

MICHAEL WHITE'S NARRATIVE APPROACH WITH
RESILIENT MALE ADULTS WHO EXPERIENCED
CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE

by

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ABSTRACT

Michael White, an Australian family therapist, has used his narrative approach successfully with individuals and families suffering from problems such as eating disorders, schizophrenia, encopresis and sexual abuse. White's questioning process accesses how clients have escaped the impact of their problems. This study examines how White's narrative approach helped two male adults uncover the resilient capacities that enabled them to overcome their child sexual abuse.

The purpose of the study was threefold. The first purpose was to explore two resilient adults' lived experience of child sexual abuse through the use of Michael White's approach. The second was to examine the impact of Michael White's questioning protocol on the participants' awareness of their own personal resiliency characteristics. The third was to explore how the research process changed the participants' dominant view of self.

Data were gathered through semi-structured interviews which were audiotaped and transcribed verbatim. A content theme analysis was used to identify how, over time, these two men managed to overcome their abuse. Three themes were identified: Living in Balance, Reclaiming the Freedom to Choose and Being Open to Learning. These themes describe the participants' inherent resilient capacities. The degree to which these resilient capacities were mobilized and amplified were influential in determining the degree to which they had surmounted their abuse.

The results of this study indicate the ways in which Michael White's narrative approach allow the counsellor and participant to access resilient capacities and characteristics. The resilient capacities and characteristics identify how the two men

reclaimed their personal agency, that is, how they experienced a capacity to be active agents in their lives. Becoming aware of how they took back control of their lives convinced them that they could be active agents again by mobilizing their newly recognized inner strengths and resources.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract	ii
Table of Contents	iv
Acknowledgments	vi
CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION	1
Statement of Hypothesis and Research Questions	4
Design of the Study	4
Limitations	5
Overview of the Chapters	6
CHAPTER 2 A REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE	7
Core of Constructivism	8
Narrative Method	9
Philosophy of Michael White's Therapy	11
Cultural Context	14
Summary	16
Resiliency	17
Definitions	17
Internal and External Characteristics	18
Resiliency and Sexual Abuse	21
Conclusion	24
CHAPTER 3 METHODOLOGY AND RESEARCH	25
Participants	26
Setting	27
Tape Transcriptions	27
The Interviews	28
Phase I	28
Phase II	29
Phase III	29
Role of Researcher	30
Analysis of Data	31
Data Analysis of Phase I	32
Data Analysis of Phase II	33
Data Analysis of Phase III	34
Issues of Ethics and Rigor	34

CHAPTER 4 THE DOMINANT STORY	36
The Dominant Story	37
Introducing Jeff and Paul	38
Jeff's Story	39
Paul's Story	40
Recruitment Into Experience	42
Repercussions of the Abuse	45
Restraints	49
Restraints Reinforced Through Society	53
Mapping the Influence of the Problem	54
Summary	59
CHAPTER 5 ALTERNATIVE STORIES	61
Relative Influence Questions: Part II	62
Exploring Alternative Stories	64
How Jeff and Paul Reclaimed Their Personal Agency	66
Living In Balance	67
Reclaiming the Freedom to Choose	71
Being Open To Learning	75
Reclaiming Personal Agency Takes Time	78
Personal Resiliency Characteristics	79
New or Confirmed View of Self	80
Discussion	81
Summary	83
CHAPTER 6 SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND BEYOND	84
Characteristics and Capacities of the Resilient Adult	87
Michael White's Narrative Approach	90
Conclusion	95
Implications for Future Research in Counselling Practice	96
References	97
Appendix A Copy of Informed Consent for Adults	103
Appendix B Semi-Structured Interview Guide	104
Appendix C Notations Used In The Quotations In The Text	109
Appendix D Sample Interview Transcript	110

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The therapeutic world has shifted from a focus on client problems to a focus on client competence. Resiliency, a concept that emerged at the outbreak of the new wave in therapy, focuses on an individual's ability to recover or adjust easily to adversity.

Resiliency is increasingly seen as an important component in an individual's ability to overcome the effects of sexual abuse. Reports of sexual abuse in both females and males are reaching epidemic proportions (Geffner, 1992). Learning from those who have surmounted their sexual abuse may provide valuable information which may help others in similar circumstances. Michael White's narrative approach focuses on how, at times, people manage to have more influence over their problems and therefore experience a capacity to intervene and be proactive in their lives. His approach uncovers clients' resilient characteristics and competencies that enabled them to recover balance and control into their lives. In this study, the use of Michael White's approach to interview two resilient adults who surmounted their childhood sexual abuse uncovered how they managed to reclaim their lives.

Michael White, a family therapist from Australia has used the narrative method with individuals and families in many different contexts and is well known nationally and internationally for his research methods and techniques (Tomm cited in White & Epston, 1990). White has studied the self narrative that dominated people's actions and ways of being. The self narrative is composed of events and meanings associated with those events that defined how a person interpreted their lived experiences. White believed that

the interpretation of experience was influenced by set cultural standards in society. He found that people came into therapy with a problem that dominated the story they told. This dominant story in therapy became known as the family's or individual's 'problem saturated story'. White is known for his psychotherapy technique of externalizing the problem. Externalizing the problem engages the client in a verbal separation of the problem from the person thereby enabling clients to talk about their problems as if they were distinct entities apart from themselves. This enables the client to view his/her problem from a new perspective and therefore engages the client in finding different ways of solving the problem by accessing his/her strengths and resources. White uses the externalizing technique to map the influence of the problem in the individual's or family's life and then to map the influence of the individual or family over the problem. Mapping the times when the family/individual had more influence over the problem enables the clients to experience a sense of personal agency, a sense of having the self in control. Externalizing the problem and mapping out the influence enables clients to "break from their performance of their stories and experience a capacity to intervene in their own lives and relationships" (White & Epston, 1990, p. 16). I used White's narrative approach to interview two resilient male adults who believed that they had overcome their child sexual abuse without suffering any long term effects.

According to O'Connell Higgins (1994) who studied resilient adults,

"resilience implies that potential subjects are able to negotiate significant challenges to development yet consistently 'snap back' in order to complete the important developmental tasks that confront them as they grow. Unlike the term 'survivor', 'resilient' emphasizes that people do more than merely get through difficult emotional experiences, hanging on to inner equilibrium by a thread" (p.xii).

O'Connell Higgins based her study on the resilient adult and she defined resilient as "individuals who exemplify and amplify resilient capacities that inhere in us all" (p.xii). I chose to draw on O'Connell Higgin's definitions because her focus closely resembles my study. Currently, there are many studies on resiliency, but comparing studies is difficult because no standard definition exists.

Most of the academic literature on resilience has focused on the traits of resilient children. Very few studies have focused on resilient adults. O'Connell Higgins (1994) noted that "resilience is a cumulative process, not a product and it is open to all in some measure" (p.7). Slagle (1990) recommended that to access the core of how persons were resilient was to access their thoughts and feelings through life narratives. The interesting feature of the resilient is not that they are invulnerable, for they too have normal human shortcomings, but that somehow they are able to call on their resilience to help them beat the odds (O'Connell Higgins, 1994).

In my clinical experience in counselling, I have encountered many children and adults who have suffered from the repercussions of childhood sexual abuse. However, research studies indicate that about 20-25 % of those who were abused do not suffer any long term effects (Cahill, Llewelyn & Pearson, 1991). I chose to study this particular area in hopes of understanding how some adults who were sexually abused as children are able to overcome this trauma. Much of the sexual abuse literature focuses on the pathological characteristics of the sexually-abused female. Very few studies have researched sexually-abuse males and of the few studies that have, the focus is on the psychological impact and symptomatology of the male victim. Morrow and Smith

(1995) encouraged future research to focus on the resiliency features rather than on the pathology of survivors of childhood sexual abuse.

Based on my understanding of resiliency, I was curious to know if applying White's narrative approach, which focuses on strengths and competencies of individuals, could be an effective means of retrieving the personal resources of resilient individuals in order to understand how they surmounted their child sexual abuse. White's narrative approach provides a useful theoretical model to understand how two resilient adults, over time, negotiated their adversity with coherence and competence that led to the surmounting of the abuse.

Statement of Hypothesis and Research Questions

Hypothesis

The questioning protocol of Michael White will increase people's perception of their own resiliency.

Research Questions

1. How does one derive understanding of a lived experience through the use of Michael White's approach?
2. What is the impact of Michael White's questioning protocol on the participants' awareness of their personal resiliency characteristics?
3. How has the research process changed the participants' dominant view of self?

Design of the Study

The researcher used a single-case research design with a qualitative analysis procedure for exploratory and descriptive purposes to access an individual's lived

experience. Single case research designs are used to study an individual's personality and to understand individual dynamics, thus increasing the depth of understanding developmental phenomena (Kazdin & Tuma, 1982). Yin (1989) supports using a case study strategy "when the focus is on a contemporary phenomenon within some real life context" (p.1).

The participants in the current study were two adult males who experienced child sexual abuse. Child sexual abuse was defined as any sexual activity involving a child under the age of 18 with an adult who is at least five years older. The participants, through self report measures, identified themselves as relatively well-adjusted in adult life. They acknowledged the trauma of child sexual abuse but reported that they have escaped long- term distress.

Using Michael White's questioning protocol, the participants engaged with the researcher in a three-phase process consisting of semi-structured interviews that were audiotaped for the purpose of transcription. A content-theme analysis was used to analyze the data which involved an ongoing, systematic, comprehensive and reflective process that divided data into relevant units. These units were categorized into an organizing system that compared data to discover patterns which result in a synthesis of patterns and themes.

Limitations

The limitations of the study concern the generalization to larger populations and the credibility of qualitative analysis. A common concern stated by Yin (1989) is to avoid generalizing from single cases, just as from a single experiment. The value here is to

look at general theoretical possibilities as derived from the content of the descriptive data instead of generalizing to populations or groups. The goal of the researcher using case studies is one of analytic generalization as appropriate and not of statistical generalizations. Patton (1990) stated that rigorous data-gathering techniques, the researcher's credibility as well as an overall appreciation of qualitative methods accounts for the credibility of qualitative methods.

Overview of the Chapters

This chapter has provided background to the study, the stated research problem, and limitations of the study. A detailed review of the literature follows in Chapter 2. Chapter 3 outlines the qualitative methodology used throughout the study. Chapters 4 and 5 reveal the results of the study and Chapter 6 concludes the study with a summary, conclusion and implications for future research and counselling practice.

CHAPTER 2

A REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Current developments in family therapy have shifted from first-order cybernetics to post-modern, second-order cybernetics (Parry, 1991). The second-order is based on the belief that, "there is no privileged position or neutral vantage point from which to observe or practice" (Parry, 1991, p.39). All reality is subjective as expressed by clients. The second order requires a separation from the scientific labeling and classification of a client's experience to a narrative paradigm which challenges the hierarchy in family therapy and works with the stories as described by the client.

O'Hanlon (1994) suggested that the therapeutic world was on its third wave of change. The first wave focused on pathology, the second wave focused on problems and the third wave, beginning in the 1980's, focused on competence. Therapies based in Constructivism appeared to be the new fashion (Speed, 1991). Coale (1992) described constructivism as a therapy which emphasized a "non-instrumental linguistic 'co-creation' of new meanings in 'problem-determined' systems" (p .45). Minuchin (1991) perceived the new movement as an evolution of new meanings based upon the narratives told in the therapeutic conversation.

Narrative, one method under the constructivist umbrella, as well as other related methods, appeals to therapists because of the focus on client solutions and strengths (O'Hanlon, 1994). Michael White, a family therapist from Australia, has been viewed as one of the main developers of the narrative method. White has utilized the narrative

approach with many different contexts and is highly respected nationally and internationally for his methods and ideas. White was interested in the self narrative that dominates actions and ways of being due to the meaning ascribed to lived experiences that have been influenced by set cultural standards in society. Relative influence questions externalize problematic parts, thus opening conceptual space for the problem to be viewed differently, and reduce the impact the problem has over people. Separating the person from the problem empowers the individual and leaves him/her with a sense of personal agency; a sense of having the self in control.

The current literature review integrates Constructivist and Narrative ideas relevant to Michael White's therapy and it highlights how White's therapeutic approach may be successful in eliciting personal resiliency characteristics from adults who were sexually abused as children. The review begins with an overview of the Constructivist and Narrative approaches and it describes the philosophical underpinnings of Michael White's therapy, including the influence of Michel Foucault's thoughts on cultural discourses. The literature review on Michael White's therapy is descriptive because the proposed research is based in White's therapeutic context. The literature on resiliency and sexual abuse is also reviewed.

Core of Constructivism

Compared to an objectivist view that believes knowledge exists outside of the individual's personal experience (Whitman, 1993), constructivist theorists believe that human beings alone and together co-constitute the meaning of their world (Neimeyer, 1993; Speed 1991) and are therefore able to participate in the deconstruction and

reconstruction of new meanings (Master, 1991). A therapeutic environment, based on Constructivist theory, is viewed as neutral, non-directive and subjective because of the belief that "language makes, rather than reflects reality, and that all truths are socially consensual inventions" (Minuchin, 1991, p.48). Conversation allows the old belief system to be perturbed, thereby introducing new meaning which allows the client to perceive their situation in many ways that are conducive to solutions of the problem they bring to therapy (Coale, 1992). These ideas form the basis of constructivism and within this structure lies the Narrative method.

Narrative Method

Holland and Kilpatrick (1993) defined narrative as the stories that people tell of their life experiences. Narratives are structures of meaning and power that are constitutive and interpretive (Bruner, 1987). Narrative structures organize and give meaning to experiences in coherent sequences through time. These structures generate directionality and connectedness among otherwise isolated events (Gergen & Gergen, 1984). Holland and Kilpatrick suggest that events or stories are organized and meaning is attached based on the plots and themes that reflect cultural values. Culturally-constructed meanings determine the significance of choices through the life course of an individual.

Problems occur when past events are not meaningful in and of themselves and new narratives are necessary to explain a new reality (Bruner, 1986). Generating new narratives opens up new spaces and possibilities for change by releasing people from past assumptions, judgments and interpretations (Holland & Kilpatrick, 1993). This is achieved by examining ignored events in the old narrative. This examination enables

persons to recognize other ways of understanding a situation. New perspectives allow for the construction of new patterns of meaning in more coherent and satisfying ways of coping. This empowers persons to return to being active authors in their own lives.

Integrating the theme of narrative into the therapeutic setting has been both criticized and supported. Fish (1993) described the narrative approach as a fashionable trend that is being oversold and embraced without interrogation. O'Hanlon (1994) stated that there is little empirical research for the narrative approach but its effectiveness is supported with anecdotal evidence. O'Hanlon referred to one narrative empirical study that found "White's patients stayed an average of only 14 days in the hospital compared to a matched control group who received standard psychiatric care that stayed an average of 36 days" (p.28). Besa (1994) empirically assessed Narrative Therapy's effectiveness for resolving parent/child conflict and concluded that five of six families (88%-98%) showed a decrease in parent/child conflict.

Although empirical research is limited using the Narrative method, anecdotal and clinical evidence does support success with a wide range of problems. To prevent Narrative Therapy from becoming a trend, O'Hanlon (1994) believed that one must truly believe in it's philosophy; the person is not the problem. The problem is the problem. In addition, Cohler (1991) emphasized the life story concept as being important for understanding and making sense of the continuity and change within lives over time especially with persons who overcome adversity.

There are several different varieties of constructivist experiences, narrative being only one type. Evaluation of strengths and weaknesses of constructivist ideas is not the

current purpose. Rather it is to provide an overview of constructivist philosophy with a narrative focus as a means for understanding the work of Michael White. The next section integrates the constructivist/narrative ideas with Michael White's therapy.

Philosophy of Michael White's Therapy

In developing his Narrative theory, White found reinforcement and support from the writings of Gregory Bateson and Michel Foucault. White believes that we live in a real world that socially and physically impacts our constructed reality. This stands in contrast to the radical constructivist view that reality is constructed solely by the individual (White, 1995). White insisted that in order to understand the meaning ascribed to the experience, the narrative metaphor must include the issues of power, social structures and developmental history that have allowed cultural constructs to survive. How meaning is attached to experiences is based upon the interpretation of the experiences. White adopts the idea of the interpretative method as defined by the social sciences.

"Social scientists refer to the interpretive method when they are studying the processes by which persons make sense of the world" (White, 1989, p 6). It is the understanding that persons are unable to view reality objectively; therefore, all understanding is based on interpretations of life experiences and "any act of interpretation requires the ascription of meaning" (p.2). Viewed from White's therapeutic perspective, the interpretive method would suggest that meaning attached to events determines behavior. The meaning of experience is derived through the stories people tell about their lives and "a story can be defined as a unit of meaning that provides a frame for lived

experiences ” (Epston & White, 1992, p.80). Stories contain events and meanings plotted in sequences across time. Through this connection process, persons make sense of their lives (White, 1989). This self narrative provides coherence, continuity and meaning necessary for putting order in our daily lives and for interpreting any new experiences.

Life contains many, many stories. However, White contends that we live our life according to one story that dominates what we think and what we believe to be true. Sub-stories or alternative stories are often never expressed because they do not fit with the dominant story. White views the dominant story as shaping a person's life because meaning is attributed to experience and experiences are purposely selected because they match the dominant view.

Persons enter therapy when their ways of being and thinking of themselves and others contradict their dominant narrative. The dominant narrative is viewed by White as the problem-saturated description of a client's lived experience (White 1989). Meaning of the client's experiences is judged by their own subjective interpretation of reality, not by an external objective reality. Therefore, White's interest in therapy is in the meaning that people have attributed to events and how this meaning has impacted their lives. White utilizes a technique called “externalization” to achieve a separation of the problem from the person.

Externalization is a verbal separation of the problem from the identity of the client by objectifying or personifying the problem (Tomm, 1989). Externalization enables persons to disconnect from their problem-saturated life story by opening conceptual space to explore new ways of solving problems and identify previously ignored aspects of lived

experience that were not a part of the dominant story. This is achieved through relative influence questions that distinguish the influence the problem has on a person and the influence a person has on the problem. Relative influence questions ascertain information that contradicts the dominant story and assists a person in identifying personal resources and competencies (White, 1989). By altering the story, the client is able to shift meaning around the events that surround the problem. This process of externalizing the problem using relative influence questions creates for the person a sense of having the self in control versus a sense of self under control. Therefore, a person is able to become proactive, take responsibility, make new choices in life and pursue new possibilities.

Searching for unique outcomes follows the externalizing process. Unique outcomes are lived experiences that have been previously neglected and propose to challenge or contradict the dominant story (White & Epston, 1990). Unique outcomes free a person from unitary knowledge that dominates one's life (Neimeyer, 1993) and bring forth an awareness of one's strengths and capabilities (Tomm, 1989). Unique outcomes are plotted into an alternative story. Significant alternative stories produce new meaning that alters a client's view of his/her relationship with problems. Questions are pursued to acquire a complete picture of the actions or behaviors that have occurred in the unique outcome. The questioning highlights gaps in a person's knowledge of self, others and relationships. The purpose of therapy is to fill in gaps and discover the landscape of action in the dominant story as well as in alternative stories.

White (1995) proposes that stories have dual landscapes; the landscape of action and landscape of consciousness. The landscape of action provides the structure of stories that contain the experiences of events all connected together through time and in relation to specific plots. The landscape of consciousness is the interpretation or meaning given to the events. Exploring the landscape of action helps to locate, generate or resurrect alternative stories that will make sense of the unique outcome. The client derives new meaning from the alternative stories in the landscape of action which leads to new possibilities. New possibilities lead to new narratives that free the person into being an active author in his/her life once again.

Cultural Context

White's philosophical underpinning suggests that our actions and thoughts are impacted due to cultural knowledges that influences our constructed reality. Stories are framed by historically-constructed, dominant, cultural knowledges within the context of specific institutions and social structures that are developed within a community of people (White & Epston, 1990).

Externalizing the problem encourages persons to separate from their problem and look at it objectively. This challenges persons to question cultural practices that may be oppressive. It is here that White blends his thoughts on externalization with Foucault's ideas on modern history and the objectification of persons. Madigan (1992) summarized Foucault's philosophy as it pertained to White's views on culture by suggesting three modes in which human beings are objectified. The first is called dividing practices whereby persons are excluded through negative labeling. Second is scientific

classification which classifies persons according to scientific labeling; e.g. DSM IV and the third is subjectification in which human beings take a passive position; a sense that the self is under control due to their interpretation of set cultural norms.

According to Madigan's (1992) interpretation of Foucault, these three modes of objectification are constitutive dimensions of power and knowledge whereby "all discursive practices (all the ways a culture creates social and psychological realities) are interpretations embedded in specific cultural discourse, where the subject is considered created by, and creating of, the cultural discourse" (p.269). Furthermore, "once an individual becomes part of society's discourse, certain cultural 'truths' are then integrated and privileged, thereby restraining the construction of alternatives" (p.270). "These 'truths' act to set standards of 'normalization' and influence how people are to shape their lives" (p.270).

There is at present a debate in the family therapy field between those who support and those who criticize White's interpretation of Foucault's philosophy on cultural discourses and the use of power. Fish (1993) believed that White and Epston's interpretations of Foucault's analysis of stories and discourses were "selective and flawed" (p.222). He added that their interpretation of Foucault's meaning of power was "severely skewed" (p.224). Redekop (1995) described Fish's evaluation of White and Epston's view of Foucault's story, discourses and power and disagreed with his interpretations. Redekop argued against Fish's characterization of White and Foucault and provided supporting evidence for the similarities between the ideas of the two men. He concluded that "there are too many alternative stories to be elicited" (p.317). The

debate about how well White interpreted Foucault's work seems to depend on which end of the Constructivist/Objectivist spectrum one is sitting.

Summary

Based on White and Epston's (1990) belief about culture and subjugating knowledges, externalizing the problem through conversations enables persons to identify private stories and cultural knowledge that make up their identity. Externalizing the problem allows persons to separate from unitary knowledges that are making them passive agents in their lives. This helps them to challenge the truths that specify their lives. Externalization acts as a counter practice to the adoption of cultural norms that objectify persons and their bodies. The therapeutic process opens conceptual space for persons to re-author their lives and relationships according to alternative stories. These alternative stories empower persons and give them a sense of personal agency (Tomm, 1989). White's ultimate purpose is to "challenge the techniques that subjugate persons to a dominant ideology" (p.29) by identifying a "person's problem within the sociopolitical language context in which they live" (Madigan, 1992, p.278).

White's narrative approach is a method used to access the life story of an individual to ascertain the meanings attributed to experiences which impact behaviors. White's approach has been used successfully with individuals to help them overcome complex problems including depression, paranoia, suicide risk and eating disorders. One characteristic of resilient individuals is their ability to construct new meanings for events to enhance understanding. Applying White's narrative process could be an effective means to retrieve personal resources of resilient individuals. White's therapy fosters an

awareness of personal agency, times when the client was an active agent in their life and this awareness may highlight the characteristics of resilient adults that enable them to “snap back” when faced with adversity.

Resiliency

The construct of resiliency has gained recognition in the last two decades in developmental psychology (Cicchetti & Garmezy, 1993). Resiliency research has included persons from infancy to adulthood; the majority of the literature is about childhood resiliency. Topical areas of study have included resiliency in relation to: poverty, discrimination, psychosis, maltreatment, neglect, family stress, divorce, wars and Holocaust survivors.

Definitions

Researchers have defined resiliency in many different ways although all have captured a similar concept. Werner (1984) defined resiliency as “the ability to recover from or adjust easily to misfortune or sustained life stress” (p. 68). Egeland, Carlson & Sroufe (1993) used the concept of resiliency to refer to one’s capacity to adapt successfully despite high risk status through use of internal and external resources. Fonagy, Steele, Steele, Higgitt and Target (1994) viewed resiliency as a combination of social and intra-psychic processes that occur through time with consideration of personal attributes, family, social and cultural environments.

Research supports the idea that people are resilient at different periods in their life (Cicchetti & Garmezy, 1993; Herrenkohl, Herrenkohl & Egolf, 1994) depending on individual factors, environmental conditions and developmental tasks (Rutter, 1987;

Zimmerman & Arunkumar 1994; Egeland et al., 1993). O'Connell Higgins (1994) stated that all people have resilient capabilities within, some just exemplify and amplify their capabilities more than others.

Internal and External Characteristics of Resiliency

Resiliency research has focused heavily on the internal and external factors that contribute to one's ability to overcome stressful life events. A summary of the internal resiliency attributes in children and adults in comparison to their vulnerable counterparts includes: being active when solving life's problem with a feeling of having control over their lives versus being passively subjected to it (Werner, 1984; Cowen, Wyman, Work & Parker, 1990; Valentine & Feinauer, 1993); having an internal locus of control (Herrenkohl et al, 1994; Werner & Smith 1982; Valentine & Feinauer, 1993; Luthar, 1991); the ability to construct new meanings for events in order to enhance understanding (Valentine & Feinauer, 1993; Werner, 1984); having a higher intelligence and therefore better academic achievement (Radke-Yarrow & Brown, 1993); and, having temperamental characteristics that invite a positive response from others (Garmezy, 1991; Radke-Yarrow & Brown, 1993). In a review of the resiliency literature, Fonagy et. al., (1994) summarized many of the same resilient characteristics in children's psychological functioning as mentioned above and added: super coping skills, task-related self-efficacy, higher self worth, interpersonal awareness and empathy, willingness and capacity to plan, and a sense of humor.

External attributes included actively participating in extracurricular activities, e.g. hobbies and creative interests (Werner & Smith, 1982), being well liked by others

(Garmezy, 1983; Werner & Smith, 1982), and having support either within the family or outside of the family (Egeland et al., 1993; Valentine & Feinauer, 1993; Herrenkohl et al., 1994).

Research to date has focused heavily on the 'what' factors that contribute to resiliency whereas research explaining 'how' the resilient surmount their trauma appears to be lacking (Masten, Best & Garmezy, 1990; O'Connell Higgins, 1994). Herrenkohl et al., (1994) stated that the internal and external characteristics do not explain the driving force of resiliency and that a more in-depth look into an individual's life through the revealed stories is necessary.

O'Connell Higgins (1994) studied the process by which resilience develops. She believes that resilience is a cumulative process and not a product. Her study involved 40 adults, 23 female and 17 male, with 58% experiencing physical and/or sexual abuse. She discovered the resilient adults to have a locus of hope whereby they recruited surrogates early in childhood and adolescence to fulfill the love they needed and hope for a better life. The resilient adult also displayed faith and vision in how they want their lives to be and how they do not. Lastly O'Connell Higgins found that the resilient adult pursues his/her life as social and political activists to help heal the pathways for others.

Beardslee (1989) conducted three studies using an in-depth life-history approach to access resilient individuals' self-understanding in relation to their particular context; war, cancer, and children whose parents had serious affective disorders. He believed that the best place to start understanding resiliency was by interviewing the individual directly

versus using external measures to assess one's resiliency. The results concluded that self-understanding played a crucial role in one's resiliency.

Although Beardslee (1989) studied resiliency using an in-depth life-history approach, many of the empirical studies used other means of obtaining data. Resiliency was researched using checklists (Egeland et al., 1993; Radke-Yarrow & Brown, 1993; Cowen et al., 1990), life events scales (Luthar, 1991; Herrenkohl et al., 1994; O'Connell Higgins, 1994), peer and teacher ratings (Luthar, 1991; Cowen et al., 1990), assessments (Egeland et al., 1993; Radke-Yarrow & Brown, 1993), interviews (Egeland et al., 1993; Radke-Yarrow & Brown, 1993; Cowen et al., 1990; Herrenkohl et al., 1994; Luthar, 1991; Valentine & Feinauer, 1993; O'Connell Higgins, 1994), intelligence tests (Radke-Yarrow & Brown, 1993; Egeland et al., 1993) and observations (Egeland et al., 1993). These studies concluded that resiliency was dependent on the number and degree of risk factors relative to the number and degree of protective factors present at the particular time that determined one's ability to cope.

Slagle (1990) stated that resiliency is often measured by cognitive and behavioral skills and by the amount of external social support. She discussed how this means of operationalizing resiliency was deficient because resiliency was a process that changed over time depending on the risk factors impacting the individual. Slagle outlined how internal factors of thoughts and feelings were often neglected. She believed that to get at the heart of resiliency, accessing personal experience obtained through life narratives would provide the most valuable data. The interviews performed in the empirical studies, mentioned in the previous paragraph were not accessing a life narrative but asked

questions about external information; e.g., What is your relationship with your parents? Slagle concluded that questioning subjects' affective and cognitive processes would heighten awareness of how individuals turned trauma into triumph.

Although resiliency research has highlighted the protective factors that enhance an individual's chances of overcoming stressful life events, the majority of the research has concerned children. There are very few studies on the resilient adult and few studies on the area of resiliency and sexual abuse.

Resiliency and Sexual Abuse

There is a gap in the literature regarding how adults who were sexually abused as children managed to challenge their trauma and live effectively in their adult life. A review of the sexual abuse literature concluded that 54-75 per cent of victims reported the trauma as having a damaging effect on their lives (Baker & Duncan, 1985). In a review of the literature, Cahill, Llewelyn and Pearson (1991) compiled a list of long-term effects of sexual abuse that occurred in childhood which included: negative self-perceptions; relationship problems; sexuality problems; difficulties in social functioning; depression; lower self-esteem; substance abuse; feelings of isolation; and, post-traumatic stress disorder.

Based on a review of sexual abuse, Geffner (1992), concluded that childhood sexual abuse was reaching epidemic proportions. The occurrence of sexual abuse in Canada and the United States was approximately one in five girls and one in ten boys. However, he indicated that statistics were probably low due to research difficulties that accompany this type of abuse. Geffner stated that research studies have found child

sexual abuse to have created social and family problems that manifested themselves in substance abuse problems, depression, suicidal behaviors, eating disorders, dissociative disorders and teenage pregnancies.

Lisak (1994) studied 26 adult male survivors of childhood sexual abuse through autobiographical interviews. The content analysis revealed 15 themes that described the psychological impact the abusive experience had on their subjects. The 15 themes were: anger; betrayal; fear; isolation; legitimacy; loss; self blame/guilt; shame/humiliation as well as issues surrounding homosexuality; helplessness; masculinity; negative childhood peer relations; negative schemas about self; and sexuality. Lisak stated that the increased recognition of men who have been sexually abused has led to increased research in the areas of prevalence and long-term effects. Studies researching the personal resiliency characteristics of men who have overcome childhood sexual abuse are scarce.

Long & Jackson (1993) studied coping strategies of adult females who were sexually abused as children. They were interested in two forms of coping, emotion-focused and problem-focused. With emotion-focused coping, the women believed they had little control of stopping the abuse and regulated emotions or distress through actions of denial, dissociation or minimization. With problem-focused coping the women believed they had control and attempted to stop the abuse. The majority of the women used the emotion-focused coping strategy and they were also identified as being high in symptomatology. Long and Jackson concluded that optimal adjustment was dependent on the victim's appraisal of the event as being seen as helpful or harmful, feeling in control or being controlled.

Briere (1989) stated that symptom and construct approaches are the two methods for understanding childhood sexual abuse. Research has focused heavily on the symptom-oriented approach to childhood sexual abuse (Morrow & Smith, 1995). Morrow and Smith focused their research on understanding the resiliency features of adult females who have survived and coped with the abuse. Their findings were similar to those of Long and Jackson's (1993). Survivors coped using emotion and problem-focused methods. Their findings were also similar to the resiliency literature that discussed the external and internal factors that contributed to resiliency.

Several studies highlighted the fact that degree of coping was dependent upon the meaning associated with the sexual abuse. Silver, Boon and Stones (1983) discovered less psychological distress and higher self-esteem with adult female incest survivors who found meaning to their experience. Draucker (1989) also found that female incest survivors who were coping well had already achieved some satisfactory understanding of the trauma.

Hazzard (1993) performed a pilot study with adult female sexual-abuse survivors using Finkelhor's traumagenic dynamics model and Taylor's cognitive adaptation theory to identify trauma-related beliefs. The results indicated that the beliefs about personal powerlessness and vulnerability were linked to subjects with low self esteem and an external locus of control.

Morrow and Smith (1995) recommended future research focus on the strengths of survivors of childhood sexual abuse rather than on their pathology. Similarly, Geffner (1992) concluded that more research was needed in order to understand who emerged

unharmd from a childhood sexual abuse experience and what factors contributed to such resiliency.

Conclusion

This chapter reviewed the literature on Michael White's therapy, resiliency and sexual abuse. Because White's approach accesses a person's self narrative and the personal strengths and resources that enabled him/her to have more influence over his/her problems, it is argued that White's narrative approach can access how two resilient adults managed to surmount their abuse. I will use White's narrative questioning protocol to access the participants' self narrative and identify their individual strengths as well as the cognitive and behavioral processes that enabled them to turn trauma into triumph. the methodology for this approach will be described in Chapter 3.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY AND RESEARCH PROCEDURES

The current study employs a deductive, single-case approach to examine the impact of Michael White's Narrative questioning with two adult survivors of childhood sexual abuse. A single-case research design was employed to perform an in-depth investigation of two individuals' lived experience that could not be accessed otherwise. Kazdin and Tuma (1982) stated that single-case research designs are "useful for applying unique therapeutic techniques" (p.16) and that they also "yield extraordinarily valuable information" (p.20). The intention of the research was to explore how one derived understanding of a lived experience and to elicit personal resiliency characteristics using semi-structured interviews. A content-theme analysis was undertaken with the transcribed notes. The qualitative analysis produced three themes that describe the resilient capacities the participants used to help them overcome their abuse.

The research involved the participants in a series of semi-structured, in-depth interviews following the approach outlined by Michael White (1989). The interviews were conducted in three phases. Phase I explored their dominant story, Phase II explored their alternative stories and Phase III examined the impact the research process had on the participants' awareness of their personal resiliency characteristics. The first two phases followed Michael White's narrative questioning. The process was semi-structured to prevent excessive information and to extract comparable findings between participants, yet flexible enough to accommodate each individual's personal account of his lived experience. I have used pseudonyms to refer to both participants in this study to protect

their identities. The following sections outline, in detail, the rigorous procedure applied throughout this study.

Participants

I used purposive sampling to investigate the unique stories of two adult men who were sexually abused in childhood. The criteria for selection involved being an adult male who had been sexually abused under the age of 18 and claimed to have overcome the trauma without having suffered any long-term distress as a result of the abuse. I had known one participant as a result of a previous counsellor/client relationship. His story matched the criteria for my study. I approached him and asked if he would be interested in being a subject for my research. I explained the purpose of the research and believed that he would be a good candidate because of our established rapport. This participant willingly agreed, hoping that his story would help others in a similar situation.

A friend, who had been aware of my research and my quest to find one more subject, introduced me to the second participant. I met with this man, explained the purpose of the research, clarified any questions he had, and investigated to see if he met the criteria for my study. He did meet the criteria and was open and willing to share his story with the hope that he could benefit from the research process.

One participant, Jeff, is 43 years old, has been married for 18 years and has three children. He has obtained two baccalaureate degrees and a certificate. He works full time as a social worker. He enjoys weight lifting and reading and states that he feels confident in his life right now. The second participant, Paul, is 35 years old, is separated

from his spouse and has two children. He is a certified electrician, works full time and runs a small part-time business.

Both participants were open, honest, and articulate as well as trusting of both the research process and me as the interviewer. They were both flexible in their time schedules and they both persevered through the rigorous questioning. They maintained their enthusiasm and even enjoyed a laugh every now and again.

Setting

All interviews with Jeff took place in my home. Paul's interviews took place at his home. The choice of location for the interviews suited both the participants and me. Each participant and I spent the first ten to thirty minutes of each meeting talking about general topics. That was followed by the interviews which lasted 60 to 90 minutes. Following the interviews, a debriefing took place that lasted from ten to thirty minutes. The total time per session with each participant ranged from two to three hours.

The interviews were audiotaped. The equipment consisted of a tape deck and a standing microphone. The equipment made one participant uncomfortable for the first five minutes of the first interview but there was no difficulty after that time. All interviews took place in the kitchen with the participant and me sitting kitty corner to each other. I asked participants to avoid loud movements with chairs or hands on the table in order to reduce any noises that would interfere with sound quality.

Tape Transcriptions

Transcribing the tapes was easily accomplished due to good quality equipment. The voices came out very clear. All tapes were transcribed verbatim (see Appendix D for

an example of the transcription). Four tapes were transcribed by a paid professional and three were transcribed by me. All transcripts were reviewed to ensure all appropriate commas, pauses, and periods were used effectively. Morse (1994) stresses the importance of these factors to maintain the speaker's expression.

The Interviews

During the first meeting, I discussed the research process with the participants. This first meeting lasted about one hour. I explained the research and answered their questions. I had them fill out the consent form and we spent some time getting to know each other. I did not use this first meeting in the analysis. Following the initial meeting, the research interviews began which took the participants through a three-phase process. Following is a description of each of the three phases.

Phase I. In the first phase of the research process, I asked participants to describe their dominant story. This involved accessing information about their life, beginning with their current living situation and going back in time to explore the abuse. Next, I explored the events leading up to the abuse, how they were recruited into their experience and what beliefs or assumptions about self, others and the world were formed as a result of the abuse. These questions are based in White's philosophical framework. We then continued moving up chronologically from the past to where they are today. After gaining access to their dominant story, I identified, externalized and explored their restraints and the role these restraints played in their lives and continue to play in their lives today.

Phase II. The purpose of the second phase was to explore alternative stories, stories that did not get told in the retelling of the dominant story. These stories have been ignored or forgotten. The goal of searching and exploring alternative stories is to access the times when Jeff and Paul did not give into their restraints. After identifying the unique outcomes or times when the restraints or problems had less influence over their lives, I continued with Michael White's unique account questions, unique redescription questions and unique possibility questions. Exploring these types of questions has the effect of plotting the participants' unique outcomes into alternative stories that encourage reflection. This helps determine new meanings that contradict the dominant stories. Unraveling the mystery of the alternative stories engaged Jeff and Paul in story-telling and meaning-making which highlighted ideas of personal agency. Breaking free from their problem-saturated dominant story and enhancing and building on their alternative stories encouraged a re-authoring of their lives; "the process of persons entering into stories, taking them over and making them their own" (White & Epston, 1990, p.13).

Phase III. The third phase consisted of a debriefing interview that investigated the impact Michael White's process had on Jeff's and Paul's awareness of their personal resiliency characteristics and how, if at all, the research interviews changed their view of themselves.

The exact number of interviews per participant varied depending upon the time necessary to complete each phase. Jeff completed the three phases in three interviews. Paul took two interviews for phase one and one interview for each remaining phase of the process.

I completed the seven semi-structured interviews over a four week period and obtained 151 pages of transcribed text. Each interview had a specific focus and goal which was determined by following White's questioning protocol. Prior to each interview, I prepared the questions to ask using Michael White's questioning protocol within the context of Jeff's and Paul's given information. I decided how to plan and sequence my questions following White's process and how much detail to elicit. Patton (1990) emphasizes that well-structured and well-sequenced questions with the researcher having knowledge of how much detail to elicit contributes to the quality of the participant responses.

I extracted Michael White's questioning protocol from his published work. The interviews, though structured, focused and conducted in the same manner, contained flexibility. My job remained one of asking specific questions, listening, summarizing and probing with questions to clarify the participants' meaning or to further explore an answer for greater understanding. Due to the high degree of structure and focus, I was able to pick up subtleties and follow leads that enhanced the in-depth investigation. Morse (1994) stated that good researchers are meticulous and well prepared which enables them to be ready to detect important information. All interviews were intensive, probing, thorough, and reflective of lived experience.

Role of The Researcher

I viewed my role in the research as a co-author in the process. Although the participants and I were engaged in a therapeutic conversation, I was not 'counselling'. Combining my curiosity and in-depth questioning with the participants unraveling of

their stories, resulted in Jeff and Paul re-authoring their lives. Jeff and Paul reported feeling comfortable with me as their interviewer and they felt very open and relaxed in my presence. This was important for the current research because it allowed a co-authorship of stories. Jeff and Paul agreed that they felt comfortable with a female interviewer because it enabled them to let down their “male ego shield” as Paul called it, that protects them from looking weak, and to “wear their heart on their sleeve” and trust the research process. As the interviewer, I definitely felt as if we were on a trip together, exploring and unraveling mysteries that had been buried for a long time. The success of the research process is a result of the co-authorship between interviewer and interviewee.

Analysis of the Data

Following each interview, I filled out a summary sheet reflecting my observations about the interview. The summary sheet included information such as date, place and time of interview with the identified participant. The summary consisted of questions regarding the main issues in the contact, a summary of information received, any salient, interesting or important points and questions or notes to consider for the next contact. This idea was borrowed from Miles and Huberman (1984) who believed that the summary sheet “captures thoughtful impressions and reflections” (p.51). This helped establish a context containing pertinent information that would be available at any time to remind me of the salient aspects of each interview.

Data analysis was ongoing throughout the data collection period and beyond. After each interview, I analyzed the transcribed text prior to the next interview to ensure all necessary information was collected and my understanding of the story was clear and

complete. This process of analyzing one interview before going onto the next fostered data manageability as well as the establishment of a more extensive and detailed data bank. Morse (1994) stated that concurrent data collection and analysis helps guide data gathering so as to let the researcher maintain control and reduce unnecessary information.

I read and reread all transcripts after each interview and repeatedly throughout the data collection and analysis stages of the study. I made two copies of each transcript. I left one copy untouched and filed under "Raw Data". I filed the second copy under "Data Reduction". This 'marked up' copy contained all highlights, margin notes and coding.

Data analysis of phase I. Following the first phase of the research process, I read the data through a first time, with marker in hand, to highlight any phrase or word that popped out as significant to me. I 'went with the flow' on the first reading and looked for repetitions and connections in the data. The next time through I wrote margin notes. These consisted of summaries, questions to clarify in interview two and reactions to the text. I also used descriptive coding in the margins of the raw data to classify text. Miles and Huberman (1984) define descriptive coding as that which "entails no interpretation, but simply the attribution of a class of phenomena to a segment of text" (p.56). Initially I had planned to cut up an entire transcription into its descriptive codes and tape everything into individual file folders. This was accomplished with the first set of data. When I received the other participant's data, relating to Phase I, I chose to develop a matrix on large chart paper for comparison so as to achieve a complete visual representation of Phase I. The matrix consisted of the descriptive code categories with each cell containing

direct quotes from both participants. A number identified where the quote could be located in the original text. I further classified the matrix sections into three significant descriptive codes or themes; recruitment, repercussions and the identification of restraints. These themes and descriptive codes were extracted from White's philosophical framework

Data analysis of phase II. The second phase of the research process involved searching for alternative stories where participants refused to give into their restraints. The data from this phase consisted of reading the transcripts to highlight the quotations that described how, at times, Jeff and Paul managed to break free from their restraints. I rewrote these descriptive quotations on large chart paper. All extracts contained their identification code so they could be referenced with ease. Explanatory codes were given to each quote. According to Miles and Huberman (1984), an explanatory code is a word that indicates a pattern or theme. The initial search revealed four themes; 'Living in Balance', 'Being Assertive', 'Spirituality' and 'Being Open to Learning'. After considering the best fit between data and themes, I decided to broaden the rule for the 'Being Open to Learning' theme to include the spirituality quotes. The church, acting as a role model for Jeff and Paul, opened their eyes to learning a better way to live life. I also changed the assertive theme to "Reclaiming the Freedom to Choose" because the quotes in this theme included speaking up for oneself but also for being aware that one has the freedom to choose to speak up. This phase of analysis generated three themes or patterns that described how Jeff and Paul, at times, reclaimed their personal agency; 'Living in Balance', 'Reclaiming the Freedom to Choose' and 'Being Open to Learning'.

Each quote was then clustered by thematic grouping to help organize and give clarity to the data to make sure the analysis reflected the generated metaphors.

Data analysis of phase III. All significant information regarding the impact the research process had on the participants, their awareness of personal resiliency characteristics and how the process changed their dominant view of self was extracted. Jeff's and Paul's resiliency characteristics are described and information regarding the two men's changed self perception is described in Chapter 5.

I doubled checked the transcripts for all interviews to make sure all relevant data were included and to know why certain data were excluded. Although my two participants experienced very different stories, common themes were shared between the two. The intention of cross analysis was to make comparisons without sacrificing each participant's unique story.

Issues Of Ethics And Rigor

I maintained anonymity of participants throughout this discussion as well as in the following chapters through the use of pseudonyms. The participants were aware that at any time they had the freedom to withdraw from the research as outlined in their informed consent forms.

I made a conscious attempt throughout this chapter to provide an 'audit trail' whereby sufficient detail concerning the conceptual development of the study was provided so others could reconstruct the process (Morse, 1994). Patton (1990) discusses the importance of credibility in qualitative research. He stresses rigorous techniques and methods of gathering high quality data and justifying the credibility of the researcher. I

employed a rigorous and credible process in the data analysis. The rigorous techniques applied consisted of: testing of rival explanations; searching for negative cases; knowing why data were excluded from a theme; having multiple interviews with the same individual to gain in-depth rich text; on-going analysis from the onset to the termination of data collection and beyond; undertaking a study compatible to the skills of the researcher; and maintaining intellectual rigor by reviewing the data over and over again to see if it was reflective of the themes. In the following chapter, I hope to provide the story to the first half of our journey.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE DOMINANT STORY

The first phase of the research process was to gain a picture of Jeff's and Paul's life story. I wanted to obtain information about their life story in order to understand their interpretation of their lived experience and to understand how the meanings they attributed to their life events influenced and shaped their lives. The questions used in Phase I and Phase II are based on Michael White's text analogy of how problems are constructed and solved. As explored in Chapter 2, White's philosophy is based in the social scientist perspective that proposes "what persons know of life they know through 'lived experience' ...and in order to make sense of our lives and to express ourselves, experience must be 'storied' and it is this storying that determines the meaning ascribed to experience" (White & Epston, 1990, p.9). My role as interviewer was to explore many different aspects of their story in order to piece together how the two men have constructed their lives.

A conceptual idea in White's writing is that of a dominant story. In this chapter we will see how Jeff's and Paul's current life experiences as two adult men with careers, children, wives and relationships are shaped by their own dominant stories of their abuse. An exploration of how Jeff and Paul were recruited into their experience, the repercussions of the abuse, identification of restraints and how the restraints are reinforced through society provide the context for a mapping of the oppressive practices. All these pieces provided the broad conceptual base I required to gain an understanding of the participants' dominant stories.

The Dominant Story

Michael White defines 'dominant story' as the prevailing story people use to retell their lived experiences. Jeff and Paul described their lived experiences through the stories they told. Bruner (1986) argued that "life experience is richer than discourse. Narrative structures organize and give meaning to experience, but there are always feelings and lived experience not fully encompassed by the dominant story" (p. 143). In Jeff's and Paul's cases, we talked mostly about their abusive experiences because I needed to understand them in order to understand how, over time, they managed to become resilient. Their lives have many more aspects which did not get a chance to be expressed in the retelling of their dominant story. Often these parts contain experiences which White refers to as unique outcomes, times when Jeff's and Paul's lives were not plagued by problems. Plotting these unique outcomes into alternative stories is discussed in greater detail in Chapter Five.

The two participants chose to select only a few experiences as they told their life stories. These experiences demonstrated the ways Jeff and Paul viewed their life and showed how they constituted the shaping of their lives. White (1992) proposes that "persons' lives are shaped by the meaning they ascribe to their experience, by their situation in social structures and by the language practices and cultural practices of self and of relationship that these lives are recruited into" (p. 122). In Phase I of the interview process, I intended to gain an understanding of how Jeff and Paul were recruited into their abusive experiences, the impact of the experiences on their beliefs and assumptions about self, others and society and whether any of their beliefs and experiences were

reinforced through cultural practices or social structures. This information represented the subjugating knowledges that defined the 'truths' that specified the two men's lives.

These truths are based on the oppressive beliefs, attitudes and practices that are reinforced by family members, others and society. Oppressive beliefs, attitudes and practices became the restraints that restricted Jeff and Paul into a problematic lifestyle. Mapping the influence of the restraints, and using a therapeutic technique called externalizing, provided a clear picture for myself and for Jeff and Paul how the problem influenced or continued to influence their lives and relationships.

Introducing Jeff and Paul

Jeff and Paul are the two participants in this study. Jeff, 43 years old, has been married for 18 years and has three daughters. He is a social worker who enjoys the challenges of the job. He feels confident as a person who has had to struggle through life to reach the plateau he is at now. His hobbies include weight lifting and reading.

Paul is 35 years old, a single parent with two sons. He is a certified electrician with a small business on the side. He enjoys camping, fishing, skiing and snowmobiling.

After the initial introductions in the Phase I interviews, I asked Jeff and Paul to go back in time so that I could arrive at an understanding of their abusive experiences. I asked if they could tell me about the abuse, how old they were, how long it lasted, who the perpetrator was and any other information they felt comfortable sharing. This helped provide information which constituted their dominant story. The stories Jeff and Paul shared retold their childhood sexual abuse experience as they now understand it and can reflect upon it as grown men.

Jeff's Story

There were a number of perpetrators, OK. It started I would have to say now, I remember it starting or it was an ongoing process when I was at least 3 or 4 years old. [...] First of all I was blaming it on my natural father and I said well, this started occurring with him when I was 7 or 8. OK, maybe 6. But then I started to remember other events you know. My natural father was not a physically big man. He was short and stocky and powerful. But I always remember a larger pair of hands and a taller, more menacing figure, and through analyzing my dreams and thinking and trying to confront it, it turned out that it was my grandfather. [...] I was scared of my grandfather, always scared of him, you know. And I hated going to spend time with my maternal grandfather. [...] My grandfather died in 1963, and I remember that because that's when JFK was shot - it was in that time period. And I was happy, because I was scared of him, OK. What he used to do was he used to take me out into the orchard and into the greenhouse. And what he used to do was he'd get down on his knees, put his hands on my shoulders, and used to tell me what a nasty, spoiled little bastard I was, and I deserved everything that happened to me. And he convinced me you know, and I couldn't get away from him because he was powerful - his hands were so big and strong. Those wrists, I mean, you know his arms were unbelievably strong. And he used to pull my pants down, pull my underwear down and he used to put me up on a - oh platform where they used to put plants on a - sill, a big sill and he used to stick needles into my bum. And he used to do it in such a way that you could see the pinpricks, but nobody ever questioned. [...] And sometimes, he used to - you know like - take a frozen wiener and insert it up my anus. It hurt - very cold, OK. And then what would happen is I'd feel guilt and angry and he'd always make these statements like [...] you're always on pins and needles. And that was how he demonstrated his power and his authority and control over me in front of my parents. Because they wouldn't know what the hell he was talking about. And he'd always say that if I didn't do what he wanted me to do, like he used to use really infantile language [...] But what he used to do was he'd say, well, do you love mommy, yes, do you want anything to happen to her, no, and this is when we'd go through this perverted process. [...] Well what happened you see, is while this was going on, like my Uncle Fred, who was my biological father, would take me out on a motorcycle and we'd go shooting and he would, you know kiss me and he would also sodomize me too [...] This went on until I was about 12 years old.

Jeff's abuse by his grandfather stopped when he was 8 when his grandfather died. The abuse by his father continued until age 12 when his father moved away to another town. At age 16, Jeff visited his father one summer and became embroiled in a physical fight. Jeff, being taller and stronger, started fighting back and demanded that he was not going to let his father put him through the hell he did when he was a child. Jeff refused to

“sink to his father’s level.” From ages 17 to 23, Jeff drank heavily and involved himself in power relationships with men. At age 21, Jeff assaulted seven men and turned himself into the police so they could put him in jail. The policeman advised Jeff to get counselling rather than putting him in jail. Jeff took this advice. At this time Jeff also signed himself into a detox program. When Jeff was in the counselling and the detox program, he started meeting people who encouraged him to go into social work and helped him along the path of recovery. Later, Jeff went to university and obtained two degrees and a certificate. He felt that he had taken control back into his life between age 23 and now, at age 43.

In contrast to Jeff’s story which had much violence in it, Paul’s story is one of friendship and intimacy. Although Paul’s story may not seem to be obviously one of abuse, this story of seduction is no less abusive.

Paul’s Story

I was 14 years old at the time, and, as a matter of fact, I remember it was 10 days away from my 15th birthday, so I was almost 15. And I had never had any - I mean I had had sexual contact, but I had never actually had intercourse with anybody. And myself, I guess some of the background that I need to put into place is that myself and my three siblings were all adopted. My older brother, my older sister, and my younger sister. We were all adopted from separate homes, separate backgrounds. And about a year before the event, not even a year, maybe even about 6 months because I think she came to live with us in the summer, so - my cousin came to live with us at the house. And she was with us for about a year. And she was 21 when it happened. Basically, what happened was that we got quite close, like we developed a friendship first. And it was quite a close relationship I felt. Mind you, I’m still thinking in terms of a 14-year old, not having had any real sexual experience. Certainly not a lot of emotional attachment to any other person outside the family. And we got to be really good friends. And what happened was we’d - since I had a bedroom in the basement, she also had one - late at night we started to talk and she knew I was into writing poetry at the time, and we started giving each other back rubs in her bedroom, which was at the furthest corner of the house. And so, like, I’d go to her bedroom and we’d just sit up and talk. I’d actually crawl into bed with her. And she’d give me a back rub, and I gave her, and this went on for weeks. And, you know, we read poetry together, and usually the bedroom was lit by candles and she’d have incense going, and it was quite a heady experience for a 14-year old. [...] One

night, we were laying in bed together, and I guess it was 1 or 2 in the morning. You know the rest of the house was asleep and she asked me if I'd ever had sex. And the question kind of surprised me a little and I said, well, no. And she says would you like to? Just like that, very matter of factly, and I guess my response was just, like, sure! Because I mean I had a certain amount of desire anyway, and I guess the other thing is, you know, when you're 14 years old, you don't want to be like, uncool. [...] And I mean the relationship went on for, oh gosh, for a few weeks anyway, I mean, like sexually. I'm sure we were probably engaged in sex probably 5 or 6 times. Then I recall that it did start turning kind of cold, in that she started rejecting me, and I couldn't understand it. I didn't know what was happening; I didn't know what was going on. But of course, it wasn't something I could make a big stink about. I certainly couldn't tell my parents about it because I was in fear of them finding out anyway - for her and for me because I knew I would be in deep trouble. So I just kind of went along with it [...] and after a certain amount of time it started to dwindle and die.

Prior to age 14, Paul described himself as friendly, non violent, non aggressive, sensitive, confident, well-liked, and fun loving with a good sense of humor. Following the abuse he developed a temper and kept his feelings to himself. On one occasion shortly following the termination of his relationship with Claudia, Paul's mother commented to him about his temper and Paul recalled his mother wondering where this temper came from. Paul had nobody to talk to about the relationship or his feelings following its termination. Claudia left the relationship without giving Paul any reason as to why it ended. This confusion and the necessity to keep it quiet left Paul with no outlet to release his overwhelming emotions regarding Claudia, and his suppressed emotion came out in the form of a temper. Paul's way of dealing with Claudia's rejection was to involve himself in other relationships. Paul married at age 25 and separated almost five years later. Following his marriage, he continued to have many temporary short and long term relationships with women.

Both Jeff and Paul identified their experiences as 'abuse' when they were in their thirties. At the time the abuse was occurring, neither man labeled it as abuse. Jeff suppressed a lot of painful memories that started to resurface after his first daughter was born. Paul discovered his teenage experience was abuse after discussing his relationship difficulties with a counsellor friend. Although Paul's abuse is not normally defined as violent, he is still suffering the repercussions of it.

After gaining access to Jeff's and Paul's dominant stories, I wanted to explore in more detail the practices of recruitment that brought Jeff and Paul into their experience. Questions about how Jeff and Paul were recruited into their experiences consisted of: who had the power to define their experience; how was this achieved; and, what were the direct or indirect messages enforced by the perpetrator.

Recruitment into Experience

In abusive situations the perpetrators have the power to define the experience for their victims through direct or indirect messages. These can be looks, specific words or tone of voice. Styles of recruitment vary. Jeff's father and grandfather enticed him through direct and indirect messages that instilled enormous fear. Regardless of their method, the perpetrators succeeded in meeting their needs at the expense of their victims.

Jeff: "Well first of all my grandfather would do it in a very methodical manner. He would be stripping me while he was talking to me and I would be too scared to do anything. [...] My grandfather had the ability to just exude a kind of hatred through innuendo. Boy - you're on pins and needles - we'll take you down to the orchard and that'll get the sticklers out of you. Little phrases like that - little words like that [...] Now Fred was different because he was more volatile about it, more emotional. He would scare me into it. [...] He would just go berserk. You know, he'd start destroying stuff around me, and once he got to me I was too scared to do anything. Like they were both very scary men. [...] Fred would always

try to kill himself, and to kill Mom. Like they both used my mother, you know, as an instrument to use as leverage against me.”

Jeff's grandfather and father used threats, a cold gaze, a specific tone of voice or a well-known phrase to recruit Jeff into the abusive experience. Their style of recruitment enforced a fear that controlled Jeff's thinking and behaviors. Jeff was constantly afraid and often feared for his own life as well as his mother's life. He believed that his life must be relegated to whatever these two men decide. Fear was the tool Jeff's father and grandfather utilized to meet their needs at Jeff's expense. The styles of recruitment became the oppressive practices suppressing Jeff's freedom. He had no way of controlling how he would live his life because the fear was too overwhelming. Jeff's father and grandfather had the power to define his experience because of their position of power and authority.

Paul's recruitment, although very different from Jeff's, still had an impact on his thoughts, feelings and behaviors. Instead of fear, Paul's cousin used seduction to entice him into the abusive experience. Claudia and Paul developed a friendship, became good friends, shared poetry and gave each other back rubs in her bedroom late at night. After the scene was set, Claudia asked the question:

Paul: and she asked me if I had ever had sex. And the question kind of surprised me a little and I said “well no”. And she says “would you like to?”

Having spent time together sharing poetry and philosophies, Paul trusted his cousin. Trust allowed Claudia the power to recruit Paul into the sexual experience. At 14 years old, Paul was at an age where human sexuality was intriguing and interesting to

him. She played on his sensitivities and vulnerabilities to seduce him into an experience, that at the time was positive, yet as Paul stated later, “you’re not enlightened enough to know what the repercussions are, the deep-seated changes that can take effect on a person after an experience like that.”

Claudia controlled when and how the relationship would start and finish. Paul stated earlier that Claudia started rejecting him and he could not understand why. In the spring, Claudia moved out and Paul visited her to rekindle what they had. After his arrival at the house where she lived with her friends, Claudia rejected him again.

Paul: She basically turned off my advances and it hurt me [...] but for me, at the time, all I felt was really hurt and rejected. [...] I had tried advances and she pushed me away. So that’s pretty direct rejection. And then she verbally told me that she didn’t want us to do that - and I can’t remember specifically, but I seem to recall that she had said that she just wasn’t interested in that anymore.

Throughout their entire relationship, Claudia had the control and the power to decide what, how, when, and where. The actual sexual activity did not prove to be problematic for Paul, but the direct rejection without a reason as to why it ended was the most painful outcome. This style of controlling and manipulating Paul’s life is another example of how Claudia had the power to define Paul’s experience. His interpretation of this event in his life set patterns for future relationships.

Jeff’s and Paul’s perpetrators used their position of power and authority to recruit their victims into the abusive experience. The perpetrators defined how they would meet their needs at the expense of their victims. The repercussions of the abuse live on long after the actual sexual abuse experience has ended.

Repercussions of the Abuse

The repercussions of the abusive experience had a direct impact on Jeff and Paul. Their interpretation of the abuse formulated beliefs and assumptions about self, others and society. Jeff and Paul regarded these as 'truths' that specified how they would lead their lives. Their interpretation over the years of the abusive experience constituted their personal identities. Tomm (cited in White & Epston, 1990) stated that "our personal identities are constituted by what we 'know' about ourselves and how we describe ourselves as persons. But what we know about ourselves is defined, for the most part, by the cultural practices (of describing, labeling, classifying, evaluating, segregating, excluding, etc.) in which we are embedded (p.vii). Since all stories have a past, present and future, White and Epston claim that the "interpretation of current events is as much future-shaped as it is past-determined" (p.10). The repercussions Jeff and Paul experienced with the abuse played a significant role in their attitudes and behaviors during and following the abusive experience. In the interview, I asked questions to gain a perspective of the repercussions of the abuse. Some of the questions were: What impact did the abuse have on your perception of self or world?; What impact did the abuse have on your feelings, beliefs and experiences?; What beliefs about yourself or the world do you think have survived and at times today, still have an impact on you?; What beliefs about yourself and the world do you think had the most impact and played a large role in your life? This type of questioning attempted to gain an understanding of the repercussions of the abusive experience and how Jeff and Paul interpreted those events.

Jeff: Well I felt that I wasn't any good, I didn't feel good about myself. I didn't have any confidence in myself about anything. I didn't feel like I could make friends because I felt that all relationships were use/use

relationships, all right. [...] I hated the world, OK, it was a scary place, it was big and it was out of control. [...] I started reading. Like I could read - that was one thing I did do. And I got a hold of some books that Fred got from the University Library on the Kinsey Report that was about homosexuals, OK. And I was 9 when I read it, and I decided that I must be a homosexual because men liked to sodomize me, so therefore I must be a homosexual. And I thought that male/female relationships were perverse. [...] What happened is I reached the point in my life where I was saying well, OK, Jeff you can do what your grandfather did, you know. Because I was going through a very funny phase. Like, I'd see a 6-year old boy and my inclination would be, OK, can I take him out to the woods, do what I have to do, and then kill him so he can't tell. That scared me, you know, that's scared me, and I said I'm not that [...] And it scared me because, you know, I didn't want to be like that, and I said, you know, I don't like myself. I don't like what I'm going to become. I don't want to drag anyone down to this level.

The repercussions from the abuse had Jeff thinking and acting in a way that reflected the oppressive beliefs, attitudes and practices imposed upon him as a child. Growing up with the beliefs such as, "relationships are just use/use", "I must be a homosexual because men liked to sodomize me" and "the only joy that could be gained was by men hurting men" reflected the oppressive beliefs by which Jeff interpreted his life. These oppressive beliefs restricted Jeff from behaving differently than his father and grandfather. Although Jeff knew he did not want to impose on other children the abusive behaviors he suffered, he at times found it difficult not to degrade himself to "the level" of his father and grandfather. These oppressive beliefs subjugated Jeff's personhood. The repercussions of the abuse left Jeff feeling isolated from others, insecure and tempted to repeat the abusive behaviors onto others.

Jeff hated the world and felt like it was scary and out of control. In contrast, Paul viewed the world as a great place to live. Paul viewed the initial repercussions of the abuse as a positive outcome because the experience taught him about sexuality and how

to treat women. However, this hands-on teaching lesson produced overwhelming side effects after the abuse was over.

Paul: I learned, how to treat a woman in bed. [...] those were some of the things I felt pretty good about growing up. I never had a problem with relationships in that area, you know, ever since then and I thought I've been lucky. [...] It made me feel more mature. I mean something like that can't help but empower a person. [...] It was an amazing experience. I felt the world was a great place to live. It was like wow, I've got this to look forward to. I felt good about it. I didn't know any different. Because let's face it, at that age you're not enlightened enough to know what the repercussions - the deep seated changes that can take effect on a person after an experience like that.

After Paul told me about the immediate influence of the abuse, I asked him in what ways the abuse had an impact on his life now. Paul said that when he continued to wonder why his relationships with women would not work, he recognized the problematic repercussions of the abuse. He began to see a pattern.

Paul: I didn't even realize it at the time - but looking back the pattern I see, and it's almost definitely connected, is my relationships since then, and you have to understand I had to be very secretive about our relationship. I felt like I was in love with somebody. Like this was like a first love. It was the first serious, adult kind of love. [...] Not that I wouldn't go out at all and allow my friends or acquaintances to see my partner, but it felt uncomfortable. [...] To me it was a thing where, a relationship that isn't like that - is one even when you think it's going good, maybe it isn't. Because at any time, somebody can just push you away and say no. I don't want this any more. And this is something that I got from Claudia that I never really understood, but I didn't realize it. All I knew at that time is that I had to deal with it. And I dealt with it the best that I could.

The initial repercussions of the abuse had Paul thinking that sex and life were great. He felt well-schooled and competent in the sexual arena. However, in relationships following the one with Claudia, Paul put too much emphasis on his competence at performing well sexually and lacked confidence when it came to the social

aspect of his relationships. As his life went on, Paul continued to feel a need to keep his relationships a secret, even though as an adult, engaging in sexual relationships with older or younger women was allowed.

It was at this point in Paul's interview that I became aware of the taken-for-granted practices that restricted Paul's ability to grow and develop relationships. He did not know how to be open and honest and share his partners with family and friends. His interpretation of his experience with Claudia shaped future relationships. Paul's attempt at recovering from his hurt and rejection pushed him into more female relationships. These relationships were characterized by women who, at times, treated Paul the way Claudia did. Paul stated "I was never let down easy with Claudia, I was never given an explanation as to why it ended and it has happened in relationships since then, where the person has just walked away." Paul was not aware of what it was about him that seemed to destroy relationships but each relationship following Claudia never seemed to work out quite right.

The relationship with Claudia left Paul with insecurities about himself. He built up a belief that if he could protect his relationship from outside influences it would not fail. He also built up the belief that even when you think love is good it might not be. He made it his responsibility to try to keep relationships safe from outside influences by isolating his partners. The meaning Paul placed on the events with Claudia became the means of interpreting future female relationships. In his attempt at finding true love, 'secrecy' and 'isolating his partners from the environment' became the oppressive

practices defining how Paul would interpret future events with female relationships.

These practices continued to sabotage future relationships

When I obtained information in the interviews about the repercussions of the abuse, I became aware of the oppressive beliefs, attitudes and practices that required Jeff and Paul to remain stuck: the restraints that did not allow them to view their lives differently.

Restraints

According to Michael White, restraints are made up of beliefs and patterns of interaction called 'vicious cycles.' The beliefs consist of the "normative expectations about how people should be as individuals and in relationships" (Adams-Westcott & Isenbart, 1990, p. 41) "Vicious cycles include those habitual patterns of interaction that maintain problematic behaviors. Family members are generally unaware that their interaction is patterned and perceive themselves as having no choice but to participate in the vicious cycle" (Adams-Westcott & Isenbart, 1990, p. 41). Jeff's and Paul's taken-for-granted practices and attitudes led to the development of problems. They acted as restraints.

Beliefs that act as restraints are those rigid, unrealistic, specifications or rules that are imposed on an individual as truths (Adams-Westcott & Isenbart, 1990). Beliefs about family loyalty and what is expected can compromise the growth of individual family members when family loyalty is a first priority. These rigid expectations blind individual family members to noticing their personal strengths and resources. In the following

quote, Jeff's comments depict an example of the beliefs which imposed restraints on him from developing a sense of self.

Beliefs

Jeff:: I believed all men were like this with their children [...]“Even when I was 10 or 11, I understood and thought well, maybe sex is only just to relieve tension, OK, a certain amount of physiological tension. And that the only joy that could be gained was by men hurting men. [...]My mother and Fred and my grandfather discouraged me from pursuing any relationships with girls as friends because they were weak. Even my mother reinforced it, you know, you're better off to be with a strong man. I had a very skewed perception of relationships.

Jeff grew up believing that all fathers were like this with their boys. Family members imposed their rigid views on Jeff regarding the roles of men and women and they defined who Jeff should have relationships with. As a result of these rigid beliefs, Jeff locked himself into a victim lifestyle characterized by feelings of powerlessness. He developed a picture of himself as having few resources. Based on these unrealistic expectations, Jeff engaged in patterns of interaction that perpetuated problematic behaviors.

Patterns of Interactions: The Vicious Cycle

OK. So what happened was that I could not develop relationships with females. [...] I started going through a lot of confusion. [...] I went through a number of emotional changes where I had some good relationships, but all of a sudden, you know, the things that happened between my grandfather and myself seemed to take over. I allowed them to take over again, and I did become involved in power relationships with men.[...]The relationships with some of the men I had sex with were deep but it wasn't a balanced healthy kind of relationship. [...] What I would do is we'd start drinking and then I'd hammer the hell out of him. Like backhanders, throw him against the wall. [...] I was not functioning properly. I was moody all the time and I drank a lot. When I started drinking that is when I would just hammer the hell out of guys.

Jeff depicts a clear example of the restraints that prevented him from escaping his problematic lifestyle. Although he realized alternative lifestyles existed, Jeff was restricted into believing he had no choice but to act in the way that was reinforced by the family with whom he grew up.

Paul also formed some very clear beliefs and patterns of interaction that, up to and including the research interviews, still had an impact on his life. He was not aware of what it was that he did in his female relationships, or why relationships failed, only that they did. Paul was blind to the restraints that controlled his life.

Beliefs

Paul: She taught me respect for your partner, she taught me how to please your partner, and how it is important to please your partner first.[...] Maybe it manifested itself in being a little bit too important as a part of the relationship, in other words if I could perform sexually for my partner, maybe that becomes a little bit too much of a focus. And because my first experience sexually was such a good one with her, I mean you always want to do at least as good again, duplicate it or do better.

Paul initially viewed the contact with his cousin as very positive. She was kind, gentle and understanding. She taught him the 'ropes' and he believed he would be forever grateful. However, following the termination of his relationship with Claudia, Paul felt rejected and worthless. In order to be reassured he still had some prowess, he engaged himself in future relationships and controlled them by placing a large emphasis on pleasing his partner in hopes he could keep his relationships from breaking up. Paul stated in the debriefing interview "I placed too much effort into pleasing my partners in order to gain control with them instead of allowing my partners to love me for who I am." The belief that being good in bed will keep a relationship together perpetuated mistrust

and isolation in Paul's relationships causing relationships to fail. Paul's attempts at controlling his girlfriends by placing too much emphasis in the sexual arena isolated him from developing a well-balanced relationship.

Patterns of Interactions: The Vicious Cycle

Paul: I had to keep it quiet, I had to hide it. I had to hide it from my friends. I had to hide it from my parents. I had to hide it from the environment that I lived in. [...] Ever since then, I'd always have a difficult time being very open with my partners. In other words, I found it difficult to involve my partners in anything other than one on one. [...] It's like I said, a pattern where I said, if this is going to be a true love of mine I've got to attend to it and make sure, like I've got to stay on top of it and make sure that it works. And I can't allow outside interference to damage it. I was almost secretive about my girlfriends. I never really felt comfortable.

As a result of his relationship with Claudia, Paul became secretive with future partners. He kept future relationships quiet, secretive and away from friends in an attempt to make the relationship feel safe. He believed that if he exposed the relationship to the 'environment' his partner may just 'go away'. He never wanted to experience the intense pain and hurt he experienced with Claudia. These restraints bound Paul into a pattern of behavior that continued to sabotage any relationship he had.

Family and societal rules restrained Jeff's and Paul's growth as individuals. Jeff and Paul repeated the cycle of behavior they learned in their abusive experience. They continued to act accordingly following the abuse, because they did not know how to break free from the oppressive beliefs, attitudes and practices that restricted them from acting differently. These restraints contributed to Jeff and Paul creating a picture of themselves as having few choices. The beliefs and patterns of interactions prevented

them from noticing their strengths. The restraints contributed to the production and maintenance of abusive behavior (Adams-Westcott & Isenbart, 1990).

Restraints Reinforced Through Society

One helpful component of White's text analogy is that it includes the broader sociopolitical context of a person's experience. White and Epston (1990) state that the stories people tell of themselves are framed by a broader sociopolitical context in which they live. Considering the role society plays in a person's beliefs, attitudes and practices helps in understanding the consideration of societal 'power' and its effects on lives and relationships. In Chapter 2, I discussed Foucault's philosophy regarding the issues of power. He claims that persons are subjugated by the effects of societal 'power' in which people are divided through practices of isolation, scientific labeling, classification, etc. Foucault refers to the sense of societal 'power' as shaping of people's lives. The society in which Jeff and Paul grew up reinforced some of their beliefs and patterns of behavior. Jeff grew up in a very violent and abusive environment where men ruled the household. In Phase I, I asked if society played a role in the reinforcement of his beliefs and patterns of behavior, and this is what Jeff said.

Jeff: "Might makes right."

Jeff believed that using force was normal and natural. There was no compromise, discussion or interdependence. Power of strength was everything. Paul also grew up in a society that encouraged men to be cool, lose your virginity at an early age and be a 'real man'. These beliefs supported Paul in what he did. It gave him a sense of bravado.

Paul: I mean it's taboo to have sex with a member of your family. As far as feelings of right and wrong, I knew that somebody this young shouldn't

be having sex with someone of that age. [...] When you're 14 years old, you don't want to be like uncool. [...] I mean you see it on T.V. You know, the geek gets his first chance with a woman and he chokes right? And of course, I wasn't going to choke.

The pressures of society as well as what society dictated to be correct or incorrect, appropriate or inappropriate influenced Paul's decision to partake in the sexual activity. Paul felt a cultural pressure which gave preference to the popular, non-virgin boys over the uncool, virgin boys. Paul wanted to make sure he belonged to the popular group.

People and societal structures imposed and reinforced both men's restraints. These restraints became problematic for Jeff and Paul when they realized that they did not approve of their own behavior and practices but did not know how to go about changing them. Jeff's and Paul's dominant stories revealed the oppressive beliefs, attitudes and practices that restricted their behavior making them succumb to passengerhood. They were not in the driver's seat. Their beliefs and cycles of behavior were driving them. In order to gain an understanding of the impact of the beliefs and behavior practices, I mapped out the influence the 'problems' or restraints had in their lives.

Mapping the Influence of the Problem

Through the use of relative influence questions, I was able to engage Jeff and Paul in a separation of the problem from their lives (White, 1989b). There are two types of relative influence questions. The type used in the first phase of the interviewing is described in this Chapter. The second type of relative influence questions is described in Chapter 5. Relative influence questions invited Jeff and Paul to become aware of their problem and the influence it had or was having in their lives. In particular, I used

White's relative influence questions in Phase I to map the influence 'fear' had in Jeff's life and 'secrecy' and 'controlling the environment' had in Paul's life.

Mapping the influence of the problems is begun by externalizing the oppressive beliefs, attitudes or practices that restrict an alternative view of the dominant story, the prevailing story that Jeff and Paul tell of their life situation. Externalizing is a therapeutic technique that separates the person from the problem and aids people in challenging the 'truths' that specify their lives (White & Epston, 1990). Externalizing the problem from the person opens conceptual space for people to take an active stance to escape the influence the problem plays in their life (Tomm, 1989).

Up to this point in the interview, the predominant theme in Jeff's story was that of fear. Words describing how scared Jeff felt are easily identified in his transcripts. Statements like "I was scared, always scared." were frequently heard and seen. Jeff lived his childhood scared to death. It was this fear that prevented Jeff from taking control back into his life and leading it the way he wanted. There was a time when Jeff had mentioned feeling guilty and angry, but he discounted their importance. I explored 'Fear' as I felt it was of most significance and checked it out with Jeff to see if he felt this was the case.

LFG: Now we're just going to talk a little bit about the current, the present now, to see what role these fears, being scared, that seems to be the largest emotion that overwhelmed you as a child. That was the biggest thing -

Jeff: It was.

LFG: So what I want to know is, then, in what way has 'Fear' - kind of externalized this thing, as being a thing on its own - in what way has 'Fear' had an effect on your life?

Jeff: Well, what happened is (pause) that fear became very predominant. Between my 18th and 22nd year. What happened is - I went through a number of emotional changes where I had some good relationships, but all of a sudden, you know, the things that happened between my grandfather and myself seemed to take over. I allowed them to take over again, and I did become involved in power relationships with men, OK.

LFG: So it interfered with relationships.

Jeff: Yeah.

LFG: "How does 'Fear' impact your relationships now with family or wife, job or friends?

Jeff: I guess I'm a strict disciplinarian because I always had this sense of fear, well I'm going to lose control and that won't happen. But it's just like sometimes it's there and I don't need to think like that.

LFG: So what does 'Fear' try to make you do, even still in the future. You say it's kind of there. What does it -

Jeff: Well sometimes I just get angry, and I just feel like a need or desire to lash out -

LFG: So 'Fear' wants you to kind of lash out -

Jeff: Well not fear - I want to do it. Like, out of the sense of fear, I feel like I want to do it, but I say no, no, come on, come, don't do this.

I capitalized and put single quotes around 'Fear' in the text to define it as a separate entity from Jeff. My style of talking in the excerpt above demonstrates the externalizing technique. This type of questioning provides a broad field of information from which alternative stories can be found. Externalizing the fear encouraged a conceptual separation of the problem from Jeff and provided him with a conceptual space to view 'Fear' differently. However, Jeff did not really accept the externalizing idea as he has already extensively processed his lived experience. He began reclaiming his

personhood at age 23, twenty years ago. Externalizing 'Fear' did not have the impact it may have had for Jeff because at the time of the interview he was not suffering from his problem.

The interview with Paul, on the other hand, showed a different level of processing his lived experience. Shortly after the abuse, Paul viewed his experience as a positive event. When I asked Paul how the abusive experience impacted his life today, the effects of the oppressive beliefs and attitudes started to become clear.

LFG: I'm just going to stop you there, because you've said a lot and I am getting confused. What I hear you saying is, your perception of the abuse was positive, however, secrecy was enforced. I hear secrecy, and this secrecy, although you may not have recognized it at the time, secrecy was enforced because this was a relationship you could not talk about.

Paul: Yes. That was the abuse.

LFG: That was the abuse.

Paul: That was the abuse. Not the sexual contact. The abuse was the having to keep it quiet and then when I wanted to continue, it was just cut off from me and I was never, never by her, given an explanation. I was never let down easy. I was never - and it kills me that it has happened in relationships since then. Where the person has just walked away. And what hurts me the most is not getting a why. I mean, if you're going to walk away, you're going to break up with somebody, at least tell them why. Don't just leave it. And that was the hardest thing for me. That was the abuse. It wasn't the relationship itself. It was the how it was cut off and how it had to be kept quiet.

LFG: How did 'Secrecy' impact your life then, and how does 'Secrecy', in a sense still impact your life now?

Paul: I've always been very aware of - I guess it's OK to be a little dishonest if you're saving somebody's feelings. You know, it's kind of - it's brought up issues where I've felt as long as I'm sparing somebody's feelings - either in a relationship or in a friendship, it's OK to keep quiet about certain things, you know, if you're sparing somebody's feelings. And I've always been one to want to be up front and honest with my friends.

I continued to explore how 'Secrecy' had an impact on any decisions he made. Since the abusive experience, Paul has always needed structure in his life and he doesn't like surprises. He described how there is secrecy between this person and that person and the stress level is unbelievable. 'Secrecy' has sabotaged relationships between Paul and his partners even though he has desired to be open and honest. When asked what kinds of things 'Secrecy' had him worrying about lately he said:

Paul: I guess my biggest fear is screwing up again. You know, I'd like to resolve and rectify any of the responses, negative responses that I've developed as a result of the abuse. I'd like to have it worked out. Like if it means I have to go to counselling or seek some kind of professional help, or just work it out in my mind, rationalize it, put it to rest, put it behind me so I don't make the same mistakes that I made in the past. That's probably the biggest fear for the present and the future.

'Secrecy' plagued Paul's relationships. His beliefs about 'Secrecy' and that it is "OK" to be a little dishonest prevented open and honest communication between Paul and his partner. The second part of Paul's problematic patterns of behavior was his need to maintain control over the relationship's environment. This idea was not completely clear to me until my second interview with Paul. The second interview was still a part of Phase I, where I was trying to achieve a clear picture of his dominant story. Paul's second interview consisted of clarifying different points made in interview one. While gaining clarity in a variety of places, I worked hard to explore what other restraint restricted Paul from living freely with a partner, without feeling the need to isolate his partner from outside influences. Michael White stresses the importance of externalizing those problems the clients view as restricting in their lives. If the client does not agree with the choice of word or words to be externalized, the therapeutic process will not have

the needed impact. I wondered if Paul's major theme was hurt, or rejection, or lack of trust, fear of being exposed, etc. Then I asked him to clarify those patterns that had created some difficulties in his life, a piece of text I remembered from the first interview, and Paul replied "well the big thing is the secrecy and the wanting to control the environment surrounding my relationship, so that it feels safer." These two points were revealed as the two major themes that maintained Paul in an oppressive lifestyle regarding his female relationships. Paul politely accepted the idea of externalizing these restraints as 'monsters'.

Externalizing the oppressive beliefs, attitudes or practices that restrict Jeff and Paul and mapping the influence these problems had or still have in their lives provides a broad, detailed description of their dominant stories. Their stories contain evidence of the beliefs and patterns of interaction that prevent Jeff and Paul from living free from the oppressive lifestyles that at particular times still control their life.

Summary

Jeff's and Paul's dominant stories depict a description of their lived experience. Their stories are based upon their interpretation of their lived experience and those aspects of their stories they choose to remember and retell. Jeff's and Paul's dominant stories contain evidence of the styles of recruitment demonstrated by their perpetrators to control and manipulate them into their abusive experience and the repercussions of the oppressive beliefs, attitudes and practices imposed upon them. Predominant in the stories are the restraints consisting of beliefs and vicious cycles confining them to a problematic lifestyle and how these restraints were reinforced through cultural messages. Mapping the

influence of the problem using relative influence questioning clarifies the extent to which the problems interfere in their lives and relationships. The information contained in the dominant stories do not highlight Jeff's and Paul's strengths or resources that have at times enabled them to escape the influence of the problems in their lives. Part two of the relative influence questions are explored in Chapter 5. This line of questioning engaged Jeff and Paul in a conversation that searched for and explored the unique outcomes and alternative stories that enabled them to identify previously neglected but vital components of their lived experience.

CHAPTER FIVE

ALTERNATIVE STORIES

Chapter Four provided a descriptive account of Jeff's and Paul's dominant stories. Their dominant stories contain oppressive beliefs, attitudes and practices imposed upon them as children. These beliefs and patterns of behavior became the restraints restricting Jeff and Paul to a problematic lifestyle. I externalized the restraints to map the problems' spheres of influence in Jeff's and Paul's lives and relationships. A thorough mapping of the presence of the problem in the two men's lives provided a broad field from which to ascertain unique outcomes that provide the foundation for alternative stories.

I used Michael White's questioning protocol in Phase II. White's questioning protocol contains four categories of questions called unique outcomes, unique account, unique redescription and unique possibilities. This questioning involved Jeff and Paul in verbalizing descriptions of alternative stories. The questioning confronted gaps in their knowledge of themselves. Phase II questioning encouraged Jeff and Paul to fill in these gaps by identifying unique outcomes. Unique outcomes are the times when Jeff and Paul did not give into their restraints.

In this chapter we will see how Jeff and Paul challenged the oppressive beliefs, attitudes and practices. A thorough investigation of Jeff's and Paul's alternative stories revealed how they, at times, reclaimed their personal agency. A thorough investigation of their alternative stories had a direct impact on their self perception and awareness of personal resiliency characteristics.

Relative Influence Questions: Part II

The first type of relative influence questions outlined in Chapter 4, described the influence the problem had in the two men's lives. The second type of relative influence questions explores times when Jeff and Paul had more influence over their problems. Tomm (1989) proposes that this set of questions highlights personal resources in overcoming the influences of their problems. In the interviews, I invited Jeff and Paul to describe situations when they took action against their problems. This line of questioning brought forth an awareness of the times when they had taken back control in their lives. Tomm comments how an increased sense of personal agency; a capacity to intervene in one's life, may be achieved in the therapeutic conversation. The conversation can bring a recognition in the client that options do exist; a choice to either continue to submit to their problems or to reject the invitations. During the course of this interview, Jeff and Paul explored new alternatives to their situations. This new awareness opened conceptual space that enabled them to explore new behaviors, new thoughts and new self perceptions.

This process of exploring alternative stories begins with a search and exploration of unique outcomes. Unique outcomes are the times or occasions in the participants' lives when they did not give into the oppressive beliefs, attitudes and practices that specified how they should live their lives. The types of unique outcome questions I used were: Was there a time when you could have been stopped in your tracks by (restraint) but you withstood it instead?; Were there times in your life when you were able to escape (restraint)?; Can you recall a time when you could have given into (restraint) but didn't?

Searching and exploring unique outcomes challenges the restraints that had locked Jeff and Paul into a problem-saturated description of their life story. Jeff's and Paul's dominant stories in Chapter 4 depict an example of a problem-saturated description.

In the course of Phase II questioning and following the discovery of a unique outcome, I asked questions that plotted this event into the context of some pattern of events that derived at a unique account. "Unique account questions invite family members to make sense of the unique outcome by locating it within a pattern or class of events that are linked in time and place. Unique outcomes are plotted into the landscape of action" (White, 1989, p. 42). Some examples of this type of questioning are: How did you encourage that strong part of you?; How did you get yourself ready to take this step?; What preparations led up to it?; What were you thinking at the time?; Have you been advising yourself differently?; What sort of training did you do to prepare your relationship to decline the invitation to cooperate with the problem?

The next types of questions are unique redescription questions. "Unique redescription questions invite family members to ascribe significance to the unique outcomes and unique accounts through redescription of themselves, others and their relationships. These questions encourage family members to operate in the domain of consciousness and to call forth alternative knowledges." (White, 1989, p. 43). Examples of the type of questions I asked in this category were: What personal qualities could these achievements indicate?; What difference does realizing this make to how you feel about and treat yourself?; So what do these things tell you about yourself that the

feelings had been hiding from you?; What do these discoveries tell you about what you want for your life?

The last category of questions is called unique possibility. "Unique possibility questions invite family members to speculate about the new personal and relationship futures that are attached to the unique accounts and unique redescriptions." (White, 1989, p. 44). Examples of these types of questions include: What difference will knowing this about yourself make to your next step? What new possibilities would open up for you if you were to side more with this new picture that you have of yourself as a person? What new possibilities might these changes open up for you?

Searching and exploring unique outcomes, placing them in time, attaching meaning to those events and exploring possibilities for the future helped Jeff and Paul to create a new description of their own life stories. As Jeff and Paul broke free from the performance of their old story, they experienced a capacity to control and influence their lives and relationships.

Exploring Alternative Stories

Jeff managed to overcome his oppressive beliefs, attitudes and practices imposed upon him as a child. He broke free from the problem-saturated description of his life and moved into a lifestyle free from restraints. My curiosity revolved around wondering how Jeff managed to reclaim his personhood and how he managed to break free from the fear that ruled his life for so long. Phase II of the interview explored Jeff's alternative stories, a version of the dominant story that did not get a chance to be expressed.

Although Jeff's dominant story from age 3 to 23 was a problem-saturated description of his life story, there were still hints of Jeff attempting to challenge these notions imposed upon him from family members and societal labeling. In this interview with Jeff, I was curious to know how Jeff managed to escape isolation, how he managed to weight train to dissipate anger rather than slipping into old habits; how he, at times, accounted for his ability to resist his father and grandfather; how he challenged the training he grew up with regarding women and relationships; and how he encouraged that strong part of himself to not bring himself down to the level of his father and grandfather.

As I explored these unique outcomes, I was able to plot them into alternative stories about how Jeff was able to challenge his restraints. For example, I would ask Jeff a series of questions: Was there a time when you could have been stopped in your tracks by fear but you withstood it instead? How do you account for your ability to do this? What does this tell you about yourself that you didn't realize before? What difference could these qualities make to your future? Alternative stories do exist even though they were not part of the retelling of Jeff's dominant story. As a child and young adult, Jeff ignored the alternative stories because the beliefs and practices in them did not fit with the problem-saturated description. Exploring these times in Jeff's life where he managed to challenge the restraints he grew up with, opened up new descriptions of an old story. Cultivating these new descriptions elicited the awareness in Jeff of his personal agency, how, at times, he managed to intervene and take control in his life. This exploration of his alternative stories enabled him to re-author his life and to side more with this new description of himself rather than the old description of himself.

In contrast, searching for Paul's alternative stories took place in the present. Paul's oppressive beliefs, attitudes and practices, the main issues of 'Secrecy' and 'Controlling the Environment' were searched and explored as we talked.

Paul's interview for Phase II was composed of searching for times in his life when 'Secrecy' and 'Controlling the Environment' did not influence his actions and behaviors and sabotage his relationships. I offered to use the term 'monster' to isolate and make clear to Paul that the restraints were not part of him. I motioned with my hands and commented about the 'monsters over here'. Paul agreed to using this terminology for his restraints. Later, Paul used this term on his own in our conversations. Having Paul use this word on his own signified to me that talking about his restraints as monsters made sense to him and it made him feel more in control of his own life.

Paul was suffering from his restraints in the present whereas Jeff had already overcome his restraints and was leading a well-balanced lifestyle that he believed suited him. I emphasize this to distinguish why Paul had 'monsters' and Jeff did not. Although Jeff had reclaimed his personhood many years ago and Paul started to view his life from a different perspective as we spoke, they showed similar characteristics in how they reclaimed their personal agency.

How Jeff and Paul Reclaimed Their Personal Agency

Three themes emphasize how Jeff and Paul were able to escape from their problem-saturated life stories. The themes tend to overlap somewhat and sometimes a quote may contain aspects of other themes embedded in the quote. The three themes that

describe how Jeff and Paul, at times, took back the control in their lives, are: Living in Balance; Reclaiming Freedom To Choose; and Being Open to Learning.

Living in balance. The theme, 'Living in Balance' consists of two parts. The first part involves the inner core which is a feeling experienced at the 'gut' level where Jeff and Paul sensed something was either right, wrong, good or bad. The inner core can be compared to our intuition. The second part of this theme involves living in balance with actions and feelings. The occasions when Jeff and Paul managed to escape their restraints involved incidents where their actions and feelings balanced and a sense of 'this feels right' was experienced. To live in balance is a challenge for Jeff and Paul for they have lived with imbalance for a great part of their lives. The following conversation provides an example when Jeff was living in balance.

I asked Jeff how he learned a new way to dissipate his anger through weight lifting instead of being violent towards others like his grandfather and father. Although there were times when Jeff did use violence, there were also times when he did not. I searched for those times.

Jeff: Well I did not like being hurt. I know how it made me feel. It made me feel low, it made me feel degraded and I decided that I would never want to put anyone else smaller than myself in a position like that.

LFG: So how had you the courage to challenge anger in a more positive form?

Jeff: Well as I said before, I felt that if I were physically stronger I would be more confident in myself and I would have more control over myself and so I just started lifting weights.

LFG: Were there any preparations that led up to it?

Jeff: Well I guess it was a psychological preparation, an accumulative kind of process where I would see older boys with good muscle tone

feeling good about themselves and not being bullies and being calmer and I started to decide well I want to be like these guys. They are stronger, they are confident, they work in a garage or a grocery store and they are good workers, people like them. So I decided to emulate those boys and I studied hard in school. I decided that if I read more and started doing physical things that I would feel better about myself and I started to.

LFG: So did you know this about you or is this something new, that you chose not to go in the path that you were brought up because you were influenced by all the other good people in society or the books that you read [...] and you wanted to be like that and you talked about not wanting to lower yourself down to someone's level. So did you know this about you?

Jeff: Yes I did like, it was an intuitive, visceral feeling that if I did something that was going to be destructive towards someone else, I would end up feeling worse about myself.

Living in balance became very important to Jeff. His actions needed to be congruent with his feelings and when this happened he felt good about himself. He was back in the 'driver's seat' of life, if only for a moment. He knew at an instinctual level what was right and wrong. He began to know that hurting other people would go against what he believed to be the 'right thing to do'. Jeff worked hard to challenge the oppressive practices of his childhood. He used other people in society as his role models of how he would like his life to be. He did not want to lower himself to be like his father and grandfather. Learning to live in balance with actions and feeling and trusting his intuition enabled Jeff to begin to take back control in his life.

The following conversation I had with Paul revolved around 'Secrecy'. We were exploring times when 'Secrecy' did not interfere in a relationship.

LFG: So in any relationships that you've been in, have there been times when Secrecy has wanted to prevent you from being open with your partner, but you chose to fight it instead and not give into 'Secrecy'?

Paul: Un-hunh. Yes, I'd have to say - I'd have to agree with that. But there have been times where it's been difficult as well. Where let's say, if I've been in a situation where I've had someone who is really important in my life, and somebody who is not as important, another female friend, say, came to town or something like that. Whereas I didn't want to tell the person that I was closest to that this person came into town, because I knew that they would feel hurt.

LFG: But did you tell them?

Paul: Yes, I did.

LFG: So how did you give yourself priority? At that time, to tell the person instead of giving into 'Secrecy'?

Paul: How did I give myself priority?

LFG: Right.

Paul: Well basically - my own personal integrity or choice is to be up front and honest. And I felt it was more important for that than to sabotage my own ideals of that. It was important and it was a conscious decision. I had to decide was I going to or not.

LFG: It was important for you to live in balance with what you believed to be true and how you act.

Paul: Exactly.

We explored a little more about Secrecy and then I asked:

LFG: So what do these discoveries tell you about what you want for your life and for future relationships?

Paul: I need honesty for myself. I need to be true to myself, I guess. I have to maybe rather than being so resilient and doing what the other person wants so much, there has to be a balance, at least in my own personal life as far as my standards go for myself. And how I conduct myself in the relationship. I have to be true to myself first and then I can be - malleable in the relationship. Giving to that person in how they like me to give - as first of all I am true to myself, and what my own standards are.

Paul is beginning to understand that he needs to live in balance with his actions, morals of right and wrong, and his inner desires in order to escape the oppressive practices and beliefs he used in his female relationships. Giving into 'Secrecy' robs Paul of his personal integrity. Paul was aware of the times when he may 'mingle' with two women at the same time. Paul knows that he should not, but the strong internalized restraint of 'Secrecy' he has internalized has become a hard habit to break. Exploring a time when he did not give into 'Secrecy' exposed a time when he took control of his life and felt good about his actions. He tells about a time when he was open and honest, a behavior he sensed at the gut level as a way to be true to himself.

Claudia met her needs at Paul's expense. As Paul engaged in other relationships, he continued to sacrifice his needs to please his partner first. My questioning highlighted for Paul his need to take care of himself first and that his actions and feelings must match. As a result of our conversation, Paul slowly started to generate a new description of himself and the way that he would like to be. Paul's description of himself was one that practiced honesty and openness with female partners, a value he strongly believed in as a child. This new description expressed balance and integrity and a freedom from 'Secrecy'.

Desires and wants pulled Paul and Jeff forward toward a more balanced life. Old habits encouraged and pulled them both back into imbalance. What needed to occur for Jeff and Paul to start living more in balance was for them to realize they had a choice. They had the power to change old habits and challenge the truths that specified their lives. This is articulated by the second theme which illustrates how Jeff and Paul started

to make their own decisions based on what they wanted to do rather than allowing their habits, fears and impulses control their lives.

Reclaiming the freedom to choose: Awareness of personal agency. Being assertive and taking back control in their lives illustrates the second theme. As Jeff grew older, stronger and smarter he started to reach his own personal threshold where he refused to take any more abuse. He discovered that he had the freedom to choose how he would run his life. It became clear throughout Jeff's life narrative, that at times, and in various developmental stages, Jeff took risks and started fighting back to regain control in his life. The following examples illustrate how Jeff reclaimed his freedom to choose.

Jeff:

- "Well I just refused to go see my grandfather."
- Well anger, accumulative anger built up inside of me. You know it was a very long process that I went through and finally I started acting on it. I started saying no. I am not going to go anywhere with Fred. I am not going to go anywhere with my grandfather. So I refused to do it.
- I can remember when Fred wanted me to get on the back on the motorcycle and I wouldn't get on with him, I just would not, and he'd pick me up and I was trying to get away from him.
- I refused for the simple reason that he was going to hurt me more than even I could take.
- Well I ran away from my grandfather.
- Well I was not always going to put up with that.
- Well I started thinking well dammit, I can have a girlfriend and do all the things that men and women like to do.
- Yes, I started becoming stubborn because it started occurring to me that if people didn't have enough sense to give me a bit of autonomy and a bit of peace that I have to fight for it, so that's what I started doing.

Jeff started to learn how to meet his needs without sacrificing his integrity at the hands of his grandfather and father. He started to challenge the oppressive practices that

imprisoned his spirit. Jeff was aware of what was right and wrong at a visceral level. He knew, from observing others the inappropriateness of what was happening to him and he would no longer tolerate it. Reclaiming the freedom to choose was a process that took time. Jeff appeared to have an inner threshold reference point telling him when enough was enough. He refused to sacrifice who he was as a human being.

Paul also started to learn to speak up. Following is a conversation we had where we explored a time when 'Controlling the Environment' had less of an influence in a female relationship.

LFG: Can you recall another occasion when you could have given into 'Controlling the Environment' but didn't - times when you and your partner did go out and do things with other people?

Paul: Un-hunh. Yeah, there was a time where I went out with a girlfriend of mine, and she was just graduating from nursing school and we'd gone out to a party. It was early in the relationship - we were still getting to know one another. And she did something involving drugs which really shocked me, being a nurse, and I suppose if I was more into Controlling the Environment, that I wouldn't have allowed myself to see her again after, because basically, I don't know if I gave her an ultimatum, but I told her it was unacceptable, and actually she surprised me and told me she didn't expect me to call again. And I saw the value and the potential in her, and I thought well, you know, you take it a day at a time. And I can make the right decision about things like this. So rather than saying no - I just don't want any part of this, this isn't where I'm at - I allowed my inner strength and faith in that maybe there is something here to guide me.

LFG: How was it that you were able to stop yourself from being completely overtaken by 'Controlling the Environment'?

Paul: I guess the thing is I took my time. [...] I was able to take time away from her and away from the relationship to think about it - what I wanted to do. Consider my own desires and I guess that was a lot of it, perhaps in like this controlling monster, where I want to control the environment. Perhaps it also generates a feeling of insecurity where you feel you have to act immediately, you have to do something about it or the consequence of loss will be there. I'd given myself time to think it through, and deal with

it, rather than feeling so emotionally involved, and rushed, and insecure, that I was able to think it through and do what I felt confident in doing.

From the rejection in his abusive relationship, Paul learned to protect himself in future relationships and he developed insecurities that they would leave. These insecurities made Paul react to circumstances immediately without giving the situation another thought. For example, Paul had stated in a general conversation with me how a girlfriend of his arrived at his home later than expected and he instantly felt insecure thinking that maybe she was up to something. In refusing to experience hurt and rejection again, Paul made a rushed decision and accused her of having an affair. This perpetuated more insecurities in the relationship. In the interview excerpt described above, Paul had just begun a new relationship with this nurse and therefore still felt in enough control to make decisions that were good for him. Choosing to take time out to think was unusual for Paul in relationships where he became deeply involved. Paul recognized that on this occasion it was important for him to make decisions that reflected his values and morals and not be controlled by the 'Controlling the Environment' monster that instilled insecurities. Paul started to discover he has the freedom to choose to live his life the way he wants to rather than being passively subjected to it.

In this interview of discovering alternative stories, Paul began to realize his personal agency, his ability to take back the control in his life if he so chooses. Following is an example of Paul escaping the influence of 'Controlling the Environment' monster.

LFG: So what do you think this might tell you about your ability that you wouldn't have otherwise known?

Paul: I don't know, it seems kind of abstract to me now, but perhaps it identifies that my inner abilities, my inner strengths are stronger than the monster. And that I do have the ability to change the behavior patterns. And that the monster is just a pattern and something that I can change, that I do have the ability to deal with.

LFG: How could you teach your monster that you can appreciate yourself without taking its side? What can you say to it? What can you teach it? Tell it something about you that you appreciate in you and that you are not going to take its side.

Paul: That I appreciate the person that I am. That I have the choice to make my own decisions. That I don't have to give in to it. That I prefer to not give in to it and that I would rather empower myself to make positive choices, rather than give in to its control.

LFG: So what could you do that would prove to this monster that you are going to be your own person and not a person for it?

Paul: Well I guess the proof is in the pudding. I guess I have to make a conscious decision not to allow myself that pattern of behavior, and start a new - like have faith in myself, I guess that I'm going to change the pattern. That I am going to make sure that I take time to think things through and not be intimidated and pushed any longer. And I guess I have to make a conscious decision to do that.

LFG: What does this tell you about yourself that you maybe didn't realize before?

Paul: I guess the biggest thing is that - is that I have the ability to change a behavior that I didn't realize was something almost external that was - I mean it was a pattern, but it was something that was not - is not a part of me. It's not the way I am. It's not the way I am. It's something that is changeable, that is something that I can choose to develop the way I want.

At this point in the interview, Paul started to discover his personal agency. Paul realized he had the power to decide how he wanted to run his life; with or without the monster. The questioning for Phase II illuminated the alternative stories that are seldom expressed as part of the dominant story. These counter plots encouraged Paul to give a new description of his life and what he might want for his future. Paul began to re-author

his life in a dominant story free from the restraints that locked him into a problem-saturated description of his life story.

Apart from Paul and Jeff discovering the freedom to choose, other people and societal structures provided role models and possible options in life that Jeff and Paul could choose to emulate. Jeff and Paul remained open to learning better ways to deal with their life.

Being open to learning: Finding a better way to be. As Jeff and Paul became aware of different problematic practices in their lives, they reclaimed their personal agency by being open to learning and finding a better way to live. Jeff began to notice other people in his family who acted in the way he preferred. He also tried to live by the rules of the Bible. Paul began evaluating his own behavior and started realizing that how he acted was not improving the quality of his relationships. He began opening himself up to new options and other ways to be.

Breaking old habits is difficult. Only when we desire to be another way, when we see others out in the world that model what we want to be like, can we then have something concrete to focus on to make changes. Drawing from Gregory Bateson's work, Michael White discusses Bateson's notion regarding 'news of a difference.' White quotes Bateson who says "it is the perception of difference that triggers all new responses in living systems" (White & Epston, 1990, p.2). Awareness of people, societal influences like the church, and just being around family members who modeled how Jeff desired to be, provided Jeff with the 'news of a difference' that opened new doors to learning how to change.

Jeff: It was a sense of me wanting to be like my second cousins on my father's side. You know normal healthy kids. That was what I wanted because it made me feel good, it did not make me feel angry, it did not make me feel worthless [...] and I knew that I was better than just being relegated [...] I always noticed that my second cousins parents were nice to them, they were very relaxed people and at their grandparents they were very good to me and they weren't sinister like my grandfather and that's where I started developing the idea that there are normal people out there.

The church also influenced Jeff's life.

Jeff: Like I said at the point it would have been easy to sink to be degraded [...] there was a parable that the Sunday school teacher used to tell us that if you chose the high rocky hard road it would lead you to heaven, if you took the low, easy road it descended to hell. And I guess that was the paradigm that I pursued, cause I knew that if I was going to try to normalize my self perception, normalize my relationships with other people and try and fit within a larger societal kind of context, I knew that I would have to learn things other parents have already taught their kids.

Interacting with people outside Jeff's immediate family provided information that taught Jeff about a different way to live. According to Jeff, this new information fit more with his wants and desires out of life. The importance of having a variety of role models seemed to be critical in his wanting to change his lifestyle and be somebody different. Jeff also mentioned earlier how he would emulate confident boys with good muscle tone. Jeff's acute awareness enabled him to observe different ways of being. Through books and other people in Jeff's world, he put together a collage of the characteristics he would like to embed in his own personality and that is what he did.

Paul repeatedly tried to protect his relationships from outside influences in order to protect himself from feeling extreme hurt and rejection. Slowly, Paul realized no matter how hard he tried, it was never enough.

LFG: So how were you able to refuse the hold Controlling the Environment monster had on you?

Paul: Well I guess it's come to accepting that relationships are based on freedom of choice. [...] It came down to the fact that words can only mean so much based on the sincerity and the honesty of the people that are speaking the words. Because actions speak volumes. [...] It's a person's actions that count, I guess. So the thing is, I came to realize you can't control the other person. You can have an effect on the environment, but you can't control it to the extent that the person is going to do, necessarily what you want.

LFG: So how did you encourage that strong part of you to learn to just let it go and believe that relationships are based on freedom of choice?

Paul: Well I guess the thing is I realized that the other way was a losing battle. [...] The same problems kept happening - the same negative responses kept repeating itself and I felt more exposed and more vulnerable. I guess for me it became a defense for myself to protect myself - to say look it, I can't be responsible for another person's actions or desires.

LFG: So how were you advising yourself differently? Than a time when Controlling the Environment was more in control?

Paul: Well, I guess my own personal spiritual belief has helped in that I've had to put my faith in, in I guess in God, or as some people would say in the universe. And I've had to learn to be less dependent on others, I had to focus more on my inner strengths and say, I don't need people around me to be happy. I can be happy on my own. And if I happen to please someone, if someone sees me as someone they'd like to be with, then they're going to choose that regardless of what I am doing - trying to create an environment for them. They're going to love me for who I am.

Breaking free from restraints is hard work. It appeared that Paul had a threshold point that signaled to him when enough was enough. Paul's attempt at protecting himself from being hurt and rejected, perpetuated his problem of insecurity. However, Paul reached a point where he realized his behaviors were ineffective. Paul started to break free from the restraint of 'Controlling the Environment' by being aware of his actions and discovering his freedom to choose a different way. Having a desire to find a better way

to be enabled Paul to slowly start escaping from the oppressive beliefs and practices that specified his life.

Reclaiming Personal Agency Takes Time

Jeff and Paul both openly admit that breaking free from old habits of behavior and taking back control in one's life is no easy task.

Jeff: It's taken an active 20 year process to come to where I am today. Like I say, I am 43 years old and it's taken time to get here there was a conscious effort on my part to try and develop that.

Paul: I think it's something that you have to develop and work on continually. I think it's - I don't think you're ever really there. I think that there's always the possibility like I think you have to set your standards and then after you set your standards, you have to live by them.

Overcoming childhood sexual abuse proved difficult for both Jeff and Paul. The experience developed oppressive beliefs, attitudes and practices that restricted Jeff's and Paul's ability to live their lives freely. Learning to escape the restraints required inner strengths, and awareness: an awareness of the signals sent from the 'gut level' to live in balance with actions and feelings; an awareness of their freedom to choose; and an awareness to learning a better way to be. These three themes described how Jeff and Paul reclaimed their personal agency, how they challenged the restraints by taking back control in their lives. Identifying and exploring times when the two men were active agents in their lives provided insight into their individual strengths which in turn had a direct impact on how they now view themselves. Following is Jeff's and Paul's feedback from the debriefing interview, Phase III, that explored their awareness of their personal resiliency characteristics and how the research process impacted on how they now view

themselves as a result of exploring their alternative stories. The feedback in Phase III also validated Michael White's Narrative Approach.

Personal Resiliency Characteristics

Phase I and Phase II of the research process took the participants and myself on a journey through their life stories. Phase I described their problem-saturated dominant stories and Phase II described their alternative stories. The alternative stories exposed for Jeff and Paul, times in their life when they had reclaimed control of who they wanted to be as persons. Having Jeff and Paul develop meaning around these alternative stories invited a re-authoring of their lives which in turn brought forth their personal resiliency characteristics. The central question I asked to ascertain information regarding their inner capabilities was: We've gone through the interview process and as a result of the interviews, what new insights did you gain about your inner capabilities and inner strengths as a person?

Jeff: "I realize that I am an extremely resilient person with tremendous intelligence and a zeal to help other people. [...] I've learned that I had the ability to not stifle my anger but acknowledge my anger in situations [...] and in an open and logical manner be emotionally honest to that person and stick to my convictions about my beliefs. The questioning reinforced that I am psychologically a very tough person. [...] I am a pugnacious person. Pugnacious means that you are stubborn and you are insistent upon a point of view no matter how overwhelming the odds are. Pugnacious means to be tough but also tough and irritating. [...] I have a lot more empathy for people than I thought I did.

Jeff identified his personal resiliency characteristics as tremendous intelligence, ability to deal with anger, psychologically tough, pugnacious and empathic. These personality characteristics combined with Jeff's ability to reclaim his personal agency

enabled him to overcome his childhood sexual abuse. This question for Paul reinforced that he did all right under the circumstances.

Paul: The questioning showed me that I have a lot of resiliency. [...] I was able to deal with what I was confronted with and go on and I think be a fairly respectable human being [...] and I don't have a bad outlook on life. I guess one of the biggest inner strengths it has shown me is that my parents did a great job raising a son that is fairly self-reliant and self-confident and I haven't had to lean on anybody from where I am today, I've done it myself.

Paul's personal coping style was to bury the abuse and move on. His philosophy of life was that it was good and nobody owed him anything. His personal resiliency characteristics reflected an individual who was and is self-reliant and self-confident. These characteristics combined with Paul's ability to take back control in his life at different times enabled Paul at times, to overcome his childhood sexual abuse.

New or Confirmed View of Self

The second part of the debriefing interview asked the question "How has your opinion of yourself changed from the beginning of the interviews to the end of the interviews?" Exploring Jeff's and Paul's dominant stories and then contrasting those stories with alternative stories had a direct impact on how they now view themselves. This view of self may be new or may simply confirm what they had already known.

Jeff: I realized through this process that I am all right. [...] I was struggling to find my sense of worth. Like I knew I was worthy and had value but you know I feel that now that I am a much more confident person and I am not afraid to stand for my beliefs. [...] I am a much more pugnacious individual than I ever thought I was and I have a lot more empathy for people than I thought I did.

Exploring alternative stories engaged Jeff into meaning making which validated his inner strengths and confirmed that he is “all right”. Paul also realized through this process that he too is “all right”.

Paul: I have to admit I feel better about myself now than I did at the beginning of the research process. [...] I’ve almost had reconciliation with myself. [...] Now that I’ve identified these things that get me down, I feel more relaxed about things now, it’s like I can slow down and take it easier again. I don’t feel like its such a treadmill, it feels like a weight has been lifted. You know like I’ve been packing around 100 lbs of crap on my back for so many years and you get used to it. It may make your legs look great but your back gets sore and it feels good that I am shedding. I mean I haven’t shed it all yet. I realize I have some work to do but just in the realization, a weight has been lifted and its very helpful and I feel better about myself because of that. [...] I feel like I am just a little more complete now. I am a little bit stronger in those good qualities that I had thought of myself and I think some of those bad things I had pent up are a lot less.

As a result of the research process, Paul experienced an insight into his life and how he was living his life all these years. He became aware of his ‘monsters’ and this insight preceded a new description of his childhood story and his life afterwards. The process has confirmed for Paul that he is “all right”, more complete and capable of putting his life back in order.

Discussion

Jeff’s process of achieving what he has today has been a process of two steps forward, one step back. He would escape his restraints and then slip back into old patterns. Exploring Jeff’s alternative stories reinforced that he is and was a very determined, stubborn character who refused to be a passenger in his life. Exhaustive readings, emulating people in society he admired and having strong beliefs of right and

wrong, enabled Jeff to overcome and break free from his abusive experience and the oppressive practices imposed upon him as a child.

Exploring Paul's alternative stories produced in Paul an awareness of his personal agency. He discovered that he has the choice to live with or without his monsters. Paul was always aware of a behavior pattern that seemed to sabotage relationships but he did not know what the pattern was until we started challenging 'Secrecy' and 'Controlling the Environment' monsters. When I asked Paul what he now wants for his life, this is what he said.

Paul: Well, that I still want something more positive, I guess. [...] Living more in balance and more, let's say closer to what my ideals early on were and still are. [...] And I feel better that maybe I can shed some of it now and get on with the path as I saw it unfolding.. [...] that as long as I am being honest with myself, I am going to be able to be straightforward and honest with people that are in my life. Also, that I guess the other thing is, things that have occurred in the past that I felt may have had an impact on me, but didn't know how much impact it had on me and what had manifested in my behavior patterns as a result of these things, like the questioning, I've gotten answers for now. And with the answers come release. [...] So I'm going to start working at putting it behind me, and getting into healthier, more productive patterns in my life, rather than the old, like I can put the wondering and the questioning of how it has affected me to rest. I can put it to bed. [...] I've learned something new about myself. [...] My personal virtues are still pretty strong and intact [...] and I still strive to pursue a path with those as much as with those things as my goal.[...] I want to find a partner in my life. And I don't want those things to interfere any longer. [...] My future could be a lot better served by escaping their grasp. Less stress - more honesty. [...] On a day to day basis, I would be much more relaxed, emotionally stronger, more self-confident, for sure. [...] I'm going to feel more comfortable with myself. Be more relaxed and more confident that I don't have to question my motives quite as much. I don't have to worry so much about if I'm doing the right thing, as long as I follow my basic beliefs. That you know I've learned are still there. That as long as I do that, the decisions I make in the future, while they may not always be the best ones, they are going to be the right ones. [...] I think my self-esteem is going to be reinforced - certainly. If you feel better about yourself, your entire outlook is going to be better. And

certainly you can't help but feel better about yourself if you are moving in a more positive direction.

Through the interview process, Paul has become newly aware that he has choices.

Paul's refusal to submit to the effects of his monsters helped to undermine their power.

Phase II for Paul clarified how he now wants his life to be. However, the hard work is about to begin. Now that Paul has become aware of his problematic behavior lifestyle, he needs to put energy into changing it, choosing to be someone he has not been in quite some time. He is able to clearly articulate the shift in perspective with hopes of it evolving into a new description of himself.

Summary

A thorough investigation into alternative stories resulted in Jeff and Paul re-authoring their lives, increasing their awareness of their personal agency and gaining a new perspective to an old story. This chapter is a sharp contrast to the descriptions of recruitment, reinforcement and restraints as described in Chapter Four. Exploring the alternative stories exposed how Jeff and Paul at times, reclaimed their personal agency. In reclaiming their personal agency they recovered balance and control in their lives. The exploration of new possibilities for Jeff and Paul helped to reinforce their future free from restraints. The last chapter re-examines Michael White's theory in light of the findings.

CHAPTER SIX

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND BEYOND

So far in this study, the life stories of two adult men sexually abused as children and their resilient capacities that aided them in the surmounting of their abuse have been revealed, explored and described. This chapter compares and contrasts the resiliency literature with the three resiliency themes discovered in this study and critically exams how Michael White's narrative approach enabled the resurrection and identification of the resilient capacities inherent in Jeff and Paul. I will begin by recalling the origins of the research.

As a former elementary school teacher and now as a practicing counsellor, I have encountered children and adults who have suffered from the devastating consequences of childhood sexual abuse. My curiosity in this project centered around discovering what it was about people's belief systems that prevented them from healing from the trauma of abuse. My supervisor suggested exploring resiliency characteristics, rather than pathological characteristics, to gain an understanding of what it was about those who had been sexually abused that has enabled them to cope and live reasonably effective lives. Resiliency, a new concept to me, was appealing because of its positive focus. With my supervisor, I decided I would use Michael White's narrative approach with two adult men who identified themselves as resilient to investigate their resiliency characteristics. White's narrative approach focuses on how sometimes the personal strengths and resources of individuals allow them to free themselves from the debilitating effects of their problems.

My research used White's narrative approach to explore how two resilient adults who were sexually abused as children, managed to overcome these childhood experiences. As a researcher, I also explored the impact Michael White's questioning protocol had on the research participants' awareness of personal resiliency characteristics and on their self-perception. White's narrative approach is intended to be therapeutic in that it provides a structure for individuals to construct a perception of themselves which may be different from the perception they held prior to the interviews.

At the onset of the research, I assumed White's process would uncover the participants' personal resiliency characteristics. However, in the concluding phase of this research, I discovered, not only did White's approach uncover personal resiliency characteristics such as stubbornness, pugnacity, empathy, self-reliance, intelligence etc. but it also revealed the resilient capacities within Jeff and Paul that allowed them to recover balance and control in their lives. The utilization of these resilient capacities became the power they needed to help them surmount their abuse.

Based upon Michael White's narrative approach, I structured Phase I and Phase II of the study very carefully by following his process. The entire research process engaged Jeff and Paul in a therapeutic conversation. I accessed Jeff's and Paul's lived experiences through their dominant stories in Phase I. The dominant stories described how Jeff and Paul interpreted their life prior to, during and following their sexual abuse. A content analysis of the transcribed data revealed evidence of how Jeff and Paul were recruited into their experience, the repercussions of the abuse and how the repercussions developed restraints that prevented them from breaking free from their abuse. Phase II involved a

search and exploration of the times when the subjects' lives were not plagued by problems. A content analysis of the transcribed data for Phase II revealed how Jeff and Paul managed to reclaim their personal agency.

The three themes describing how Jeff and Paul reclaimed their personal agency identify the resilient capacities within both men. I chose to call 'Living in Balance', 'Reclaiming the Freedom to Choose' and 'Being Open to Learning' resilient capacities because personal agency, as defined by White (1990) is a person experiencing a capacity to intervene in one's life. Capacity as defined in the Webster dictionary is the potential for experiencing or appreciating the power to produce, perform or deploy. Therefore, the types of capacities within the two men are the three themes mentioned above; the potential to experience balance, freedom, and hope of finding a better way to be by learning from others. The resilient capacities were a part of both Jeff and Paul. However, how each man amplified these capacities defined to what degree they were able to overcome their abuse.

Although I have examined resilient adults who experienced child sexual abuse, the goals of this study are to understand the nature of lived experience through the use of Michael White's approach, how White's approach contributes to the awareness of personal agency and to the awareness of personal resiliency characteristics. Researching resilient adults using Michael White's approach is critical to understanding how his approach lends itself to uncovering the resilient capacities and how these capacities can be mobilized.

Although understanding resilient adults who were sexually abused as children could easily become the main focus of this thesis, it must remain in the background. So before moving on to the discussion of Michael White's narrative approach, I will briefly compare and contrast what the study revealed about the characteristics and capacities of resilient adults with the literature on resiliency in Chapter 2.

Characteristics and Capacities of the Resilient Adult

My study revealed similar themes to the reviews and empirical reports on resiliency described in Chapter 2. The academic literature however, focuses primarily on the internal and external resiliency characteristics of children. Only two studies could be found that have researched resiliency with adults. Valentine and Feinauer (1993) studied the resilience factors associated with female survivors of sexual abuse and O'Connell Higgins (1994) researched the resilient adult to find out why some loved well despite hate. She focused on the process by which resilience develops. Of her 40 subjects, 23 women and 17 men, 58 % had experienced repeated sexual or physical abuse, usually both. I will use these two studies to compare and contrast my findings.

A dominant theme in O'Connell Higgins study is the Locus of Hope. This theme portrays that the resilient children select surrogates, people who act as parental figures, that provide them the love they need and a vision for a better life. The resilient children form attachments to the surrogates and internalize the attachments effectively. Valentine and Feinauer (1993) share a comparable theme called "The Ability to Find Supportive Relationships Outside the Family". This theme describes how the sexually abused women sought healthy people and healthy families for support and to act as their role

models. These two similar themes parallel my dominant theme of “Being Open to Learning”. Both of my subjects were also open to finding a better way to live by emulating people in society, family members or the church to provide them with the surrogate love they needed and as well as information that told them that life can be different and better.

Another dominant theme in O’Connell Higgins study is described as Faith and Vision. This theme portrays the resilient people faithfully choosing how to see, faithfully choosing how to be and faithfully choosing what not to be. These visions were guided through literature film and the arts. Valentine and Feinauer (1993) identified the theme “Internal Locus of Control/Recognizing Personal Power.” This theme was equated to subjects realizing they could say ‘stop’ and subjects believing they could do what they wanted by taking control of their lives. These themes confirm my theme of “Reclaiming the Freedom to Choose”. Jeff and Paul realized they had options when they started rejecting what they did not want and started fighting for what they did want which began the process of both men taking back control into their lives. Resilient persons appear to have a strong desire to fulfill their visions for a better life by being active agents who are determined to live out their dreams.

O’Connell Higgins’ (1994) ‘faith and vision’ theme also describe a convictional knowing arising from Faith Development Theory which describes how people organize and make sense out of their lives based upon their firmest core understanding of what is true. Valentine and Feinauer’s (1993) theme of “self- regard” was defined as “the ability to think well of oneself” (p.220). Their subjects made statements about knowing they

were valuable because they had a “gut” feeling and an innate sense that they were worthy. These themes of Faith as “convictional knowing” and self-regard confirms my theme of “Living In Balance” whereby it was important for Jeff and Paul to live in balance with their actions and feelings which they experienced, at their core level as being the ‘right thing to do’. O’Connell Higgins states that “we are always involved in an underlying, ongoing process of making coherent sense of our lives through our deeper convictions, whether or not these are articulated or conscious” (p.173).

The two studies on resilient adults share extremely comparable findings with my study. The wording of the themes differ, perhaps due to the approach taken to the study, but the themes are very similar in nature. Valentine and Feinauer (1993) look at resilience factors as being partly abilities and partly philosophies. I view my study as closely resembling O’Connell Higgins (1994) work with resilient adults and the process by which resilience develops. I view my themes, not as abilities but as capacities inherent in people that when mobilized, enable people to overcome adversity. Nevertheless, all studies appear to be speaking a similar language and emphasize important features of the resilient adult.

The academic literature places emphasis on internal and external characteristics that enabled people to overcome adversity. O’Connell Higgins (1994) believed that “resilience is a cumulative process, not a product and it is open to all in some measure” (p.126). In concluding my research I concur with O’Connell Higgins. Both Jeff and Paul, prior to the research interviews believed they were resilient, meaning they believed they had recovered or adjusted to their abuse without having suffered any long term

effects. The current research process uncovered the same resilient capacities in both men, however Jeff utilized his resilient capacities regularly throughout his life to recover balance and control so that he could fulfill his vision of faith and hope for a better life. At the end of the research process, Paul saw himself as doing very well in many aspects of his life other than his relationships with women. However, at times, Paul did mobilize his resilient capacities in his attempt to recover balance and control in his life. Based on my research with these two men, I believe that both men are resilient but to varying degrees along a continuum. I also believe that Paul has the potential to increase his resilience status by amplifying his internal resilient capacities that lie dormant waiting to become accessed and mobilized. Michael White's narrative approach proved to be a framework from which to identify and foster resilient capacities in others.

Exploring the resilient adult using Michael White's narrative approach revealed comparable findings with the other two related studies. So the question remaining, relates to how White's narrative approach enabled the uncovering and identification of resilient capacities in Jeff and Paul.

Michael White's Narrative Approach

Engaging Jeff and Paul in a therapeutic conversation using Michael White's narrative approach successfully led to information regarding the resilient capacities they employed to set themselves free to recover balance and control in their lives. Although my original aim was to discover Jeff's and Paul's resiliency characteristics, which both men identified for me in the debriefing interview, what I discovered as well were the resilient capacities inherent in both men. When mobilized these resilient capacities

propelled personal growth and development towards a better quality life. Following are the components of White's approach that enabled the uncovering and fostering of resilient capacities.

One of the critical components of White's narrative approach is how he composes two visual maps that complement each other. One map depicts when the problem has more influence in a person's life, the problem saturated dominant story. The second map complements the first map by depicting when a person has more influence over the problem. Exploring times when a person had more influence over their problem(s) promotes the recognition and identification of resilient strengths and resources of an individual. Externalizing the problems for Jeff and Paul, and then mapping out the influence the problem had over Jeff and Paul or the influence Jeff and Paul had over their problems produced a contrast of stories.

The relative influence questions for the first map allowed the two men to shift the blame they had internalized against themselves to the responsible parties who hurt them. For example, it was important for Paul to realize that 'Secrecy' and 'Controlling the Environment' were a result of the abuse he had suffered from Claudia, as well as recognizing the powerful influence society played in his beliefs and assumptions of self and what it means to be a man. Placing blame and responsibility where it belongs and becoming aware of the problems' sphere of influence in his life enabled Paul to view his life events from a new perspective. Establishing how the problems had taken over the two men's' lives provided contrast to those times when Jeff or Paul had more influence in their lives. Establishing strong contrasts between the two maps became significant ways

in which Jeff and Paul could recognize their resilient capacities that they mobilized when fighting back.

The relative influence questions used to access information for the second map identified Jeff's and Paul's competence and resourcefulness in the face of adversity, thereby exposing the resilient capacities inherent in them. Jeff and Paul experienced a greater sense of personal agency when exploring the second map because the questioning allowed them to identify times when they experienced a capacity to intervene in their lives rather than feeling the self under control. Exploring the second set of relative influence questions brought their resilient capacities to the surface and led to an awareness and mobilization of these untapped assets. The resilient capacities confirmed for Jeff what it was that enabled him to surmount his abuse. The questioning for Paul brought forth an awareness and recognition of how he, at times, had recovered balance and control in his life. The awareness propelled the mobilization of his resilient capacities that were dormant most of the time when it came to female relationships.

Further exploration of the second map promoted the discovery of unique outcomes. Asking questions regarding the events and meanings surrounding unique outcomes revealed how the two men interpreted and placed meaning to their events. It is this meaning making that revealed their resilient capacities. For example, questions that led to an understanding of how Jeff applied non-violent means to vent his anger were: How had you the courage to challenge anger in a more positive form?; Were there any preparations that led up to it?; Did you know this about you or is this something new?. Exploring the meaning-making surrounding a unique outcome enabled Jeff to reveal how

he had used his resilient capacities of “living in balance”, “utilizing his freedom to choose” and “learning from others” to recover balance and control in his life and to enable him to build towards a vision of hope for a better life. Exploring the meaning-making process which was associated with times in Jeff’s and Paul’s lives when they had more influence over their problems uncovered their resilient capacities.

O’Connell Higgins (1994) stated that to critically examine resilient potential, one must “explain and amplify the past and present strengths of the traumatized, clarifying the adaptive strategies that keep them farther from the bottom rather than focusing on why they are not closer to the top” (p.322). Michael White’s process accessed and revealed Jeff’s and Paul’s active process of how, over time, they utilized their resilient capacities to be active agents in their lives. Jeff continually activated his resilient capacities over time and this enabled him to surmount his abuse. For Paul, his resiliency became fostered by White’s approach of probing his alternative stories and the meanings associated with these stories which brought to light Paul’s awareness of his resilient capacities needed to further heal from his abuse. Meaning-making plays a significant role in the resilient person because understanding how a person interprets their lived experience and understanding how they connect events together in an attempt to make coherent sense out of their lives become the truths by which they live their lives. How people interpret their lived events, combined with how often they amplify their resilient capacities, defines the degree of resilience.

According to O’Connell Higgins (1994) “like a set of Ukrainian nesting dolls, we are a collection of selves, simultaneously encompassing all of our previous versions yet

understood by the most recent 'us' through the assumptive lens of our current developmental complexity" (p.70). Michael White's process celebrates a person's resilience by focusing on the capable, strongest and most active of the selves. White's process underscores strengths and promotes an awareness of the capacities inherent in all of us to enable our growth and recover our balance. His process of engaging in a critical self-examination enabled the resurrection of resilient capacities because he focuses and elaborates on the strengths people. His process allowed me to see how Jeff and Paul reclaimed their personal agency to recover the balance and inner security they so desperately needed in their lives. White's narrative approach was successful in identifying how Jeff surmounted his tumultuous childhood. Although we were engaged in a therapeutic conversation, White's approach was a successful research questioning protocol to access resilient capacities even though, at the time of the interviews, Jeff was not currently suffering from any problems. White's process was also effective in fostering Paul's resilient capacities. As a result of White's questioning protocol, Paul became aware of his abusive background and placed blame and responsibility where it belonged. This began the healing process and identified his internal resilient capacities. Exploring the unique possibility questions also helped Paul to elaborate and thereby strengthen his resilient capacities which he may now choose to utilize more often to bring forth the kind of life he desires. Michael White's process successfully examined the wisdom that guided Jeff's and Paul's overcoming. His process allowed them to see how much they struggled but also how much they fought to preserve themselves, even in

minute ways. Overall, I think Michael White's narrative approach provided a useful and effective frame through which to view resilient adults.

Conclusion

Michael White's narrative approach, used as a research tool to interview resilient adults who had been sexually abused as children, proved to be a successful model in identifying the resilient capacities that enabled two men to surmount their childhood sexual abuse. His process also had a direct impact on Jeff's and Paul's awareness of their personal resiliency characteristics that helped to keep them from crumbling under the sheer weight of the effects of their abuse. Overall, White's process and focus on strengths and times when they were active agents in their lives was an empowering experience for Jeff and Paul. The process identified their resilient capacities enabling them to recover from their abuse.

The themes discovered in this study parallel themes found in two related studies. This is confirming that White's process is capable of uncovering a person's resilient characteristics and capacities enabling a person to cope in times of adversity. Based on past studies on resiliency combined with the current study, I believe all people are resilient and are made up of resilient characteristics and capacities that help them get through tough times. However, based on my study, I also believe that people are resilient in varying degrees. Though most people cope in times of adversity, some people seem to cope better or more effectively. The strengths and resources appear to rest within each person. How a person activates and amplifies them determines to the degree to which they are resilient.

Implications For Future Research In Counselling Practice.

Based on this study, I would encourage future research to consider using Michael White's approach to examine the resilient adult who has experienced another type of trauma, rather than sexual abuse, in order to compare and contrast the resilient capacities.

At times I found White's questions extremely awkward and complex and my participants also found them to be very challenging. Based on my experience, I would encourage people wanting to practice White's approach to modify his questions and his language style, especially if used with children.

Overall, I believe Michael White's narrative approach has potential and value in research and practical arenas especially for those in the helping professions.

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Appendix A
Copy of Letter of Informed Consent for Adults

(NOTE: DATE TO BE INSERTED)

To Whom It May Concern:

As a graduate student at the University of Northern British Columbia, I am using a Narrative approach to study the resiliency characteristics of adults who were sexually abused as children. This research, I believe, will provide insight into the coping behaviors of adults who have managed to overcome this stressful life event.

I would like you to participate in my research study titled "Adult Sexual Abuse Survivors Awareness of Personal Resiliency Characteristics: A Narrative Approach." The purpose of the study is to gain a better understanding of the personal strengths that have enabled adults to overcome childhood sexual abuse and to investigate if using the narrative approach has an impact on the subject's awareness of their personal resiliency characteristics. If you decide to participate in the study, you will be interviewed approximately four times; each session will be about 1 to 1.5 hours in duration. The interview will consist of a semi-structured interview protocol to elicit your life story and how you were able to overcome childhood sexual abuse. There are foreseeable benefits from your participation. In particular, the process may increase your awareness of your personal strengths.

Your participation is completely voluntary and you will be free to refuse or stop at any time without penalty. All interviews will be audio-recorded for purpose of transcription. Your identity and all recorded information will be kept strictly confidential. To further ensure confidentiality, a pseudonym will be used for the purpose of transcription.

If you have any concerns or require further information, please feel free to contact the following:

Liana Grant
 Mackenzie, B.C.
 Phone: 997-5227

Ron Lehr, PhD
 Faculty of Health and Human Sciences
 University of Northern British Columbia
 Phone: 960-5572

Please read the following paragraph, and, if you agree to participate, please sign below.

I agree to participate in the research study as described above. I understand that any information about me obtained from this research will be kept strictly confidential. I further understand that I can withdraw from this research at any time without penalty.

Signature _____ Date _____
 Investigator _____ Date _____

Please place your initials here acknowledging receipt of a copy of this consent form. ____

Appendix B

Semi-structured Interview Guide.

Phase 1

- Who had the power to define your experience?
- How was this achieved? What did the perpetrator say? Do?
- How was () enforced?
- What direct or indirect messages were you told by the perpetrator that influenced what you believed to be true?
- What messages, if any, were reinforced from society or social context that seemed to confirm the perpetrators messages?
- What were some of the beliefs or assumptions you had about yourself or the world as a result of the abuse that you believed to be true and acted according to these beliefs and assumptions?
- What impact did the abuse have on your perception of yourself - of the world?
- What impact did the abuse have on your feelings, beliefs, experiences etc.
- What beliefs about yourself/world do you think have survived and at times today, still have an impact on you?
- What beliefs about yourself and the world do you think had the most impact and played a large role in your life?
- In what way has () had an effect on your life?
- What role do these beliefs () () play in your life now?
- How does () impact your relationships with family, wife, job, friends, decisions made, what you think, how you behave, what you do , how you feel, what you think of yourself?
- What influence has () had in your life/relationships with people?
- When you submit to () how does this invite you to _____?
- In what other areas does () have an impact on you?
- So how do you think other people view this as a problem?
- What are some of the things you believe that you do that contributes to the () being a problem for you?
- How was () problematic in your lifetime?
- How was () encouraged by other people in your life?
- How was () enforced?
- What are some of the ways that () has pushed you around and interfered in your life?
- In what way(s) is () still getting in the way of things you want to do?
- How much of what has happened to you influenced your life? How much do you think it has held you back?
- What kinds of things has the () got you worrying about lately?

Phase II

Unique Outcomes

- Was there an occasion when you could have been stopped in your tracks by () but you withstood it instead?
- Have there been times when you have not succumbed to the () pressure, times when the () could have gotten the better of you but did not, and times when you prevented it from overwhelming you?
- Were there times in your life when you were able to escape ()?
- Can you recall an occasion when you could have given into the problem but didn't?
- Given your father's encouragement of secrecy, were there times when you were able to stand up to secrecy and tell someone about the abuse that was happening to you?
- How were you able to do this?
- How did you give yourself priority?
- How was it that you were able to challenge the ()?
- How had you the courage to be yourself in these situations?
- How was it that you defied the () when you disclosed about your father abusing you?
- I'm interested in the fact that you were strong enough to have some clear ideas about what was right for you...how do you think you were able to have such a clear idea about what you wanted and needed?
- So, how did you managed to turn the tide, how did you stop yourself from drowning in all of this?
- What does this tell you about yourself that you didn't realize before?
- What do you think it is about the events that you have related that tells me that you still have some influence in the life of the problem?
- Can you see how I could be surprised that you made such a contribution under the circumstances?

Landscape of Action

- How did you encourage that strong part of you?
- When did you start thinking of yourself as a survivor?
- How did you get yourself ready to take this step? What preparations led up to it?
- What were you thinking at the time? Have you been advising yourself differently? What did you tell yourself that pulled you through on this occasion?
- How did you manage to take this step?
- What do you think you might have been doing to get ready to for this step?
- What do you think might have gone into your preparation for this step?
- What sort of training did you do to prepare your relationship to decline the invitation to cooperate with the problem?
- What do you think you were doing to contribute to this event?
- How do you account for your ability to do this?

- Is this something that surprised you about yourself... the fact that you were able to stand up the () in this way?
- What about you helped you to be able to do this?
- What was different about this situation compared with one when the problem was more in charge? What was different about you?
- I would like to get a better grasp of this development. What did you notice yourself doing or thinking as a younger person, that could have provided some vital clue that this development was on the horizon of your life?
- What do you think this achievement tells me about new traditions you could be making for yourself?
- What does this step tell you about the nature of your new direction?
- If I had been a spectator to your life when you were a younger person, what do you think I might have witnessed you doing then that might help me to understand how you were able to achieve what you have recently achieved?
- What do you think this tells me about what you have wanted for your life, and about what you have been trying for in your life?
- What do you think this might reveal to me about what you value most?

Landscape of Consciousness

- What personal qualities could these achievements indicate?
- What sides of you do you think are becoming more visible to others?
- What difference does realizing this make to how you feel about and treat yourself?
- So what do these things tell you about yourself that the feelings had been hiding from you?
- What do you think the () would have found out about you from this?
- What ideas might this give you about you? Are there ways you can help yourself to keep having this idea about you?
- Did you know this about you or is this something new?
- Let's reflect for a moment on these recent developments. What new conclusions might you reach about your tastes; about what is appealing to you; about what you are attracted to?
- What do these discoveries tell you about what you want for your life?
- What do these developments tell you about what suits you as a person?
- Do you think this new picture of you that accompanies this new direction suits your sort of person more than the old picture did? If so, why does it suit you better?
- Which of the realizations that accompany this new picture of yourself appeal to you most?
- What is it that you now know about yourself that makes you want a stronger connection with this new direction than the old?
- Can you see why the fact that you managed to stand up to the () in this way makes me think you are pretty strong?
- Of all those persons who have known you, who would be least surprised that you have been able to take this step in challenging the problem's influence in your life?

- How do you think this spoke to them of who you are, and about what you believe to be important?
- What difference does knowing this about yourself make to how you feel about yourself?
- What effect does appreciating your resolve not to cooperate with the problem have on your attitude toward yourself?
- If you were looking at yourself through the eyes of that ten year old boy right now, what would he be seeing in you that he would really appreciate?
- What is it about the development of you as a person that would be most important to him?
- Noticing this, would he encourage you to try to be someone else, or would he take you for who you are?
- Why do you think he would have liked you for a parent?
- What difference do you think it would have made to his life if he'd had you for a parent?
- What could you do to side with this ten year old boy's attitude toward you, rather than (the abusing adult's) attitude?
- What difference would this make in your relationship with yourself to how you would treat yourself?

Unique Possibilities

- What difference will knowing this about yourself make to your next step?
- Since you find this new picture of yourself appealing, in what ways could you enlarge it by siding further with it?
- What new possibilities would open up for you if you were to die more with this new picture that you have of yourself as a person?
- What difference could these qualities make to your future?
- How will your new future be different to the future of your old past?
- What new possibilities might these changes open up for you?
- What do you think these realizations tell me about the new directions that are available to you?
- If you were to side more strongly with this other view of who you are, and of what your life has been about what difference would this make to your life on a day to day basis?
- What difference will taking up some of these new possibilities make to your relationship with yourself?

Phase III

1. We've gone through the interview process and as a result of the interviews, what new insights did you gain about your inner capabilities and inner strengths as a person?
 - What new insights or new awareness about your personal capabilities to overcome your childhood trauma became evident as a result of the research process?
 - What new insights did you gain about yourself that either you did not realize before or you had forgotten, that the questioning seemed to bring out or reinforce?
2. How has your opinion of yourself changed since the beginning of the interviews to the end of the interviews?
 - How do you view yourself now as a person versus how you viewed yourself before the research process began?
 - What views or opinions about yourself as a person have been added to your repertoire of how you would now describe yourself?
3. What would be the difference in your openness if I were a male?
4. Is there anything else you would like to add?

Appendix C

Notations Used In The Quotations In The Text

Quotations From Interviews

The interviews were transcribed verbatim. For the purpose of clarity and fluidity of the text, the symbol [...] has been used to denote edited parts from the original interview transcript. The parts that have been omitted do not sacrifice meaning.

Appendix D
Sample Interview Transcript

This original interview excerpt is from Interview 2-3: 4-6.

LFG. is the researcher and S2 is Paul.

S2 So - well, I guess it's come to accepting that relationships are based on freedom of choice. And I guess a lot of this comes from the controlling that I have experienced being with Shauna. And that - well, and also there was a relationship with Claudia too. Where she was kind of sneaking around behind my back. It came down to the fact that words can only mean so much based on the sincerity and the honesty of the people that are speaking the words. Because the actions speak volumes -

LFG OK - so if -

S2 If a person - it's a person's actions that count, I guess. So the thing is, I came to realize in - with a person, being with a person that expressed her way was the right way - like things to believe in, and the actions didn't follow what she was preaching, basically I guess. I learned, like I say, what you say or do - or anything a person says or does, is not necessarily going to affect what the other person - you can't control the other person. You can have an effect on the environment, but you can't control it to the extent that the person is going to do, necessarily, what you want.

LFG So how did you encourage that sort of strong part of you to learn to just let it go and believe that relationships are based on freedom of choice? How did you encourage -

S2 How did I develop it?

LFG How did you encourage that strong part of you?

S2 Well, I guess the thing is I realized that the other way was a losing battle. I kept - when the - not the pattern, but the -

LFG Controlling the environment monster?

S2 Yeah - well it - the same problems kept happening - the same negative responses kept repeating itself, and I felt more exposed and more vulnerable. I guess, I guess for me it became a defense. It became a defense for myself to protect myself - to say, look it, I can't be responsible for another person's actions or desires.

LFG But that's a strength in you to learn to let it go without having controlling the environment - trying to hoard and keep close - you learned inside to just let it go and what will be will be. So how were you advising yourself differently? Than a time when

controlling the environment was more in control? How had you been advising yourself differently?

S2 Well, I guess my own personal spiritual belief has helped in that I've had to put my faith in, in, I guess in God, or as some people would say in the universe. And I've had to - I've had to learn to be less dependent on others, I guess. I had to focus more on my inner strengths and say, I don't need people around me to be happy. I can be happy on my own. And if I happen to please someone, if someone sees me as someone they'd like to be with, then they're going to choose that regardless of what I am doing - trying to create an environment for them. They're going to love me for who I am.

LFG Right. So what do these things tell you about yourself? OK - that controlling the environment had been hiding from you. Do you understand the question?

S2 No. (Laughs).

LFG OK. What you just told me - first of all, you identified a time when you did not give in to controlling the environment monster. There were times when you were out with friends and you trusted that. Then, you also mentioned that what you learned was you just have to have relationships happen based on freedom of choice. And what you were telling yourself at the time - how you were advising yourself differently when you were more in control versus controlling the environment was more in control. You were advising yourself by just believing in the universe, your spiritual belief that things will happen as they shall happen. And if someone wants to love me for who I am, they will do that. OK. So there are two pictures here - one where controlling the environment impacts you and controls you, but you just mentioned a time when you were in control, and you - OK. So those are the kind of -

S2 When I felt more personal power.

LFG Right, right. So what do these things tell you about yourself that when controlling the environment is in control, it hides these characteristics from you - these positive things about yourself. So the question is, so what do these things tell you about yourself that controlling the environment had been hiding from you?

S2 Oh, I see. Um, er, well, I guess it's hidden from me a lot of personal strengths, inner strengths that have been there all along but I didn't have faith in to rely on. I should have relied more on, I guess, more of my core values. That I shouldn't have been so fearful of the outcome in relationships because I'm strong enough to get through them and I should have had more faith in the person that I am, I guess.