

THE BLESSER-BLESSEE RELATIONSHIP: A PASTORAL CHALLENGE

BY

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(14045584)

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At the

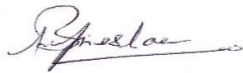
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Declaration

I, Brent Frieslaar, student number 14045584, hereby declare that this dissertation, "*The Blesser-Blessee Relationship: A Pastoral Challenge*," submitted in accordance with the requirements for the Master in Theology degree at University of Pretoria, is my own original work and has not previously been submitted to any other institution of higher learning. All sources cited or quoted in this research paper are indicated and acknowledged with a comprehensive list of references.



.....

Brent Frieslaar

29 November 2019

Dedication

I dedicate this research to my late mother, Johanna Kathleen Winifred Frieslaar, who I have known as the parent who raised and nurtured me for most of my life after the unexpected death of my father, Joseph Alfred Frieslaar. To my mother, affectionately known as Ninnie, this work is dedicated to you as the woman who taught me the value of love and respect for all God's people and especially women who are also made in God's image. Thank you also for challenging me to consistently practice the discipline of patient, holy listening.

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To have achieved this milestone in my life, I would like to express my sincere gratitude to the following people:

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Abstract

For many young women, life can be an overwhelming, stressful and challenging experience. The increase in the cost of living and high costs of education places a huge financial burden on the parents of these young women especially those who are financially insecure and who have unfortunately not been awarded bursaries or student loans. Many have to find means of income in order to fund their studies and/or eke out a living. Older men who are wealthy have been found to take advantage of these realities and they seek out young women who are struggling financially and “bless” them by providing for their financial needs. Some older men even go beyond these offerings and lavish the young women with other luxury items. Young women see these men as caring and loving and also as a practical escape from financial burdens they face. The older men, called “blessers”, seek return on their blessings and this is often in the form of sexual favours. The young women are expected to satisfy the sexual desires of their blessers, often at great personal cost and endless sacrifices. This exposes young women to sexual exploitation and abuse.

This research seeks to gain a better understanding of the phenomenon and why women engage in these relationships and why some remain in these relationships. It also seeks to create awareness of the dangers of these relationships within the context of the church and to empower young women with a healthy sense of self-worth and value in order to make safer and informed life decisions and to pastorally care for those who have experienced trauma. As a result of the understanding gained through narrative approach, the researcher seeks to begin the process of developing a pastoral care and healing methodology/intervention method.

Keywords:

Blesser
Blessee
Transactional sex.
Inter-generational relationships.
Poverty.
HIV/AIDS.
Teenage pregnancy.

Gender-based violence.
Intimate partner violence.
Gender inequality.
Patriarchy,
Objectification.
Commodification.
Human trafficking.
Narrative.
Narrative therapy.
Positive deconstruction.
Shame.
Self-worth.
Pastoral care.
Trauma.
Healing

List of abbreviations

ACSA	Anglican Church of Southern Africa
GBV	Gender Based Violence
IPV	Intimate Partner Violence
WHO	World Health Organisation
POWA	People Opposing Women Abuse
PEPFAR	President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief
OT	Old Testament
NT	New Testament
UN	United Nations

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1. CHAPTER ONE: GENERAL ORIENTATION

1.1 DEFINITION OF KEY TERMS

- **Blesser:** A modern day “sugar daddy” who blesses a young woman, usually a University student, with material needs. (Thobejane, et al. 2017)
- **Blessee:** the young woman who is the recipient of blessings (Thobejane, et al. 2017)
- **Blessings:** can be tuition, accommodation and stationery expenses paid for, also including food and other luxury items like expensive handbags, smartphones, laptops; modern, luxury apartments, cars, spar treatments, overseas holidays and flights; inter alia. (Thobejane, et al. 2017)
- **Parish:** A smaller geographical area within a Diocese, which usually has a Priest, under the Diocesan Bishop’s licence, with oversight – usually called a Rector.
- **Rector:** From the Latin word “regular” meaning “rule”. The Rector is appointed by the Diocesan Bishop with the responsibility for pastoral ministry, preaching and teaching in that place.
- **Anglicare:** Anglicare is a ministry within the Anglican Church that was started to address the needs of individuals looking for counselling with a spiritual influence. Anglicare is seen as a resource within the church and is thus offered free of charge. Anglicare counsellors, have been approved and licensed by the Diocesan Bishop. All counsellors are trained in basic counselling through the Family Life Centre. Adapted from parish website: (Parkview, n.d.).

The researcher will use other terms and concepts, and this will be clearly defined and explained in the different dissertation chapters relevant to its discussions.

1.2 INTRODUCTION

The story extracts contained in ANNEXURE C depicts a modern example of the blesser phenomenon that has seen young women being “blessed” by older men and the purpose of sharing the story is that it will serve as a window that allows the

researcher to introduce the topic. The source of the story is Jackie Phamotse's national bestseller, BARE. The extracts of the story illustrate some of the symptoms that happen in blesser-blessee relationships.

This research study will focus on young women who are the blessees. For the purposes of this Masters dissertation, the scope will be limited primarily to gaining an understanding of the blesser phenomenon and the lived experience of blessees who have experienced trauma because of intimate partner violence. This will be explained in the Methodology section.

One should not rush into formulating interventions without first seeking to gain a thorough understanding of the blesser phenomenon. This view is supported by scholarship dealing with this phenomenon (Hoss & Blokland 2018, Stoebenau, et al. 2016).

The formulation, development and testing of the effectiveness of an intervention in the form of a comprehensive pastoral care and healing intervention model to respond to the trauma of blessees falls beyond the scope of this research and will therefore be the focus of the researcher's doctoral thesis.

The premise or thesis of this study is that the "blesser" phenomenon contributes significantly to a shame-oriented and patriarchal culture that objectifies women and this culture is the root cause of the violence and abuse inflicted upon women.

1.3 BACKGROUND OF THE RESEARCH STUDY

The death of Karabo Mokoena is just one of many tragic stories of women who suffered abuse from her boyfriend. Sandile Mantsoe was found guilty of her murder. This is just one example of many incidents of intimate partner violence (IPV) that the researcher has found to be connected with the blesser phenomenon.

In a NEWS24 online article titled 'Ex-blessee bares it all' (Sekudu 2017) the writer cautions her readers about dangers of the blessee life: "If you want to be blessed you might consider praying to God for a blessing because blesser or sugar daddies aren't just about sprinkling a lavish lifestyle over your life."

The writer of the article, Bonolo Sekudu, informs that this reality is all too familiar for Jackie Phamotse who is a former model and blessee who survived rape, depression, emotional and mental abuse at the hands of a blesser.

In the article, Jackie also explains her motivation for writing BARE: “All I want is to share my story with young girls because many of them are trapped in abusive relationships at the expense of luxurious lifestyles,” she says. The NEWS24 article is only one of several articles which covers Phamotse’s experience.

Having watched a television documentary in which a young lady who was considering this blessee lifestyle was being interviewed and the cautionary advice she was being given, the researcher became exposed to this blesser-blessee phenomenon.

The content of the documentary was very disturbing to the researcher and caused him a great deal of concern and distress; especially as others who cautioned the young lady revealed how their lives were being controlled in very negative ways and the extent of abuse, violence and exploitation that they suffered at the hands of older men who lavished all kinds of gifts on them.

The researcher was deeply moved by the painful and traumatic experiences of these young women and having read Phamotse’s book deepened the distress he experienced and challenged him pastorally.

The researcher is aware that there are paradigms which position women as sexual agents who engage in transactional sex.

However, there are also the realities of abuse and exploitation, as portrayed by Phamotse in her book BARE. Therefore, this research study will focus on the abuse and intimate partner violence that blessees experience in relationships involving transactional sex.

The researcher is an ordained Anglican Priest and, at the time of finalising this dissertation, an appointed Rector of a parish in the Diocese of Johannesburg.

1.4 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

For the purposes of this study the researcher will use the qualitative approach to gathering and analysing data. Denzin & Lincoln (2005: 3) defines qualitative research as

a situated activity that locates the observer in the world...consists of a set of interpretive, material practices that make the world visible...and transform the world...into a series of representations, including field notes, interviews, conversations, photographs, recordings, and memos to the self. At this level... qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them.

Within the field of qualitative research, the researcher will use the narrative research approach. Torill Moen quotes Gudmundsdottir who describes narrative research as “the study of how human beings experience the world...” (Moen, 2006). This supports the rationale of understanding the lived experience of blessees as postulated in the Introduction to this chapter.

Literature reviews, in-depth unstructured interviews and, where appropriate, case studies will be employed in the investigation of the blesser phenomenon. By means of this approach, the researcher seeks to better understand the blesser-blessee phenomenon and the impact it has on blessees.

In seeking to gain an understanding of the phenomenon the researcher will demonstrate the importance of story-telling (narrative) as a pastoral care approach which is proposed by Edward Wimberly. As a further development of the story telling approach the researcher will appeal to the field within Pastoral Theology called Narrative Therapy and this also connects with the narrative research approach. He will also demonstrate connections of the narrative approach with Pollard’s Positive Deconstruction model.

Alice Morgan describes Narrative Therapy as “involving ‘re-authoring’ or ‘re-storying’ conversations.” She says that these descriptions suggest that “stories are central to

an understanding of narrative ways of working” (Morgan 2000: 5). Morgan shows the value of deconstructing the negative stories of our lives in order to explore alternative stories that empower us and help us take control of our lives in a positive way.

Pollard’s model will be used to help blessees deconstruct their lived experiences, their worldviews and diminished sense of self-worth in order to reconstruct these in a positive way that begins to bring about healing.

For the purposes of formulating and testing the effectiveness of an intervention in the form of a healing and pastoral care methodology (the focus of the researcher’s doctoral thesis), the researcher will conduct a more thorough in-depth study of shame, its various aspects and its impact on the lives of young women who have experienced trauma through violence and abuse.

The framework that will be used to inform and guide the researcher in this study will be a feminist interpretation.

1.5 THE RESEARCH PROBLEM – PROBLEM STATEMENT

Jackie’s book and Sekudu’s article emphatically highlights that many young women are lured into relationships that promise luxurious lifestyles but cautions that this perceived blessed life often brings very dangerous consequences for young ladies.

Being a priest and theologian, the researcher, now having discovered the blesser-blessee phenomenon, is of the view that the abuse, violence, trauma and exploitation which young women are subjected to diminishes the full humanity of our sisters in Christ who are created in the Divine image. The discovery of this phenomenon and its implications on the *Imago Dei* has resulted in this investigation.

Furthermore, the researcher acknowledges that this phenomenon presents a significant challenge to pastoral care and this therefore requires an effective pastoral care response from the Church.

Additionally, he is keenly aware that there may well be female members of his own congregation who are or may have been subjected to such abuse and exploitation and are perhaps suffering in silence because of guilt and shame they experience.

In his quest to help young women who suffer such trauma to move from guilt and shame to self-worth, the researcher finds himself asking certain key questions regarding this phenomenon. These questions will form the foundation upon which this study will be conducted and the responses to these questions will be used as a tool that will assist the researcher in beginning to formulate an effective pastoral care and healing methodology for blessees.

These questions are:

- How does the blesser phenomenon impact on the Image of God in those who engage in blesser-blessee relationships
- What is it that makes young women to consider entering into “blesser-blessee” relationships?
- Do they know what is expected of them in exchange for the “blessings” they receive?
- Are they aware of the dangers and risks of these relationships?
- Where there are instances of abuse and exploitation inflicted on the young women, why do some remain in abusive relationships?
- What is the role of social norms in this phenomenon?
- Are these young women receiving counselling and support and if not, what is the church doing about bringing healing and revealing God’s love to them?
- How has a biblical term “bless” come to be used in the context of this phenomenon?
- In what way can a male clergy engage therapeutically with a young woman?

1.6 RESEARCH STUDY AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

The broad aims of this research study are to discover the:

- contributing factors that lead young women to consider involvement in blesser-blessee relationships

- impact of the phenomenon on the Image of God in women who are objectified and commoditised?
- factors and aspects of culture that can lead to an exploitative, abusive relationships
- reasons why female blessees remain in such relationships

The objectives or outcomes of this research study is to:

- Deepen understanding of the blesser phenomenon through listening to the stories and lived experiences of young women who have been engaged in blesser-blessee relationships
- Create awareness of this phenomenon within the church in a non-judgemental way and highlight the dangers of engaging in blesser-blessee relationships
- Through narrative approach, empower women to be liberated from the negative impact of the phenomenon

1.7 RELEVANCE OF THE STUDY

This research study falls within the field of Practical Theology and its relevance is to promote better understanding of the blesser-blessee phenomenon and its related aspects such as intimate partner violence in order to begin formulating an effective intervention in the form of a pastoral care and healing methodology.

Since this study will focus on the blesser phenomenon and specifically how the trauma that results from violence, abuse and exploitation diminishes the full humanity of the blessees, the researcher's doctoral thesis will seek to further develop the study by demonstrating connections between the blesser phenomenon and human trafficking and the impact of shame.

1.8 RESEARCH GAP

Having done an initial survey of the literature and research done on the phenomenon of blesser-blessee relationship, the researcher has discovered that there has been some research done on the phenomenon and there are of course books like Phamotse's BARE that provide a sort of case study. There is much scholarship on the blesser phenomenon, transactional sex, intimate partner

violence, and the impact of the blesser phenomenon on HIV prevalence and the increasing rate of teenage pregnancies.

However, the researcher has found very little, if any, research literature that deals with this phenomenon from within the context of the church and what the approach of the church should be. Therefore, this research study will seek to fill this gap.

The next chapter presents an initial review of the literature on the topic of the blesser phenomenon in order to gain an appreciation of the landscape of the problem.

2. CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 INTRODUCTION

It is reported that in 2014, there were 25.8 million people living with HIV/AIDS in Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA). This accounts for 70% of the global HIV/AIDS cases. Of the 25.8 million people, 56% are comprised of new infections amongst women. The proportion is higher for younger women, aged 15-24, which is reported at 66% (Gatobu 2017: 63).

According to Mampane (2018) South Africa has the fastest growth of HIV prevalence and incidence rates worldwide. He also states that women in South Africa bear the brunt of the HIV epidemic than men. This is corroborated by Ramjee and Daniels' research which highlight that women usually become infected with HIV 10 years earlier than men (Ramjee & Daniels 2013).

The statistic that is of concern to the researcher and has relevance to this research study, is that the recent South African National HIV Prevalence, Incidence and Behaviour Survey revealed that young women in the age group of 15-24 years are particularly at risk of contracting HIV than men of the same age group (Human Sciences Research Council 2012).

In his article, Mampane (2016) reports that there were approximately 2000 new HIV infections occurring among adolescent girls and young women aged 15-24 years each week in South Africa, a rate 2 and half times that of males of the same age group. Similarly, Gatobu (2017: 66) remarks that in 2013 alone, it is estimated that there were 380 0000 new infections in this age group. She further adds that, in 2015, there was an estimated 2.3 million adolescent girls and young women living with HIV/AIDS.

Considering the above, the researcher of this dissertation is inclined to agree with Mampane (2018) when he says that the HIV prevalence and incidence rates among adolescent girls and young women in South Africa have reached crises proportions.

As concerning as all these statistics are, one would ask what the relevance of all the HIV statistics is to the topic of this dissertation.

Firstly, it needs to be said that the Church of Jesus Christ is called upon to respond to the high rates of HIV infection as it impacts on the lives of all people made in the image of God.

More specifically and because the researcher is an ordained priest in the Anglican Church, he wishes to emphasise that HIV is one of the 8 Missional Priorities of the Anglican Church of Southern Africa. One of the goals of this missional priority is to reduce the number of new HIV infections and reduce the incidences of unsafe sex, inter alia (ACSA 2017).

As mentioned above, health, including HIV and AIDS, malaria and tuberculosis is just one of the 8 missional priorities of ACSA. One of the others is the protection and nurture of children and young people. What is most concerning about the age group referred to thus far, in the view of the researcher, is that it comprises the Youth of our country.

In order to achieve its mission priority of nurturing children and young people, ACSA has appointed a task team. The comments of this task team are worth noting “It is human nature to protect and provide for those we hold most precious, and that is especially true when it comes to children. However, helping young people fulfil their potential and teaching them to be responsible, successful adults have become enormous challenges... The church has a role to play in nurturing young people to be responsible adults in the world” (ACSA 2017).

Within ACSA there are several Dioceses and one of these is the Diocese of Johannesburg. The Bishop of this Diocese, The Right Reverend Dr Steve Moreo has, at the 65th Synod of the Diocese held in 2017, charged all parishes, organisations and schools within the Diocese to be intentional about children and young people. In the words of Bishop Steve

I therefore commit myself to give leadership in the Diocese, to ensure that our parishes, organisations and schools and our archdeaconries are safe,

healthy and spiritually enriching communities for children and young people and are equipped for the service in the Church and society, in leadership skills and to exercise that leadership in the life and mission of our Diocese (Moreo 2017).

At the time of writing this chapter, South Africa will celebrate the public holiday recognising the importance of Human Rights. In this light, the work of researchers such as Seodi White (anthropologist, social development lawyer and women's rights activist) is important and relevant. Her article analyses how the construction of extreme poverty, gender inequality and powerlessness among women in Malawi make them vulnerable to HIV transmission and argues that the persistence of poverty, inequality and powerlessness violate women's right to life (White 2010). In the researcher's view, this is not only relevant to women in Malawi but all women made in the image of God.

In the light of the above – the Human Rights aspect and the missional focus of the work of ACSA in relation to HIV and young people – this dissertation seeks to create awareness of high-risk factors and social practices, norms and beliefs that contribute to the rise in HIV infection and incidences of unsafe sex as well as those factors that contribute to gender-based violence. Based on the initial preliminary research conducted for this literature review, the researcher has found that “Blesser-Blessee” relationships contribute significantly to HIV infection rates, intimate partner violence and gender-based violence.

Gatobu quotes Dr Don Messer, an advocate for HIV/AIDS, when he states that “women lack self-autonomy over their own bodies. They often are not free to resist sexual overtures because of the threat or actuality of violence. Poverty further complicates this situation since older men take advantage of younger women, becoming “sugar daddies” that offer young women money for food or clothing or tuition... (Gatobu 2017: 64-65).

In his article titled “Exploring the “Blesser and Blessee” Phenomenon...” Mampane explains that the reason why his study focussed mainly on young women under the age of 30 years is because “it is worth noting that adolescent girls and young women

are more likely to engage in transactional sex than older women” (Mampane 2018). The researcher will now turn attention to this phenomenon called transactional sex in order to show its relevance to “Blesser & Blessee” relationships.

2.2 TRANSACTIONAL SEX AND ITS LINK TO BLESSER-BLESSEE RELATIONSHIPS

A large body of research surveyed to conduct this literature review as part of this dissertation reveals that transactional sex is a significant theme within the phenomenon of Blesser & Blessee relationships.

In their study of Blesser and Blessee relationships amongst female students in a rural university within the Limpopo Province, researchers Thobejane, Mulaudzi and Zitha (Thobejane et al. 2017) defines transactional sex as “any sexual relationships where gifts have been given and sexual relations have occurred.”

These researchers are also quick to highlight that the line distinguishing transactional sex from general pre-marital sexual relationships is blurred. Making reference to research conducted by Kaufman & Stavrou (2004), Thobejane and colleagues point to the case in Southern African context where gift giving is linked to sexual access and is a widely practiced norm and they further refer to the giving of bride wealth or lobola as a prime example of this (Thobejane et al. 2017).

Mampane (2018) comments that, in a nutshell, transactional sex can be defined as the exchange of sex for money, favours, and/or material goods. He continues to clarify that the phenomenon of transactional sex is common in both rural and urban areas. Yet, he emphasises the prevalence of the phenomenon in poverty-stricken communities such as rural areas where young women are likely to engage in sexual relationships for money or material gain.

According to Mampane the transactional sex phenomenon grew in popularity in 2016 as a result of media coverage and was labelled the “blesser and blessee” phenomenon. In describing these “blesser and blessee relationships” he says that older rich men (“blessers”) tend to entice young women (“blessees”) with money and expensive gifts for sexual favours.

This research study will focus on young women, especially in the 15-24 age group, as blessees. The researcher is aware that there are also cases where older women are the “blessers” who “bless” younger men and this has come to be known as the Ben 10 phenomenon.

In the case of the study conducted in rural university in Limpopo province, the researchers of that study state that in the lives of young female university students, “blessers” play an important role because they contribute to their financial needs including the provision for tuition fees, accommodation and food (Thobejane et al. 2017).

However, their research also reveals that the gifts do not just stop there. For they provide historical context to the “blesser and blessee” phenomenon by pointing to the fact that the term gained rapid popularity in 2016 when girls would post pictures on social media platforms such as Instagram and Facebook. These pictures boasted of them (blessees) sipping cocktails on the beach, popping bottles of champagne in the club or getting their nails done, using the hashtag #blessed (Thobejane et al. 2017).

The researcher finds Mampane’s definition of blesser and blessee useful yet is more aligned with Thobejane and associates (2017) when they contend that the blesser is a modern day “sugar daddy”. Yet even when saying the blesser is a new version of sugar daddy, they enhance the description by emphasising that a blesser’s power “puts him on a much higher pedestal, giving him a god-like status of sorts.” What is staggering is that their research reveals that in South Africa the blessers are differentiated in levels: Level one blesser will sponsor you with airtime and data, level two sponsors with clothing and Brazilian hair, level three sponsors with iPhones and property and level four will even set you up with flashy cars, trips to overseas mostly Dubai and even hook you up with some business opportunities. No wonder, they say, sugar daddies, who generally only provide pocket money, groceries and airtime are no match for blessers.

Furthermore, the researchers bring more focus to the terminology of blesser by saying that “when a female student has a blesser, her life is blessed financially.” But they caution that there may be consequences to the blessings received (Thobejane et al. 2017).

Considering this dissertation, the researcher also seeks to challenge the term “bless” as it is used in the context of the blesser-blessee relationships as well as the assigning of the term “god-like status”; especially when bringing into question the consequences of being “blessed”. This will be dealt with in Chapter 4 of this research study through an analysis of key biblical texts dealing with the concept of blessings.

When one considers the case of Treasure in Phamotse’s book¹, it is also clear that her blesser (Tim), blessed her with an apartment, a car and helping her to boost her modelling career. But the suspended conclusion of that section of the story begins to paint a picture of some of the negative consequences of the blesser-blessee relationship. Some of these negative consequences are manipulation, emotional blackmail and sexual violence, amongst others. Further elements of Treasure’s story will be dealt with in this and later sections of this research study where it is appropriate and relevant.²

In the Annexure C2 (i-iii) the story from Annexure C1 continues and clearly demonstrates the manipulation, emotional blackmail and sexual abuse/violence which Treasure is subjected to. It also demonstrates how her blesser (Tim) calls all the shots and dictates the conditions of the sexual acts that he inflicts on her and how Treasure is left with no option but to endure the pain and discomfort.

For now, the researcher returns to the description of blesser as it is used in the topic of this study. Of great concern to the researcher is Mampane’s comment that the older men who are blesseres are, in most cases, married who secretly engage in

¹ Refer Annexure C1-forms part of Chapter 1 - Introduction

² It needs to be noted that the story of Treasure in BARE is in fact the actual experiences of Jackie Phamotse. Therefore, Treasure’s story forms a primary case study as evidence for this dissertation.

extra-marital affairs with these young women. Seen in this light, he says, most people equate transactional sex with prostitution and sex work (Mampane 2018).

The researcher's review of the literature informs him that there are debates among scholars when it comes to equating transactional sex with prostitution and sex work. What follows is a brief overview of some of these viewpoints.

2.3 TRANSACTIONAL SEX, SEX WORK AND PROSTITUTION – VARIOUS VIEWS

It is argued that transactional sex and sex work are not synonymous because in transactional sex the exchange of valuables is undertaken within the context of a romantic relationship rather than in sex work where the exchange is rather casual and not romantically linked. This is the view held by scholars MacPherson and colleagues (MacPherson et al. 2012).

When one considers the sexual coercion and violence that will become evident in this dissertation, especially in the case of Treasure in Phamotse's bestseller "BARE" and other case studies, the researcher questions the use of the term "romantic relationship" and wonders where romance enters into the picture.

In their research article of the contextual study in Tembisa of transactional sexual interactions among young girls and older men, researchers Hoss and Blokland contend the importance of distinguishing the transactional sexual relations of their research subjects from prostitution. They argue that interactions with sugar daddies are shaped by a negotiation process that is subtler than prostitution and is not clearly defined (Hoss & Blokland 2018).

According to researchers Thobejane, Mulaudzi and Zitha, transactional sex can be said to be like sex work in certain aspects, including that they consist of non-marital relationships and are usually engaged with multiple partners for rewards. They do, however, point to one differentiating characteristic being the lack of a formal "once-off" exchange which they argue is a definitive feature of sex work (Thobejane et al. 2017).

These researchers refer to Hunter (2002) who defines transactional sex as a superset of prostitution, whereby there is an exchange of gifts for sex. They also make reference to Motyl's study which suggests that "sugar daddy relationships are no different to that of transactional sex and goes so far as to suggest that they should be criminalised." Thobejane et al critiques this suggestion of "criminalisation of sugar daddies" calling it bizarre while adding that it does highlight the transactional nature of the relationship which they point out in many communities may be described as prostitution (Thobejane et al. 2017).

On the other side of the debate, Mazvarirwofa in his study highlighted that the majority of people were confused between having a relationship with sugar daddies and being a prostitute, but according to the girls who engage in such relationships say it's different. They emphasise that these men are only paying for their time nothing else (Mazvarirwofa 2014).

Kenny Kunene³ is featured in an online eNCA news report (2016) and in Thobejane and associates' article. He is quoted as saying "it would be better to describe the trend as "pimps and prostitutes", as what takes place is "the action of a prostitute". He further goes on to say that if South Africa accepted the trend of blessers and blessees, we would be saying that "it is OK to create a society of young prostitutes" (Thobejane et al. 2017).

Some researchers contend that if young women rely extensively on transactional sex as a way of life for a longer period, they are likely to transition into sex work in future (Stoebenau et al. 2016).

From the above it is clear that there are various viewpoints on the matter of transactional sex, blesser-blessee relationships and prostitution. The researcher finds that the more recent work by researchers McMillan, Worth and Rawstone (2018) resonates more with him. They argue that there are various terminologies that seek to distinguish a range of economically motivated paid sex practices from

³ Kenny Kunene is a businessman who is highly critical of the blesser phenomenon, although he admitted that he had once been a big part of it.

sex work and these are characterised by...efforts to evade the stigma associated to the labels sex worker and prostitute. They also point to the work of Leclerc-Madlala (2003) who proposed that transactional sex was a new alternative terminology which ... was found to be more appropriate to describe paid sex practices in Sub-Saharan Africa. This was because the new terminology did not impose inappropriate meanings or stigmatise subjects (McMillan et al. 2018).

In the view of the researcher, the above viewpoints seem to explain why many young women do not wish to use the term sex work and prostitution because of the stigma associated with these labels or terms.

Furthermore, the researcher wishes to emphasise, along with Mampane (2018), that irrespective of whether these women are involved in transactional sex or sex work, there are many researchers who argue that the two practices at the end of the day are proven to be high-risk sexual behaviours for HIV infection in SSA.

The researcher will now bring into focus another social challenge relevant to the blesser-blessee phenomenon and transactional sex. This will be done in order to contextualise the environment in which blesser-blessee relationships occur.

2.4 THE IMPACT OF TRANSACTIONAL SEX AND BLESSER-BLESSEE RELATIONSHIPS ON TEENAGE PREGNANCY

Whilst the discussion up to now as it relates to blesser-blessee relationships has been set in the context of HIV infections, it is not the only social challenge that requires a pastoral response from the church. Of great concern is the number of school girl pregnancies that are making the headlines. According to the study by Masilo and Makhubele (2017), the findings revealed that learners indulge in unprotected sex at an early age. This behaviour puts them at risk of falling pregnant and contracting sexual diseases.

A study conducted in Ghana revealed that 86% of the respondents dropped out of school – citing pregnancy as the reason. What is very distressing for the researcher is the age of some learners in Ghana. 12 learners were reported to be pregnant while completing Grade 1. There is no doubt that dropping out of school has long

term negative effects on learners – including their potential to secure employment in the future (Masilo & Makhubele 2017).

The researcher wishes to add that teenage pregnancies do not only affect the respective teenagers' potential to secure future employment but the pregnancies rob them of their ability to fulfil their potential as valued people made in the image of God.

Whilst the above describes the dire situation in Ghana, South Africa is certainly not immune to the scourge of teenage pregnancy. 45 276 pregnant learners were reported in 2009 according to information by the Department of Basic Education, as per Masilo and Makhubele's research (2017).

Furthermore, their research findings revealed that the involvement of teenage girls with sugar daddies or blessers have emerged as the common denominator factor in placing learners and young females in general at risk of being sexually active at an early age. The outcomes of this reality include sexual diseases and pregnancy.

Ndlovu (2015: 1) stated that there were over 26000 pregnant learners in KwaZulu-Natal. Furthermore, Savides (2016) reports that one blesser infects as many as 15 girls a week, sometimes from the same school. For the researcher, these statistics demonstrate the significant negative impact of "blessers" on the lives of young women; especially in the 15-24-year age group.

In 2016 South African Health Minister, Dr Aaron Motsoaledi, announced a 3 year "Anti-blesser" campaign. This was apparently aimed to keep girls in schools and wean them of so-called "sugar daddies".

Julianne Hoss, a One Young World Ambassador⁴, conducted research among young girls in Tembisa as part of her Master's Thesis which focused on assessing the main challenges facing high school girls in the area (Hoss & Blokland 2018).

In a radio interview Hoss welcomes the campaign as a necessary intervention step that will help support the girls. However, she also shared her concerns about the campaign saying that people do not fully understand the so called "blesser" phenomenon and the girls they become involved with. She says "what bothers me most about this campaign and how it was introduced, is that we completely seem to shut out the perception of the girls we are actually talking about... So, we speak of the phenomenon that I feel we haven't fully understood. That's what we need to address." Hoss continues by expressing her concern that the campaign is focused on the high HIV/AIDS infection rate, and not on the bigger picture of gender inequality which could be the contributor to the problem. (Hoss 2016).

My understanding of Hoss' comment about the campaign focusing on the high HIV infection rate is not that she is disagreeing with the fact that the interactions of young girls with blessers places them (girls) at higher risk of HIV infection. Rather she is drawing attention to the fact that most campaigns focus too narrowly on the symptoms. In her view the campaigns do not consider the deeper underlying factors of unequal power relations and gender inequalities (Hoss & Blokland 2018).

Practical theologian and Anglican Priest, Revd Dr Vicentia Kgabe has focused her Masters research on the traumatic experience of church going girls who fall pregnant out of wedlock. In her dissertation she addresses the discrimination, stigma and judgment that young girls face who fall pregnant. Her research informs that these girls are expelled from the church and all its activities for a minimum period of 3 months. Yet, she rightly points out, the young men who impregnated them are not judged in the same way, for she says "interesting and embarrassing enough the church only discriminates against women and not the men. Nothing is

⁴ One Young World identifies, promotes and connects the world's most impactful young leaders to create a better world, with more responsible, more effective leadership (One Young World, n.d.)

done in order to discipline the boy or man involved in this act. This is grouse (sic) injustice on the girl child.” (Kgabe 2007:6). I am in agreement with Kgabe about the gross injustice inflicted on the girl child and in my view, this is a prime example of gender inequality which Hoss refers to.

The researcher also agrees with Hoss when she says that the campaigns do not seek to engage with the young girls themselves to find out their intentions and circumstances. Also, she says that we often speak of a phenomenon (in this case “Blesser”) that we do not yet fully understand. Hoss and Blokland together with other researchers (Stoebenau et al. 2016) support my point made in the Introduction to this dissertation: One should not rush into formulating interventions without first seeking to gain a thorough understanding of the blesser phenomenon.

Another social challenge and also a Human rights issue, is that of gender violence and intimate partner violence. A large body of the current scholarship on “blesser-blessee” relationships report of the link between transactional sex, sex work and gender violence and intimate partner violence.

2.5 THE LINK BETWEEN TRANSACTIONAL SEX AND GENDER VIOLENCE AND INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE, MANIPULATION AND ABUSE

According to a PEPFAR online article, transactional sex often coexists with risky sexual behaviours such as early sexual debut and inconsistent condom use. Consequently, there is considerable evidence linking transactional sex to undesirable sexual and reproductive health outcomes including sexually transmitted infections, unintended pregnancies, unsafe abortions⁵, and gender-based violence (PEPFAR 2015).

In Hoss and Blokland’s study (2018), they quote researchers Stroebeu and others, Luke and Kurz and others who comment on the vulnerability of young girls and women in interactions with blesser whereby it is impossible for the women to negotiate the conditions in which to have protected sexual intercourse. This in turn

⁵ Refer Treasure’s experience of forced abortion in the Annexure section (Annexure C3 (i-iii)).
Source: (Phamotse 2017:139-141)

influences their experience of force, coercion and abuse (Luke & Kurz 2002), (Stoebenau et al. 2016). Furthermore, Hoss and Blokland report on the feedback by the participants of the study which reveals that girls experience manipulation or are abused by older men. In the interviews there were descriptions of girls getting confused in their interactions with blessers and attributed this mainly to the power imbalance between a girl and an older man (blesser).

Researchers Dunkle, Jewkes, Nduna, Jama, Levin, Sikweyiya and Koss explored the prevalence and predictors of transactional sex in their study among men in rural Eastern Cape and their study revealed a strong and consistent association between perpetration of gender-based violence and material goods and exchange. This, they reported, suggests that transactional sex in both main and casual relationships should be viewed within a broader continuum of men's exercise of gendered power and control (Dunkle, et al. 2007).

In an article titled "South African Men Who Commit Gender-Based Violence are more likely to Have Transactional Sex", researcher Doskoch (2008) reports that gender-based violence was the strongest predictor of transactional sex with a casual partner. Furthermore, Doskoch comments that just as in the case of transactional sex with a casual partner, intimate partner violence was the strongest predictor of having been in a relationship with a main partner. Additionally, it was found that the likelihood of young men to have given money or other resources in exchange for a relationship was higher if they had a history of physical violence and/or sexual violence against a main partner (Doskoch 2008).

Researchers Thaller and Cimino highlight that intimate partner violence and sex work has been previously constructed within scholarly literature as being mutually exclusive phenomena but they argue that both can be situated under the umbrella of gender-based violence (Thaller & Cimino 2017).

In her chapter within the book titled *Pastoral Care, Health, Healing and Wholeness*, Gatobu argues that the transmission of HIV/AIDS both in consensual relationships and commercial relationship, should be considered as a form of gender violence (Gatobu 2017: 62).

Mampane (2016) conducted a study among rural women in South Africa which identified marital rape, Gender based violence (GBV) and Intimate partner violence (IPV) as high-risk factors for HIV infection.

Along with Health (including HIV and other) and Protection and nurture of children and young people as referred to earlier, Women and Gender is also one of the 8 missional priorities of ACSA. Within this missional priority, ACSA's Women and Gender task team identified six strategic goals. Amongst others these are:

- Combating gender-based violence
- Offering counselling and support
- Raising awareness about human sexuality (ACSA 2017)

Therefore, this dissertation will seek to make a contribution towards the missional priorities of ACSA as it relates to HIV, nurturing children and youth and women and gender. In reviewing the current literature, the researcher finds the “blesser-blessee” phenomenon and relationships as being integrally linked to each of these priorities.

A more detailed discussion of the contribution of “blesser-blessee” relationships to gender violence and intimate partner violence will be dealt with in Chapter 4 of this dissertation as it seeks to address the central argument or thesis statement being that: the “blesser” phenomenon contributes significantly to a shame-oriented and patriarchal culture that objectifies women and this culture is the root cause of the violence and abuse inflicted upon women.

In order to build an understanding of the “Blesser” phenomenon and “Blesser-blessee” relationships, this research will now consider the factors that lead to Blesser-blessee relationships, those that predispose learners to indulge in sexual activities against the risk of pregnancy and those that influence the susceptibility of young women to transactional sex and HIV risk. In order to present an integrated discussion, the researcher will also seek to demonstrate how these factors are inter-related.

2.6 FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO BLESSER-BLESSEE RELATIONSHIPS, FACTORS THAT PREDISPOSE LEARNERS TO INDULGE IN SEXUAL ACTIVITIES AGAINST THE RISK OF PREGNANCY AND FACTORS THAT INFLUENCE THE SUSCEPTIBILITY OF YOUNG WOMEN TO TRANSACTIONAL SEX AND HIV RISK

In his research into exploring the “Blesser-Blessee” phenomenon, Mampane (2018) has identified certain themes and sub-themes that he discovered in his analysis of the data gathered. Broadly the themes are Socio-behavioural, Sociocultural and Socioeconomic factors. While there are several factors within the various themes, this research will focus on what has been identified as the most significant by most researchers on the topic of Blesser-blessee relationships. An in-depth discussion on all factors within the broad themes is beyond the scope of this dissertation.

Socio-behavioural Factors

Peer pressure. According to Ronald Goldman, the hunger for significance and status is basic to all adolescent experience. Goldman (1965: 168) argues that we all want to be respected and accepted, and for the adolescent their status is of great concern when they are uncertain about their place in society. He explains further that, during this turbulent and rapidly changing phase of their life, youth are bombarded with mass media messages from television, internet, print and radio that says that they should conform to the “teenage image” (Goldman 1965: 162).

In the experience and view of the researcher, these media messages construct what this “teenage image” should be and consequently also prescribe what youth should have to be accepted as part of the “in crowd”.

A significant amount of more recent research on the continent of Africa have proven that peer pressure plays an important role in the lives of adolescents and young people. (Djamba 2004), (Masawure 2010) and (Plummer & Wight 2011).

The research findings of an ethnographic study by Wamoyi, Wight, Plummer, Mshana and Ross established the link between peer pressure, transactional sex and HIV risk (Wamoyi et al. 2010) and have shown to be consistent with statements made by the participants who participated in the focus group discussions and in

depth interviews conducted as part of Mampane's research (2018). Some of these statements are:

When we go to social events I want to look like the other girls, otherwise they gossip and laugh at you if you don't have beautiful stuff, and you need to get a working boyfriend who can afford to buy you beautiful stuff.

In my group of friends, I'm the "starring" because I set example about all the latest fashion and beauty products... my "blesser" buys me whatever I want.

Nowadays you must have a "blesser" so that he can buy you a cell phone or tablet and data so that you can go to Facebook and WhatsApp to mingle with other potential "blessers"... me and my friends we always get men from social media platforms.

Mampane makes the point that peer pressure is an influencing factor that makes young women to be involved in transactional sex for financial and material gain and to fit in or integrate into their friendship circles and social networks (Mampane 2018).

Regarding the case of female students of a rural university in Limpopo province, the researchers also indicate peer pressure as one of the factors leading to blesser-blessee relationships and influencing sexual behaviour and motives among young girls (Thobejane et al. 2017). They remark that the girl may not be seen as cool if she does not wear the fashioned shoes, clothes, make-up worn by her friends or found to be available on the market. Peer pressure is a driving force creating a desire to fit in and this leads young women to make choices they would not normally make just to impress their friends. Such choices involve having sexual relations with older men just to fit in and having a sugar daddy or blesser appears to be the easiest route to achieve that. (Thobejane et al. 2017).

Peer pressure is also a factor identified in the case of the research conducted by Hoss and Blokland among learners in Tembisa. Hoss & Blokland (2018) reports that the participants in their study shared with them that to date an older man is seen as a status symbol. A schoolgirl might be regarded as superior by other learners

when she identifies herself by means of her relationship with an older man. Some of the comments made by participants are

“When you date someone older than you – it’s a date, a fashion, a trend. They want to be trendy; they want to be seen.”

“The girls who are going out with guys brag about it. They go to places over the weekend. Then they brag on Mondays.”

Furthermore, some learners shared that they perceive certain behavioural and character changes of girls once they start dating older men. Because these girls aim to be autonomous and resent instruction by their parents, other authority figures and other learners, they are experienced as arrogant, having superiority complexes, judgemental, bullying and demeaning of other learners. In this regard some of the comments made by participants are

“They don’t want to be told anything. Not by their parents and not by any girl. They are also bullies...”

“They get to be full of themselves...They end up being mean to others... When the other girls are around, they laugh at them, saying they are wearing filthy clothes.”

Rumours and gossip are also reported by participants, with some girls guessing who is in a relationship with an older man. Those who do not date older men feel challenged (Hoss & Blokland 2018).

Researchers Masilo and Makhubele (2017) also report that peer pressure is viewed as the main factor that influences teenage pregnancy because most of the teenagers have friends who may be sexually active. They refer to a study conducted by Thobejane whose results reveal that almost 100% of respondents indicated that they have friends who play an important part in their lives (Thobejane 2015).

Additionally, Masilo and Makhubele also support their points about peer pressure by referring to the findings of a study conducted in the large part of Busan in South Korea which reveal that learners mostly cite their friends as their source of sexual information and there is the belief that their friends are their best counselling resource when they encounter sexual problems (Kang 2005).

Sociocultural Factors

Gender norms. Mampane (2018) highlights that the African cultural practice of “*lobola*” requires that a man pays a bride price to the family of the woman he intends to marry. Consequently, they argue that this gender norm has inculcated a cultural expectation for which men are compelled to make economic provision for women. Researchers contend that, viewed in this light, men are mainly perceived as providers and women as receivers of financial benefits in relationships, including in transactional sex encounters (MacPherson et al. 2012), (Jewkes & Morrell 2012).

In Mampane’s research participants made comments which clearly demonstrate how gender norms have instilled a culture where women prefer to engage in transactional sex relationships. This is with the aim of benefitting financially and materialistically. Some of these comments are

“Although I’m not that poor because I have financial support from my parents, I still expect him to give me something in return when I have sex with him.”

“I’m married but I demand that he “blesses me now and then, especially after I give him good sex.”

“No pain no gain...I expect to at least be thanked for the services I rendered, nothing for “mahala” (free). (Mampane 2018).

In my view, these comments and especially the use of strong words like “expect” and “demand” demonstrates just how pervasively gender norms have influenced our contemporary culture.

In the PEPFAR article referred to earlier, it is stated that transactional sex is widely practiced in SSA and is closely linked to sociocultural expectations of gender whereby men are expected to act as a provider to their partners, and women expect compensation for having sex (PEPFAR 2015).

Hoss and Blokland (Hoss & Blokland 2018) argue that a patriarchal understanding of the role of men is what gives birth to the notion that a man has to provide for a woman. This, they say, leads many women to expect financial support and the men

compete to fulfil that role. Reference is made to the frequent assumption about the man's entitlement to dictate sexual interaction with the female if he is providing for her.

Public perceptions and the actual interactions between the male and female partner in blesser-blessee relationships are largely shaped by social norms. Hoss and Blokland quote research by Shefer and Strebel who report of attempts made from a moral standpoint to evaluate such relationships. This leads to a blame and shame culture which judge girls for what may be perceived as a lack of values and morals (Hoss & Blokland 2018).

I am inclined to agree with Hoss when she says in an interview with Radio 702 (Hoss, 2016) that she would caution against judging and blaming young girls. I would argue that, rather than reinforcing a culture of blame, shame and judgement, these young women should be shown the love and grace of God and understanding and also, they should be empowered to make life choices that will liberate them from transactional sex and blesser-blessee relationships.

Hunter (2002) contends that a broader "masculine discourse" comprises these social norms which serve to reproduce gendered power structures and specific expectations of women and men.

Earlier, the researcher made reference to the criticism by Hoss of intervention campaigns. She bases her argument on scholars Harling and others who say that these patriarchal values are what influences most intervention campaigns. They focus on changing the girl's behaviour so that they will abstain from inter-generational relationships (relationships with older men). Harling et al (2014) contend that the underlying goal of most interventions is to create the taboo that shows the girls that their behaviour is not socially accepted and the aim of such interventions is to keep them away from older men. Patriarchy and its influence on "blesser-blessee" relationships will be discussed in greater depth in Chapter 4.

Intergenerational relationships. Senior anthropologist, Dr Suzanne Leclerc-Madlala, conducted a technical meeting on Young Women in HIV hyper-endemic

countries of Southern Africa in Muldersdrift from 18-19 June 2008. During the meeting she did a presentation titled “Intergenerational/Age-Disparate Sex and Young Women’s Vulnerability in Southern Africa”⁶. In it she provides a working definition of Intergenerational sex as follows:

Intergenerational sex: A sexual partnership between a young woman (15-24 yrs.) and a man of 10 or more years older. But, she says, because heightened vulnerability is indicated in young women who report partnerships where there is an age gap larger than 5 years, the term **age-disparate sex** is more useful as a conceptual tool (Leclerc-Madlala 2008)

Leclerc-Madlala consults to PEPFAR and in its online article, defines an age-disparate relationship as one where there is an age difference of five or more years between partners, with the man being older than the woman in the relationship. Furthermore, the link with transactional sex is established when it states that, “often, transactional sex occurs in age-disparate relationships between young women and older men because older men are more likely than boys to have the means to offer gifts for sex.” In defining an “intergenerational/cross-generational” relationship, the article states that it “is a specific type of age-disparate relationship, in which the man is 10 or more years older than the woman” (PEPFAR 2015).

In his article in which he explores the “Blesser-Blessee” phenomenon, Mampane (2018) also uses the terms intergenerational and age-disparate sexual relationships interchangeably and highlights the high prevalence of these relationships in SSA. Furthermore, he brings to attention the fact that, in South Africa, the media has glamorised these relationships by the “blesser and blessee” phenomenon. He is in agreement with Leclerc-Madlala and PEPFAR in describing the age difference – where the men who engage in these relationships is usually more than 10 years older than the young women, they get involved in.

⁶ This presentation is based on Leclerc-Madlala’s research article titled Age Disparate and intergenerational sex in southern Africa: the dynamics of hyper vulnerability (Leclerc-Madlala 2008)

The following comments were expressed among the majority of women who participated in focus group discussions and in-depth interviews of his study:

Sugar daddies are “blessers” because they bless you with expensive things that your boyfriend can’t even afford.

I like older men because they take good care of you both financially and sexually...unlike boys who will just have sex with you and dump you.

Married men are perfect because they don’t spend much time with you because of their family responsibilities...so I have ample time to meet other men when he’s with his family.

His wife is old so he likes me more because I’m sexy and young...he buys me everything I want.

These comments highlight the willingness of these young women to engage in intergenerational relationships.

Mampane describes KwaZulu-Natal as a province which has been hit hard by the HIV epidemic in South Africa and he points to a study in this province conducted by Harling and associates. Their study discovered high rates of new HIV infections among young women who engage in intergenerational relationships and transactional sex (Harling et al. 2014).

In her presentation, Leclerc-Madlala describes the problem of these relationships as being associated with unsafe sexual behaviour, low condom use and increased risk of HIV infection. To substantiate this point, she draws on research studies in various countries.

In a study by Gregson et al in rural Zimbabwe clear empirical evidence demonstrated that young women routinely form partnerships with men 5-10 years older, and larger age disparities with most recent partners were a significant predictor of HIV infection status (Gregson et al. 2002).

A study of over 8000 men in Botswana by Langeni (2007) discovered that the odds of having had unprotected sex increased by 28% for every year's increase in age difference.

Leclerc-Madlala also highlights that the evidence about age-disparate relationships inform us, among other facts, that, while many young women are prey to the sexual coercions of older men, many are also active in seeking/exploiting partners for gain. The latter do not perceive themselves to be victims and often report being 'in control' (Leclerc-Madlala 2008).

This is corroborated by Hoss and Blokland (2018) who advise of two major narratives of the "sugar daddy" or blesser phenomenon that have dominated the public discourse on the topic. One narrative emphasises the girls' vulnerability and experience of victimisation, whereas the other narrative highlights their role as social agents with control in such interactions.

Socioeconomic Factors

Poverty. This factor has been identified as a driving force for HIV transmission, according to research in SSA. Mampane (2018) cites the reason as being that uneducated and unemployed young women are likely to engage in risky sexual behaviours including transactional sex. The following comments were reported in interviews conducted as part of his study:

I've been sending my CV (curriculum vitae) all over but I can't get a job...maybe is because I didn't finish matric, so I'm forced to use my body to earn a living.

My parents passed away and I'm the eldest one at home...we are orphans so I must make means to support my siblings.

Many young women in rural South Africa experience poor living conditions and this plays a major role in their exposure to the risk of contracting HIV. Mainly because of economic reasons these women engage in transactional sex not so much because they are willing (Mampane 2018).

In the case of the study among young female learners in Tembisa, Hoss and Blokland (2018) report that the context in which the participants live is characterised by poverty and social challenges caused by a general lack of resources. According to Gobind and du Plessis (2015) these factors are often cited as reasons for engaging in sugar daddy (blesser) relationships.

Tembisa is a township that had historically been designated for so-called Black people during the apartheid regime in South Africa. Black townships, like Tembisa, were under-resourced and continue to be poor areas even two decades after apartheid was abolished. Living conditions such as this establish a context of structural violence for the daily lives of the girls (Hoss & Blokland 2018).

Galtung (1969) defines structural violence as being characterised by social structures or social institutions which may harm people by preventing them from fulfilling their basic human needs. Examples of such social structures or institutions are poverty, lack of resources and opportunities for personal improvement.

In his PhD thesis, Motshedi also describes aspects of structural violence when he ascribes people's experience of poverty to a lack of capacity to access economic and social resources (Motshedi 2009: 3).

Therefore, in the researcher's view, it is not only gender and intimate partner violence that those involved in blesser-blessee relationships are exposed to, but also structural violence which is a contributing factor.

In their study, Masilo and associates comment that poverty is continuously cited as one of the contributors to teenage pregnancy and they point to several research studies. One, in particular, conducted by the Department of Social Development in the Limpopo Province reported one of the participants confirming that poverty does influence teenagers to fall pregnant. The participant further elaborated that she fell pregnant at the age of 16 after having sexual intercourse with a 32-year-old man. The reason offered for having sex with this man was the lack of food at home and that she needed the money to buy clothes and food (Department of Social Development 2011: 56).

According to the Chronic Poverty Centre (2008), poverty is defined as the lack of resources especially those needed for survival, goods needed by human beings in order to keep on living and also the ability to function as a full and active member and have individual dignity. This Centre further explains that poverty is a major factor for girls exchanging sex for money at an early age. According to Thobejane and colleagues, involving sexual favours in exchange for money is a survival strategy for many young girls to enable them to get basic needs such as food, shelter, clothing etc. (Thobejane et al. 2017). To support the above statement, they refer to an eNCA Checkpoint news video clip (eNCA 2016) which states that young female South Africans are usually getting involved with blessers because they lack jobs or enough money and they end up living in poverty with no money to support themselves and to get basic needs.

Additionally, Thobejane et al goes on to say that poverty increases the likelihood of women engaging in sex work or more subtle forms of transactional sex. Examples they cite are trading sex for beer in bars (Thobejane et al. 2017).

They also refer to Professor Bhana of University of KwaZulu-Natal who is an expert in gender and childhood sexuality and who informed a Teen Pregnancy conference in Durban that the abject poverty of many young girls in South Africa makes it easier for the blesser Phenomenon to flourish (Thobejane et al. 2017).

In the view of the researcher, Prof Bhana's statement can be taken to mean that blessers take advantage of the background of young females (blessees) by offering them things that are beyond their own capacity. This is corroborated in the eNCA Checkpoint online news bulletin referred to earlier.

Thobejane and associates quote Prof Bhana when he says "As long as we have these kinds of inequalities, Blessers will thrive because young women's aspiration towards those middle-class lifestyles are easily accessible through blessers (Thobejane et al. 2017).

Therefore, I agree with Prof Bhana when he states that we need to address unemployment as this will empower young women to become self-sufficient and independent.

In her paper, Seodi White (2010) uses the findings of a grounded study conducted by Women and Law in Southern Africa Research and Educational Trust Malawi (WLSA-Malawi) to show how social realities in specific contexts are driving the epidemic, particularly against women. Extreme poverty was clearly established by the study to be the major reason behind female vulnerability to HIV transmission. A major conclusion that emerged was that, women perceived men as a source of economic support. Using the findings as her base, White argues that poverty is a major driving influential factor that forces women to opt for economic survival, rather than protecting their sexual and reproductive health rights. Since a large number of women perceive men as a source of economic support and the resulting belief that they cannot make money to support themselves and their families, White contends that these perceptions and beliefs places women in a disadvantaged position. She further argues that the construction of gender relations and roles are the underlying causes of the realities that women face in Malawi. In the WLSA study, the following was articulated by a group of women:

You have no man; you wake up in the morning and have completely no idea where the next meal for yourself (and your children) will come from. You have completely nothing, no soap for bathing or washing, no maize flour, no relish, and even the gardens are dry so there isn't even nkhwani (pumpkin leaves).

A man approaches you and says I will give you K20 (0.2 cents) or K50 (0.5 cents) if you have sex with me. From where are you going to get the strength to say no? So of course, you sleep with him to temporarily relieve your poverty. And between protecting yourself from HIV infection and your immediate needs, you definitely are desperate to meet your needs, so you even submit to unsafe sex. It is difficult to turn down an opportunity for money by insisting on condom use when you are so desperate and poor.” (White 2010).

The above sentiments express just how deep an impact poverty makes on the lives of women in Malawi – and not only poverty but also gender power imbalances which affect the women’s ability to insist on protected sex. This situation does not only happen in Malawi, as the researcher has discovered in the review of current scholarship.

Sexual partner’s refusal to use condom

In their review of factors that predispose learners to indulge in sexual activities against the risk of pregnancy and sexual diseases, Masilo and Makhubele (2017) attribute sexual partner’s refusal to use a condom as one of the factors. They refer to a study conducted by Ziyane and Ehlers (2006) in which female respondents affirmed that, when it comes to the utilisation of the contraceptives, men were the decision makers who either approve or disapprove of the use of contraceptives.

Giggans and Levy (2013: 7) are of the view that one of the ways in which a male partner controls and claims possession of a girl’s body and her sexual activity is refusing to use condoms and not allowing the partner to use any kind of birth control.

Gqamane’s MA dissertation reveals that, of the reasons given for boys and young men not using condoms, males are pressured in order to prove their status as men and that these rules and pressures often dictate their sexual practices (Gqamane, 2006, p. 15) Furthermore, Gqamane’s study also reports that there is another factor that contributes to the non-utilisation of condoms and that is the fear that females experience being that they will lose the respect of their male partner if they are asked to use a condom (Gqamane 2006: 72).

The control exerted by men over the bodies of females was also evident in the contextual study conducted by Hoss and Blokland (2018) among learners in Tembisa who reported on the young girls’ experience of elements of manipulation and abuse. Some of the participants expressed how certain behaviours were adopted by older men with the intention of creating trust in the girl. An example is where he would present himself as a father figure, suggesting that he will protect her.

Regarding the use of condoms, one of the comments made by some older men, as reported by the participants of the study, is “when I bought you a beer, it didn’t come in a plastic, it comes clear.”

Hoss and Blokland state that what is perceived by the participants as a major challenge in interactions between young girls and blessers is the fact that men dictate the behaviours of the girls and attach their favours to certain expectations. The participants shared an example of how the men will initially use a condom and later expect the girls to sleep with them without any form of protection. The girls feel that they are not in a position to insist on the use of a condom. In the words of participants “when the day comes when they have skin to skin sex and the girl falls pregnant, the sugar daddy will run away because they have a wife and young children to look after” (Hoss & Blokland 2018).

An adage that, in the view of the researcher, powerfully expresses the attitude against condom use is expressed in the study by Mulumeoderhwa (2018) which researched the perspectives of male students on condom use and concurrent partners in the context of HIV in the eastern Democratic Republic of Congo. During the focus group discussions, most of the participants reported the preference among young men for flesh-to-flesh sex over protected sex using a condom. The following was stated by an 18-year-old urban male: *“Nowadays’ youth often say: ‘you cannot eat a candy in a wrapper, which means skin-to-skin’. It is not any youth who agrees to use condoms.*

A rural 18-year-old male expressed: *There are boys who say that they cannot eat a candy in a wrapper, and that they must have flesh-to-flesh sex. Such boys may think that a girl does not love him if she suggests him to use condom* (Mulumeoderhwa 2018). There was a strong preference among most participants for flesh-to-flesh sex because condoms were perceived to reduce sexual pleasure.

From the researcher’s point of view, the above sentiments and beliefs demonstrates the influence of social and gender norms on sexual practices. This is also reinforced by Dr Don Messer, quoted earlier by Gatobu:

“Women lack self-autonomy over their own bodies. They often are not free to resist sexual overtures because of the threat or actuality of violence. Poverty further complicates this situation since older men take advantage of younger women, becoming “sugar daddies” that offer young women money for food or clothing or tuition. Statistics demonstrate that younger women tend to get HIV from older men. The women likewise are unable to protect themselves sexually, since men are famous for resisting the use of condoms because they insist it reduces their “pleasure” (Gatobu 2017:64-65).

Having reviewed the significant factors that are connected with the blesser-phenomenon, the researcher will now present a succinct summary of the scholarship and insights gleaned from the literature.

2.7 PRELIMINARY CONCLUSIONS

In conducting this initial literature review, the researcher has discovered that the literature on the “blesser-blessee” relationships is very limited. This is because, as previously stated this phenomenon gained popularity and began to draw media attention since only 2016. There are many scholarly articles which refer to “sugar-daddies” and transactional sex and even among these articles there are none that addresses the topic from a pastoral care perspective or what the response of the Church should be.

Regarding books, the researcher has only found one book on the topic of Blessers and that is Phamotse’s bestseller titled “BARE – The blesser’s game” which seeks to highlight for adolescent girls and young women the very real dangers of entering into these “blesser-blessee” relationships.

Phamotse’s book and the articles reviewed for this dissertation connect the term “blesser” with “sugar-daddy”. Extracts from Phamotse’s book have been included in the Introduction to this dissertation as well as in this literature review. These extracts provide evidence of the dangers of manipulation, abuse, sexual violence that are inherent in these relationships.

The articles reviewed also demonstrate aspects of violence, manipulation and abuse inflicted on the young women who were participants of interviews and focus group discussions as part of research studies conducted. While the researcher acknowledged that the available literature emphasised that there are women who actively seek out blessers for material gain and consumption and there are also those who report of agency and control, the reality exists that there are many cases and instances where the blessees are subjected to exploitation, manipulation, abuse and sexual violence.

Through the review of available scholarship, the researcher has also demonstrated that transactional sex is a significant theme within the “Blesser-Blessee” phenomenon. The Blesser phenomenon has rapidly gained popularity through social media platforms since 2016. The phenomenon has also featured prominently in investigative journalism programs such as eNCA’s Checkpoint as well as other television programs, e.g. SCANDAL. The links between transactional sex, teenage pregnancies, HIV infections, gender-based violence and intimate partner violence has also been established in this literature review.

Poverty, structural violence, gender-inequalities, peer pressure, gender norms and patriarchal structures are several factors, among others, that were found to be drivers or contributors to the phenomenon of blesser-blessee. This has all demonstrated that the phenomenon of “Blesser-blessee” relationships is complex and multi-layered.

Additionally, the researcher has also seen fit to place the phenomenon within the context of HIV and teenage pregnancies to show the impact of “blessers” on adolescent girls and young women. In order to show how this dissertation seeks to make a contribution to available scholarship as well as to the prevailing social programs of the Church, the researcher has also shown its relevance to the work of task teams appointed by the Anglican Church of Southern Africa as part of its 8 missional priorities.

Recognising that the focus of this dissertation is to understand the phenomenon and the impact of its various elements on young women, the next chapter will explain

the approach and methodology that the researcher will employ as he seeks to begin a process of pastoral care and healing for the young women.

3. CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 INTRODUCTION

In Chapter 2 of this dissertation, the researcher re-emphasised the point made in the Introduction (Chapter 1) being that one should not be too quick to rush to intervention strategies (including proposed healing and pastoral care methodologies) without first seeking to understand the Blesser-Blessee phenomenon and the contextual environment in which the phenomenon operates and has shown to flourish. The environment and pertinent factors relevant to the phenomenon were presented in the literature review in the previous chapter.

Furthermore, in Chapter 1 the researcher also clarified the focus audience of this research study being young women who are the blessees and the scope of this dissertation was established as being primarily limited to gaining an understanding of the phenomenon through the lived experience of the young women who have experienced trauma as a result of abuse and violence inflicted on them at the hands of blessers.

In order to gain understanding through the lived experience of the young women, the researcher therefore will use the Qualitative research and Narrative approach. As part of the Narrative approach and in moving toward the formulation of a healing methodology, the researcher will highlight the connections between Narrative Therapy and Nick Pollard's Positive Deconstruction theoretical model. The rest of this Chapter will discuss these aspects of the methodology that will be applied.

3.2 BROAD RESEARCH APPROACH - QUALITATIVE

There are two basic approaches to research namely the Quantitative and Qualitative approach. The former approach encompasses the generation of data in quantifiable form which can be subjected to rigorous quantitative analysis in a formal and rigid fashion. Qualitative research, on the other hand, is concerned with subjective assessment of attitudes, opinions and behaviour (Kothari 2004: 5).

When comparing the two approaches, the following story resonates with the researcher significantly. Although an over-simplification, it expresses the differences in a narrative way that can be easily understood. Rosaline Barbour tells of a story⁷ that is the basis of an analogy used by Tricia Greenhalgh. The analogy is of two children observing leaves falling from trees in autumn to characterize two different 'research mind-sets': one which is drawn to counting and calculating the rate of leaf-fall and predicting when trees will become totally bare and the other which involves pondering the broader context where only some trees lose their leaves and the diversity of sizes, shapes and colours of leaves involved. Barbour paraphrases Greenhalgh (and Helman) in saying that the 'calculators' are prone to becoming quantitative researchers, while the 'ponderers' are much more attuned to qualitative research approaches (Barbour 2008: 3).

The researcher finds this analogy both relevant and interesting because, while he is very analytically minded and previously has worked in environments rich in calculation work, he is also a deeply reflective person and finds himself "pondering" quite a lot about the reasons for people's behaviours and how certain social factors,

⁷ Source of story is Cecil Helman

phenomena and context impact on people's lives. The desired outcome of this "pondering" or reflecting is so that the researcher can formulate a discerned and reasoned approach to bringing about transformation in the lives of God's people who are made in the Divine image.

As has already been mentioned this research study will follow the Qualitative approach. In Chapter 1, the researcher has already defined this approach according to Denzin and Lincoln who states that qualitative research is "a situated activity that locates the observer in the world...and transform the world... qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them" (Denzin & Lincoln 2005: 3).

In the researcher's analysis of the above definition as it applies to this research, the observer is the researcher who seeks to bring about transformation (positive change) in the world of the blessing phenomenon and the researcher uses qualitative techniques to study and understand "things" (in this case people – the female blesses) as he seeks to make sense of or interpret the blessing phenomenon in terms of the meanings the blesses bring to them.

The researcher wishes to emphasise the importance of noting that it is the meanings that the blesses bring to them – not the meanings of others. The researcher finds that this connects with the point that Julianne Hoss makes when she expressed concerns that the interventions offered often do not consider the perceptions of the young girls themselves. (Hoss & Blokland 2018).

This vital idea or concept of the lived reality or experiences of the blessees is further reinforced by Mills and Birks (2014: 9) who state that the overall purpose of qualitative research is “to examine phenomena that impact on the lived reality of individuals or groups in a particular cultural and social context.” In this case the phenomenon is that of the blesser-blessee and the individuals are the young women who live their lives within the cultural and social contexts which has been discussed in Chapter 2.

In his analysis of this concept of the lived reality or experiences of individuals, the researcher is reminded of Anton Boisen. According to Barbara Howard⁸, Boisen coined the term ‘the living human document’, regarded as a key concept for Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE) and has as its primary focus the intensive study of human experience (Howard 2017).

Glenn Asquith Jr. (1982), in his online article, acknowledges Boisen to be the ‘father’ of CPE and further states that Boisen, in pioneering the term ‘the living human documents’, emphasises the importance of the study of theology through human experience.

In his book titled ‘The Living Human Document’ pastoral counsellor and CPE supervisor, Charles Gerkin immediately also acknowledges Boisen as the founder of CPE and this paradigm of pastoral care – the living human document (Gerkin,

⁸ Barbara Howard is an Anglican Priest and the Director of Hunter Centre for Clinical Pastoral Education

1984: 30). What the researcher furthermore finds significant is that, according to Robert Frost's article, Boisen views the care of souls as the central task of ministry and therefore advocates that the study of living documents, i.e. people, be the starting point, rather than the study of books. Frost continues by clarifying that, for him, Gerkin defines the true purpose of pastoral care by the identification of the appropriate starting point. "The starting point," Frost argues, "is neither the sacred texts nor rituals of one's religion nor the facts of the current situation, but rather the person's lived experience up to that encounter" (Frost, n.d.).

This emphasis by Gerkin and Boisen, of the importance of the lived experience of humans connects with what the researcher has identified to be the scope of this study – to gain an understanding of the blesser-blessee phenomenon through the lived experience of the blessees who are the primary focus audience and it is for this reason that the Qualitative research approach is the most appropriate and the one followed.

Earlier it was stated that the researcher finds Anton Boisen's view of the care of souls being significant as the central task of ministry. The most famous definition of pastoral care is the one offered by Clebsch and Jaekle who stated

"The ministry of the cure of souls, or pastoral care, consists of helping acts, done by representative Christian persons, directed toward the healing, sustaining, guiding, and reconciling of troubled persons whose troubles arise in the context of ultimate meanings and concerns" (Clebsch & Jaekle 1964:4).

This is significant because the researcher is a Rector of a parish, as stated in the Introduction. In the Anglican liturgy of the Institution of a Rector of a parish, it is stated that the Bishop invites the Rector-to-be to “receive the cure of souls which is both mine and yours in the name of the Father and the Son and of the Holy Spirit” (CPSA 1993). The cure of souls is described as the vocation and function of the priest who is installed over a pastoral charge, in this case a Rector. This, therefore, in the view of the researcher, connects with what Boisen regards as the central task of ministry – being the care of souls.

In order to set the above within the framework of Pastoral care and pastoral theology, especially within the African context, the researcher draws on the definition of Pastoral theology offered by the Director of the Centre for Gender Equity and Empowerment, Philomena Njeri Mwaure. In her chapter titled ‘Healing as a Pastoral Concern’ within Waruta and Kinoti’s book, Mwaure (2005:72) states “Pastoral theology can be defined as that branch of theology that discusses the duties, obligations and functions of the priest in the care of souls.” In emphasising the importance of contextualisation in which this pastoral theology needs to be understood, she continues by saying “Like all branches of theology, it can best be understood when it is integrated into the cultures, times, circumstances and concrete situations of a particular people” (Waruta & Kinoti 2005:72). In the view of the researcher, this also connects with the importance of exercising pastoral theology by considering the lived reality or experience of the blessees.

Up to now the researcher has introduced the discussion on Qualitative research using the definition offered by Denzin & Lincoln and demonstrated how elements of

that definition connect with this research study. According to Lichtman (2014:7) another widely used source of information about Qualitative research originates from the work of John Creswell, who is one of the early writers in the field. Creswell defines this approach in the following way:

Qualitative research begins with assumptions, a *worldview*, the possible use of a theoretical lens, and the study of research problems inquiring into the *meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem*. To study this problem, qualitative researchers use an emerging qualitative approach to inquiry, the collection of data in a natural setting sensitive to the people and places under study, and data analysis that is inductive and establishes patterns or themes. The final written report or presentation includes the *voices of participants*, the reflexivity of the researcher, and a complex description and interpretation of the problem, and it extends the literature or *signals a call for action* (Creswell 2007:37).

(Researcher emphasis)

The researcher is inclined to agree with Lichtman that Creswell's definition is rather unduly long but it does contain many important components (Lichtman 2014:7). Those components deemed important by the researcher and of relevance to this study has been indicated in italics in the above definition. The researcher will explain the relevance of these components in this and following Chapters.

Lichtman (2014:12) also explains that a particular research approach guides qualitative researchers and she refers to a particular one called phenomenology. In describing this, she says that this is "where researchers are interested in lived

experiences of individuals.” Considering that this research study is focused on the phenomenon of the “blessor-blessee” relationship, the researcher notes that there is again a reference to the lived experiences of individuals.

The researcher now turns attention to a more focussed approach for this study and that is the Narrative approach.

3.3 FOCUSED RESEARCH APPROACH – NARRATIVE INQUIRY

As indicated in the Introduction of this dissertation, one of the research aims/objectives is to empower young women who are blessees to realise that they have inherent worth as individuals. The research study also aims to empower these young women to be liberated and healed from the trauma of abusive relationships with blessers and to realise that they have within themselves the ability to regain control of their lives and to make more informed and better life choices.

Much has been said thus far about the lived experiences of individuals and two authors whose work is authoritative in the area of Narrative approach are Michael White and David Epston. In their seminal work, namely *Narrative Means to Therapeutic Ends*, the authors begin with the assumption “that people experience problems when the stories of their lives, as they or others have invented them, do not sufficiently represent their lived experience. Therapy then,” they say, “becomes a process of storying or re-storying the lives and experiences of these people” (White & Epston 1990: front flap).

Gatobu (2017:73) asserts that, when it comes to intervention approaches for women empowerment, either in pastoral counselling or group encounters, the most powerful

is the narrative approach proposed by Michael White. She further argues that “this approach works very well in multicultural contexts and especially oral cultures like Africa where the stories, saying, proverbs, and folklores are powerful tools for lessons and empowerment.” Gatobu further explains that the benefit of the narrative approach is that it allows women to be able to tell their stories “in their own language, pace, and vocabulary” and that this reveals adverse strangleholds that have dominated a metanarrative of defeat and victimisation (Gatobu, 2017:73).

The power of story-telling and narrative also features prominently in the work of research professor Brené Brown who has spent the past two decades studying courage, vulnerability, shame, and empathy. She is quoted as saying “maybe stories are just data with a soul” and “owning our story and loving ourselves through that process is the bravest thing we will ever do” (Brown 2019). The researcher will apply principles of Brown’s work further in his doctoral thesis. For now, he will take a closer look into the qualitative approach of narrative inquiry.

3.4 DEFINITION OF NARRATIVE

In seeking to understand Narrative research or Narrative inquiry, the researcher deems it necessary to first understand the root meaning of Narrative.

The Merriam-Webster dictionary categorises the word narrative into noun and adjective. As a noun it defines narrative as something that is narrated; like a story or an account and also a way of presenting or understanding a situation or series of events that reflects and promotes a particular point of view or set of values. As an adjective, it defines narrative as having the form of a story or representing a story

and also of or relating to the process of telling a story (Merriam-Webster, Incorporated 2019).

According to Hannu Heikkinen, the Latin noun *narratio* means a narrative or a story and the verb *narrare* means to tell or narrate (Heikkinen 2002). In using this Latin source, Torill Moen defines narrative as “a story that tells a sequence of events that is significant for the narrator or her or his audience” and goes on to emphasise that narratives capture both the individual and the context. (Moen 2006:60).

From the above definitions, it is clear that narrative involves stories or accounts, the presentation of a story and the process of telling a story. Practical theologian, pastoral therapist, writer Chené Swart is an executive, a life coach and a consultant that offers various workshops that apply Narrative practices in various contexts. In her book she defines narrative as “a string of incidents and events that took place over a period of time, and which human beings have made meaning of in a way that influences their actions, identity, conclusions and possibilities for the future” (Swart 2013:169). While White and Epston speak of re-storying lives, Swart speaks of re-authoring. Narrative therapist Alice Morgan points out that Narrative therapy is sometimes referred to as involving ‘re-authoring’ or ‘re-storying’ conversations (Morgan 2000:5).

3.5 NARRATIVE INQUIRY/RESEARCH

In the SAGE dictionary of Qualitative Inquiry, Thomas Schwandt defines Narrative Inquiry as a broad term which incorporates the interdisciplinary study of the activities involved in generating and analysing stories of life experiences (e.g., life histories,

narrative interviews, journals, diaries, memoirs, autobiographies, and biographies) and reporting that kind of research (Schwandt 2011).

Rebecca Mazur emphasises that the term narrative research and narrative inquiry is often used interchangeably and can be defined in various ways. She continues to clarify that, in its broadest sense, the term refers to a research methodology that uses stories and storytelling as a source of knowledge. Furthermore, she contends that it is important to understand that “narrative research does not merely seek to uncover and retell stories; rather, it seeks to explore and interpret, in a disciplined way, people’s lived experience...” (Mazur 2018).

According to Ruthellen Josselson, the emphasis of narrative research is on storied experience. She further states that this mode of inquiry encompasses a wide range of disciplines including anthropology, education, psychology, social work and sociology and also a range of research approaches including ethnography, phenomenology, grounded theory, action research, among others.

In grounding narrative research, Josselson states that narrative researchers rely on the epistemological arguments of such philosophers as Paul Ricoeur, Martin Heidegger, Edmund Husserl, Wilhelm Dilthey, Ludwig Wittgenstein, Mikhail Bakhtin, Jean-Francois Lyotard, and Hans-Georg Gadamer (Josselson 2012).

3.6 DATA COLLECTION METHODS OF NARRATIVE RESEARCH AND ANALYSIS OF NARRATIVE RESEARCH DATA

Mazur argues that there is no widely accepted way to go about conducting narrative research and she cautions that this lack of doctrine can be both liberating and confusing to novice researchers. The usual practice, she states, in narrative inquiry

is to approach the narrative puzzle by obtaining narratives from participants and then use thematic analysis, discourse analysis, or other similar analytical frameworks. In describing the analytical process, she says that narrative researchers will often read texts multiple times in order to understand how themes relate to each other and to a larger whole. (Mazur 2018).

Josselson agrees with this multiple reading approach and emphasises that the analysis of narrative research texts is primarily aimed at an inductive understanding of the meanings participants attribute to stories and then organising them at some more conceptual level of understanding (Josselson 2012).

Both Mazur (2018) and Josselson (2012) point out that narrative researchers collect their data in a variety of ways but it is common to conduct personal interviews. According to Josselson, these interviews are usually unstructured or semi-structured, depending on the research question. Josselson further clarifies that narrative researchers might also use personal documents such as journals, diaries, memoirs or films as bases for their research and analysis (Josselson 2012).

Torill Moen states that narrative research can involve a number of data collection methods including field notes, journal records, interview transcripts, researcher observations, storytelling, letter writing, newsletters and other documents. She further adds that she would add video recordings to this list as these, she argues, can also be very useful in narrative research (Moen 2006).

In the current research study, the researcher will, as far as possible seek to collect data using unstructured personal interviews. An approved interview questionnaire has been prepared for this purpose (Refer Annexure B). Although the desired primary data collection method is personal interviews (for the purpose of engaging with the living human document as previously explained), the researcher will not only limit his study to this method but he will also employ additional methods such as case studies, conference papers and filmed interviews available through news media. In following this procedure, the researcher is validated by Josselson who asserts that “narrative research uses whatever storied materials are available and can be produced from the kinds of people who might have personal knowledge and experience to bring to bear on the research question” (Josselson 2012).

A review of the available literature on narrative research reveals that scholars such as Torill Moen, Ruthellen Josselson and Rebecca Mazur have revealed that these additional data collection methods are acceptable approaches (Mazur 2018), (Moen 2006), (Josselson 2012).

Narrative research scholar Mazur also asserts that an extensive literature review is an acceptable research method and concludes that it is part of narrative research (Mazur 2018). Researcher and dissertation writing expert Eric Hofstee includes extended literature reviews as one of the research designs and he states that this method relies almost exclusively on the secondary literature. He does add, though, that it also perfectly possible to integrate the comments of experts or specialists through the use of interviews and questionnaires. Hofstee further asserts that

extended literature reviews can be combined with a thesis statement (Hofstee, 2006:121).

For the purposes of the current research study, the researcher will be applying the extended literature review method as an additional approach in order to obtain the necessary information. The initial literature review conducted in Chapter 2 focussed on a significant aspect of the phenomenon of blesser-blessee relationships, being transactional sex and its impact on young women as it relates to gender-based violence, intimate partner violence and sexually transmitted diseases. Chapter 4 will employ the extended literature review method integrated with appropriate case studies, interviews and other appropriate narrative approaches (such as those mentioned earlier) in dealing with the central argument or thesis statement of this research.

The primary reason for the above mixed-methods approach is because the researcher has identified a compelling limitation to using only interviews. This limitation is presented in the next section.

3.7 LIMITATIONS OF PERSONAL INTERVIEWS AS SINGULAR DATA COLLECTION METHOD FOR THIS STUDY

The researcher resonates with the view espoused by Pastoral theologian Edward Wimberly who shares his concern about the “crisis of purpose and shame that is engulfing our society” He continues by saying that these crises are evident in a culture that reflects a lack of meaning and purpose. These crises have resulted in what Wimberly calls a ‘shame-oriented’ culture. As a way of addressing his concern about the crisis of shame and purpose, Wimberly asserts that he has chosen narrative or storytelling. In using the narrative method, he says there is the hope

that pastoral counsellors may address the malady of the lack of meaning and purpose in life. (Wimberly 1999:13-14).

The researcher contends that it is this 'shame-oriented' culture that makes it very challenging and difficult for those who have been or are involved in blesser-blessee relationships to come out and courageously share their stories and lived experience. In the researcher's interview with Jackie Phamotse, she confirms that there is a name, blame and shame culture (Phamotse 2018). For this reason, the researcher has found it very challenging to secure interview appointments with these young women.

In an effort to address these challenges, he has found it necessary to enlist the assistance of co-researchers where appropriate. In the case of one NGO, Embrace Dignity, that the researcher has approached, albeit in a different town, he has asked for those who know the young women to assist in obtaining their responses to the questionnaire. At the time of concluding this chapter, the researcher was unsuccessful in obtaining primary data from this NGO.

In the case of another organisation seeking registration as an NGO, New Life Center for girls, the researcher has found it beneficial to adopt the approach where the original founder of the organisation and who has an established relationship of trust with several of potential interviewees, becomes a co-researcher for this study. The purpose of this is two-fold namely to help the interviewees feel calm, secure and comfortable and also to act as an interpreter in transcribing the interviews.

Another limitation of the personal interview method as it relates to this research study, is that of sample size and sampling method. Given the context of the blessing-blessee relationship shrouded in a culture of shame, it is very difficult to gain access to young women who are courageous enough to openly share that they are or have been involved in these relationships. Many fear for their lives and are concerned about their safety, understandably so.

According to Josselson (2012), narrative research is not generalizable to populations but rather highlights the particularities of experience. The researcher's understanding of her assertion is that it is not essential that the sample population within narrative research is representative of the larger population. This is further reinforced in Josselson's emphasis that narrative researchers work with small samples of participants. The aim and focus being, she says, to "obtain rich and free-ranging discourse" (Josselson 2012). Given the challenges previously highlighted by the researcher, the current study will report on the interview findings of those whom the co-researcher is able to interview.

Before moving onto a discussion of the narrative approach within the field of therapy and its connections with another model, the researcher will highlight some advantages and disadvantages of narrative research and address ethical considerations.

3.8 ADVANTAGES AND DISADVANTAGES OF NARRATIVE RESEARCH APPROACH

The researcher will first highlight the disadvantages followed by the advantages of Narrative research as identified by Josselson (2012):

3.8.1 Disadvantages

Novice narrative researchers find the vaguely defined process of this research method a challenge with which they struggle.

They also have to come to terms with the difficulty with which interesting results can be guaranteed in advance.

The labour-intensive nature of narrative research is also problematic, especially in the analysis phase which requires repeated readings of texts to develop interpretations and insights.

3.8.2 Advantages

The opportunity to be exploratory and the ability to make discoveries free of the restrictions of prefabricated hypothesis, manufactured variables, control groups and statistics is a major appeal of narrative research.

Narrative research creates the possibilities for social change by empowering marginalised groups with a voice as well as representing unusual or traumatic experiences that are not conducive to control group designs (Josselson 2012).

3.9 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

According to Mazur, narrative researchers need to be aware of the standard issues of privacy, confidentiality and informed consent that apply to narrative research. She continues to argue, however, that, because of the method's emphasis on relational engagement between researchers and participants, there exists a need to grapple with further ethical considerations. She says this is due to the unique nature of narrative research among other qualitative research methods. (Mazur 2018).

In addressing these ethical considerations, the researcher of this study will follow the ethical guidelines of the University of Pretoria by making use of informed consent

forms, assuring the participants of confidentiality and their right to withdraw from the research at any time.

Thus far in the discussion on narrative research, the researcher has demonstrated the centrality of stories and story-telling as a source of knowledge. Narrative therapist Alice Morgan (2000:5) contends that stories are central to an understanding of narrative ways of working.

3.10 UNPACKING NARRATIVE WAYS OF WORKING

In her work as an executive and life coach, consultant and trainer in narrative practices, Chené Swart informs us that narrative work originates from the insight that the narrative is something we have constructed and she further states that what people think is “true” and “their reality” is called a constructed narrative. Swart further explains that a constructed narrative consists of a series of incidents which we have interpreted to say: “This is my story”. The constructed narrative appears true to the person who often refers to the story as “this is the way it is.” If this is the understanding of the way things are, she argues that it is foreseeable that our narratives become our way of living as we live our narratives (Swart 2013:21).

Swart makes reference to the work of Michael White in her book on narrative practices. Another scholar who makes reference to the work of White is Janet Lee, whose work involves the clinical and methodological applications of theories of feminism and whose research interests include women's history and issues concerning women and the body.

Lee's article focuses on the strengths of a feminist narrative metaphor in helping women "re-author" their daily lives. In it she describes White as a strong proponent and practitioner of the narrative metaphor (Lee 1997:5) and she refers to an interview where he was addressed as a "therapeutic anthropologist" (White 1995:27).

In the same interview, White responds to a question about the limitations of the narrative approach by cautioning that he would prefer not to use the word "approach" and prefers to call it, more broadly, a world-view" (White 1995:37). Swart used the term constructed narrative and she explains also that the intention of narrative practices is "to invite human beings to become agents and authors who are able and gifted to paint or write a new preferred narrative..." In referring to the intention of narrative practices and the hope of the work in helping human beings to arrive at a new preferred narrative, the researcher resonates with the crucial question which Swart poses and that is "if the narratives we live are constructed anyway, why not live into a narrative that is chosen and alive with possibility" (Swart 2013:21)?

In analysing what Swart is saying in using the word constructed and also writing or painting a new preferred narrative, the researcher contends that if narratives are constructed, then they can also be deconstructed and then reconstructed to arrive at a new preferred narrative that is life-giving, filled with hope and alive with possibilities.

Previously, reference was made to White's preferred use of the word "world-view" rather than approach and earlier in this Chapter reference was made to Creswell's definition of Qualitative research. It is worth revisiting a part of this definition here:

"Qualitative research begins with assumptions, a *worldview*..."

A scholar who has developed an approach to help people adopt a critical appraisal of their worldviews is Nick Pollard. As a result of his work with youth on educational campuses, Pollard offers the church an approach called positive deconstruction.

3.11 POSITIVE DECONSTRUCTION AS A THEORETICAL MODEL TOWARDS THE FORMULATION OF A PASTORAL CARE & HEALING METHODOLOGY

Pollard explains that the process is 'deconstruction' because he is seeking to help people to take apart what they believe in order to look carefully at the belief and analyse it. The process is 'positive' in the sense that this deconstruction is done in a positive way – in order to arrive at something better. Pollard (1997:44) says that "it is a positive search for truth."

I agree with Pollard that it is essential to "recognize and affirm the elements of truth to which individuals already hold", but that it is equally important, through the process of positive deconstruction, "to help them discover for themselves the inadequacies of underlying worldviews they have absorbed" (Pollard 1997:44). Only then can one truly arrive at the 'something better' which Pollard alludes to as the aim of this method.

This theory and its application will be discussed more fully in Chapter 6 of this dissertation in which the researcher will discuss its applications towards the

formulation of a pastoral care and healing model to help blessees move from brokenness to healing and from shame to self-worth.

In order to begin to help blessees in this healing process the researcher will next make an appeal to the field within Pastoral Theology called Narrative Therapy which has linkages to positive deconstruction and the narrative research/inquiry approach.

3.12 LINKAGES BETWEEN POSITIVE DECONSTRUCTION AND NARRATIVE THERAPY

In her introductory text, Morgan (2000:v) attributes the ideas and ways of working contained in her book to the work of David Epston and Michael White.

Additionally, she states that there is variety of several themes which constitute what has come to be known as 'narrative therapy' and she adds that each therapist engages with the ideas and themes somewhat differently and furthermore, she suggests that, when one hears someone referring to 'narrative therapy', they might be referring to certain ways of understanding problems and their effects on people's lives (Morgan 2000:2).

Morgan (2000:4) also contends that narrative therapy views problems as separate from people and the practice works on the assumption that people have within themselves the skills, competencies, beliefs, values, commitments and abilities that will help them to change their relationship with problems in their lives.

From the perspective of the researcher, the aspect of Narrative therapy that connects most directly or closely with Positive deconstruction is what Morgan describes as situating the problem in context. She explains the work of narrative therapists in narrative ways of working as taking an interest in and seeking to

discover, acknowledge and 'take apart' (deconstructing) the beliefs, ideas and practices of the broader culture in which the person lives that are serving to assist the problem and the problem story (narrative). Through this process, the cultural beliefs that have supported the problem to enter the person's life and the beliefs and ideas that sustain the life of the problem are exposed for questioning and challenge. Morgan further asserts that the beliefs and ideas that support problems in the person's life are often regarded as 'taken for granted' as 'truths' or as 'common-place understandings' (Morgan 2000:45).

In her comprehensive overview of the assumptions, principles, values and theoretical principles that inform narrative work, Swart also refers to 'taken-for-granted beliefs and ideas. She contends that these taken for granted beliefs and ideas in our society and culture, together with the influential people in positions of authority informs us that the way things are, is the fixed reality. Swart further explains that this notion of "the way things are" describes the taken for granted belief and ideas that construct a society's or culture's perceived worldview, reality and ways of life (Swart 2013:31).

The researcher's understanding of what Morgan and Swart explain, as it relates to the current study, is that when these taken for granted beliefs and ideas support and sustain the problems that affect young women (blessees) in ways that wounds or traumatises them, then these worldviews and their underlying taken for granted ideas and beliefs that inform a dominant problem-saturated narrative⁹ need to be

⁹ (Swart 2013:168): This will be explained in more detail in Chapter 6

deconstructed in ways that help the blessee arrive at alternative, life-giving narratives.

3.13 PRELIMINARY CONCLUSIONS

In this Chapter, the researcher has introduced the research approach, methods and techniques which will be used to achieve the research objectives and outcomes as discussed in Chapter 1; the primary being to gain an understanding of the lived experience of blessees within the phenomenon of blesser-blessee relationships in order to move towards the formulation of a healing and pastoral care model.

The broad research approach chosen by the researcher is Qualitative and the more focused research design within Qualitative research is Narrative research or inquiry. The reasons for choosing this research design was explained extensively in this chapter. Significant among the reasons was the importance of consulting the “living human document” as proposed by the founder of Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE), Anton Boisen.

The researcher connected the advice of Boisen to the data gathering technique of personal interviews within Narrative Inquiry and the anticipated challenges and limitations of the singular use of personal interviews was presented, together with solutions proposed by the researcher as a means of addressing the anticipated challenges and limitations.

The principles, values and assumptions that inform Narrative work and practices were also discussed and it was discovered that the taken-for-granted beliefs and ideas in society results in what Wimberly calls a shame-oriented culture.

Furthermore, it was also discovered that the taken for granted beliefs inform a society or culture's construction of its perceived worldview.

The Chapter proposed a theoretical model called Positive Deconstruction that seeks to take apart worldviews in order to analyse them and connections between this model and Narrative Therapy were demonstrated.

In this chapter Wimberley's reasons for using narrative as a way of dealing with what he called a shame-oriented culture was presented.

Chapter 4 will apply the method of an extended literature review of the effects of the transactional sex aspect of blessing-blessee relationships, being gender-based violence and intimate partner violence. Through the application of the extended literature review method, the researcher will offer an integrated discussion in seeking to address the central argument or thesis of the current study.

4. CHAPTER FOUR: THE CONTRIBUTION OF BLESSER-BLESSEE RELATIONSHIPS TO GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE, INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE AND WITHIN THE CONTEXT OF A PATRIARCHAL AND SHAME ORIENTED CULTURE

4.1 INTRODUCTION

“Overall, 35% of women worldwide have experienced either physical and/or sexual intimate partner violence or non-partner sexual violence... Most of this violence is intimate partner violence (IPV). Worldwide, almost one third (30%) of all women who have been in a relationship have experienced physical and/or sexual violence by their intimate partner. In some regions, 38% of women have experienced intimate partner violence... Globally, 7% of women have been sexually assaulted by someone other than a partner” (World Health Organisation 2013:2).

The above statistics from the 2013 report developed collaboratively by the World Health Organisation (WHO), the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine and the South African Medical Research Council reveal the striking findings regarding violence against women on a global scale.

Furthermore, with regards to the global prevalence of women who have experienced either physical and/or sexual intimate partner violence or non-partner sexual violence, the report asserts that while there are many other forms of violence that women are exposed to, the 35% reported already represents a large proportion of the world’s women. The 38% of women who have experienced IPV, according to the report, occur in the South-East Asia WHO region (37.7%). Following closely behind is the WHO African region at 36.6%. Given these alarming statistics, it is not surprising then that the compilers of the report, in the view of the researcher, correctly assert that the findings powerfully communicate a message that violence against women is not a trivial problem that only occurs in some pockets of society, “but rather is a global public health problem of epidemic proportions, requiring urgent action” (World Health Organisation 2013:5).

The researcher is in agreement with United Nations Secretary-General, Ban Ki-Moon who is quoted in the WHO report as stating “There is one universal truth, applicable to all countries, cultures, and communities: violence against women is

never acceptable, never excusable, never tolerable” (World Health Organisation 2013:2). Yet the researcher will extend this not only to women but also to young girls.

The phenomenon of violence against women and children appeared prominently in South African media recently in reports about putting an end to Gender-Based Violence (GBV). The case of UCT student Uyinene Mrwetyana in August 2019 refers where she was raped and killed by being bludgeoned with a scale inside a Cape Town post office (Meyer 2019). The death of Mrwetyana and the violence inflicted on many women in South Africa sparked the resurgence of the #Amlnext campaign.¹⁰

Regarding a sexual crime against a child, there was the incident of the 7-year-old girl who was raped inside the toilet at a Dros family restaurant in Pretoria in September 2018 (eNCA, 2019). The relevance of this is that it relates to gender-based violence.

In light of these heinous crimes of gender violence, the researcher is inclined to agree with renowned Circle theologian Denise Ackermann who is quoted in fellow Circle and African theologian and renowned academic Professor Isabel Apawo Phiri’s article. Ackermann states “I suggest that there are two pressing issues that should be central to women doing theology in our part of the world. The first is the endemic nature of sexual violence against women and children. A war is being waged against the bodies of women and children in this country” (Phiri 2002:19). The researcher would argue that it is not only an issue that should be central to women doing theology but also African male theologians and all men in general. The picture of the protestors holding a poster with the words “Real men don’t abuse women” (Annexure E) illustrates this point (Siswali 2018).

¹⁰ #AmlNext is a social media campaign launched on 5 September 2014, by Inuit Canadian Holly Jarrett, to call attention to the High rate of missing and murdered Indigenous women in Canada (The Globe and Mail 2014)

In this chapter, the researcher will present the argument that “blesser-blessee” relationships enable GBV and IPV as he seeks to conceptualise and support the central premise or argument of this dissertation. As has been explained in the previous methodology chapter, this will be done through an extended literature review that builds upon the initial literature review presented in Chapter 2. This extended literature review will be based largely on secondary sources while also integrated with relevant cases, references to video material and extracts from a key interview with Jackie Phamotse, whose story the researcher has introduced in Chapter 1 of this study. By way of clarification the central premise or argument that will be addressed is: Blesser-blessee relationships and the blesser phenomenon contributes significantly to a shame-oriented and patriarchal culture that objectifies women and this culture is the root cause of the violence and abuse inflicted upon women.

4.2 ESTABLISHING GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE AND INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE WITHIN THE CONTEXT OF THE PHENOMENON OF ‘BLESSER-BLESSEE’ RELATIONSHIPS

In section 2.5 of Chapter 2, the researcher established the context of gender-based violence (GBV), intimate partner violence (IPV), manipulation and abuse by demonstrating correlations with transactional sex. The theme of transactional sex and its significant connections with blesser-blessee relationships was established in section 2.2. The initial literature review in Chapter 2 highlighted the research conducted on transactional sex and demonstrated that there is considerable evidence linking transactional sex to gender-based violence and other undesirable sexual and reproductive health outcomes. The findings gleaned from and evidence presented in the literature review presented in Chapter 2 together with the information, insights, and evidence presented in this chapter is intended to demonstrate how the ‘blesser-blessee’ phenomenon enables gender and intimate partner violence.

In a newspaper article dated 18 July 2018 titled “Stop the slaughter of our sisters”, the writer makes reference to an article in May 2018 by Wendy Mothata headlined “Stop killing us! Let’s talk about the brutal murders of women in South Africa.” This article of May cited police figures that 1713 women were murdered in the last nine months of 2016. In addition, the July 2018 article referred to a study that half of the

women killed were slain by someone with whom they had an intimate relationship (Siswali 2018). One is reminded of our sisters in Christ: Anelisa Dulaze, Karabo Mokoena, Reeva Steenkamp, Annelene Pillay, Zestah September, Nosipho Mandleleni. These are from South Africa and there are untold others and also in other parts of the world (Phamotse 2017: 214).

The writer states that, on average, a woman is murdered every four hours and contends that South Africa has one of the highest rates of femicide in the world. With relevance to the current study, the article emphasised that such violence can be expressed within a culture of predatory male sexuality as in the case of forms of promiscuity. Relationships with “blessers” was described as being included in such forms of predatory male sexuality (Siswali 2018).

Having now established the phenomenon of “blesser-lessee” relationships within the context of gender-based violence and intimate partner violence, the researcher will next discuss the concept of violence as it relates to women and adolescent girls.

In her chapter titled ‘Conjunction of Gender Violence and HIV/AIDS’, referred to in the initial literature review chapter, pastoral psychotherapist Dr Anne Gatobu distinguishes between Domestic violence and Gender violence. “Domestic violence”, she argues, “presumes stable relationships, usually bound by the marriage covenant or other long-term commitment”; whereas “Gender violence, on the other hand, encompasses both the domestic violence as described above but moves beyond to casual encounters, sexual assault, sex trafficking and any other forms of violence vented on another simply by virtue of their gender and vulnerability” (Gatobu 2017: 62).

In the view of the researcher, this distinction is helpful for the purposes of the current study in that it helps to better understand how the ‘blesser-lessee’ phenomenon operates within the context of violence in its broadest sense.

4.3 DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AND INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE

Earlier, the researcher introduced this chapter with the WHO global and regional statistics estimates of violence against women. These statistics emphasised that

almost one-third of all women who have been in a relationship have experienced physical and/or sexual violence by their intimate partner.

Locally in South Africa, a newspaper article by Johannesburg advocate Brenda Madumise titled “Scourge of Violence against women has to be stopped” also cited alarming statistics that nearly 50% of women in SA are reported to have been brutally violated. She points to research findings which highlighted that more than 50 000 cases of rape occur annually and she continues to say that “intimate partners are the most likely perpetrators of violence against women.” Madumise further contends that this behaviour is underpinned by what she calls the “preservation of patriarchal power.”

Additionally, she describes a vicious cycle of violence which “keeps women in conditions of poverty and fear of poverty keeps women trapped in violent situations”. Of particular relevance to the argument set forth in the current study, Madumise asserts that the culture of “blessers” enables this reprehensible environment. She further describes the term “blessers” as a perverted misnomer that celebrates the abuse of young women by men old enough to be their fathers (Madumise 2018). In light of the above, it can, therefore, be argued that the phenomenon of “blesser-blessee” relationships can be defined as one which involves intimate partners.

Much research studies (Ali & Naylor 2013) (Kiss et al. 2012) (Rose 2015) have been conducted on the topic of intimate partner violence (IPV). The study by Ali and Naylor describes IPV as referring to the use of sexual, psychological and physically coercive acts against an intimate partner. They further state that, upon their review of the literature on the topic, there are various terms, often used interchangeably, to describe the phenomenon including domestic violence, domestic abuse, intra-family violence, wife abuse, spousal abuse, wife battering, and courtship violence, among others. (Ali & Naylor 2013).

As stated in the all-encompassing terms of IPV above, domestic violence is one of these. According to the WHO study (2013:4), the broad term ‘violence against women’

“Encompasses many forms of violence, including violence by an intimate partner (intimate partner violence) and rape/sexual assault and other forms of sexual violence perpetrated by someone other than an intimate partner (non-partner sexual violence), as well as female genital mutilation, honour killings and the trafficking of women.”

The discussion of domestic/intimate partner violence that follows is informed by an African perspective and set within an African context. Therefore, in using Nasimiyu-Wasike, Phiri, Hinga, Gatobu, and others as credible African sources to support the arguments set forth in this study, the researcher firmly grounds the study in an Afrocentric context.

According to Professor Anne Nasiiyu-Wasike (2013:121), domestic violence can be expressed in various forms:

1. Physical assault like bullying, punching, hitting, slapping, shoving, throwing things about, pulling hair, twisting of arms and ankles and choking.
2. Use of dangerous weapons: for example, knife, gun cane. An example of this is cited in Phamotse’s book “BARE” where Treasure’s father, Thabo, enters the house in a violent rage with a gun and ends up shooting his wife Thato in the arm (Phamotse 2017:26).
3. Damaging property: for example, breaking or smashing furniture to scare the partner, burning clothes
4. Emotional abuse: for example, intimidation, isolation, ridicule, cursing, humiliating and making the woman feel worthless. Here too, the violent scene in “BARE” is a case in point where Thabo uses the word “bitch” twice in addressing his wife Thato.
5. Denial of basic needs such as food, proper medical care, money, contact with friends and/or relatives
6. Sexual abuse or assault.

A behaviour and treatment of women exist which used to be called wife discipline but today it is called wife abuse (Nasimiyu-Wasike, 2013:123). Professor Teresia Hinga states that there are many occasions where women have been subjected to

violence and the excuse was that they have in some way or another offended their male folk. This, she submits, is particularly the case of wife battering or beating (Hinga 2013:140).

4.3.1 African Tradition and wife-beating

This practice is underpinned by a cultural and traditional belief that a woman should belong to somebody. In marriage, she belongs to her husband who could do anything with her. This is according to Julia Gichuhi who is quoted by Nasiiyu-Wasike (2013:122). The researcher vehemently disagrees with this way of viewing women as he sees all women equally as men in being made in the image of God and having human rights just as men do.

Several African countries report of the traditional practice where men pay substantial amounts of money or large herds of cattle, sheep, and goats to the girl's parents before marriage. This is known as the African cultural practice of *lobola*. In Chapter 2 the researcher has emphasised the contention by several scholars that this practice or gender norm has inculcated a cultural expectation for which men are compelled to make economic provision for women. Research conducted by Mampane (2018) demonstrated how gender norms have instilled a culture where women prefer to engage in transactional sex with the objective of benefitting financially and materialistically. This has relevance to the 'blesser-blessee' phenomenon.

This cultural practice or gender norm of *lobola* led to men believing they have a sense of total ownership of women. A Cameroonian woman is quoted as saying "Therefore, the men own the women for they have bought them, just like shoes, cars or other property. They feel that they can beat them as much as they like – after all, it is their money." Furthermore, domestic violence is reinforced in some African cultures where there is a practice of giving the man a gift of a whip on the wedding day. This is viewed as an instrument with which he can discipline the wife (Nasimiyu-Wasike 2013:123).

It needs to be pointed out that it is not the objective of the current study to offer a critical assessment of the advantages and disadvantages of the African lobola-model. That is beyond the scope of this research. However, where the practice of the model leads to the violation of the rights and human dignity of women, then the researcher disagrees with it and submits that very careful and serious theological reflection thereof is required followed up by decisive action.

4.4 GENDER VIOLENCE

The researcher deems it necessary to begin this section with a definition of Gender violence and, for the purposes of the current study, the source will be the definitions offered by the United Nations General Assembly's Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women (UN General Assembly 1993). Article 1 of the Declaration states:

For the purposes of this Declaration, the term "violence against women" means any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life.

Furthermore, Article 2 states:

Violence against women shall be understood to encompass, but not be limited to, the following:

(a) Physical, sexual and psychological violence occurring in the family, including battering, sexual abuse of female children in the household, dowry-related violence, marital rape, female genital mutilation and other traditional practices harmful to women, non-spousal violence and violence related to exploitation;

(b) Physical, sexual and psychological violence occurring within the general community, including rape, sexual abuse, sexual harassment and intimidation at work, in educational institutions and elsewhere, trafficking in women and forced prostitution;

(c) Physical, sexual and psychological violence perpetrated or condoned by the State, wherever it occurs.

Within the framework of these definitions, the researcher will seek to demonstrate how the 'blesser-blessee' phenomenon contributes to gender-based violence. It is also worth noting here that the researcher will frame his discussion in alignment with Gatobu's contextualisation of heterosexual relationships (Gatobu 2017:62). While it is recognised that there are reports of lesbian and gay relationships having just as high incidences of violence as any heterosexual relationships, it is critical that, for the purposes of the argument set forth in the current study, gender violence be viewed in the traditional heterosexual relationships. The reason for this is because it is in these relationships where, as Gatobu (2017:62) submits, dynamics of violence are documented as basically "power over". The deliberations of the dynamics of violence in gay and lesbian communities are beyond the considerations of the current discussion.

It is also worth noting at this point that the researcher is well aware of the reality that there are instances of gender violence that are inflicted by women on men and he does not deny this. For the purposes of this research, the violence inflicted on women by men will remain the focus.

An actual case of violence inflicted upon a woman involved in a blesser-blessee relationship and that has resulted in death is illustrative here to substantiate the argument of how the 'blesser-blessee' phenomenon contributes to violence. A Mail and Guardian newspaper article relates the unfortunate story of Sharon Otieno, a second-year student at Rongo University in Southwestern Kenya. The writer of the article states that she was allegedly in a relationship with Okoth Obado, the married governor of Migori County who impregnated her. Sharon's mother had the paternity of the baby confirmed. Sharon and Barack Odour, a journalist from Kenya's *Daily Nation* newspaper had arranged to meet with Obado's personal assistance to get Okoth's version of a story that implicated him. Not long after the meeting, the pair were abducted. Odour managed to escape but Otieno was taken to an unknown location. On September 5 2018, her corpse, riddled with stab wounds, was discovered in a forest (Rupiah 2018).

In the interview with Jackie Phamotse, she shared with the researcher that, in her work on researching the blesser phenomenon she discovered that many girls go missing. “Girls disappear. They never come back” (Phamotse 2018). Additionally, in a media interview on eNCA, Jackie shares with the interviewer that her own experiences with a blesser (narrated through the character of Treasure in BARE) led her to the conclusion that, if she didn’t get out of the relationship, she was going to die – he was going to kill her or arrange for her death (Phamotse 2018).

The researcher has in Chapter 2 demonstrated the connections between transactional sex (a key feature of ‘blesser-blessee’ relationships) and its impact on HIV infection rates and how the ‘blesser-blessee’ phenomenon increases the risk and vulnerability to adolescent girls and young women. Reference was also made to the studies by several researchers which demonstrate how gendered power affects the negotiating ability of the adolescent girls and young women for safer sex.

The former Deputy Minister of Health (2004-2007) Nozizwe Madlala-Routledge is the Executive Director of Embrace Dignity, an NGO located in Cape Town which supports women who are trapped in prostitution and human trafficking by offering exit programmes that also empowers the women. In Pretoria News article titled ‘Blessers symbol of prestige with deadly effects: Phenomenon fuelling new HIV infections in young women in SA’ Madlala-Routledge is quoted as saying “women often do not have the power to negotiate safe sex in these relationships, especially as some men offer more money for sex without a condom” (Fallon 2018).

Another article that is illustrative of the gendered power imbalances that lead to violent situations is titled ‘Too scared to even ask him’. It reports of a grim new study that reveals the fear that many young women have of asking their sugar daddies (blessers) to wear condoms or get tested for HIV. Their fear is rooted in the possibility of their older sexual partners becoming violent. The article was written in the context of a protest called #The Total Shutdown in which women marched against gender-based violence, rape, and sexual assault. The article also refers to a study reported by *Times Live* which reveals that, despite some women choosing older partners, there was an admission that the biggest downfall of having a blesser is the fear of asking him to wear a condom. The outcome of the study is the

revelation that the young women feel a sense of obligation to their blessers and these blesser-blessee relationships expose them emotionally and physically to violence (February, 2018).

The challenging essays of Hinga and Gatobu are instructive in this discussion of Gender Violence. Hinga (2013:138) states that her work seeks to highlight the dimensions that abuse and violence against women and children can take as well as exposing the underlying attitudes and factors that render women and children vulnerable. She further asserts that her essay operates on the hypothesis that the contexts and environment in which abuse and violence against women occur is inherently nurtured by patriarchal structures and values. Gatobu's work seeks to demonstrate the inter-connectedness of HIV/AIDS and gender violence. In Chapter 2 of this study, Gatobu's hypothesis was introduced: she contends that the transmission of HIV/AIDS both in consensual and commercial relationships, should be considered as a form of gender violence (Gatobu 2017:62). Both Hinga and Gatobu refer to various aspects of Gender violence which will be discussed next.

4.4.1 Female Genital Mutilation

While this aspect of gender violence may not appear to be relevant to the 'blesser-blessee' phenomenon, the researcher deems it necessary to address it. Through the argument set forth by Gatobu, the researcher will demonstrate how it relates to the phenomenon.

Female genital mutilation (FGM) falls within Article 2 of the UN General Assembly's Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women, as stated previously. Hinga (2013: 142) maintains that it is a form of violence against women and children that often goes unchallenged. This, she reasons, is because it is not only acceptable but mandatory. FGM is a phenomenon that has a high prevalence, especially in Africa. This is supported by a UN statistic that claims that at least 200 million women living today have undergone FGM in 30 countries. It is further assumed that many of these occur in Africa (Gatobu 2017:68).

Female circumcision is an ordeal that hundreds of girls have to endure annually. There is evidence that there are not many societies that have not seen it necessary

that the female body should conform to some preconceived notions of what ideal womanhood should be and so they resort to the manipulation of the female body. Feminists have seen similarities with such diverse practices as Chinese foot-binding, female genital infibulation and other gynaecological practices. These, they argue, arise out of patriarchal values that are uncritically internalised and lead to practices that dehumanise and brutalise women. Shockingly these atrocities are inflicted by women on women (Hinga 2013:142).

Gatobu (2017:68) states that this practice is still very much alive and occurs especially in sections of the African continent that receive less exposure to westernisation. The highest prevalence of this practice occurs in regions that are war-torn and also those which embrace traditional gendered values.

Furthermore, it has been proven that there is no beneficial value of the practice of FGM for girls. Its singular value is to the sexual benefit of the male partners while it restrains the female's sexual enjoyment. Gatobu supports the assertions of Dr Messer who, in an interview, points to the vulnerability of the infection of HIV/AIDS among women in general:

Women everywhere are more susceptible biologically to getting infected. When violence is involved, vaginal or anal tearing can easily occur making the probability of infection even greater.

Gatobu concludes that the incidence of FGM heightens the vulnerability of HIV/AIDS infection, on both a biological and social level (Gatobu 2017: 68-69).

Additionally, the practice of FGM is a signal to society that the girl is now ready for marriage and Gatobu asserts that "the very intention and impact of FGM on the girls is an act of violence." Despite the girl not being ready, both socially or psychologically, for a sexual relationship, FGM signals such readiness and this, according to Gatobu, "is in itself a violation of human rights and an exposure to the vulnerability of preying men" (Gatobu 2017:69). When one views this statement in the light of predatory male sexuality in the newspaper article (Siswali) referred to previously, it can be argued that this has relevance to older male blessers.

Gatobu (2017:69) further highlights that there are untold numbers of girls who have undergone FGM in non-sanitary contexts and, as a result, contracted HIV/AIDS due to the uncensored contact of blood and she asserts that one can only view the practice of FGM and its harmful physical, psychological and emotional impact on girls as acts of gender violence.

4.4.2 Sexual Abuse, Sexual Assault and Rape

“By far, the most humiliating acts of terrorism that women are faced with are the acts of rape” (Hinga 2013:140). Hinga continues to elaborate that females are, from a very tender age, vulnerable to sexual abuse. These are inflicted by what she refers to as so-called child molesters. The case of the 7-year-old girl who was raped by a man in the toilet of a Dros restaurant in Pretoria, is illustrative of this reality; though, of course, this is not the only incident (ENCA 2019). Gatobu also refers to rape of especially young girls when she says reports of the alarming reality that most girls are raped between the ages of 5 and 18. Several girls become easy prey to uncles and so-called cousins because of their trust of these older males who are known to the family by association or immediacy.

Education within family structures about sex and adulthood has collapsed and this has resulted in girls often not even knowing that they have been violated. Furthermore, fear of stigmatisation and a culture of shame has resulted in these girls feeling that they do not have avenues to report these acts of violation. Only when they reach a certain age and are tested for HIV/AIDS do many of them discover, to their horror, that their violations are accompanied by a death sentence. In light of this, Gatobu rightly asks “who would argue against perceiving this as gender violence?” (Gatobu 2017:66-67).

4.4.2.1 Defining Rape

According to the Sexual Offences and related matters Amendment Act of 2007, rape is defined as “Any person (“A”) who unlawfully and intentionally commits an act of sexual penetration with a complainant (“B”), without the consent of B, is guilty of the offence of rape. Sexual assault is defined in two ways:

- (1) A person ("A") who unlawfully and intentionally sexually violates a complainant ("B"), without the consent of B, is guilty of the offence of sexual assault.
- (2) A person ("A") who unlawfully and intentionally inspires the belief in a complainant ("B") that B will be sexually violated, is guilty of the offence of sexual assault (South African Government 2007: 20).

A crucial word in these definitions is 'consent'. The considerations of various interpretations of consent are beyond the scope of the current study. It is sufficient to say, in summary, that there are scholars who question the distinction between rape and consent. One of these scholars is feminist legal scholar Catherine McKinnon who, back in 1987, argued that there are constructions of heterosexual intercourse which claim there is a fine line between the degree of force required to define sex as rape and the pressure that is accepted as normal in everyday sexual encounters (Powell 2010: 68).

Powell (2010: 89) makes reference to the Victorian Crimes Act of 1958 which defines consent as meaning 'free agreement' and adds that there are a number of conditions under which a person does not freely agree. Within the South African context, The Sexual Offences Act of 2007 defines consent as voluntary or **un-**coerced agreement and also stipulates conditions under which a person does not freely agree (South African Government 2007: 16).

Rhodes University in Grahamstown¹¹ has organised an annual Silent Protest for at least 7 years and is claimed to be the biggest protest against rape and sexual violence in South Africa, with participant numbers growing each year (Rhodes University 2019). During his final year of seminary training at the College of the Transfiguration, the researcher participated in the Silent Protest. The reason for his participation was to stand in solidarity with victims of rape and sexual violence. When the silencing element of the protest was broken, the researcher had the

¹¹ The researcher is aware of the new name for Grahamstown being Makhanda. Graham's town was the official name at the time of the researcher's seminary training (2010-2012) and therefore applicable to the event described.

opportunity to hear first-hand the stories of young women who courageously shared their experiences of rape and sexual assault. This led the researcher to reflect theologically on these awful acts of violence which he views as a violation of human rights. This violation of human rights diminishes the inherent worth of women made in the image of God. The result of this reflection was the researcher's conclusion that these inhumane acts of violence must be stopped. As an African theologian, he sees it as his role, along with others, to not only speak out against these atrocities but also to actively work for transformation.

Researchers Evelyn Rose and Seodi White also endorse this view of intimate partner and gender-based violence as a violation of human rights and dignity. In her article Rose argues that IPV against women by men should be conceptualised within international law as a crime against humanity and a state crime. Furthermore, she contends that this conceptualisation of IPV offers a contribution by means of heightened appreciation and understanding of the damage it inflicts on women (Rose 2015: 31,33). White's argument was discussed in Chapter 2.

4.4.2.2 Singular and Gang rape cases

Another sexual assault story that the researcher was exposed to was that of the gang rape of Treasure in Phamotse's book BARE. It is worth mentioning here, again, that BARE is Phamotse's articulation of her own experiences in the form of a novel. The detailed narrative of the horrific gang rape is presented in the opening pages of Chapter 14 of BARE (Phamotse 2017:71-75). Not only was Treasure brutally violated in this incident but she had to endure a subsequent rape later at the hands of a model scout named Allen (Phamotse 2017:99-100). These rape incidences were also referred to in the interview with Phamotse (2018). One can only imagine the trauma that Phamotse experienced as a result of these rapes as well as the sexual acts inflicted on her by her blesser as referenced in Chapter 2 of this dissertation.

Furthermore, the case study of Lulama is also illustrative of the prevalence of gender violence in the form of rape. The following is a synopsis of the case study titled 'Derailed by a sugar daddy'. Lulama is a 16-year-old isi-Xhosa speaking Black

South African adolescent who suffered two separate incidences of rape during the course of a single night after she was asked to run an errand for a neighbour. A review of the narrative records of the traumatic encounters revealed to the researcher that she was accosted by an acquaintance who persisted in his intentions to accompany her. After being subjected to unwanted sexual advances, including groping, Lulama tried to shout to nearby police officers to assist her. Upon the arrival of the police officers, the perpetrator informed them that what they were seeing was his involvement in a domestic dispute with his girlfriend and therefore there was no need for them to intervene. Following the departure of the officers, he proceeded to pull Lulama away and then forced her to his house where he raped her. When he released her much later, she fled but was then tragically accosted again by two other men who dragged her to an empty warehouse where they repeatedly raped her.

She was subsequently diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and depression. A treatment programme commenced but was prematurely terminated after Lulama only attended 11 sessions. Of particular reference to the topic of this research, during the course of the treatment plan, Lulama revealed to the therapist at session 4 that she was involved in a romantic relationship with a 43-year-old man named Siphon for 3 weeks. She was the recipient of expensive clothes and jewellery on a regular basis, thanks to Siphon. Yet she shared that she had not engaged in sexual activity with him and that she believed he only wanted her friendship. At the insistence of her grandmother and with the support of two police officers, Siphon was warned to stop seeing her.

This was followed by further interventions by the therapist, including arranging for Lulama to stay with a friend (Mandisa) and her family. This proved to be a positive step forward as Mandisa's family offered a nurturing and loving environment with lots of encouragement and reassurance. They also helped Lulama focus on her goals for the future. Since then Lulama's mood had reportedly significantly improved and she was much happier – in contrast to the many previous episodes of sadness and depression. Then the derailment of her progress manifested.

At treatment session 6, Lulama disclosed that she had renewed her relationship with Sipho and that he had physically assaulted her when she refused to visit him after school. Later there was a reported shift to positivity where Lulama received two awards for academic excellence at her school's prize giving. The therapist congratulated her on these achievements and used the opportunity to challenge Lulama's negative appraisals that her life had been permanently damaged by the traumas she experienced. However, this positively proved to be temporary as later Lulama prematurely terminated the treatment. The therapist tried in vain to trace her whereabouts and after 6 months contacted her teacher who informed that Lulama had dropped out of school after discovering that she was pregnant. It was also reported that she was living at the time with a much older man (Padmanabhanunni & Edwards 2016).

This case study is evidence of the reality of the traumatic experience of rape and abuse and its harmful effects. Additionally, of relevance to the topic of the current research, it demonstrates the negative impact of the 'blesser' phenomenon on the life of a blessee who was showing so much promise of a hopeful future.

4.4.2.3 Participatory action research describing the ideal safe community

In the youth-led, participatory action research study facilitated by humanitarian Roya Varjavandi (2017) in a district close to central Durban in the Kwa-Zulu Natal Province, the voices of 20 adolescent volunteers were given prominence. They identified various social issues which they assessed to be critical to the context. These included sexual violence, teenage pregnancy and blesser (Varjavandi, 2017:87).

As part of the research design process followed, the participants developed an ideal community map that highlighted what they identified to be essential resources that helped to nurture resilience to the social problems identified. These resources included a hospital, a police station, a Safe Park, and church, street lights. The comments made by participants described their current reality and what they believed should be implemented to transform their communities into the ideal conditions to help them feel safe.

A 15-year-old male participant made this statement; identifying that security and policing in neighbourhoods was inadequate and that they often felt unsafe in their surroundings.

“We want street lights everywhere we go, even at night because a high percentage of crime which is caused by dark roads. You could be followed by someone.”

Another 17-year old female participant conveyed their concern about the risks of public sanitation facilities when she made this statement:

“You can get mugged, even raped, when you go to the toilet at night. There must be a toilet inside and water inside because it’s too far. That needs to be sorted”

(Varjavandi 2017:93).

For the researcher, this connects with Lulama’s environment. One could argue that, had Lulama’s community been better equipped with the infrastructure resources identified above, it could have provided for a safer environment in which she ran the shopping errands for her neighbour. However, in the case of Lulama, even the presence of the police did not prevent the eventual rape that occurred at the hands of her acquaintance. This connects with what Nasimiyu-Wasike (2013:120) says about cases that often go unreported because of the attitude of the police towards domestic violence. Many consider domestic violence as a family affair in which they prefer not to intervene.

4.4.2.4 Acquaintance/date rape

Among the various aspects of sexual abuse/violence and harassment which Hinga (2013:141) describes, the phenomenon of acquaintance rape or so-called date rape is regarded as subtle and probably more frequent incidents of sexual assault. In a research article by James Glanville PhD and Prof Yolanda Dreyer (2013), the authors cite statistics sourced from a 1995 study by Wiehe and Richards which report that the majority of rapes (50%-85%) are inflicted by a known acquaintance and in a residence familiar to the rape victim (61%).

Hinga further elaborates that acquaintance rape involves sexual abuse of a woman by a friend or acquaintance whom the girl trusts rather than inflicted by a stranger.

This trust is abused when the friend suddenly and unexpectedly forces her to have sex. The reality is that these cases of forced sex often go unreported. In the instances where they are reported, it is often difficult for the girl to prove rape because, tragically, it is implicitly assumed that a friend cannot rape (Hinga 2013:141). Hinga's assertions are supported by Glanville and Dreyer who argue that "victims of acquaintance rape are less likely to seek support from friends, family, crisis centres and the police than those who are victims of a stranger rape". Glanville and Dreyer further state that it seems apparent that stranger rape is more easily acknowledged by the court than acquaintance rape; resulting in cases of acquaintance rape suffering a poorer conviction rate than stranger rape (Glanville & Dreyer 2013).

Hinga (2013:141) submits that the consequences of situations of acquaintance rape are the significant numbers of unwanted and crises pregnancies that have beleaguered societies and she furthermore contends that these pregnancies are in themselves a major pastoral challenge for the church. To this pastoral challenge of acquaintance rape, Hinga adds the case of spousal rape that also results in unwanted pregnancies. If one considers the stories which women share among each other, Hinga suggests that there are untold horrors that occur even in the context of marriage (Hinga 2013:142).

4.4.2.5 Spousal Rape

Practical theologians Glanville and Dreyer emphasise that there is a difference between spousal and acquaintance rape. This difference is with spousal rape; the victim is not only familiar with the perpetrator but the spousal perpetrator is intended to be seen as her life partner.

This has relevance for this research study because, even though blesser-blessee relationships occur outside the contractual terms of a marriage relationship, a blesser can be regarded as more than just an acquaintance or friend. He is an intimate partner with whom the blessee has a relationship and he can inflict acts of violence such as sexual assault and rape on her. Moreover, in 'blesser-blessee' relationships, there is the belief that, because a man has bestowed gifts and money on the girl and/or financially provided for her, it is expected that she should not refuse

when the blesser wants to engage in sexual activity with her. This makes it more difficult for her to prove rape. The following statements by participants in the research conducted by Hoss and Blokland (2018:9) serves to substantiate the point.

“The girl has no right to say ‘no’ to sex in the house of the sugar daddy”

Some guys tell the girls “When I bought you a beer, it came straight it didn’t look away”

The participants perceive that older men are prepared to use intimidation and violent force to pressurise the girls. The descriptions of sexual intercourse offered by the girls suggest that they are not always actively participating or willing to sleep with the men.

Comments shared by the participants suggest that the men coerce the girls with violent threats to either pay back the money given to them as gifts or be sexually complicit (Hoss & Blokland 2018:9).

The article by Phiri, referred to earlier, is instructive in this discussion of spousal rape or rape by an intimate partner. What is significant within the context of the current study is that Phiri makes it very clear that her paper offers a theological reflection from an African perspective. “African theology”, Phiri suggests, “is concerned about making Christian theology relevant to the African experience of God. It affirms the importance of African culture, African Traditional Religion, the Bible and the Christian tradition in the way African Christians reflect on God.” Furthermore, she states that her paper will seek to examine the particular experiences of African Christian women with African culture within the context of Christian marriages (Phiri 2002:20).

In her theological reflections, Phiri (2002:22-24) supports her discussions by incorporating the case studies of contemporary women’s experiences in Christian homes. The researcher of the current study will make reference to some of the statements that reflect elements of verbal, physical and sexual abuse and the notions of submission expected as normative of wives.

“Most of the times my husband is very hush (sic). He shouts and scolds me for very minor things. He does not even allow me to explain. So, I keep quiet. So, in that condition, he just demands to have sex with me having not apologised for what he did. Sometimes when I am fasting and he knows about it, he uses me even then and says there is nothing wrong with that...”

“My husband does not preach that violence against women is wrong. We as women are always told to submit and respect our husbands.”

“Although I have not experienced every form of domestic violence, truly speaking, sometimes I feel it would be better if I never got married at all. But, with God’s help, I will still accept and love him as he is.” (Chipo – not her real name)

“My husband is an evangelist but somehow the devil is robbing him. When he drinks alcohol, he shouts at me. He does not give me a chance to explain. He says I think I am a better Christian than he is. Sometimes he listens to my prayers and when he is drunk, he begins to accuse me of the things I said in my prayers...”

“The old mamas tell us not to complain when our husbands are spending a lot of time counselling young girls. Yet we know that those who are spiritually weak are taking advantage of this and you find that in the same church the married men are having affairs with the young ladies. When I share what I am going through at prayer meetings, the old mamas will tell you that you must not ask. We must appreciate our husbands because they gave us their name of being Mrs somebody...”

(Thandi- not her real name)

Phiri explains that the reason why she chooses to examine the experiences of African Christian women is to support her argument that “Christian women are not exempted from experiences of domestic violence in their homes.” This is not to say that only Christian women experience intimate partner and gender violence. As evidenced by statistics already cited, there are significant numbers of women who experience intimate partner violence, irrespective of their religion.

There are beliefs in the African culture that promote gender-based violence that emerge from the stories shared by Chipo and Thandi. The first is the belief that the man owns the woman in a marriage or intimate partner relationship. The researcher

understands this to be related to the African *lobola* model. Phiri refers to research by Purity Malinga where one man is quoted to have said: “In African culture, my wife is not my equal. She is my property. She is like one of my children. I have paid ‘*lobola*’ for her. Therefore, we cannot be equals” (Phiri 2002:24).

There is also the assumption that a married woman should not say no to her husband’s or intimate partner’s sexual advances and therefore sex is used as a weapon of domination in marriage and intimate partner relationships (Phiri 2002:24).

Although it did not emerge in the two stories but it is a belief Phiri considers important to mention because it is life-threatening to women and children. This is the myth that reached its pinnacle in 2001: that having sex with a virgin will cure an HIV infected man of the virus. The consequence of this myth is that many babies, even as young as five months, have been raped (Phiri 2002:25). While Phiri uses the word belief, the researcher views this as a myth because there is no reported medical evidence that having sex with a virgin will cure one of HIV/AIDS.

The researcher regards the above beliefs, assumptions, and myth to be relevant to the blesser-blessee phenomenon.

Nasiiyu-Wasike is correct in her assertion that domestic violence is indicative of the reality that women and men do not enjoy equal power and status in our society. It has been reported that

Men still believe that women are their possessions and that they can do with them what they like if they feel aggressive. They feel that can take their aggression out on their wives and no-one has the right to tell them they can’t. Their belief is thus supported by the community, which turns a blind eye and permits them to get away with it. (Nasimiyu-Wasike 2013:123).

This she says is the main cause of domestic and intimate partner violence but there are other factors that contribute to this complex social problem. According to the writer of an article about curbing violence against women and girls, The *Circle of Concerned Women Theologians*, known as ‘the Circle’, is a multi-religious association of women theologians in Africa which was birthed from the vision of its

founder, Mercy Amba Oduyoye of Ghana. The article focuses on the role that the Circle has played in the struggle to terminate or diminish the rate of gender violence which occurs in West Africa and cites significant contributing factors as the causes of this violence. These, the author says, include economic inequality between men and women, violent measures of resolving conflict, male authority and control (power) and domination of women (Owusu-Ansah 2016).

A detailed discussion of all factors falls outside the scope of this research but one which is of particular relevance to the argument set forth in this study will be discussed next in the section titled Causes of Gender and Intimate Partner Violence.

4.5 CAUSES OF GENDER AND INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE

4.5.1 Patriarchy: The Root cause

South Africa, like most other countries is a patriarchal society. Patriarchy is defined by Rich (1986:57) as:

the power of the fathers: a familial social, ideological, political system in which men by force, direct pressure, or through ritual, tradition, law, and language, customs, etiquette, education, and the division of labour, determine what part women shall or shall not play.

The researcher resonates more with the definition offered by Phiri: "Patriarchy can be defined as a father-ruled structure where all power and authority rests in the hands of the male head of the men." She further states that "patriarchy has defined women as inferior to men, thereby perpetuating the oppression of women by religion and culture" (Phiri 1997:11).

Therefore, the researcher is of the view that Musimbi Kanyoro (1996:5) is correct in her assertion that:

Culture is the leading issue, which has pre-occupied the theology of African women. Culture has silenced many women in Africa and made us unable to experience the liberating promises of God. Favourable aspects of our cultures, which enhance the well-being of women, have been suppressed. Those that diminish women continue to be practised in various degrees of our societies, often making women objects of cultural preservation.

The researcher's view is supported by Phiri (2002:20) who attributes the reasons for this violence to be the patriarchal structures of African cultures which she contends is reinforced by the patriarchy that is found in the Bible. Furthermore, she argues that the lives of African women are significantly shaped by the dominant position taken by both African culture and the Bible. Additionally, Hinga (2013:145) argues that the patriarchal and endocentric culture in which women live is the root cause of the violence they experience. This is evident in the presence of two cultures, both African and biblical which she says is formative of the environment in which women live in Africa.

Biblical history reflects a patriarchal nature where women were often seen as possessions to be used and bargained with in ways that benefitted the men. It is most unfortunate that the Bible is often used to reinforce patriarchy and the church has often shown itself to be guilty of perpetuating the idea of the male as the head and women as subservient and secondary to men.

4.5.2 Commoditisation and Objectification of women

According to Hinga (2013:146), when one examines the biblical culture, it is noticeable how, in many instances, the Hebrew culture that underpins and informs the biblical narratives expresses behaviour that is itself androcentric in nature. There are many incidents, anecdotes, stories, and laws in the Old Testament which depict the handling of women in Hebrew culture as less than human. An example of this is found in the Decalogue which demands that a man should not desire 'another man's wife or his donkey,' implying that the woman and the donkey are related to the man, in the same way, that is, they are both viewed as property or things.

She further argues that, within African religion and culture, one can also find cultural scripts of terror.¹² The conception of a heterosexual marriage relationship bears testimony to the commodification of women. A prime example of this is evident in the Gikuyu language where there is the imagery of what a man does when he takes a woman for his wife. The imagery resonates with the language of the market place:

¹² In reference to Phylis Trible's 'Texts of Terror'

the description being *Kugurana* or *Kugura Muka*. The same root word *Kugura* is used in reference to the acquisition of commodities like sugar, or goats. This becomes even more painfully evident in the case of pregnancy out of wedlock; for example, should a person's unmarried daughter be impregnated, there is a saying that comes into operation namely *Mburi ya ng' ania niiroinirwo Kuguru*. Translated this says 'x has broken the leg of y's sheep. Once more, the imagery in the language reflects women as a commodity equivalent to sheep. It is Hinga's assertion that the manner in which women are perceived as a commodity to be bought and sold is what contributes to the indiscriminate abuse of women. This truth is evident in the unapologetic declaration by some men. A case in point is the shocking defence of the practice of wife-beating in a recent parliamentary debate where an honourable member argued for its justification citing the reason to be that the husband has bought the wife – *amenunua mke* (Hinga 2013:146-147).

The social system of patriarchy and its connections with 'blesser-blessee' relationships have already been established in the discussion of gender norms as a sociocultural factor that contributes to the 'blesser' phenomenon (Section 2.6 in Chapter 2). The initial literature review revealed that several researchers emphasise the gendered nature of the phenomenon and the patriarchal structures, attitudes and norms that underpin the phenomenon. Data in an article by Watt and associates revealed that the norm of transactional sex reinforced the undervaluing and commoditization of women and the title of the article reflected the gendered belief "Because he has bought for her, he wants to sleep with her" (Watt et al. 2012). This reflects the attitude of some men who believe they have ownership over women's bodies because they bought things for the women.

Another article whose title reflects the attitude of ownership (*The Girl is Mine...*) argues that the phenomena of IPV and sex work should not be constructed as mutually exclusive within scholarly literature but can and should be situated under the umbrella of gender-based violence. The authors assert that both IPV and sex work have been described as a consequence of male sexual proprietariness. This, they say, is the perception that women are sexual and/or reproductive property to be owned and exchanged. In their research, they illustrate significant points of

intersection in IPV and sex work to support their thesis (Thaller & Cimino 2017). A significant point of intersection will be discussed later in this chapter.

In order to demonstrate the correlation between the concepts of commoditisation and objectification of women and the 'blesser-blessee' phenomenon, the researcher makes reference to images, captions and slogans on websites that are available on the internet. According to the research study conducted by the Youth Research Unit (YRU) at UNISA, participants in the study elaborated on the existence of websites which are dedicated to the activities connected with the 'blesser-blessee' phenomenon. Examples of these are BlesserInc, Blesserfinder and Blesserfinder Mzansi (Basson 2018: 10). A perusal of these websites and others reveals that, while both older men (blessers) and younger women (blessees) search for the other, it is the language and images used that convey the messages of objectification and commodification. Young women are lured into these transactional sex relationships through the use of material things such as cars, ocean cruises, jets, shopping bags with designer labels. What is more shocking, in the view of the researcher, are the images that are posted of young women who wear as little as possible and whose bodies are flaunted in way that suggests their value and worth is only defined by their bodies and sexuality.

On websites like Blesser-finder and others, one finds descriptions posted by blessers stating some of the criteria that their blessees must meet. In the study of the case of 'blesser-blessee' relationships within a rural university in Limpopo province, researchers Thobejane and associates make reference to such slogans as #UPGRADEYOURWORTH and #YOURPUSSYISNOTCHARITY. The authors of the study argue that these slogans are an attempt to present themselves as a source of female empowerment through their private parts (Thobejane et al. 2017). These websites with their images and slogans are evidence of how the 'blesser-blessee' phenomenon contributes to the commoditisation and objectification of women. The researcher's perusal of some of these sites reveal several images which can be described as pornographic (Facebook 2019) and (Blesser Club 2019).

In light of the presence of such images and slogans, it is worth noting the impact of exposure by youth to pornographic material.

4.5.3 Youth exposure to pornographic material

The participants in the YRU study at UNISA explored the exposure to pornographic material during the focus groups discussions. The findings from further explorations during these discussions revealed that from an early age the majority of young people experienced some exposure to pornography. Furthermore, the focus groups also revealed that an estimated 80-100% of young males and 60-100% of females view pornographic material. The study asserts that such exposure to pornographic material has the potential of influencing the decision-making process of young people and therefore acts as a motivating factor to become involved in risky relationships and unsafe sexual practices. There was agreement among the participants that the 'blesser-blessee' phenomenon is fuelled by exposure to online pornographic material. This is evidenced in a verbatim statement expressed by a male participant of 19-22 years: "Porn encourages this thing of blesser and blessees" (Basson 2018:16).

In her comprehensive assessment of various forms of violence against women and what she proposes as appropriate responses for the Church, Pamela Cooper-White presents a compelling argument about how pornography contributes to gender-based violence. Using several examples of films and printed publications, she demonstrates in very graphic detail how pornography promotes violence against women and girls. She quotes Jane Caputi, an expert on sex crimes against women who summarised several studies and drew several connections between pornography and sexual violence:

1. In many cases, pornography actually is sexual violence, a document of actual degradation, rape and torture.
2. Pornography is used manipulatively to undermine women and children's capacity to avoid or resist abuse.
3. Pornography causes sexual violence through its capacities to normalize that violence, give ideas to receptive male viewers, and break down some men's personal and social inhibitions against behaving in a violent manner (Cooper-White, 2012 pp. e-book).

4.5.4 The need to dismantle patriarchy, its structures and values

In light of all that has been discussed thus far, the researcher concurs with Hinga in her assertion that “patriarchal culture and values that objectify women are, it would appear, the root cause of the abuse that women experience” (Hinga 2013:147). Similarly, Gatobu attributes the major reason for gender-based violence being sustained in Africa to patriarchal systems which she argues are those that demand women to construct female identities that are demeaning and give birth to perceptions of themselves as second place citizens (Gatobu 2017:74).

Therefore, Gatobu, Phiri, and others argue that patriarchal structures must be dismantled. Gatobu (2017:73) asserts that effective intervention strategies should focus on “the need to dismantle patriarchal systems that continue to fuel and maintain the gender violence and breed the perfect contexts for HIV/AIDS to thrive.” At the expense of repetition, it has been demonstrated in the current study that the transactional nature of ‘blesser-blessee’ relationships has significantly enabled the breeding of contexts for HIV/AIDS to flourish.

Phiri (2002:19) contends that sexual violence is a result of patriarchy which she says has made violence a power game. She follows up this assertion with a crucial question: “How then can one dismantle patriarchy to ensure that women and children are protected regardless of what problems a nation or home may be facing?” The Circle (referred to earlier) have, according to Phiri, therefore raised the importance of a theology that addresses the seriousness of the impact of patriarchy on the experiences of women and she cites Dr Nyambura Njoroge who also emphasises the need to dismantle patriarchy:

Patriarchy is a destructive powerhouse, with systematic and normative inequalities as its hallmark. It also affects the rest of the creation order. Its roots are well entrenched in society as well as the church - which means we need well-equipped and committed women and men to bring patriarchy to its knees. (Phiri 2002:19)

4.5.5 Revisiting the transactional sex nature of the blesser phenomenon and its correlation with prostitution

The same study by YRU at UNISA, referred to earlier, states that “the ‘blesser-blessee’ phenomenon can be described as a form of transactional sex, which has a number of similarities with prostitution, as it involves non-marital sexual relationships...” (Basson 2018:4). In the view of the researcher, the non-marital aspect of the phenomenon falls within the definitional range of Gender violence as espoused by Gatobu earlier in this chapter. The current study has in section 2.3 of the initial literature review Chapter emphasised that there are similarities between transactional sex and prostitution, even though it is acknowledged that there are those who argue that there are aspects of transactional sex that differ from prostitution and sex work. The researcher articulated his stance that transactional sex and the phenomenon of ‘blesser-blessee’ relationship is to be viewed as a form of prostitution. The findings of Basson’s study also revealed that participants in the focus group discussions described the ‘blesser-blessee’ phenomenon as a form of prostitution as evidenced by the following verbatim quotations: *“Yes, that’s what we say, they’re prostitutes” (Female participant, 19-22 years). “It is prostitution because she is selling her body” (Female participant, 16-18 years). “It is the same thing as prostitution. They are prostituting themselves. There are better ways to get money, I honestly think for struggling girls it is not the only option” (Male participant, 16-18 years) (Basson,2018:11).*

4.6 EXPOSING THE RECRUITMENT PRACTICES WITHIN THE ‘BLESSER-BLESSEE’ PHENOMENON AND ITS CONNECTIONS WITH HARMFUL CRIMINAL ACTIVITIES

The study by YRU in exploring the ‘blesser-blessee’ phenomenon identified the prevalence of the practice of recruiting girls for blesser and that third parties participate in these recruitment practices. The involvement of club owners and waitresses who lure young girls in clubs and introduce them to blesser was mentioned by participants in the study (Basson 2018:15-16). This indicates that there is a recruitment process practice within the ‘blesser-blessee’ phenomenon. It is also significant to emphasise here that participants in the study also elaborated on the correlation between the ‘blesser-blessee’ phenomenon and certain criminal activities including drug use, rape, and sex trafficking. A 19-22 years of age female participant in the study is quoted as reporting “For someone who started as a

blessee, they grow to be slave queens, then after being a slave queen, they start recruiting girls...from being a slave queen to a trafficker” (Basson 2018:15-16). These practices demonstrate the multifaceted and complex nature of the ‘blesser-blessee’ phenomenon.

Phamotse also uncovers the above practices in her book BARE and refers to what she calls the Hockey Club (Phamotse 2017:149-153). In her interview with the researcher, she confirmed the recruitment practices and affirmed its connections with human trafficking. The interview with Phamotse helped to broaden the researcher’s understanding of the ‘blesser-blessee’ phenomenon and also his understanding of human trafficking. Up to the contact with Phamotse, the researcher had a limited perspective of human trafficking that involved only incidents where girls were thrown into a car boot or a container and shipped off to foreign countries or where they are recruited under the disguise of job offers such as modelling or other careers but are then forced into prostitution. The following verbatim statement reinforces that trafficking is not just about abducting a girl and throwing her into a car boot:

“...who find themselves in those kinds of situations where it is not as easy as you picking up a child in the street and throwing them in a boot...” (Phamotse 2018)

The following are verbatim statements which reflects evidence of some of the activities and the practice of even training some girls to lure and recruit others:

It seems like entertainment so you would go to dine, have fun and then obviously all these sexual things happen. But once you are in it, they sort of sculpt who they want.

Because now you are in their environment, it is their territory; and they sculpt you out.

And when you are in their environment it is difficult for you to say, “I will not do that, I do not want to do this.”

They have a whole network of people that do different things. Whether it is the drugs solicitation, whether it is organ transfers - where they recruit girls

and then they steal certain parts of their bodies and you find girls disappear, they never come back.

So, a girl would now get into this environment and she would be taught how to lure other Girls.

She will be given different options to say “Okay, we need new recruits, there is a World Cup or there is this event, we need new recruits with different kinds of things. We need drug smugglers, we need people who do money laundering, we need this, we need that.

(Phamotse 2018).

Previously, the researcher mentioned the NGO called Embrace Dignity. This organisation expresses their commitment as “ending prostitution through law reform, public education and by supporting prostituted persons’ to exit the industry.” It is the belief of the organisation that

Calling prostitution sex work legitimises it and disguises its inherent violence and harm. While women in the industry experience different degrees of abuse, coercion and violence, all of them are physically and psychologically harmed. There is no denying that prostitution and trafficking are intertwined, based on the commodification and objectification of human beings and sex.

Grizelda Grootboom is one of many women who was assisted and empowered by Embrace Dignity. A video of her interview on News24 appears on the Embrace Dignity website and tells the riveting story of how she was recruited into the harmful web of human trafficking and forced prostitution by someone she believed to be her friend (Embrace Dignity 2016).

The Executive Director of Embrace Dignity, Nozizwe Madlala-Routledge, wrote a letter of petition on 10 December 2014 which was addressed to the Speaker of National Assembly and the Chairperson of the National Council of Provinces. In the letter she appeals to Parliament to help end the oppression of prostitution and sex trafficking and, to reinforce her proposal, she makes reference to a study on prostitution and trafficking conducted in 9 countries (Madlala-Routledge 2014).

The International study that Madlala-Routledge refers to is a 2003 study by Melissa Farley and associates in which they interviewed 854 people who were involved in prostitution in 9 countries, including South Africa. The study found that 71% of respondents were physically assaulted, 63% have been raped and 68% met the criteria for Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (Farley, et al., 2003). It further reported that “the severity of PTSD symptoms of participants in this study were in the same range as treatment-seeking combat veterans, battered women seeking shelter, rape survivors, and refugees from state organised torture” (Farley et al. 2003:56).

Having established the connections of ‘blesser-blessee’ relationships with prostitution and human trafficking and in the light of these disturbing statistics, the researcher will next summarise the harms of prostitution; as gleaned from the review of the current scholarship.

4.6.1 The harms of prostitution and trafficking

In the edited work by Maddy Coy titled ‘Prostitution, Harm and Gender Inequality’, Meagan Tyler delivers a persuasive argument about the harms of prostitution. Tyler begins by making the profound assertion that the very acts of prostitution are in and of themselves viewed as harmful. This is the case even in the absence of any additional act of physical or sexual violence. She elaborates further by saying that “the sex required in systems and institutions of prostitution is seen as objectifying and dehumanising, as a violation of women’s human rights and even as a form of violence against women” (Tyler 2012:88).

Based on her review of social science, sociology and medical literature, Tyler has identified 3 substantial types of harms; namely the significantly increased likelihood of experiencing physical and sexual violence, the psychological harms (particularly post-traumatic stress and dissociation) and the experience of harm associated with the sex of prostitution.

4.6.1.1 The harms of physical and sexual violence

The statistics cited by Farley and team in their study emphasise the evidence of physical assault and rape. The report on the study by Farley et al. concludes that

prostitution is multi-traumatic irrespective of where and how it takes place (Farley et al. 2003:60).

4.6.1.2 Psychological harms

Tyler contends that there is an inherently harmful aspect of prostitution, especially if one considers the implications for psychological health. Tyler says that, here again, the work by Farley et al. (2003:56) provides support for this contention. Included in their study was an element that sought to assess the frequency of PTSD among people who were working in various types of prostitution. According to the most authoritative diagnostic text for mental disorders, *The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM)* produced by the American Psychiatric Association, PTSD can occur after exposure to:

Extreme traumatic stressors involving direct or indirect personal experience of an event that involves actual or threatened death or serious injury; threat to one's personal integrity, witnessing an event that involves death; injury or a threat to the personal integrity of another person; learning about unexpected violent death, serious harm, or threat of death or injury experienced by a family member or other close associate (Farley et al. 2003:36).

As was already mentioned, 68% of the overall sample met the DSM criteria for a diagnosis of PTSD. Farley et al. state that "most prostitution, most of the time, includes these traumatic stressors" (Farley et al. 2003:36). Supported by the evidence contained in the study by Farley and associates, Tyler suggests that one needs to take into consideration both the trauma associated with the sex of prostitution itself as well as the psychological stress. The case of Lulama's diagnosis of PTSD and her treatment which was derailed by a sugar daddy (blesser) and was previously presented in this chapter is instructive for the current study of 'blesser-blessee' relationships and gender violence.

4.6.1.3 The harm through the sex of prostitution

In linking together both sociological research and feminist theory to explore not only the physical and psychological harms associated with prostitution, Tyler also conceptualises what she terms 'the sex of prostitution' (Tyler 2012:88).

She elaborates that what is seen as defining prostitution is the sale of sex or sexual services, that is, the commercial aspect. As Tyler says “the problem is not the sex that is required in prostitution but the fact that it is bought and sold. The researcher understands this to mean the exchange of money or gifts for sex which has relevance to the ‘blesser-blessee’ phenomenon.

Supported by Barry’s work in *Female Sexual Slavery* of 1979, Tyler suggests that “to focus primarily on the economic dimension of prostitution can obscure what is really at the centre of prostitution, which is sex. She goes on to say that

It is not just a woman’s body that is used in acts of prostitution. The person or self cannot be separated from either the body or the sexual services performed in prostitution.

An integral relationship exists between the body and the self. The connection between mind, body, and self bears testimony in the lived experiences of prostituted women. Evidence of this is found in several sociological studies which have revealed that what is inflicted upon women’s bodies in prostitution has severe emotional and psychological consequences including dissociation and PTSD. Dissociation is regarded as a coping mechanism by women in a variety of prostitution contexts and “can be understood as an attempt by prostituted women to separate what is happening to them in prostitution from their own concept of self” (Tyler 2012:93-94).

It is worth noting Barry’s contention that women who have not experienced brutal physical trauma have also employed dissociation as a coping mechanism. She has noted that the strategy of maintaining emotional distance and dissociating can be likened to ‘what female teenagers, lovers, and wives report in the experience of objectified sex’ (Barry 1995:31 quoted in Tyler 2012:95). According to Barry

Commodification is one of the more severe forms of objectification; in prostitution, it separates sex from the human being...Sexual objectification dissociates women from their bodies and therefore their selves (Barry 1995:29 quoted in Tyler 2012:95).

Tyler offers her explanation of Barry’s suggestion in this way:

Sexual objectification not only defines prostitution but also constitutes one of its harms. She notes that the sex of prostitution is the 'reduction of oneself to sexual object' and that this objectification can be seen as destroying human dignity (Tyler 2012:95).

One of the consequences of being involved in 'blesser-lessee' relationships, as identified by participants in the YRU focus group discussions, is the emotional impact on the lessee. The study reported that, for the most part, the girls who were involved with a bleaser have experiences of very low self-esteem, feel worthless, disrespected and perceive themselves as being a sex object (Basson 2018:15).

Tyler concludes her discussion by asserting that the conceptualisation of the sex of prostitution is helpful in connecting the various harms of prostitution. The researcher has previously discussed the concepts of objectification and commodification and its relevance to the bleaser-lessee phenomenon.

According to Coy, there is extensive literature documenting women's experiences of sexual objectification and she points to such researchers as Farley and others including Tyler. She also makes reference to Nussbaum whose work provides an elaborate conceptual framework for objectification, defined as 'seven ways to treat a person as a thing' (Coy 2012:109). Furthermore, Coy refers to some of the findings that emerged from life story interviews and art workshops that constituted elements as a part of a creative methodology. This methodology, Coy states, created opportunities for a deeper exploration of the lived experience of the women participants. A significant finding was the perception by several women that they were reduced to a body (Coy 2012:117).

The researcher here emphasises a significant similarity between the outcomes of the methodology described above and the one described in Chapter 3. This similarity is found in exploring and discovering the lived experience of women involved in bleaser-lessee relationships.

Additionally, the life story interviews and art workshops (titled 'MyBody MySelf') revealed emotions associated with prostitution that were, predominantly, matching

those expressed by women to describe the legacies of sexual abuse and violence. These include shame, guilt, hating the body, blame and alienation from the self (Coy 2012:111).

In their work of reframing Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) and sex work as intersectional spaces of Gender-Based Violence, researchers Thaller and Cimino note that one of the parallel characteristics of IPV and sex work is the concept of shame and stigmatisation and they continue by saying that these are experiences of women who engage in sex work. They conclude their discussion on gendered shame and stigmatisation by emphasising that it appears to be easier to lay the blame for violence against women on the women than it is to acknowledge harmful and established gendered cultural beliefs (Thaller & Cimino 2017:207-208).

The experience of shame and stigmatisation as expressed in the research by Thaller and Cimino is consistent with the experiences of blessees as reported in the research by Hoss and Blokland and Basson. The interview participants in Tembisa described their perceptions of girls dating sugar daddies as having a negative emotional impact on the girls. Additionally, girls experienced fear of being judged and punished for their behaviour, forcing the girls to remain silent and some hide their relationships. This results in feelings of shame (Hoss & Blokland 2018:7). Similarly, in the YRU study, Basson states that there are emotional and social impacts on young girls who engage in blesser-lessee relationships and she adds that the emotional and social impacts are inter-related. Stigmatisation by the community is the reported experience of young girls who engage in blesser-lessee relationships. The results of this stigmatisation are loss of personal dignity and also loss of respect and support of friends and family members (Basson 2018:15).

In Chapter 1, the researcher identified research questions that form the basis of his reflection on the blesser-lessee phenomenon. One of these questions is 'How has a biblical term "bless" come to be used in the context of this phenomenon?' In the next section the researcher will offer an analysis of the biblical term "bless" in order to develop a theological reflection as it relates to this research study.

4.7 UNDERSTANDING THE BIBLICAL MEANING OF “BLESS” THROUGH AN ANALYSIS OF KEY BIBLICAL TEXTS

By way of introducing this section the researcher makes reference to the first Religion, Gender and Sexuality in Africa Conference hosted by the College of Humanities at the University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN) in May 2018. The conference, held at the Pietermaritzburg campus, brought together more than 65 religious, gender and sexuality scholars and activists from around the Global South who presented papers and performances (University of Kwazulu-Natal 2018).

In an article in the City Press titled ‘Blessed but not by God’, journalist Vuyo Mkize reports on the Conference and states that the traditionally theological notion of being blessed has taken on a warped new meaning. The researcher sees this warped meaning as being in agreement with Madumise’s assertion that the term blessers is a perverted misnomer. Mkize further reports that theologians and religious scholars have called on the Christian Church to take a stand and speak out on what she terms the “wrongful popularisation” of the term blessed. One of the speakers who attended the UKZN Conference is Professor Beverley Haddad. She was one of the scholars who took issue with the label (Mkize 2018).

Haddad posed a crucial question that has relevance to the research question for this study. She is quoted as asking “For me, the question is why is a theological notion such as ‘blessing’ being popularised to symbolise financial blessing acquired through transactional sex?” She continues by challenging the lack of research being done on the subject and the apparent silence by the church on the matter. To quote Haddad:

To my knowledge, no systematic work is being carried out on the subject despite the fact that the theological notion of ‘blessing’/‘blesser’ is obvious. Yet the church has been strangely quiet on the matter. There has been little consternation in the public realm, let alone prophetic witness and action by the church on the ground [against the perversion of the use of the term blessed]. Feminist African women scholars of religion and theology are not surprised. The church has shown little interest in addressing gender concerns within its own patriarchal practice and has been mostly quiet in the South African context of intimate partner violence (Mkize 2018).

The researcher agrees with Haddard and Madumise about the perversion of the use of the term 'blessed'. Furthermore, the researcher has also identified the lack of research on the blesser-blessee phenomenon especially from within the church and this was identified in the Research gap within Chapter 1. Therefore, this study seeks to address this gap and it is hoped that the researcher's analysis of the biblical term 'bless', as it relates to the 'blesser-blessee' phenomenon will make a contribution to the field of Practical Theology and begin to advance theological reflection and discourse on the subjects of transactional sex and intimate partner violence. This is a need that Haddard has identified. Haddard also offers a critique of prosperity theology:

The hashtag blessed community of young urban women epitomises the values of neoliberal capitalism in its most extreme forms. They choose to harness the tools of prosperity theology and link their desire for material wealth with the unmediated power of God, who intervenes and takes the wanting out of waiting. In so doing, they cover their actions in spiritual sanction.

Mkize reports of Haddard's contention that there is a need for both the African women's theology and the church at large to investigate the prosperity gospel's impact on the values and ideologies of young women (Mkize 2018).

It needs to be pointed out here that, while the researcher is well aware of the arguments in favour of and against prosperity theology, it is not the intention of this study to offer a critique of these arguments and it is beyond the scope of the study to investigate the impact of the theology on young women as suggested by Haddard. Furthermore, a thorough and detailed exegesis of all the biblical texts containing the word "bless" is an area within the discipline of Biblical Studies and therefore falls outside the scope of this study. Recognising that such an extensive treatment of the word and its biblical meanings are not within the researcher's field of expertise, he will offer an introductory coverage of some of the texts dealing with the term 'bless', with relevance to the central argument of the current study.

4.7.1 Old Testament (OT) sources and meanings

The Hebrew word for the verb ‘bless’ is בָּרַךְ (barak). It usually indicates the action of pronouncing good things upon the recipient. Its most frequent occurrence is within Genesis; Deuteronomy and Psalms. Its earliest occurrence is in the Creation narrative “And God blessed them”.

Blessing comes from God who is the ultimate source of blessing in the OT; though sometimes this is implied rather than stated. At the heart of God’s blessing is God’s presence (Gen 26:3 and 24) and God’s presence also implies God’s protection (Gen 12:3). The Priestly Blessing, also known as the Aaronic blessing (Numbers 6:24-26) is regarded as perhaps the most important blessing in the OT and refers to God’s presence with the metaphor of God’s face. Just as God blesses humanity, we can also bless God in worship. The formula “Blessed be God” is found in many places throughout Scripture (Mounce 2006:67-68). It is significant to note that, after God creates the world and creatures, we find the words “and God saw that it was good”; when God creates human beings, we find the word ‘very’ before good. For the researcher this signals God’s affirmation of the worth and value of God’s creation.

The Hebrew word for the noun ‘blessing’ is בְּרָכָה (Bĕrakah). This also denotes the pronouncement of good things on the recipient or the collection of those things themselves. Bĕrakah first occurs in the OT when God calls and blesses Abram (Gen 12:1-3) and in the midst of this blessing, God declares that Abram “will be a blessing” (12:2). The question is how? Abram and, by implication, his descendants are to be a blessing to the nations through the promise that is in Abram, “all the families of the earth will be blessed” (12:3 cf. Isa. 19:24; Zech. 8:13). God will bless the world through his people. Ultimately, God fulfils this promise to Abram by sending Christ as Abram’s seed (Mt 1:2). God’s blessing brings righteousness (Ps 24:5), life (Ps 133:3) and salvation (Ps 3:8). (Mounce 2006:70).

4.7.2 New Testament (NT) sources and meanings

The Greek word for the verb bless is εὐλογέω (eulogeō). This means “to bless, praise, thank” someone. This notion of praise and thanksgiving is used in various relationships in the NT. God and Jesus bless people (e.g. at Jesus’ ascension, Lk

24:50), especially by giving them salvation (Acts 3:26; Gal 3:9). Paul speaks of “the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places (Eph 1:3). God’s blessing is to give his people spiritual blessings in life here and now and eventually welcome them into His eternal kingdom. When Elizabeth cries out to Mary, “Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the child you will bear!” (Lk 1:42), she is indicating how much God has blessed Mary in being chosen as the mother of the Christ child. We can bless God. When we do so, we “praise” God for who God is, for what God has done and what God will do. People can bless one another. For example, Melchizedek “blessed” Abraham as he returned from war (Heb. 7:1, 6-7), and Jacob “blessed” the sons of Joseph upon his death (Heb 11:21). Blessing on such occasions may involve material blessing, but they also involve an act of human kindness and acceptance (Mounce 2006:69).

There are two Greek words for the adjective ‘blessed’. εὐλογητός (eulogētos) means “blessed, praised.” In Mk 14:61, the high priest asks Jesus, “Are you the Messiah, the Son of the Blessed One?” In Jewish circles at this time, there was a reticence to speak the name of God, God was given the title of “the Blessed One.” Most of the uses of eulogētos are in the NT letters and are used in the sense that God is to be blessed or that praise is bestowed on the Lord (Rom 1:25 and 9:5; 2 Cor 1:3; 11:31; Eph 1:3; 1 Pet 1:3).

The other Greek word for the adjective ‘blessed’ is μακάριος (makarios). There are two major ways makarios may be taken in the NT. Firstly, a makarios individual is “happy” or “fortunate” because of life’s circumstances. In 1 Cor. 7:40, Paul says that the widow who remains unmarried is “happier” remaining as she is. Secondly, makarios conveys the idea of being especially favoured: “blessed, happy, or privileged.” This is particularly true of the individual who receives divine favour, as in the blessings cited in the Sermon on the Mount in Mt. 5:3-11. Mary is proclaimed “blessed” because she believed the report of Gabriel (Lk. 1:45). (Mounce 2006:70)

The Greek word for the noun ‘blessed’ is εὐλογία (eulogia). For the most part, eulogia is used to refer to the blessings God bestows on others as well as the blessings and praise he receives. Blessing God involves both words and thoughts

that magnify, honour and praise God's being, nature and attributes (Rev. 5:12-13 and 7:12). Such praises are acts of worship. Saying a blessing or offering thanks for food and participating in the Lord's supper are examples of responding to God's blessing by offering a blessing (1 Cor 10:16). The word eulogia also refers to the benefit of a blessing received (Rom 15:29). Blessings come from God in the realm of the natural (Heb. 6:7) and the supernatural (1 Peter 3:9). The ultimate blessing is salvation (Gal. 3:14); Eph. 1:3). People also have the capacity and responsibility to bless others; in 2 Cor. 9:5-6, Paul uses eulogia 4 times for the "generous gift" he is collecting for fellow believers in Jerusalem (Mounce 2006:70-71). In these and following verses the attitude of generosity is encouraged. God is the one who is most generous in bestowing gifts and blessings and as can be seen from the above references and meanings, God's blessings result in only good things for the recipient.

Considering these understandings of blessing, bless and blessed and God as the source of blessing which results in, not harm or danger, but rather what is good for the recipient, the researcher contends that the use of the term as it relates to the blesser-blessee phenomenon and transactional sex is indeed questionable. The researcher has demonstrated the impact of the phenomenon on teenage pregnancy, the increase in the HIV/AIDS infection rates and how the phenomenon enables intimate partner and gender-based violence. In light of this, one needs to question how young women are being 'blessed'. It can be argued that, indeed, the word blessed has been distorted and perverted. Therefore, the researcher is in agreement with Haddard and other scholars who call on the Church and its leadership to take a stand on this wrongful use of the word.

4.8 A CALL FOR THE DOWNFALL OF BLESSERS

The youth participants in the participatory action research study referred to previously, call for action to be taken to ensure the downfall of blessers. In the research, the youth identified the phenomenon of blessers as a problem for girls and the right of the girls to say 'no'. Through the participatory activities as part of the research design, the participants identified a theme called "staying away from blessers" which linked to the contextual risks of sexual violence and transactional sex as problems. To demonstrate that the problem of blessers must be addressed,

the participants took as their inspiration the #Fees must fall slogan to create posters with #rape must fall and #blessers must fall slogans. They also created a photo story titled #Why Blessers Must Fall.

In the participation action research, study a 16-year-old participant shared her first experience with a 'blesser':

I was accompanying my sister to the salon and was waiting outside. This man old enough to be my granddad stops in front of me in his car and was like come here and showed me a couple of R200s. I just said hell no, leave me alone. He called me foolish for refusing. I told him my mum has more money! From my point of view, it's a mid-life crisis.

In her report of the study, the facilitator highlights that there is much that one should unpack in the statement which suggests that "the man's actions are part of a phase that he will grow out of, rather than being harmful gendered behaviour." The representation of the issue of peer pressure in one of the photo stories created can also be viewed as replicating the notion that the 'blesser' phenomenon is perpetuated by women's choices and that women bear the sole responsibility to avoid blessers. This again reinforces the predominantly gendered nature of the phenomenon in that men are seen to be absolved of their responsibility to re-examine and amend their behaviour (Varjavandi 2017:96).

The YRU study at UNISA concluded that the 'blesser-blessee' phenomenon is extremely dangerous for the blessee participants in the relationship. It exposes them to unsafe sexual practices, the risk of contracting HIV infection and being impregnated at an early age in their life; not to mention the emotional manipulation sexual exploitation and being drawn into criminal activities such as sex trafficking (Basson 2018). In the case study research of Lulama, the authors quote Leclerc-Madlala (cited in Chapter 2 of the current study) to express their agreement with the dangers of transactional sexual relationships as put forward by Basson; being that these relationships render girls vulnerable to the risk of exploitation and domination by older, wealthier men, also to physical and sexual abuse, unplanned pregnancies and sexually transmitted infections (Padmanabhanunni & Edwards 2016:84).

4.9 PRELIMINARY CONCLUSIONS

This chapter set out to argue the central premise of this thesis: that the ‘blesser-blessee’ phenomenon contributes significantly to a patriarchal and shame-oriented culture that objectifies woman and it is this culture that is the root cause of violence against women. This argument was presented within the framework of an extended literature review of various sources, both primary and secondary. The primary source was an interview with Jackie Phamotse, the author of the book *BARE: THE BLESSERS GAME*. The secondary sources included journal articles (including those which incorporated actual cases), books, filmed interviews and relevant newspaper articles.

Using relevant material from the initial literature review presented in Chapter 2, this Chapter built on this foundation to develop the central argument as described above. Framing the argument within the context of the current social problems of Gender Violence and Intimate Partner Violence, the researcher introduced the Chapter by presenting key statistics to emphasise the extent of the problem and the need for an urgent response.

Through the use of, mostly African scholarship, the researcher developed the argument by establishing the phenomenon within the context of gender-based and intimate partner violence and the social system of patriarchy. The social issues of IPV and GBV were defined and discussed, with relevant cases and extracts from interviews and other research studies conducted on the ‘blesser-blessee’ phenomenon to reinforce the argument. Various forms of violence against women were discussed such as wife-beating, Female Genital Mutilation and rape.

The concepts of commoditisation and objectification of women were discussed within the context of the social system of patriarchy. The researcher demonstrated the relevance of these concepts and their interaction to the blesser-blessee phenomenon and also how the phenomenon contributes to commoditisation and objectification. Parallels between these concepts and pornography were drawn with relevance to how pornography fuels the phenomenon.

Through emphasising the similarities between transactional sex and prostitution and sex work, the researcher exposed certain recruitment practices within the blessing-bleesee phenomenon to highlight its connections with criminal activities like sex trafficking. The publications of an NGO involved in supporting women involved in prostitution and human trafficking, together with key research studies were the basis for showing the connection between prostitution and human trafficking.

The harms of prostitution were presented to emphasise both the physical and psychological impact on women and girls involved in the industry. Trauma, especially Post Traumatic Stress Disorder and depression were found to be one of the significant harms. The researcher also incorporated the concepts of commoditisation and objectification to highlight what one scholar conceptualised as the 'sex of prostitution' to connect the various harms. This conceptualisation highlighted that many women perceive themselves as being a mere sex object. It can be argued that this diminishes their full humanity made in the image of God.

One of the key questions of the current study was revisited; being the distorted use of the biblical words 'blessed' and 'blessing'. Through an analysis of the biblical use and meanings of these keywords, the researcher concluded that the synonymous use of the word with transactional sex indeed causes a perversion and distortion of its original meaning.

The chapter concludes by re-emphasising the negative impact that the phenomenon has on the lives of adolescent girls and young women who are blessees. Chapter 5 presents relevant information from the interviews conducted with young women.

5. CHAPTER FIVE: INTERVIEWS AND ANALYSIS

5.1 INTRODUCTION

Through the extended literature review in the previous chapter, the researcher argued that the ‘blesser-blessee’ phenomenon contributes to gender and intimate partner violence and concluded that the phenomenon has a significant negative impact on adolescent and young women who are the blessees. The researcher did not only consult secondary sources but also integrated key primary source information from his interview with Phamotse.

In this chapter, the researcher will draw on further primary information sourced from the ‘living human documents’. These are the women who agreed to share their stories and experiences of being in relationships characterised by violence, abuse and exploitation. Through employing the narrative approach, the researcher invited the participants to share their stories verbally and some in writing.

5.2 PARTICIPANT DEMOGRAPHICS

In chapter 3, the researcher emphasised the challenges he encountered in securing interviews and explained why it was possible to ultimately consult with only 5 women. Furthermore, for the reasons mentioned in the methodology chapter, the researcher had to enlist the assistance of a co-researcher who met with the women. The ages of the women interviewed range from 28-33 and the geographical location is suburbs close to the inner city of Johannesburg.

In the interviews, they shared that they reside at *mnyamandawo*. In his consultation with a domestic worker known to the researcher, he found that this word is comprised of two parts; *mnyama* which means ‘darkness, no electricity’ and *ndawo* which is ‘a place’. The domestic helper also advised the researcher that this is often an abandoned building with no electricity and often without water and the environment is characterised by high levels of crime and violence and is generally not a safe place for anyone, let alone children. This is also supported by the context shared by a participant:

"I don't like this place where I'm living because it is not safe, there's a lot of drugs and crime happening..." (Siphosethu, aged 33)

Four out of the five women originate from the Eastern Cape and one from Kwazulu-Natal. In the findings below, fictitious names are indicated to protect the identity of the participants.

5.3 KEY FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

The unstructured interview questionnaire designed to guide the narrative approach sought to first invite the interviewee to share information about her upbringing, home life, relationship with parents/caregivers, education and her life in the community. The reason for this is to enable the interviewer and researcher to develop an understanding of her context and to demonstrate the willingness of the interviewer to understand her background and story. In the research study conducted by Masilo and Makhubele, their observations noted that the females that are particularly vulnerable and becoming involved with blessers are those still attending school or university or those who are unemployed and from less fortunate family environments (Masilo and Makhubele 2017: 9630).

5.3.1 Home, family life and upbringing

Four out of the five participants shared that they were raised by their grandparent(s). In the majority of the cases, the interviewee, together with their siblings, were left in the care of their grandmother. The number of siblings ranged between 4 and 8. Some gained siblings through re-marriage by one of their parents. Reasons for being left in the care of a grandparent ranged from one of the parents leaving because of re-marriage or for an unknown reason. They reported that they experienced love and support from their grandmother, though some reported that their stepmother did not treat them with kindness and rather favoured her own children. This is evidenced in the following statement: *"...my father got married to another woman and my mother left us with my father. Life was not easy at all, the stepmother had 3 children. They were treated better than us. Our father loved us and we had good times with him"* (Ethel, aged 28).

In the majority of the cases, the home circumstances were described as difficult. In one case the following is reported: *“my father lost his job, the wife left him with children, and it was not easy for my father... my brother worked hard to support us. He is now working and has 3 children and a wife. My sister is doing well with her husband and 3 children, myself with 5 children, 2 staying in a children home and two I stay with, one is with my older sister and my younger sister is working as well with one child. I am the only one struggling”* (Ethel, aged 28).

5.3.2 Challenges to completing education

In all 5 cases, the participants reported not continuing school to grade 12. In 3 of the cases, the reason was attributed to being impregnated. While one participant did not expressly state that she was pregnant, she did report that *“I stopped at grade 11 because I got involved in a relationship when I was too young, age 15...”* Later she does share that she has 5 children. Masilo and Makhubele quote Setlalentoa who says that *“it is through a family that a child learns to learn”*. They further contend that *“the nature of the parent-child relationship is important.”* In substantiating their point, they quote McGoldrick and Shibusawa who assert that *“teenagers who do not have a close bond with their parents are at greater peril of having a teenage pregnancy”* (Masilo and Makhubele 2017: 9630).

5.3.3 Participants’ experience of violence, abuse and exploitation

All 5 participants reported experiences of violence, abuse and exploitation. While the textual records of the interviews did not in all cases expressly state that it was at the hands of a blesser, the analysis of the text does indicate that acts of violence and abuse were inflicted on the participant by a man. Research studies indicate that, in many cases, adolescent girls and women who engage in transactional sex relationships often refer to their partners as boyfriends (Basson 2018:4). This is evidenced, for example in 1 case: *“I had a boyfriend, the father of my first two boys, he was very abusive, treated me very bad, beat me forced me to sleep with him any time any day. He was not drinking alcohol; he was stealing cell phones and sell them. He was always having money. He wouldn’t want me to be with other people. He was controlling. It was not easy like get out of that relationship. I don’t even want him next to me or my kids he is a monster”* (Zoliswa, age 30).

"I have been in an abusive relationship before. The man was very abusive because he was doing everything for me. Men are like that when they do things for you, they treat you like thresh, they sleep with you the way they like at any time, even if he comes home late you don't have to ask anything he just wake you up and want sex because he thinks he owns you. He even tells you that you are nothing. He does everything for you" (Nolitha, aged 29).

"I was depending on a man who was paying rent. He was my blessing. He was doing everything for me but will come home early mornings and forced himself on me. Even if I don't want. Men are abusive in a way that they change you as a person" (Ethel, aged 28)

"I was involved in a relationship that was abusive where a man will force me to sell my body and bring money. He will do things for you, buy alcohol and treat you like a nothing to him" (Nobuhle). It is significant to note that, in Nobuhle's case, she was recruited into prostitution and sex trafficking under false pretences by someone who claimed to be her friend. She was promised a job which would enable her to provide for herself, her child and the rest of her family. She reported being happy and excited at this prospect, only to discover that, upon arriving in Johannesburg, her friend was involved in prostitution and forced her to participate.

This was also the case with Siphosethu who was also promised by a friend that she would get a job and also have opportunities to study. "I came to Johannesburg, life was not good, and I had to sell my body for survival."

The experiences of these women as shared in their stories are all evidence of abuse, violence and exploitation and is consistent with the secondary literature sources which have been discussed thus far. The experiences of Nobuhle and Siphosethu are also consistent with the literature consulted regarding recruitment into sex trafficking and prostitution.

Furthermore, it is also noteworthy that the women also expressed the notion of men believing that they have ownership over their bodies because the men provide for

them. This, too, is evidence that the lived experience of the participants is consistent with the secondary literature.

Additionally, the women experienced feeling trapped in relationships and without options to exit the relationships because of the dependence on men as blessers. Evidence of this is found in the following statements:

*“I don’t have a choice because I’m not working, I’m depending on the man”
(Siphosethu)*

“I realise that it is not easy to come out of a relationship where you are being abused especially when that person is doing everything that you ask for. You end up being bonded to it” (Nobuhle)

It is significant that the word bonded is used. This connects with the words bondage which has similarities in meaning to slavery. In the preceding chapter, the researcher demonstrated the linkages of the blesser phenomenon with human trafficking and prostitution, especially forced prostitution. Nobuhle and Siphosethu’s lived experience of being recruited into these activities is instructive in this analysis. Researchers such as Beatrice Okyere-Manu argues that problem of human trafficking is one of the major crises facing South Africa. She also emphasises that it is referred to as modern day slavery because of its similarities to slave trading activities in colonial Africa. Her paper further argues that “any theological and ethical engagement must take the lived experiences of victims into consideration” (Okyere-Manu 2015:117).

5.3.4 Participants’ perception of blessers and men in general

As the women shared their stories and experiences, the researcher observes from the textual records that the women expressed very strong emotions when they described their perceptions of men in general and blessers in particular. This is evidenced in statements such as the following:

“Depending on a man is not a nice thing. I hate men. I look at them I have anger even before they talk, I attack them. Blessers are destroying women. They are

abusive and think they own women. I hate them because our children can't even listen to us because of them. They buy expensive cell phones, clothes and alcohol for our children. They take them on their expensive cars, they sleep with them and children end up not listening to us as parents because we can't even provide for them. It's so painful to see our children falling into the same path we have walked. In the beginning, the relationship is good, the person treats you like a queen but at the end, you become a slave. Problems in a broken relationship are Abuse, anger, children also getting affected negatively.” (Nolitha)

“Where I stay with them (children), it is not safe, especially for a girl child. Men are very cruel here they can abuse her because I fight a lot with them. I hate men I hate them in a way that before he can start talking, I swear at them. I attack them before they open their mouth to defend myself. I hate men, I hate them” (Ethel).

“Yes, men are always abusive, there are good men but very few, it is painful to be abused, the only thing I don't want is when they abuse children and they like young girls because they can control them easy. I cannot allow any man to abuse my children; I can sturb them to death. So, it is better to be alone than to have someone who will give you everything but abuse you and your children” (Zoliswa)

“I think blessers are not a good idea because they provide everything but they control one's life. They normally target young children, look at our children because we cannot afford expensive clothes for them; the blessers do so, they buy expensive cell phones. Buy expensive alcohol, drive nice cars, and our children like those fancy things and hoping it will last, they end up taking drugs because these people force them to do whatever they want as they own them. Once you are in it is not easy to pull out. How are you going to pay the money he has spent on you?” (Siphosethu)

“I think blessers are abusive and they should be a rested as they mostly take young girls. They buy expensive phones for them that the parents can't afford, they buy expensive labels of clothes. They are also involved in drugs as they force the blessee to sniff drugs and sleep with them. They are controlling their lives. Blessers need to be arrested as they are doing crime” (Nobuhle)

The above sentiments from the participants reveal a very distressful narrative of the lived experiences of these women. While it is unfortunate that most of them view all men in the same light, it is understandable given their experiences of how men abuse, exploit and violate them. For the researcher, this signals the extent of the impact that blessers have on blessees who experience physical, mental and emotional abuse. The findings also give the researcher the sense that they also experience a degree of helplessness as they see the blessers exploiting and abusing children in their communities. They have expressed hopes and dreams for their children and they perceive the blessers as predators who destroy their children's full potential and chances of a bright future.

Furthermore, the women's perceptions of men in general to a large degree provides an explanation of why the researcher, being a male, found it very challenging to secure the interviews with blessees. This was the reality for a significant portion of the duration of this research study. This addresses one of the research questions of the current study: In what way can a male clergy engage therapeutically with a young woman?

The majority of the participants view blessers as having a negative impact on the lives of women and, as in Nobuhle's case, goes so far as to describe their actions as criminal and therefore blessers should be arrested. The women's perceptions of the negative impact of blessers is consistent with the secondary literature sources as discussed in Chapter 4.

5.3.5 Coping strategies of participants

As the women shared their stories, the findings revealed that there is a prevalence of using alcohol to ease or numb their pain and suffering. Evidence of this is found in the following statements:

"I drink a lot, I used to fight with him because he treated me very bad. I fought him and ended up at the police station" (Ethel)

“People are very judgemental especially to us who stay here at mnyamandawo. They see us drinking they don’t know what we are going through” (Nolitha).

“I had to do things that I didn’t like because he was my provider. I ended up drinking alcohol to ease the stress” (Siphosethu)

“I started drinking alcohol to ease the frustration and pain” (Nobuhle)

For the researcher, this coping mechanism of using alcohol described above connects with what Coy describes as one of the coping mechanisms of dissociation. In her research, Coy discusses how dissociation is a way that women deal with objectification. She cites research conducted by Farley and others who she says support her own research which revealed a strong feature that emerged from women’s accounts with objectification. This included

the need to separate the thinking, feeling self from the physical body – ‘switching off’ to avoid feeling ‘degraded’; ‘pretending I wasn’t there’; feigning enjoyment as a distraction; using substances to alter mood and dull sensation.

She continues by referring to one of the interviews in her research with Jackie who described using vodka and cocaine ‘just to get me through the night...every day to keep my mind off what I was doing’ (Coy 2012:109, 112).

5.3.6 Participants’ experience of being judged and their responses to counselling

To the question of ‘How would you describe society’s view of blesser relationships’, the participants responded that they experience being judged by others and especially by the church. This discourages them from attending worship services and belonging to a faith community. The researcher is of the view that this judgementalism further enables the shame-oriented culture as described by Wimberly (Wimberly 1999:13).

Furthermore, these attitudes alienate our sisters in Christ and, instead of affirming their status as citizens in the household of God (Ephesians 2:19 NRSV), it alienates them from this household of God.

In his Foreword to 'We Were Baptized Too', quoted in Germond and de Gruchy's 'Aliens in the household of God', Archbishop Emeritus Desmond Tutu's words are rightfully critical when he says "we reject them, treat them as pariahs, and push them outside the confines of our church communities, and thereby we negate the consequences of their baptism and ours. We make them doubt that they are the children of God, and this must nearly be the ultimate blasphemy" (Tutu 1997:ix-x). While Tutu's words in the book refer to the topic of homosexuality, the researcher deems them relevant for the current study.

When asked about whether the interviewed participants have received counselling, they responded that they do not see the need for counselling. They express the belief that it is not necessary and that they find support from other women with whom they share similar experiences. This could be as a result of the judgement they experience from others, especially from the Church; as evidenced in the following statements:

"I never receive any counselling; I don't see why I should go and share my pain anyway. It is now over. Even if I go to church who can I talk to? I don't need that people look at me and talk about my pain, it's ok I cope, I have my sisters that we share our sorrows. The church should be supporting, people walking with us through the pain" (Nolitha)

I never receive any counselling. I don't think I need it as we share with our sisters here. We share our sorrows and troubles. I do go to church and I don't talk to anyone because you share your pain because people judge you. Especially here at mnyamandawo where they always see us drinking, they always say we are lazy; we want free and easy life but they don't know our pain. We always drink to ease our pain, struggles and sorrows. Churches should be supportive, not judge people. But we are sinners to them" (Ethel)

“I never receive any counselling, the church should be giving support but they judge a lot those people, especially the charismatic churches. I rather stay where I am” (Zoliswa).

From these statements, the researcher observes the use of words like ‘pain’ and ‘sorrow’ and ‘struggles’ which indicate these emotions are part of the lived experiences of these women. This indicates the existence of trauma as will be explained in Chapter 6. They also express that they deem it important that the church walks alongside them. The researcher understands this to suggest that they need a pastoral caregiver to journey with and walk alongside them and those who experience violence, abuse and exploitation. Furthermore, they also need the support of the church to help them out of their current circumstances and to enable them to fulfil their dreams, wishes and hopes.

5.3.7 Hopes, dreams and aspirations of a brighter future: An encouraging picture

Another interview question sought to uncover if the participant has hopes and dreams and what strategies or steps have been or being taken to achieve those dreams. The reason for this is to acknowledge the participant as being a person of inherent worth and to affirm that she has the potential to achieve her hopes and dreams. Additionally, it is also to help the researcher identify in what ways he may be able to empower the participant to achieve her full potential. The importance of hope in Pastoral Care is emphasised by Steyn and Masango who state that “in times of difficulty hope will become the motivation to continue with this life, even to those in the midst of great suffering” (Steyn and Masango 2012). The responses to this question are very encouraging. All the participants expressed their hopes, dreams and aspirations of a better life in the way of safer and healthy accommodation, a secure job and to see their children obtain an education that will ensure they have better life experiences. Additionally, what is even more encouraging is that the participants envisage their capacity to achieve their hopes and dreams independent of a blesser. All 5 participants indicated that they perceive the importance of securing a job and have taken positive steps to achieve this goal. They have prepared a Curriculum Vitae (CV) and are actively circulating this essential

document at various places of employment. This is evidenced in the following statements:

“My strategies to get what I’m wishing for; I have been taking my CV to different shops for employment. I sometimes go and do washing for people” (Nolitha, aged 29)

“I have already prepared my CV. I have sent it to different shops. I sometimes get piece jobs, to be able to buy food for my children. I started my small business where I’m selling cigarette, sweets and small beer. To enable myself to pay rent and pay for my child school fees. I want to make my life better” (Ethel, aged 28)

“I have dreams and wishes. I always wanted a job but no luck. I tried to send my CV but I don’t get it. I always wanted to have my own place. I have my own place but it can be nice to get a safe place” (Zoliswa, aged 30)

“I had dreams and hopes: I always wanted to live a better life, have my own place to stay, my children to be educated, I always wanted to get a job and work for my children. I am working on it, as I submit my CV to the shops. I sometimes do part-time jobs” (Siphosethu, aged 33).

“My dream is to have my own house where I can stay with my children. I would love to get a better job. I am submitting my CV” (Nobuhle, no age indicated).

The fact that these women have prepared CV’s suggests that they do have some skills and abilities to secure employment. They should be affirmed in these skills and abilities and also encouraged and given support to further develop these skills and acquire new skills to increase their chances of securing employment. They should be given opportunities to participate in skills development programmes.

5.4 PRELIMINARY CONCLUSION

The purpose of this chapter was to present and analyse the primary sources as it relates to the blesser-blessee phenomenon. The primary sources constituted

interviews with 5 women who, through the method of narrative or storytelling, shared their lived experiences.

The findings in many ways proved to be consistent with the secondary literature. Women experience violence, abuse and exploitation as a result of being involved in blesser-blessee relationships. The living conditions of the women were characterised by crime, violent and as being unsafe.

Women reported feeling trapped and enslaved in these relationships. As a result of their lived experience of abuse, violence and exploitation, they also experience trauma, being judged and shame. These experiences led to them perceiving no need for counselling but rather to find support with other women who shared similar experiences.

The findings also revealed instances of recruitment into sex trafficking and forced prostitution. They expressed very strong hatred and dislike of men in general and blessers in particular. Overall, the sense is that blessers are viewed in a negative light with some reference to their activities being described as criminal and there was a call for blessers to be arrested.

On a positive note, the women shared their hopes and dreams and expressed a willingness to take proactive steps to lift themselves from their current circumstances.

They emphasised that the church should not adopt judgemental attitudes but rather walk alongside, seek to understand the lived experiences of and to support women who are abused, violated and exploited.

The next chapter will seek to begin this process of journeying with our sisters in Christ. It will offer a framework as a foundation from which a pastoral care and healing methodology can be formulated.

6. CHAPTER SIX: TOWARDS A PASTORAL CARE AND HEALING INTERVENTION

6.1 INTRODUCTION

¹⁸ 'The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,
because he has anointed me
to bring good news to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives
and recovery of sight to the blind,
to let the oppressed go free,
¹⁹ to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour.'¹³

These are the recorded words of Jesus as he read from the scroll of Isaiah in a synagogue in his home town of Nazareth (Luke 4:18-20). Through these words, Jesus declares his anointed mission and purpose. He has come to bring good news to the poor, to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free. The oppressed could well include all who are held in slavery and bondage, those who experience being trapped in relationships that are abusive and are subjected to exploitation and violence, those that are under the burden of oppressive structures, beliefs and values. The oppressed could also include those who society holds in low esteem, are viewed as having little value and treated as objects and second-class citizens. It is to these and all who live under oppressive structures that demean, dehumanise and shame, that Jesus came to liberate.

6.2 WHO ARE THE OPPRESSED AND CAPTIVES WITHIN THE 'BLESSER-BLESSEE' PHENOMENON?

In the preceding chapters, the researcher has demonstrated how young women and adolescent girls are abused, violated and exploited as a result of being involved in blesser-blessee relationships. Through consulting both secondary sources and engaging with the 'living human documents', the researcher has argued that the 'blesser-blessee' phenomenon contributes to a shame-oriented and patriarchal culture that objectifies and commodifies women. This results in gender-based and

¹³ Scripture references source: (Anon., 2005)

intimate partner violence. Correlations between the blesser-blessee phenomenon and forced prostitution and human trafficking were demonstrated. It has been stated that these practices are regarded as a form of modern-day slavery which violates the human rights of women and diminishes their dignity (Gabhan 2006:528).

6.3 DEFINING THE PURPOSE AND SCOPE OF THIS CHAPTER

The purpose of this chapter is to offer a foundation and framework from which a pastoral care and healing intervention can be formulated. It is important at this point to emphasise that the formulation of a comprehensive pastoral care and healing model and its implementation within the church will be the focus of the researcher's doctoral thesis. This dissertation serves to begin the process by means of journeying with those who are wounded and traumatised.

As part of constructing the framework of a pastoral care intervention, the researcher will seek to demonstrate how the application of the principles and techniques of Narrative therapy can be applied and integrated with Pollard's Positive Deconstruction model.

It has been stated that gender-based and intimate partner violence and abuse inflicted on women is a global health problem of epidemic proportions requiring urgent action. This violence results in trauma and PTSD (Madlala-Routledge 2014), (Farley et al. 2003:34,56). Therefore, the researcher contends that this calls forth from the Church a pastoral and ethical response. It calls on clergy and pastoral counsellors, from the laity (members of the church who are not ordained) and those in ordained ministry, to journey with those who are wounded to experience healing that will bring them to a place of wholeness.

In the initial and extended literature review chapters of this study, the researcher established connections between the social system of patriarchy and its connections with the blesser-blessee phenomenon and he argued that patriarchy is the root cause of violence and abuse inflicted on women. This research study furthermore demonstrated the need for the dismantling of patriarchy, its structures and values that demand women to construct female identities that are demeaning and give birth to perceptions of themselves as second place citizens. Through grounding this study

in African scholarship, the researcher also emphasised the evidence in both Biblical and African religion that supports the central premise of the study.

While reference was made to certain biblical texts which highlight the androcentric context of Hebrew culture, Hinga contends that there are values in the Biblical tradition which contradict the patriarchal ones and which the church could appropriate in its attempt to construct a response to the issue of violence (Hinga 2013:147).

In the Creation narrative in Genesis (Genesis 1:27), we find that women and men were created in the image of God. This means that, just like men, they should be treated with human dignity. Hinga further submits that, as the Church seeks to discover an appropriate response to the issue of violence against women, Christians should look to Jesus as their model and that it would be useful for the church to ask ourselves: “What would have been Jesus’ response to the problem” (Hinga 2013:148)?

6.4 JESUS AS THE MODEL FOR THE CHURCH IN ITS ATTEMPT TO RESPOND TO VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

Wimberley speaks of a shame-oriented culture. He is of the view that, as a way of coming to grips with this shame-oriented culture, what the world needs today is to mimic how Jesus felt about himself. Wimberly further states that his mission is to embark on an in-depth exploration of Jesus’ self-understanding, his relationship with others and his ministry. In doing so, he expresses that it is his hope that as we emulate Jesus, we can be motivated to discover our God-given possibilities (Wimberly 1999:13-14).

With relevance to the current study, the researcher, therefore, poses the question: What do the biblical narratives tell us about Jesus’ relationships with women during his life and ministry in First-Century Palestine? What was the mind of Christ? Wimberly teaches us that “we contemporary Christians can learn a lot by trying to emulate the mind of Christ Jesus” (Wimberly 1999:13).

We need to also understand the context in which Jesus grew up and lived out his ministry. Hinga (2013: 148) asserts that, in his teaching and ministry, Jesus significantly transcended the patriarchal culture in which he was raised. New Testament and Theology Professor James Borland states that women were frequently regarded as second-class citizens. To support his assertion, in his online article adapted from his book titled 'Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood: A Response to Evangelical Feminism', he points to scholars (Hurley 1981), (Evans 1983), (Spencer 1985) who document the place of women in the first-century Roman world and in Judaism (Borland 2017). In summarising what these authors put forth, Ben Witherington III concludes that "It is fair to say that a low view of women was common, perhaps even predominant before, during and after Jesus' era" (Witherington III 1984:10).

Scholars like Rebecca McLaughlin PhD agrees with Hinga by saying that Jesus was stunningly countercultural and crossed ethnic, religious, gender, and moral boundaries. She points to the example of when Jesus engaged with a Samaritan woman who later became an evangelist to her people (John 4:1-30) (McLaughlin 2019). Similarly, Professor Mary J Evans describes Jesus' approach to women as "revolutionary" for his era (Evans 1983:45). Borland reinforces the researcher's view on women when he states that "For Christ, women have an intrinsic value equal to that of men. Women are created in the image of God just as men are. Like men, they have self-awareness, personal freedom, a measure of self-determination, and personal responsibility for their actions (Borland 2017).

Biblical scholars Frank and Evelyn Stagg and Gilbert Bilezikian find no recorded instance where Jesus disgraces, belittles, reproaches, or stereotypes a woman. These writers claim that examples of the manner of Jesus are instructive for inferring his attitudes toward women and show repeatedly how he liberated and affirmed women (Stagg & Stagg 1978) (Bilezikian 1989).

Of particular relevance to the topic of the current study within the context of gender violence, the account of the woman caught in adultery demonstrates what Jesus response would be to issue of violence (John 7:53-8:11). The manner in which Jesus handles the situation shows that his attitude stands in stark contrast to the

received Jewish wisdom which stated that a woman who committed adultery deserved capital punishment. Hinga highlights that Jesus went beyond just rescuing the woman from her accusers. He went on further to challenge the underlying sexism implicit in the double moral standards which were evident in the encounter. Jesus challenges the would-be executioners to examine their own hearts. While Jesus did not condone the woman's actions, he decried the violence that the men were about to inflict on her as 'equally', if not more, sinful (Hinga 2013:148). By showing the woman grace and compassion, he liberated her and empowered her to 'go and sin no more.'

In a different context in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5:27-30) Jesus' teaching on adultery makes a radical statement when he places the blame for adultery not on women as it was customarily viewed but rather on the lustful inner attitudes that men have about women. The researcher here refers to accusations directed at women today that the kind of clothes she wears invites men to abuse her.

Hinga contends that it is these lustful attitudes that lead to sexual abuse of women. In his teachings Jesus demands a high level of discipline on men when he claims that should they as much as look at a woman lustfully, they have already committed adultery. She further submits that

if the church reinforced this teaching of Jesus that abuse of women arises out of sinful attitudes in the men, instead of blaming the victim as the church often tends to do, we will have progressed significantly on the way towards the liberation of women and the restoration of their dignity (Hinga 2013:148-149).

Jesus models for us a way forward in our search for appropriate responses to the problem of gender violence and abuse. He does this not only in his teachings but also in his praxis in relation to women. It is clear that Jesus resists the prevailing contexts that objectified women (Hinga 2013:149).

There are many other examples of Jesus' encounter with women which can model for us the way in which we need to treat women in our contemporary society. The

researcher is in agreement with Borland when he emphasises Jesus valuation of women:

Jesus demonstrated only the highest regard for women, in both his life and teaching. He recognized the intrinsic equality of men and women, and continually showed the worth and dignity of women as persons. Jesus valued their fellowship, prayers, service, financial support, testimony and witness. He honoured women, taught women, and ministered to women in thoughtful ways (Borland 2017).

The researcher submits that this way of viewing, treating and ministering to women, as Jesus did, will make a significant impact in any pastoral care and healing intervention that the church can formulate as it seeks to empower women and enable them to experience the liberating promises of God.

Having now followed Wimberley's advice of emulating Jesus as the model of pastoral care and seeking the mind of Christ as exhorted in Philippians 2:5-8, he will, in the next section discuss the narrative therapy approach. Wimberly states that, in his attempt to address the shame-orientated culture characterised by a lack of purpose and meaning in life, he employs the method of narrative or storytelling which is found so often in scripture (Wimberly 1999:14).

6.5 NARRATIVE THERAPY APPROACH

As a foundation on which to begin to formulate a pastoral care and healing intervention, the researcher began the narrative approach by inviting women to tell the stories of their lived experiences of abuse and violence at the hands of blessers. This was done through the use of interviews and the findings of these interviews were discussed and analysed in Chapter 5 of this study. A significant theme that emerged was the participant's experience of judgement and shame.

In her introductory text to Narrative therapy, Morgan (2000:2) points out that "Narrative therapy seeks to be a respectful, non-blaming approach to counselling and community work, which centres people as the experts in their own lives."

Morgan's use of 'respectful' and particularly 'non-blaming' is what the researcher would like to extract from the above description as he sees it to be relevant to the 'blame and shame' paradigm that exists in our society even today.

6.5.1 The effects of living in a shame-oriented culture

My understanding of Wimberly's argument, presented earlier of modelling Jesus, is that we should look to Jesus as the model of pastoral care and to study Jesus' sense of self-identity and self-worth. Then I believe we can come to an understanding that our identity is not defined by the views held by our society or community but, rather, our identity is rooted in Christ. When we are helped to come to this understanding, we can be free of the labels that others ascribe to us and also be liberated from the 'shame' that comes with those labels.

In augmenting the above, the researcher resonates with the assertion by Chené Swart when she points to the unfortunate practice whereby, we have acquired ways of speaking about others with labels. The result, she contends, is that we are left feeling no connection to others as human beings. Swart further argues that the consequences of this labelling practice are that the labels turn human beings into objects that can be analysed, judged and scrutinized. This, she says has the effect of dehumanising people. She cites examples of such labels as 'feminist', 'rebellious teenager', 'gay nurse', 'negative team', 'violent nation' (Swart 2013:17-18). The researcher would add 'homosexual teacher', 'promiscuous or loose girl'.

The problem with these labels is that it names the problem but in such a way that the individual, team or community is the problem. The negative effects are that the person takes the label into their identity and begins to talk about themselves in this way as well. This means they have internalised the story (Swart 2013:35).

Returning to Wimberley, he speaks of the internalisation of shame and refers to a shame-based personality that internalises the negative images of one's group identity and such images, he argues, undermine one's basic sense of well-being. As a way of supporting the afore-mentioned statement about mimicking the way Jesus felt about himself, Wimberly asserts that there is no clinical or psychological evidence that Jesus suffered from a shame-based personality. He continues in his

contention that it is possible to argue that Jesus had consistently been exposed to shame and humiliating situations throughout his adult ministry. Yet it seems Jesus never suffered from the internalisation of shame (Wimberly 1999:39).

The relevance of the discussion up to this point about the name, blame and shame culture, the internalisations of narratives that make the person the problem and the internalisation of shame, as it relates to the current study, is that the labels that society assign to blessees and the way in which society judges and blames them, causes them to internalise the shame and this erodes their sense of worth as human beings. The labels and the shame associated with those labels have the effect of dehumanising these young women.

Morgan speaks of dominant stories and Swart speaks of dominant saturated narratives that make the person the problem and results in the internalisation of the narrative and the shame associated with that narrative.

6.5.2 Dominant stories/dominant problem-saturated narratives and their effects

Both Morgan (2000:5) and Swart (2013:23) agree that humans are interpreting beings. This means that we have daily experiences of events that we seek to make meaningful. The researcher also agrees with Wimberly in his assertion that we currently live in a fractured world comprising of many competing worldviews from which we must choose in order to bring meaning to our lives (Wimberly 1999:17).

According to Morgan (2000:6-8) a dominant story is that story where one has selected certain events to which one has given emphasis and prominence over others. Wimberly calls this process 'privileging'. We give meanings to our experiences constantly as we live our lives. A narrative is like a thread that weaves the events together, forming a story.

Swart (2013:168) defines a dominant problem-saturated narrative as that narrative in which the person is seen as the problem, the reason for the problem and the cause of the problem and she adds that kinds of narrative reflect that the problem is

all there is to the person; the problem-saturated narrative becomes the only story possible about that person.

In the view of the researcher, the relevance of this to how it relates to the current study is that the dominant story of being a blessee becomes the only story possible about the young woman and this leads to her feeling trapped in this narrative. This leads to her concluding that this is the “story of my life” and “this is the way it is”. This becomes her “truth” (Swart 2013:21).

An effective strategy or technique that narrative therapists can employ in narrative work is to help the person to separate their identity from the problem for which they seek assistance. White and Morgan point us to this technique in what they call externalising.

6.5.3 Externalising of the problem

“Externalising” is an approach to therapy that encourages persons to personify the problems that they experience as oppressive (White & Epston, 1990: 38). Morgan describes it as a process through which the narrative therapist begins speaking about the problems in ways that situate it separately from the person and their identity. She further explains that this approach is based on the premise that the problem is the problem, as opposed to the person being seen as the problem (Morgan 2000:17).

In the case of the blesser-blessee phenomenon, the woman who is the blessee is not the problem. As was discussed in Chapters 2 and 4, the problem is the social structures, beliefs and social norms that reinforce patriarchy and the objectification and commodification of women that leads to violence. The problem is also the socio-economic conditions that perpetuate poverty and cause many women to see engaging in blesser-blessee relationships as their only options.

There are many benefits or advantages that result from the externalising of problems but the most compelling is that the technique begins to disempower the effects of labelling (Morgan 2000:24) and it also opens up new possibilities for

people to take action in taking back their lives and relationships from the problem and its influence (White & Epston 1990:39).

The researcher chooses to use the word narrative where Wimberly uses conversations. In another work, Wimberly reinforces the idea that humans are interpretive beings who seek to find meaning and purpose in their lives. He reminds us that our growth, development and interpretation of life occurs through our internalisation of conversations that span across generations and within a variety of contexts. These conversations, Wimberly highlights, originate from a variety of sources and they all impact us. Yet, he asserts, that it is our responsibility to choose how we internalise them and make decisions about how they influence our lives. While he acknowledges that our interactions and experiences with different groups and conversations do affect us, we still have agency or the power to create meaning through the process of privileging. This privileging is a process by which we articulate our current story and the conversations that construct our stories, our assessment of the story and its impact on our current lives, and the decisions we make to re-author or re-edit the story conversations. He continues by emphasising that the goal of pastoral counselling is to ensure that we increase our agency or capacity to privilege. (Wimberly 2003:26).

In her discussion of externalising conversations, Morgan informs us that this externalising makes allowance for exploring the relationship between the person and the problem. She continues by saying that “when we keep in mind that people are in a particular relationship with the problem for which they seek help, this opens possibilities for re-authoring conversations (Morgan 2000:28).

Wimberly further elaborates on the goal of pastoral counselling by stating that “it provides the space for examining negative conversations that we have internalised, but counselling is also about facilitating the privileging of positive conversations so that one can move forward in one’s life and vocation.” He further asserts that, as human beings striving for meaning, we are never fully satisfied with negative conversations. For he says

Negative stories always impoverish the person, positive stories enhance and enrich. Negative stories lead us away from God and ultimately to sin and

death; positive stories lead us toward a relationship with God. There is something within us that lures us to internalise positive stories and conversations that give our lives true meaning and purpose.

(Wimberly 2003:26-27).

The researcher finds connections between what Wimberly states above within the field of pastoral counselling and he resonates with what communication pathologist and cognitive neuroscientist Dr Caroline Leaf has to say within the field of neuroscience. Originating from South Africa and now making a living in the USA, Dr Leaf asserts that

“We are *wired for love*, which means all our mental circuitry is wired only for the positive and we have a natural *optimism bias* wired into us. Our default mode is one of being designed to make good choices. So, our bad choices and reactions were wired in by our choices and therefore can be *wired out*.”

(Leaf 2013:14)

In describing the process of externalisation, Wimberly cautions that it is not the same as psychological projection, which he says defends the ego from anxiety. On the contrary, Wimberly contends that the externalisation process emerges when a person comes to the realisation that, up to that point, he or she has been living their life in an attempt to avoid internal pain. He says that “externalisation is the decision to face the pain caused by privileging negative stories and conversations.” Wimberly further describes externalisation

“As a process of reflection that helps persons to look at ways their recruitment takes place and the impact that recruitment has on growth and development. A point of externalisation is to lessen the impact of negative conversations and to promote more positive conversations through exploring one’s recruitment” (Wimberly 2003:27-28).

In order to understand what Wimberly means by recruitment, we need to consider the messages that society bombard us with through various media. Wimberly (2003:10) contends that, for several numbers of people, it is tempting and too easy to listen to what society says we should be. Within our society and culture, we are

instructed as to what we need to be successful, become rich, buy this car, live in this house, get married, have these many children.

In the context of the current study, the researcher proposes that one could add to the list above: this particular branded handbag or shoes, prominent brands of laptops, cell phones and tablets, style of imported hair, seen to be socialising in high profile nightclubs and associated with certain profiles of people who can bless you with overseas trips and open the doors to lucrative business opportunities.

Wimberly also refers to values and attitudes in society like carrying a gun will make you important, step on your colleague if he or she gets in your way to the top, trust nobody, love only yourself, and get what you can for today. These values, he contends, are derived from the marketplace where you are only as valuable as the goods you possess. The only things of value you have are things you can sell in the marketplace—your talent, your skills, your looks, and your information. In the marketplace, humans are viewed as commodities that can be bought and sold. What you are worth means how much money you can bring in. Wimberly states that we are recruited by society and media into internalising these messages that dehumanise and diminish the image of God within us. These messages also stand in stark contrast to the message contained in Scripture. According to the Bible, being a person of worth and value means being embraced by God's love despite our faults and human limitations (Wimberly 2003:10).

With relevance to the current study and in light of the above discussion on dominant, problem situated narratives, externalisation of the problem and privileging conversations, the researcher proposes that an appropriate pastoral care and healing model should help those wounded and traumatised as a result of being involved in blesser-blessee relationships through the narrative therapy techniques described above. The narrative therapist should help blessees to externalise the problem and to help them see that they are not the problem. Blessees should be helped to assess the negative narratives that they are recruited into and to explore positive, life-giving narratives that help them move from shame to self-worth. Most importantly, the blessee should be given the opportunity to share their stories and experiences and to ensure their voice is heard.

In Chapter 3, the researcher referenced Swart and Morgan who emphasize on 'Taken-for-granted ideas and beliefs' within society that informs the narratives of our lives. Swart informs us that part of narrative work and its approach is to discover, acknowledge and unpack the societal beliefs and ideas that serve to assist the problem story (Swart 2013:71).

Morgan is in agreement with Swart and the process of unpacking of beliefs and ideas is what Morgan calls deconstruction. The researcher views this as having relevance to the Positive Deconstruction model of Nick Pollard, which will be discussed in the next section.

6.6 INTEGRATION OF POSITIVE DECONSTRUCTION AND NARRATIVE THERAPY: TOWARDS A MODEL FOR PASTORAL CARE AND HEALING

In working with blessees who are wounded as a result of being involved in blesser-blessee relationships, the researcher is influenced by Morgan who asserts that "problems only survive and thrive when they are supported and backed up by particular ideas, beliefs and principles." Therefore, the researcher is interested in discovering, acknowledging and deconstructing these beliefs, ideas and practices of the broader culture in which the blessee lives that serve to assist the problem (Morgan 2000:45).

As has already been mentioned, Pollard explains that the process is 'deconstruction' because he is seeking to help people to take apart what they believe in order to look carefully at the belief and analyse it. The process is 'positive' in the sense that this deconstruction is done in a positive way – in order to arrive at something better. Pollard (1997:44) says that "it is a positive search for truth."

In seeking to explain his model or theory, Pollard uses the analogy or parable of restoring a motor vehicle. He describes the first car he bought as an undergraduate student. The chassis was good and most of its bodywork was satisfactory. But he says those two elements were about all that could be said in favour of the car. He describes the engine as being worn out, the gearbox had a pitiful crunching nature and the car had a broken suspension. The car barely got him around and it was

really not any good. After some time passed, Pollard discovered another car of the same make and model which was unfortunately written off in an accident. Nevertheless, there were lots of new parts which were in good condition. So, he immediately bought it and set out to take both cars completely apart. Rather than ascribing his work to that of a vandal engaging in negative deconstruction, Pollard described his process as that of the positive deconstruction of a mechanic. He examined each part, assessed its condition and discarded that which was not good and retained that which was good. After eventually assembling all the pieces, he successfully started the car and discovered he now had a very good car. Not much was left of his original car. Rather than being sad, he was overjoyed because the result was something far better (Pollard 1997:44-45)

This parable or analogy very accurately describes the process of positive deconstruction. As Pollard says, its goal is to arrive at something better. In order to offer the church a framework towards the formulation of a pastoral care and healing intervention in response to the blesser-blessee phenomenon and within the current context of gender and intimate partner violence, the researcher will next demonstrate the application of Pollard's model to the topic of this study.

The process of positive deconstruction

According to Pollard (1997:48), the process of positive deconstruction involves four elements:

- Identifying the underlying worldview
- Analysing the worldview
- Affirming the elements of truth it contains
- Discovering its errors

In the discussion that follows, the researcher will seek to apply these elements, as appropriate, to the blesser-blessee phenomenon. In order for this application to be practical and effective, the researcher presents a fictitious scenario whereby he is called upon to counsel a 19-year-old female named Aaliyah (meaning "to rise up") who suffered abuse and violence at the hands of her blesser, Barack (whose name means "blessing").

Aaliyah meets with me to receive counselling after about a month of being separated from Barack. Having completed such courses as Pastoral Care as well as Counselling and Spiritual Direction at Seminary and a Counselling course at Family Life Centre, I soon find that I need to dig deep to access all the resources, knowledge and counselling experience to journey with Aaliyah. Being a pastoral caregiver who is keen on applying narrative ideas and techniques into my work, I am reminded that Morgan teaches us about stories being central to an understanding of narrative ways of working (Morgan 2000:5). So, I invite Aaliyah to share her story.

As she shares her story, it soon becomes evident that Aaliyah has been subjected to sexual, physical violence and emotional abuse; and she displays signs of trauma. Moreover, she also shares that the reason for her parent's separation was because her father had, over a period of 5 years, sexually abused her. Thankfully her mother believed Aaliyah when she shared her horrible experiences and confronted her father. With the support of her mother, Aaliyah underwent a brief period of counselling but then terminated the sessions for financial reasons.

Writing in our South African context, trauma counsellor Yvonne Retief informs us that the Greek word for trauma literally means wound and she further asserts that psychological wounding is the result of what people experience who have undergone trauma. Additionally, she explains that emotional pain and suffering is the normal emotional reaction to such wounding (Retief 2005:13). My observations of and listening to Aaliyah as she shares her story reveal that she is a wounded person who experiences emotional pain and suffering at the hands of her blesser, Barack.

In Chapter 4, reference was made to the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM)* produced by the American Psychiatric Association. Retief (2005:15-18) also refers to the fourth edition of the DSM (DSM IV) and describes it as a long and comprehensive medical description. She suggests that she finds some inadequacies in the DSM model. She refers to several cases where she encountered particularly adults who were molested in their childhood. In these

cases, she found that the experience of the patients did not match the DSM IV definition (that is, they did not experience or observe a life-threatening event). However, they exhibited many of the symptoms described in some of the paragraphs of DSM IV. She refers to life experiences like divorce and others where this was also the case. Retief explains that this led her to the realisation that what was closer to what she had experienced in her practice over more than 20 years is the wider definition of the Institute of Traumatology which reads as follows:

People have experienced trauma if they have been exposed to events related to either experiences in life or the phase they are in (example transition from one phase of life to another, or circumstances arising from a new phase which they find unmanageable) and if that results in their ordinary coping mechanisms being disabled and at least one of the following effects can be observed:

- There is an element of resignation
- There is a deep, almost irreversible change in a basic viewpoint or conviction
- Their normal coping mechanisms are seriously overloaded.

Retief emphasises that if people have undergone an acutely upsetting experience which does not meet with the above definition, they are experiencing a crisis (Retief 2005:18).

Retief also explains that there are various phases in the normal course of processing a traumatic experience. Briefly, these are: (1) Alarm, (2) Outcry, (3) Recoil, (4) Integration. Along with some of the phases, Retief indicates certain frequencies of brainwave patterns and areas of the brain that come into operation (Retief 2005:30-40). These phases and their associated characteristics will be more fully discussed in my doctoral thesis as I seek to more fully develop the pastoral care and healing intervention model. For now, it can be argued that Aaliyah is probably in phase 2.

Victims of trauma need a specific kind of help during each of the phases and usually the very least that can be meaningfully offered, during the first and second phases to traumatised people, is physical support. This means just being there for them, listening to, calming and encouraging them (Retief 2005:43). This connects to what Pastoral Counsellor, David Stancil Ph.D., suggests as one of the six principles of Pastoral Care: the principle of presence. This principle is rooted in the promise God

made to Moses (Exodus 3:11-12) and to Joshua (Joshua 1:5), and which Jesus ultimately extended to us (Matthew 28:20): The promise is contained in the words “I will be with you.” Therefore, one of the tasks of pastoral caring is to be physically present with people with whom we are on a journey to bring them to a place of healing and wholeness. These wounded persons may not recall what we said, but what they will remember is that we were there, fully present, with them. Through the power of God’s Holy Spirit working in and through us as we care for them, when we are able to be emotionally present with them through effective listening, they will also remember that God was there with them (Stancil 2015).

Therefore, in light of the above principle of presence as postulated by Stancil and offering physical support and encouragement recommended by Retief, I will seek to practice effective listening to Aaliyah as she continues to share her story. It is for this reason that I am inspired by what spiritual director Margaret Guenther calls ‘Holy Listening’. She describes it as “a work of mutual obedience...to be obedient is to listen, to hear. When both director and directee are mutually obedient and engaged in holy listening, the story gets told.” She remarks that in our rapid-paced culture, “as time-obsessed people, we dismiss those not ‘worth’ listening to. By contrast, the holy listener is reluctant to classify and then dismiss the other person.” Working as a nursing home chaplain, Guenther admits that she is able to see all the residents “as persons, children of God, only when I was willing to be a holy listener and to be present at their sometimes halting and incoherent telling of the story” (Guenther 1992:148-149).

Likewise, as one called by God into the sacred work of pastoral caregiver and spiritual guide, I am mindful that, as I journey with Aaliyah, I, too, through God’s grace, may be God’s holy listener who sees her as a person of worth and value. I am called to see her as God’s beloved daughter who has trusted me to enter into her sacred space. Therefore, I need to respect that space and to treat it as sacred. While Guenther (1992:142) remarks that “it may be impossible to work with an abused woman, especially in the early stages of her growing consciousness”, Aaliyah has sought help from me and indicated that she was referred to me by a skilled female therapist. Guenther emphasises the importance of this practice whereby an abused woman needs this specialised support, especially from a

woman in the early stages. She further states that, while there is no statistical evidence available, survivors of abuse seem drawn to the church. “Sometimes they experience real grace in a sense of God’s love – in spite of everything” (Guenther, 1992:139).

In this study, it was highlighted that women who are involved in blesser-blessee relationships experience being judged and negatively labelled by society. Swart has informed us of the negative effects of this labelling which results in women being dehumanised. As a blessee, Aaliyah also shares that, as the relationship with Barack developed, her sense of self-worth and her dignity was eroded as her value as a person was reduced to that of a sexual object. Barack repeatedly reminded her of biblical scriptures which required women to be submissive. In listening to her, I seek to discover the dominant story which leads her to experience shame, loneliness and the pain. In my pastoral work with Aaliyah, I seek to help her discover the negative narratives that she may have internalised about herself – those narratives that are destructive and lead her to internalising shame and guilt. Scholarship in previous chapters of this study demonstrated how women who have been subjected to violence experience shame. In her work with women who have experienced abuse, Guenther also states that there is much shame connected with abuse and she further affirms that the victim is filled with shame and guilt; she feels somehow to blame for what happened to her (Guenther 1992:138, 140).

As I listen to Aaliyah, I discover that she needs to be affirmed as a human being made in the image of God who loves her irrespective of what narratives society had recruited her into believing. She is a person of value and worth and not merely an object to be abused. I try to help her by identifying the taken for granted beliefs and attitudes that lead people to treat her as less than human. Together we explore the gendered norms, beliefs and patriarchal values that objectify her and lead to her doubting that she is a child of God.

In my narrative way of working with Aaliyah and as we seek to analyse the prevailing worldview inherent in society about the value of women, I will help her, by asking questions which seek to deconstruct dominant beliefs and problem saturated dominant stories, to realize that, according to Wimberly, these worldviews are not

always helpful to our self-esteem or self-affirmation and that they often “produce a culture of shame that undermines our sense of self.” He continues by explaining that this culture of shame is “characterized by a pervasive sense of worthlessness, being unlovable, and a feeling that there is a fundamental flaw in one’s being” (Wimberly 1999:17).

Morgan helps us understand that “acts of men’s violence and abuse against women can only exist when they are supported by ideas of patriarchy and male dominance that serve to justify and excuse this violence” (Morgan 2000:45). In analysing the dominant beliefs, norms and values that lead to gender and intimate partner violence, it is important to determine the sources that give birth to feelings of shame so that they can be deconstructed in order to arrive at an alternative story that will empower Aaliyah. In this regard we turn again to the wisdom of Wimberly as he informs us that these sources include:

increased evil and insensitivity toward other human beings, dehumanizing stereotypes that degrade physical and gender differences...sexism, homophobia, classism and racism” (Wimberly 1999:17).

Through deconstructive conversation, I will explore with Aaliyah the effects of these sources of shame in order to help her see how patriarchal culture is negatively influencing her sense of self. By naming and unpacking some of these dominant gendered values and cultural practices, we are able to explore how her life has been affected (Morgan, 2000: 47) so that we can arrive at alternative stories that help Aaliyah to achieve “the something better” as we continue on the journey of “the positive search for truth” which Pollard (1997:44) refers to.

Pollard (1997:55-56) states that we should affirm the elements of truth. The truth is that Aaliyah has been created in the image of God. This means that she has an identity and with this a certain dignity. I will also seek to help her understand that, while sin has distorted the image of God in us (Grudem 2007:444), the church and secular society is wrong when it suggests that women are merely objects to be exploited, abused and violated. We need to understand that sin is not merely a personal matter. Konig (1994: 110) argues this point when he points to structural sin as he states “people create structures; and because people are sinners,

structures and systems can be sinful as well.” To illustrate his point, he points to examples of structures such as slavery or apartheid as inherently sinful and he adds that in such cases “there is no point in trying to improve it: the entire structure”, Konig argues, “must be broken down and replaced with another” (Konig 1994:110). To use Pollard’s terminology, I would say that such structures must be “deconstructed” and replaced with “something better” and I would add that sinful structures such as structural violence which perpetuate poverty and inequality, patriarchal structures, norms, values and beliefs that allow the blesser-blessee phenomenon to flourish, must be deconstructed as well if there is any hope of helping our wounded sisters in Christ to experience healing and wholeness.

Up to now I have endorsed the value of storytelling as a method of journeying with Aaliyah from a condition of shame to a state of self-worth. I have shown how Wimberly has helped in this regard through his use of storytelling in counselling the wounded and broken children of God. Morgan has also shown the value of deconstructing the negative stories of our lives in order to explore alternative stories that empower us and help us take control of our lives in a positive way. In working with Aaliyah, I will also seek to help her claim God’s love for her as a child of God made in God’s image and thereby reclaiming her dignity and self-worth.

Furthermore, as I continue to engage in the process of holy listening in journeying with Aaliyah, I help her deconstruct the negative images and dominant story that she may have internalised and begun to believe as way things are and the only “truth” about herself and her life. Additionally, I seek to help her deconstruct the narratives of shame which she may have internalised and then reconstruct new, positive, life-giving and affirming narratives to help her move from shame to self-worth.

Wimberly (2003:53) makes reference to some literary works which he says seeks to answer a major theological question: “What is sacred identity formation like for a person when the dominant conversations about one’s worth and value are negative?” In describing sacred identity formation, Wimberly asserts that, at the heart of it, the process is about God’s grace being at work in our lives to restore our spiritual, emotional and relational health. He also claims that his understanding of

sacred identity formation is underscored by his Wesleyan background. It is this understanding of the power of Wesley's prevenient and justifying grace to heal our brokenness and separation from God that informs Wimberly's process of sacred identity formation. This formation, he says, "involves our ability to respond to God's gracious transforming presence in our lives restoring us to our original relationship with God, which was disrupted by the fall" (Wimberly 2003:11). This connects to what I referred to earlier about sin distorting the image of God within us. So, through the process of holy listening and applying the principle of presence in my journey with Aaliyah, I will seek to help her through the process of sacred identity formation. This will be done through what I referred to earlier as Wimberly's technique of privileging. This has parallels with Swart's narrative work.

In her narrative work, life-coach Swart (2013:71) asks an important question: Whom do we authorise to speak? Here she is referring to the authorities that we allow to speak over and into our lives. Whose narratives do we give more authority to? Swart explains that these authorities are those who we authorise to speak over our lives and often leave us feeling like docile (submissive, compliant, dutiful, passive) beings that never measure up. In my journey of exploration with Aaliyah, I could use questions suggested by Swart and apply them to the blesser-blessee phenomenon, such as:

- Who are the people in society who enforce and advocate patriarchal ideas and beliefs that lead to you being dehumanised and worthless?
- Who is allowed to tell your story of your worth and value?
- What is the narrative of the docility you have been living?
- How has the story of docility influenced you?
- Who has been supporting this story of docility?

(Swart 2013:71).

In applying Swart's narrative questioning above and Wimberly's privileging technique, I will seek to help Aaliyah identify who she has been giving authority to speak over and into her life? To use Wimberly's terms: "whose narratives has she been privileging?" (Wimberly 2003:26-27). Through the process of holy listening, I

will seek to help her appreciate the importance of privileging conversations with God. Wimberly refers to the novel by Clifford Harris and proceeds to demonstrate the value of privileging God conversations and how this leads to life-transforming experiences for Clifford:

Through conversation with God, Clifford begins to see himself from God's point of view. He sees what God wants him to become, and he sees the kind of relationships God wants him to have. As these conversations become part of who Clifford Harris is, they become part of his sacred identity. He finds himself embraced by God's unmerited grace that affirms his value and worth despite what he has done in his life... (Wimberly 2003:20).

Through the process of holy listening, I will seek to help Aaliyah appreciate the importance of privileging conversations with God and by so doing, it is my hope that Aliyah can also experience the same life-transforming grace and the power of God's love for her as, together, we help her move from shame to self-worth. Furthermore, in helping Aliyah in the path to wholeness, through the process of sacred identity formation and restoring the broken image of God in her, being an instrument of God's grace, I will seek to help her along the process of sanctification. Wimberly reminds us that this is the process "whereby God leads us through grace into a life of holiness." He continues by pointing to some theologians who speak about this process as reclaiming the *imago dei* (image of God) within the self and still others who talk about this as growing into the image of Christ. Wimberly further clarifies that "the process of sanctification begins with a renewed relationship with God through the power of grace" (Wimberly 2003:20). Therefore, in my narrative therapy work with Aaliyah, I will seek to help her enter into this renewed relationship with God so that she can, as Clifford Harris did, see herself from God's point of view, who God wants her to become and the kinds of life-giving positive relationships God wants her to have.

In seeking to affirm the truths for Aaliyah, I believe the storytelling method within narrative therapy will be most valuable for her as an initial approach. Through narrative therapy and the deconstruction of negative stories I will also help Aaliyah discover the inadequacies (errors) of the damaging belief systems and structures

for this is what Pollard states is the final stage in the process of positive deconstruction (Pollard 1997:56).

But Pollard also issues a warning to his readers about what he sees as mistakes that people can make with positive deconstruction. One of these, he says “is to think that positive deconstruction is all that is needed. I don’t believe that this one approach is the answer to all our problems...” (Pollard 1997:46). I believe that Pollard is here suggesting that we supplement his method with others in order to arrive at an effective holistic model of reaching out to others as we, through their permission, enter into their sacred space. It is for this reason that I have allowed Pollard to dialogue with Morgan, Swart and Wimberly in my pastoral response to Aaliyah. Additionally, Guenther’s Holy Listening method will also be instrumental in the narrative work of helping Aaliyah to a place of healing.

Guenther offers pastoral counsellors and spiritual directors’ valuable insight in journeying with those who are wounded. The holy listener needs to always be aware that the listening is holy, to be willing to put him/herself out of the way and become humble. The holy listener is required to be critical without being judgemental. Above all to be reverent, for he/she is entrusted with something precious and tender. The holy listener is

“Invited to share in pain, hunger, courage, hope, joy and holiness. Coming without an agenda, the holy listener is open to anything the directee might bring. He/she is willing to hear about darkness and desolation, the times of God’s seeming absence and neglect. He/she is not frightened by another’s anger, doubt or fear; and he/she is comfortable with tears. At the same time the holy listener knows the truth of the resurrection. This ministry of presence is a kind of intercessory prayer, as the holy listener waits and watches – sometimes in the warmth of the stable, sometimes in the pure light on the high mountain apart, sometimes in the desolation at the foot of the cross, and sometimes with fear and great joy in the encounter with the risen Christ.” (Guenther 1992:149-150).

6.7 PRELIMINARY CONCLUSION

The researcher introduced this chapter with what some theologians call the Nazareth Manifesto or Jesus' Mission statement and the chapter then set out to identify who the oppressed and captives are in the context of the scourge of gender and intimate partner violence. With relevance to the topic in this study, the oppressed that Jesus came to liberate are the blessees who experience violence, exploitation and abuse at the hands of their blessers.

The chapter moved onto explain that, even though the extended literature review demonstrated the patriarchal and androcentric nature of Biblical and African traditions, there are positive values within the Biblical tradition which the Church could incorporate into its efforts to formulate appropriate intervention approaches. The researcher demonstrated the value of modelling Jesus' life and ministry in developing a pastoral care and healing model that can be used to journey with blessees and women who have been abused. Pastoral caregivers are encouraged to seek the mind of Christ and model his attitude towards the ministry when approaching women.

In connecting the narrative approach methodology employed for this study with the narrative therapy techniques of White, Epston, Morgan Swart and Wimberly, the researcher in this chapter began the process of establishing a foundation towards the formulation of a pastoral care and healing intervention model. Essential techniques of identifying dominant stories and problem saturated narratives which lead to internalisation of shame, images, values and beliefs that diminish self-worth were incorporated into the framework of the intervention model. The value of externalising problems, negative narratives and privileging positive conversations with God were emphasised as helpful tools that can be used in pastoral care approaches.

The narrative principles of deconstructing dominant stories and taken for granted beliefs were integrated with Pollard's Positive deconstruction theory to help wounded women to reconstruct new life-affirming narratives that nurture and help them move from shame to self-worth. Wimberly's understanding of sacred identity

formation was explored to help blessees experience transformation from negative identities into which they have been recruited.

The researcher also demonstrated the value of establishing correlations between the pastoral care principle of presence and Guenther's Holy Listening process as ways of entering the scared space of blessees in order to journey with them and respond to their trauma and shame.

Through this process of narrative therapy, positive deconstruction and engaging in holy listening to the stories of blessees who have experienced violence and abuse, the researcher has begun the process of offering the church an initial framework towards a pastoral care and healing intervention model.

In the next and final chapter of this study, the researcher will, by way of making recommendations for the church, offer a strategic approach towards the empowerment of women.

7. CHAPTER SEVEN: FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

7.1 INTRODUCTION

In the previous chapter of this thesis, the researcher offered the church a foundation framework towards the formulation of a pastoral care and healing intervention model that could be used in journeying with blessees that have experienced violence, abuse, exploitation and trauma.

The purpose of this chapter is to summarise the findings and conclusions and offer recommendations – in terms of proposed actions for the church and identifying areas for further research. By way of recommendations for the church, a strategy for empowerment of women is offered. This involves challenging and addressing those systems, norms, beliefs and structures within society that perpetuate violence and dehumanise women. The church needs to be active in working with both government and non-governmental organisations to address, using the words of Musimbi Kanyoro, “those aspects of culture that continue to be practised in various degrees of our societies, which diminish women and make them objects of cultural preservation and renders them unable to experience the liberating promises of God.” Additionally, “to ensure that those favourable aspects which enhance the well-being of women” are promoted (Kanyoro 1996:5).

In the next section, the researcher will summarise the findings of this study before making recommendations for a strategy of empowerment for women as well as for areas for further research.

7.2 FINDINGS

This research study set out to gain a deeper understanding of the blesser-phenomenon and the lived experience of blessees through listening to the stories of young women. It also sought to discover the social and cultural aspects that can lead to exploitive and abusive relationships and the contributing factors that lead young women to consider involvement in blesser-blessee relationships.

The study found that a significant factor driving this phenomenon is the high levels of unemployment and also poverty. Moreover, the culture of blesserers also flourishes

because of the gender norms and beliefs that have instilled a culture where women prefer to engage in transactional sex relationships. The study found that the transactional sex nature of the blesser phenomenon has a negative impact on the lives of young women in the form of increasing the rate of HIV infection and an increased number of teenage pregnancies. The additional dangers of engaging in transactional sex relationships are that it renders girls vulnerable to the risk of exploitation and domination by older, wealthier men, also to physical and sexual abuse. Additionally, the study found that the blesser phenomenon leads to criminal activities like human trafficking.

The research design and methodology chosen for this study was the narrative approach through the use of interviews. The analysis of the interviews revealed consistencies with the review of secondary literature sources in that the lived experience of women engaged in blesser relationships was that of objectification and commodification leading to gender and intimate partner violence and abuse. This leads to victims experiencing shame and trauma. This presents a pastoral challenge to the church and calls forth action to be taken.

In offering a response to this challenge, this study sought to lay the foundations for a pastoral care and healing intervention model to journey with blessees who experience trauma and to begin to help them move from shame to self-worth. The framework for this pastoral care and healing intervention model incorporated the principles of narrative therapy to allow young women to share their stories and to discover those narratives that seek to lead to their internalisation of shame and that disempower and demean them. Through the use of Pollard's positive deconstruction theory, the dominant problem-saturated narratives and those beliefs and systems which assist the problem are deconstructed. By practising holy listening and applying the pastoral care principle of presence, the pastoral caregiver can help the blessee to privilege conversations with God and reconstruct new positive narratives and a sacred identity that is life-giving and transformative.

The researcher will develop the pastoral care and healing intervention model further in his doctoral thesis which will involve an in-depth study of the subject of shame.

The doctoral thesis will also further develop the study into the area of human trafficking and what the church's response should be.

The initial literature review in Chapter 2 of this study made reference to certain missional priorities identified by ACSA and how the current study could make a contribution to the work of ACSA committees by offering a resource. Furthermore, the extended literature review in Chapter 4 emphasised the concern raised by theologians about the popularisation and perversion of the term blessed. Theologians lament the lack of research work on the subject of blessing as well as on the topics of gender and intimate partner violence. The researcher hopes that the current study will also make a contribution in this area to the field of Practical Theology by offering a resource that can assist in the advancement of theological reflection, discourse and praxis.

The researcher will next recommend elements of an empowerment strategy for women as part of the framework for formulating a pastoral care and healing intervention for the church.

7.3 AN EMPOWERMENT STRATEGY FOR WOMEN

In addition to journeying pastorally with women who have experienced abuse and trauma as a result of gender and intimate partner violence, pastoral caregivers and the church at large should also be working with organisations such as POWA (People Opposing Women Abuse) who can help and support abused women. The Mission of POWA is to provide professional services that comprise of advocacy, training, psycho-social support, legal and sheltering to survivors of violence. POWA is committed to enhancing the quality of life of all women and girls (POWA 2016). There are other organisations such as Embrace Dignity (Embrace Dignity 2016) mentioned previously in this study. The elements that comprise the framework of the empowerment strategy below are sourced from a Pastoral care and Christian ethics course (Theological Education by Extension College 2006:119-124)

7.3.1 Enable storytelling or narrative

One of the leading African theologians, Nyambura Njoroge, asserts that the starting point to empowering women is the reclaiming of the women's voice (Njoroge 2002:53). Therefore, one of the first steps is to enable women to tell their stories. This was already started in this current study through the application of the narrative approach and narrative therapy. In enabling women to share and tell their stories, it is important for men in society and in the church to bear in mind that we need to:

- Provide space for stories
- Encourage story-telling or narrative
- Listen to women's stories without seeking to rewrite them in masculine imagery
- Believe the stories
- Feel the responses

7.3.2 Address interpretations of Scriptures that devalue and disempower women and work at correcting oppressive church teachings, as well as structures that inhibit women

Instead of being used to empower, the Bible has, sadly, been used to oppress. We have seen examples of this in the debate on the ordination of women, to justify oppressive systems like apartheid, the treatment of those within the LGBT community and in the treatment of women. From the (mis)interpretation of some of the Scriptures have arisen Church teachings, some of which oppress and disempower women. Some of the foremost African theologians like Nyambura Njoroge, Mercy Oduyoye, Musimbi Kanyoro, Isabel Phiri, Gertrude Kapuma and others within the Circle of Concerned African Theologians, have written extensively to address the abuse of and violence against women and girls and also to critique patriarchal structures that have sought to oppress and silence women.

There are certain Christian teachings on marriage, divorce and servanthood which lead to the disempowerment of women and entrap them in abusive relationships. The church can be described as morally callous when it chooses to remain silent in regards to sexual and all violence against women and children. The researcher proposes that it might be helpful for people to read Biblical texts like the Rape of Tamar in 1 Samuel 13:1-22. Pamela Cooper-White has written a comprehensive

and practical critique of the various forms of violence against women in her book *The Cry of Tamar* (Cooper-White 2012).

There may also be a need for church leaders to facilitate Bible Studies to enable those who have not had a voice hear God speaking to them through God's Word. These Bible Studies should be facilitated in a way in which church leaders (priest, parish or church minister, preacher, catechist) do not control the agenda and should present the Bible in ways that are liberating and life-transforming. Furthermore, the Bible Studies should seek to tell the narratives of the women in the Bible. Theologians and scholars like Gerald West and others of The Ujamaa Centre for Biblical & Theological Community Development & Research provide Contextual Bible Study Resources that can assist the Church in this transformative work (University of KwaZulu-Natal n.d.). The work of various contributors edited by John Riches also offers a helpful Contextual Bible Study resource with group studies for Advent and Lent (Ball, et al. 2010).

7.3.3 Stand in solidarity with women

This requires that all people within society and the Church acknowledge the scourge of violence against women and children. Men and women need to take this matter seriously and stand in solidarity with women who are abused. Hinga contends that women should "take up the pastoral challenge themselves and become, as it were, pastors unto themselves as well as pastors of the church itself..." Women can be pastors unto themselves by supporting one another unequivocally when tragedy strikes..." She further asserts that the church needs to be seen actively and consciously standing in solidarity with women. Such efforts need to arise out of a sincere concern for justice for women and the restoration of their dignity. She continues by saying that

"A prior condition to the effective education of society on the issue of women and violence is that the church itself be seen to treat women with justice and to uphold their dignity. In practical terms, this means that the church has to openly and conscientiously work towards the eradication of sexism implicit and often explicit in its own structures and praxis" (Hinga 2013:150).

In chapter 4 of this study, the researcher referred to the Silent Protest organised by Rhodes University and that he had demonstrated his solidarity with women by participating in the silent protest march. This is an example of one of the ways in which the church can show its solidarity – by identifying similar initiatives hosted by organisations that speak out against violence against women and participating in those initiatives. This action step is also explored next.

7.3.4 Mobilise and expose

It has been stated in this current study that those who have been sexually abused experience shame and anguish and pain. Their experiences are also that of confusion, loss of self-esteem and a sense of abandonment by God. Relief has reminded us that the word trauma literally means ‘wounded’ so these women are wounded and in need of healing. Professor Susan Rakoczy affirms the importance of healing when she says

If there is no healing, only survival, the pain becomes the deep psychological, emotional and spiritual reality of the person. It goes underground but lives all the same. It is expressed in inappropriate ways, as the woman’s need for deep care, nurturing and healing calls for attention. And, if unattended, this reality is passed onto the children, especially girls – their mother’s low self-esteem, psychological and emotional disturbances, fear and depression become their inheritance (Rakoczy 2000: 28).

The following are offered as suggestions for ethical and pastoral action. The church could:

- Train counsellors and form support groups or enquire about existing groups and support structures in one’s area/community
- Enquire about shelters for abused women in their community and work in partnership with such shelters to offer these women a safe sanctuary
- Offering areas of parish/church property for the provision of trauma counselling services
- Work with the Department of Social Development in order to design and implement initiatives that seek to empower women

- Call on Government organisations to work towards the eradication of poverty since this is identified by several scholars to be one of the major factors contributing to the flourishing of the blesser phenomenon
- Conduct enquiries about the existence of any women's group in one's area and work in partnership with these groups to provide care to victims of abuse and violence
- Work in partnership with parish organisations like Mother's Union and Anglican Women's Fellowship to help women who are victims of violence and abuse
- Bring men together to reach each other in non-threatening ways and explore models of masculinity that are life-giving and liberating
- Conduct transformative workshops with church men's groups like Church Men's Society, Bernerd Mizeki and others to address harmful practices, beliefs and norms that promote patriarchy
- Conduct workshops that address toxic masculinity in society and the church
- Distribute literature (organisations like POWA, Embrace Dignity and others have resources on their website); explore the internet and find resourceful ways of sharing information with others; organise workshops and events and invite speakers in the field of addressing violence against women
- Run relationships workshops where, for example, the Christian message of active love of self and one another can be a theme that is life-giving and transformative and a good foundation for relationship building
- Initiate parish internal audit where the patriarchal face of the church is examined – it's symbols, images, language and limited roles of women – all of these reinforce the message of society that men are higher up the hierarchy than women.
- Create opportunities for naming the sin of abuse and for prophetic ministry, be the voice of the voiceless – speaking, preaching and praying about it and condemning violence in all its forms
- Create liturgies that touch the experience of women and that use inclusive images and language.

7.3.5 A call for action from the Church

Furthermore, this study urges the churches to become more active in addressing the scourge of gender violence in their communities. With specific reference to the afore-mentioned actions of addressing toxic masculinity in society, journalist Virglatte Gwangwa in her article reports of the inter-faith dialogue on violence and inequality hosted by UN Women and the Southern African Catholic Bishops Conference in August 2018. At this Conference, Pastor Sduduzo Blose from the Seventh Day Adventist Church affirmed the correlation between the blesser phenomenon and gender violence when he stated that churches are the breeding grounds of toxic cultures such as the blesser culture. He also stated that it was in churches where girls were told to wait for the right men who would treat them well.

The Southern African Catholic Bishops Conference's Abel Gabuza said he hoped that after the dialogue, the faith-based leaders would speak about gender-based violence in their communities. "This is our way of saying that it is time we take to our pulpits and speak about these issues and be firm in condemning the violence against women. This is the beginning of the change we want to see, and we hope that the dialogue will spark such conversations in the society." Sizani Ngubane from the Rural Women's Movement said forced marriages were still popular in rural KwaZulu-Natal and Eastern Cape. She said *ukuthwala* (bride abduction) led to girls being raped and trafficked. A UN representative, Anne Githuku-Shongwe, said one in three women were being violated daily. She said women had tried all in their power to talk about these issues, but not much had changed and she continued to add that "men and churches are the holders of the patriarchal mind-sets, and you can change it." She challenged priests, bishops and other faith leaders to stand firm in challenging men in their church and communities against woman abuse (Gwangwa 2018).

The Anglican Church of Southern Africa (ACSA), of which the researcher is an ordained member, had in September 2019 held its Synod of Bishops in Benoni. Online documents of both the Synod of Bishops and the Provincial Synod reveal encouraging messages that ACSA is taking the matter seriously and calls forth

action from the Church. A summary of key statements and decisions contained in the online documents are presented below.

The communique of the Synod of Bishops reports that Synod met against the backdrop of various issues including “fresh outbreaks of xenophobic attacks against fellow Africans from other nations and of renewed activism over the scourge of violence against women, children and other vulnerable people.” The Synod expressed that “we condemn the violence meted out against them, we express our condolences to those who have lost members of their families and we share our prayers for the traumatised.” (ACSA 2019).

The ACSA Provincial Synod, also held in September 2019, spoke out on violence against women and children and singled out “belief in the dominance of men over women” as one of the causes of violence against women in society. Furthermore, the Dean of Grahamstown, the Very Revd Andrew Hunter proposed a resolution voicing “abhorrence” at violence against women and children and he also stated that “the culture of ‘toxic masculinity’ in society teaches boys than girls are there for their use and pleasure.” The Provincial Synod urged men to “to speak clearly and boldly” against male domination to other men in society and “to make active space for the voice of women to be heard” (Bishopscourt Media 2019).

7.3.6 A critique of 16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence

The 16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence is an annual international campaign that kicks off on 25 November, the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women, and runs until 10 December, the date set by United Nations as Human Rights Day (UN Women n.d.).

In chapter 2, the researcher referred to 21st March as the South African Human Rights Day. Given the alarming statistics of gender-based violence that has been presented in this study, the researcher asks a very important and crucial question: How are the human rights and the equal dignity and worth of all people, especially women, valued in this country of South Africa? The researcher also challenges the effectiveness of the 16 days of Activism campaign: is it truly making a contribution to reduce the gender-based violence against women?

This view is also supported by sociologist Nokuthula Mazibuko who asserts that human-rights day currently holds no meaning for many South African women. In her Pretoria News article, she describes the focus of her research is domestic violence and she also asks an important question “how can we celebrate ‘human rights’ when the rights of our women, our mothers, daughters, sisters, and aunties, are being violated daily?” She further asks “what are we-the government, academia, civil society-doing to resolve this?” Her article calls on the South African government to work collaboratively with various NGO’s and Government departments to address the scourge of violence against women and children (Mazibuko 2018).

Furthermore, the researcher also questions why there should only be 16 days of activism against gender-based violence. Does it mean that for the remaining 349 days in a year, the focus should be abandoned? Therefore, the researcher recommends that the activism against gender-based violence should be a year-long focussed campaign of 365 days. The researcher supports this recommendation by referring to Mazibuko who states that

South Africa attempted to implement a 365 days of Action campaign to eliminate Violence against women and Children, year -long campaign of "action" with a five-year cycle from 2007 until 2011, but it just did not work as funding seemed to be a challenge. However, if you look at the current funding available to deal with gender -based violence matters (between R 28.4 billion and R42.4bn per year or between 0.9% and 1.3% of GDP annually), one can argue that there are funds to run this campaign. So, rather than the annual 16 Days of Activism campaign, why can't South Africa use these funds to continue the 365 Days campaign? (Mazibuko 2018)

7.4 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

While the current study focused primarily on blessees who enter into blesser relationships to earn a living, support their family and pay for education, it also acknowledged that there are women who actively seek the provision of blessers to acquire a certain lifestyle. In Chapter 4, the researcher also highlighted a need for further research identified by theologians who critique prosperity theology.

Therefore, this study recommends this as an area for further research where both the African women's theology and the church at large should investigate the prosperity gospel's impact on the values and ideologies of young women.

Another area for research would be to focus on older men who are blessers, the factors, beliefs and practices that motivate them to seek out younger females especially when these older men are married and have families of their own. This research should also focus on offering the church a pastoral approach that addresses these factors, beliefs and practices and that works towards the rehabilitation of these men to where they become active agents of transformation that leads to an end to the blesser culture and the violence and abuse against women.

7.5 FINAL CONCLUSIONS

The central premise/thesis of this study is that the 'blesser-blessee' phenomenon contributes significantly to a patriarchal and shame-oriented culture that objectifies woman and it is this culture that is the root cause of violence against women. Through an extensive consultation of the secondary sources and an engagement with the primary sources in the living human documents, this study had demonstrated the central thesis statement to be true. In responding to the problems of gender based and intimate partner violence and its root cause, the researcher has offered the Church a foundational framework towards a pastoral care and healing intervention as well as a strategy of empowerment for women.

List of Annexures

A	Interview Questions for author of BARE: Jackie Phamotse
B	Semi-structured Interview questions for research participants
C1	Initial extracts of Treasure's story in BARE
C2 (i-iii)	Continuation of Treasure's story (copy from BARE)
C3 (i-iii)	Treasure's experience of forced abortion (copy from BARE)
D	Informed Consent Letter
E	Real men don't abuse women

ANNEXURE A

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR JACKIE PHAMOTSE

Notes for interviewer

After thanking Jackie for making the time for the interview, clarify again the reason for the interview as part of Masters Research and inform that, for the purposes of the research the interview will be recorded.

Also, that she will be asked to sign a document indicating her permission for the interview and for it to be recorded for the purposes of Masters research.

Guideline Questions are below (not all questions may necessarily be asked):

Jackie, I've read your book BARE and I was very moved by your story, so much that it inspired me to make the Blesser phenomenon the topic of my Master's research. Congratulations on your book being a National Bestseller!

I've listened to interviews you've had with several news stations and I've read some of the articles that have been written about your story.

1. In one of the articles you relate the reason for writing BARE. And I quote "All I want is to share my story with young girls because many of them are trapped in abusive relationships at the expense of luxurious lifestyles," Can you tell us more about this?
2. What are some of the practical ways in which you want to empower young ladies?
3. One of the key aims of my Masters research is to develop an understanding about the blesser phenomenon and especially the factors that predispose young ladies to engage in these blesser relationships. In your experience of this Blesser phenomenon, what would you say is the key driving factors?
4. What would you say are the reasons why young ladies find it difficult to get out of these relationships; especially in situations where they experience abuse?
5. Juliane Hoss is a researcher who has done research work among girls at a high school in Tembisa as part of her Masters research. She contends that, in many cases, girls are portrayed as greedy, immoral or careless and are judged for entering a relationship with an older man in their search for money. How would you respond to that?
6. In 2016, Health Minister Aaron Motsoaledi announced a new programme aimed at keeping girls in schools, weaning them off so-called "sugar daddies", and reducing teenage pregnancy. This was termed an anti-blesser campaign. What are your views about this campaign?
7. On the back cover of BARE, it is said "Those who fought for freedom neglected to educate their offspring about social civilization and self-worth." I find it interesting that the term self-worth and not self-esteem is used. Can you share some more on that statement? What would you say is the difference between self-esteem and self-worth?

8. I found the quotation by Nina Simone in your post-script in BARE quite inspiring “You’ve got to learn to leave the table when love’s no longer being served.” What motivated you to use that quotation and what does it mean to you?
9. What did you hope it would mean for your readers?
10. In the post-script you pose some profound questions about the understandings of love and you suggest that perhaps we need to go back to the scriptures to find the answers. What might be the reasons for this appeal to Scriptures?
11. As I said in the beginning, as part of my research I have read articles and listened to interviews in which you share your story – and of course I have read BARE. I would describe your experiences as very traumatic and I am inspired about how you have emerged from such trauma. Have you received any support from the church or Christian friends to help you through your painful journey?
12. In your view, what should be the voice of the Church in response to this Blesser phenomenon? How could the Church help you in your quest to help young ladies who are trapped in abusive relationships and who have experienced trauma as a result of abuse?
13. Would you be open to working alongside the Church in creating awareness of the dangers of this phenomenon and in developing intervention programmes and ways of helping wounded souls to experience healing?
14. I am thankful to you for your willingness to be interviewed as part of my fieldwork research. I would greatly appreciate it if you could help me by connecting me with other ladies who would be willing to share their experiences with me so that I can journey with them in a pastoral way? I would of course take every care in protecting their identity and ensuring confidentiality.

ANNEXURE B

SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW AND NARRATIVE THERAPY QUESTIONS FOR INTERVIEWEES

IMPORTANT NOTES:

- Interviewees in this case refers to young women, of 18 years of age, or older. They are people who have experienced trauma as a result of abuse, violence and/or exploitation through being involved in a blesser-blessee relationship
- The Methodology being used in this research, is based on narrative/story telling approach, and for this reason the researcher will employ narrative therapy techniques in order to respond pastorally to the interviewee
- The questions that are planned to be asked, will not only be those to answer the research questions, but also to help the researcher better understand the lived experience of the interviewee, and to begin a healing process through methodology of pastoral care.
- Below is suggested list of questions for the interviewer to explore (some of which are based on narrative therapy principles)
- Other narrative therapy questions will be explored as the interviews progress

GUIDELINE QUESTIONS FOR SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS

- Would you kindly journey with me through your experience as a blessee involved in a blesser-blessee relationship?
- Will you kindly share with me more about how you grew up? What was your homelife like?
- What about your upbringing regarding school and the area you grew up in?
- Describe for me your relationship with your parents?
- Would you share with me about how you connected with them? Could share your feelings, hopes and dreams honestly with them?
- In your journey of life, do you have hopes, dreams etc? Could you kindly share them?
- What strategies have you put in place in order to achieve your dreams?
- Do you believe there are ways in which men and women are supposed to act in relationships?
- Can you describe the social norms that affect you in your journey?
- What might some of the reasons be that made you enter into the blesser relationship?
- Before you made a decision to enter into this relationship, could you share if you knew the person?
- How did you get in touch with this person?
- At the time of entering into the relationship, were you aware of his intentions?
- Were you aware of “sugar daddies” and “blessers”
- Is there anyone who knows/ knew about (relevance) about your relationship, please share?

- How did you get out of it? (if its relevant)
- Did they share their views with you?
- How did you respond to them?
- Can you recall what others, outside of your family and close friends were saying about blesser relationships?
- Could you tell me specifically what are the ways in which he “blessed” you?
- How would you describe the attitude/approach of the blesser at the beginning of the relationship? Tell me about the way in which he treated you?
- Did you feel safe in the relationship? / Do you feel safe as you continue in this relationship?
- What actually happened after the end of this relationship?
- What problems emerged from this broken relationship?
- How do/did you relate to his negative behaviour?
- How did you deal with the issues?
- At what point did he become violent or abusive? How did that make you feel?
- When things began to change for the worst, did you communicate that you wanted to leave?
- What might be some of the factors that prevented you from ending the relationship sooner and leaving?
- Earlier on, you shared some hopes and dreams with me – do you believe that you can still achieve those dreams?
- How would you describe society’s view of blesser relationships?
- At this point in your journey, would you share with me whether the Church was involved? In what way?
- You have shared some traumatic experiences. Have you received counselling?
- In your view, are the ways in which society is dealing with phenomenon effective?
- What do you believe society should be focussing on?
- What should be the role of the church?

Some considerations for the interviewer/counsellor employing narrative therapy principles:

- Listen/ be alert for
 - the broader social context of the story shared
 - the dominant story
 - ‘thin descriptions’
 - Alternative stories
 - Internalising conversations
- As part of narrative therapy, help them
 - Externalising conversations – help the interviewee to name the problem and to separate the person’s identity from the problem

ANNEXURE C 1

EXTRACTS FROM NOVEL TITLED 'BARE': AUTHORED BY JACKIE PHAMOTSE

In this novel Jackie powerfully narrates the experiences of Treasure Mohapi who is initially wooed by a wealthy man who grooms her into a power-hungry machine but eventually she is confronted with the profound question: is the pleasure worth the pain and endless sacrifices? What can she offer a man who has everything but a soul? Adapted from back cover: (Phamotse 2017).

What follows are extracts from the novel interwoven with commentary by the researcher.

ANOTHER THREE MONTHS passed; life was fast, and each weekend was a party. Tim became the centre of her world. She was addicted to him and the lifestyle he came with, and she was in love with the idea of having someone to take care of her. He gave her all of his attention and spoon-fed her gifts and money. What was there not to like?

Her modelling career was taking off, and so was her relationship. Social media played a huge part in her everyday life; she posted every lunch, every gift, every gig and every trip she took with Tim. She wanted people to see that she was getting high ratings and that she had a man who gave her status. It worked; people started treating her like a queen.

The greed and rudeness of some people in the modelling industry was frightening, but she was determined to succeed one way or another. In this city, you had to know the right people to get through the door, and Treasure bulldozed her way in. Tim was her key to power by association. She was called onto well-known media platforms and TV shows. She made friends like Kenny Kunene who gave her access to the best VIP parties all over the country. She was on the exclusive lists of clubs like ZAR that gave models a PR boost; she met other ambitious women and models who were respected and fun-loving, like Miranda Dlamini and Ella Kayembe; and yes, she even met Khanyi Mbau.

Life was good. She was becoming a member of high society, and she was hooked on the attention and the good times. The void within her was quickly filled by the sudden fame. She replaced her need for genuine love with social power and Tim's presence. Social media validated her relevance in the modelling industry as she started appearing in blog posts, then magazine features, then more blog posts;

fashion and fame are always feeding on themselves and each other. (Phamotse 2017:126-127)

The above extracts depict how the young blessee exploits the gifts, power and status of the blesser to elevate her own status and fame and how she takes maximum advantage of the opportunities brought to her by the blesser.

"I'VE BEEN TRYING to call you, Tim; it's been TWO WEEKS and you've said nothing. My messages have all gone unanswered. And now you pop out of nowhere?" Treasure asked irritably. They were sitting in Tim's car outside Lintle's flat.

Cool, calm and collected, Tim pulled out a little box. "Well if you open that, you'll have your answer. Stop worrying so much; you know I'm yours baby."

Treasure took the box and opened it. "Keys? What are these for? Is this a joke?" Realising she had no idea what was going on or how to react, Treasure suddenly felt paranoid.

"That is the set of keys to your new apartment. It's a two-bedroom townhouse with a swimming pool and braai area. It's fully furnished." Treasure was too blown away to respond. She stared at Tim as he continued.

"We're going to have wonderful romantic dinners and date nights there. I know you're very scared to be alone so it's in a secure complex in Rivonia. And inside the apartment is a SECOND key for the garage, where something extra special is waiting just for you."

"Um..."

"You mean I'm going to have my own place? And a car?!"

"Yes," Tim laughed. (Phamotse 2017:128)

What follows is how the relationship changes from one that appears to be caring and loving to one that is nasty, cruel and exploitative on the part of the blesser.

"Treasure, do you think I'm your fool? Who just dropped you off at the gate? Is it one of your boyfriends?"

"Baby, come on; you must have seen that was a cab. I went to Lintle's place and we decided to go to the weekend social event," said Treasure defensively as she unlocked her door.

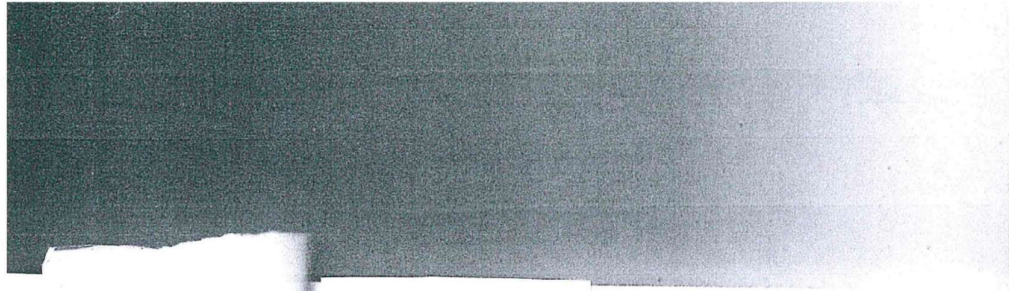
"You didn't bother to inform me? It seems like you're forgetting who feeds you. I own each and everything here and as soon as you step out you inform me."

That sat in silence for an hour, Treasure massaging her throbbing temples.

“You did this just so that we would fight all night and I’d be unable to sleep with you, right?...

Tim followed her into the kitchen. “You’re my woman and that is my cookie. (Phamotse 2017:145-146).

**ANNEXURES C 2 AND C 3
COPIES FROM "BARE – THE BLESSERS GAME"**



double check who you're with?"

n, I'm on my own a lot. I've cut p with new people that I meet at ng me names on Facebook, and re s eeply for Tim. When he's ies about life in Alexandra and don't know what makes him so s make him upset."

I can see when you're hiding

sclose about my relationship; I e was too scared to mention the e might do? Her eyes teared up;

her glowed more than her face. nile. The perfect bounce in her fe. Lintle was scared for her but ing. A lot of businessmen and to secret, but how they treated s. Life in Sandton didn't come ndin sacrifice to make.

he's at my place. I have to go. fe'll call everyone and demand

ut you owe me; you know I

p my king waiting?" Treasure d to go!" She ran out, almost d that she could find Treasure

he stood at the door smoking want to play it, Treasure?" y."

Who gave you permission to at what you're wearing, tight

ANNEXURE C 2(i)

Bare

"Baby, let's get inside; it's freezing out here."

"Treasure, do you think I'm your fool? Who just dropped you off at the gate? Is it one of your boyfriends?"

"Baby, come on; you must have seen that was a cab. I went to Lintle's place and we decided to go to the weekend social event," said Treasure defensively as she unlocked her door.

"You didn't bother to inform me? It seems like you're forgetting who feeds you. I own each and every thing here and as soon as you step out you inform me."

Treasure was shocked to hear the hurtful words coming out of Tim's mouth. He was fuming with anger, pacing up and down and smoking in the house, which he never did. She tried to calm him down.

"Baby, I'm sorry; I should have told you, but you haven't answered any of my messages in the last couple of days and I didn't think that you would reply to this one."

"That's the problem! You don't think. That's why your father kicked your mother out! You're just like her – disrespectful!"

Treasure was mortified. How dare he bring up her mother? He knew nothing about her or her history, nor did he know her father. She looked at him and saw bitterness and rage, and she felt the same way. Both of them were fed up.

They sat in silence for an hour, Treasure massaging her throbbing temples.

"You did this just so that we would fight all night and I'd be unable to sleep with you, right? You know that this is my time to go and yet you can't be bothered to apologise and fix the problem," Tim said rudely.

Treasure couldn't believe her ears; the same man that had called her away from an event, made her angry and insulted her mother still wanted to have sex. She was amazed and disgusted. She stood up and went to make tea in the kitchen, still annoyed at his comment.

Tim followed her into the kitchen. "You're my woman and that is my cookie. Even the Bible says: 'Don't deprive your partner of sex.' So you will give me what belongs to me, if you're still my woman?" It was a rhetorical question, because he wasn't giving her a choice.

Treasure continued making tea but felt Tim's cold shadow around her. She saw from the corner of her eye that he was undressing. "This isn't the right time for sex Tim!" She pushed him out of her way.

"Oh, so you want to give my cookie to someone else, just like you've been cheating on me all this time."

Continuation from story as per Annexure C1

Treasure was bored with his accusations. She went into the bedroom and drank her tea, trying to be calm but trembling with fury.

Tim came in angrily. "Oh no, you won't blow me off just like that. Either you will provide for my needs or we don't have a relationship!"

Treasure thought long and hard. This manipulation had been going on for months. Tim was out of control and she knew she couldn't say a word that mattered to him anymore. She stood up, switched on some music and dimmed the lights. Slowly she took off her jeans, pulled up her T-shirt and placed it on the floor. Tim took off her bra. He kissed her neck and squeezed her breasts. Treasure showed no reaction but didn't refuse either. He pushed her backwards onto the bed, did some foreplay robotically and then had his way with her. There was a pause and she hoped it was over, but no.

"How about we increase the pace? I want you on your knees. Anal is my desire today." Treasure looked at him and his smirk said it all; there was no way out. His mind was set.

Treasure was on her knees as he forced himself into her, pushing and pushing, dry and tight. He seemed to prefer it like this.

Treasure tried to make sounds to show her discomfort, but he was enjoying his power too much to care. Tears flowed down her burning cheeks, dripping onto the carpet, yet she still kept her screams in. The rough carpet slowly peeled her skin off her knees.

She found some comfort in the sound of house music in the background. He explored her body but he could not arouse those alien sensations in her anymore. His own desires were too great to care about her emotions. The twinkle in his eye for Treasure was gone; she was just another possession that he owned.

Eventually he stood up and got dressed. "Get yourself something nice to wear for tomorrow night; we have an awards dinner to attend. From now on I want you to leave this modelling thing alone; it's not a lucrative career. I saw pictures of you between two guys the other day. What do you think my friends say to me? Who respects naked women anyway? So please stay at home and I will provide for you; you don't need to be out except when you're with me. If I see anyone close to you I will kill them. Ask your young boys who the Alex Mafia is; then you will know my roots!"

He left money on the coffee table and left.

Treasure sat gingerly at the side of the bed, staring at the money and trying not to make her pain worse. *Am I really just good for trophy media appearances and sex? He wants me to be like a housewife, but I'm not even married to him. Could I give up all I have just to sit around and be a sex slave?*

ANNEXURE C 2 (iii) *Bare*

If I died in his arms who would bury me? Who do I really belong to?

She loved Tim, but that wasn't enough for her anymore. His kind of love wasn't comfortable or blissful. Still, she couldn't just leave. She tried hard to reason with herself but her heart was in agony and her body was numb to what had just happened.

She couldn't help thinking of all the men that had meant something in her life; she had always tried to see the good in them but now hate was the dominant feeling in her. Her father claimed to love, yet he was dangerous and ruthless. Alex was a player of note and she could never have him. Tim was a greedy, power-hungry man. All the men in her life had taken pieces of her, yet she kept hoping they would change.

ANNEXURE C 3 (i) Bare

out!" He let her go and stormed out.

Treasure was left in a state of shock. She didn't know what to do or say. Out of pure instinct, she rushed to the front door and locked it in case Tim came back to do something worse. Then she went into her bedroom and locked that door as well, trying to calm herself.

Maybe he's just shocked. He'll come around. This is our baby; he loves kids and he would never kill it. Besides, it's too late for an abortion. I will not kill my own seed – there's no way. Tim loves me; he's just shocked... She kept convincing herself.

She spent the rest of the day tidying, trying to stay calm and daydreaming about the baby. It was so exciting. She had so many plans to make. She didn't know its gender yet, but she had a tentative list of names she had always liked, both English and Sotho. This baby would be well educated and proud of its origins. She swore to protect it from indifference, neglect, trauma, injustice and domestic violence.

She texted Tim that evening. <Don't worry, baby, everything's going to be fine. I don't need anything, but I ask for your love and support.>

There was no answer.

FORCED ABORTION

TIM ARRIVED EARLY the next morning, before six. He let himself in and stood next to Treasure's bed, fuming while she slept. Eventually he kicked the bed.

"Wake up, bitch! This is MY house. Get UP!"

Treasure woke suddenly, disorientated. She sat up in a panic and pulled her blankets close protectively. This was all totally wrong. "What's happening?"

"Get dressed. Bring your ID document and wear something comfortable. And DON'T eat or drink ANYTHING."

"Where are we going? It's so early. I just woke up! I need to shower."

"Get OUT of this bed, woman," Tim growled. "NOW. We have a seven o'clock appointment at the Sandton Clinic. You want to go dressed like that?"

Treasure got up and got ready. She was overwhelmed with emotion: defiant and scared and panicking and angry. Maybe he just wanted to check that the baby was really his? That was fine with her. He could have a thousand paternity tests. Once he saw that baby's heart beating in its tiny body he would love it too.

At 6.35 she got into the car and sighed. "This drama is really not necessary."

Tim snapped and glared at her. "Listen, if you know what's good for you and your mother you will do as I say, otherwise the money will stop and you will both have nothing. So just listen to me and your cosy life will carry right on, with diamonds and dresses and champagne and buffet breakfasts."

His obvious contempt for her made her regret not securing her apartment or even changing the locks. *What did I expect from him? A baby shower?*

She contemplated escape, but he was driving as fast as he could, and he had locked down all the car's doors and windows. Even if she could somehow throw herself out, she didn't want to harm her baby.

A nurse was waiting for them at the clinic entrance at 6:55. She clearly knew of a 'situation' that needed taking care of. She was cold, fast and business-like as she examined Treasure, while talking over her head with Tim. Treasure wasn't aware of their exact arrangement, but it didn't seem promising.

Who knows what Tim has told her? Surely they should be doing an ultrasound scan?

The nurse didn't engage with Treasure's questions except to tell her to "Relax; everything will be okay." It wasn't very convincing. Treasure nicknamed her *Iron Hladi*.

By 7:15 they were escorted to a ward where she was put on a drip with Tim standing close by. Treasure wanted his reassurance, but he was still angry and moody under his blank expression. She began to feel dizzy and tired, and then she fell into a deep sleep.

"WAKE UP, MY ANGEL; I'm taking you home to rest."

It took Treasure a while to orientate herself. She was a little drowsy but she managed to get out of the bed. She was still wearing a hospital gown and she could feel a lot of discomfort in her cervix. Had they been checking on the baby? Maybe they had done some kind of invasive DNA test.

As she sat in the wheelchair Tim showed her, she realised there was a thick sanitary pad in her underwear, as though she had had a miscarriage. But that didn't make sense... She looked up at Tim and his expression confirmed her worst fears. A cold lump descended into her core as she realised what had been done to her. She went into shock as Tim knelt next to her and spoke grimly, very quietly into her ear.

"If you say ONE WORD I will take all that you have in a heartbeat. When we get to reception, sign all the documents and say nothing. You know what I'm capable of, so don't test me. Remember, we are a happy couple, so smile

ANNEXURE C 3 (iii) *Bare*

and thank everybody on your way out.”

She was too weak to respond. Tim pushed the wheelchair out of the ward to the reception area. *Iron Hlaudi* was there, looking indifferent and dour. She gave Treasure a document to sign. Tim paid the bill and helped her into the car. The drive home passed in a daze. Before she knew it, she was back in her own bed.

“You need to rest. I guess all that food you bought yesterday will come in handy after all.” He kissed her cheek and left her.

THREE WEEKS PASSED, and Tim didn’t visit Treasure once. She was exhausted, mentally and emotionally. She was desperate for support. But she had no one to reach out to.

On some days he phoned her to see if she was ‘out clubbing’, which Treasure found preposterous. How could he be so out of touch? Her heart and mind were not in that space. Not once did he say that he loved or missed her. He was on his own planet, with no concern at all for the human life they had made and lost.

Treasure sank into a deep depression. Her morning tea was gin and tonic; lunch was wine and home-delivered Nando’s chicken. Dinners were tears and hot wings accompanied by her new best friend, chocolate pinotage.

Her doctor refrained from asking too many questions and prescribed anti-anxiety medication. It made her apathetic and drowsy. Entire days were spent weeping and sleeping. She felt numb, but told herself she was healing. She couldn’t bear the pain otherwise.

Eventually, Tim started coming around again. He carried on acting like nothing significant had happened, and he was also more controlling than ever. Treasure felt too alone to fight back. She would have to keep up with this charade for now.

ANNEXURE D: INFORMED CONSENT LETTER

Studente nommer/Student number: **14045584**

Van/Surname: **FRIESLAAR**

Nooiensvan/Maiden name:

Titel / Title:**REV**

Voorname / First names:**BRENT FRIESLAAR**

Geboortedatum / Date of birth: **19TH APRIL 1973**

ID nommer / ID number: **7304195115083**

Burgerskap / Citizenship: **SOUTH AFRICAN**

TOPIC : THE “BLESSER-BLESSEE RELATIONSHIP: A PASTORAL CHALLENGE

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this research is to gain a better understanding of the blesser phenomenon and why younger women engage in blesser-blessee relationships. The researcher also seeks to create an awareness of the dangers of these relationships and to equip young women with better life choices that affirm their value and improve their sense of self-worth. Through this research and the understanding gained about the phenomenon, the researcher will begin to develop a pastoral care and healing intervention methodology - this will be the focus in the doctoral thesis. The healing and pastoral care will be started through the narrative approach and narrative therapy as part of the researchers work within the Masters dissertation.

Procedures to be followed

The researcher is planning to do research among women 18 years and older in Gauteng in order to gain a better understanding of blesser-blessee relationships and the blesser phenomenon. The information will be gathered through a series of in-depth interviews with a sample of no less than 5 women using the narrative approach. The researcher has made contact with the agency for Jackie Phamotse who has indicated her willingness to assist in this research study by also being interviewed. The researcher has met with Jackie Phamotse and a successful interview was held in which Jackie shared her story and other insights.

Jackie has also indicated that she will assist the researcher in connecting him with young women known to Jackie who have also experienced similar experiences of violence, abuse and exploitation.

Furthermore, the researcher will also meet with young women at the formerly known Lombardy home for girls but who are now based in Midrand. This organization is one of the social outreach beneficiaries of the parish where the researcher is appointed as Rector by the Anglican Bishop of Johannesburg Diocese.

The researcher holds a Basic Counselling certification with Family Life Centre and also completed practical courses in Pastoral Care, Counselling and Spiritual Direction as part of his Diploma obtained at Theological Seminary.

Risks and discomforts

The Research will not involve the young women to be at any risk in any way. The participants will be expected to share their experiences in interviews in order to supply information to the researcher. The information will be treated with utmost confidentiality and therefore there will be no risk involved.

Benefits

This is a voluntary exercise, there will be no gain, either in cash or in kind. The only benefit will be that the participants will be able to share their stories through counselling that can be provided.

Rights of Participants

The research will make sure that the rights of participants are respected throughout the process. It will be voluntary and participants may withdraw at any time if they feel so without any negative consequences. The researcher will explain the process at the beginning of every meeting so that participants are reminded of their rights.

Confidentiality

The researcher will make sure that the whole exercise and process is done confidentially. The identities of participants will be protected. The information collected during this research will be accessed by the researcher and the University of Pretoria.

Declaration

In order to ensure that all participants of the interviews have agreed to participate, the researcher will prepare a form of declaration in this way

Having received detailed explanation by the researcher on the aims and objectives of this research, I... .. am willing to participate in this interview and agree to the recording of the interview for the purposes of this research study.

Signature:

Date:

Researcher: Rev Brent Frieslaar



Signature:

Date:

ANNEXURE E



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