals are interrelated and that the country’s politics, the environment, social groups, community belonging and family intermingle to inform an individual’s socialization. As each one experiences Agape and takes that experience home with him/her, and in turn shares what has been learnt and experienced with those around him/her, so a new informational feedback loop is created with messages of healing, acceptance, connecting, which is recursively fed back not only into the Mamelodi community, but also across the world.

In terms of the process of socialization, Berns (2004) points out that we form a sense of self which reflects the attitudes of others and can be termed the “looking glass self” (p. 36). Mead called this sense of self the “generalised other” and makes the statement that one’s self holds the concepts, standards and opinions of others, as well as his or her experiences of how others relate to him or her. As many individuals stated in their transcripts, Agape Healing Community has afforded them the chance of being re-parented; an experience of home and of belonging. In terms of the second order cybernetics construct of ‘fit’, individuals are thus given the opportunity to ‘fit’ differently, to form a different sense of self during the reciprocal process of a different social and environmental interaction.
In terms of the risk factors within one’s environment (Freeman, 1993; Gibson, 1993; Ramsden, 1994; Stevens & Lockhart, 1997; Straker, Moosa, Becker & Nkwale, 1992; Turton, Straker & Moosa, 1991), certainly Mamelodi township can be defined as a criminogenic environment with high levels of crime, ubiquitous poverty, neglect of children and vigilantism, to name a few. In the midst of this, Agape Healing Community constitutes a home, a safe haven where community members come together to support and to re-parent one another by making space for talking and for acceptance of all. This then is in accordance with what Straker, et al. (1992) and Stavron (1998) have to say about external support systems serving as mediating factors, which mitigate the harmful effects of a stressful and criminogenic environment.

According to Fiske and Stevens (1996), “group membership is essential to human physical survival from infancy onward” (p.116). In each person’s transcript, reference was made to a sense of belonging, to a perception of Agape Healing Community as a home. This echoes the findings of Fiske and Stevens (1996) that one’s sense of well-being hinges upon belonging to a group – something that remains a life-long need. Fiske and Stevens (1996) then make the further distinction that the group to which one belongs also needs to engender feelings of worthiness in its members. The members of Agape Healing Community were all able to explain not only how they had been helped and felt supported in the community, but how they had, each in their own way, been able to help others too. Agape then embodies the idea, previously discussed, that self is not a direct, unmediated experience. Instead, self is formed through our socio-cultural language systems that
colour our experience of selfhood and is echoed in our experiences of those around us.

Kurpius (1993) questions an over-focus on environmental factors and also cautions against over-attributing community problems to internal, individual factors. Agape Healing Community’s efficacy would seem to lie in its promoting an awareness, on an individual level, of one’s own prejudices and assumptions, and also on what each one individually and uniquely brings to the community. The stage thus set, an opportunity is created for open sharing between individuals, and a healing space is created between them. There is a deep respect for each individual and an acknowledgement that nobody is ‘the healer’ or ‘giver of resources’ to another; that no-one is superior relative to another. There is a connection on the level of being people bearing witness to something that does not reside in anyone, that no-one can claim ownership of.

Even though in some ways of seeing, Stan and his students seemed to be privileged and to have the resources and knowledge to bestow upon community members, this was not the case. Each member’s knowing, knowledge and perceptions were received as contributions to the co-created space of healing amongst the members of Agape Healing Community, with no member seen as more privileged or knowledgeable or resourceful than another. In addition to this, it was not clear on any given day which members were in need of healing. Many members related how they would go to Agape Healing Community to help those around them, only to discover it was they
who needed help more – that they were the ones who had grown and expanded their sense of themselves.

In terms of the current literature on community work and on employing a pre-determined, linear and fixed programme within a community, Agape appears to mirror the findings of Glynn (1981) and Rubin and Rubin (1995), who put forward the idea that a collaborative approach to community outreach programmes, where community members are consulted and cooperative in the process of designing an intervention, works best. At Agape Healing Community, the approach is not a pre-determined intervention to be imposed on the community, it is instead a co-created experience amongst all members which forms always around an ethos of sharing, but, in detail, is never the same on any given day. Is this not empowering for all present: bringing to the fore, asking for, and celebrating each one’s sense of giving? Of seeing that the resources needed are already present and reside within each one?

In terms of the evaluation aspect of community work put forward by Kurpius, et al. (1993), this is indeed an ongoing process playing out in situ. Looking at the process of feedback, the system that is Agape Healing Community is in the process of positive feedback, where the system is able to accept new information and is responding to it in such a way that change is afforded a place. Furthermore, this change, instead of occurring in line with first order change, where minor changes occur while the essential thought processes stay the same, second order change is occurring, where shifts in perspective are occurring. In line with the ecosystemics construct of reflexivity, the seer is
included in what is seen, and a process of constantly looking back on oneself, evaluating, learning, and differently responding occurs. In some ways of looking, one could see this as an evaluative stance.

Also, at a higher level of recursion, all is as it should be and what looks like chaos at one level of seeing, can have order and harmony from a higher standpoint of looking (Becvar & Becvar, 2003). Agape Healing Community can seem barren and can also seem chaotic at times, but with hindsight, there is an order, a harmony to it.

In this research, from a postmodern epistemological and qualitative stance, the researcher has immersed herself in the research setting, and in particular, became a member of Agape Healing Community. The setting was approached from a position of enquiry and no attempt was made to control either the participants or the variables of the setting. Rich and detailed data was gathered in order to describe what, in each participant’s view, was occurring at Agape Healing Community. This has provided a better understanding of respondents’ experiences of Agape Healing Community and specifically which aspects of Agape have been healing for them.

The data was analysed and located within the larger community or ecology in which Agape Healing Community exists. Discourses were taken from the transcripts and examined in context of the larger society, with a particular focus on the aspects that have led to the members of Agape Healing Community constructing themselves as a healing community.
It is acknowledged that the discourses selected and the resultant analysis of Agape Healing Community is a record of the inferences the researcher has drawn, rather than an objective portrayal of an objective reality.

As put forward by Denzin and Lincoln (2000), the researcher drew on her own experiences as a resource. She immersed herself in Agape Healing Community and gave a first-hand account of what transpired. The researcher’s account and view of Agape Healing Community is subjective and therefore cannot be unquestioningly generalised to a larger population, or, for that matter, to any other member of Agape Healing Community.

Discourses were examined with a view to detailing how they have informed who we are as well as the extent to which the discourses at Agape Healing Community have been reformative. Discourses would seem to form us, to oppress us, or to reform us. This study sought to illuminate the discourses present in the community, since it is believed that an awareness of these discourses and of their effects on community members, injects a sense of self-agency into the process, instead of individuals being thoughtlessly swept along in the exchange – often, but not always, to their detriment.

In keeping with the construct of social constructionism, the findings were taken back to each participant for feedback and their responses incorporated into the final results and analysis.
In terms of the interviewing process, the researcher, in an attempt to capture, in as natural a manner as possible, the unique accounts of the participants, allowed them to relate their experiences with minimal guidance. Some of the interviewees gave an in-depth and detailed account of their experiences at Agape Healing Community, and others’ responses were succinct and not in-depth. The researcher strove not to interfere and chose rather to preserve the authenticity of each one’s chosen manner of address and of relating their experiences at Agape Healing Community.

The researcher made an effort to maintain transparency during the research process. It was thus acknowledged that the interpretations and analyses of the transcripts were the co-construction of her and the participants’ chosen versions of reality, and that neither is an unchangeable construal of events. The participating members provided the feedback that the research had indeed helped to create a deeper sense of community, of critically engaging with their experiences at Agape Healing Community, and that this had deepened their feeling of growth as a result of being a part of Agape Healing Community.

6.3 REFLECTION ON THE RESEARCH PROCESS

The process of researching Agape Healing Community has offered tremendous opportunities for growth, both for myself and for the participants. The beginning point of trying to document exactly what it is that happens at Agape Healing Community has proved to be an enormous challenge. Stan
and Corinne were able to provide some guidance here by pointing out that describing Agape Healing Community requires a new language, a different way of speaking. Since what Agape Healing Community is is for the large part experiential and not academically encountered, I found the shift to an academic and meta-cognitive level uncomfortable and stilted. As Stan pointed out, time spent writing about Agape Healing Community is time taken away from actually being in the community, and from giving to Agape in the ways that matter. That said, participants reflected that engaging in a dialogue about their experiences at Agape Healing Community in some ways affirmed and also clarified what had been healing for them through the experience, and that being a part of this research had been a positive and rewarding opportunity for introspection and sense-making. Certainly that has been my experience, and I come away from writing this dissertation immeasurably enriched for having made a space for talking about, and critically engaging with Agape Healing Community, rather than encountering it on an experiential level only.

I particularly enjoyed the reflexive process of gaining members’ input and feedback from the research itself and felt that this not only provided a richness and depth to the study I could not have accomplished on my own, but that it was congruent with the openness, the sharing and the harmony that together the many voices of Agape Healing Community form.
6.4 LIMITATIONS

- In this study, only ten members of Agape Healing Community were interviewed. Interviewing more members would perhaps have yielded a richer, more detailed and varied description of Agape Healing Community.

- While the study explicitly included only members of Agape Healing Community, members of the larger Mamelodi East community were not included in the interviewing process. Certainly the members of Agape Healing Community cannot be taken to be representative of the community at large and the results of the study therefore have limited usefulness for other community interventions. A broader selection of participants may have enriched the process of co-constructively illuminating the discourses present in the larger Mamelodi East community in which Agape Healing Community is embedded.

- This being a mini-dissertation, there was a limit to the number of participants interviewed and the time taken to carry out the research. This dissertation has had as its aim to raise awareness of Agape Healing Community and in particular which aspects of it have been healing for its members. To this end, the research has been exploratory, and a descriptive fore-runner to possible future research which may arise out of this study.
• This research gave an ear to the unique experiences of some of the members of Agape Healing Community and as such cannot be generalised to the larger population.

6.5 RECOMMENDATIONS

• An historical account of how the Mamelodi East township came about and the experiences of its members on a historical time-line may give a richer ecological background from which to carry out further research.

• As this research was undertaken as part of a master’s degree, and as such was limited in scope, further in-depth research might be carried out as part of a doctoral thesis.

• Past students who were a part of Agape Healing Community could be interviewed, as well as members of Agape from previous years who, for whatever reason, do not currently attend its weekly gatherings. Both could provide richer, more varied data for further research.
6.6 CONCLUSION

The former political regime lay over South Africa like a thick, poisonous fog; a pedagogy which spawned concepts of oppression, segregation and fragmentation. What we need to ask now and in any project taking on oppressed or disadvantaged communities is: Where does hope of reformation or change lie? Is it in the community at large? Is change upon such an abstract concept even possible? Or could it be that by changing one person, beginning reform from within each one of us, we can reform a community?

Agape Healing Community is making a difference to the community, a few people at a time. Certainly the psychology fraternity, in the form of the students who attend Agape Healing Community each year, is benefitting. Agape spreads its message, one person at a time, into the pedagogy, which will in turn eventually make a difference on a societal level. In the same way, we look to see how Agape’s efficacy lies in changing one person at a time, and in so doing, at how it is changing a community.
REFERENCES


APPENDIX A

GROUP INTERVIEW

Present: Andrew, Refilwe, Stan, Solly & Lee

[Initially, the group consists of Lee, Andrew and Refilwe. Later, Stan and Solly joined the group, and Stan again left towards the end]

Lee: Andrew, how long have you been a part of Agape Healing Community?

Andrew: I have been coming to Agape since 1996 in the SOS Children’s Village. The people who started here were Stan, Corinne, Nichi and Solly. At Agape, we meet together and relax. It is about spending time together. Bomber came in 1999 or 1998, Sam and Maria. Refilwe has been coming since then too.

Refilwe: Agape has been about feeding my soul and being able to acknowledge myself and to improve my environment around me. It changed my life very, very much. Agape has helped most of all in the low tone environment.

Lee: Could you explain what you mean by low tone environment?
Refilwe: It means an unhappy environment... because Agape could handle the low environment through the counseling offered there... because of the counseling and this improved my skills,... my parenting skills, it helped me to learn better... it helped to look at things differently... and gave me my way out from life.

Lee: How did Agape give you a way out from life?

Refilwe: I now know what it is that I am supposed to be doing and also what I am not supposed to be doing. As far as I am concerned, Agape has helped me to achieve my goals.

Lee: How?

Refilwe: I have seen if a person is going through a difficult time, if they don’t know where to start, or how to handle that... Agape helped... it has helped me to understand myself and the people around me. It has shown me that there is life after any kind of issue... hard, big or broad issues alike can be solved.

Lee: What do you feel you have been able to contribute to Agape?

Refilwe: Well, in order to give something to Agape, you must be part of it and... just be able to send people here. People that are able to
come here… I can give them moral support. Agape gave that to me… it gave me a family.

Lee: Do you feel that Agape has made a valuable contribution to Mamelodi?

Refilwe: Yes, very much… by going to schools, being involved in hospitals, going to the police… and also to give acceptance in Mamelodi… the people who live here have been able to see that Mamelodi has been acknowledged. Agape has made me to be able to see that different things are not the same. That ‘p’ and ‘d’ are not the same… with ‘p’ the tail is going down and ‘b’ the tail is going up… I have been helped by a correction of me and my ancestors, especially through the communication cycle of me and my ancestors… and in my dreams.

Lee: How do you perceive the members of Agape?

Refilwe: I think that Stan has played the best role in Mamelodi, whether it was international… we are still in contact with people in Holland, Norway, Sweden, USA, London… dark or green or blue, Stan was there. When the ancestors called Stan, they called him the “Old Man”.
Lee: Why?

Refilwe: Because it is an acknowledgement of his part of being here and of what he has done. The ‘Old Man’ means how the ancestors are respecting him… acknowledging what he did. He is the father of healers and the brother of healers, and is together with the community.

Corinne played an important role within the parents of Mamelodi, even in education within Mamelodi. She is the sister… and Nichi Casati… she is a girl, a lady and sister to most of us. She still speaks to us and she is concerned. Nadia still phones us, communicates with us. She has even sent a message about Olga. Jan communicates with us. He is concerned. Agape is a network… far and wide.

Stan: There was an Italian woman and her builder husband. He was a healer. Together they videotaped Agape. I could see Agape through their eyes. I saw a man and a woman talking in a healing space. It made me wonder, where does the healing happen? What makes us feel better? We have all become healers. In the ndoro, there are always four or five healers doing the work. One of the visitors to Agape was just blown away. He said, ‘I have no words’ in the ndoro and sat down. It
was as if he was acknowledging that we pronounce the words for others, like a masterpiece painting, prophetically they are all talking for you. Healing is a powerful human process of living in connection with others. The title ‘healer’ isn’t a rank, it happens between us… you are trying to read between the lines…beyond academia is the healing… between the lines of a theory, healing, in one word, is love. It’s a big word… it is so complex… in the moment of the ndoro… and that love can last a lifetime, you take it in your body.

Lee: When we come here with words and theories, it is as if we are immune… if we are not connected with self, we cannot connect with those around us either.

Stan: Our work is to get into those connections with each other because that is where the healing is.

Lee: How has Agape healed you?

Andrew: It is our community. Since 1986.

Stan: Sam was here from the beginning. We started with nothing… under the tree… and that was how Agape was for five years. One of the most important goals I had was to shed some of the assumptions which I carried from my training. Some of it was
about power and being the one in charge. Over time, this moved to a stance of ‘I don’t know’ or ‘I have failed’.

Refilwe: Some of the people coming here don’t know their own well-being. When they come here, they can find out about themselves and know themselves and their healing… learn how to handle that process. Some others just come here and just end up doing what they need to be healed.

Stan: Giving up and allowing stuff. One realization was how aesthetics are part of our work as healers. The act of psychotherapy is an aesthetic process, it includes healing, it includes love, not just for art… an artist once said that you cannot create a masterwork unless you have the harmony within you. Healing work is painfully beautiful… and the criterion that emerged for me of painful beauty, rather than ‘sustainability’, is to be able to be in the painful beauty.

Solly: Agape helped me to cope well and spiritually by building my morale. I feel affirmed and acknowledged. It has helped someone with paranoia… helped me to take my medication… helps me to stay better.

Andrew: Hello!
Solly: For me, Stan is a father.

Andrew: Ya, he is our father..

Solly: Corinne is our mama and Agape is home…

Andrew: Yes, the *queen* mother!

Solly: It’s where I am getting talking healing, healing talk… feeling supported.

Refilwe: Where you create your soul space… this year I have been coming often.

Andrew: Yes, until we die.

Refilwe: This is the space to create for yourself. When you are having problems at work… it is nice to have a supportive space.

Solly: Yes, this is where I feel I have a special place. It helps to communicate through talking and through writing and connecting with people… to those who can help, even if you get referrals to other people like doctors.
Refilwe: I met a drug addict woman here and she was very very miserable… she had holes in her…

Solly: Agape is a real healing community…

Refilwe: Agape is a real healing community [laughs]…

Solly: Part and parcel of the residents of Mamelodi…

Andrew: At Mabopane there is a small Agape… here we can just rest. You know what, it is just a small church and it is like the weekend… you come here to relax, to see everyone.
APPENDIX B

Interview with Emma

Lee: When did you first come to Agape Healing Community?


Lee: Who were the members of Agape when you first came here?

Emma: Stan and the students were at the Development Centre… I heard about Agape and we wanted to send delegates to Agape to support them. I am the only one of those delegates sent who is still left here. I remained here for seven years. I have found this place interesting. I have seen that the community can be helped with problems; family problems, suicide, drugs… I fell in love with this place. I have an urge to work with communities and to help other people… well, you are not working, but you are helping others. Some people say to me that they are suffering and I want to help them. But it isn’t that you only help others and not yourself… but I don’t see myself as suffering… I want to give them advice. Also, it helps to get contacts at Agape… I go to enquire how I can help, or how others can help me, we can network together. For instance, I go to enquire about the adoptive mothers in our community… I try to help them. I am myself an adoptive mother of eight years… like now
there is a family headed by a girl of 24. I took her to a registered psychologist at the centre nearby.

Lee: How has Agape helped you?

Emma: When I came here, I didn’t have a problem, but I saw others who did… people so helpless… for instance Refilwe, Sam and even Bomber. We heard about their problems, for instance Sam said he would have killed himself if it wasn’t for Agape… the despair, feeling worthless and inferior. Your family can make you feel less than dead… especially children who come here for therapy from broken families, even two to three-year-olds… then they cope after that. What I have noticed is that to be healed, you need to feel loved, to feel touched, stroked… for someone to see your glowing face… then you can manage with you crisis.

Lee: How would you describe Agape Healing Community?

Emma: People come here with problems… Refilwe and I had a parenting group and programmes for children… we did a stimulating programme… we were busy with parents doing parenting. We discovered that many of the problems are with the mothers. If things go wrong, they scream, shout, hit, insult… then we share ideas like ‘don’t hit your child, he is just hungry. Let your child heal, grow, develop. It isn’t your child’s fault that
there is no food, but you must try other means’. This therapy was very good. There was a boy called William. His mom wasn’t right. His mom grew up not living with parents and was treated badly. We explained that how when a child grows up being hit, he grows stubborn. It is better rather to understand what you want or do not want. But Will was hit so badly he lost his mind… when you looked at him you would see a mad boy. The therapy we used for them was teaching… and letting the boy play… then the boy’s mind just came back… his ‘mad boy’s eyes’ went away bit by bit.

Lee: How do you perceive the members of Agape Healing Community?

Emma: I see Stan as a hard worker, as very very dedicated. They are dedicated: Corinne, Stan and Nichi are not used to this place… but Nichi wasn’t afraid even when they stole her radio, she wasn’t scared… not of thugs, of being held up at gun point… she would just go anywhere. She was very soft… a very nice lady. Even when they know this place, they still come.

Once Stan and I went to a traditional healer, everyone knows him [Stan]. They call him ‘Baba Baba’, ‘Old Man, Old Man’! [laughs]. He looks old because of his wrinkles, but he isn’t old. Wherever he goes, people know him. What I like about Stan is
when people come to Agape, like Olga and Sam, they show respect and you can see in their eyes that they love them very much, that they matter to them. Stan and Corinne are very close, and they work together. Students from overseas come here and do research and many thousands of students from many places. When they leave here, they cry.

I was ill for three years. I didn’t help as much as I had. I saw that Stan looked to me as if he was lost. He had lost Bomber. Sam was working, even Rose, Connie and even Olga were not here as much as before. So I stayed with Stan to support him. He said, ‘You know what, Emma? I am going to retire soon. If you don’t come, who is going to do this community work?’ That’s what he said. That’s why I came every Wednesday and then off I go to work after he goes.
APPENDIX C

Interview with Esther

Lee: How did you come to be a part of Agape Healing Community?

Esther: The first point of contact with Agape Healing Community that I had was through Unisa. I enrolled for the Ecosystemics course and received a letter inviting us to visit. I wanted contact with the lecturers and other students and went along to see what it was all about.

Lee: Who were the members of Agape Healing Community?

Esther: They were Bomber, Sam, Olga, Solly, Rachel, Rose, Refilwe, Connie, Oom Dawid, Andrew, Stan, Corinne, Zsofia, Michael, and more Unisa and UJ students. The membership at Agape is fluid, people come and go all the time, and yet there is a feeling of constancy.

Lee: What have you learned from Agape Healing Community?

Esther: I have always felt overwhelmed by the socioeconomic issues in our country. As a result (to try and do something about these issues), I became involved with a shelter for street children. I was involved in doing art classes with them. There was no
supervisor and no support structure, which made me feel even more overwhelmed. I carried my own load as well as the loads of all the children in the shelter. I realize that unconsciously I felt as if I was doing nothing. So I have for some time and in other ways been involved in community work. Agape has taught me that I am not the saviour. In some way, it gave me the tools to decide which burdens to leave there under the blue gum tree after every Wednesday, and which to carry with me. It's an ‘equals’ position. I couldn’t give money to these people, yet I know that I go back to a warm home in winter… but I knew that I could give lots at Agape.

Lee: How would you describe Agape Healing Community?

Esther: It was here that the ecosystemic epistemology came alive for me. The rituals emphasize what happens in real life… the exposure was valuable. I met really special people there: Bomber, Olga, Sam, Stan, Corinne… people from different parts of society.

I loved the ritual of the ndoro, because I love to ‘philosophize’ about stuff and to have an outlet for stuff that I believe to be significant, but that me friends do not specifically want to hear about all the time … like when I found a blue bead in the dust… I could talk about it and be heard… I also found this worked both
ways… I would also hear the talking of others. I found that through this process, I could live more consciously… what was happening at Agape became part of everyday life. I also learned to be more aware of nonverbal behaviour, like when I couldn’t hear someone speaking or I could not understand the language someone was using, I could still see a lot in what their body was saying.

About ancestors… they were previously not really part of my frame of reference, but Agape, and specifically the ndoro, made a space for them. I became aware of the influence of people like Bomber on me, and also of people who live far away from me. Like when we light the mpempu… because of how Stan approaches it you can invite whoever you want to be there with you, maybe also people who are far away from you, you somehow miss them less when you have been able to be with them in that way. My brother is a traveler who is far away for long periods of time. If you think about people, you bring them closer to you. For instance, instead of saying to a friend, ‘I thought of you today, because of this and this..’, or ‘I missed you today’; consider the difference of saying, ‘You were in my mind’.

When others speak in the ndoro, it depends on how I feel and what they are talking about, I can learn from how they see the world, because each has a different approach to it, they make it
extraordinary. Stan constantly looks at the world as if it is a completely new place and he makes meaning from that. Almost as if he was exploring the world like a toddler. He looks at ordinary things in new ways, and applies this simple theory to his life.

I often strongly identify with Corinne. Stan seems to reflect on life on a metalevel, and Corinne on an emotional level. Stan talks poetry and Corinne talks about experiencing life. Both of them, with their different approaches, enable others to talk. Stan motivates me to think about my thinking. Corinne encourages me to be more conscious, to slow down, and to experience life with all my senses.

Lee: Has it been hard at times for you to be at Agape Healing Community?

Esther: Yes, very… I have a mainly western approach to life, but aspects of community members’ approach to life and culture resonate strongly with me. I could go along with that and still feel comfortable. I see the dichotomies between those who have a car and petrol and those who do not, or those just wanting to talk and those who demand from me. I got very close to Connie. She had a visit from her ancestors and this prompted me to do a lot of reading about western and traditional culture,
because I felt I couldn’t help her otherwise. She unintentionally forced me to wonder about my role as a western clinical psychologist in an African healing environment. Even now, I would like to learn more about many traditionally African customs. I really would like to know what that world is all about.

Lee: What do you feel you have contributed to Agape Healing Community?

Esther: I am a very passionate person, and that carries over into my work. I gave a lot of myself to Olga, Solly, Sam, Bomber and Connie. I feel as though I am sometimes an ‘energy-giver’ and I think I have poured energy and passion into Agape.

Lee: What aspects, specifically, do you think are healing about Agape Healing Community?

Esther: I have to a large extent realised that I won’t save South Africa and that that is okay. Agape has helped me to get to terms with the fact that I am not the saviour, but that my effort does make a small difference and that I am needed. Also to acknowledge my role in western society, for instance, it is now also okay if I want to see clients individually and to charge them. Like Stan and Corinne. They don’t just do community work.
Bomber healed me a lot in terms of my grandfather. He reminded me so of my grandfather. I experienced him as the grandfather, the overseer of Agape. I spent many hours with Bomber under the blue gum, not doing much but gaining more than I can ever explain. There was healing there for me. Even without Bomber, just sitting at Agape under the blue gum in the sand was so special.

A specific highlight was when I took photo’s of Agape for Stan’s trip to South America. One day I took photo’s of Veliswa’s and my shadows. At one point, she had taken photo’s too. We were both smiling continuously and we did not speak much, as if we both realized that we are treading on sacred ground. When later at home I edited the photo’s, I realized that we had been taking photo’s of the ancestors. The empty chairs. Even mentioning it now almost feels sacrilege. It was a very sacred experience.

Lee: How do you perceive the members of Agape Healing Community?

Esther: I see Stan as a father. He is going to retire the year after next. If no-one takes over, Agape will be no longer, not without Stan. At the times when he wasn’t there, there were hardly any people. If the father goes, the Agape family won’t be okay. But
maybe Agape is not meant to live forever and that will be okay. Who knows?

Lee: Is there anything more you would like to say about Agape Healing Community?

Esther: I really like Stan and Corinne’s ritualistic way of life, and their appreciation of natural phenomena. I have always been inclined to pick up stones and butterfly wings, and they reminded me why. Something close to living, close to the earth is something I have inherited from them. I have seen how important it is to have rituals in everyday life. I light candles and listen to specific music during times of death, and I sometimes I wonder what people close to me think of these peculiarities. They reminded me why it is important. I have become more aware of the primal experiences of life and I am grateful.
APPENDIX D

Interview with Stan

We had been hopeful enough and daring enough to go into the township in 1986 in the political milieu of the time. This ecology was verbalized through us nonverbally in unexpressed ways through each of us. I was giving up an international career and the security of all that I have been taught, yet it constitutes a hiding behind a mask and one’s intellect. The articulation of our own struggle is the connection between us and within and between the members of the community we form.

We saw a tremendous commitment of people. We all felt its growth of a core of commitment. Then Bomber joined us and that was such an affirmation.

Healing is also for the healer and that became our ethic. What the healer is saying is the struggle of the community. In the articulation is the forming of community. Agape is about creating a safe healing space so that a crisis can happen, since crisis is the cauldron of transformation. When we make a safe place for crisis to happen, this is part of the transformation of South Africa.

Agape began with us stripping ourselves of the claimed certainty we professed to have. We learned along the way to make use of different languages – drumming, acting and dancing. These are all alternate forms of relating and connecting.

Through time we came to the idea of Agape needing to be built in shape of a spiral, the ndoro. The spiral is an international symbol and embodies the
essence of life it is in the curling of a wave, in water that goes down the drain, in the form of a flower. We extended the idea of a sacred ndoro to appoint it also as a place, in the architecture of Agape as well as situating it in a spiral.

If one looks at the history of South Africa, in terms of apartheid, Agape presented a different option for people. To get mental health help one had to cross political lines. We had to cross under barbed wire and borders kept in place by guns. Agape, against this backdrop presented a safe place.

The seating arrangement in the ndoro in the shape of a spiral is a shape that can be taken overseas and provides a sacred healing space.

The talking stick was a less conscious reaching for a symbol. The culture in South Africa has been one of using sticks to announce their role. Healers would often carry a stick to announce their position. It is also protective. We felt unsafe here in Mamelodi often. When used in the ndoro, the talking stick would allow people an honourable space which others could allow and hold for each other.

The process that occurs in the ndoro and repeating it every week. It is interesting to see how some are used to making a confession in a public way. It allowed people to be heard in a respectful way.

In the ndoro, we saw another process unfolding. People would speak in a seemingly disconnected way, but a bigger link would emerge with some voicing the unspoken in others. This then became a healing space. It was asocial.
We who formed the community of Agape were called names by my colleagues... and these names came from those who were most embedded in the ideology of apartheid, in religious boundaries and professional boundaries.

One of the indices points to the important different difference between what we do and what other projects do. Most are focused on particular issues and focuses on one homogeneous group, in other words those prepared to fights HIV and AIDS. At Agape we see old and young and everyone inbetween. Agape is not task oriented. Community work profoundly addresses the issue of family which has been fragmented and hurt, ruptured by apartheid. Agape provided a counterpoint which imitated family which is loving and therefore healing. Agape enacts family. Where the family of South Africa is black and white; inclusive of all colours, creeds, religions and ages, and manages to hold the struggle of people within their lives. Agape then can provide a sense connectedness around the horror that surrounds people... to face together with others in the struggle, not only the psychological but the physical pain as well.

The physical geography of South Africa and the numbers of people being around 4 million whites and 35 million blacks. These provide limited opportunities for connection. Sometimes it is the first time that children can touch across the colour line. We have wanted to spread the dream of Agape. My hope is that some generations of therapists will take with them from Agape the love and that they will in turn recreate a loving community which breaches boundaries and defies prejudices of community.
I think it is also important to state that healers are not images of fully functioning people. They are also flawed and when they can acknowledge that to themselves and others, then they are accessible. Throughout the year at Agape people connect with thousands of people. Maybe it’s only a touch… maybe it’s complex therapy. Ultimately it is this that is healing for South Africa, addressing the wrongs brought about as a result of apartheid in our history.

We are and have been so unaware of connectedness. Healing resides in the connections between us. Modern science with its complex theories has no sense of that. Within the linear, scientific epistemology, one can hear doctors speaking of how “the patient died, but the operation was a success”. This is to lose sight of the person and ultimately also of ourselves. It is through the “one-leggedness” of people that connections form. Some of the relatedness that happens within the context of South African history – incredible stories that breach boundaries of separation and of ideologies.

In the beginning of Agape, when we had formed our group, we were later thrown out of the SOS Children’s Village. The then ANC youth were afraid politically to be associating with us and for what danger it might bring upon themselves. We were told to leave the centre and to no longer carry out therapy there. As a result, we found ourselves out literally sitting on the pavement. But we still went each Wednesday to Mamelodi. Then somebody offered us huts… and so we became squatters in no way different from the township squatters, looking over our shoulders all the time. This was a
growing experience for us and when we came to the point where we felt
secure enough, that was when we got the building together.

We found we would spend our time making things. We made a table,
bookcases and so on. In time the bookcase was used as firewood and the
table kept on breaking and would be repaired as it broke. Over time, we
progressed from the idea of having a building that locked to building the open
shaped walls and lapa’s that were to form Agape. Members of the community
helped us and the walls and thatched roofs took form. There was a space for
the ndoro in the mornings and all the walls were neatly painted a pinkish
colour. When we arrived the next week, it was to find that somebody had
written graffiti all over the walls. It said “F… God… F… whites… F… Agape”.
Our first thought was to paint over it. But then we came to our senses. We
realised that this was nothing more than poetry, it was an expression of
people’s pain, part of what we were doing there… it was our pain and anger
too. How many times have we felt that angry ourselves? Or wanted to swear
at Agape? So we left the writing on the walls. Then we found that others
started painting on the walls too. A dialogue had begun. The wall held the
history of Agape’s archives. Things were written such as “painful beauty”, “I
am sorry Stan”, “Hello darkness my old friend”. Then somebody added a
script to the bottom of the “F… Agape” writing that said, “I see you, I hear you,
I am you.” That is community and the walls were carrying all that was
happening at Agape.
When we come to clean up Agape each Wednesday morning, we see by what is left behind the story of a child who slept there, teenagers who smoked a pipe, angry people who walked through there and burnt the roof on one of the lapsa’s.

Some time later we went to a conference which was attended by many different people. What we noticed was that every group had some sort of identifying feature amongst them - whether it was the nurses who wore uniforms or had epilettes on their shoulders, and so on. We realised that we did not, as a community, have an identity as such. This was how the beads came about.

We were finding that many people were coming to us and asking what it is that we do exactly. The idea came to make a play about psychotherapy. Agape met every Saturday and the members of the community would do a play. One day, for instance, there was a play about a young pregnant girl who was kicked out of her home. The actors said, “Let’s go to Agape.” At which point the play stopped with “now what?” So I said, “Okay, I’ll come into the play..” and we spontaneously played it out right there on the stage. That was how alternative ways of talking formed. We took the play to schools and everywhere and shared to process of shifting into other modalities of language with community members.

Sculpture for me also opened up a modality of communication. One day a man called the Elephant man came into Agape with bags of sculptures.
These were sculptures made by members of the community of Mamelodi. The Elephant man brought a statue with liberated hands. It was through this man that we found our first talking stick that we could use at Agape.

In trying to articulate academically what therapy is, one can say that psychotherapy focuses on transformation, but also on conservation… and it is important that both transformation and conservation work in a didactic, related way. Therapy gives a place for connection and is about conservation. At the same time, change can create fear and a feeling of being lost. Agape provides a place of conservation, a home, and also a place for transformation. To this end, an example of a funeral is apt. It is an act of conservation because it reinforces togetherness and affirms family.

In a healing space the identity of the leaders or elders is important. I become the father and Corinne the mother. Within the process of conservation, the healers, instead of being almost invisible, become very visible. The healer needs to show fallibility in the process of healing others. I therefore become the flawed father, and Agape takes the role of conserving family, community.

Many therapists present their therapy as being transformative, yet it is in fact conservative. It is the client, not they, who must change. The therapist is concerned with the conservation of their room, of their technique and so on. This is an exclusive act of conservation and reifies the differences between people and different levels of power intrinsic to their assigned roles.
In the connection through our own humanness with others is where I believe healing lies. The process of life has its own seeds of transformation and conservation. In the crises, in the fights we have… if we allow it to happen and don’t feel the need to fix it, then you are holding the pain and this then becomes a healing space. It is not necessary to take the pain and suffering away. It has a purpose.

I feel concern over the stage when I will retire and the universities ask why the students have to go to Agape. To write more about Agape won’t help. I would rather be there because that is what helps. Agape is like a Navaho sand painting. It forms and re-forms each time we come together and no days are ever the same. The series of meetings are recorded and remembered in your body and go with you in all you do.
APPENDIX E

Interview with Olga

Lee: When did you start coming to Agape Healing Community?

Olga: I was young. In my teens.

Lee: How do you feel you have been able to contribute to Agape Healing Community?

Olga: By writing stories, drawing, painting, karate, and playing games.

Lee: How do you perceive Agape Healing Community?


Lee: Was it helpful?

Olga: Yes.

Lee: How was it helpful to you?
Olga: In high school I got raped and couldn’t go to anyone I could come here and talk and get help. They attended to my case. Even now I have this HIV thing. I can come here to sell my beads. I can take care of my son.

Lee: How has Agape Healing Community been healing for you?

Olga: It took me from the weakness to the braveness. I am a fighter. I am strong.

Lee: Do you feel that you have helped others by being here?

Olga: It helps many people. Even children. Children learn not to cry but to learn how is life.

Lee: How then would you describe Agape Healing Community?

Olga: It’s a home. When you feel lost you can come and be healed inside. Where you can find happiness. It’s a home...a home with a mother and a father… a second chance at life.

Lee: What would you say does Agape Healing Community try to accomplish as a community?
Olga: Like some people don’t talk. Then they come here and we tell them it’s healing therapy. They can solve their feelings and get help and to see how to solve problems. There’s no community healing around. Since Agape is here it’s changed many people.

Lee: Do you think that Agape Healing Community can be improved in any way?

Olga: Yes, it improves every year. Different people, students, different cases. You can see smiles on people’s faces and they say thanks for helping. They don’t easily forget Agape.

Lee: Have you felt in any way healed by Agape Healing Community?

Olga: Yes, by being able to talk. I don’t like talking, but feel that I can talk to anyone and share with anyone here.

Lee: Is there anything else that you would like to tell me about your experiences at Agape Healing Community?

Olga: I don’t want it to end because there are more people outside who need to be helped. It helps to come here every Wednesday. I have learned some people can love you at Agape and that you can have the strength to carry on when life is hard.
APPENDIX F

Interview with Sam

Lee: How did you come to be a member of Agape Healing Community?

Sam: I was doing a leadership course and by July, I had to go to a conference in Cape Town. The lecturer was not there so I came back home. It was suggested to me that Stan at the SOS Children’s Village could help. Stan and Corinne were not doing a leadership course but they told me to stay with them and help them with what they were doing.

Lee: Yes..

Sam: I was involved with talking to students. We drew pictures. I liked sitting with them, drawing, talking. I wanted to do a leadership course with them… and I wanted to start an arts and culture workshop for children. Well… the children, they came and went… and in 1992 we were thrown out of the SOS Children’s Village. We came to the YMCA and got a space. Here we worked with the students again. Sometimes my problems came up… . Ya, during the process of me coming here, people came and went. I said to Stan that I see myself as having two powers… Stan said to me, “You are a healer and you are an artist and
an antenna of the community. I see you working in the community with children and people."

Lee: Sam, could you tell me more about that?

Sam: I saw Agape working when I saw an old lady up in the mountain and she said she was all alone and stressed that she had no-one to talk to. She was healed in one session. I have seen students and people healed through music and art…. But you know, sissie, it is not for me to see them healed. It is up to them to see they are free or healed and maybe they will say thank you and do what I told them.

Lee: How would you describe Agape Healing Community?

Sam: In an image or word form. In an image, it’s a spiral form. The lines of a spider’s web. In a word form, it is a home for people to be listened to and cared for to show they are loved… for people to not feel ashamed… a place for them to come and sit and talk. It will open up their minds in an environment that will set them free.

Lee: What, in your opinion, does Agape Healing Community try to accomplish as a community?

Sam: To make people aware in life that one is not alone and show people not to depend from other people or from the material. They need to
depend from their own. It’s not about psychologists or students, professors… it’s about the individual as you come for healing. You need to see yourself as having a form of doing things on your own… achieving liberty.

Lee: What, do you think, constitutes a healing community?

Sam: It’s upon my vision not to improve but to develop it. Children will come here, if the crowds can be revived and children encouraged to come here and not be on the street doing drugs and all that. The children who were here came far. They are doing something. They are working. One child was doing drugs. Now he is selling flowers. Ya, sissie, in terms of operation, Agape, it’s cool.

Lee: Have you felt in any way healed by this community?

Sam: Ya… ya… ya… to tell you honestly… ya, sissie, I have been coming here for seventeen years and have felt healed. I try to remember the names of students who are healed from pain inside… those who were abused emotionally and physically and treated badly by their peers. Even though I am with them, I am alone. Here, doing drums and art opens my mind… to be with Emma, Connie, Maryna, John, Manhen, Linda, Nicky… it’s not easy to remember all the names. I have two powers: prophetic power and cultural healing power and to be opened up to my powers through my work here in art and music. I committed
a crime when I was sad. I was arrested. Then I went to see a
sangoma. She said I need to do twasa. I thought, how could this be?
I went to my uncle’s father, my father, my grandfather and mother, and
I prayed. I couldn’t find the answer… but I sought the answer. It would
take me four hours to go 1000m, a distance that should have taken
fifteen minutes. It felt like my spirit was leaving my body… I felt weak.
Then I got red and white cloths, as the sangoma directed me to do. I
went home and my mother and I went to the field and then we came
back. Then the heavy rain fell. This was my sign of twasa. And ya,
sissie… this experience really helped me, even though I didn’t open up
the prophetic spirit… but I pray to God and he shows me in my dreams
what I need to know and I am so grateful for that.
It’s so hard to be a prophet if there is no-one in your family who is one,
unless you follow God or your dreams where the ancestors guide you.

Lee: Are there healers in your family?

Sam: Yes, my mother’s mother was a prophet. On my father’s side was the
traditional school. My mother’s uncle was a traditional healer… it was
only my mom’s mom who was a prophet. My mom is a believer. I read
in the Bible about the one who serves God… it goes from generation to
generation.

Lee: Could you tell me why you have been healed by being part of this
community?
Sam: For one to live in pain it will make the person to be what he’s not or to do what he’s not supposed to do… so I needed to be healed. I have liked all the students who have passed her from first to last. The students have taught me it’s not about colour, race, age… it’s about form that stands tall and is a tree that bears fruit. Stan and Corinne have helped my patience and love to grow strong. They showed me to wait and to do planning. When the time was right, they gave me a sewing machine after I did my dressmaking course.

It was in 1999 before twasa. I got a call from this man who said I abused two children and a woman who said they were planning a party and I left her alone and she went to the children and opened a case of child abuse against me. The police came and took a statement. I said “I’ll talk to the judge… stand trial in the Pretoria court.” My trial was postponed many times. I saw two children at court and Bomber. He came to me and said, “It’s over.” I said, “I told you I was innocent and honest.” I told Stan, “It’s okay if you are a human. You must be painted whatever colour they want, but if you are innocent, you are innocent.” It turns out the woman bribed them R500.00 to open a case. I was doing an outreach programme with the children, but was stopped right there.

Lee: How are we become a healing community?
Sam: I think it’s about sharing… speaking of difficulties that’s inside and also outside… the unspeakable. In the past, people who shared here and people felt we needed a programme where we can share, tell tales and that no-one else listens to… to tell the pains I have seen and felt. Just by seeing and hearing others talk… If I was an author I would write a book about it’s not about talking, it’s about creating trust… sharing our burdens. People who work in communities create healing through counseling… and differences develop where members can use and take into the community. I see Agape as a home too and I felt it’s a home with a father and a mother and children… and even ancestors… because a home without each, isn’t a home, but if one is missing other members… you try to push the name of the family to go on.

Lee: How do you see the future of Agape Healing Community?

Sam: Well, sissie, Stan will stop if he has to, but there should be a way he can carry on because Stan and Corinne…they are the ones who do this and organize students to come… but if students could come on their own without Stan, it will happen one day. I need to use this place to teach the youth arts and all those things to cope in the world. It hurts me when during the week children come here and smoke. They are destroying an asset of the community if they try to burn the roof. I try to work with peer groups. We talk about life in general and addressing societal issues… that’s how I try to make a little Agape in my community. The main thing to learn is to depend on self, not
others. This is developing people. It’s not about protecting men and women. The Bill of Rights is to every human being.

Lee: Is there anything else you would like to share about your experience of Agape Healing Community?

Sam: I like to have people like Stan to move in his steps... people who want to know the other side, who will walk in his shoes, to ask what is life all about? My home will struggle without him. Even if Corinne didn’t come it would struggle.

Lee: Sam what, specifically, is it about Agape that you have found to be healing?

Sam: As well as I try to show people that we are funny and cowards, not the world. When you point a finger it’s they who must be blamed.

Lee: So would you say, Sam, that one of things you have learned at Agape Healing Community was to depend yourself?

Sam: Yes, I have been helping others, but couldn’t see through myself and wasn’t able to be on my own. Now I can be on my own and just go on. This place opens me. I am able to talk and to do things on my own. One day my mom and dad will leave me and I must be accountable for myself and to pass it on to those who depend on me in turn.
Lee: So, through finding resourcefulness in yourself, have you found that you are able to share it and pass it on to the community?

Sam: I do believe in a communal world. By having one place and sharing for different purposes, it is worth it, rather than to be greedy for just yourself.

Lee: Is there anything else you would like to add?

Sam: Ya sissie. One thing, you know sissie… people shouldn’t run away from what they are or what is theirs… because if they run away from self, you run towards problems… because what is yours is yours… it can’t change, it’s yours for the rest of your life.

Lee: Would you consider writing the book you mentioned earlier?

Sam: I was supposed to write a book. I wrote it, but the pages kept messing up and the pages kept getting lost. I feel like I need to tape myself and talk and talk and talk until it is time for me to stop. I wanted to teach children that it’s all about us… it’s not up to anyone else. What we need is to express the self using writing, poetry, reading, music, art and ourselves.

Lee: It’s about finding your own voice and your own form of self-expression?
Sam: Ya sissie.

Lee: Have you found that in Agape Healing community?

Sam: Ya, I found it in Agape.

Lee: I found it healing at Agape to learn to receive my own voice, and for others to hear it.

Sam: Ya… people need to learn to listen without having their heads full of their own thoughts. We need to be patient. Sharp like snakes. Wise like a dove. We need to take care, to look at things carefully… take your time… don’t rush… and we will be able to get exactly what we want.

Lee: How do you understand the difficulties this community is facing?

Sam: People need to be shown they are loved and cared for and liked. They need to be shown the light. People need to be shown the light. People are running into darkness. Things they aren’t meant to do. Why do people cut off heads, slice open bodies like sheep? Why do people hate each other? Maybe it’s race, colour, gender… people are running away from the light into the darkness. There are two ways to kill; in
body and in mind. Darkness is entertainment and nice... it's easy.
People who are shown the light know the love and the way of the light.
How great it is that love doesn't buy you with material things. It shows
you how warm, how strong people can be. But people want
darkness... that's why people get divorced... they are moving away
from humanity, ubuntu... their humanity. People need to see how
much they can give of themselves once they know that light. Teach
people to fish for themselves, to rely on self.

Lee: Would you say that Stan and Corinne know the light?

Sam: Yes. Even if you are raised in church or a synagogue, you still need to
find the light for yourself. There are spoons at the table and people are
feeding each other.

Lee: Do you think that Stan and Corinne share the light with those around
them?

Sam: Yes. Stan did a programme called leisure music, drama and dance
with the youths. For a white man to do that in the late 80's isn't easy...
but for Stan it was easy. He did it with love.

Lee: This programme was instigated when apartheid was still in effect?
Sam: Yes, Stan was the first white man to vote in this black community. He’s my white brother… my mentor… and my father. How do you feel to be with people who are oppressing you? It’s not about what has been done. It’s how I do things. When I am with white peers, they make you somehow feel different because you need to have degrees, certificates or good schooling… or they are rich… then you are able to be with whites and sometimes they fight your spirit, physically and sometimes verbally.

Lee: What do you do?

Sam: I love my mom. Here at Agape, I have found my mother and my father. At home my mother taught me if people fight with you, you don’t have to respond, you can just keep quiet. If someone as white, you don’t know if that person is a tourist, or a good or bad person. You say to them, “You are a regime. I hate you for what you are.” You are practicing what was done to you. In terms of the African culture, you need to see each other as human beings, as was done before the whites colonized South Africa. Africans had to go back into nature, go back to the same love, care and practices of their ancestors. We must listen as they come to guide us to realizing through our dreams… if you don’t take your dreams seriously, you miss your spiritual guidance.

Lee: Sam, you do you know the light?
Sam: Let me say I live with it and since not praying every morning I feel like I shifted away from the light. I spoke to God and asked for a woman. God gave me a woman. I have never known anyone like her. She gave me a son, Khotelela. This is my father’s father’s name. Therefore this child is my ancestor… from flesh to spirit, to flesh…

Lee: Who else knows the light?

Sam: Corinne knows the light… no-one who… can live in a dam or swim in a river alone without the light. You have to have power not to fear water.

Lee: What does water represent to you?

Sam: Water is darkness and light, life and death. Without water we cannot survive.

Lee: So strength lies in knowing both sides – life and death; light and dark?

Sam: Yes. In order to have light, you need to know about both.
Interview with Rosemary

Lee: How did you come to be a member of Agape Healing Community?

Rosemary: I was stressed out. I couldn’t do anything. I was very shy. I cried a lot. I talked with two of the students here. I came here in 2003, 2004, 2005 and 2006. We talked together about my stress. At first I was not able to talk, but I have learned how to talk now. Agape changed my life.

Lee: In what way do you feel you have been able to contribute to Agape Healing Community?

Rosemary: I help others as well by talking with them about their problems.

Lee: How have you felt a part of Agape Healing Community?

Rosemary: I was part of the schools. It was the first time I had worked with children. I help those around me here by talking.

Lee: What specifically do you feel is helpful about Agape Healing Community?
Rosemary: Many things. You can help someone else to learn how to walk. It helps a lot.

Lee: What, in your opinion, does Agape Healing Community try to accomplish as a community?

Rosemary: To help those who don’t have anything to at home here.

Lee: Do you think that this outreach programme can be improved in any way?

Rosemary: Yes. Maybe we could talk in radio and television about Agape. They can help more people.

Lee: Could you tell me how you have been healed by being part of this community?

Rosemary: I am blessed when I am here. Everything.

Lee: What, specifically, has felt healing for you?

Rosemary: Talking and laughing together.
APPENDIX H

Own Process

I have, through my experiences at Agape Healing Community, come to understand how community can exist within each of us. Community is, after all, made up of people, each with their internalised sense of what that is. Maiello (1999) speaks of being concerned with “the individual’s capacity to create culture more than with the individual being created by culture” (p.219). In the sense of affinity we have, or can find, with each other, we find our community. Bryant states “To him who in the love of Nature holds communion with her visible forms” (Barnhart, et al., 1974, p. 426). This has been my experience at Agape Healing Community.

In theorising about community work, one can insulate oneself and, by definition, see oneself as apart from, and an objective observer of, the community one is working in. The term ‘community’ can become reified as an entity that is static and knowable, but what exactly is ‘community’ anyway? Is it a particular geographic location? Is it a particular group of people? Yes, in some ways of knowing. Yet it is so much more than that.

The first time I drove into Agape Healing Community I did not know what to expect. I saw rows of houses that have been functionally built. Shacks and houses side by side, makeshift fences and walls. Rubbish in the streets that gets burned and disappears into a pile of ash and acrid smoke. Dust that
swirls all around. People walk on the street and live in dire poverty. Yet they have smiles on their faces and share a sense of community and belonging I have not seen or known where I live. I drive around the location and have a genuine sense of wonder at the people I see. How do they feel? What is life like for them? How do they manage without the comforts that I know?

I have come to this place to find those who lack, but that is not what I see. I arrive in the location ready to give, yet I receive. I feel almost selfish. Am I getting more than I give? I am learning about sharing and a community that is enriching me, not the other way around. Slowly what is revealed to me is that it is I who has come to Agape to be healed. And I am.

I came to Agape expecting to have more than those around me and to ‘help’ those previously disadvantaged in our country under the oppressive former political regime. I am not sure who was oppressed any more. This seems now to be a linear one-dimensional idea. In some ways, the people around me have had a history of oppression under a fragmented political dispensation. Yet what exactly has been oppressed? I do not see oppressed people before me. I ask myself: do I know nothing of being oppressed myself?

I thought when I came to Agape I would have the knowledge and training to share with community members. Yet it is I who has been educated and empowered. What has my training and extensive education given me? I am left deeply questioning that. On one hand, my level of education has entitled me to be at Agape, yet how prepared am I? I feel like I have been journeying
away from all that I think I know. I see how words and theories can insulate us from ourselves and those around us. How theorising can complexify things, weaving a web behind which we can safely hide.

It is in the ‘not knowing’ that defences are put down and I find that I can receive what the community has to offer me. It is also when I journey back to a joining with myself and my humanness that I can join with those around me.

At first, coming to Agape was terrifying. What will it be like to drive through this location? Will I be safe? Will I be wanted? Welcome? Will I feel ‘out’ and very white? Or green?

The centre itself when I drive into the YMCA grounds seems so bare. There are curved walls, one with a thatched lapa, the other burned away. On the walls are the paintings of others who have been there before me. Poetic verses alongside profanities: ‘F… you’ it says. I am told that when Agape first was opened, these angry words were painted on the walls. At first, Stan and his colleagues who opened the centre were dismayed, and wondered if they should paint the words away. After careful consideration, they decided not to paint the words away because Agape was after all intended to be a place where such angry feelings and pain could be expressed – and received.

We subsequently had a day of adding our painting to the walls of Agape. I found this to be a tremendously cathartic experience and a chance to leave my mark. What would I say? Did it have significance? In the end, what I wrote had meaning for me and was about journeying into myself to find my voice and let it be heard, firstly, and perhaps most importantly, by me. I
painted a flower in the ‘u’ of the swear word telling people to go away. It is such an angry word. So clear and so absolute. The flower for me represented hope juxtaposed against unadulterated hatred and anger, because that is oppression to me. An oppression I know well.

I came to Agape Healing Community to try to make that right in some small way. To my amazement, I found that the sense of fragmentation and disconnection resided in me. It is there that it needs to be mended and healed before I can hope to effect such a feat outside of myself and in the spaces between the people that come to Agape Healing Community. It was I who needed to have the courage to reach out and join with my inner self, to see the parts of me in pain and so long forgotten. The oppressed, silenced and disadvantaged parts of me were illuminated and, with courage, brought for healing. In the ndoro, morning meetings where every person is given the chance to speak and to give words to ‘how we come there’, I gave a voice to these damaged parts and in showing my vulnerability, perhaps made a space for others to share theirs too.

I had had an unquestioned, received, and subjugating narrative given to me by my own errant and neglectful father (Freedman, 1996; McNamee & Gergen, 1993; White, 1995; White & Epston, 1990) and being a part of Agape Healing Community was then a chance to choose another narrative by which to live and one which can counter the discourse of a lack of fathering which in so many ways appears to be a lack of structure, or spine, giving support to our country’s youth. Many of the clients I see are grappling with issues
related to having no fathering and it is through my own struggle that I find I can connect with them.

One of the clients that I worked with Agape was a little girl, who as a result of neglect from both parents, was repeatedly raped at the age of seven. Another young girl I saw had attempted suicide several times and each time hoped that her dad, who does not wish to see her, would somehow come and save her from her life. These and many of the cases I worked with at Agape, are illustrative of the discourses of pain, loss and fragmentation running through the community. These clients gave a voice to a larger pain; the crying out from the community, that shares their pain.

Another discourse in the community is that of being malnourished. But starving for what, I wonder? A client I had seen all year was hospitalised at three years of age for malnutrition because her grandfather neglected to notice that she was too young to feed herself ‘the scraps from his plate’. This case was assigned to me and co-counsel, M. Our client, S, came to us with difficulties putting into words her psychic pain, so that she instead felt it in her body. She was also in some ways camouflaged, and came every week with another dichotomously opposed ‘persona’ to interact with. One week she is the ‘queen’ and a ‘sangoma’, the next week she called herself the ‘Slave’. Another session brought forth an ‘autistic child’.

Interesting to me is that neither M nor I had conceptualised the case in the same way and each of us has had an entirely different experience of S. This
bears out that reality is not an objectively known entity ‘out there’, but is the product of what each therapist sees. The client’s ‘pathology’, instead of residing within S, manifested eloquently in the space amongst us. There were times when M became the imperious and all-knowing ‘queen’, who declared what her diagnosis was, and times when I became the pathologised ‘autistic child’, feeling silenced and overwhelmed by the mixed messages coming to me via my senses (both from the client and my co-therapist). Other times had left M in a state of mute numbness and frustrated confusion both at the client’s camouflage and his experience of me as the healer/sangoma, and at times the not-knowing child. These relationship patterns illuminated important information from the client and told us something of S’s familiar ways of being with others around her. The relationship pattern caused a crisis or disequilibrium amongst all three of us, which has played out in supervision between M and me.

In supervision, we joined another system and found that the dynamic was playing out there in the form of a dichotomous and subjugating sibling rivalry, or an either/or conceptualisation, where one human being is preferred over another, and there is not enough space for both to coexist. The subjugation of one voice by another, more dominant one, was a theme carried by not only M and me, but by our supervisor as well. This echoed S’s sense of being one way and not another, for instance, the queen, who did not, or could not, know or acknowledge the slave; the good mother who knows nothing of having an autistic child, and perhaps in the way she would prefer this therapist, then that. Yet through all of this, there appears to be a steady shift in S, where the...
tired, used slave was allowed a weary sigh; the messy and troublesome autistic child peeped in and the spot she left on the queen’s pretty dress was somehow tolerated. The connections forming between us were those in which complexities and differences were allowed and held, and her talk was of ‘crossing the river Jordan’ and of ‘being healed from the inside’.

In the same way as S, M and I were not able to speak about our pain – to each other or to ourselves. It had to play out interactionally, experientially, with both of us feeling the searing pain of being left out and not chosen in preference to another.

Through the process of evolution Hoffman (1995) speaks about, between M and me there is now a growing space to coexist and to embrace our differentness. We walk together striving to honour the loud and the soft voices within us and between us, and the nuances we bring to bear in the therapeutic setting. In so doing, we honour the voices and speaking of our professor, whose graceful holding of M and me in supervision was a difference that made a difference – the experience of a different interaction; the chance at a relationship in which self is elicited and allowed to ‘fit’ differently.

One day a fellow student and I were called in to join a birthday celebration of a few members of that senior citizens club. These members are my favourite at Agape. They meet every week and start the day with aerobics in the YMCA building. This is a large and dingy hall with several broken windows.
The members form a colourful circle in the middle the room with one person tapping his foot in rhythm and another singing for accompaniment. Later, they will practise their singing for the choir festival they are to participate in later this year.

On this day, however, the table had been set for a feast and expectant guests had gathered. After each one had said their speech, they sang, greeting each birthday person with wholehearted abandon.

My colleague and I had to go back to our work and left the party a little early. We stepped outside to an icy and dusty blast of wind on our faces. To our right was a burnt, black field and in front of us was a large patch of dry, brown mielie plants. What struck me was the abject poverty all around us, the barrenness, yet behind us we left a room full of abundance and wealth. Abundance in human spirit and sharing of everything that matters. Again I walked away humbled and knowing that it was I who had come to learn from them to share in their bounty.

On my birthday, I asked them to come and celebrate with all of us at Agape. At noon, they formed a line and called me to walk in front of it as they sang and walked to Agape with me. I was sung to that day as I never have been before. The sincerity and generosity of the people will stay with me forever.

What does not wash away in the water of my bath after a long and dusty day spent at Agape Healing Community, is the longing for such a family, such a sense of sharing or communion. I go home to take my daughter to a birthday party. The grounds are beautiful and immaculately tailored in the country club.
estate where the party is held. I take a walk into the trees on the periphery of the grounds and sit down to rest and to have some quiet time. I can see the party from afar. The group sings to the child, but they are shouting. The stilted joviality in their cheers does not reach their eyes, and I feel forever changed. Could it really be that I feel a longing for the dusty and ‘barren’ Mamelodi township? The one I wash from me when I re-enter my own world, yet remains etched on my mind and in my heart.

One of my clients, named O, comes to Agape every week. One of the ways to construct his way of being in the world at this time is to use the label of paranoid schizophrenia. Having come from the university and an ‘educated’ background that informs my use of such a label, I at first felt it was unethical to work with this client without hospitalising him, since he had been off his medication for quite some time and had become psychotic. The narratives of psychiatry, institutionalisation, being sane versus being insane were all in evidence here. Yet it was I who was ‘institutionalised’ and locked into one way of thinking.

In supervision, I learned to slow down and to stop seeing everything in linear, dichotomous terms. What if I could listen for the metaphors in what O had to say and that in fact there was a way of connecting with this man through compassion and understanding his confusion and pain? (Holma & Aaltonen, 1997; Muntigl, 2004).

O is afraid of his family and feels persecuted by them. He often speaks of his food being poisoned and of needing to run away and hide ‘by the trees’ and to
wash himself in the river to get rid of the ‘unclean spirits’ in his body. He speaks of others contaminating his thinking and of the marijuana he smokes making a ‘fog’ in his mind.

I begin to hear the metaphors in O’s talking. Does the theme of contaminated food for instance allude to ambivalent feelings experienced by him from his parents and other family members? Is love laced with hate? Do his relations nurture him and harm him too? O’s talking about having a drugged and ‘foggy’ mind could imply that he feels things are not clearly spoken about in his family system. Are there discrepant meanings in what is said? Do verbal and nonverbal cues not match?

Is there a subjugated narrative of hatred and loathing behind a louder, overt declaration of warmth and caring? When O speaks of evil spirits flying around and of how he needs to cleanse himself, is he speaking of how the ‘bad’ feelings can become manifest through his own body and mind?

O spoke about not feeling a sense of belonging and of not feeling special to his family. At nineteen, O was betrayed by his family and, as a result, was incarcerated for a year.

He was locked in a cell that was dark and in which he was utterly alone. He describes how he knew it was morning because the meal that was put through the slot in the door looked like it was breakfast. Nobody from his family visited him during this time.

At lunch time at Agape, we perform the ritual of eating lunch together. I took the ‘talking stick’ one day at lunch when O had been able to eat with us. It had been his birthday, which we acknowledged with congratulations and then
we pointed out that this was the place where he belongs and is special. O, through a subsequent series of events a brief institutionalisation, is back on his medication and still comes to Agape every week. He teaches me about my own belonging and exploration into where my place is at Agape too.

I also wonder about where and how my experience at Agape fits in at the University of Johannesburg. This is not the first time I have wondered how to bring my experiences at Agape to UJ. It is difficult to capture in words what Agape is and how experiences are constructed amongst the members of a healing community on any given day. I find the epistemology or paradigmatic stance not detailed in the areas which look good on paper, nor readily lending itself to the construction of a flashy presentation that fits neatly into a theoretical framework.

One of the questions my academic training urges me to ask is is this community intervention sustainable? Each individual brings to Agape something unique and shares according to what he or she has to offer and feels able to give of him/herself. Agape is constructed by and made up of the individuals who are there on any particular day or in any given year and no two are ever the same. Is part of the sustainability of this community outreach its ability to form and re-form in this manner? That whoever is able to be there, whether as client or helper, or both, is received openly and without judgement? The ‘Agape family’ is a space held open for whoever has joined
with it at that time. The project has been in effect for over ten years, which bears witness to its sustainability, in one sense of the word.

There is a saying amongst members that we have had an ‘Agape day’. I do not really know what that is for anyone else and I imagine that, if asked, there will be as many answers as there are people there. I know an ‘Agape day’ to be a day when I have come to help others and felt healed myself. A day when I have been able to hear my voice, and in that, to hear and to recognise the voices of those around me. This is something I take with me and has left me irrevocably changed. My sense of community, or communion, with self and therefore with those around me, is the gift I take with me and hope to have shared with others.