Religion in rewriting the story.

Case study of a sexually abused man

R.Ruard Ganzevoort[1]

ABSTRACT

The case study of this article consists of a rigorous structure analysis of a narrative interview with a sexually abused man. Three different (thematic) story lines are distinguished in the interview. Together with specific periods of the life span, persons, and evaluations, these provide insight into the narrative structure, in which the idiosyncratic meanings and functions of religion are found. It is shown that this participant gives religion more than one place and function in his story. The meaning of religion should therefore be seen as a constellation of differentiated meanings in the various story lines. Outlining implications for theories of religious coping and of religion and abuse, the author argues for dynamic multidimensional models. Narrative approaches as the one used here, seem useful to understand the polyphonic nature of life stories.

This article brings together a number of research areas needing more investigation. It addresses religious coping, narrative theory, religion and sexual abuse, and sexual abuse of males. Each of these topics merits more attention than has been given it so far. I try to unravel some complexities, and present a viable way of investigating these issues. The procedure and results are relevant in my view to each field mentioned. My approach is inductive from the start, using narrative research methods. I will discuss how survivors are construing and reconstruing their stories. More specifically, I will focus on how the place and function of religion changes in this process, as will be apparent in the case study presented.

The rationale for my research is to be found in my conviction that both research on religious coping and research on religion and sexual abuse show some important omissions. Borrowing a phrase of Pargament (1997), religious coping

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theory is interested in 'the many faces of religion' in the coping process. Pargament defines coping as a search for significance in times of stress and religion as a search for significance in ways related to the sacred. In describing the function of religion, he creates a typology of two axes: ends or destinations of significance, and means or pathways to significance. Each axis is divided in two: conservation or transformation. Thus, religious coping can function to transform or preserve significance in coping processes, both as means and ends. This may be functional or dysfunctional for the coping process as a whole. Pargament's thoughtful conceptualization, his continuing research, and his extensive review of research make his book an authoritative contribution to the field. Yet, its focus is limited to the influence of religion on coping, leaving the influence of crisis and coping on religion almost unattended (Ganzevoort, 1998c). This turns religion (conceptually) into a more or less stable system, making it hard to pursue his own emphasis on religion as a process. As the analysis presented here may make clear, a multidimensional and polyphonic approach is called for if we are to understand the place and function of religion. This approach should be integrative (Ganzevoort, 1994a,b, 1998c). A narrative perspective can be useful here as my presentation may show (Ganzevoort, 1993, 1998d).

RELIGION AND SEXUAL ABUSE

Research on religion and sexual abuse is in many ways still in its infancy. Despite an outburst of research publications on the effects of sexual abuse, these studies have given only little attention to religion. There are kinds of exceptions in empirical literature. One focuses on the contribution of religion to the incidence of sexual abuse. Initially, theological publications (especially from a feminist perspective) blamed the religious tradition for creating a male dominated climate of patriarchy in which sexual abuse can prosper (Imbens & Jonker, 1991). Notwithstanding its importance, this theory should be questioned when male victims are taken into account. Furthermore, research has shown much more complexity in the relation between sexual abuse and religious background. For example, Elliott (1994) found prevalence of sexual abuse in active conservative Christian families to be below average, while above average in nonactive conservative Christian families. Clearly, religion can be used by perpetrators as an instrument of oppression (Hegger 1997), but it can also attenuate the risk of sexual abuse to occur. This makes the early feminist remedy of reconstructing the Christian tradition a bit suspect.

The other empirical exception to the silence on religion and sexual abuse can be found in research determining specific religious variables affected by sexual abuse. This line of research focuses on the ways in which sexual abuse influences religion. This influence can be found in the capacity to trust and hope, relate intimately, and feel accepted by others and by God (Ganje-Fling & McCarthy, 1996; Hall, 1995). Common themes in relation to religion are shame, guilt, anger, loss of freedom, and control versus surrender (Kane, Cheston, & Greer, 1993; Smith, Weinert, Horne, Greer, & Wicks, 1995). Given the number of possible

effects presently known, more influences on religion may be established in future research (cf. Lisak, 1994). At present it has been established that sexual abuse is correlated negatively with religious involvement (Hall, 1995), especially for male victims (Finkelhor, Hotaling, Lewis, & Smith, 1989), and for victims from conservative Christian families (Elliott, 1994). God images were found to correlate with the trauma of sexual abuse, but only if trauma was severe (Doehring, 1993).

In bringing together the fields of religious coping and of religion and sexual abuse, we can combine the influences of religion on coping with sexual abuse and of sexual abuse on religion. This interface makes for a complex process. Following Pargament's notion of 'significance' as central to both coping and religion, we can try to determine the specific significance an individual attributes to religion and to sexual abuse. The individual's construction of a life story then becomes a suitable object of research.

METHODOLOGY

The material I present is part of a research program on religious dynamics in sexually abused men. The purpose of this project is to offer insight into the interaction of sexual abuse and religious beliefs and experiences. Because of the lack of attention for abuse of males, I chose to focus on their experiences. I use qualitative (narrative) methods to discover how these men construe their lives and where religion has a place (if any) in their stories. In a second phase of my investigation, I will turn to quantitative methods to discover more precisely correlations between aspects of sexual abuse and of religion.

In this first phase of my research, I have conducted twelve narrative interviews. One of these interviews serves as the case study for the present article. The participants volunteered for this project after reading an invitation in various media. These men were thus aware that the investigation focused on religion and sexual abuse. Obviously, this did influence their anticipation of the interview and their willingness to talk about religion. As the project focused on how rather than whether they would talk about religion, this limitation seems not problematic. The men were invited to tell their story in their own way. The role of the interviewer was limited to evoking further exploration of the story.

My analysis of the interviews is based on the understanding that the subject construes and reconstrues his story in a way perceived meaningful and adequate for interaction with others (including the interviewer). The narrative theory guiding my research distinguishes six dimensions of narrative (Ganzevoort, 1998b): structure (including time sequencing and conceptual plots), perspective (including the social position of the narrator and the issue of power), experiencing (including evaluation and the dialectic interaction of emotions, body, and interpretation), role assignment (the attribution of roles to self, others, and God), relational positioning (the use of narrative to establish, maintain, alter, or end relationships), and audience (including being addressed by significant others and

accounting for one's life in front of them). My reading of the interview transcript focuses on how the participant construes a plausible story for the present audience. For the purpose of this analysis I chose the dimensions of Time, Evaluation and Role assignment to determine the place and function of religion.

Narrative analysis

The starting point for my method of reading is the observation that one life story contains more than one story line. The analysis begins by coding the text for central themes. The aim is to condense these themes into a limited number of thematic story lines. Detailed coding and global reading are pursued until a 'best fit' is found between the codes and the text. These story lines will be used in further analyses as each of them is connected to specific relationships, and a specific place and function of religion. Each text fragment is then coded for the narrative dimensions chosen. Within the dimension of Time, text fragments were coded on the variables Youth, past Adulthood, Present and Future. Four fragments were initially double coded on time. For statistical ease they were recoded into the dominant period. Only one fragment was coded as referring to the Future, and was recoded into the period of the Present. Within the dimension of Evaluation text fragments were coded on the variables Wanted, Unwanted and mixed or neutral (referred to as Mixed). This interpretation is based on a clearly positive or negative stance of the narrator (as seen in evaluative remarks or the expression of positive versus negative emotions). Any doubt concerning this interpretation led to the coding of Mixed. Within the dimension of Role assignment each fragment was coded for references to self and others (individuals, groups or generalizations). Additionally text fragments were coded for explicit references to Religion (experience, beliefs, behavior), specific mentioning of God or Jesus, for explicit references to Sexual abuse (events, experiences, consequences), and for references to Sexuality.

This method of reading uses interpretive and objective coding, dependent on the specifics of each dimension. Following this coding procedure, correlations were computed between the story lines and the various dimensions. The interpretation of the data is discussed with the participant to establish whether he experiences the analysis to be an adequate account of his life story. Further discussion of the method and its methodological implications has been published elsewhere (Ganzevoort, 1998a).[2] Coding was done by the present author.

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[2] In that publication the data of this case study were used as an illustration of the method. However, due to technical problems the data had to be recoded entirely for the present paper. As a result of somewhat different criteria, the numbers and percentages differ. Even with these differences the same patterns and conclusions appear.

RESULTS

I will first present the brief biography of the participant in this case study, whom I will call Frits, and move on to describe the place and function of religion in further detail. The biography follows:

Frits was born shortly after World War II in a large city. Between his parents, semiactive Roman Catholic shopkeepers, much tension is felt. The second of three children, he is abused sexually by his father for two years, starting at age six. Diagnosing venereal disease, the family doctor intervenes and arranges placement in a children's home. Several times, his mother takes Frits and his siblings away, and they are returned by the police. Frits resorts to religious images of suffering for the sake of others, and plans to become a priest. In his university years, he is inspired by liberation theology, and ends up being a social worker. He has had heterosexual and same-sex relationships, and is still uncertain about his sexual orientation. A father of two children, his marriage ended in divorce after ten years. He now is living alone, although he has a (female) partner. Frits has been in therapy for some years, in which he started painting and writing. At present he is no longer a member of the church.

THREE STORY LINES

Central themes in the story of Frits are being Invisible, living in Conflict and Serving. Using these themes as labels in coding the story lines, all meaningful text of the interview could be coded.[3] This resulted in distinguishing 330 text fragments: Invisible 135 fragments (40.9 %), Conflict 114 fragments (34.5 %), and Serving 81 fragments (24.5 %). In each story line sexual abuse and religion have key functions. Nevertheless, their function and meaning change according to the story line in which they emerge. The reconstructive narrative process uses the variation of the story lines to enable a change of meaning. Evidence of this can be found when the three story lines are compared. I will first summarize the three different story lines, and then proceed with the statistical analysis.

Within the story line Invisible, Frits describes himself as someone who is not seen by others. Nobody takes notice of him, and subsequently, he withdraws from contact with members of his family, peers, etcetera. This parallels the invisible position of his father, and in his relation with his father a degree of intimacy is experienced. However, intimacy degenerates into sexual abuse, forcing Frits to further withdrawal. He identifies himself with religious examples including Jesus and martyrs. In his work and his relations as an adult, he functions reasonably well, but is not accessible for really intimate connections. In the church he notices a lack of attention for his needs and wishes. Invisibility leads to isolation, not only in social interaction and religious experience, but also in an estrangement from his feelings and body. Simultaneously he experiences himself as elevated and holy.

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[3] Only those fragments were excluded from coding that were not part of the participant's narrative, for example his question whether the interviewer wanted sugar in his coffee

Through therapy and the relation with his present partner, he learns to entrust himself to others. This leads to an intense experience of his problems in his sexual relation, but it offers possibilities of change as well. His religious story has been altered (within this story line) to an impersonal God image of cosmic processes of which he is a part, and where uniqueness is avowed. Frits still describes Jesus as an example, no longer in terms of suffering, but in terms of autonomy and connectedness.

Within the story line Conflict, Frits commences with the conflicts and fights in his family of origin. He takes the role of a mediator, or he flees from the scene. These roles are repeated at school, in the children's home, and later in his more intimate relations. The experiences of sexual abuse fit in his stories of conflict, and create further conflicts both in the family and in his feelings. The conflicts are mirrored in his inner conflicts concerning his identity, religious beliefs, sexual orientation, confusion about a disposition to abuse minors, and so on. He describes several inner voices as metaphors for his emotional polyphony. Frits tries to solve these conflicts through rational clarification. As a child he seems to find meaning by taking religious figures as Abraham (sacrificing Isaac) as an example. Conflicts with the church make these examples less convincing to him. The relation with his partner is threatened by his inner conflicts, but instead of fleeing, he accepts the battle, leading to an improvement of their relation. Frits learns to accept his inward struggle as part of his existence. His religious story has been altered (within this story line) from a refuge to a dynamic process of becoming, where responsibility and freedom of choice are enhanced. The figure of Abraham again provides an example for him.

Within the story line Serving, Frits finds a solution for living in the family situation of being invisible and living in conflict. The serving role attributes meaning to what is happening to him, but it also keeps him in abusive situations. His religious stories provide a frame of reference in which serving and sacrifice are noble acts, to be retributed in the hereafter. Noticing that his serving role costs him too much, and demanded by his partner and others to stop living in self-sacrifice, Frits learns to become more assertive. Time and again, he regresses to his serving attitude. His religious story has been altered, within this story line, from an image of God as demanding obedience and servitude, to an image enhancing autonomy and the discovery of his own goals in life. Isaac is taken as a religious example of a person who does not have to be sacrificed.

STATISTICAL ANALYSIS

The statistical analysis aimed at uncovering the narrative structures in which religion and sexual abuse appear. The first step served to determine the correlation between the three story lines and the dimensions of time and evaluation. Crosstabulating the three basic dimensions of story line, time, and evaluation, no significant correlation was found except an association between Time and Evaluation (Cramer's $V = .18$, $p<.01$). Focusing on the variables within

these dimensions, we could specify this association into a (slight) correlation between Present and Wanted (V = .24 , p<.01). In each dimension, three subsamples could be determined in which several significant correlations were found, both between dimensions and between variables in these dimensions. These correlations, displayed in Appendix 1 (open here), mount up to two patterns, that can be understood in terms of a narrative construction that portrays a shift from one pattern to another.

The first pattern, dominant in fragments about his youth, consists of an Unwanted story line of Conflict and a Wanted story line of Serving. The pattern could be extended with the slight correlation in the total text of Wanted and Invisible (V =.20 , p<.05). The second pattern, dominant in fragments about the present, consists of a Wanted story line of Invisible and Conflict and a Mixed story line of Serving.

The patterns can be interpreted by the summary given above. As a child, Frits experienced living in conflict and becoming invisible. He found a refuge for this in redefining his life as serving. Useful as a strategy for survival, this interpretation proves dysfunctional for him as an adult. Therefore, in his stories about the present, Frits gives less attention to stories of Serving, and more to Invisible, notably in the meaning of regaining the possibility of experiencing intimacy. The shift from pattern 1 to pattern 2 can be interpreted as a narrative construction of coping or healing, as the correlation between Present and Wanted in the total text suggests.

CLUSTER ANALYSIS

In order to refine the analysis of the narrative structure and include the variables in the dimensions of Role assignment, Religion, and Sexual abuse, K-means Cluster Analysis was used. This resulted in a satisfactory four cluster solution.[4] To interpret these clusters and the strength of their contributing variables, correlations between Cluster number and other dimensions and variables were computed. For the dimensions, there are clear correlations between Cluster number and Evaluation (V = .36 , p<.01), Story line (V = .39 , p<.01), and Time (V = .47 , p<.01). In Table 1 we present significant correlations of each cluster with variables, showing the fabric into which the threads of religion and sexual abuse are woven.

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[4] Comparing the frequencies in 3 to 10 cluster solutions, the best number of clusters seemed to be 4 or 5. As we wished to include all text fragments, we tried both options. The 5 cluster solution, however, showed insufficient reliability for 3 clusters and lack of correlations between clusters and variables. This did not seem helpful for the interpretation of the narrative structure. The 4 cluster solution did not show such limitations. Based on the calculation of the means of each cluster, the distance between clusters 3 and 4 is the largest (2.138). Clusters 1 and 2 are closest together (1.183). Other distances: 1 - 3: 1.715; 1 - 4: 1.979; 2 - 3: 1.734; 2 - 4 1.805

TABLE 1: *Significant Correlations of Clusters with Specific Variables*

Dimension		Cluster 1[a]	Cluster 2[b]	Cluster 3[c]	Cluster 4[d]
time	youth	-.30 **			.50 **
	adulthood	-.21 **	.33 **		-.23 **
	present	.47 **			-.34 **
evaluation	unwanted	-.28 **	.39 **	-.20 **	
	wanted	.30 **	-.28 **		-.20 **
role assignment	self	.26 **		-.22 **	-.25 **
	father	-.36 **	-.25 **		.82 **
	mother	-.26 **			.53 **
	brother				.20 **
	family of origin	-.41 **	-.24 **		.85 **
	former wife		.22 **		
	men general	-.37 **	-.21 **		.68 **
	women general			-.23 **	.30 **
	school			.31 **	
	context	-.29 **		.51 **	
story lines	invisible	.48 **	-.26 **	-.21 **	
	conflict	-.32 **	.32 **		
	serving			.27 **	
sexuality	general		.12 *	-.17 **	
	abuse	-.15 **		-.15*	.41 **
religion	general	-.23 **	-.24 **	.72 **	-.18 **
	rel. figures	-.33 **	-.28 **	.82 **	-.12 *
	church	-.20 **	-.14 *	.47 **	
	God		-.11 *	.19 **	
	Jesus	-.12 *	-.12 *	.34 **	
	seminary	-.14 *		.38 **	
	symb. fig.	-.12 *		.30 **	

Note. Number of fragments N = 330. All correlations in this table are Cramer's $\underline{V}$. Only significant correlations larger than .20 are presented in the dimensions of Time, Evaluation, Role assignment, and Story Line. In the dimensions Religion and Sexual abuse, significant correlations larger than .10 are presented to provide a maximum of detail. " computed on variables correlating significantly and higher than .20 with this cluster.

[a]Number of fragments in cluster n = 119, " = .70. [b]n = 71, " = .49. [c]n=64, " = .69. [d]n=76, " = .76.

* p < .05. ** p < .01.

Cluster 1 (n=119) centers around Invisible, Present, and Wanted. There is a slight correlation with Self and an association with Present partner (V = .19 , p<.01). Noting that 70 % of the fragments about his children are found in this cluster, we can interpret them to be connected to the meaning of this cluster. The cluster correlates clearly and negatively with Family of origin (V = -.41 , p<.01), and with Religion (V = -.23 , p<.01). Scale reliability for Cluster 1 variables is good (= .70). Within the subsample of Cluster 1, we find significant correlations between Wanted and Children (V = .26 , p<.01), and Religion (V = .34 , p<.01), Conflict and Present (V = .28 , p<.01), and Unwanted (V = -.27 , p<.01), and between Sexuality and Mixed (V = .24 , p<.01).

Cluster 2 (n=71) seems to be incoherent and is difficult to interpret. Scale reliability for Cluster 2 variables is insufficient. This cluster has clear positive correlations with Unwanted, Adulthood, Conflict, and a slight correlation with Former wife. The cluster correlates negatively with Family of origin (V = -.24 , p<.01), and with Religion (V = -.24 , p<.01). Between the central variables, we find within this subsample slight negative correlations between Adulthood and Unwanted (V = -.29 , p<.05), and Conflict (V = -.26 , p<.05), underscoring the incoherence of the cluster.

Cluster 3 (n=64) centers around religion (beliefs, behaviors, experiences), religious figures (God, Jesus, symbolic figures, church people), and the broader social context. There is a slight correlation with Serving (V = .27 , p<.01) and slight negative ones with Invisible (V = -.21 , p<.01) and Unwanted (V = -.20 , p<.01). Scale reliability for Cluster 3 variables is good (= .69). Within the subsample of this cluster we find interesting correlations between Wanted and Serving (V = .25 , p<.05), Invisible (V = -.33 , p<.05), God (V = .47 , p<.01), Jesus (V = .47 , p<.01), and Church (V = -.31 , p<.01), between Unwanted and Present (V = -.31 , p<.05), and Context (V = .33 , p<.01), and between Symbolic figures and Present (V = .41 , p<.01).

Cluster 4 (n=76) centers around his family of origin, particularly his father. Cluster 4 correlates clearly with Youth (V = .50 , p<.01), Sexual abuse (V = .41 , p<.01), and slightly negatively with Wanted (V = -.20 , p<.01). The meaning of this cluster is extended to generalizations about men and women. Scale reliability for Cluster 4 variables is good (= .76). Within the subsample of this cluster there are interesting correlations between Conflict and Mother (V = .24 , p<.05), Women (V = .23 , p<.05), God (V = -.23 , p<.05), and Brother (V = -.23 , p<.05), and between Mixed and Brother (V = .31 , p<.01), and Sexuality (V = .33 , p<.01).

INTERPRETATION

Leaving cluster 2 aside, we can interpret the patterns of the narrative construction of this participant with even more precision. Cluster 4 describes the background situation of his family of origin, his youth and his experiences of sexual abuse. Central self-other relations are all within the family of origin. The story line Conflict is associated with this cluster, (particularly in his youth, where we find a

slight correlation between Cluster 4 and Conflict: V = .20 , p<.05). Though present in fragments of this cluster, brother, God, and sexuality do not fit the pattern of unwanted youth stories, which may be an indication that they provide some kind of counterstory.

Cluster 3 can be understood as his survival strategy of serving, ongoing into his adulthood. This survival strategy uses religious imagery. Central self-other relations are all in the broader and less personal context, which is described as Unwanted. The crucial story line Serving is clearly perceived as Wanted within this cluster. General religious variables correlate with Serving; Specific religious variables (God, Jesus) correlate with Wanted. Church, however, is described as Unwanted. This cluster does not correlate with any life episode specifically. However, within this cluster we find a correlation between Symbolic figures and Present (V = .42 , p<. 01), whereas the correlation between Jesus and Youth just misses significance (V = .24 , p = .52). Although this cluster is not Unwanted, it is far from the narrator's ideal story. It may best be understood as an ambivalent survival strategy, that is wanted in relation to the original conflict, but unwanted in relation to present healing.

Cluster 1 can be seen as the story Frits is creating for the present, in which intimacy and connectedness are his goal (being the positive pole of the story line Invisible). Central self-other relations are with his present partner and children, but there seems to remain some distance, as can be seen from the generally slight correlations and the Mixed valuation of Sexuality. The negative correlations between the central variables Invisible and Present show that these variables both account for part of this cluster, but that their coherence is less than expected. This may be because Present correlates with Conflict (in a not unwanted way). Children and religion are Wanted in this cluster, even though religious variables correlate negatively with the cluster as a whole.

Rewriting the story thus can be traced by following the story lines an individual uses to construe his or her life. Obviously, in this interview I measured only the present construction of his youth, and not the development itself. Frits construes his development along the junctions of his story lines. He describes himself as a child choosing the serving role in a situation of conflict where his interests and longings were made invisible, as an adult stuck in this serving role toward an impersonal social context, and now creating the role of intimate relating in a situation where he is seen by others and tries to handle conflict constructively, and stop serving.

SEXUAL ABUSE IN THE STORIES

Earlier I stated that sexual abuse (as religion) has a key function in these stories, and a different one in each of them. This should be elaborated further. It is not at all self-evident that a survivor of sexual abuse includes experiences of sexual abuse in his or her stories. Many, especially male victims, would rather deny these experiences, omit them from their core narratives, or reinterpret them that they

are no longer perceived as abuse. More than that, one characteristic for traumatic experiences is that disintegration or fragmentation of language and narrative occurs. Herman (1993) states that trauma affects individual psychological structures and the systems of attachment and attribution necessary for interaction with others. Therefore, traumatic experiences are static, unverbalized, and fragmentary, which brings her to the conclusion that they are prenarrative.

The ability to construe and reconstrue a story (narrative competence) is damaged by traumatic experiences. This includes perception, processing, storing, and retrieval of verbal autobiographic memory. If trauma is experienced in earlier stages of development, and if subsequent pathology occurs (like dissociation and borderline syndrome), further impediments for the achievement of narrative competence follow (Gardner et al., 1995). Part of the impact of sexual trauma on narrative competence has been established empirically: Victims of sexual abuse employed more words in writing a self-narrative, used more pronouns concerning other persons than concerning themselves, and invested more in writing about the past than about the present. Higher numbers of pronouns regarding others indicate the probability of ineffective coping (Klein & Janoff-Bulman, 1996).

With our participant, sexual abuse is included in his stories. This may be because secrecy was severed by the intervening family doctor, which prohibited denial. Furthermore, Frits has been in therapy for two years, which he framed as related to his experiences of sexual abuse (although his therapist did not). He argues that therapy did not help at all in coping with his experiences, but it may have contributed to the ability to include sexual abuse in his stories. His painting, writing, and talking about his traumatic experiences may have been ways of integrating them in his stories, but our data do not permit conclusions at this point.

Even more interesting is the way he includes sexual abuse in his stories. There is an obvious correlation between Sexual abuse and Youth (V = .37 , p<.01). No significant correlations appear when sexual abuse is crosstabulated with story lines. However, the correlation between Sexual Abuse and Serving is significant within the subsamples of Present (V = .21 , p<.05), Unwanted (V = .22 , p<.01), and Cluster 2 (V = .31 , p<.01). Cluster 4 contains 35 (60%) of all fragments about sexual abuse. In comparison, Cluster 1 has 12 (21 %) fragments about sexual abuse, Cluster 2 has 7 (12 %) and Cluster 3 has 4 (7 %).

Following the interpretation of the clusters rendered above, we can understand the different meaning of sexual abuse in the three story lines. In Invisible it symbolizes the unattainability and degeneration of intimacy. Frits says: 'He was drinking. So if I have an image of my father, I see no face, hardly any face. It is an empty space.' Frits experiences the abuse as a negation of his identity: 'I am gone. As an individual, I have no chance to prove myself. No chance to be angry, to show my emotions, just to be somebody. You're just not there.'

In Conflict, he describes how his father's transgressions were a result of the conflicts between his parents. Memories of abuse include 'his hands, his body, a

cigarette lighter, cigarettes, a bottle of gin.' 'But it didn't have to hurt.' Frits saw no possibility of talking about the abuse, because this would result in new conflicts. When confronted, his mother is furious and demands Frits to stop being loyal to his father. A new time of conflict comes when the children are put in a children's home, and their mother takes them away. 'This was not about me or my sister. She just wanted to win.'

The case is a bit more complicated in Serving, because Frits uses this story line to make sense of his experiences. Sexual abuse is interpreted as a way of serving his father: 'He can express his feelings toward me, and I have the idea that I can help him. It is kind of selfless sacrifice, putting myself at his disposal.' The way Frits expresses himself suggests that this be a matter of free choice. His freedom of choice is limited however, as the actual events of abuse happen regardless of his choice. His initial seemingly positive interpretation in the story line of Serving, is reversed in his reinterpretation of the inadequacy of this story line as a whole. This reinterpretation includes a reconstruing of the meaning of his experiences of sexual abuse.

RELIGION IN THE STORIES

The key question to answer is what place or function religion has in this interplay of stories. For that purpose, we needed this extensive analysis of the narrative structure. There is no significant correlation between religion (or Cluster 3) and any Time variable. We do find slight correlations between Religious figures and Serving ($V = .22$, p<.01), most clearly in the subsample of Adulthood ($V = .42$, p<.01), and between Religion and Wanted ($V = .22$, p<.01), most clearly in the subsample of Present ($V = .35$, p<.01). Within the subsample of Adulthood we find a clear negative correlation between Religion and Invisible ($V = -.32$, p<.05). Following the clusters, we find 61 (64 %) of the fragments about religion in Cluster 3. Clusters 1, 2, and 4 have 18 (19 %), 6 (6 %), and 11 (12 %) respectively.

Focusing on the way the participant talks specifically about relating to God or Jesus, we find significant correlations between Wanted and God ($V = .20$, p<.01), and Jesus ($V = .27$, p<.01). Divided by story line, the correlations are even clearer in Conflict (both $V = .34$, p<.01) and in Serving ($V = .24$, p<.05 and $V = .41$, p<.01 respectively), but nonsignificant in Invisible. In Cluster 3 these correlations are strongest (both $V = .47$, p<.01). Interestingly, Symbolic figures correlates strongly with Present ($V = .42$, p<.01), whereas the correlation between Jesus and Youth just misses significance ($V = .24$, p = .052).

These patterns suggest that with this participant, religion functions differently in distinguishable parts of the story. In his youth the story line Serving enables him to construe a meaningful counterstory, one in which religion has an important place. The religious stories in his youth depend heavily on images and stories available in his religious tradition and socialization. He is impressed by stained glass windows portraying St. Sebastian and Jesus in suffering. Frits says: 'I am giving myself away, just like Jesus. You are suffering, that is by order of the

Father, just like I am suffering by order of the father.' These stories produce the feeling of being chosen, and Frits reaches the conclusion that he should become a priest. His interpretation seems meaningful to him as a child. As an adult however, he discovers it to be dysfunctional, as it prohibits intimacy and self-enhancement and maintains his isolation and conflicts.

Interestingly, he can find new religious images and stories as an adult. This may be due partly to his involvement in theology of liberation. Corrective experiences of intimacy with his partner and his children may also be of influence. Still, Frits also draws on reinterpretable older stories, as is apparent from the correlation between Symbolic figures and Present. A large part of this reconstructive process is conducted in painting. During the interview, he shows and describes one of these paintings in detail. The painting is inspired by the story of the binding of Isaac by Abraham. Frits says: 'But in the story it is Abraham who does not doubt, but simply carries out the order, because God has a purpose with it. And it is God, who eventually decides to send an angel and says: Abraham, you don't hesitate. Leave it now. But my father cannot use that as a legitimation. He can't wait for an angel to come and say: Stop. He is responsible himself. And in this version the angel comes and says: I will not interfere. Sort it out for yourself. He is looking the other way.' Although Frits does not use images of a personal God, and devaluates personal images of Jesus, he describes experiences of intimate connectedness with God: 'It is a sensation of happiness. There are moments you feel completely part of the coherence of everything, you know.'

RELIGION IN REWRITING

Having described the way Frits construes his religious stories, we now focus on the contribution of these religious stories to the process of rewriting. As the analysis has shown, the clusters and patterns describe two instances of reconstruction or reinterpretation in Frits' life story. Thus, within this interview two episodes of rewriting appear. The first one is the reconstruction of his experiences in his youth, through the story line of Serving. The second is the reconstruction in his Present story, diminishing the importance of Serving and enhancing the story line of Invisible, in the direction of intimacy and autonomy. Clearly, the first rewriting is accessible for our investigation only through the second.

As stated, Frits describes himself as a child choosing the serving role in a situation of conflict where his interests and longings were made invisible. This choice can be interpreted as resulting from rewriting the story of being invisible and the victim of conflicts. The story line Serving formulates the reinterpretation of the same facts. Sexual abuse and the negation of his identity prohibit a meaningful story in the lines of Invisible and Conflict. They do (at least retrospectively) strengthen the unwanted poles of these story lines. This interpretation does not seem meaningful to Frits as a child.

To solve this problem of meaningful interpretation, Frits construes a new narrative, in which the same experiences are framed differently. Thus he creates a story line, in which he is actively present, connected with his father in a specific form of intimacy (in the mode of serving), and to be rewarded for his sacrifice. The fact that he can draw upon religious imagery and stories, legitimizes this narrative effort, and provides the structures and words needed for his new story line.

The story line Serving has several functions for Frits. First, it attributes meaning to formerly meaningless suffering. Second, it enhances identity and uniqueness, apparent in his feeling chosen. Third, it establishes a relation with God, thereby overcoming isolation. Some ambiguity is found in his religious story of Serving. On the one hand, he is to serve God or Jesus, resulting in a reward in the hereafter. On the other hand, he will be served and rescued, which he describes in dreams of being lifted from a morass by Jesus. Rewriting his story as Serving appears to be an effective narrative strategy.

As an adult, this story line seems no longer functional, because it pinpoints a specific role of servitude as the one available option. This excludes the possibility of freedom, autonomy and development. It is dysfunctional, as it is only a refuge story for Frits, leaving the situation of invisibility and conflict unaltered. Having rewritten his story as Serving thus prohibits further change.

When Frits is leaving his family of origin, and enters a situation in which safety and a degree of self-sufficiency is found, the limitations of his role in the story line of Serving become problematic. It is then that the second major reconstruction of his stories commences. In contrast to the constellation of stories of his youth, he now describes himself as an adult choosing the role of intimate relating in a situation where he is seen by others and tries to overcome conflict and stop serving. Again he construes a narrative in which he is actively present and intimately related. To be able to do so as an adult, he is not allowed to prolong his serving role, as he states explicitly in the interview. His partner demands him to be mature and autonomous. The process of rewriting now consists of devaluing the story line of Serving, and reconstruing the story line of Invisible, stressing the possibility and need of intimacy.

Again this means a reframing of the original events. Only now Frits can interpret the sexual acts as abusive, although he experiences extreme difficulty in explicitly blaming his father. His selflessness and sacrifice are reinterpreted as narcissistic, pursuing no other aim than to be accepted and rewarded. His religious images and dreams of serving and being served are reinterpreted as imperfect auxiliaries. This reconstruction uses religious stories of dynamic cosmic processes, which he derives from theological sources. The price for this reconstruction is that his impersonal image of God turns out to be a limitation for experiences of intimacy. The one description of feeling related to God is characterized by vagueness. When expressing himself in painting, he resorts to traditional stories and gives them a twist of meaning, as in the recounted story of the binding of Isaac.

Summarizing this analysis, the place and function of religion in rewriting the story is multilayered. In each story line religious images and stories serve various functions. Religion (in a broad sense) provides structures and words for interpreting the events of life. It also legitimizes certain interpretations by connecting them to traditionally validated images and stories. In the process of rewriting, the constellation of story lines is reconstructed, and the religious perspective offers new interpretations. It also prohibits some interpretations or proves them to be inadequate in the reconstruction.

DISCUSSION

We will formulate some implications for theory and research on religious coping and on the connection between religion and sexual abuse. This case study has underscored the well accepted notion that the place and function of religion cannot be treated as monolithic, or assessed by means of unidimensional measures. The meaning of religion for one individual may vary over the discernable story lines, periods and relationships. Even in one particular situation, the meaning of religion may be ambiguous

The place and function of religion in religious coping are immersed in the narrative process. Both religion and coping with sexual abuse imply attributing meaning and establishing relationships. This means that they contribute to development and change of the individual's life story. As processes, both are dynamic and versatile, constantly evolving and reconstructive, continuously interacting in social processes. To assess the function of religion in coping and the function of coping in religion, we need a dynamic perspective.

The case study has highlighted a way of accessing this narrative process. Focusing on the various story lines gives us a more detailed insight in how and why certain stories and images are framed in religious terms. It makes us see why stories that seem dysfunctional may have a function after all, possibly because an interpretation is dysfunctional in one story line and functional in another. It clarifies how the narrator can use the various story lines and their junctions to construe a specific constellation of stories he or she perceives to be meaningful, or that is legitimate for the audience of significant others. Finally, it helps us understand how the narrator construes retrospective development, thus rewriting the stories of coping and religion. These insights can be meaningful in clinical work and in research.

In the specific domain of religious coping with sexual abuse, the implication of this case study is that we need to discover how an individual integrates sexual abuse in the diverse story lines. The idiosyncratic meaning of sexual abuse may then become apparent with the possibly religious framing of it. Tracking down the narrative processes of religion and coping with sexual abuse may provide insight in specific connections. It may also give a clue how therapeutic reconstruction is possible. Finally, it may help us understand which religious stories are functional in framing sexual abuse. This can be established with

fairness only if we accept the polyphony and the shifts in the individual construction of it.

An important consideration is the conclusion that individuals may have their own creative appropriation and reinterpretation of religious terms and images. The question to be asked then is not whether religion is salutary or harmful for survivors of sexual abuse. Instead we should ask which aspects of religion are accessible and validated in specific situations and stories, and which are not. A clinical goal may then be to enhance narrative competence and to validate the individual's religious creativity.

CONCLUSION

This article offers an exhaustive treatment neither of sexual abuse and religion, nor of religious coping. It underscores the storied nature of religion and its dynamic polyphonic character. Focusing on the individual multidimensional construction of life stories, we find that religion can provide structures and images for a meaningful narrative. Implications for research on religious coping and on religion and sexual abuse at least include the need to take into account that one's religious life story is a dynamic and creative texture of distinguishable story lines.

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