

*Hendrik Kriek*

---

# Climbing Mount Kilimanjaro: a therapeutic team adventure

First submission: March 2003

This study presents a description of an adventure therapy experience undertaken by an individual who climbed Mount Kilimanjaro as part of a hiking team. Using phenomenological analysis and operating from a social constructionist stance, it describes how the narratives of the subject were altered through the interplay of individual, team and adventure. It shows how she reclaimed nurturing behaviour, regained emotional competence and relinquished independence. Through the experience, she also escaped her situation of entrapment by redefining her competing relationships, allowing leadership and re-evaluating spirituality by means of an enhanced sense of connectedness. Thus, she used the adventure experience as an event or text through which she created meaning and reconstructed some of the operant narratives in her life. The study indicates that adventure provides an opportunity for participants to deconstruct and reconstruct the operative narratives of their lives.

## 'n Kilimandjaro-bestyging: 'n terapeutiese spanavontuur

Hierdie studie gee 'n beskrywing van die terapeutiese ervaring van 'n individu wat die berg Kilimandjaro as deel van 'n staptoerspan geklim het. 'n Fenomenologiese analise vanuit 'n sosiaal-konstruksionistiese uitgangspunt word gevolg en dit beskryf hoe narratiewe van die individu verander is deur die wisselwerking van individu, span en avontuur. Dit dui aan hoe sy versorgingshandeling herontdek het, emosionele toereikendheid herbevestig het en onafhanklikheid laat vaar het. Dit dui voorts aan hoe sy haar gevoel van beklemming ontkom het deur kompeterende verhoudings te herdefinieer, leierskap toe te laat en spiritualiteit te herevalueer deur middel van 'n groter belewenis van verbintenis. Dus, die avontuur-terapeutiese ervaring is gebruik as gebeurtenis of teks waardeur sy betekenis kon skep en sommige operante narratiewe in haar lewe kon reconstrueer. Die studie dui daardeur aan hoe avontuur aan deelnemers die geleentheid bied om operante narratiewe te dekonstrueer en te reconstrueer.

Adventure therapy is a fairly new area within the mental health field in South Africa compared to places like Europe, Australia and the USA, where it has been used for over fifty years. Internationally, adventure therapy programmes have been used for four main purposes: recreation, education, development and therapy (Miles & Priest 1999). It is only in recent years that they have started to gain popularity and have been applied for various purposes in the South African context (Botha 2002). An example is the use of adventure therapy as part of the University of Pretoria's counselling psychology training programme. Students are required to participate in a high-ropes course, and reflect on the impact thereof on themselves as therapists as well as on the research applications of adventure in therapeutic environments.<sup>1</sup> Another example is its application by the clinical psychologists of the Team and Leadership Development Centre in their team development and personal growth programmes.<sup>2</sup> Recent interventions include a cycle tour with cancer survivors and a high-ropes course with in-patients recovering from substance abuse. However, although it is clear from the above that adventure therapy is being used locally, its use is relatively limited and its local application needs investigation. In this paper a local application is presented to illustrate the use of adventure therapy in South Africa. A short explanation of what this field entails is given, followed by a description of the impact of a therapeutic adventure experience on the life of an individual.

## 1. An explanation of adventure therapy

Itin (1998: i) is correct in stating that "there is no one universally accepted definition of adventure therapy, or of what constitutes it and how it is best conducted". He correctly points out that the range of meanings assigned to the term "therapy" could be part of the problem. Other difficulties in arriving at a definition include the fact that the word adventure is open to interpretation; the range of application of adventure therapy (for example, wilderness expeditions versus ropes courses);

1 Personal communication from Dr Lourens Human, senior lecturer in the Dept of Psychology, University of Pretoria.

2 Personal communication from Mr Greyling Viljoen, director of the Team and Leadership Development Centre.

the different disciplines involved (for example, social work, education and psychology) as well as the depth of psychological involvement (Ringer & Gillis 1995). However, it is possible to concur with Ringer (2000) that the elements constituting adventure therapy are physically or psychologically demanding outdoor activities and/or a remote natural setting; the utilisation of experiential learning in group settings, and the employment of a range of therapeutic traditions including counselling, psychology, sociology and education.

In gaining a better understanding of what is meant by adventure therapy, the “definition points” provided by Gillis & Thomson (1996: 10) are helpful. They clarify this form of therapy by pointing out that it entails:

- Using an active, experiential approach to group (and family) psychotherapy or counseling

Although mainly focused on group or team interaction, one-to-one conversations between therapist and client while involved in an activity are acknowledged and used in the therapeutic process.

- Utilising an activity base

The activities used in adventure therapy are multiple and varied. They include ropes courses (high ropes and low ropes); group games; indoor trust and initiative activities; river rafting; cycle touring; canoeing and kayaking; caving; backpacking; rock climbing and abseiling; 4x4 trekking; camping, and archery.

- Employing real and/or perceived risk

One of the key elements of defining adventure is the fact that it uses risk (whether physical or psychological) as a clinically significant agent to bring about a desired change.

- Creating meaning through insights which are expressed verbally, non-verbally, or unconsciously, and which could lead to behavioural change

Participants are assisted by facilitation of verbal and non-verbal introductions prior to and discussions following the activity.

- Punctuating isomorphic connection(s)

This refers to the way the structure of the activity matches the resolution of the problem and significantly contributes to the transfer of lessons learned into changed behaviour.

In this study an adventure therapy journey is analysed by using these definition points as indicators. It describes the experience of an individual who formed part of a hiking (activity) team (experiential group) that climbed Mount Kilimanjaro (activity and risk), and explores how this experience impacted on the narratives she employs (creation of meaning and punctuation of isomorphic connections).

## 2. Theoretical and methodological considerations

The description presented in this paper is composed from a social constructionist stance. This stance implies agreement with Gergen (1997) who views social constructionism as an inter-subjective epistemology whereby reality is co-constructed interpersonally and constituted in language. It allows for a critical stance towards commonly accepted assumptions about the world around us and proposes that various possibilities about how the world can be constructed should be opened up (Gergen 1985). Thus, instead of trying to find universal truths, it investigates the way reality is constructed and how we use language to facilitate this construction (Burr 1995). The construction can be seen, with Freedman & Combs (1996), as a metaphor in which reality is constructed when people come together in time, place, culture, society or context and when meaning is negotiated through language:

In striving to make sense of life, persons face the task of arranging their experiences of events in sequence across time in such a way as to arrive at a coherent account of themselves and the world around them [...] This account can be referred to as a story or self-narrative (White & Epston 1990: 10).

Thus, social constructionism allows reflection, evaluation and deconstruction of cultural or dominant narratives, discourses and (in particular) self-narratives. As Johnson (1993: 11) states:

There is abundant empirical evidence that narrative is a fundamental mode of understanding, by means of which we make sense of all forms of human action. There are various types of narrative structure that play a role in how we understand actions [...] narrative is not just an explanatory device but is actually constitutive of the way we experience things.

Viewed in this way, the narrative approach becomes a metaphor that allows people to make sense of their everyday lives and to see reality

as unfolding through time and space (Doan 1998). These self-narratives assist in the constitution of the self, since one's identity is seen as a social interaction within a particular context. The self is therefore seen as a process that occurs in the space between individuals within a particular system. Thus, the individual creates a sense of the self in the manner in which it interacts with his or her environment and according to the interactional effect he or she receives or the functions it could serve to him or her. The dominant narratives of the relevant contexts therefore also inform this self-narrative.

The field of narrative research developed out of the social constructionist stance to assist in describing these self-narratives. The aim of narrative research is to listen to and be drawn into these stories. It requires the researcher to work from a "not-knowing" position that allows the "subjects" to tell their stories as they are experienced (Anderson & Goolishian 1992: 28). Thus, the subjects are afforded an opportunity to narrate their own stories. In addition, narrative research also requires the exploration of narratives that have been institution-alised and legitimised by the community at large to form cultural or dominant narratives (White & Epston 1990). The social constructionist stance referred to requires the researcher to be aware that he or she is involved in the process of co-creating the research process and will assist in deconstructing the dominant cultural narratives.

However, individuals also experience events that do not fit dominant or self-narratives. These unique outcomes (Carr 1998) provide opportunities for the generation of alternative, resistant or unique accounts of individual's lives (Freedman & Combs 1996). In the current study, the "reality" involved and the experience thereof as a "unique outcome" is the adventure experience of climbing Mount Kilimanjaro and the impact this had on the self-narratives of a member of the team. Anna (a pseudonym) formed part of a thirteen-person hiking team. The party consisted of long-time friends as well as strangers. Two clinical psychologists joined the hike as participant observers. Although not designed to be an adventure therapy experience, its impact as a unique outcome provided an opportunity to examine it. The experience is seen as a text (*mimesis*) with which interaction takes place and through which the construction of reality and meaning occur (*diegesis*). In addition, it allows reflection on the self-narratives operative in the individual,

given the dominant narratives, and provides an opportunity for co-constructing alternative narratives. It provides a description, and therefore a co-construction of the subject's realities.

A variety of methods may be employed to "hear" the narratives that are co-constructed. These include literature reviews, discussions with individuals, audio- and/or video recordings and the writing down of conversations and experiences. The researcher has a number of tools of analysis available to deconstruct these narratives. Among these are narrative theory, especially the helpful distinction between *mimesis* (the actual experience) and *diegesis* (the account or narration of the experience), discursive analysis and discourse analysis. In the present study a phenomenological approach is employed to analyse and co-construct the narrative of Anna.

Thus, through the use of the phenomenological method, the narrative presented by the individual is analysed to facilitate co-construction thereof. Therefore the human experience as "a culturally constructed phenomenon" is used within the narrative metaphor (Crossley 2000; Butt 1999). As a description the nature of the research is qualitative. It aims to understand a social phenomenon in a specific context by understanding the meaning attached to it by an individual. To facilitate this understanding, the current research is not focused on finding a truth or truths regarding Anna's experience or even on trying to understand a particular phenomenon. It is rather aimed at co-constructing and/or sharing the experience to make new meaning possible. The role of the research process and particularly the role of the researcher (as co-constructor) is therefore important to clarify.

As a clinical psychologist and involved in adventure therapy in private practice, the researcher joined the team on the invitation of the organisers. The request was to assess the adventure experience with the possibility of using it in future as a team-building activity. The role of the researcher was therefore that of participant observer. In addition to using observation as a subjective participant the experience was explicated by interviewing the participants. Each was given the same set of questions to answer and these were analysed by using the phenomenological method of analysis (Giorgi 1970; Kruger 1979). This method allows for hierarchical categorisation and extended description of the constituent profiles that emerge from the natural meaning

units (cf Kruger 1979: 128-31). Reliability was ensured by having the results examined by a psychologist familiar with the technique and by discussing the process with the colleague who participated in the adventure trip. The co-construction process was enhanced by the fact that Anna entered into therapy with the researcher and remained in therapy for almost a year. During this process the deconstruction of the adventure as a unique outcome and the impact it had on her self-narratives were explored. The current description is aimed at mapping her understanding of the meaning attached to the adventure and consists of the elements that evolved during the trip and therapy.

To summarise the approach, a phenomenological instrument of analysis was used to co-construct a narrative metaphor from a social constructionist stance. The results of this research process are given in the following section.

### 3. Description of the adventure therapy experience

The use of adventure therapy may be further illustrated by providing a description of its impact on the life of an individual who formed part of the team that climbed Mount Kilimanjaro. Since it is consistent with the already mentioned definition points of adventure therapy, it serves well as an example illustrating the field. The paper features a description of the interplay between the individual and the team and points to adventure processes operative in both systems. It is aimed at the exploration of some of the elements that could have impacted on making the experience meaningful to the participant. It is focused on the experience, exploring the ways in which it influenced other systems of the individual's life.

The following developments evolved during the adventure trip and through contemplation of the experience by Anna.

#### 3.1 Reclaiming nurturing

Anna stated that she was involved with the well-being of the members of the group from the outset. This concern manifested itself in the sharing of information, encouragement and pointing out some of the dangers of the climb. The risks of mountain sickness and the impact of the symptoms thereof were particularly emphasised and she urged some of the members

to walk more slowly (thereby reducing the possibility of mountain sickness). She openly rebuked some of the members for not taking the risks seriously and took great pains to point out the dangers of “irresponsible” behaviour.

This caring and protective behaviour was evident right throughout the hike and intensified towards the end of the expedition. She described this need to protect and to prevent members from hurting themselves as a surprise and reported that she did not experience this type of behaviour as part of her “normal functioning”. She stated that she had not experienced this maternal feeling since her children had been small (between fifteen and twenty-two years ago). Thus, the group allowed her the opportunity to experiment with roles different from those that she normally employs. She took on the role of “nurturer” like the metaphorical hen nurturing, caring for and protecting her chickens.

The progression in her provision of nurturing must be noted. The initial level was tentative and general and directed towards the group as a whole. It persisted throughout the hike and with some individuals it never grew beyond this level. Other members were treated with more involvement. The two examples below depict intimate progression.

- The first instance is her nurturing behaviour when her husband (Bill) became ill on the second day due to mountain sickness. The symptoms included excruciating headaches and pain from the effects of the illness on his stomach. She was protective and caring towards him because “she realised that he was very ill”. She comforted him, provided him with medicine and made sure that he was put to bed. This conduct was in such contrast to what he normally experienced that he mentioned on a number of occasions: “It is uncharacteristic behaviour”.
- The other occasion that illustrates the different role that she played during the trip occurred on the last evening of the hike. During that night the last member of the team to reach the summit, Chris, arrived in the camp hours later than the rest of the group. He was totally exhausted suffering from oedema. Her concern and feelings towards Chris when he was tired and ill underscored the importance of her reclaimed maternal urges. She stated that she felt that he needed physical touch and nurturing. She went to great lengths to ensure that he was safe, comfortable and out of danger. She describes her experience of her behaviour as “I went even deeper into the nurturing self”.



The team was “used” by Anna to devise different levels of experimentation with care and nurturing. Situations arose on Mount Kilimanjaro that do not normally occur in her life. The necessity of having to live with “strangers” for a week, to endure a physically demanding adventure and deal with illness are all examples of experiences which went beyond everyday life for Anna. The manner in which she claimed back the impact of maternal nurturing through touching and caring provided a powerful example of how she used the group experience to go beyond her everyday life. Confirmation that this was “new” behaviour was presented by Bill (her husband) and Chris (a friend of many years). They stressed that it was “completely unfamiliar behaviour” from her and in reflection during therapy she confirmed this.

### 3.2 Relinquishing independence

The second important psychological aspect that was challenged by climbing Mount Kilimanjaro involved her need for control and independence. At the outset of the hike she was asked about her expectations of the trip. She stated that it was “a challenge that she [could] control”. That this control was not ultimate became clear as the trip progressed. All the precautions, medication and preparation to control the mountain did not enable her to accomplish what she stated as having been the initial aim of the climb, namely to reach the summit. The fact that the mountain could not be controlled in spite of all her efforts led her to question the necessity of control. Indeed, the obsolescence of the need to control becomes evident when it emerges that it was precisely the uncontrollability of the mountain that allowed her to use it. Ultimately, she used the team to reach a different summit, namely to go beyond independence to accepting assistance.

The incremental manner in which this acceptance occurred must be pointed out. It started with her refusing assistance from the assistant guide, who offered to carry her rucksack, and extended to the point where members of the team carried her into the last camp. Between these extremes she managed to progress from completely independent and refusing help to a point where she could do nothing but accept help. The first instance of the switch to accepting help occurred on the third day, when she handed her backpack to the assistant guide. This happened on the day after the night when she treated her husband and could thus

be linked to her reclaiming her nurturing role. That evening she felt miserable and ill and allowed her husband to support her and to care for her. The next day she extended her acceptance of help to include other members of the team where she allowed Ernst to push her from behind to ease the pressure of the hike and accepted medicine and food from team members. As the day progressed she needed more and more assistance from them. This progressed to the point where more members were involved in getting her to the camp. On the latter part of the walk she was carried into the camp by team members while others assisted in carrying the bags of those supporting her.

The manner in which the whole team became involved in this process is illustrated by the facts that everybody waited for her to be ready at the departure point and that at base camp everybody became involved in trying to lend a hand. Thus, the more her independence was relinquished, the more feminine her role started to become. This allowed her the opportunity to be more nurturing. This inverted relationship must be stressed, as it was in relinquishing independence that she was able to take on a different role; as the importance of the one diminished, so the importance of the other increased.

The acceptance of help that was brought about by illness (her own and her husband's) illustrated to her the difficulty of independence and that ultimate control of life is limited. Isomorphically her need to be in control at all times and at all costs was hereby questioned. This very questioning and the successful acceptance of not being in control opened the way for new experiences. As she describes it:

I needed everyone's help — and got it from many — Ernst, John, George and the guide ... I could do nothing but to lean on them and accept their help.

The importance of the team in this process must be noted. As she developed by exploring different roles, the group was willing to accept its responsibility. The norms that were of assistance, support and caring for each other were well established and enabled the group to react to the need of the individual. The important role that Anna played in establishing these norms must be noted and her participation in this regard may be seen as preparatory to the task that she set herself. Thus, it was important for her to ensure sufficient trust and security and a

norm of mutual assistance in the group in order to enable her to create the stage on which she could experiment with different behaviour.

### 3.3 Regaining emotional competence

Nightfall at the end of the second day (when the group arrived at the Shira plateau) was indeed a spectacular showpiece of nature. The sun was setting behind Mount Meru towards the west while directly behind the camp the dome of Mount Kilimanjaro shone in the last rays of sunlight. As the sun was setting the full moon rose over Mount Kilimanjaro. Thus, nature provided a perfect metaphor of change in the rise and fall; yet at the same time presented a striking sense of balance and equilibrium. Anna described this moment in the following way:

... the moon rose like a great silver balloon in the darkening sky over the pink mountain touched with white along the top, and reflecting the sun setting beneath the plateau behind. For me a synchronous symbol of my rising femininity/yin/anima and setting masculinity/yang/animus which has dominated my life ...

To Anna the “masculinity/*yang/animus*” meant the rationality and analytical thinking that was evident in her career through research, writing and an attempt to explain life by means of logical and deductive thought. Her philosophy of life was very much determined by that of Ayn Rand, which stresses the value of the individual and the self but also focuses on rationality as opposed to emotion and feeling. Anna mentioned that this philosophy had dominated her life and that there was no place for instinct, emotion or spirituality. She had created a life in which it was important for her to excel in thought processes at the expense of emotional involvement. Thus, her life (both personal and public) was characterised by a lack of emotional content and an active attempt to negate emotions by focusing on a rational explanation of life. The function of this is of importance as she attempted to create an image of “a highly polished, tough, competent woman — a match for any man!”

She explained the emotional experience on the second day as one of “heightened awareness” in which she experienced everything as “glowing with beauty”. This culminated in her emotions as she entered the camp (and experienced the sunset). She stated that she had experienced emotions “she hadn’t felt for more than twenty-five years”. She stated that even

if the trip had ended at Shira (on the second day) it would have been sufficient for her.

Her regaining emotional competence could have been brought about by the sense of heightened emotional sensitivity which was also expressed by some other members of the group. Various emotions were revealed during the day, ranging from happiness, fear, concern, and exultation to apprehension. The challenge which lay ahead and the unpredictability of the effect of mountain sickness on the success of the attempt led to a sense of uncertainty. Most conversations dealt with this issue and with the necessity of participation and support to ensure that everybody succeeded. This was coherent with the norm of emotional sharing and involvement already established by the group, which allowed relative strangers to share emotionally. Thus, the group's focus on emotional issues could have prompted Anna to focus beyond the rational into the realm of the emotions and to find unexpected experiences. The force with which it evolved created a "peak experience" and she ventured fully on experiencing heightened emotional awareness. The circularity between her actions and those of the group must be emphasised. As she participated in creating a norm of shared emotional experience, so she was influenced to share. Thus, the group allowed its members to participate in constructing norms but also required them to operate in harmony with that norm.

Apart from the human interaction, the sheer magnitude of the natural beauty compelled her to focus inwardly and to allow emotions that she did not normally experience to emerge. This rediscovering of emotion probably allowed her to play such a significant role in caring for her husband that evening. The emotional climax probably lessened the need for her to reach the summit and served as a reinforcement for her experimentation with different roles. Thus, she escaped internally focused entrapment by reclaiming the emotional side of her personality and finding freedom (Uhuru).

### 3.4 Redefining conquering

Anna is an independent, self-assured woman in her own right and able to hold her own in any situation. She comes across as opinionated and capable of influencing people, arguing her point of view and providing direction to others. She defines herself as displaying "a bit stronger

*animus* than *anima*”, illustrating her ability to compete with everyone and particularly with men operating in her field of expertise.

This sense of competition was particularly prevalent in her marital relationship, where she had a strongly-felt desire to be able to compete or to prove that she could be successful in the area in which her husband is successful. She had spent most of the past fifteen years competing with him on this terrain. This had led her to abandon some of her interests and skills in favour of building a career in a field more suited to him. This career move was the result of a philosophical point of view that was competition-orientated, rational and performance-driven. The result was that these elements became the focal point of their marital relationship and the element of competition, in particular, became very strong. Her husband shares these attributes; he too is competitive, self-assured in interaction with her and very persuasive. This had led him to define the “rules of the game” and it had become a competition on this terrain. She was drawn into this through a strong sense of not wishing to disappoint people and wanting to prove to her husband that she was able to succeed. The competition was meant to please him; it was on his terms and on a terrain largely determined by him.

The competition in the marital relationship extended beyond that boundary to include relations with men in general. Thus, she wanted to prove herself in interaction with men and became increasingly trapped in a perpetuating game. Apart from feeling trapped in her marriage and her interaction with men, she also felt trapped in her career. There, in the public arena, she was operating in an area that did not come naturally to her. She felt obliged to prove herself and experienced pressure to perform well. Thus, she was trapped in the everlasting pattern of having to attempt to conquer. The effect of all this was that she was unable to enjoy what she was doing.

The experience on Mount Kilimanjaro was different from her (or the rest of the group’s) daily experience as it was physical in nature and not a rational or intellectual quest such as most of the team were involved with in their daily lives. The very nature of the experience forced everyone to experience emotions that opened inwardly focused attention. Being on a terrain where Anna felt more comfortable, the experience assisted her in changing the relentless pattern of having to conquer.

As she accepted the inevitability of having to relinquish control and independence, she found herself

... in an archetypal female role — weak and depending on them. No longer able to compete or to prove [that], as a woman, I could do anything they could do — and better!

Being in that role probably made it possible for her to accept the different role described earlier. She used the opportunity to allow her husband to conquer, to reach Uhuru. The evening before the final ascent she realised that she would not be able to make it to the summit. However, she was in a position where she “could help Bill prepare, encourage him to go — give him my gear — nurture, support and encourage — not compete”. Thus, it became important for her to prepare the way and to ensure that her husband made it to the top. It became less important for her to make it to Uhuru than to make sure that he did. In stronger terms it could be said that she could not make it because that would take away from the conquering that, in her mind, was his task. His conquering served the function of emphasising to both of them the importance of the nurturing (his need to receive and her need to give).

Bill stated that he always felt that “if somebody else could do it, he could do it too, or better”. The experience on the mountain, however, showed him that he was “not omnipotent after all”. It was undoubtedly the physical demands of the hike that brought him to this realisation. However, the opportunity that was created by a more nurturing partner could have played a part in his focusing on his mortality. This awareness could have been sparked by the realisation that it is all right not to be omnipotent. The manner in which his wife’s conquest was completed could have allowed him the opportunity to feel more comfortable with the possibility of failure.

Thus, the mountain allowed them the opportunity of experiencing different roles. He conquered by reaching the summit and she conquered by staying behind and allowing him to conquer. However, at another level, she conquered a nurturing role instead of the mountain while he nurtured her by “playing the game” of letting her stay behind and of conquering, permitting her to occupy the new role.

These new roles allowed them an opportunity to redefine the competition that was prominent between them. She describes the effect of the climb thus:

... it helped my relationship with Bill ... I am no longer in competition with him ... suffering from the mistaken view that being good at what he is good at will please him ... I'm returning to my own world ... the world where I belong ... which is completely different from his world.

Although there is some overlap ... he learns to dance ... I plan the organisation seminar ... most of the animosity seems to have dissolved.

### 3.5 Allowing leadership

The group had an appointed leader who was instrumental in getting it together, arranging everything and ensuring that all the administrative tasks were accomplished. He had had the idea of climbing Mount Kilimanjaro for some time and had raised it with some of his friends. The idea had quickly found favour and he had managed to bring everybody together. He had been responsible for most of the administrative arrangements and taken great care to ensure that everybody knew about the finer details of the trip. He had arranged with the touring agency and been the link between it and the members and the guides on the mountain. He tried to look after the group, served as medical advisor and generally made sure that everybody was happy.

However, the informal leadership position in the group was taken over by Anna. She gathered everyone around her, made sure that everyone was happy, provided instruction and information on the hike and determined the tempo of the group. This was particularly evident in the manner in which she paced the group. For example, on the fourth day the group waited very long for her while everybody else was ready. This was a very significant day in the development of her interaction with the group as it was to be the decisive day for her in accomplishing some of the tasks she needed from the group (as above). Another example of her informal leadership was the manner in which she focused on the needs of the group (notwithstanding the fact that the group itself was very focused on the members' different individual needs). A further indication of the fact that she acted as an informal leader was evident from the way in which she challenged the appointed leader. This challenge was evident in a particular incident where the formal

leader wanted to do something individually that could potentially have been detrimental to the well-being of the group.

This happened when the leader insisted that the assistant guide accompanied him ahead of the rest of the group. He was not dressed properly and it started raining and he became cold. Some members were left alone in the rain and heavy mist on a route which was fairly difficult to follow. Thus, the leader did something individually that was in conflict with the needs of the rest of the group. Anna took him to task regarding this behaviour by insisting that it was not in the group's best interests. This underscored her position as informal leader and established the norm that the needs of the group must take precedence over those of an individual member. It served the function of strengthening the norm that the group had to act cohesively. By these means the group understood that somebody (the informal leader) would care for them and that the guides would make the decisions regarding the well-being of the group. Thus, in her role as informal leader, Anna also strengthened the role of the guide in his leadership role. This enhanced the trust and security of the group. Her role as informal leader allowed her the opportunity to take care of the group — establishing her nurturing role.

Anna underplayed her role as informal leader as she allowed the appointed leader to fulfil certain leadership roles. She was content to play a secondary role while allowing the group to progress in a manner with which she felt comfortable. This position allowed her the opportunity to care for the members of the group and to ensure that everyone was comfortable. The same pattern may be observed: she allowed someone else to conquer (lead in this case) and she provided the background and the safety net.

### 3.6 Connecting with larger systems

Anna stated that she had experienced a great “sense of destiny” and “*karma*” on the day the team reached the Shira plateau. The feeling had recurred on the last day when she had returned ahead of the rest of the group. She said she had felt happy and at peace and realised, without any disappointment at not reaching the summit, that this was the way it had to be. She stated that she had experienced a connection with a larger entity pointing out her harmony and unity with larger life sys-



tems — as if she were part of something greater. Thus, she had experienced being synchronistically linked to an underlying spiritual meaning. This experience on the mountain became a point at which she started to rethink her own spirituality and reallocate spirituality into her life. It led her to focus on larger life issues and explore the value of myth, the collective unconscious and Eastern philosophy. The strongly symbolic event of the moon's rising while the sun was setting, redirected her mind to the unity of things, the harmony of nature and the interrelation between an individual and nature. This required her to question her own interaction with life systems and she started to realise certain imbalances and to experience a sense of being "out of sync" with larger systems. The obvious impact of focusing more inwardly and rediscovering the impact thereof on herself and on other systems was to force her to rethink her own spiritual connections.

The nature of this spiritual quest may be related to the name "Kilimanjaro" — meaning "a never-ending journey". One is forced to contemplate the nature of the journey, its impact and value, as well as the natural consequence of the destination to which this journey leads. These are all questions relating to an individual's metaphysical quest to define his or her place connected to the systems of life. Thus, metaphorically relating life to a journey, climbing Mount Kilimanjaro became a powerful tool in starting to answer these questions. Anna used the opportunity to redefine her connectivity and to discover its synchronicity.

Mount Kilimanjaro is an active volcano. The sense of its "being brought forth" as a volcano and being the cradle of Africa has prominently female attributes. It can therefore be related to aspects of the "world navel" as found in mythology. That Anna found her feminine side and her connection with destiny and *karma* here at the navel of Africa bound her to the experience as by an umbilical cord. The sense of strength, nurturing and connectedness that stemmed from the experience allowed her an opportunity to test the new role and to reclaim aspects of the nature that she had desired for a very long time. This points to her discovery of, and search into, synchronicity. Synchronicity is "... a co-incidence of events that is meaningful to the participant; thus each synchronistic experience is unique" (Bolen 1982: 18). Anna regarded the climbing of Mount Kilimanjaro as such an event be-

cause it became meaningful to her through the manner in which she used the adventure to rekindle her spirituality, to come into contact with her inner self and to point herself in a different direction in life. She felt that the climb was helpful in putting her in the correct psychological frame of mind to be open to input in her life. She also regarded the climb as symbolically meaningful, while it gave her an insight into her personal psychological situation.

### 3.7 Escaping entrapment

Anna stated beforehand that she felt she needed the hike as an opportunity to escape some of the pressures of her situation in South Africa. She said that she felt trapped and needed time for reflection and re-consideration of her role and her life in South Africa. This feeling of entrapment was felt in most areas of her life, including the following:

- Individual

The individual system was mainly determined by her non-work activities, which included reading, report writing and research. Most of it was left-brain activity that conflicted with her training in fine arts as well as her artistic and musical abilities.

- Marriage

She described how she felt trapped in the circularity of having to compete and of trying to prove herself. She said that her relationship felt as if she had been “swimming upstream for too long”.

- Career

Anna was in a career in public life that she described as “more and more miserable”, “like a fish out of water, feeling surrounded by enemies and blocked at every turn” or “on the wrong path”.

The description of her entrapment had a mainly external focus and she was thus seeking to escape from external entrapments. From the above psychological description of her entrapment it appears that there were also internal aspects determining her search to escape. The manner in which she used the mountain experience to make internal changes has already been described and it had visible external consequences as well. The following external changes are indicative of the way internal changes likewise affected external systems: she made a career change, started to paint, opened a new business, began taking dancing classes,

started a journal and found a new hobby. Thus, her Uhuru was demonstrated on two levels, internally and externally.

#### 4. Concluding remarks

It would seem as if the team experience on the mountain had a very significant impact on Anna and could well be defined as a unique outcome. She used the team to accomplish certain tasks she had set out to perform that could not have been done without the assistance of a group or without an experience so extremely different from her everyday life. It is clear that within the adventure context the group provided a valuable opportunity for her to experiment with certain behaviour and that the positive acceptance thereof by the members of the team allowed her the chance to implement some of it in other systems. The synchronistic event whereby certain personal psychological dynamics were matched by processes in the team enabled her to accomplish and redefine some operative narratives in her life, including her reclaiming nurturing behaviour, regaining emotional competence and relinquishing independence. She escaped her situation of entrapment by redefining her competitive relationships, allowing leadership, and through the experience re-evaluating spirituality through a sense of greater connectedness. Thus, she used the adventure experience as an event or text by means of which she created meaning and reconstructed some of the operant narratives in her life. In this way, different meanings and different narratives became possible for her, which allowed her to expand her horizons. In much the same manner, co-creating and telling the story in the current research paper is also expansive and opens the possibility for this to become a narrative, adventure or experience that might be the start of yet further narratives.

## Bibliography

ANDERSON H & H GOOLISHAN

1992. Human systems as linguistic systems: evolving ideas about the implications of theory and practice. *Family Process* 27: 371-93.

BOTHA R

2002. Using an adventure medium to construct unique outcomes: a social constructionist approach. Unpubl MA thesis. University of Pretoria.

BURR V

1995. *An introduction to social constructionism*. London: Routledge.

BUTT T

1999. Overview: realism, relativism, social constructionism and discourse. Parker (ed) 1998: 13-25.

CARR A

1998. Michael White's narrative therapy. *Contemporary Family Therapy* 20(4): 485-503.

CROSSLEY M L

2000. Narrative psychology, trauma and the study of self/identity. *Theory & Psychology* 10: 527-46.

DOAN R E

1998. The king is dead, long live the king: narrative therapy and practicing what we preach. *Family Process* 37: 379-85.

FREEDMAN J & G COMBS

1996. *Narrative therapy: the social construction of preferred realities*. New York: Norton.

GERGEN K J

1985. The social constructionist movement in modern psychology. *American Psychologist* 40(3): 266-75.

1997. Toward a post-modern psychology. Kvale (ed) 1992: 17-30.

GILLIS H L & D THOMSEN

1996. A research update (1992-1995) of adventure therapy: challenge activities and ropes courses, wilderness expeditions, and residential camping. Unpubl presentation to the Coalition for Education in the Outdoors Symposium, Bradford Woods, Indiana University, Martinsville, IN.

GIORGI A

1970. *Psychology as a human science: a phenomenologically based approach*. New York: Harper & Row.

GIORGI A, A BARTON & C MAES (eds)

1983. *Duquesne studies in phenomenological psychology*, 4. Pittsburgh: DUBESQUE UNIVERSITY PRESS.

ITIN C M (ed)

1998. *Exploring the boundaries of adventure therapy: international perspectives*. Boulder, CO: Association for Experiential Education.

JOHNSON M

1993. *Moral imagination: implications of cognitive science for ethics*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

## Kriek/Climbing Mount Kilimanjaro

KRUGER D

1979. *An introduction to phenomenological psychology*. Cape Town: Juta.

KVALE S (ed)

1992. *Psychology and postmodernism*. London: Sage.

MILES J C & S PRIEST

1999. *Adventure education*. State College, PA: Venture.

PARKER I (ed)

1998. *Social construction, discourse and realism*. London: Sage.

RINGER T M

2000. Address to 2nd International Adventure Therapy Conference, Augsburg, Germany, 20-25 March 2000.

RINGER T M & H L GILLIS

1995. Managing psychological depth in adventure/challenge groups. *Journal of Experiential Education* 18(2): 76-81.

WHITE M & D EPSTON

1990. *Narrative means to therapeutic ends*. New York: Norton.