Pastoral therapy and extra-marital affairs:

a narrative approach

by

ANDRÉ BOTHA

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PROMOTER: PROF. D J KOTZÉ

JOINT PROMOTER: PROF. J T DE JONGH VAN ARKEL

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TEXTUAL NOTES

Translated quotes

I have translated quotes from authors writing in languages other than English into English. The reader will find the original versions as footnotes and the translated English versions in the main text.

Page reference numbers

I have used the Harvard reference system (Kilian 1989). Kilian (1989:26) comments on the Harvard reference system, making the following introductory statement in connection with references in the text:

> In this system references to sources in the text give **only** the **author's surname** and the **year of publication** in parentheses, adding a page reference **if necessary** [bold mine].

This statement has led me to believe that usually only the **author's name** and the **year of publication** are required in a reference in the text. It has also led me to believe that a reference to page numbers may be added if I deem it necessary.

Hence, I have usually given only the author's name and the year of publication. It was only after completing the thesis' manuscript that I learnt that other readers interpret Kilian's (1989:26) statement differently, i.e. they consistently add page numbers to text references.

My interpretation of Kilian's (1989) statement is, however, consistent with the system of reference of the American Psychological Association (APA):

> A publication is cited by inserting the **author's name** and the **year of publication** in the text.... The **name-date method** is widely accepted as the most convenient citation method in psychology (and many other disciplines) and is used, with minor variations, by the British Psychological Society (BPS) (1979) and the American Psychological Association (1983) [bold mine].

<div align="right">(Plug & Verster 1987:16)</div>

My promoter, joint promoter and I have decided to leave the references as they are and to include this textual note on references to page numbers. I have inserted some page reference numbers, but it was impossible to do so everywhere due to time limitations.

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with her characteristic expertise for the linguistic aspects of the research report.

I am most grateful to my dear wife, Irma, for her patient and consistent inspiration and understanding, not to mention my children, Lilise and Theunis.

SUMMARY AND KEY TERMS

Summary

Extra-marital affairs are the main reason for divorce in western society. Pastoral therapists usually operate within a modernistic theology and use their 'expert' knowledge of theological ethics to confront the unfaithful spouse - a pastoral therapeutic approach that neither delivers the desired results, nor honours the client's expertise and freedom. This study endeavoured to socially construct pastoral therapy using the principles of postmodernistic social construction discourse with couples/spouses where one spouse is or was engaged in an extra-marital affair.

The relation between a modernistic epistemology and a postmodernistic epistemology, and how this relation affects theology, practical theology and pastoral therapy were explored. The propium of pastoral therapy in a postmodernistic paradigm and the implications of a narrative approach in pastoral therapy for theological ethics were reflected upon.

A narrative description of extra-marital affairs was constructed and some of the cultural discourses which co-constitute extra-marital affairs were discussed. The pastoral therapist and clients were simultaneously in conversation with ethical discourses and relational, personal and emotional discourses, thus co-constructing new alternatives and possibilities. During these multiple reflexive conversations, some of the cultural discourses (eros; self-fulfilment; extra-marital sex and hedonism) which co-constitute extra-marital affairs were deconstructed.

In the light of the usual limitations of the life-span of an extra-marital affair, the pastoral therapist and faithful spouses socially constructed alternatives and possibilities for their lives to enable them to outstay the extra-marital affair of the unfaithful spouse.

Multiple reflexive conversations with (un)faithful spouses co-constructed, with relational and ethical discourses, a narrative approach in pastoral therapy. The use

of externalisation and ritualisation in a narrative approach in pastoral therapy concerning extra-marital affairs was explored. A sense of guilt and secrets were also themes in multiple reflexive conversations with unfaithful spouses. This prompted reflection on the use of Scripture in a narrative approach in pastoral therapy. The relation between the biological-psychological aspects of extra-marital affairs and narrative therapy are also briefly explored.

Key terms

Pastoral therapy; Narrative therapy; Marital therapy; Extra-marital affairs; Postmodernistic epistemology; Multiple reflexive conversations; Deconstruction; Social construction theory; Marriage; Ethics; Cultural discourses; Agape; Eros; Sex.

BACKGROUND TO AND AIMS FOR THIS RESEARCH

We have lost our names and become numbers...lost control of our destinies to governments, industries, and machines....**Love is a way to remain human in an inhuman society**; it is therefore more prized, in every form, than ever.

(Hunt 1969:283-284)

1.1 The topicality of marriage, romance and extra-marital affairs

1.1.1 The topicality of extra-marital affairs

Attraction and affairs are central issues in modernistic western life. Tales of extra-marital love remain ubiquitous and it is almost impossible to avoid the portrayals of adultery or extra-marital love in the media. Many plays, films, books, popular songs and poems focus on or include this topic, which has held enduring interest for people not only in our time but throughout the centuries (Hunt 1969; Lawson 1990). Kaslow (1993:2) stated:

> The interest in the topic of attractions and affairs probably began with the fateful encounter of Adam and Eve, and is universal; it pervades professional literature, the Bible, art, opera, ballet, novels, history, politics - in short, all realms of life. The fascination with the topic is eternal and ephemeral - desire and passion provide energy for great accomplishments; betrayal wreaks havoc in spurned individuals and distraught families.

1.1.2 The topicality and popularity of marriage

By the beginning of this century, society had organised itself around the child-bearing family. The average life expectancy was about 45 years (Ventura 1996a).

People grew up in families, married and without delay proceeded to have five to ten children. Whereas before the industrial revolution, people were still often part of an extended family and were making a living in a family business or closed community. Recent changes in the family life cycle, however, have shifted the emphasis to marital concerns and decreased the emphasis on child-bearing family concerns (Carter & Mc Goldrick 1989).

Compared to people in the previous century, people now live much longer and will be married for many years after their children have left home (Hunt 1969). It is also evident that the economic structure of the western culture has changed in recent decades, forcing people to work away from home, thereby putting more pressure on their marriages. Previously, a couple spent most of their time together trying to make a living. Nowadays, a couple spend most of their time as individuals in different workplaces working (more often than not) intimately with other individuals (Adler 1996:42). People in contemporary nuclear families and marriages expect their personal emotional needs to be met in this most intimate of relationships: Marriage has to bring happiness (Pieterse 1977; Mace & Mace 1974; Rice 1990).

Marriage is becoming increasingly important in the organisation of society (Worthington, Shortz & Mc Cullough 1993). It remains one of the fundamental aggregates of the church (Louw D J 1989; Everett 1985) and is more popular than in the past and will continue to be the most trusted way of life (Hunt 1969). The following statistics and the interpretations based on them, illustrate how popular and how current an issue marriage is. These statistics were quoted and discussed by Chadwick and Heaton (1992:1-2, 53-55) who compiled an extensive summary of various scientific surveys on marital life in the USA.

- Marriage rates for males and females have remained relatively stable since 1966. Although we are nearing the end of the twentieth century, 84% of women, when interviewed on their ideal lifestyle, responded that being married constituted their preferred lifestyle. Only 8% preferred not to be married and 8% expressed no opinion in response to the question.

- The perceived level of marital happiness has varied little over the past fifteen years and 95% of respondents described their marriage as 'happy'.

The perceived level of communication between husbands and wives had increased substantially during the interval between 1920 and 1980. The marital relationship has deepened since the 1920's and husbands and wives share more with each other and provide more emotional support.

- This improvement in the overall perception of satisfaction in marital life is due to various factors such as the influence of books and magazines; marriage enrichment programmes and the women's rights movements which encourage couples to explore equal roles.

It is also true that more and more marriages end in divorce (Worthington 1988:17; Efird 1985:11) and that the institution of marriage is not taken for granted in a postmodernistic environment (Jordaan 1996). However, although our postmodernistic culture is characterised by a diversity in types of marital relationships and although cohabitation is increasing (Jordaan 1996), evidently matrimony remains a popular way of life. Landis and Landis (1977:109) stated:

Our society has been called a 'love-orientated' and a 'marriage-orientated' society, in that people are under pressure (whether consciously or not) to fall in love or to be in love with someone. In some ways being in love is viewed as evidence of normality, a way of conforming to the expectations of society.

Lawson (1990) found that, despite the so-called sexual revolution of the 1960s, the vast majority of people in the USA and Britain still cling to the institution of marriage and regard sexual fidelity as important. Over 90% of people in western society marry before they are fifty years old. Most of the individuals who choose not to marry cohabit in committed relationships that resembles marriage. In fact, almost all people become part of a couple at some point in their lives, regardless of country and culture (Halford, Kelly & Markman 1997:4).

Given the high rates of divorce and of remarrying, and given the high rates of second marriages ending in divorce, one might come to the same conclusion as Worthington (1988:17): 'Apparently, the institution of marriage is not as endangered as some people claim; however, the permanence of individual

marriages is in peril'. The logical conclusion to be drawn from the information available is that the institution of marriage is still one of the main experiences of human life (Worthington et al 1993).

1.2 Western culture's ambiguity towards extra-marital affairs

The above mentioned trends must not deceive us. According to Chadwick and Heaton (1992:83), one of the most dramatic changes in American marital experiences during the past fifty years is the increase in divorce. More than 33% of couples who married in the 1970's and early 1980's ended their marriages within ten years. Divorced men and women reported that it was generally the woman who wanted to get a divorce. About 50% of the divorced couples did not seek professional help. In a survey on 256 divorced persons, 17% stated that unfaithfulness was the main reason for the divorce. This implies that at least the individual who sought the divorce rejected unfaithfulness within the relationship concerned.

On the one hand, western society values the marital bond and individuals truly experience more happiness in this intimate relationship. On the other hand, society is fascinated by romance and extra-marital relationships. This fascination clashes with the value placed on marriage and many married persons do engage in extra-marital affairs (Thompson 1984). This ambiguity is highlighted in a statement such as the following:

> Ours is a society that **values marriage**, but our society also has a mixed heritage and great ambivalence regarding sexuality. On one hand, adultery continues to be used in our legal system as a tool for administering blame and punishment. At the same time, the entertainment world creates a continual stream of movies and television shows that use an **affair as the major story line** [bold mine].
>
> (Brown 1991:2)

When one reviews the literature on the **topicality and popularity of marriage** and

the **prevalence of extra-marital affairs** [see the next section], one can understand why Hunt (1962:22) made the following comment:

> Our culture is thus schizoid. It offers us an approved model of marriage [monogamy] which, for all its values and its beauty, is suited to the needs and emotional abilities of only some - perhaps the minority - of us; it simultaneously offers us a deviant, disapproved model [extra-marital affairs] which, for all its disadvantages, is suited to the needs and emotional abilities of the rest - perhaps even a majority - of us.

The clash between popularly 'sanctioned' monogamy and the fascination of 'illicit' extra-marital affairs for western culture leads to tragedy in the lives of many adults, children and families - even to the point of affair-related murders.

1.3 The prevalence of affairs

1.3.1 Introduction

Marriage is increasingly important in our society. Hence, it is an irony that statistics suggest that most marriages will, at some point, need to resolve the emotional trauma resulting from an affair (Moultrup 1990). Some reports suggest 50 to 60% of husbands and that 45 to 50% of wives have experienced extramarital affairs by the time they are forty (Martin 1989). Approximately **50% of all white males** and **30% of white females** in the **Republic of South Africa** have at some time engaged in an affair (De Bruin 1992). I could not verify the figures mentioned by De Bruin because I could not find any research done in South Africa in this regard.

The following paragraphs set out some information on extra-marital affairs in certain categories. For detailed discussions on the prevalence of extra-marital affairs, the reader is referred to Moultrup (1990); Adler (1996); Lawson (1990); Woodward (1997); Hunt (1969); De Bruin (1992) and Chadwick and Heaton (1992).

1.3.2 Unfaithfulness, gender and age

The National Opinion Research Centre of the University of Chicago investigated the relation between age, gender and marital unfaithfulness in their 1994 survey and found the following (Adler 1996:32):

Infidelity: Gender and age
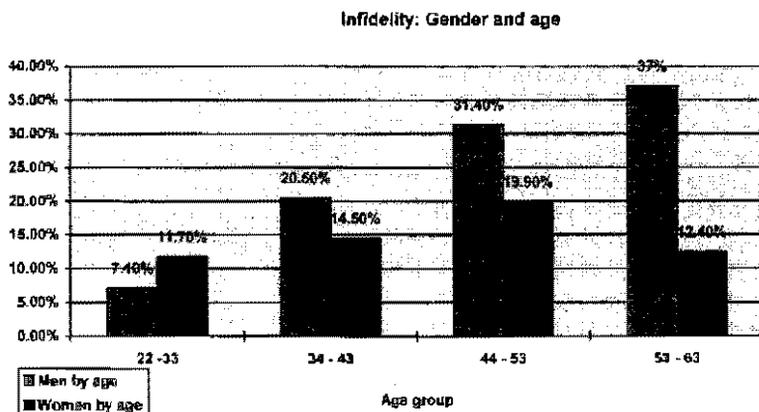
Figure 1: The relation between age, gender and unfaithfulness

(The vertical axis represents the percentage of people who engage in extra-marital
affairs in 1994 , and the horizontal axis represents men and women by age)

Commenting on the data set out in the above graph, Adler (1996:42) stated:

> While older women today are much less likely to have had affairs than the men
> the same age, among women in their 20s the pattern is reversed: in this age
> group women are more likely to stray than the men....adultery among women
> seems to be increasing, which many regard as an unintended consequence of
> the women's movement.

These trends can be ascribed to various factors: More women are in the work
force now and they have more access to men other than their husbands or men
belonging to their family. Women are increasingly sexually assertive and are more
ready to engage in extra-marital affairs (Bell, Turner & Rosen 1975). Atwater

(1979) found that women's involvement in extra-marital sex was also related to their talking to other women who were already engaged in extra-marital sexual relations. Hence, women who were engaged in a social group in which extra-marital sexual relations were more prevalent, were more inclined to become involved in extra-marital sexual relationships (Thompson 1984).

1.3.3 Unfaithfulness and church attendance

Given that this study approaches extra-marital relations from a pastoral therapeutic point of view, some data on the relation between religious commitment and involvement in extra-marital affairs may be helpful. The National Opinion Research Centre of the University of Chicago investigated the relation between church attendance and unfaithfulness in their 1994 survey and they found the following (Adler 1996:44):
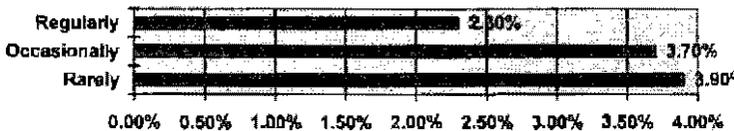
Figure 2: The relation between church attendance and unfaithfulness

(The vertical axis represents the incidence of church attendance and the horizontal axis represents the percentage of church-goers who had extra-marital affairs in 1994)

People who rarely attended church were more prone to engage in extra-marital relationships than regular church-goers. Church attendance may be a preventive factor in terms of extra-marital affairs. However, extra-marital affairs do occur even among the clergy. A survey among 1000 Protestant ministers in the USA revealed that 12% of ministers admitted to sexual intercourse outside marriage. An additional 18% of ministers disclosed that they had kissed someone other than their spouse (Woodward 1997). If one adds these two figures, assuming that the

definition of an extra-marital affair includes kissing someone other than one's spouse, a total of 30% of ministers were unfaithful to their marital partners.

1.3.4 Unfaithfulness and marital history

The National Opinion Research Centre of the University of Chicago investigated the relation between a person's marital history and unfaithfulness in their 1994 survey and they found the following (Adler 1996:44):
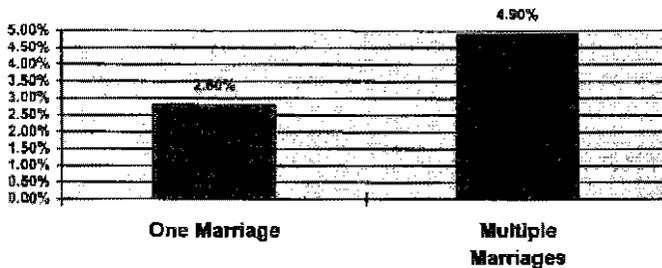
Figure 3: The relation between marital status and unfaithfulness
(The vertical axis represents the percentage of people who had extra-marital relationships in 1994 and the horizontal axis represents people's marital history)

People who had been married several times were more inclined to engage in extra-marital affairs than people who were or had been married once. Further, the majority of the men and a minority of the women who had experienced an extra-marital relationship once, make it a way of life thereafter.

For some, extra-marital affairs are only a continuation of their pre-marital sexual behaviour. The first extra-marital affair after the wedding is 'no big deal' and nothing has changed. These people dissociate sexuality from emotional involvement in a relationship and may continue to have extra-marital relationships for the rest of their lives (Hunt 1969:258).

1.3.5 Unfaithfulness and education

The National Opinion Research Centre of the University of Chicago investigated the relation between educational level and unfaithfulness in their 1994 survey and they found the following (Adler 1996:44):
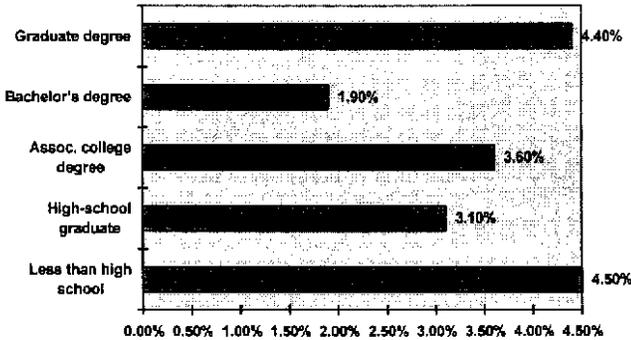
Figure 4: The relation between level of education and unfaithfulness

(The vertical axis represents the level of education and the horizontal axis represents the percentage of people who had extra-marital relationships in 1994)

The lowest and highest levels in the education spectrum correlate with a higher incidence of unfaithfulness.

1.3.6 Unfaithfulness and attitudes toward extra-marital sex

In a combined survey by the General Social Survey and the National Opinion Research Centre of the University of Chicago, the following question was put to respondents: "What is your opinion about a married person having sexual relations with someone other than the marriage partner - is it **always** wrong, **almost** always wrong, wrong only **sometimes, not wrong** at all"? Respondents' answers were grouped according to age and gender. Figure 5 details the responses (Chadwick & Heaton 1992:161):

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	Age group	Always wrong	Mostly wrong	Sometimes wrong	Not wrong
Males	18-24	71%	17%	10%	3%
	25-34	66%	20%	10%	3%
	35-44	68%	17%	12%	4%
	45-64	76%	14%	8%	3%
	65+	81%	9%	6%	4%
Females	18-24	76%	15%	9%	1%
	25-34	72%	17%	10%	2%
	35-44	70%	17%	10%	3%
	45-64	83%	10%	5%	2%
	65+	90%	6%	3%	1%

Figure 5: The relation between age groups and unfaithfulness

This data shows that most respondents held fairly conservative values with regard to fidelity in marriage.

Attitudes toward extra-marital sex appear to have changed over the period from 1974 to 1994:

> In **1974** the National Opinion Research Centre at the University of Chicago surveyed attitudes toward extramarital sex. The view that adultery was "always wrong" won majorities in every age group, but the margin was smallest among 18- to 29-year-olds: just 59% agreed with the proposition. But **since then** attitudes have **undergone a remarkable shift.** Twenty years later the same cohort, now in their 40s, condemned adultery by a much more resounding 74%. And **people now in their 20s**, who may have seen in their own families what happens when couples take adultery too lightly, **show up in this survey (1994)** as statistically **the most sexually conservative group** in America, tied with people in their 60s in their overwhelming rejection of marital unfaithfulness [bold mine].

(Adler 1996:44)

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The conservative attitudes of people now in their twenties do not imply that these people will engage in fewer extra-marital affairs. It is true that most brides (95%) have not even thought of the prospect of becoming involved in extra-marital sex after the marriage and have accepted monogamous marriage with its sexually exclusive boundaries as the normal script for females (Atwater 1979), but as many as 45 to 50% of wives have experienced an extramarital affair by the time they are forty. These figures apply in the USA (Martin 1989).

If there are so many extra-marital affairs, it becomes essential to examine the effect of extra-marital affairs on marital life.

1.4 The effect of an extra-marital affair on a marriage

Adultery spoilt our marriage, said one young woman...'I still feel now [some seven years later] that it spoilt our relationship. It spoilt it, just spoilt it'.

(Lawson 1990:36)

If one bears in mind the conservative values of people in their twenties, then the following data is significant. Respondents were asked the question, 'Was your husband/wife involved with someone else just before your marriage ended?'. A variety of respondents answered 'Yes' (Chadwick & Heaton 1992:155). Figure 6 sets out the results of this survey.
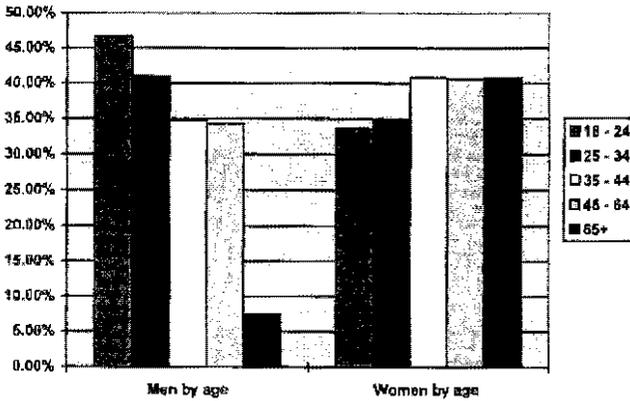
Figure 6: The relation between unfaithfulness, gender, age group and divorce
(The vertical axis represents the percentage of people who said 'Yes'
and the horizontal axis represents men and women in age groups)

Although there are significant differences in unfaithfulness as a reason for divorce compared to age and gender, it remains one of the main reasons for divorce.

An astonishing 46.6% of male divorcés in the 18-24 age group reported that their spouses were involved in an extra-marital affair just before the marriage ended. The corresponding figure for women is 33.6%. Pittman (1990:33) stated:

> Unfaithfulness is the primary disrupter of families, the most dreaded and devastating experience in a marriage. It is the most universally accepted justification for divorce....The crises that follow infidelities fill the offices of family therapists, lawyers, and plastic surgeons. I doubt if there is any problem to which we all devote more energy.

However fascinating the romance, however exciting a secretive extra-marital affair, in the most cases, unfaithfulness remains a devastating experience for everyone involved. Extra-marital affairs affect the future prospects of a marriage.

In 1987, the National Survey of Families and Households investigated the main reasons for divorce in the USA. The results are summarised in Figure 7 (Chadwick & Heaton 1992:97):

Main reasons:	Listed first:	Total times listed:
Unfaithfulness	168	255
No longer loved each other	103	188
Emotional problems	53	185
Financial problems	30	135
Physical abuse	29	72
Alcohol	25	47
Sexual problems	22	115
Problems with in-laws	16	81
Neglect of children	11	74
Communication problems	10	18
Married too young	9	14
Job conflicts	7	20

Figure 7: The main reasons for divorce

In this survey, 483 people were asked for their opinions. Of these, 168 persons indicated that unfaithfulness was their main reason for divorce. It is, however, worth noting that 255 out of 483 respondents mentioned that unfaithfulness was one of the reasons, not necessarily the main reason, but one of the reasons for their divorce. Converted to a percentage, it implies that **53% of the sample** indicated that **unfaithfulness** was **one of the reasons** for **divorce.**

A note on statistics and the inferences drawn from them: Pittman (1990) reflected on the meaning of statistical findings and voiced his concern that figures may be misleading because many extra-marital affairs occur in the final phase of marital breakdown.

In the next section, the status of research on extra-marital affairs and marital therapy is explored.

1.5 The status of research on extra-marital affairs and marital therapy

1.5.1 The lack of research in secular psychotherapy on extra-marital affairs

Authors differed on the quantity and quality of research concerning extra-marital affairs. As early as 1978, Sprenkle and Weis (1978) noted that very little had been written on the implications of extra-marital affairs for marital therapy. Not much has changed since then:

> Extramarital affairs were extensively studied during the 1970s. Although these reports are limited in scope and lack clear definitional links in the operationalization of extramarital involvement, recent research in this area of study is scant.
>
> (Hurlbert 1992:104)

Brown (1991:10-11) observed that the **mental health profession** has **neglected** the phenomenon of **affairs** in their therapeutic practices and urged therapists to become more involved in this issue. In this regard, Pittman (1990:24) wrote: 'When I first began raising the subject in family therapy circles a decade ago, I found very little in the literature, and few therapists who were comfortable with the topic'. Moultrup (1990) stated that there has been a noticeable dearth of literature related to the problem of affairs. However, Kaslow (1993) differed from Moultrup and claimed that much had been written. Working in the **South African** context, Fourie (1992: summary)[1] stated that,

> although a lot of research had been done on the nature and prevalence of extra-marital relationships, only a few researchers could be found that

---

[1] Alhoewel heelwat navorsing reeds oor die aard en voorkoms van buite-egtelike verhoudings onderneem is, kon daar slegs enkele navorsers gevind word wat gepoog het om riglyne of 'n strategie vir huweliksberaad vir hierdie spesifieke probleem te ontwikkel.

(Fourie 1992: Opsomming)

endeavoured to develop guidelines or a strategy for marriage counselling for this specific problem.

This study has identified a considerable number of researchers dealing with extra-marital affairs (Adler 1996; Atwater 1979; Bell et al 1975; Brown 1991; Elbaum 1981; Glass & Wright 1985, 1992; Hunt 1969; Kaslow 1993; Kell 1992; Hurlbert 1992; Lawson 1990; Martin 1989; Moultrup 1990; Penney 1989; Pittman 1990; Thompson 1983, 1984; Sprenkle & Weis 1978). However, only a few dealt with therapeutic issues concerning people involved in extra-marital affairs (Brown 1991; Pittman 1990; Moultrup 1990; Virkler 1992; Fourie 1992).

1.5.2 The reasons for the lack of research in secular psychotherapy dealing with affairs

According to Kell (1992:157), the **lack of research** on extra-marital affairs and the consequences of affairs on relationships, and the lack of research on therapeutic proficiency in this regard, may be a **reflection of our society's moral ambivalence** about such relationships:

> The extra-marital affairs is one of society's unrecognised relationships. It exists somewhere between the shadows of disapproval and the limelight of prurient speculation. It is rarely accorded serious consideration or respect, with the result that those who are parties to such relationships often feel abandoned when they are most in need. To some extent this ambivalence about the status of the extra-marital affairs is reflected in our own profession [as psychologists].

Pittman (1990:24) also observed that psychotherapists had neglected extra-marital affairs as a problem that demands treatment because psychotherapists regarded extra-marital affairs not as a mental health issue, but as a moral issue. Moral issues are, according to many psychotherapists, not part of the agenda of psychotherapy (Doherty 1995; May 1969). Ellis (1969:161) is only one example of a psychotherapist who felt that 'moralists may never believe it, but it would appear that **healthy adultery**, even in our supposed monogamous society, *is* possible'

[Ellis's italics, bold mine].

Hence, the **moral ambivalence** among many psychotherapists may have contributed to the lack of research on therapeutic issues concerning extra-marital affairs.

1.5.3 The lack of research in pastoral marital therapy

There is a lack of research in **pastoral counseling** or **pastoral therapy** [2] with regard to marital problems. The lack of research in respect of problems related to extra-marital affairs is even more profound (Jagers 1989). Virkler (1992) was the only Christian scholar who devoted a whole book to the therapeutic issue in a **pastoral** therapeutic way. A few authors published articles on pastoral therapy concerning extra-marital affairs (Brock & Lukens 1989; Jagers 1989; Martin 1989; Steinke 1989).

Reviewing two studies, Worthington et al (1993:14) concluded: 'In pastoral counseling...**marital problems consistently top the list of prevalent concerns presented to pastors for counseling**' [bold mine]. However, by 1993, few scholarly articles had addressed marriage and marital therapy. This was especially true in journals that are more broadly focused on integrating Christianity and psychology.

Worthington et al (1993) investigated three journals that attempt to integrate psychology and Christianity and reviewed a total of 1061 articles. They found that only 14 **(1%)** of those 1061 **articles concerned marital therapy**. Furthermore, Worthington and others (1993) reviewed 1140 more articles published over 12 years (1980-1992) in four pastoral counselling journals (*Journal of Pastoral Care; Pastoral Psychology; Journal of Pastoral Counseling and Journal of Pastoral Practice*) and found that only 25 **(2%) focused on marital counselling**. They recommended increased research on pastoral counselling that focuses on marital

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[2] In this study, I prefer the terms **'pastoral therapist'** and 'pastoral therapy' instead of the terms **'pastor'** or **'pastoral counsellor'** and **'pastoral counselling'**. I motivate my preference in **Section 5.4.1**. Wherever the term **'pastor'** is used, I use it as a term for the minister of a local congregation.

counselling (Worthington et al 1993:13).

1.6 When is an extra-marital relationship an extra-marital affair?

Exactly, when is an extra-marital relationship an extra-marital affair? Authors define extra-marital affairs differently. Some claim that an affair constitutes sexual intercourse, while others argue that an affair be something as trivial as a platonic friendship that affects the emotional closeness between the partners in the marriage. An affair, in terms of various articles, may therefor lie on a continuum between two extreme poles, the one extreme being sexual intercourse and the other a platonic friendship which intimidates the excluded marriage partner (Brown 1991; Hunt 1969; Kaslow 1993; Lawson 1990; Moultrup 1990; Pittman 1990; Thompson 1983, 1984). Moultrup (1990) defined an extramarital affair as 'a relationship between a person and someone other than his[/her] spouse that has an impact on the level of intimacy, emotional distance, and overall dynamic balance in the marriage'. A **narrative** description of an affair was part of the research problem.

1.7 The research problem in theological terms: pastoral therapy and extra-marital affairs

1.7.1 The research problem: Hamartologizing an affair?

Extra-marital affairs are relationships with conspicuous ethical consequences (Pittman 1990; Virkler 1992). They are condemned in the western Christian theological tradition. The **research problem** I examined was that pastoral therapists are tempted to handle the spouse that is or was engaged in an affair only in a **hamartologizing way**, in other words, they use the **confessional approach** in practical theology. This approach applies Scripture to the situation, or in postmodernistic epistemological terms, this approach applies a modernistic construct of theology as the truth to the situation. Hence, pastoral therapists using this approach neglect the individual circumstances of the situation, or at best, they regard the circumstances of the individual only as secondary and Scripture as

primary in meaning (Veltkamp 1986:16).

> Instead of illuminating [the extra-marital affair's situation], pastors are tempted
> to become judgmental and raise the issue of guilt. This temptation is
> particularly strong when there is a so-called third party involved in a marital
> relationship...
>
> (Heitink 1979:209)[3]

Whenever pastoral therapists raise the question of guilt and become judgmental,
they hamartologise the pastoral therapeutic encounter. Adams (1976:86) is an
explicit modernistic example of hamartologisation:

> The pastor cannot set aside his convictions - even temporarily. Even if he
> could, he would be wrong in doing so. His Christian presuppositions must at all
> times control the interview. To 'accept' sinful behaviour in the eyes of the
> couple or spouse is to condone it.

Adams's simplistic hamartologizing prescriptions for pastoral counselling was met
with criticism from many other pastoral therapists (cf. Clinebell 1984:127; Louw
1993:9). Hamartologizing an extra-marital affair does not seem beneficial to any
attempt to save the marriage concerned:

> Even though the majority of people I have seen involved in affairs are
> committed Christians and know what the Word of God says about adultery,
> appealing to this knowledge does not stop the involvement. Appeals to family,
> mother, church, or even job security also have negligible effects.
>
> (Norman Wright 1982, in Virkler 1992:91)

Virkler (1992:6) elaborated on some pastoral therapeutic myths concerning extra-
marital affairs. He discussed the following **therapeutic myth**:

---
[3] In plaats van te verhelderen laat hij zich verleiden tot beoordelen en het stellen van de
schuldvraag. Dit gevaar dreigt vooral wanneer in een huwelijk een z.g. derde in het spel is....."

(Heitink 1979:209).

If a person is an evangelical believer, a strong biblical confrontation will usually cause him or her to stop the affair.

Scores of evangelical pastors could testify that this usually does not work - generally it only results in losing a parishioner. By the time an affair has become apparent to others, it has usually reorganised a person's perceptions, values, and emotions to such a degree that a strong biblical confrontation will only build a wall between the person and his or her confronter.

Although Virkler (1992) opposed a direct confrontation with the unfaithful spouse, he too hamartologised the pastoral therapeutic encounter, staying true to the so-called confessional approach in practical theology (cf. Pieterse 1993b; Dill 1996).

In coining the concept 'hamartologizing the pastoral therapeutic encounter,' this study does not intend to dodge the moral question, nor does the concept imply that it is incorrect to see an extra-marital affair as sin. **To regard adultery as sin in a pastoral conversation is not incorrect, it may, however, be insufficient** (Veltkamp 1988:19). The study shows that postmodernistic social construction discourse is the dominant premise of narrative therapy, and this type of discourse centralises moral questions. Morality is one of the primary concerns in postmodernistic social construction discourse (White 1995). One of the issues in this research then was how do we 'moralise' in the pastoral therapeutic encounter.

Furthermore, the question is asked whether pastoral therapists tend to hamartologise the pastoral encounter whenever they define certain 'objective' and essential truths about marriage in Scripture and then utilise these constructed truths as the fixed and divine point of reference in the pastoral therapeutic conversation - even if they avoid direct confrontation with the unfaithful spouse?

1.7.2 The research problem: A fixed and divine reference point as agenda of pastoral therapy leads to hamartologizing

Theologians have continuously throughout the ages, and still do enter into debate in an attempt to define the essential truths about marriage in Scripture. These discourses have been well documented throughout the history of Christianity (Thielicke 1964; Delleman 1966; Heyns 1970; Geisler 1976; Wheat 1980; Tetlow & Tetlow 1983; Efird 1985; Everett 1985; Louw 1983, 1986; Algemene sinode van die Ned Geref Kerk 1986; Heyns 1986; Oppenheimer 1990; Comes 1993; Jordaan 1996; Du Toit 1996; Joubert 1996; Janson 1996). An elaborate discussion of our theological tradition's discourses constituting matrimony, adultery and divorce does not lie within the scope of this study. I reflect briefly on **my own theological-ethical views** about **marriage, adultery** and **divorce** in **Section 6.3.7.**

In a modernistic and positivistic paradigm these **essential dogmatic truths about marriage** became a **fixed and divine ethical point of reference** in the pastoral therapeutic encounter and was set as **the eventual, actual, and sometimes hidden but always the ultimate agenda** of the pastoral therapist. The pastoral therapist had to correct a spouse if he/she was outside the boundaries of the fixed agenda (cf. Adams 1973, 1976; De Klerk 1978; Clinebell 1984; Louw 1983, 1986; Virkler 1992). Within the framework of this study, this means a **hamartologisation** of the pastoral therapeutic encounter.

The tendency to hamartologise the pastoral therapeutic encounter is not an isolated phenomenon found in a cultural vacuum. Christianity in the West had a colonising and patriarchal character and Christians in this culture tended to use warlike metaphors when they spoke about the Christian faith:

> To this day we talk about an evangelistic campaign, a crusade, a missionary offensive. Even when we do not use this terminology, our conduct often reveals a comparable mentality. We think in the context of clear-cut answers to every problem.
>
> (Bosch 1979:31)

Bosch (1979:33) is clearly critical about this Christian culture and he makes his own attitude clear when he stated: 'Under no circumstances should people be bulldozed with the gospel, for it ceases to be the gospel when foisted upon people'.

Dill (1996), not only renounced the confessional approach, but also reflected on **different hermeneutic approaches** in pastoral therapy (e.g. the approaches of Firet, Louw, Capps, Gerkin and Veltkamp). He criticised the hermeneutic approaches as a mode of pastoral therapy where the pastoral therapist still functions as the expert on the lives of people:

> Most of the **prevailing pastoral approaches** consider the role of the pastor to be that of spiritual expert. He approaches clients' problems in an objective, rational and empirical way when he distinguishes between types of problems, the causes of problems and solutions to a problem. When he acts in a descriptive and eventually prescriptive manner, there is the **danger** that the pastor can force his ideas on the client. Instead of co-operatively seeking wisdom, the pastor will point out a certain interpreted truth as the 'correct truth'. These kinds of objective, **universal solutions are meeting more and more resistance**...[author's bold].
>
> (Dill 1996:169)[4]

The following quote exemplifies the expert mode of pastoral therapy that prevails in the hermeneutic approaches:

> The communicative events of the pastoral encounter are **essentially about a process of realising the truth of the Word of God as the truth for people within interpersonal relationships**....The real content of the pastoral conversation, namely salvation, imparts a **directional dimension** to the

---

[4] By die meeste **heersende pastorale benaderings** word die rol van die pastor as dié van 'n geestelike ekspert gesien. Hy benader kliënte se probleme op objektiewe, rasionele en empiriese wyse. In die onderskeiding van sowel tipes probleme, oorsake van probleme en oplossings vir probleme. Deur deskriptief en uiteindelik ook preskriptief op te tree, is die **gevaar groot** dat die pastor se idees aan die kliënt opgedwing word. In plaas daarvan dat daar saam na wysheid gesoek word, word 'n sekere geïnterpreteerde waarheid gewoonlik as die 'regte waarheid' aangedui. Sulke **objektiewe, universele oplossings het egter al hoe meer teenstand begin kry**... [author's bold].

(Dill 1996:169)

pastoral communication [bold mine].

(Louw 1993:42 & 60)[5]

Hence, even in the hermeneutic approaches, the pastoral therapist functions as the expert who controls the agenda and/or the outcome of the conversation (Dill 1996).

But how can pastoral therapists refrain from bulldozing people or from being experts on other people's lives when an extra-marital affair is the therapeutic theme? How can pastoral therapists refrain from being the experts on people's lives in **theological-ethical matters** such as extra-marital affairs? These questions were part of the **research problem** investigated in this study.

These questions are all the more crucial when one realises that living in a postmodernistic world means to live in a world where there is no longer any consensus concerning a fixed reference point (Parry 1991). In a postmodernistic paradigm and epistemology (Kvale 1992a; Kvale 1992b) all 'truths' are only co-constructions that do not mirror objective realities, but rather construe 'realities' (cf. Brueggemann 1993). Furthermore, with the advance of postmodernism, 'therapists who proclaim, "This is true because God says it is true", will find it difficult to maintain credibility and establish good therapeutic rapport in a pluralistic culture comprised of people with diverse religious values' (Mc Minn 1994:349).

If pastoral therapists are not supposed to hamartologise, what are they to do? Should or may they dodge the moral issue? This is the theme of the following section.

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[5] In die kommunikasiegebeure van die pastorale ontmoeting gaan dit dan wesenlik om die proses van waarheidsverwerkliking van die Woord van God as waarheid vir die mens binne menslike verhoudinge....Die saakinhoud van die pastorale gesprek, naamlik die heil, verskaf 'n rigtinggewende dimensie aan die pastorale kommunikasie gebeure.

(Louw 1993:42 & 60)

1.7.3 The research problem: Dodging the moral issue, affairs and the propium of pastoral therapy

It is no good to dodge the moral issue in **pastoral** therapy because an extra-marital affair is inevitably a **theological-ethical** matter (Thielicke 1964; Delleman 1966; Heyns 1970; Geisler 1976; Wheat 1980; Louw 1983). Pastoral therapy is by definition therapy related to theological and thus ethical matters. Hence, dodging the moral issue in pastoral therapeutic conversations would turn the therapy into secular therapy (Heitink 1991; Firet & Vossen 1991; Browning 1993; Louw 1993).

Dodging the moral issue is more than a theoretical possibility. Van der Ven (1991:105) [6] reflected on the identity of pastoral counselling in the Netherlands and its inclination to disregard its theological roots because of the high premium placed on freedom of the individual:

> I believe that one of the underlying principles of **Clinical Pastoral Education**...is justly the honouring of the fundamental freedom and fundamental right to self-determination of the patient. This may lead, however, to a situation where **Clinical Pastoral Education**...pays **too little attention to religious themes** and to focus too much on...inter- and inner-psychological processes....Fichter (1988) reported that a trainee in an American **Clinical Pastoral Education** programme was prohibited to talk about God - if he should talk about God, the trainee could be penalised by refusing him admittance to the training program.

Heitink (1991) also considered the rise of individualism in America and the Netherlands and its effects on pastoral counselling. He made the following

---

[6] Ik denk dat een van de grondbeginselen van de KPV...terecht gelegen is in de eerbiediging van de fundamentele vrijheid en het fundamentele zelf-beschikkingsrecht van de patiënt. Als gevolg daarvan kan het voorkomen dat KPV...soms onvoldoende aandacht geven aan religieuze thema's in de pastorale counselling en te zeer focus richten op...de inter- en intrapsychische processen....Zo vermeldt Fichter (1988) dat het een trainee aan een Amerikaanse KPV-training verboden werd om over God the spreken op straffe van niet tot de training te worden toegelaten.

(Van der Ven 1991:105)

comment:

> It is into this climate [of individualism] that the rise of the 'pastoral counselling movement' fits....it is accompanied by the therapeutising of soul care and the psychologising of theology...the lack of a moral context in the pastorate...a lack of biblical-theological notions.
>
> (Heitink 1991:21)[7]

The **identity** of the pastoral therapist and the **theological character** of pastoral therapeutic conversations were key topics in the history of the pastoral counselling movement (Strunk 1993). It is evident that the pastoral counselling movement was in danger of disregarding its theological tradition by neglecting theological and moral questions (Veltkamp 1988:215).

To conclude: On the one hand, there has been a hamartologizing of extra-marital affairs in pastoral therapy that disregarded the fundamental freedom of the individual who seeks counsel (Van der Ven 1991:105). On the other hand, there was some dodging of the moral question in pastoral therapy so that pastoral therapy was reduced to purely secular therapy (Heitink 1991; Browning 1993; Louw 1993).

The latest trend in the pastoral counselling movement is to attach value to its theological roots again and to reaffirm the ethical character of pastoral counselling (Louw 1993; Gerkin 1986, 1991; Veltkamp 1988; Wicks et al 1993). Patton (1994:29) wrote:

> In recent years, the pastoral care movement and clinically focused education for ministry have been criticised as being too individualistic, gender- and culture-biased, theologically naïve, and over-influenced by psychology.

Steckel (1993:32) reflected on the latest trends in the pastoral counselling

---

[7] In dit klimaat past de opkomst van de 'pastoral counselling movement'...Dit gaat gepaard met een therapeutisering van de zielzorg en een psychologisering van de theologie....het ontbreken van een morele context van het pastoraat...een gemis van bijbels-theologische noties.

(Heitink 1991:21)

movement and puts it in the following words:

> The trend today is clearly in the direction of reaffirming the distinctively
> religious and theological dimensions of pastoral counselling,...The literature of
> pastoral care and counseling is now rich with references to the religious
> resources for counseling to be found in Scripture, theology, and devotional or
> spiritual literature. Everyone now seems to be in favor of more theology!

Given the above dilemmas, part of the research focused on the following question:
Is there a way out and can a **narrative approach** in **pastoral therapy** provide with
a compass in the world of extra-marital affairs?

1.7.4   The research problem: Can a narrative approach in pastoral therapy provide a compass?

In any therapeutic situation the **values** held by **the pastoral therapist** and **the
couple or spouses** are of utmost importance in the outcome of the therapy
process (Moultrup 1990; Wylie 1994b). Can pastoral therapists utilise the concepts
underlying narrative therapy without abandoning their theological values and
tradition when they are working with couples or a spouse where one spouse is or
was engaged in an affair?

Can a pastoral therapist be a genuine partner in the dialogue without being the
representative or the commissioner of a fixed point of ethical reference with a
hidden and ultimate agenda? Can the pastoral therapist thus engage in a dialogue
with the couple or spouse where both parties are involved in a co-construction
process (trying to find alternative ways of living) where the ethical tradition is not a
fixed point of reference but rather another 'partner' whose 'voice' can be heard in
the co-construction process?

Will this lead to **moral relativism** in the **pastoral** therapeutic encounter? The
dominant premises underlying narrative therapy are concerned with the ethical
constitutive effects of conversations.   One of the main exponents of narrative
therapy stated:

> I do not think that there is any constructionist position that can escape a
> confrontation with questions of values and personal ethics. In fact, according
> to my understanding, the constructionist position emphasises these questions,
> and elevates this confrontation. So, the idea that constructionist positions lead
> to a state of moral relativism - where there is no basis for making decisions
> about different actions - doesn't fit with what I know of this position.

<div align="right">(White 1995:14)</div>

Narrative therapy is thus a therapeutic approach which is sensitive to (secular)
ethics. The question remains, however, whether it is possible to utilise a narrative
approach and **theological-ethical** values simultaneously.

Furthermore, whenever psychotherapy used a positivistic approach, it considered
religion unrelated and even irrelevant to the process of therapy. Postmodernistic
social construction discourse as epistemology, however, is now opening the door
for a new dialogue between religious and therapeutic discourses (Kotzé & Roux
1997).

Narrative therapy (White & Epston 1990) is based on the above mentioned
postmodernistic epistemology. When a person tells a therapist a story, that person
believes he is telling the whole truth. The story teller equates his/her story with the
historical life events it refers to. His/her story mirrors the true life events. However,
a story is not a life; it is only a selection of events out of a life (Butler & Harper
1994). Every story is a form of censorship (Parry 1991). The beliefs or myths held
by a person (and his/her cultural and familial linguistic discourses) act as a censor
that ignores some elements of the lived experiences but integrates other elements
into the story. Every story is a function of beliefs or discourses.

Hence, a 'problem-saturated story' - like an extra-marital affair, is a social linguistic
construction. It is a function of beliefs or discourses that interpret and constitute
person's life and relationships (White & Epston 1990). Most authors who write
using a modernistic paradigm stress the linguistic disposition of extra-marital
affairs when they use terms such as the 'idea of romance'; 'romantic illusion';

'perpetuating the romantic myth' and 'romantic fantasy' (cf. Pittman 1987, 1990; Virkler 1992; Martin 1989).

According to the tenets of narrative therapy, it is possible to deconstruct the myths and beliefs (discourses) that captivate a person. This can be done by means of a process of deconstruction. Narrative therapy operates on the assumption that a person can be separated from his/her problem-saturated story (White & Epston 1990; O'Hanlon 1994). The research addressed the problem whether this type of deconstruction is possible when extra-marital affairs are the issue at hand.

The research also addressed the problem whether this deconstruction of the dominant life story can enhance the ethical competency of the spouse engaged in an affair to accept more responsibility (cf. Martin 1989) and accountability for the effects of the extramarital relationship and the future of the marriage.

1.8 The aim of this research

In formulating the aim of this research, modernistic terms such as 'hypothesis' were avoided. These terms belong to the world of objective researchers studying subjects, i.e. operating in a power mode congruent with a modernistic epistemology (Steier 1991:165). This research was conducted using the principles of postmodernistic epistemology. The aims of this research were the following:

- To allow the pastoral therapist and conversational participant(s) to simultaneous converse with theological-ethical discourses as well as with relational, personal and emotional discourses, thus co-constructing new alternatives and possibilities where one spouse is or was engaged in an affair, and
- To socially construct pastoral therapy with couples/spouses using the principles of postmodernistic social construction discourses where one spouse is or was engaged in an affair.

I elaborate in Section 3.4.2 on the aims of this study.

1.9 Outline of this research report

In **Chapter 1**, I explore the topicality of marriage and of extra-marital affairs. I reflect on our society's ambiguity towards extra-marital affairs and the prevalence of extra-marital affairs. After dealing with the status of research on extra-marital affairs and marital therapy, I indicate that a confessional approach in pastoral therapy is not beneficial in this regard. A narrative approach in pastoral therapy, however, could be of help.

Chapter 2 clarifies some of the terms and concepts used.

In **Chapter 3**, I explain the implications of modernistic and postmodernistic epistemology for research. I reflect on postmodernistic methodology and set out my research procedures.

Chapter 4 addresses some dominant premises of narrative therapy in the light of my chosen postmodernistic epistemology. This epistemology has profound effects on how I understood the stories of people.

Postmodernistic epistemology has profound implications for theology, practical theology and pastoral therapy. I discuss these implications in **Chapter 5**.

In **Chapter 6**, I reflected on the practical ethical implications of postmodernistic epistemology for pastoral therapy and the propium of pastoral therapy.

Chapter 7 reflects on modernistic descriptions of extra-marital affairs and the reasons for extra-marital affairs. A narrative description of an extra-marital affair is also given.

Chapters 8 - 15 form the actual pastoral therapeutic part of this research. These chapters covers several discourses that co-constitute extra-marital affairs, the deconstruction of those discourses and pastoral therapeutic discourses with the faithful and unfaithful spouse. **Chapter 16** reflects on the biological-psychological

aspects of extra-marital affairs and their implications for a narrative approach in pastoral therapy.

Chapter 17 summarises my reflections and experiences of a narrative approach in pastoral therapy dealing with extra-marital affairs. **Chapter 18** suggests themes that may require further research.

In this study, **pseudonyms** are used instead of participants' real names to guarantee confidentiality.

CLARIFICATION OF TERMS AND CONCEPTS

This chapter briefly describes some of the terms most commonly used in this study. The list is not comprehensive, and terms which are not described here are described within their context in this study.

2.1 Epistemology

The following terms relate to epistemology in some way.

2.1.1 Paradigm

A **paradigm** can be described as a historical scientific tradition composed of a linguistic network of theories or of scientific models that are recursively related to each other.

> [T]he term refer to the assumptions, theories and instrumentation that [are] considered to be normative within a scientific discipline by a community of scientists at a particular point in time ad in terms of which theories are developed and problems identified and solved.
>
> (Kriel 1996:366)

Hence, a paradigm is determinative for how human beings generate their knowledge of the world (Brueggemann 1993).

2.1.2 Epistemology

Epistemology refers to the relationship between the knower and the knowable and concerns the assumptions that inform and shape the process of knowing (Moon, Dillon & Sprenkle 1991:174). Ontology is recursively related to

epistemology, and epistemology to ontology (Kotzé 1992:4). In its turn, ontology and epistemology are related to a paradigm based on inquiry. Ontology and epistemology lie on a continuum that correlates with the relevant inquiry paradigm.

2.1.3 Postmodernism and related terms

Authors differ as to what is meant by **postmodernism** and they are not consistent in the ways they distinguish between the following concepts (Lowe 1991; De Villiers 1991; Kvale 1992a; Maree & Strauss 1994; Kotzé 1994; Van Aarde 1995a; Dockery 1995).

> As currently applied, the term **postmodernism** is an umbrella concept covering styles, movements, shifts, and approaches in the fields of art, history, architecture, literature, political science, economics, and philosophy - not to mention theology. Several of its leading theorists argue, in keeping with the diffusion, that there is not one postmodernism, but many.

> (Mohler 1995:68)

For the purposes of this study, the following descriptions of postmodernism are adhered to: The term **postmodernistic age** refers to a certain situation and time in history but remains a vague and ambiguous concept (Kvale 1992a:1). A society enters the postmodernistic age when it loses its faith in the notion of absolute truth - even the possibility of an attempt to discover absolute truth (O'Hara & Anderson 1991:22). **Postmodernism** refers to the cultural expression of the postmodernistic age (Kotzé 1994:20), while terms such as **postmodernistic thought** or **postmodernistic discourse** refer to certain philosophical ideas of postmodernism (Kvale 1992a; Van Aarde 1996).

A characteristic aspect of **postmodernistic discourse** is the **epistemological notion** that objective and singular knowledge is impossible and that multiple realities are preferred (Gergen 1994). Postmodernistic discourse represents a radical questioning of the foundationalism and absolutism of **modernistic** conceptions of knowledge (Lowe 1991). Postmodernistic discourse is intrinsically neither exclusive nor ideological and respects other views, even views and ideas

from the modernistic paradigm. Postmodernistic thought challenges the concept of narrative as a realistic representation of 'reality'. It is sceptical about the validity of language (De Klerk 1996a:195). Dill (1996:101)[5] wrote:

> What emerged was a completely new paradigm with a new epistemology, broadly known as *postmodernism*. Critical realism; a new form of critical hermeneutics; a new, limited task for philosophy of science; an epistemological emphasis on holism and pluralism; the discovery of the communicative value of language; and the realisation that human beings are essentially narrative beings that live within and on the basis of certain discourses - all these constitute the new *era of postmodernism* [author's italics].

2.1.4 Discourse

A term that is frequently used in this study is the term postmodernistic discourses. **Discourses** refer to systematic and institutionalised ways of speaking or taken-for-granted-realities (White 1995). A discourse is a set of more or less coherent stories or statements about the way the world should be (Drewery & Winslade 1996). Hare-Mustin (1994:19) describes a discourse as follows:

> By discourse, I mean a system of statements, practices, and institutional structures that share common values. A discourse includes both linguistic and non-linguistic aspects; it is the medium that provides the words and ideas for thought and speech, as well as the cultural practices involving related concepts and behaviors...By a restrictive and expressive set of codes and conventions, discourses sustain a certain world view....In doing so, discourses bring certain phenomena into sight and obscure other phenomena. The ways most people in a society hold, talk about, and act on a common, shared viewpoint are part of and sustain the prevailing discourses.

---

[5] Wat na vore gekom het, was 'n totaal nuwe paradigma met 'n totaal nuwe epistemologie, breedweg getipeer as *postmodernisme*. Kritiese realisme; 'n nuwe kritiese hermeneutiek; 'n nuwe, beperkte taak vir wetenskapsfilosofie; epistemologiese klem op holisme en pluralisme; ontdekking van taal se kommunikatiewe waarde; en die besef dat die mens wesenlik 'n narratiewe wese is wat in en vanuit bepaalde diskoerse lewe - dit alles is deel van hierdie nuwe *era van postmoderniteit* [author's italics].

(Dill 1996:101)

Some discourses tend to be privileged in a given society and function as 'truths' that exert power over people's lives. Discourses do not represent essential or inherent qualities on absolute reality but are social constructs believed to represent essential 'reality'. They shape people's lives and relationships. A postmodernistic paradigm is less concerned with what a discourse is, than with what it does (Lowe 1991:45). Hence, the noun 'story' often becomes a verb in the language used to discuss discourse. 'Discourses powerfully shape a person's choices about what life events can be storied and how they should be storied' (Freedman & Combs 1996:43). Hence, discourses are never neutral (Zimmerman & Dickerson 1994:235).

2.1.5 Cybernetics

Cybernetics is the science of communication and control and focuses on the interactive processes of systems (Hoffman 1990:1). 'In **first order cybernetics** the observer does not form part of the observed system' (Kotzé 1994:24) In **second order cybernetics** it is difficult to identify or observe a definable system. The observer is him/herself a participant in the system being observed. This compels the observer to describe the system as an observing system. Thus, 'truth' becomes a matter of perspective within a system, a perspective that is simultaneously dictated by the system. Second order cybernetics is related to **constructivism and social construction theory** (Von Foerster 1984, 1991; Kotzé 1994).

2.1.6 Constructivism

Constructivism can be regarded as the biological precursor of social construction theory. Constructivism proposes that we as humans do not perceive an objective universe. The objects we believe we are observing are products of the activities of our own nervous system. Hence, objectivity does not exist (Von Glasersfeld 1984; Efran & Lukens 1985). Some psychologists use the term 'constructivism' as a sociological term and thus as a variant of 'constructionism' (Polkinghorne 1995; Mahrer 1995; Neimeyer 1995; Bohart 1995).

2.1.7 Social construction theory

Social construction theory holds that all human beliefs about the world are social linguistic inventions made by people interacting in social discourse and not true descriptions of any objective reality (Hoffman 1990). The term 'constructionism' is a synonym for 'social construction theory'.

> From a constructionist perspective neither 'mind' nor 'world', is granted ontological status, thus removing the very grounding assumptions of constructivism. Nor do extreme forms of constructivism, which reduce the world to mental construction, become a satisfying replacement. For the constructionist, terms for both world and mind are constituents of discursive practices; they are integers within language and thus themselves socially contested and negotiated. Social constructionism, then, is neither dualist nor monist...but social constructionism traces the sources of human interaction to relationships and the very understanding of 'individual functioning' to communal interchange.

(Gergen 1994:68)

2.1.8 Structuralism and post-structuralism

Structuralism conceives of meaning as a product of deep, unchanging structures that manifest themselves in the surface difference between those structures. Structuralism holds that there are permanent and universal structures in the human organism and that these structures explain the formal and patterned regularities in language and actions (Polkinghorne 1995).

Structural analysis was a famous exegetical method used in the seventies. The exegete analysed the surface structure of the text to reveal the inner and real meaning of the text. Proponents of structuralism include Saussure, Levy-Strauss and Chomsky - to name but a few (Dill 1996).

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Structuralism influenced psychology in a profound way. Modernistic psychologists view people's actions or stories as the surface manifestations of their inner core and essential traits. It follows that psychologists have, via their expertise, privileged knowledge allowing them to interpret people's actions and stories. Hence, modernistic psychologists believe they have privileged 'insight' into the 'actual' meaning of people's actions as these actions 'reveal' the deep and unknown essentials of people (White 1997).

Structuralism was met with severe criticism by authors like Alter (1984:6) who stated:

> The formidable intellectual apparatus of structuralism... offers the literary intelligentsia what any professional... needs in order to maintain its own coherence and morale - an esoteric language, a set of elaborate procedures that can be performed only by the initiate, and the conviction that the specialised rituals... have universal efficacy, or at least universal applicability.

> (quoted by De Klerk 1996a:199)

These criticisms led to post-structuralism. **Post-structuralism** is more akin to **postmodernistic thought** and denies that the surface structure of texts or actions is fully representative of inner and essential qualities. Hence, the therapist cannot have more 'insight' in the behaviour or stories of their clients than the clients themselves (White 1997).

2.1.9 Deconstruction

Deconstruction is a reaction against structuralism in that it rejects any effort to find a structural objectivity within a text or action. It rejects the traditional understanding of texts that holds that a text represents things in a literal way and that a text or word has only one meaning. The main proponent of deconstruction is usually considered to be Jacques Derrida (De Villiers 1991). Meaning is not contained in a word (read text or narrative or actions). The meaning of a word is determined by differences between that word and other words. Concepts are thus

defined, not by themselves, but always by other concepts. A word in a dictionary is always explained by reference to other words. A word's meaning is conveyed by other words' meanings, meanings that differ from the original word. To understand the meaning of a word, it has to be read against a whole system of meanings that differ from the original meaning (Polkinghorne 1995). Meaning always implies difference and deferred meaning - signifiers always refer to other signifiers and the moment this happens, is the moment of *différence* (Du Toit 1987). Words have an indirect meaning because they do not refer literally and directly to other concepts but refer to other words metaphorically. Hence, an author's intention is obviously not available to a reader. The meaning of the text is more than the original intention of the author. A deconstructive reading of the text implies that the reader is looking for the unintended and unquestioned assumptions inherent in the text. The attention is rather on the gaps, silences and ambiguities in the text (Lowe 1991). It tries to reveal the taken-for-granted beliefs embedded in the text's meaning. Understanding a text or a narrative is more similar to the comprehension of paintings than to the deciphering of codes (Polkinghorne 1995). Hence, deconstruction can be seen as a form of demythologisation (Hartin 1986)..

2.2 Culture

Culture is defined in different ways in different disciplines. For the purposes of this study, culture is the interpretative and coping mechanism of a given society (Rossouw 1993). The term refers to the ways of thinking and the practices within a community. Culture is expressed in the actions, e.g., the arts, architecture, rituals, customs, etc., and in the linguistic constructions of people. Because culture is composed and are sustained by a vast array of discourses and practices, it is never settled. Culture is a by-product of discourses and, because certain discourses exert more power than and dominate other discourses, culture too is dominated by certain discourses (cf. Brueggemann 1993). The dominating discourses of a given local culture are the taken-for-granted realities and practices of that culture (cf. White 1995). Since discourses are not stable but are subjugated by social linguistic deconstruction processes, culture too is always fluid and 'on the move' (Gerkin 1991).

2.3 Extra-marital affairs and related terms

The term **extra-marital affair** is much more complex and is discussed extensively under the heading **A 'definition' of extra-marital affairs** in Section 7.2.

2.3.1 Unfaithful spouse, faithful spouse and lover

The term **unfaithful** is used for the married spouse who is involved in an extra-marital relationship. The term **cuckold**[9] or **faithful spouse** refers to the married partner that is faithful to her/his marital partner. The **third party** or **the lover** or **affairee** is the other (married or unmarried) man or woman who is having an extra-marital relationship with a married spouse. These terms are widely used in the literature (Pittman 1990; Brown 1991; Kaslow 1993). As the reader may have noticed, the chosen terms reveal a certain moral stance (cf. Brown 1991:2-4). It does not matter, however, which metaphors or terms we choose, we cannot dodge a moral stance because all metaphors or terms are inevitably ethical metaphors or terms (Dueck 1991; Drewery & Winslade 1996). Although the above terms come from secular literature, they reflect a moral stance that is congruent with the theological tradition (Louw 1983; Heyns 1986) and with western society (Pittman 1990).

2.3.2 Sex, eros, filia, and agape

In this study, the concepts **sex, eros, filia,** and **agape** are referred to as the four main discourses among others, that co-constitute matrimonial love (Louw 1983; Wheat 1980; Botha 1992). May (1969:37) gave the following brief descriptions of these four concepts:

> There are four kinds of love in our Western tradition. One is **sex**, or what we call lust, libido. The second is **eros**, the drive of love to procreate or create - the urge, as the Greeks put it, toward higher forms of being and relationship.

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[9] Pittman (1990) uses the term 'cuckold'.

The third is **filia**, or friendship, brotherly love. The fourth is **agape** or caritas as the Latins called it, the love which is devoted to welfare of others, the prototype of which is the love of God for man. Every human experience of authentic love is a blending, in varying proportions, of these four [bold mine].

Marital partners are usually ignorant of the distinctions and differences between eros, sex, filia and agape (Louw 1983; Wheat 1980; Botha 1992; Lawson 1990). The psychological phenomenon of 'being in love' is a combination of eros and of sex (Virkler 1992), while 'love' may be depicted as a combination of filia and of agape (Botha 1992). Marital love is a combination of 'being in love' and of 'love,' i.e. **marital love** is a **combination of eros, sex, filia and agape** (Louw 1983; Wheat 1980).

2.4 Hamartologizing

Hamartologizing is a pastoral mode of therapy where a pastoral therapist is inclined to moralise about the presented problem. In this process, her/his 'expert' (and modernistic) knowledge of the theological-ethical discourses functions as the only truth. These ethical truths function as the fixed agenda of the therapeutic conversation. Hamartologizing is a representation of the so-called confessional approach in practical theology (cf. Dill 1996). Hence, the pastoral therapist determines the outcome of the conversation.

In the following chapter, epistemology is the primary focus.

THE POSTMODERNISTIC CONTEXT OF THIS RESEARCH

Where postmodernism can be seen to be the emerging conceptual context for pastoral care as the new millennium approaches, hermeneutics, the science of interpretation, can be viewed as a crucial methodological perspective within today's pastoral encounters.

Hurding 1995: 294

3.1 Introduction

Scientific researchers must be accountable for their epistemological presuppositions. Hence, they must be accountable for the philosophical and meta-scientific frameworks in which they conduct their research (Pieterse 1993a; Kotzé 1992; Bawden 1991; De Jongh van Arkel 1991a).

In this study, I have chosen postmodernistic social construction discourse as the constitutive epistemology of this research. The scope of this thesis did not allow for extended reflections on epistemology (cf. Dill 1996). However, in this chapter, I elucidate my epistemological choice.

I **first** provide a short explanation of modernistic epistemology, and then give examples of the imperialistic and colonising effects of a modernistic epistemology and its research results (Section 3.2.1 - 3.2.3).

Secondly, I briefly describe postmodernistic social construction discourse and how it functions as epistemology (Sections 3.3.1 to 3.3.4.4).

In the **third** place, I demonstrate that my choice of postmodernistic social construction discourse as the epistemology used in this research has explicit implications for:

- the research **methodology**;
- the therapeutic **process** as such;
- the **meaning-generating discourses** in which the pastoral therapist is concurrently in conversation with theological-ethical discourses and relational, personal, emotional discourses. Together, all these discourses **co-construct new alternatives and possibilities** for people's lives and for pastoral therapy where one spouse is or was engaged in an affair, and
- the social construction of this **research report** (Sections 3.4 to 3.5 and 3.7).

Fourthly, I reflect very briefly on the relation between **'trustworthiness'** and postmodernistic social construction discourse as epistemology (Section 3.6).

In the **fifth** place, I comment on the **research report** and how it relates to postmodernistic social construction discourse as epistemology (Section 3.7).

3.2 Modernistic epistemology and the reification of knowledge

3.2.1 Modernistic epistemology

For many years, the positivistic epistemology of the modernistic paradigm dominated the world of human research in the sciences without being questioned. At the heart of this epistemology lies a belief in an objectively knowable world. It was taken for granted that a scientist can study any object objectively and that the research results would represent essential and universal truths. Modernistic epistemology involves **first order cybernetics**: The observer is detached from the system she/he observes (Section 2.1.5).

In the context of this discussion, a statement by Toulmin is apposite. Toulmin identify the kinds of knowledge that qualify as real knowledge in **modernity**. He said there was:

- a move from oral to written, so that what is reliable is what is written;

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- a move from the particular to the universal, so that real truth is what is true everywhere;
- a move from local to general, so that real truth had to be the same from locale to locale; and
- a move from the timely to the timeless, so that the real is unchanging.
- Real knowledge is written, universal, general, and timeless; in other words, great truths operate everywhere and thus form a large, coherent whole.

(quoted by Brueggemann 1993:5)

In the modernistic paradigm, 'objects' contain inherent essential and universal truths which can be elucidated by means of **empirical research methods**. These truths are and will be the same, independent of the identity of the researcher, over time and in various situations.

One of the pillars of the epistemology of the modernistic era has been the belief that this world can be studied using logical and empirical methods. Thus the **controlled experiment** come to be regarded as a guarantee of absolute truth, a guarantee against biased conclusions and the 'city walls' to keep ideology and values out of research. The positivistic epistemology was believed to be impersonal and objective:

Logical empiricist philosophers were the most ambitious in this case, for they saw the possibility of unifying all scientific endeavours under a single logic. In this case the attempt was to elucidate the rules of procedure by which the important strides in the sciences and technology had been accomplished. These rules of procedure could thereafter be adopted by any discipline that claimed to be generating knowledge. Further, it was believed, if these rules of method were made available...progress of the sort demonstrated in the natural sciences could be achieved across the spectrum of human endeavours.

(Gergen 1992:18)

In the modernistic paradigm, empirical research was seen as the great instrument of **progress** in terms of knowledge and technology which would enabled humans

to improve their life circumstances (Doherty 1991). The application of quantitative and controlled research experiments by every individual scientist was to contribute to the accumulation of knowledge. In this way, the true essentials of nature were to be explored, analysed and described.

We are at the dawn of a new epistemological era. In the following sections I will elaborate on the changes that have come about in terms of epistemology.

3.2.2 Alternative discourses

Postmodernistic social construction discourse criticises the epistemological practice of modernistic psychology (Kvale 1992a; Gergen 1992; Kvale 1992b; Hoffman 1992; O'Hara & Anderson 1991). This criticism is due to a basic incompatibility between the fundamental assumptions of the epistemologies of postmodernistic psychological research and modernistic psychological research.

> Today, there are signs of a disintegration of the scientific foundations of modernistic psychology. Further, there is a growing boredom with current psychological knowledge, which currently appears to have less to say about the human situation than do the arts and the humanities. And within the psychological profession, the tensions between the theoretical orientation of academic psychology and professional practice have increased.

(Kvale 1992a:10)

Hoffman (1992:9) is another voice in this regard:

> The Social Constructionists not only challenge the idea of a singular truth, but doubt that there is such a thing as objective social research as well. They charge that we cannot ever really know what 'social reality' is, and that therefore traditional scientific research, with its tests and statistics and probability quotients, is a pious hope if not a downright lie. This claim, if accepted, would obviously threaten the status quo in the mental health profession.

In modernity, humans were the centre of the world. They were the independent observers detached from an objective world. This position has now been revised:

> Man was at the centre of the Age of Enlightenment. The science of psychology was founded on a conception of individual subjects, with internal souls and later internal psychic apparatuses. In a postmodern age, man is decentred; the individual subject is dissolved into linguistic structures and ensembles of relations. A question arises to the status of psychology as the science of the individual when the individual has been dethroned from the centre of the world....The new provoking insights about man in the current culture are more likely to be found in...philosophy, literature, art, and anthropology.
>
> (Kvale 1992b:40)

Postmodernistic epistemology has disillusioned many psychologists and psychiatrists of the modernistic era (Gergen 1992:25). Modernistic psychological theories have been unmasked as just another set of cultural discourses that function as knowledges of power. These theories were inherently imperialistic and led to the subjugation of clients (Doherty 1991:40; O'Hara & Anderson 1991:21).

3.2.3 The reification of knowledge and its consequences

Freedman and Combs (1996) elaborates on the linguistic and social process of the **reification of knowledge**. Simply stated, the process of reification implies that ideas, categories, laws, beliefs, social customs, and categories arise through social interaction over time and are accorded 'reality status'. It implies that cultural discourses like theological and psychological discourses not only represent human characteristics, but produce them (Gergen 1994:272).

The discourses in psychology have saturated the culture of the western world with pop psychology buzzwords. Terms such as 'self-image', 'inner-self' and 'subconscious' have been set up as constituting 'reality' (cf. Hare-Mustin 1994). Today, we live in a society, where men and women's understanding of themselves

and their relations with others are shaped through the discourses of psychology (Kvale 1992b:43), theology (Brueggemann 1993), economy, politics and other cultural discourses (Heelas 1986:234-265). Over time, certain **privileged discourses** became **institutionalised discourses** that exert **power** over people (Lowe 1991:45).

The American Psychiatric Association's (APA) classification of mental disorders in The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (fourth edition) (DSM IV) is an example of how easily 'knowledge' can reify into 'truths'. DSM IV functions in the culture of the western world of medical science and of psychology as **'the reality'** of biological and mental illnesses. According to postmodernistic epistemology, however, it does actually not mirror reality and is only a product of linguistic systems. It is a product of a history of social interaction in which the members of a culture were co-constructing 'reality' (O'Hara & Anderson 1991:24). The language-generating and meaning-generating system (Anderson & Goolishian 1988) did not regard DSM IV as co-constructions, but rather as facts or universal truths about human pathology (Gergen 1994:272).

Furthermore, DSM IV has a colonising and imperialistic effect on the way a therapist sees a client. 'Therapists begin to police themselves, watching the way they practice, thinking of diagnosis and treatment in....terms of DSM....The language seeps into my brain, into the way I look at clients, even when I know better' (Wylie 1995:68). 'DSM lends itself exactly to the kind of reification, the false assumption that its categories are concrete realities, which transmogrifies a useful diagnostic and research aid into a cultural monster' (Wylie 1995:65).

Considering the subjugating power of some of the categories in DSM IV, Hoffman (1992:9) wrote:

>...[S]uch diagnoses - and the supposed scientific studies they are based on - are often questionable and flawed. One has only to think of the DSM III category that has recently been invented to characterize women who abuse themselves or cannot leave abusive relationships: Self-defeating Personality Disorder.

These categories have tended to function as 'objective truths' in the western world and people diagnosed and labelled as patients believed those diagnoses to be objective truths, often with disastrous consequences. I agree with Lakoff and Johnson's (1980:159) statement about the ideological power and thus dangerous aspect of modernistic 'truth':

> We believe that the idea that there is absolute objective truth is not only mistaken but socially and politically dangerous. As we have seen, truth is always relative to a conceptual system that is defined in large part by metaphor. Most of our metaphors have evolved in our culture over a long period, but many are imposed upon us by people in power - political leaders, religious leaders, business leaders, advertisers, the media, etc. In a culture where the myth of objectivism is very much alive and truth is always absolute truth, the people who get to impose their metaphors on the culture get to define what we consider to be true - absolutely and objectively true.

I would like to end this section with McNamee and Gergen's (1992:2) summary of the 'distinct sense of unease with the traditional view', i.e. an unease with the assumptions associated with modernistic psychology:

- Critical therapists locate strong ideological biases within prevailing theories...The mental health profession is not politically, morally, or valuationally neutral....
- Family therapists challenge the view that individuals are the centres of malfunction. They locate a myriad ways in which 'individual pathology' is but a local manifestation of problems inherent in the functioning of family units...
- Community psychologists expand the domain of contextual considerations to include various aspects of community life, educational institutions, economic conditions, work life, physical surrounds, and so on as they are implicated in individual disorder. From this standpoint, 'individual pathology' cannot be separated from communal process.
- Feminist scholars locate a variety of ways in which current mental health practices are oppressive and debilitating to women. The system of classifying

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mental disorders, the pejorative position of the patient, and the tendency of the mental health professions to place the blame for mental dysfunction on the individual woman as opposed to the unsatisfying conditions in which she lives all serve to sustain a patriarchal society.

- Phenomenologists attempt to expunge the therapist of preconceptions about the nature of individual dysfunction (for example, expert knowledge), so that they can understand the client's situation and actions in his or her own terms.
- Constructivists challenge the traditional separation between the knower and the known...
- Hermeneuticists argue that the traditional view of the therapist as an objective analyst of mental states is misleading and mystifying. Therapeutic interpretation is heavily laden with the presuppositions of the therapist.
- Ex-mental patients organise themselves against the profession of psychiatry, arguing that the current system of classifying pathology is not only oppressive, objectifying, and demeaning, but is also self-serving for the mental health professions.

(McNamee & Gergen 1992:2-3)

This critique by postmodernistic epistemology does not mean that the bulk of modernistic psychology is useless. It only means that, when the discourses of modernistic research are reified as universal truths and are thus objectified, they become knowledges of power that are oppressive (White 1991). Man is capable of reifying metaphors into 'reality'. That is, humans are capable of forgetting their own authorship of the human world (Freedman & Combs 1996:25). When this happens, the possibilities of new meanings and options are cut off. The linguistic discourses of modernistic and positivistic science can remain beneficial only as long as this 'knowledge' is viewed as social co-constructions that do not represent, nor mirror reality. They will remain beneficial as long as we remember that all descriptions are built on root metaphors which are part and parcel of a local culture.

I now turn the attention to postmodernistic epistemology.

3.3 Postmodernistic epistemology

3.3.1 Introduction

To my mind, the current shift in epistemology is not a phenomenon that is confined to the inner circles of the scientific community. The shift from a modernistic epistemology to a postmodernistic epistemology is a broad cultural shift which affects all areas of human life and has been born out of the realisation that the positivistic scientific enterprise has not delivered the promised goods of a better life for all.

> Our civilisation's optimistic identification of history and emancipation, of technical-scientific progress and social deliverance, of labour and progressive justice, of knowledge and moral improvement, *has today lost credibility*...Postmodernistic thought has thus reached the far-reaching conclusion that the familiar tradition of the Enlightenment is no longer appropriate as a conceptual frame of reference. This frame of reference no longer has any credibility with regard to the function and the capacity of our rationality and the role of the subject in history. Hence, the basis of modernistic thought, i.e. the Cartesian paradigm of autonomous, subject centred rationality is being abandoned [author's italics].
>
> (Kirsten 1987, quoted by Dill 1996:17)[10]

While empirical studies in various natural and human sciences are still being done, philosophers of science such as Foucault, Popper, Feyerabend, Habermas, Kuhn and Derrida are engaged in a developing debate on the legitimacy of the rational

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[10] Die beskawingsoptimistiese vereenselwiging van geskiedenis en emansipasie, van tegniese-wetenskaplike vooruitgang en sosiale bevryding, van arbeid en toenemende geregtigheid, kennis en morele verbetering *het teenswoordig ongeloofwaardig geword*... Hieruit trek die postmodernisme die verreikende konsekwensie dat die vertroude Verligtingstradisie glad nie langer geskik is as 'n konseptuele verwysingsraamwerk waarbinne die funksie en draagwydte van die rede en die posisie en rol van die subjek in die geskiedenis op 'n geloofwaardige wyse ter sprake gebring kan word nie. Gevolglik word daar van die grondmodel van modernistiese denke, die Cartesiaanse paradigma van die autonome, subjekgesentreerde rede, afgestap...[author's italics].

(Kirsten 1987, quoted by Dill 1996:17)

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basis on which the empiricists ground their research. We can argue that the latter intellectual movement is 'a massive intellectual revolution that is perhaps as great as that which marked off the modernistic world from the Middle Ages. The foundations of the modernistic world are collapsing and we are entering a postmodernistic world' (Allen 1989, quoted by Mohler 1995:77).

The process of epistemological transformation is not limited to the so-called human sciences like philosophy, psychology, theology anthropology, etc. Dill (1996) gave an overview of notable shifts in the **natural sciences**. Examples of these changes are evident in sciences such as:

- **physics** (quantum theory; complementarity; the Heisenberg principle; relativity; entropy),
- **biology** (evolution; DNA research),
- **cosmology**,
- **mathematics** and **computer science.**

Dill (1996:44) [11] made the following epistemological comments about scientific

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[11] **Induktiewe en deduktiewe metodes** is nie in staat om direkte oorsaaklike verbande tussen data en toerieë te bewerk nie (soos die modernistiese wetenskapsideaal dit wou hê). Nie-waarneembare hipoteses speel hier 'n rol.

Agtergrondfaktore in die wetenskaplike se eie verwysingsraamwerk het 'n direkte verband met die bevindinge van die navorser. Geen teorievrye waarneming bestaan dus werklik nie.

Teorieë staan nooit alleen nie of in isolasie nie, maar word altyd beoordeel volgens die mate waartoe hulle **inpas in 'n netwerk van teorieë.** Die spesifieke wetenskapstradisie moet dus teregkom in die teorie om aanvaarbaar te wees.

Die teorie-geladenheid van data beïnvloed die waarneming van alle data. Verskeie keuses in die waarnemingsproses het 'n besliste invloed op wat die navorser uiteindelik as sy waarneming sal beskou.

Dat daar **verskillende sienings van die waarheid** in wetenskapsbeoefening aanvaar word, lyk ook nie koherent met die modernistiese ideaal nie.

Die **paradigma-afhanklikheid van data** (Kuhn) wys dat kontekstuele faktore 'n baie groter rol in wetenskapsbeoefening speel as wat voor Kuhn se teorie aanvaar is.

Wetenskapsbeoefening lei nie tot sekerhede nie. Omdat teorieë voortdurend kan verander, kan wetenskap beslis nie aanspraak maak op vasstaande, objektiewe sekerhede nie. Al wat gesê kan word, is dat dit bepaalde oplossings vir sekere spesifieke probleme bied [author's bold].

(Dill 1996:44)

practices:

Inductive and deductive methods are not competent to establish direct causal relations between data and theories (such as the modernistic scientific ideal hoped for). In this regard, non-perceivable hypotheses play a role.

There is a direct link between the **background factors** in the scientist's own frame of reference and his research findings. It is impossible to come up with research findings that are free of theory.

Theories do not function on their own or in isolation, but are always evaluated according to **the compatibility of such theories with a network of other theories**. The given scientific tradition must be accommodated in the theory for it to be acceptable.

Data is saturated with theory, and it influences the perception of all data. Numerous choices in the observation process have a definite influence on what the researcher will eventually regard as his observations.

The acceptance of **diverse perceptions of truth** in the scientific enterprise does not appear to be congruent with the modernistic ideal.

The **paradigm-dependence of data** (Kuhn) indicates that contextual factors play a far more important role in the scientific enterprise than was believed before Kuhn's theory.

Scientific practices do not lead to certainties. Because theories can change continuously, science cannot claim absolute and objective certainties. All we can safely say, is that science offers particular solutions for specific problems [author's bold].

Dill's (1996) comments suggest that there is escalating debate on the discourses on how humans generate knowledge and that these discourses are even evident in the **natural sciences**. The human sciences have also been affected by these

developments and later on in this section I shall elaborate on epistemological shifts in the **human sciences.**

A postmodernistic epistemology is, however, not an easy undertaking for humans who were raised within a modernistic paradigm.

> It is difficult to present a new mode of thinking without being caught in old categories of thought. Discussions of postmodernism tend to get entangled in modernist dichotomies. This may be due to the failures of writers on postmodernity to get beyond polarities of thought....Postmodern discourse is heterogeneous; it emphasises differences and continual changes of perspectives, and it attempts to avoid dichotomised and reified concepts.

> (Kvale 1992a:6)

For a start, I would like to argue that postmodernistic epistemology is characterised by a **loss of belief in an objectively knowable world, independent of an observer.** Surely, an objective reality does exist but our linguistic constructions about that reality are ambiguous and indeterminate. Hence, 'reality' cannot be known, but is continually co-constructed. Postmodernistic epistemology involves second order cybernetics: the observer is a participant in the system he/she is observing. Thus in **second order cybernetics** we cannot indicate an observed system. The fact that the observer is a participant in the system which is being observed compels us to refer to the system as an 'observing system' (Von Foerster 1984, 1991; Kotzé 1994:24). Thus, 'truth' becomes a matter of perspective within a system, a perspective that is simultaneously dictated by the system. Second order cybernetics is related to **constructivism** and **social construction theory** (Kotzé 1994).

3.3.2 Epistemology relates to an interrogative paradigm

The last few decades have brought along a considerable shift in the interrogative paradigm. It was Kuhn's *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (1970) that provided the sharpest attack on foundationalist thought and advanced a postmodernistic paradigm.

Kuhn has argued that science does not proceed simply by the careful accumulation of data that lead to new insight. Rather, scientific data are organised around models or paradigms that have the capacity to gather to themselves and accommodate enormous amounts of data. Change in our discernment happens when through, a daring political act, a new paradigm is articulated, it receives influential support in the scientific community, the data are dramatically transposed by its practitioners from one paradigm to another, and a new 'scheme' (theory) of knowledge becomes authoritative. That is, scientific knowledge is to some extent a political achievement whereby power is utilised to shape perception and interpretation in one direction rather than in another. To the extent that scientific knowledge is a political, rhetorical achievement, it is not objective in any positivistic sense.

(Brueggemann 1993:7)

The diagram below provides a preliminary and somewhat oversimplified summary of these concepts.

	Modernistic paradigm	**Transition period**	**Postmodernistic paradigm**
Onto-logy	Reality is out there, and is bound to the natural laws of nature.	Reality is out there, but cannot be fully understood.	Reality does exist but it cannot be known.
Episte-mology	Positivism The observer remains objective and separate from the observed. For the scientific process, it is essential that the observer remains objective. Reality can be known precisely. Bias-free observations are possible with the appropriate methodology, usually the controlled experiment. Verified scientific knowledge is always general, universal and timeless and context-free.	Post-positivism Absolute objectivity is impossible. The observer influences the observed reality and cannot be wholly separated from it. Modified objectivism. Observation is always an interpretation in the light of an (un)conscious theory (Pieterse 1993a:23). Objectivity remains a principle that can be enhanced by modernistic empirical research methods.	Social construction discourse The 'observer' cannot be separated from the 'observed'. Inquirer and the inquired are fused into a single monistic entity. 'Realities' are socially constructed, the product of historical social process. Thus, all knowledge is relational, and part of local and cultural discourses, even scientific knowledge. Observers are inescapably bound to the pool of historical metaphors to describe; words chosen can only refer to other words.

(Adapted and edited from Moon et al 1991:173)

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Next, I shall proceed with a description of **constructivism** and **social construction theory**.

3.3.3 Constructivism

As has been stated, I regard constructivism as the biological precursor of social construction theory. Although neuro-physiology has produced remarkable insights into how the brain operates, nobody knows how the brain computes images or sounds or meaning out of electromagnetic waves (Levinthal 1983). Outside a human being there is no colour, only different lengths of electromagnetic waves. There is no sound and there is no music, only differences in air pressure which the human ear transforms into electric neural activity in the brain. Hence, the brain computes colour, music and meaning. Nobody knows how the brain computes sound or music (Von Foerster 1984). The brain does not function like a camera that receives the exact picture of the outside world. Instead, the brain is a closed system which never takes in information from the outside world in any direct way, so that what it perceives is always a function of its own structure. Cognition is structure determined (Efran & Lukens 1985).

Hence, 'something' like colour vision is a function of the nervous system rather than information taken in from the outside world. The biologist Humberto Maturana said: 'I explicitly acknowledge the biological impossibility of making any statement about an objective reality....There is no objective world' (quoted by Simon 1985:37). Human beings are observing systems who describe and signify in language and, without the observer, nothing exists. Language creates the illusion that we can look out and 'see' a separate outside world (Efran & Lukens 1985).

It is remarkable that constructivism is not a philosophical subject, but a biological science. In a biological sense, we cannot experientially distinguish between perception and illusion; cognition never yields knowledge about things. Knowledge is the manner of being (Efran & Lukens 1985:37). If objective knowledge is impossible, other views become legitimate versions in different ways of being, different ways of looking and listening (Efran & Lukens 1985:43). Biology and philosophy are meeting each other at the doorstep of epistemology. Constructivism relates to a Kantian model of knowledge in regarding knowledge as the invention

of an active organism interacting with the environment (Efran, Efran & Lukens 1988).

Constructivist discourse thus facilitates different views of objects. The observer has a choice as to what reality he/she chooses to construct and live by. Each individual is responsible for his/her own constructions and the actions that follow from these constructions. Hence, constructivism stresses the **ethical accountability** of a person's views and acts. Ethics always involves **moral values** to guide a person's acts. According to **constructivist discourse, ethics and moral values become important issues in order to make social co-existence possible** (Von Foerster 1984; Kotzé 1992; Kotzé 1994).

The theme of **ethics** is vital in this research and I will return to this theme in greater detail.

Gergen (1994), however, does not view constructivism as an authentic postmodernistic epistemology. He differentiates between **constructivism** and **social construction theory.** Gergen refers to Von Glasersfeld (1987, 1988) and says that according to constructivism, knowledge is not passively received but is actively built up by the cognising subject. Gergen (1994:68) goes on to say the following:

> In effect, (according to the **constructivist** view) the individual never makes direct contact with the world as it is; there is nothing to be said about a world that is un-constructed by the mind....the constructivist view remains lodged within the tradition of Western individualism. It traces knowledge claims primarily to intrinsic processes within the individual. But **social constructionism** traces the sources of human action to relationships and the very understanding of 'individual functioning' to communal interchange [bold mine].

Gergen views the constructivist claim that knowledge is generated in intrinsic processes within the individual as a subject orientated to objective epistemology. Hence, according to Gergen, constructivism relates to a modernistic epistemology.

In the next section, postmodernistic social construction discourse is discussed as an appropriate epistemology in a postmodernistic paradigm.

3.3.4 Social construction theory

3.3.4.1 Some dominant premises of social construction theory

Social construction theory is part of the postmodernistic paradigm shift but is by no means a univocal and unanimous discourse. Authors differ as to the epistemological and therapeutic value of social construction theory (Bohart 1995; Mahrer 1995; O'Hara 1995; Held 1995).

Social construction theory regards the development of knowledge as a social phenomenon and holds that cognition can only evolve within linguistic interaction.

Social construction theory claims that knowledge refer to the local cultural accomplishments of people who are talking to each other, it is an outcome of the social process in which people are interacting with one another using language. The results of empirical research are the consequences of social discourses within a local culture of science. 'Our knowing is inherently *contextual*....It is now clear that what one knows and sees depends upon where one stands or sits' [author's italics] (Brueggemann 1993:8). Thus, 'objectivity' refers to an agreement by everyone in a room and it depends on who is in the room and in what culture and time the room exists.

The view that scientific knowledge is rationally superior is replaced by an epistemology that traces the cultural and historical linguistic processes which favour certain linguistic conceptions of nature above other linguistic conceptions. What we take to be an accurate and objective description of nature, or of a psychological phenomenon, grows out of place- and time-bound social processes. When family therapists use the term 'system' to describe families, they have not discovered new objective knowledge about families, nor have they revealed any new inherent qualities of families. Instead, the discourses of 'system theory' have constituted new and alternative ways for therapists (and clients!) to experience a family. Hence, the argument is not what a discourse is, but what a discourse does

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(Lowe 1991:45). The value of discourses lies not so much in the understanding it provides, than in the way discourses constitute new ways of 'being' a family (Hare-Mustin 1994).

> Our formulations of what is the case are guided by and limited to the systems of language in which we live. What can be said about the world - including self and others - is an outgrowth of shared conventions of discourse.

> (McNamee & Gergen 1992:4).

Hence, social construction theory has brought a new consideration of our understanding of the epistemological potency of language.

3.3.4.2 Social construction theory and language

The interpretation of a (scientific) 'piece of language' is always based on concepts and conceptual structures which the interpreter has formed out of elements of his/her own subjective experience (Von Glasersfeld 1991). When people are talking to each other, they constantly modify and adapt these concepts and conceptual structures, trying to eliminate those discrepancies that create difficulties in their struggle to understand each other. The adaptation and modification process ceases when it appears that a fit has been achieved. 'And fit in any given situation is no indication of match. To find a fit, simply means not to notice any discrepancies' (Von Glasersfeld 1991). It is therefore impossible to convey the exact (scientific) meaning one person has in mind to another person. The listener is prompted to build his/her own conceptual structures which seem compatible with the words of the speaker, but may not be.

The objective reality can be storied, but a discourse about the objective reality is not reality, nor does it represent reality, nor does it copy reality. Scientists choose **metaphors** and are inescapably dependent on **a narrative mode** in their descriptions. And metaphors are metaphors, they do not represent reality. The essence of a metaphor is to understand and experience one kind of thing in terms

of other metaphors (Lakoff & Johnson 1980:5). Metaphors are interpretative constructions of other metaphors and any (scientific) discourse is an ongoing interpretative and metaphor-generating process. 'Scientific writing, then, furnishes a picture of reality that is no more accurate than fiction. All accounts of the world - mythical, scientific, mysterious - are guided by historical and culturally based conventions' (Gergen 1994:242).

> One must further add to this dialogue the powerful voice of the literary deconstructionists....when we enter the process of description we invariably rely on **conventions of language.** We must make use of these conventions or we fail to communicate at all. Yet, these **conventions** simultaneously **govern what can be communicated** - or more precisely, the ontological presumptions of culture. Thus, as **language** guides the formation of our accounts, so does it construct an array of putative objects. One may never exit the **language** (the system of signifiers) to give a true and accurate portrayal of what is the case. Understanding of the world is thus a product not of the world as it is, but of its **textual history**....if our language conventions are, in turn, dependant on social processes, and these processes carry with them various ideological or value biases, then all scientific writing and all our attempts at objectivity are **essentially value-saturated products of social agreement** [bold mine].

> (Gergen 1992:22)

Language itself is being reconsidered in postmodernistic thought. Postmodernistic thought has brought a mistrust of our naïve trust in language as the bearer of truth. The spuriousness and untrustworthiness of language now become a key premise. Language itself is de-mythologised. Language covers more than reveals. Language cannot even constitute a direct link between signifier and reality (Dill 1996).

Van Niekerk (1994:281) [12] is another voice in this regard:

> To put it another way, instead of regarding language as a facilitator of understanding and thus as an *aid* in the process of interpretation, *language itself acquires a hermeneutic function.* That is, language determines what can be known and said about reality [author's italics].

The above statements raise fundamental questions about the assumption that the language we use to describe the world operates as a mirror of the world. Research results can only operate as social constructions and are dependant on the **history of the chosen metaphors.** In this sense, a statement about an object says more about the person who utters the statement and the local culture in which he/she is operating, than about the object the statement is supposed to describe (Kotzé 1996a).

3.3.4.3 Social construction theory and ethics

Ethics plays an important role in this research. It is therefore reasonable to refer to the link between postmodernistic epistemology and ethics.

While modernistic epistemology suggests that a scientist's description is telling the 'truth' as it is, the postmodernistic scientist is a generator of cultural discourses and in doing so, is aware of the **ethical consequences** of his/her constructions (Kotzé 1992). Postmodernistic thought goes beyond the Kantian split of modernistic culture into science, morality and art, and involves a re-valuation of ethics. The positivist split between facts and values is no longer feasible; science is a value-constituted and value-constituting enterprise (Kvale 1992b:39; Gergen 1992:22).

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[12] Om dit anders te stel: eerder as om taal te beskou as iets wat verstaan fasiliteer en wat dus 'n *hulpmiddel* in die interpretasieproses is, kry *taal nou self 'n hermeneutiese funksie:* dit bepaal wat omtrent die werklikheid kenbaar en uitspreekbaar is [author's italics].

(Van Niekerk 1994:281)

Lowe (1991:48), referring to Lash (1990), described the relation between ethics and social discourses in the following manner:

> Thus, a postmodernistic orientation asks social scientists to critically examine not only the validity and effects of discourse, but also the social and power position of the *producers* of discourse. This would involve therapists' continually situating themselves in relation to their own discourses and practices and being ready to acknowledge their social origins...This form af analysis moves the focus of reflexivity considerably, from the field of autonomous scientific discourse...to the field of power...[author's italics].

To utter any discourse is thus not to reveal something, but rather to enter the domain of power - hence, all discourses are ethical discourses (cf. Dueck 1991:187).

3.3.4.4 Gergen's views on social construction theory

Gergen (1994) refined ideas on the **relational** aspect of how people come to knowledge. Gergen's comments on this matter in Chapter Eleven *(The communal origins of meaning)* of his book entitled *Realities and Relationships: soundings in social construction,* is discussed briefly below.

Gergen (1994:253-255) examined the traditional discourse that defined the concept of 'meaning' in terms of **individual signification**. Individual signification refers to the internal symbolisation or conceptualisation of the external world. The traditional discourse utilises the metaphor of 'the individual' as an 'information processor'. It believes in a phenomenal 'I', a conscious 'I', who can mean and who can convey meaning to another and who can understand another person. To understand another person one must gain access to the other person's subjective internal symbolisation. This would imply a state of **intersubjective transparency** which is not attainable and does not solve the problem of interpersonal meaning.

Gergen (1994:256) then turned to the romanticist hermeneutics of Dilthey (1894). Dilthey proposed that one person understands another by transposing him/herself

into the other's lived experience. Gergen questions this proposition. How does one person's experiential field grasp the essence of another person's experiences?

Gergen (1994:257) then referred to Hirsch (1967). Hirsch, in his book *Validity of interpretation,* stated that a text is the direct meaning of the author and that readers can employ rational methods to move from the text to the intention of the author. It was a popular exegetical method in the seventies. Gergen (1994:257) opposed the rational hermeneutics of Hirsch as a possible answer to the problem of interpersonal meaning by raising the views of Gadamer. Gadamer proposed that a person confronts a text (and thus a person's actions and stories), with a forestructure of understanding or with a given horizon of understanding, that is, with prejudices. These prejudices influence the way in which a reader interprets a text. For Gadamer there is no meaning in itself. Meaning is always clouded by the interpreter's given horizon of understanding. To evade the problem of solipsism and to escape from one's own prejudices, Gadamer proposed dialogue, a relationship between reader and text where the text can influence one's prejudices and the text's meaning is simultaneously influenced by these prejudices. The text raises questions and enables the reader to become aware of his/her given horizon of understanding. Interpretation does not occur in the head of the reader, but grows out of the **dialogue between** text and prejudices. Hence, **there can never be a correct reading of any text.**

Gergen (1994:258), however, criticised Gadamer's notions:

> For if the individual can only understand in a system of meaning that is brought to the text, there is no obvious means by which he or she can stand outside this system to allow the text to ask its own questions or to generate a consciousness of his or her own biases....Gadamer presumes that the reader can somehow make contact with an essence lying behind the text, a meaning that can ask questions...

For Gergen (1994), this is a new introduction of intersubjective transparency. For Gergen, language in itself does not signify anything. Gergen (1994:261-262) used the metaphor 'signifiers' for language and said that each signifier is meaningless and empty. We are thus for ever dependant on a second level of signifiers to grasp

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the meaning of the signifier in question. This second level of signifiers' meanings is only temporal. In its turn, this second line of signifiers is dependant on other signifiers for its meanings [13]. **Hence, meaning is a function of the relationship between signifiers, an ever ongoing hermeneutic circle. The conclusion is that meaning can never be a fixed state.**

This relationship between signifiers is embedded within the patterns of human actions. Gergen (1994:264) concluded:

> Rather than commence with individual subjectivity and work deductively toward
> an account of human understanding through language, we may begin our
> analysis at the level of the *human relationship* as it generates both language
> and understanding [author's italics].

Hence, it is human interactions in relationships that give language the capacity to mean anything. For Gergen (1994:264-271), a theory of meaning is a **relational theory of human meaning and it embodies the following seven related principles:**

*1. An individual's utterances in themselves possess no meaning.

It is only in relation to other people and the cultural and historical environment that utterances have meaning.

*2. Meaning is realised through supplementary action.

A lone utterance acquires meaning only when another person supplements the utterance with a phrase or action. An individual can never convey meaning. Another person is required to supplement the word(s) or action(s) and only then does the original utterance acquire meaning. Meaning is a function of relationships. If another person does not treat an utterance as communication and thus fails to supplement the original utterance, such an utterance is meaningless. Meaning is not generated by an action and a

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[13] In another context, Doherty (1991:40) stated: 'Words can only be shown to refer to other words, not something outside themselves'.

reaction as if the action and reaction both have their own personal meanings. Meaning is not the total of the meanings of action and reaction. Gergen is saying that an action and a reaction are meaningless signifiers unless the reaction supplements the action. The action only acquires its meaning through the supplementary reaction. Meaning is born out of joint action.

*3. Supplements act both to create and to constrain meaning.

A supplement limits the possible meanings of an action and creates the direction of the meaning of the action. The relationship between supplements and the action-supplement is always a reciprocal relationship: the one is always constraining and creating the meaning of the other.

*4. An action-and-supplement is a candidate for further supplementation.

A supplement or an action-supplement has no fixed meaning in itself. It is always dependent on further supplements for specification and clarification. Future supplements revise the meaning of any action-supplement in creating and constraining meaning.

*5. Meanings are subject to continuous reconstitution.

The meaning of a person's communication is never fixed or exact. Meaning is always a fleeting experience that is subject to alteration and clarification through further supplements. What may seem to be fixed and settled in one instance may be cast into ambiguity in the next supplement [14].

Gergen (1994:268) continued to clarify his theory of relational meaning, showing that meaning is not only derived from the micro-social relationship of say two or three persons. The potential meaning of an action is derived from our previous engagement in other relationships. The current relationship is an extension of previous 'patterns of meaning making', which

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[14] A fit in any given situation is no indication of a match (Von Glasersfeld 1991). This observation by Von Glasersfeld does not suggest that meaning exists beforehand in a reservoir ready to be dispersed. Meaning is something that is always in the making.

in their turn, serve as supplements to alter the current momentary meaning. 'In effect, meaningful communication in any given interchange ultimately depends on a protracted array of relationships, extending, one may say, to the relational conditions of society as a whole (Gergen 1994:268).

*6. Ontologies develop when relationships are increasingly co-ordinated.

Gergen (1994) argues that there is a close relationship between meaning and order. Random actions and utterances cannot create meaning. It is only when actions and utterances create structure and order that the range of possible meanings is constrained.

This also means that people in an order-generating dialogue tend to create meaning, that is, they tend to develop a positive ontology, which, in its turn, enables meaning-generating interaction to proceed. For example, a fellowship of scientists has to respect a shared academic vocabulary to create meaning. However, this reified vocabulary acquires positive ontological status.

*7. As consensus is established, so are the grounds for both understanding and misunderstanding.

Misunderstanding results when people are in dialogue who had participated in a vast array of relationships and when people were part of a local culture where local ontologies have developed. This participation does not prepare one for understanding in other relationships or contexts.

Misunderstanding is frequently the product of the ever meaning-generating character of relationships. People do not engage in new relationships as blank pages that have yet to be filled with meaning. In each new joint action-supplement encounter, the past memories of many different relationships and contexts create and constrain new possible meanings. The newly created meaning, however fleeting, inevitably alters the meaning of cultural words and gestures of the past. As Gergen puts it: the past meaning of words and gestures is subject to 'multiple recontextualization....each meaning is potentially some other, and the

possibility for misunderstanding is permanently and pervasively at hand' (1994:270).

Dill (1996), affirmed Gergen's notion of the social, **relational** and thus historical nature of the construction of knowledge. He also referred to Van Huysteen (1996) and explored the epistemological possibilities of 'critical realism', because 'critical realism' honours postmodernistic social construction discourse as epistemology. Quoting Van Huysteen (1989b), Dill (1996:55) explained 'critical realism' as realistic because it enables us to recognise the cognitive and referential nature of analogical language. 'Critical realism' is also critical because the metaphorical nature of language teaches us that models should never be ideologised, but should retain their openness.

According to Dill (1996:53), a researcher can be a 'realist' that refers to reality, but this reference to reality is a qualified realism, i.e. a 'critical realism' because language has metaphorical limitations. The success of a scientific theory depends on the effective metaphors it can call upon. The body of available metaphors in a **community** determines the explanatory power of a theory. For this reason, one might say that the epistemological model that 'critical realism' offers is a **relational** model. The implications of postmodernistic social construction discourse as epistemology and of 'critical realism' in scientific enquiry are set out by Neimeyer (1995:350):

I do believe that we can attempt to ask questions of the world in a way that invites clear invalidation of explicit hypothesis....For example, it is quite feasible to design a clinical trial that addresses the question of whether fluoxetine is superior to psychotherapy in the treatment of depression. With exacting controls to ensure the internal and external validity of the design (Cook & Campbell 1979), the world can indeed give us a useful answer to this question. But it is equally important to recognise that such an answer is ambiguated by the fact that every term in the question is itself a **social construction**, leaving it open to **deconstruction** of its operational and theoretical meaning, implicit ideological assumptions, reinforcement of particular arrangements of power and privilege within the cultural framework in which the question is asked, etc. Thus, while we can carefully arrange our

interaction with the world to clarify the epistemic legitimacy of our constructions, we retain not only considerable latitude over the interpretation of the results of our 'experiments', but the capacity to problematize our very act of questioning itself. For me, a constructivist and social constructionist framework serves as a useful conceptual tool for clarifying the intricate and overlapping processes entailed in the pursuit of 'knowledge' [bold mine].

I have reflected on Gergen's social, relational and historical emphasis of the social construction of knowledge and have shown how 'critical realism' relates to it. The distinction between our social and relational linguistic constructions and the extra-linguistic reality they refer to, must be borne in mind. An extra-linguistic reality surely exists; it is, however, our capacity to relate to that extra-linguistic reality that is problematic. Our only tool in this enterprise is language. Our relationally based linguistic constructions must not be confused with the extra-linguistic reality they try to resemble.

In this chapter I have explained why I have chosen **postmodernistic social construction discourse** as the epistemological basis of this research. In the following section, the relation between epistemology and methodology is examined.

3.4 Research methodology

3.4.1 Postmodernistic epistemology inevitably influences methodology

This section must be read in the light of previous sections and in the light of **practical theology's traditional** distinction between **'theory' and 'praxis'** in Section 5.3.6.

Research methodology in the modernistic era, was characterised by its desire for external legitimisation. It borrowed its positivistic methods and procedures from the natural sciences. In the positivistic and modernistic paradigm, methodology seemed to promise a guarantee of eliminating all value- and ideologically biased research results. These methods claimed to enable scientists to be detached and objective observers of the very things they observe (Dill 1996). Hypotheses, variables, correlation and controlled experiments provided the fabric for the observer to observe. The language of mathematics and statistics became the history of the language of human characteristics and behaviour. Hence one could say the following:

> The history of psychology became a history of what to emulate in the natural sciences, even regarding the language of physics as the ideal for psychology. Scientific respectability had more glamour than insight - psychology was unique in the extent to which its institutionalisation preceded its content and its methods preceded its problems.
>
> (Kvale 1992b:42)

In postmodernistic thought, however, the methodology of the controlled experiment loses its coveted position and positivistic research methods are viewed as misleading justificatory devices (Doherty 1991:41). Postmodernistic social construction discourse insists that the positivistic and '...traditional research methods are incapable of studying families as systems: Social context is often ignored, information from multiple levels and perspectives is not gathered, and

recursive interactions do not lend themselves to quantitative analysis' (Cavell & Snyder 1991:167).

However, given this scepticism about the relevance of empirical results, we can still try to understand, to evaluate and to inquire more deeply into the process of therapy (Markowitz 1991:12). My choice of postmodernistic social construction discourse as epistemology implies a shift from method-centredness to a **discursive practice:**

> The research process is not a mapping of some objective social reality; research involves a **co-constitution** of the objects investigated, **with a negotiation and interaction with the very objects studied**....with an emphasis upon **qualitative, interactive and involved research**....research becomes a **negotiated practice** [bold mine].

> (Kvale 1992a:13)

Although Cavell and Snyder (1991) criticised the use of qualitative methods and begged for the revaluation of quantitative methods, they admitted to the value of qualitative methods when it comes to theory **development** and **innovation** in terms **of new therapeutic** approaches.

One cannot conclude that all qualitative research is based on a postmodernistic epistemology or that all quantitative research is inherently modernistic. To my mind, a great deal of **qualitative research** was conducted using a **modernistic and positivistic** paradigm. Atkinson and Heath (1991:162) commented on **qualitative research** that was completely **modernistic** although it claimed to operate in a postmodernistic paradigm:

> Like conventional researchers, most qualitative researchers...maintain that the use of specific, systematic methods of data collecting and recording make the insights of qualitative researchers more valid or trustworthy than the insights of those inquirers who may be less systematic or methodologically more diverse....Even qualitative inquirers who claim to be 'constructivist' maintain that they can increase the 'truth value' of their observations through the

application of specific methods, such as triangulation, external auditing, and others....We believe that these assumptions among qualitative researchers are still rooted in positivistic conceptions about the nature of knowledge.

It is my view that the **epistemological paradigm** of qualitative and quantitative research must be borne in mind: is it grounded in a modernistic or postmodernistic **paradigm**? I use the term 'qualitative research' in a postmodernistic context and **the underlying research was conducted using a qualitative developmental category** (Kotzé 1994) or **action research** (Bawden 1991). Kotzé (1987) differentiated between **exploratory** and **confirmatory** research. In this research I use an **exploratory** approach. This kind of research endeavours to explore new knowledge (Kotzé 1997).

In my opinion, the research method of multiple reflexive conversations between all the participants and 'theoretical' discourses is an appropriate postmodernistic method. I agree with Kvale (1992b:51), who says:

> The qualitative research interview is no longer a mere adjunct to the basic scientific methods of observation and experimentation, but provides through conversation between persons, privileged access to the cultural world of intersubjective meaning. In several respects, the knowledge produced in an interview comes close to postmodernistic conceptions of knowledge as conversational, narrative, linguistic, contextual and interrelational.

The highest level of knowing can only be cultural and intersubjective knowledge, i.e. **local** knowledge as it is achieved through social interaction. This 'constitutes a highly unusual feature: it shows that in the Radical Constructionist view, **the need to consider others is not an ethical assumption but an epistemological requirement**' (Von Glasersfeld 1991:21). Truth is a function of relationships, i.e. all truth is **locally co-constructed** truth (Gergen 1994).

Research plans, methods and procedures have to comply with these epistemological requirements. Hence, in this study, the emphasis is not on my own observations but on the meanings generated by all the persons involved as

they collectively generate descriptions and explanations about pastoral therapy (Von Foerster 1991:78). 'According to the idea of "second-order cybernetics"...the observing therapist is an integral **part of the system** being observed, and co-constructs with the client the meaning of therapy' (Doherty 1991:41). I was thus not an independent observer but rather an inter-dependant participant within the meaning-generating system (Bawden 1991; De Jongh van Arkel 1987).

This epistemology has implications, moreover, not only for the methodology, but also for the **pastoral therapeutic process** as a **reflexive process**. Having said this, I have committed myself to an **ecology of meaning** (De Jongh van Arkel 1991a:71), which implies that 'human systems are language-generating and, simultaneously, **meaning-generating systems**' (Anderson & Goolishian 1988:372).

The 'system' within which this research was conducted was not an observed 'system,' it was more of a 'meaning-generating system'. Hence, the people who made this research possible, were not called 'subjects' or 'informants', but 'conversational participants' (cf. Kotzé 1994:61-72). Terms such as 'subjects' bind the researcher to modes of discourse that place the participants in subordinate positions in a power hierarchy instead of grounding the dialogue in a mutual process (Steier 1991:165).

I have motivated my choice of postmodernistic social construction discourse as my research epistemology and have indicated that this choice had specific implications for my research methodology, i.e. the **method** of **multiple reflexive conversations**. This choice not only had consequences in terms of methodology, but also for the pastoral therapeutic process.

3.4.2 More detail on the aim of this research

In this section I elaborate on the aim of this research (cf. Section 1.8).

1. The first objective is to explore the notions of modernistic and postmodernistic epistemology and to examine the implications of a postmodernistic epistemology for research methodology and procedures.

2. Secondly, the objective is to reflect briefly on the implications of social construction theory for the storied nature of human life and narrative therapy.

3. The objective is, thirdly, to explore the implications of postmodernistic epistemology for the academic discourses of theology, practical theology and pastoral therapy and its implications for the practice of pastoral therapy in a postmodernistic context.

4. Fourthly, the objective is to reflect on some modernistic descriptions of and reasons for extra-marital affairs and to give a narrative description of extra-marital affairs.

5. The fifth objective is to reflect on various cultural discourses which co-constitute extra-marital affairs (e.g. the eros discourse).

6. The sixth objective is the **co-construction** by the pastoral therapist, and the participants in the therapy, using theological-ethical and relational discourses, of those **alternative and preferred life narratives** which can enhance the ethical competency of the couple/spouse to take more responsibility for the effects of the extra-marital relationship on their own lives, and to be more accountable for the future of the marriage.

7. The seventh objective is the co-construction of a **pastoral therapeutic discourse** by the pastoral therapist, the participants in therapy and the promoter, using theological-ethical, relational and narrative therapeutic discourses.

8. The eighth objective is **the co-construction** of this **research report**, developed from the multiple reflexive conversations between the pastoral therapist, the participants and the promoter, and using other theoretical discourses.

In October 1995, *The Journal of Marital and Family Therapy* summarised almost all the existing research on the effectiveness of couples and family therapy.

Reviewing this journal, Lebow and Gurman (1996) concluded: 'There is now overwhelming evidence that couples and family therapy have a positive impact on the lives of a couple or spouse', however, 'some very prominent approaches to couples…remain untested, including…**narrative**…models'.

I did not intend to 'test' the narrative approach. It was therefore neither the intention **to find** nor **to confirm** something, but rather **to explore, i.e. to co-construct something.** Hence, this research may be placed in a **qualitative developmental** category (Kotzé 1994) and its objectives did not include comparing it with another therapeutic model, nor to prove something, nor to test its effectiveness, but to develop and story it.

3.4.3 *Multiple reflexive conversations*

This section must be read in the light of Sections 3.3.1 to 3.3.4.4 and 3.4.1 to 3.4.2, and in the light of the section entitled **'Theory' and 'praxis'** in Section 5.3.6.

Multiple reflexive conversations (explained in Section 3.5.5) form the basis of **the pastoral therapy** and **of this research** and they were utilised on as many occasions and between as **many participants** as possible. The **externalising method** of White was used in these multiple reflexive conversations (White & Epston 1990; White 1995) to explore the effects of the pastoral therapy on the participants, and the effects that the participants had on the pastoral therapy.

I deal with the method of multiple reflexive conversations in Section 3.5.5.

3.4.4 *A 'not-knowing' position: Participants as experts*

In these multiple reflexive conversations I participated in the dialogue from a **'not-knowing position'** (Anderson & Goolishian 1992:27). In taking up this not-knowing position, the research honoured the postmodernistic requirement that all the partners in any dialogue must be equal and open to one another to genuinely attempt the co-construction of knowledge in a postmodernistic paradigm. This does not mean, however, that I was only a passive listener in the process (Dill

1996).

Although attentive listening is vital in a 'not knowing position', I was an active participant in the dialogue. A 'not knowing position' implies that, although I introduced my own expertise into the dialogue, I did it in such a way that I honoured the expertise of the other participants. The participants were regarded as the experts of their own lives (Anderson & Goolishan 1988) and they were respected for their views about their own lives and about the therapy process. Their preferred views were not less scientific (Gergen 1994) and it was precisely the personal knowledge of the participants that co-constituted the pastoral therapy and the therapeutic process as such.

In the next section I discuss the research procedures which I followed.

3.5 Research procedures: Multiple reflexive conversations

3.5.1 Introduction

I will begin by giving a concise overview of the steps followed during this research. This concise overview will help the reader to obtain a quick 'birds-eye view' of the procedure. Then I will proceed to give a more detailed overview of the research procedure as multiple reflexive conversations.

3.5.2 The initial phase

A number of historical steps were taken during the initial phases of the research.

I pursued internalising conversations with:

- postmodernistic social construction discourse, i.e. postmodernistic epistemology as it is found in the literature;
- discourses in the literature concerning research methodology;
- discourses in the literature concerning extra-marital affairs, and
- discourses in the literature concerning pastoral therapy.

These internalised reflections eventually led to a co-construction of the **research proposal**. The research proposal initiated reflexive conversations between my promoter (Prof. D J Kotzé) and me, and between my co-promoter (Prof. J T De Jongh van Arkel) and me.

3.5.3 Preliminaries to the primary phase

The following steps were taken at the beginning of the primary phase of this research:

I pursued more **extensive** internalising conversations with:

- postmodernistic social construction discourse, and
- discourses in the literature concerning research methodology.

These internalised reflections eventually led to a co-construction of **Sections 3.2 to 3.4** of the research report, i.e. of those parts dealing with postmodernistic epistemology and research methodology. During this time I had a reflexive conversation with my promoter.

Then I proceeded to internalised conversations with the discourses in the literature concerning theology, practical theology and pastoral therapy. Conversations with my promoter and co-promoter followed and I continued to write the research report, i.e. **Chapters 5 to 6**. These chapters dealt with theology, practical theology and pastoral therapy in a postmodernistic context.

3.5.4 The primary phase

The next set of steps, i.e. **the multiple reflexive conversations** and the accompanying **internalised conversations** were part of the **primary phase** of this research. [15]

It was during this phase that the **'conversational participants'** entered therapy, i.e. those individuals and couples who came for pastoral therapy because one of the spouses was or had been engaged in an extra-marital affair.

These multiple reflexive conversations and internalised conversations formed **recursive** and **repetitive** sequences of events. These multiple reflexive conversations and internalised conversations **overlapped** and tended to occur rather **simultaneously** (Roux 1996; Kotzé 1994). Hence, the sequence of events described here is **not the historical sequence**. During these **multiple reflexive conversations** and the accompanying **internalised conversations**, I was in conversation with:

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[15] We may distinguish between **multiple reflexive conversations** and **internalised conversations**, but we can never disconnect them.

- discourses in the literature concerning extra-marital affairs;
- discourses in the literature concerning secular therapy regarding affairs;
- discourses in the literature concerning narrative therapy;
- discourses in the literature concerning pastoral therapy, e.g. theological-ethical discourses;
- relational, emotional and cultural discourses in the lives of the 'conversational participants';
- multiple reflexive conversations with the 'conversational participants' in which we reflected on our therapeutic conversations, and
- the promoter.

These multiple reflexive conversations and internalised conversations socially co-constructed **pastoral therapeutic conversations** leading to **new alternatives** in the **lives of the participants.** The internalised conversations co-constructing the remainder of the **research report** came about simultaneously.

3.5.5 *More detail on multiple reflexive conversations with 'conversational participants'*

Because social constructionism and multiple reflexive conversations with conversational participants are 'integral parts of our recent understanding of social epistemology' (Söderqvist 1991:143), I will elaborate on aspects of these conversations. Whenever a researcher writes about another person he/she constructs another identity, i.e., he/she controls another person's identity. Reflexivity is a technique which endeavours to minimise the control/power that a researcher can exert when he/she interprets, selects, orders and schematises the material concerned (Söderqvist 1991:154). Hence, reflexivity requires a researcher to become aware of his/her own presuppositions (his/her own story) and how these presuppositions inevitably bias the research process (cf. Section 6.3).

Furthermore, reflexivity implies that the conversational participants become involved in the process. It is surprising how often conversational participants come up with certain key issues in pastoral therapeutic conversations that bring about

change in their lives when the pastoral therapist did not necessarily regard those specific issues as relevant to the change (Steier 1991:169).

> The foremost feature of this type of...[research] is the sharing of power between researchers and subjects in order to construct meaning. 'Subjects' become 'participants', and the **number of interpretations** (or theoretical possibilities) generated by the research **is expanded** rather than frozen....In effect, by allowing the participants to share in the development of theoretical conceptions, **more useful and significant results emerged**...[bold mine].
>
> (Gergen & Gergen 1991:86-87)

However useful a pastoral therapist's knowledge may be in dealing with distinctions that matter to therapy, this knowledge held by the pastoral therapist is not a privileged view of what is really significant in the pastoral therapy (Steier 1991:169). Because conversational participants live in their own (linguistic) communities, they are in an unique position to participate in reflexive conversations without the limitations which constrain the language/knowledge of the pastoral therapist. Hence, conversational participants often identify key aspects of the therapeutic process which the therapists themselves are not always aware of (Steier 1991:174). Within multiple reflexive conversations, conversational participants have, so to speak, other languages to express what they deem valuable or significant in the pastoral therapeutic conversation. Steier (1991:173) gives the following description of multiple reflexive conversations:

> In reflexive research, one issue that stands out across domains is that of a reflecting of process from reciprocators to researchers, and from researchers to reciprocators. This reflecting, or mirroring, takes place in different ways, as researchers can be seen to engage in reciprocate-like activities, and reciprocators in research-like processes. It should be clear here that I refer to mirroring not in the sense of one image being the real or natural one that is reflected onto another surface, but rather in the process sense where both images are constructed, with each serving as a basis for the other - hence, a mutualness. I find...an awareness of such mirroring processes to be essential to doing constructionist research.

The following excerpt sets out some of the **procedural** aspects of multiple reflexive conversations:

> Both my research design and the reflecting interview were non-directive: My intention as researcher was to follow the families in their journey over time and to talk with them periodically about their experience of that journey and (secondarily) their experience of talking about that experience; it was not to put them through an exercise or experiment that I had set up. Similarly, a reflecting conversation follows, rather than directs; it elicits the family's ideas about what brought them to therapy, and also asks about their ideas about the process. With such research and with such therapy, the duration of the conversation and the direction in which it moves is placed actively in the hands of the family rather than being a function of a therapist's methodological or theoretical model.

(Hoffman-Hennessy & Davis 1993:369)

As the reader will see, some of the above-mentioned ideas of Hoffman-Hennessy and Davis (1993) were utilised in the research procedure.

After the initial pastoral therapeutic conversation(s), the couple/individual and I reflected on the content and on the process of the therapeutic conversation(s). This reflexive conversation occurred at the end of a session or at the beginning of the following therapeutic conversation. At the end of each session or at the beginning of each session, we reflected on the content and the process of our therapeutic conversations.

During these **reflexive conversations** it was unavoidable that the conversation **evolved into a therapeutic conversation**. Hence, when we reflected on previous therapeutic conversations, this reflexive conversation itself became a therapeutic conversation. In this way, **our conversations were simultaneously reflexive conversations and therapeutic conversations**. It was not possible to draw a clear distinction between reflexive conversations and therapeutic conversations, i.e. I was never sure whether I was engaged in a therapeutic conversation or in a

reflexive conversation. It became a never-ending process of reflection: i.e. **multiple** reflexive conversations. All the therapeutic conversations evolved into reflexive conversations, and all the reflexive conversations evolved into therapeutic conversations. Hence, **multiple reflexive conversations** functioned as the **research procedure** as well as the **mode of therapy** (cf. Gergen 1994; Steier 1991; Kvale 1992b; Kotzé 1994; Roux 1996; Hoffman 1992; Dill 1996).

The following excerpt comes from one of these multiple reflexive conversations. The conversational participant's pseudonym is Spokie. The reader will notice some of the principles of multiple reflexive conversations in this excerpt:

> **Therapist:** *One last question. How was it to look back [at our conversations] during the last 30 minutes? We had a **conversation** about our **conversation** about our **conversation**.*
>
> **Spokie:** *Quite insight-provoking. I never thought that one can explore a conversation in such a way. But it is relaxing, it is nice and illuminating - a retrospective view on what we talked about and why we talked about what we talked about.*
>
> **Therapist:** *It [i.e. the reflexive conversation] was also almost a fresh therapeutic conversation?*
>
> **Spokie:** *Yes - [it was] about why we had come upon those things upon which we had come. [It was] about how we had come upon those things - and, yes, it [the reflexive conversation] is quite therapeutic.*

This mode of research implies that we can abandon the **dualistic split** between **'research on therapeutic conversations'** and **'common and regular therapeutic conversations'** in our daily clinical practice (Kotzé 1997).

Only a portion of the therapeutic conversations/reflexive conversations were audio-taped and transcribed because it was not feasible to audio-tape each and every therapeutic conversation/reflexive conversation. Although nine cases comprised this research, in the end I used only material from seven of these nine cases because the remaining two did not raise any new key figures about the pastoral therapeutic processes.

The implications of a postmodernistic epistemological reading of these transcriptions are explored later on in this chapter under the heading **Research report** (see Section 3.7).

3.5.6 The 'conversational participants'

3.5.6.1 Couples/individuals entering therapy

At the time when I did this research, I was the full time pastoral therapist of the Dutch Reformed Church Pretoria-Oosterlig. I was known for my work as a marital therapist and couples/individuals continually and frequently entered into therapy in connection with extra-marital affairs. Hence, I had no problem in finding 'conversational participants'.

When the **primary phase** of the research had advanced sufficiently, I asked **the first ten cases** (where one spouse is/was engaged in an extra-marital affair) that entered therapy to participate in this research project. **Six couples** and another **three individuals** (three women) agreed to participate. Hence, **nine cases** comprised this research. The three individual women were:

- a divorcée (her husband had left her because he had an affair);
- a married woman who was having an affair (but her husband did not know of the affair nor of the pastoral therapeutic process); and
- an attractive and lonely single woman who was tempted very strongly to enter into an extra-marital affair with a married man.

Since I have been working among whites in a western culture, all these cases came from this background.

3.5.6.2 Explaining the research process

During the initial conversation, I informed the couple/individual about the theme of my research, and I explained the research method as a reflexive conversational process.

3.5.6.3 Explaining ethics

I then proceeded to explain the relevant ethical issues (cf. Dreyer 1991a:246-251) in our collaborative endeavour. These issues involved:

- confidentiality and anonymity;
- an agreement that the 'conversational participants' were free to determine the agenda and goal of every therapeutic conversation.

3.5.6.4 Contracting

After explaining the research procedures and method and after reflecting on the ethical issues, we entered into an oral agreement to commit ourselves to assisting each other and to the research (cf. Heller 1987).

In the next section I will reflect briefly on 'trustworthiness' and 'accountability' in a postmodernistic context.

3.6 Accountability: Local trustworthiness and multiple reflexive conversations

The term 'trustworthiness of research' is slippery because it is a term from the modernistic paradigm that has an inclination to **singular and universal truth.** How does trustworthiness function in a postmodernistic paradigm? Gergen (1994), one of the leading exponents of postmodernistic social constructionist thought, criticised the quest for objectivity as a **singular** discourse that excludes other discourses. However, Gergen (1994:181-182) was not prepared to abandon the notion of objectivity and of trustworthiness in scientific research altogether:

> Provided that one remains within the language games of the scientific
> community and goes along with their localised forms of indexing, the scientific
> account is estimably trustworthy....Further...the banal language of the

objective world may be required for communities of scientists to realise their collective goals. Without repetitive and unremarkable agreements within the sciences about 'what things are to be called', the hurdles to technological accomplishments would be enormous...It is perhaps dysfunctional, then, to suggest a full-scale abandonment of these conventions of trust.

Referring to postmodernistic social construction discourse as epistemology, Dill (1996:157) [16] made the following comment in this regard:

This approach shows that we cannot abandon science as if it has nothing to say....The implication is that within uniform research traditions, theories can even be verified or falsified, and that we can reach consensus on the 'essence of things'. Research conducted within similar traditions is thus not only possible, but also imperative, in order for significant relational knowledge to be shared.

Hence, it still remains valid that some descriptions of therapy may be not more objective and accurate because that would be modernistic, but more **useful** in **local contexts** than other descriptions of therapy. This does not mean that what is useful, will be universally beneficial across time and space. It may only be more useful in a **local community** and thus in a **temporal** sense. 'Trustworthiness' in this sense may be more in line with a postmodernistic paradigm, and it is in this sense that the term is used here.

The trustworthiness of research cannot be established by an individual researcher (Atkinson & Heath 1991:162). It is the task of the researcher and the 'conversational participants' and of the community of pastoral therapists to establish through ongoing dialogue a mutual trust about a particular pastoral therapy discourse in a particular local culture (cf. Gergen 1994; Dill 1996).

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[16] Hierdie benadering wys ook dat wetenskap nie uitgerangeer word asof dit vir ons niks te sê het nie....Die implikasie is dus dat in eenvormige navorsingstradisies teorieë selfs geverifieer en gefalsifiseer kan word, en dat konsensus bereik kan word oor die 'wese van dinge'. Navorsing binne eenderse tradisies is dus nie net moontlik nie, maar ook noodsaaklik, sodat meer betekenisvolle relasionele kennis sinvol gedeel kan word.

(Dill 1996:157)

Hence, the research procedure of multiple reflexive conversations was a mode used to establish the accountability and trustworthiness of this (postmodernistic) study (Kotzé 1997). Multiple reflexive conversations are the means which I used to hold myself accountable to the 'conversational participants'. This kind of accountability comprises a definite ethical stance (Von Glasersfeld 1991). The very persons involved, i.e. the 'conversational participants' co-construct the pastoral therapeutic discourses. They co-constructed and sanctioned the pastoral therapeutic discourses. Hence, the trustworthiness of this research was not established using modernistic 'external and objective criteria', nor was it established by means of generalisation.

In the final instance, the research report was given to some of the participants for their comments. Their commentary was, however, not incorporated in the final document because their comments only endorsed what I have learnt during the research process, i.e., their comments delivered no new insights. There were some participants, however, who did not want to read the final report because they felt they could not follow the technical language of the report.

In the next section I will reflect on issues concerning the research report.

3.7 Research report

3.7.1 Reporting in the light of a postmodernistic epistemology

The chosen postmodernistic epistemology has a number of implications for the research report. **Multiple reflexive conversations** are never a compilation of historical facts, nor are they a factual summary of a past conversation. According to postmodernistic social construction discourses as epistemology, multiple reflexive conversations cannot be a real and factual representation of what happened in therapy: 'The notion that the therapeutic process can be captured in language concepts disregards Derrida's contributions about fluidity and looseness of conceptual understanding' (Polkinghorne 1995:280).

The map is not the territory and this thesis is simply a map-making exercise where the territory is far more complex than the appearance of the map. The features of

the territory described in this thesis are only an approximation of the territory's distinctions and similarities, and so a flexible use of the map is required (Hurding 1995:294).

Hence, when I went back to the audio-taped version of a multiple reflexive conversation, I could not engage the original or true version. In reading the 'original' typed version of a multiple reflexive conversation, a **new meaning** is co-constructed between the reader and the text (Du Toit 1987; Le Roux 1996:50-52). The reader's own life stories co-constitute with the text a **new personalised version** that is never completed, never settled, never fixed and always temporarily (De Villiers 1991). The meaning co-constructed in multiple reflexive conversations is always a fleeting and temporary meaning. The 'original' version is never accessible and always lost for ever. Every re-reading of the original typed text of a multiple reflexive conversation is a new reading, i.e. a new co-constructed meaning (Le Roux 1996:50). Hence, the possibility of an objective reading of the typed versions of multiple reflexive conversations is a fallacy.

This implied that my internalised conversations could not represent or mirror:

- original **pastoral therapeutic conversations**,
- nor the **multiple reflexive conversations**,
- nor the **research process**.

Hence, this written account, i.e. the **research report**, cannot be an objective account of the research process. Consequently, in writing this thesis I decided to use the first person singular (cf. De Jongh van Arkel 1987:21).

SOME DOMINANT PREMISES OF NARRATIVE THERAPY

We are all storytellers, and the story that consumes us the most is the one we tell ourselves about our own lives.

(Penn 1991:45)

4.1 Introduction

It was not my intention, nor does the scope of this study allow me to rewrite all that has been written about narrative therapy. I will therefore, reflect only briefly on some of the dominant premises of narrative therapy.

4.2 The storied nature of human life

4.2.1 The (inter)personal view of the generation of self-narratives

In this section I will explain the **(inter)personal** stance of the generation of self-narratives. The word **'personal'** implies that a person retains his/her **self agency** (Parry 1991) in the generation of his/her self-narratives. The term **(inter)personal** stresses both the **personal agency** of people in the generation of their self-narrative(s) and **the relationally** determined properties of the self-narrative (Held 1995). Personally, I prefer the **(inter)personal** view.

The concept of the 'individual self' or **'identity'** is one of the concepts of modernistic psychology under discussion in postmodernistic social construction discourse. Concepts such as 'self-image' and 'self-concept' as a point of reference for any individual are queried and replaced by discourses emphasising the relational and linguistic properties of human beings embedded in a given (local) culture (Gergen 1994). In postmodernistic social construction discourse, we can

speak of the storied or narrative nature of human life, i.e. a person does not own an identity in an ontological sense. A person's identity is reflected by his/her self-narratives. Freedman and Combs (1996:34) stated: 'We conclude, then, that there is no such thing as an "essential" self. "Selves" are socially constructed through language and maintained in narrative'.

Generally speaking, the term 'self-narratives' refers to an individual's own, personal versions of the relationships between events over time as they relate to the self. Gergen's concept of self-narratives implies that they do not so much reflect reality as create a sense of what is true (Gergen 1994). These self-narratives constitute a person's identity.

I do not refer to a 'self-narrative' in the singular, but to 'self-narratives' in the plural. That is because "Life is multi-storied, not single storied" (White 1995:27).

In the literature, it is noticeable that authors differ as to the precise nature of the storied nature of human life (Sarbin 1986; White & Epston 1990; Gergen 1994; O'Hara 1995; Bohart 1995; White 1995; Mahrer 1995).

One's stories of identity are an evolving process that emerges in early childhood, which are not formed only within the family, but are also formed within other cultural systems, and in which religious systems play an important role (Fowler 1981, 1987). A person forms mythical narratives of him/herself and his/her world out of his/her individual and familial experience, out of his/her appropriation of the interpretations of faith and culture to which he/she has been exposed, and out of his/her interpretations of his/her unique social situation (Gerkin 1991). In this process, a person's religious experiences can play a major role. Vande Kemp (1991:39-77) gives a detailed account of the role of religion and religious systems in the formation of a person's 'identity' or stories.

The past and detailed events in a person's life are gone forever. All that is left are the memories that exist in narratives:

> Life, in this sense, is made of memory. Memory is its substance. Or rather:
> memory is what life becomes, virtually as soon as life begins. The present is
> constantly, almost furiously, becoming memory. By the time we go to bed

tonight, the events of the day will live within us not with the multiplicity of the
present but with the selective focus of memory - what we concentrated upon,
was important to us, will stand out, rather than the flux of the event....The
present only *stays* present for a fleeting instant, and then most of it is lost
entirely and irrecoverably - while some of it, a few impressions, take on new
life as memory [author's italics].

(Ventura 1996b:25)

In the light of postmodernistic social construction discourse as epistemology, it is
evident that these memories are not a 'true' representation of events or a mirror of
the past. Memories or narratives are relational and linguistic co-constructions with
mythical properties (Gerkin 1991:58). To describe these **narratives as 'mythical'**
is to validate the **non-realistic properties of these narratives**.

No individual can recall, retell or story every bit of all the events in his/her past
history (Kotzé & Botha 1994). Bound to the narrative nature of human life (Sarbin
1986), the individual, in telling his/her life story, has to select some of the events in
his/her life but has to leave out most of the events (White 1991; Ventura 1996b).
The individual's belief systems play a key role in this selection process (Parry
1991; Butler & Harper 1994; Monk 1996). The individual's belief systems constitute
which of the events or facts are selected to go into the story, and which are left out.
Furthermore, the same belief systems, which are influenced by and fostered by the
local culture, tend to distort the facts (Butler & Harper 1994).

Our observations cannot be trusted to represent the real, nor can our
rationality be assumed to mirror the order of the real. We have no sure
epistemological foundation upon which knowledge can be built. Our
experience is always filtered through interpretative schemes.

(Polkinghorne 1992, quoted by Held 1995:308).

It follows that linguistic systems themselves not only mediate between reality and a
person, they also **distort** what can be known (Held 1995:309; Winslade et al

1996:76). Neimeyer (1995) believed that the preoccupation with distortion is an objectivist obsession that is irrelevant in social construction discourses.

An individual, in constructing his/her life stories, is always in relationships with fellow humans. People with their own unique life experiences and belief systems, are partners in the co-construction of one another's stories. The selection process, the existence and function of belief systems, the distortions of selected facts and the narratives or metaphors of fellow humans and the discourses of the local culture are mostly unexamined and do not always operate on a conscious level. A person's life stories are never a mirror of the past reality. They are only a product of social discourses and thus of a co-construction process. In this sense, the historical facts of life are for ever lost. What is left, are narrative accounts of the events, and these narratives can never mirror the past.

These diverse narrative accounts of a life are neither stable nor fixed. They are always 'on the move'. Hence, the 'identity' of a person is not stable.

In this section I have explained the (inter)personal stance of the generation of a self-narrative. Personally, I prefer the (inter)personal view. In the next section I will reflect on the 'interpersonal' view of the generation of self-narratives.

4.2.2 The interpersonal or relational view of the generation of self-narratives

The word 'interpersonal' implies that social contexts determine self-narratives. Gergen (1994:186) is an exponent of the interpersonal or relational nature of the narratives in which people live:

> It will become increasingly clear that the narratives of the self are not fundamentally possessions of the individual but possession of relationships - products of social interchange. In effect, to be a self with a past and potential future is not to be an independent agent, unique and autonomous, but to be immersed in interdependency.

Gergen's (1994) concept of a person's self-narratives reflects a stance which argues **radical relational self-narratives** and that a person's identity is a **relational identity**. Gergen replaces the emphasis on the self-determining ego with social interchange to the extent that he could state that: People 'do not author their own lives' (Gergen 1994:188).

This point of view differs from that of two of the main proponents of narrative therapy, namely White and Epston (1990). Gergen queried the existence of a **core identity** in a person that is congruent and recognisable over time and space in favour of **relational** self-narratives. He proposed that a person possesses more than one life story and that the broader the repertoire of self-narratives, the greater is one's capacity for relatedness.

> Thus, even though it is common practice to view each person as possessing 'a life story', if selves are realised within social encounters there is good reason to believe that there is no one story to tell....we can construct the relationship among our life experiences in a variety of ways....The more capable we are in constructing and reconstructing our self-narrative, the more broadly capable we are in effective relationships [author's italics].

(Gergen 1994:202-203)

For Gergen (1994), one's relational identity is never a fixed entity. Instead, one's self-narratives are always validated or queried by the social interaction with one's fellow humans and the cultural environment. An 'honest' man who claims honesty as one of his self-narratives, is 'honest' as long as this self-narrative is validated or queried by social interaction with his wife or the receiver of revenue. To maintain and sustain a self-narrative such as 'honesty' is thus an ongoing, never-ending challenge of a person's engagement in relationships. The validation of self-narratives depends on the affirmation of others.

Hence, self-narratives are not a function of the self but of social interaction with other people, and in turn, their self-narratives are dependent on their interaction with other people. Self-narratives are maintained, sustained or altered in a network of reciprocating identities (Gergen 1994:209).

Gergen's radical view of relational self-narratives and his rejection of the idea that a person possesses a core identity is a controversial stance. O'Hara voiced her concern about Gergen's discourse on relational self-narratives and, in referring to the possibility of universal qualities in personality and identity, pleaded for a more balanced stance where other psychological discourses on identity are also validated (O'Hara 1995:296). Neimeyer (1995:351) felt that Gergen neglected the intriguing and personal processes by which individuals cultivate personal relationships or disconnect themselves from abusive or humiliating relationships.

I share O'Hara and Neimeyer's concern. Although Gergen's (1994) discourse on relational self-narratives makes a lot of sense, it may be a relational and **narrative reduction of the complexity of human life**. One could consider for a moment, the effects **of food** and other **chemical substances** on **human cognitive and emotional processes** - that is, on **storying** (Somer 1996).

So, for example, a sedative hypnotic such as benzodiazepine has several side effects like depression of mood; disorientation or confusion; paradoxical reactions such as acute hypercitable states combined with rage (Brandt 1993:958; Holderness & Straughan 1991:303). Certainly, the cognitions (or storying) in such occasions of rage are **not solely relationally** determined. In this case, the individual retains an **agency of self** that is in a certain sense **severed** from **relational** influences.

Furthermore, the influence of **caffeine** and of **alcohol** on cognition and emotions is well-known (Coleman et al 1987; Somer 1996). Here too, the individual retains an **agency of self** that is somehow **severed** from **relational** influences. The individual's agency of self plays a part in his/her storying of his/her narratives.

Food can also affect our cognition and emotions (Somer 1996). A person that has consumed **too much protein** experiences an imbalance in his/her body's amino acid **tryptophan**. The imbalance of tryptophan has an adverse effect on the levels of **serotonin**. Serotonin is the neuro-transmitter that is associated with depression (Levinthal 1983). Hence, even an **over consumption of protein** can influence an individual's thinking and cause a depressed mood and thoughts (Somer 1996:61).

Vitamin B6 deficiency is commonly associated with depression and is reported in as many as 79% of patients with depression, compared to only 29% of other patients. A deficiency of Vitamin B6 was found in suicidal patients (Somer 1996:139).

Furthermore, people suffering from **hypoglycemia** experience symptoms that include 'pallor, fatigue, irritability, inability to concentrate, headaches, palpitations, perspiration, anxiety, hunger, and shakiness or internal trembling' (Somer 1996:94). These are but a few examples of the **influence of food** on mood and cognition, quite apart form people's relationships.

Moreover, consider for a moment the effect of **sleep deprivation** on a person's cognition and emotions (Levinthal 1983:291-294). Hence, a person's self-narratives are also influenced by a multitude of biological and chemical factors - i.e. by the individual's own physiological brain processes and not by social relationships alone.

I have tried to show that Gergen's emphasis on the exclusively relational aspects of self-narratives may be a **reduction** of human life to discourses (Doherty 1991). I think that, when Gergen (1994) replaced the emphasis on the self-determining ego with social interchange to the point where he wrote that people 'do not author their own lives' (:188), he had gone too far. People's construction of stories (and of knowledge) may be mostly determined by the social relationships, but I think they are not only determined by relationships. The individual (and the food and chemicals he/she consumes) might play a role in the generation of stories.

> [T]herapists can **overemphasise language** and **conversational narrative** at the risk of **reducing** patterns of behaviour like physical abuse and incest to nothing more than the subjective and equivalent 'stories' of the participants....If it is not careful, **postmodernistic family therapy** may end up engaging in **just another modernist reduction** of family experience, this time to **discourse** and the deconstruction of discourse....Perhaps a little modernist expertise is helpful at times [bold mine].
>
> (Doherty 1991:42)

Many social constructionist scholars differ from Gergen's (1994) exclusive and radical view (O'Hara 1995; Held 1995; Neimeyer 1995; White & Epston 1990). Marais (1993, quoted by Dill 1996) also differed from Gergen's discourse on self-narratives. However, Marais neglected the social and relational aspects of self-narratives when he stressed the inherent and natural inborn linguistic abilities of a person.

> Human's narrative competency is linked to their linguistic potential. Just as a person has an inborn linguistic potential, he (she) also has a narrative potential. Because he (she) thinks and experiences in terms of language, he (she) is continually busy naming his (her) environment. He (she) combines and interprets his (her) experiences by creating a narrative out of his (her) experiences....Through this narrative process he (she) is grouping diverse perceptions and moulding it into an intelligible form. The activity of storying is thus a mode of linking the naïve experiences of individual entities with one another and with the self and interpreting them.
>
> (Marais 1993, quoted by Dill 1996:88)[17]

The above quote emphasises the following perspectives on self-narratives:

- historical events are combined (i.e. through a process of selection) and interpreted in the course of the generation of self-narratives;
- every self-narrative is a personal narrative that exists only momentarily;
- self-narratives are not the absolute truth, but rather interpretative and thus mythical accounts referring to realities.

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[17] Die mens se narratiewe vermoë word aan sy linguistiese vermoëns gekoppel. Soos wat 'n mens 'n aangebore linguistiese vermoë het, het hy ook 'n narratiewe vermoë. Omdat hy talig dink en ervaar, is hy voortdurend besig om die wêreld om hom te benoem. Hy kombineer en interpreteer so sy ervarings deur 'n narratief saam te stel uit dit wat hy ervaar het....Deur die narratief is hy besig om verskillende persepsies saam te groepeer en in 'n verstaanbare vorm te giet. Die aktiwiteit van vertelling is dus 'n wyse waarop naïewe ervaring van individuele entiteite in die werklikheid met mekaar en met die self in verband gebring en geïnterpreteer word.

(Marais 1993, quoted by Dill 1996:88)

Kotzé and Kotzé (1993:364) too differed in some aspects from Gergen (1994) and stated their view on self-narratives as follows:

> People give meaning to their lives through the stories they construe about their lives. Their lives are much richer than the stories they have constructed about them. On the one hand, people construe life stories that are based on their experiences of life, on the other hand, these life stories constitute their lives. Hence, lives and stories are linked recursively in relation to one another. The stories of people on their own lives are made up of diverse discourses that vary in dominance. The more dominant discourses in the story play a more prominent role in constituting people's lives and in the storying of their lives than less dominant or alternative discourses.[18]

When one reviews Kotzé and Kotzé's view in the above paragraph, it is evident that:

- a person retains an agency of self and construes his/her own stories;
- self-narratives are a reduction of life events;
- self-narratives constitute not only people's lives, but also constitute the continuing formation of self-narratives;
- certain discourses in self-narratives may dominate other discourses and will play a more decisive role in:
    - a) the constitution of a person's life;
    - b) in the selection of events that will be incorporated in the ongoing story or stories;
    - c) in the interpretation of those selected events;
- the latitude and scope of these dominant discourses determine a person's functioning in life. These new 'dominant-self-narrative-constituted-life-

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[18] Mense gee betekenis aan hulle lewens deur die stories wat hulle oor hulle lewens konstrueer. Hierdie lewens is veel ryker as die stories wat hulle daaroor konstrueer. Enersyds konstrueer mense lewenstories gebaseer op hulle ervaring van die lewe, terwyl hierdie stories andersyds weer die lewe van mense vorm. Lewe en stories staan dus rekursief in relasie tot mekaar. Die stories van mense oor hulle lewens word deur 'n verskeidenheid diskoerse wat wissel in dominansie gekenmerk. Die meer dominante diskoerse in die storie speel 'n groter rol in die vorming van die lewe en die stories daaroor as die minder dominante of alternatiewe diskoerse.

(Kotzé & Kotzé 1993:364)

events' in their turn lead to a continuation and maybe expansion of the 'dominant self-narratives', which in its turn influence the new life events.

In this section I have explored the storied nature of human life. Although I have shown that Gergen's (1994) radical discourses on the **relational** social construction of self-narratives may be a **reduction of human life** to discourses, I will adhere to my chosen epistemology, i.e. postmodernistic social construction discourse.

In Chapter 16, under the headings **Pastoral therapy and the biological-psychological aspects of an affair** and **Pastoral therapy and extra-marital affairs as an addiction**, I will again refer to the danger that narrative therapy can reduce human life to discourses.

4.2.3 Human problems as problem-saturated stories

People's stories have the potential not to be helpful but to be harmful (Freedman & Combs 1996:17). People's problems can be seen as discourses (situated in a local culture) that oppress and subjugate them. Discourses are not neutral. They embody power and can do something to people (Lowe 1991:45). Hence, people are people and problems are problem-saturated stories (White 1991:37). These kinds of problem-saturated stories are often called the dominant story, i.e. the story may dominate the story teller to such an extent that they overwhelm the story teller.

This reasoning of narrative therapy enables the therapist to view people hopefully and positively. It opens the way to thinking about problems in externalising terms (White & Epston 1990). Hence, the objective of a narrative approach in therapy is not so much to solve people's inherent problems but rather to deconstruct those discourses that are subjugating the story teller (White 1995).

In the next section, the reader will see that a narrative approach in therapy is actually focused on people's stories, i.e. the therapy is about language.

4.3 Postmodernistic epistemology and narrative therapy

4.3.1 If people live by stories, then therapy is about stories, i.e. about language

The upcoming postmodernistic social construction discourses offer new possibilities in the fields of psychological theory and of therapeutic practice (Gergen 1982:25). Family therapists today challenge the idea that it is an individual's psyche that is malfunctioning. Individual pathology is not so much a matter of individual and inner flaws, it is rather a question of **local linguistic problems**. From this perspective, individual problems, or a phenomenon such as an affair, are not a matter of intrinsic individual pathology, it is **a matter of local linguistic practices**. The **local family system**, the local educational, local political, local economic and **local cultural practices** embody the linguistic structures which embed those beliefs, **in narrative form**, that hold the individual captive. However, it is worth noting that these concepts are not inherent to psychology, but to other human sciences such as literature, philosophy, anthropology and art (Hoffman 1992:7; Kvale 1992b:47).

The paradigm shift from a modernistic to a postmodernistic paradigm with its accompanying hermeneutics, epistemology, and the advance of narrative therapy has radically changed the scene of therapeutic practice. The focus of therapy has now shifted to a person's languaging, i.e. a person's storying.

> Here there has been a shift from the study of the psyche of the individual self to studying the family as a **linguistic system**. **Pathology** is no longer seen as residing in consciousness, nor in the unconscious, but **in the structures of language**. Indeed the very term 'psychotherapist' seems to be inadequate, for the therapists do not attempt to heal some interior 'psyche', but **work with language** and, as masters of conversation, heal with words [bold mine].

(Kvale 1992b:49).

Hence, **therapy is about languaging,** it concerns storying (Zimmerman & Dickerson 1994). Language is always changing. Meanings are always unstable and on the move (Freedman & Combs 1996:29). In the next section I will deal with the particular characteristic or propium of narrative therapy, i.e. with the deconstruction of stories.

4.3.2 The deconstruction of stories, 'unique outcomes' and re-authoring

According to postmodernistic social construction discourse as epistemology, people construe the 'realities' in which they live by means of **linguistic constructions.** Family therapists argue that it is people's verbal descriptions of their family interactions that determine how they experience them. The implication for therapy is that if the therapist can change how an individual languages a problem, the problem will change (Bohart 1995). This is what is meant by the deconstruction of stories.

White (1991) acknowledges that he does not utilise the concept 'deconstruction' in the strict sense used by Derrida. Referring to Bourdieu (1988), White explained his own version of deconstruction in the following words:

> According to my rather loose definition, deconstruction has to do with procedures that subvert taken-for-granted-realities and practices; those so-called 'truths' that are split off from the condition and context of their production, those disembodied ways of speaking that hide their biases and prejudices, and those familiar practices of self and of relationship that are subjugating persons' lives. Many of the methods of deconstruction render strange these familiar and everyday taken-for-granted realities and practices by objectifying them. In this sense, the methods of deconstruction are methods that 'exoticize the domestic'.

> (White 1991:27)

According to Parry (1991:43), the deconstruction of a story is never aimed at the story as such, but at the belief systems that are encapsulated within the story. If

one deconstructs the story, one deconstructs the beliefs. It is these taken-for-granted beliefs or discourses (which are embedded in local culture) that shape people's lives. It is thus of the utmost importance to take note of those **discourses in our culture** that co-constitute and sustain **extra-marital affairs** (cf. Chapter 8).

Narrative therapy never follows 'flop proof' recipe. Instead, it is a way of thinking about how people language their problems and how to deconstruct these linguistic constructions using a process of deconstruction (White 1989, 1991, 1995; Wylie 1994b; White & Epston 1990; Monk et al 1996).

Throughout the process of deconstruction, the narrative therapist is on the look-out for **'unique outcomes'**, i.e. those preferred ways of being that are neglected and are un-storied (White & Epston 1990). The dominant story is deconstructed and a preferred outcome is **re-authored** by cultivating these neglected and un-storied events (Freedman & Combs 1996).

4.3.3 The not-knowing position of the therapist

If the client's narrative (and the deconstruction of that specific narrative) is the focus of therapy, then it follows that the pastoral therapist does not know beforehand what the content of any given conversation will be. Hence, the pastoral therapist is not free to exchange the client's narrative for his/her own (pastoral therapeutic) narrative, i.e. the pastoral therapist cannot exchange the client's narrative for the pastoral therapist's 'expert narrative'.

> Constructivism elevates the client's view of reality...to paramount importance
> in the therapeutic process. The application of constructivism to therapy makes
> the client's meaning system hierarchically superior to the therapist's theoretical
> orientation and/or beliefs. Constructivism, therefore, provides a strong
> rationale for respecting the pre-eminence of the client's world view. In practical
> terms, it emphasises the client's personal meaning system as the impetus for
> therapy.
>
> (Solovey & Duncan 1992, quoted by Held 1995:312)

Minuchin (1991:47) expressed the same idea as follows:

> Constructivist therapy argues that in the absence of any objective truths with
> which to anchor our values and conceptions of mental health, therapy is no
> more than an exchange of stories between therapist and client. In a world
> where all truths are relative, the narratives of the therapist have no more claim
> to objectivity or scientific truth than those of the client.

(Minuchin 1991:47)

These ideas have led to the coining of a concept typical of the position of narrative
therapy: **'the not-knowing position of the therapist'** (Anderson & Goolishian
1992:27). Modernistic therapeutic models, by contrast, operate from the vantage
point that the therapist is the expert:

> Structural family therapists emphasised the system over the individual, and the
> present over the past. And because they had expert knowledge of family
> transactional patterns, structural family therapists, like Bowen, strategic and
> psychodynamic family therapists - all modernist in claiming objective, expert
> knowledge - believed it was their responsibility to establish the goals and set
> the direction for therapy.

(Doherty 1991:40)

A narrative approach in therapy does not know beforehand what the content of a
person's story is, nor does it know beforehand which discourses are subjugating
the client (White 1997). Within a narrative approach, the therapist remains,
however, the **expert of postmodernistic epistemology**, i.e. of the **process of
storying** (White & Epston 1990; White 1991, 1995; Parry 1991; Freedman &
Combs 1996) and he/she remains the **expert on discourses** and what discourses
do to people's storying of their own life stories (White 1991; Lowe 1991; Wylie
1994; Monk 1996). He/she is also an **expert on the process of deconstruction**
(White 1989, 1991, 1995; Wylie 1994b; White & Epston 1990; Monk et al 1996;
Simon 1985; Freedman & Combs 1996). A narrative therapist is the **expert on the
linguistic processes of therapy** (Freedman & Combs 1996:44).

The not-knowing position of the therapist must not **mislead us** to assume that **the client** has his/her story as a fixed and known entity in his/her mind, ready for despatch (Freedman & Combs 1996). A client's telling of a story is a re-telling, but every re-telling is the construction of a new and alternative story. Narrative therapists are '**not-knowing**' because they are **searching** for the 'not yet said'.

> [Narrative therapy is] a process of expanding and saying the 'unsaid' - the development, through dialogue, of new themes and narratives and, actually, the creation of new histories.

> (Anderson & Goolishian 1988:380).

The 'not-yet-said' is thus not only unknown to the therapist, even the story teller does not know beforehand the 'not-yet-said'. This joint searching for the 'not-yet-said' co-constitutes the 'not-knowing position of the therapist'.

Genograms can be used by **expert** family therapists to locate and diagnose problems. The next section reflects on the use of genograms in a narrative approach in therapy and how it relates to the 'not-knowing position' of the narrative therapist.

4.3.4 The genogram and storying in narrative therapy

Family-of-origin therapy is famous for its use of genograms (Framo 1976; Framo 1992; Fine & Hovestad 1987; Beck 1987; Doherty 1991; Freeman 1992; Richardson 1984). **Family-of-origin therapy** is, however, bound to the **positivist epistemology** of the modernistic paradigm. According to family-of-origin therapy, the therapist is the **expert** who can examine a genogram objectively and recognise certain objective relationship patterns between family members - patterns which stretch over several generations (McGoldrick & Gerson 1985). These objective relationship patterns function as **truth descriptions** of an ontic reality. The modernistic therapist will, in the light of these descriptions, diagnose the problem, identify the patient and **strategically structure** the course of the therapy. The therapist functions as the expert who determines the agenda of the therapy.

His/her expertise evolves into a power - a power that labels the client and determines the therapy.

Brown (1991:15), a marital therapist who utilises genograms in working with extra-marital affairs, works from a family-of-origin perspective and uses a modernistic epistemology:

> Affairs are intricately tied to family patterns, particularly in those areas where we have unfinished business. Patterns of avoidance, seduction, secrecy, or betrayal in our families of origin lay the groundwork for turning to an affair when there is a problem. An affair is more likely among those whose parents had an affair....If the issues underlying the parent's affair are not addressed, as most often seems the case, family members are left on their own to make sense and cope with the affair and its aftermath, sometimes not knowing that an affair is at the heart of their unease. When the family history includes a pattern of affairs, the current affair is clearly a repetition of family-of-origin issues.

A narrative approach in pastoral therapy utilises a genogram not for its objective patterns or as an instrument for diagnosing the problem, but rather as a **handy storying** tool. A genogram provides an opportunity to explore the family-of-origin's **narratives** which **co-constitute meaning**. A person who seeks meaning is born into a transgenerational reality of relationships and is inevitably bound to those relationships for meaning. That is, the transgenerational themes, myths, events, stories, cultural and familial rituals and their accompanying discourses co-construct the life stories of individual family members (Winslade et al 1996).

People's life stories are not only constituted by their family-of-origin story. People are exposed to a multitude of other relationships at diverse levels of society. All these relationships and the accompanying events co-constitute people's life stories. I think that pastoral therapists must be aware of the genogram's potential dangerous tendency to reduce people's life stories to family-of-origin issues alone.

4.3.5 Couples in therapy: Multivariate stories, multivariate 'realities'

Extra-marital affairs inevitably involve a married couple and thus marital therapy. I will therefore reflect on the relation between the two spouses' conflicting stories and postmodernistic social construction discourse as epistemology.

All marital therapists have one thing in common. They listen to a husband and wife's stories and are astonished about the extent to which two narratives about the same relationship can differ and even conflict. The two spouses' stories about each other can differ enormously. It may even sound as if they are not storying the same marriage. 'The distortions can be astounding; people might not recognise their own marriage from their partner's description of it...' (Pittman 1990:232). Misunderstandings and disagreements between spouses are so common and occur so frequently, that these differences emphasise the **relational aspect of the social construction of meaning** (Gergen 1994:209).

The fundamental premise of dialogue is that each spouse's narrative has merit. The couple may disagree with each other but they cannot deny each other's narratives as legitimate social constructions of unattainable realities. They may react against each other's narratives and feel rejected, but they cannot invalidate each other's 'reality' as it is constructed in language. A genuine dialogue requires both spouses to have the courage, not only to disclose their self-narratives, but also to embrace the merit in the other's story (Krasner and Joyce 1991).

To my mind, Anderson and Goolishian (1988:378) were operating using a postmodernistic epistemology when they said the following:

> The conceptualization of reality as a multiverse of meanings created in dynamic social exchange and conversation interaction moves us away from concerns about issues of unique truths and into a multiverse that includes a diversity of conflicting versions of the world. Within this framework there are no 'real' external entities, only communicating, languaging human individuals.

Simon (1985:36) interviewed the biologist Humberto Maturana in this regard.
Maturana said:

> I am not saying that the different descriptions that the family make are different
> views of the same system. I am saying that there is no one way that the
> system is; that there is no absolute, objective family. I am saying that for each
> family member, there is a different family, and that each of these is absolutely
> valid.

Hence, when a pastoral therapist listens to two spouses storying their marital
experience, then there are not multiple, but rather **multivariable 'marriages'** on
the table: The wife, husband and the therapist construe each as a personal
narrative **that is never completed, never settled, nor fixed and always
preliminary.** The 'real' relationship is unfathomable (Kotzé & Botha 1994:390). In
the pastoral therapeutic encounter we are not working with the marriage, we are
working with, however relative they may be, diverse stories of marriage, all equally
valid but all different linguistic constructions. 'All relations could be said to be
"distorted" by discourse, including those within counselling' (Winslade et al
1996:76).

Since this research was conducted as **pastoral** therapy, and because **pastoral**
therapy has a vested interest in theological ethics, I will now turn to narrative
therapy's view of ethics.

4.3.6 *Narrative therapy and moral responsibility*

Narrative therapy departs from **traditional** psychotherapy's **impartial** moral stance
(Doherty 1995).

> [Narrative therapy] is a sharp move away from individualism, and certainly
> challenges some strongly held Western ideas about personal responsibility.
> The constructionist account suggests that the social rather than the individual
> realm is the primary ground from which the human being may be understood.
> But this does not mean that we can shrug off moral responsibility for the way

the world is. Far from it. In fact, we are participants in producing other people's worlds as well as our own.

(Drewery & Winslade 1996:41)

White (1991:25) argued that, through externalising conversations whereby the person is differentiated and distanced from the problem, the person attains a better position or identity to take responsibility for his/her actions. The externalising of the problem implies that a person no longer has to take action 'against his own "nature", and...is now able to take entire responsibility for the abuse that he had perpetrated on others' (White 1991:25).

> One criticism that we hear of externalizing conversations is that they might encourage people to abdicate responsibility for their behavior. We've found just the opposite. Externalizing conversations make it possible for many people to experience themselves as choosing responsibility for the first time. When a problem defines someone, there is little [he] she can do...When a problem is external to a person, [he] she can take responsibility for how [he] she interacts with it.
>
> (Freedman & Combs 1996:62)

A narrative way of working requires an awareness of the **ethical implications of the outcome of the co-construction** in the therapeutic conversation, because the therapist can no longer rely on modernistic psychological truths that can handle the ethical dilemma, irrespective of the content of the conversation (Monk 1996). The narrative therapist and the client are **co-authors**, i.e. they share the responsibility for the outcome of the conversation and its ethical implications for the lives of (other) people (Winslade, Crocket & Monk 1996).

Hence, narrative therapy is an ethical endeavour from beginning to end and, in this sense, it links up with pastoral therapy as an ethical enterprise. In the next chapter, I will reflect on **theology, practical theology and pastoral therapy as academic discourses.**

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THEOLOGY, PRACTICAL THEOLOGY AND PASTORAL THERAPY AS ACADEMIC DISCOURSES

5.1 Introduction: The link between pastoral therapy and theology

There is a vital link between pastoral therapy and theology. In the pastoral conversation, the pastoral therapist has to interpret, i.e. to theologise within the concrete situation of the individual seeking counsel (Veltkamp 1988:201). Clinebell (1984:50) stated: 'It is in this sense that pastoral care and counselling are ways of *doing theology*' [author's italics]. Pastoral therapy is probably the one situation in which the theological skills of theologians are tested to their very limits.

Hence, in the following sections I will reflect and focus on the implications of postmodernistic epistemology on theology, practical theology and pastoral therapy.

5.2 Theology as academic discourse

5.2.1 The object of theology

The scope of this study does not allow me to explore the 'object of theology', extensively. It is a fascinating subject in the light of postmodernistic social construction discourse as epistemology. Since this study focuses on pastoral therapy, I shall, however, include notes on theology, then move on to practical theology and eventually to pastoral therapy in more detail.

Theology is a logos about Theos. God, however, cannot be the object of scientific study (Louw 1993). Any word about God is, rather, a statement of faith. Nevertheless, although we cannot make God the object of study, we can study discourses about faith. Faith can be depicted in many ways. For the purposes of

this research, we can settle for Fowler's (1987:56) definition of faith. According to
Fowler, faith involves three important kinds of linguistic constructions:

1. It involves a patterned knowing (which we sometimes call belief).
2. It involves a patterned valuing (which we sometimes call commitment or
   devotion).
3. And it involves patterned constructions of meaning, usually in the form of
   an underlying narrative or story.

Although it is not possible to make God the object of theology, it is possible to
make people's language and actions, that reflect their **reality coram Deo** (cf.
Kotzé 1992), the object of scientific study (Louw 1993). Theology must not be
confused with faith and cannot make declarations about faith. **Theology** consists
of the critical and reflexive discourses of a believing community about its **faith in
God** (Pieterse 1990). Within the reformed tradition, the object of theology is the
revelation of God as it is depicted in the Bible (Jonker 1996).

Theology, like any other science, utilises theories, or rather discourses, in its
theological enterprise. The **existential experience** of faith is a reality for many
believers. But to explain this reality about faith is a **difficult task**.

Van Huyssteen's (1995:11) reflection is apposite in this regard:

> In theology too, our rational inquiry and quest for intelligibility will always
> include a response to what we experience, and empirical fit, or experiential
> adequacy, thus becomes one of the most important epistemic values that
> shape the rationality of theological reflection. The high degree of personal
> involvement in religious and theological theorising not only reveals the
> relational character of our being in the world, but epistemologically implies the
> mediated and interpretative character of all religious experience. What is
> revealed here is the epistemic and explanatory role of an ultimate religious
> commitment, which certainly is no irrational retreat to commitment, but, on the
> contrary, reveals the committed nature of all rational thought, and thus the
> fiduciary rootedness of all rationality.

Theology shares with science the contextual, experiential and interpretative dimension of all human knowledge. Faith and theology are narrative ways of looking at the world. The natural sciences are also narrative views of reality (cf. Brueggemann 1993). However, the experiential and interpretative nature of theological knowledge is more complex than the natural sciences. Faith and theology differ from the sciences in a crucial aspect: theology involves not just a way of looking at the world, it involves a very personal trust in God (Van Huyssteen 1996).

Reflecting on Johnson's (1993) study on divine presence and transcendence, Van Huyssteen (1995:12) wrote:

> [A]t the root of all religious imagery lies an experience of the mystery of God, potentially given to us in all experience where there is no exclusive zone, no special realm, which alone may be called religious. In this way the historical world becomes a sacrament of divine presence and activity, even if only as a fragile possibility.

In trying to express religious experience, the believer and the theologian are confined to **metaphorical language** (Van Niekerk 1994; Nicol 1994b; Deist 1996). There is among many conditions, however, one vital and necessary condition: this contemporary metaphorical language must be closely related to the metaphorical language in the **theological tradition** (Deist 1987; Van Niekerk 1994).

I found Gerkin's (1991:60) description of a **tradition** valuable:

> Traditions are not simply the icons of a dead past. Rather, traditions are seen as living, dynamic, historical processes that move and change in the interaction between events and meanings over time, while remaining rooted in the primal images and metaphors of their historic beginnings.

Hence, our theological tradition does not only include the Bible. Our theological tradition is an ongoing historical process in which we are not only the bearers of

the tradition but also the transmitters of the tradition, because we see ourselves as co-workers with God in His ongoing work and we share in the generation process of the theological discourses (Nicol 1994b). Hence, we are the *tradente* of the tradition (Nicol 1994b:4).

The ultimate question is, however, not whether we have a knowledge of the theological tradition, but whether we experience God and, in the quest for religious experience and in trying to verbalise that experience, whether we rely on the contours of that tradition. Such verbalised experiences of God are never first-hand or ontologically uncovered truths. They always resemble relational and subjective linguistic constructions in which signifiers signify to a never-ending string of other signifiers or texts (Du Toit 1987). They are always mediated (Van Huyssteen 1995) experiences because we experience God only through our theological tradition, a book, a sermon, nature, culture or in prosperity or adversity. I subscribe Nicol's comment in this regard: 'It is impossible for man to experience God directly' (Nicol 1994b:1)[19]. These experiences exist only in a narrative form. These narratives comprise the object of theology.

5.2.2 Theology as an open-ended historical process

All theological discourses are built on root metaphors and depict faith-related realities in terms of historical metaphors. We are, however, capable of forgetting the history of our own authorship of theological discourses. This reification of metaphors results in confusion where theological dogma is confused with 'reality' (Freedman & Combs). When this happens, the reality that is reflected in the discourses is reduced and restricted and the birth of religious ideology is immanent. It is therefore one of the tasks of theology to critically analyse the relation between metaphors and reality to prevent the formation of ideologies (Van Niekerk 1994).

Deist (1987) reflected on the unstable nature of metaphors and their implications for theology. In the following paragraphs I will reflect on the 'unsettled' nature of theological metaphors.

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[19] "Naakte Godservaring is nie 'n moontlikheid vir die mens nie" (Nicol 1994b:1).

Deist (1987) stated that the hermeneutics of a historical theology, where the text is viewed as unrepeatable, renders the text mute. This kind of hermeneutics must be supplemented by a second existential hermeneutic reading of the text in order to become the contemporary word of God.

Deist (1987) argued as follows: because God acted in history, we are bound to and dependent on history and its metaphors when we talk about God. The historical hermeneutic reading of the text can explain how God was experienced to have acted **in history,** but not how God is today. For Deist (1987), the problem of our theology lies in our view of history. We view history as a succession of fixed time settings, or as one canonical and eventually finally congealed era. Our hermeneutics have solidified and frozen the revelation of God in history.

Reflecting on the post-Newtonian view of time and space, Deist (1987) did not view time as successive time slots. Time is rather related to the relativity theory of physics and therefore time always implies movement and the relative and relational 'stance' of moving objects. Objects never occupy a fixed space, they are always on the move and their position can only be described in relation to other ever moving objects. Hence, to grasp the meaning of events in history, one has to keep the movement, relativity, and relational aspects of events in mind. A vital link exits between a culture's contemporary language about everyday life and a culture's contemporary language about God. There is a vital link between a culture's changing metaphors about everyday life and the changing metaphors in its theology. This assumption has led Deist (1987) to state the following: theological discourses are always on the move, never settled, nor fixed and always preliminary. People's understanding of God changes in relation to the metaphorical changes in their culture. This explains why the Deuteronomistic history differs from the Chronistic history, why these two texts differ in their theology about God. People live coram Deo in contemporary events in time and are engaged in an **ongoing process** of **generating new metaphors** and disregarding old metaphors **while holding on to the text.**

Deist (1987) thus disregarded the distinction between the generation history and the reception history of the biblical text. The whole historical process of the generation of theological metaphors is one and the same process. This is true for

the generation history of the biblical text and it is true for the reception history of the biblical text, and this **process is a never ending and presently ongoing process while holding on to the biblical text**.

Gerkin (1986:48) also adhered to the notion of an open-ended historical process, and I agree with him:

> The biblical story of God is an open-ended story. It does not stop with the end of the collection of biblical texts. Rather it concerns the activity of God in all of history, a story that continues in the present and is to be fulfilled in the future.

Deist (1987) related the **ongoing nature of the generation of theological metaphors** to a **post-Newtonian view of time**. I would rather say that the ongoing nature of the generation of theological discourses reflects and confirms the ideas of postmodernistic epistemology. **I distinguish between two aspects of postmodernistic epistemology that relate to the ongoing nature of theological discourses:**

Firstly, discourses utilise metaphors and metaphors have extraordinary power to re-describe reality. Every metaphor interprets and alters the previous metaphors and hence, interprets and alters the previous reality the original metaphors referred to. Theological metaphors do not represent reality. If we assume that metaphors re-describe reality, we must assume that any newly re-described reality is in itself a novel 'reality'. With metaphors we experience a metamorphosis of both language and reality (Van Niekerk 1994). When we experience God in our lives and express this experience in language, we enter into an ongoing metaphor-generating process in which both our discourses and the reality change. Theology comprises a creative component that never reaches finality and is always preliminary, always appealing for new interpretation. Our creeds are also part of this ongoing interpretative theological reflection (Spangenberg 1995). The Belhar confession is a recent example of the ongoing and interpretative nature of theological discourses.

Secondly, bearing in mind postmodernistic social construction discourse as epistemology, knowledge of the Bible does not exist *per se*. The content/knowledge of the Bible is not like water in a reservoir that is ready to be

poured into a container/person (cf. Kotzé 1994; Freedman & Combs 1996; Monk et al 1996). Thus, knowledge of the biblical text cannot be 'consumed'. A true and objective reading of the biblical text is impossible. All knowledge, and thus knowledge of the biblical text, is a result of relational social construction processes. An individual, with the contemporary discourses of his/her own life and culture, enters into a dialogue with the biblical text, and **construes a new contemporary, momentary** (Du Toit 1987), **and personal text** for him/herself. Every individual reader of the biblical text construes his/her own personal 'text' in new contexts, so much so that it is not possible to distinguish the original text from the individual's own text (De Villiers 1991).

Le Roux, citing Gadamer (1990) and Vandebulcke (1973), utilised the metaphors of 'games', 'art' and 'feast' to reflect on the process of exegesis - that is, the process of reading a text. I would like to quote Le Roux at length:

> In the endless game of reading and never-ending engagement with texts, nothing is fixed. Again and again we repeat the process of reading and looking, but the true meaning eludes us. Despite our starting over and over, the truth...cannot be grasped completely. In fact, with every repeated reading, another meaning emerges....Every time things look different. Although the link with the original text exists, it continually achieves and accrues diverse new meanings....A repeated reading is not the repetition of the original....Every interpretation is an independent and legitimate interpretation. In other words: every repetition is just as original as the original text....In addition, with every reading of the text, another meaning is discovered.
>
> (Le Roux 1996:50)[20]

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[20] In die eindelose leesspel en in die nimmereindigende omgang met tekste is niks vas nie. Oor en oor word die lees- en kykproses herhaal, maar die ware betekenis bly die mens ontglip. Ten spyte van begin en weer begin, kan die waarheid...net nooit volmaak gevat word nie. Trouens, met elke herhaalde lees, kom 'n ander betekenis na vore....Elke keer lyk dinge anders. Alhoewel die band met die oorspronklike wel bestaan, verkry dit telkens 'n verskeidenheid van nuwe gestaltes....Herhaalde lees is nie die herhaling van die oorspronklike nie...Elke interpretasie is 'n onafhanklike en geldige interpretasie. Anders gestel: die herhaling is net so oorspronklik soos die oorspronklike werk...Daar kom nog iets by: in elke lees van die teks word 'n ander betekenis ontdek.

(Le Roux 1996:50)

Will this lead to relativism? For Le Roux (1996:51-52), and I agree with him, this stance does not imply **relativism** or an undermining of truth. Using the metaphor of 'playing with the text,' Le Roux (1996:50)[21] wrote:

> A playful engagement with the text does not lead to fixed truths that are recognisable to all. What happens instead, is that we look differently at the text every time and can play with diverse possibilities of meaning. And this is not a form of relativism, but of genuine understanding. We only really understand once we play with the text in such a way that time and again it opens up new and other possibilities.

Roux (1996) and Dill (1996) considered **relativism** a phenomenon that is indicative of a modernistic approach rather than of postmodernistic epistemology. 'Relativism has always parasitised on objectivism. Hence, if we have overcome Cartesian objectivism, then we have also got rid of relativism' (Dill 1996:71)[22]. In terms of the postmodernistic epistemology, I regard the issue of relativism as part of a modernistic search for objective truth that is irrelevant in a postmodernistic epistemology.

On the issue of the **personal text(s)** that a reader constructs, Le Roux (1996:51)[23] - still using the 'playing with the text' metaphor - wrote:

> To play with texts, is not to undermine the truth. Meaning evolves out of a playful struggle with the text. It is just different. It does not produce a truth that

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[21] 'n Spelende omgang met die teks lei nie tot vaste waarhede wat vir almal herkenbaar is nie. Wat eerder gebeur, is dat ons telkens anders na die teks kyk en met verskillende betekenismoontlikhede kan speel. En dit is nie 'n vorm van relativisme nie, maar van egte verstaan. Ons verstaan eers eg wanneer die spel met die teks telkens nuwe en ander moontlikhede open.

(Le Roux 1996:50)

[22] Relativisme het nog altyd geparasiteer op objektivisme. Gevolglik, as ons Cartesiaanse objektivisme oorkom het, het ons terselfdertyd afgereken met relativisme (Dill 1996:71).

[23] Om met tekste te speel, is geen ondermyning van die waarheid nie. In die spelende worsteling met 'n teks groei daar betekenis. Dit is net anders. Dit is nie 'n heldere klare waarheid wat vir almal toeganklik en aanvaarbaar is nie. Dit is nie 'n waarheid wat empiries-klinies en tot almal se bevrediging geabstraheer en beskryf kan word nie. *Hierdie waarheid is 'n waarheid-vir-my* (italics mine).

(Le Roux 1996:51)

emerges through any rigorous application of a method. It is not a clear truth that is accessible and acceptable to all. It is not a truth that can be described and abstracted empirically-clinically to the satisfaction of all people. This truth is a truth-for-me.

I would like to call this 'truth-for-me' a personal text, i.e. a **post-canonical, socially constructed and personal text or discourse that is never completed, never settled, nor fixed and always preliminary - even in the very presence of the canonical biblical text.** Surely, an objective reality, and thus an objective canonical text does exist, but our socially constructed discourses about the objective canonical text do not match, nor resemble, nor mirror the canonical text. As we have already seen, theological discourses are always 'on the move', never settled, nor fixed and always preliminary. People's understanding of God changes in relation to the metaphorical changes in their culture, even **while they hold on to a canonical biblical text** (Van Aarde 1995b).

To conclude: The **'object' of theology** can never be a canonical text because a **univocal** canonical text simply does not 'exist' in itself. The text can only exist in relation to humans as linguistic beings. Within a postmodernistic social construction discourse as epistemology, the text can only exist as a **partner** in social construction discourses where the (contemporary and culturally bound) reader, in dialogue with the canonical text, construes his/her **own post-canonical, socially constructed and personal text that is never completed** - while **holding on to the biblical text.**

The canonical text is, as partner in a dialogue, a **normative** discourse (Roux 1996), but epistemologically speaking, it cannot be a singular and exclusive voice (Dill 1996). The discourses of a multitude of theological commentaries, theological books, sermons, personal life stories, etc., co-construct theological discourses as **open-ended and ongoing** discourses.

5.2.3 Theological discourses and contemporary postmodernistic culture

Theology does not only rely on the contemporary discourses in any culture for its constructions, it is also an activity that reflects on the meaning of the Scriptures **for** contemporary culture. A change in culture, and thus in interpretative paradigms, will inevitably lead to different theological discourses. To my mind, this phenomenon is powerfully expressed in the theological discourses of the Dutch Reformed Church of the pre- and post apartheid eras in South Africa. This implies that **theology cannot be a closed and timeless system of knowledge**.

> A theology that pretends to be timeless and a closed system of theological knowledge, unaffected by cultural shifts, runs the risk of becoming obsolete, and is itself a reaction to preceding cultural developments. Isolating theology from culture is a coping strategy by theology to deal with challenges that culture poses to a specific theological interpretation of the world.

> (Rossouw 1993:895).

Hence, the emerging postmodernistic culture cannot be avoided by the theological community and it requires fresh and urgent reflection, not to restore theology's former position but with the conviction that theology has a unique new contribution to make in the diverse discourses of this world *coram Deo* (Hartin 1986; cf. also Zuidgeest 1991).

> ...[T]he interpretation and reinterpretation of a tradition such as the biblical and Christian tradition is a continuous, living, dynamic process....in which meanings, although rooted in primary images and symbolic metaphorical themes, continually interact with the changing situations of history to create new and highly nuanced understandings of their implications....Without such continual reinterpretation and metaphorical enactment, the Christian tradition would quickly become a dead tradition, unrelated to the problems...of ongoing human life.
>
> (Gerkin 1991:19)

This is not an easy venture and theologians differ as to the value, if any, of postmodernistic thought and its implications for theology. Some view our postmodernistic culture and paradigm as a radical and threatening movement (Bosch 1991; Nicol 1994b; Gosnell 1995; Brown 1995; Stiver 1995; Henry 1995; Dockery 1995;).

In South African culture, and especially in the culture of Afrikaans-speaking South Africans, the dialogue between theology, the church and postmodernism is handicapped by the unique problems of Africa and by the fact that the Afrikaans-speaking churches are still operating in a pre-modern paradigm, while the postmodern culture is already on hand (Nicol 1994b; Breytenbach 1997). Van Rensburg (1996) argued that South African society finds itself ranging across three categories: pre-modern, modern and postmodern. Hence, theology has to reflect on the upcoming postmodernistic situation in a complex context (cf. also Nicol 1997).

Postmodernistic thought, is for many theologians, a deeply felt threat to their basic premises (Henry 1995). Some people experience great discomfort within this new paradigm and are trying to hold on to the old paradigm or to embrace a new orthodoxy (Polkinghorne 1995). To my mind, the postmodernistic threat to theology is a genuine threat to **modernistic theology** and an effort to counter this threat may lead to a revival of **religious fundamentalism** (Parry 1991:39).

Hans Küng viewed the postmodern opportunity as vital for the Christian message and believed that postmodernism is creating a climate that will revitalise spirituality and religion (1987, quoted by Maree & Strauss 1994). Postmodernistic theology must endeavour to take up the challenge **while holding on to the revelation of God in Scripture**, although theology cannot hope to continue as a modernistic theology (Van Aarde 1995b). To my mind, the new situation is, however risky, a new opportunity for theology, because it creates a new openness for faith and can be engaged as such (Van Aarde 1995a).

> While this new pluralistic, postmodernistic situation is perceived by many as a
> threat to 'mainline' churches...it is my judgement and my urging that the new

situation is in fact a positive opportunity to which church interpreters of the Bible may attend with considerable eagerness.

(Brueggemann 1993:vii)

According to Mohler (1995:77), postmodernistic theologians are trying

...to shift the basis of Christian theology away from a prepositional claim based upon an objective and universal revelation, to a self-consciously local and particular narrative claim that is rooted in a specific cultural-linguistic system. Thus, the universal truth claim of Christianity is reduced to a culture-specific system of shared meaning.

In a certain sense, I must agree that postmodernistic theological discourses surely fit into Mohler's (1995) view that the universal truth claim of Christianity is reduced to a culture-specific system of shared meaning.

For Grenz (1995), truth is a communal concept. The Bible's truth is only 'The Truth' within a culture-specific system of shared meaning, that is, for Christianity. Furthermore, different Christian communities construe different discourses of Christianity (cf. Gerkin 1991:96). Postmodernistic social construction discourse as epistemology points out that communities are actively involved in the process of constructing their own theologies. Truth is an agreement reached within a community of believers (De Villiers 1991). Therefore, the truth and authority of the Bible have to be assumed in faith by the Christian community (Du Toit 1987) and not defended as the absolute truth before the secular world or other religions. Rational arguments, based on the modernistic and positivistic authoritarian reading of the Bible, can no longer convince the world of the Bible's truth (Bosch 1991:483; cf. also Nicol 1994a, 1997).

We will have to find other ways of communicating the gospel. In the next section I will deal with this issue.

5.2.4 Postmodernistic theological discourses: Dialogue and/or mission

Veltkamp (1988:109) linked the **pastorate** with **ethics and missiology,** i.e. with theology. Hence, at this stage, I believe it to be appropriate to focus attention on Bosch's (1991) book, *Transforming mission. Paradigm shifts in theology of mission.* This book makes a valuable contribution to the current dialogue on the authoritative or dialogical position of mission and theology in our postmodernistic culture. Bosch (1991:477-483) reflected on three responses by missiology to the postmodernistic condition and then discarded them as inadequate responses. He referred to these three responses as:

- the **exclusivism** (of Karl Barth) which depicts Christianity in absolute terms as the only true divinely revealed truth;
- the **fulfilment** theory, which regards Christianity as the fulfilment of other religions;
- and **relativism** which views all religions as equally valid and other 'revealers' or prophets as important as Jesus Christ.

In Bosch's (1995:483) opinion 'we are in need of a theology of religions characterised by creative tension, which reaches beyond the sterile alternative between a comfortable claim to absoluteness and arbitrary pluralism or relativism'. He longed for a theology that could embrace the abiding paradox of 'asserting both the ultimate commitment to one's own religion and genuine openness to another's, of constantly vacillating between certainty and doubt' (:483). In his seven perspectives (set out below), Bosch endeavoured to respect the Christian theological tradition while genuinely keeping the dialogue open in this pluralistic and postmodernistic world.

Bosch's (1991:483-489) seven perspectives of a **dialogical missionary stance** that could be an **appropriate response to the postmodernistic culture** are set out below:

First perspective:

The first perspective, according to Bosch (1991:483-484), is to accept the co-existence of different faiths and beliefs in a postmodernistic world and in the global village, because we cannot possibly enter into any dialogue with or present our case to people if we resent their presence or the views they hold. Referring to Moltmann (1975), Bosch (1991:483) stated: 'Christian theology is a theology of dialogue. It needs dialogue, also for its own sake. One-way, monological travel is out, as is militancy in any form'.

Second perspective:

Secondly, a genuine dialogue presupposes and implies a commitment to one's own theological tradition. If this is not the case, dialogue would be superfluous. 'Without my commitment to the gospel, dialogue becomes a mere chatter; without the authentic presence of the neighbour it becomes arrogant and worthless. It is a false construct to suggest that a commitment to dialogue is incompatible with a confessional position' (Bosch 1991:484).

Third perspective:

In the third perspective, Bosch (1991:484) criticised the exclusivism of Karl Barth's theology and proposed espousing a compassionate and eschatological mode in our dialogue.

> Thirdly, dialogue...is only possible if we proceed from the belief that...we are not moving into a void, that we go expecting to meet God who has preceded us and has been preparing people within the context of their own cultures and convictions....We do not have him [God] in our pocket, so to speak, and do not just 'take him' to the others; he [God] accompanies us and also comes toward us. We are not the 'haves', the *beati possidentes*, standing over against spiritual 'have nots', the *massa damnata*. We are all recipients of the same mercy, sharing in the same mystery. We thus approach every other faith and its adherents reverently, taking off our shoes, as the place we are approaching is holy.

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Fourth perspective:

> Bosch (1991:484) proceeded in his fourth perspective to elaborate on the nature of the Christian witness as weak and vulnerable. Therefore, true mission and dialogue can only be conducted in an attitude of humility and never in arrogance.

Fifth perspective:

> In his fifth perspective, Bosch (1991:485) rejected an excessive holism (for example the New Age Movement) as an attempt to accommodate various different beliefs. He also rejects a simplistic pluralism where rival truths are simply part of the mosaic, where there is no such thing as orthodoxy, where we are all heretics in the original sense of the word. In either case (i.e. in holism and pluralism), **the creative tension with a theological tradition** is **not honoured** while such a **tension** is the genuine **indicator of a postmodernistic paradigm shift.** For Bosch (1991:486), authentic faith in a postmodernistic culture does not fit into pluralism, nor into holism.

Sixth perspective:

> In this perspective on true dialogue and mission, Bosch (1991:487) reminded us that dialogue cannot be a substitute for mission. Dialogue cannot be an attempt to dodge mission. Bosch (1991:487) reflected on the relationship between dialogue and mission and said:

>> They [i.e. dialogue and mission] are neither to be viewed as identical nor as irrevocably opposed to each other. It is fallacious to suggest that, for dialogue to be 'in', mission has to be 'out,' that commitment to dialogue is incompatible with commitment to evangelism....Neither dialogue nor mission is moving along a one-way street; neither is stubbornly dogmatic, bigoted, or manipulative. In both, faith commitment goes hand-in-hand with respect for others. Neither presupposes a 'completely open mind' - which, in any case, is an impossibility. In both cases we are

witnessing to our deepest convictions whilst listening to those of our neighbours.

Bosch (1991:487) quoted several statements of the World Council of Churches to affirm his own conviction that, in another sense, there are genuine dissimilarities between true dialogue and mission. Although it is true that Christianity has discovered the dialogical nature of the Christian faith, a true Christian dialogue cannot be conducted at the expense of Christianity's fundamentally missionary nature. Conscious of the plurality of beliefs and religions in a postmodernistic culture, Bosch (1991:487) boldly affirmed that **Christianity cannot point to any other way of salvation than Jesus Christ.**

For Bosch (1991:487), this perspective cannot mean that Christian dialogue and mission in a postmodern culture means 'business as usual' or that we are to continue to preach the 'old, old story'. Therefore it necessitates a seventh perspective.

<u>Seventh perspective:</u>

In this perspective, Bosch (1991:488-489) affirmed the **mystery of the paradox** of God's universal will to save the human soul, that is the possibility of salvation outside the church on the one hand, and, on the other hand, the necessity of Christian missionary work. He acknowledged the **tension** between Christianity's claim of Jesus Christ as the only way and at the same time he states that Christians cannot set limits to God's saving power and that God is constantly at work in ways that pass human understanding, even outside Christianity. Bosch (1991:489) commented:

> Such language boils down to an admission that we do not have all the answers and are prepared to live within the framework of penultimate knowledge...This is not opting for agnosticism, but for humility. It is, however, a bold humility - or humble boldness. We know only in part, but we do know. And we believe that the faith we profess is both true and just, and should be proclaimed. We do this, however, not as judges or

> lawyers, but as witnesses; not as soldiers, but as envoys of peace; not
> as high-pressure sales-persons, but as ambassadors of the Servant
> Lord.

Although Bosch (1991:348-362) did indeed take serious notice of other indicators of the emergence of a postmodern paradigm, his main concern was the missionary enterprise of the church. The seven perspectives of Bosch's (1991:483-489) theology must be understood against the background of a widening crisis in the missionary enterprise of the Christian church. Bosch (1991:3-4) ascribed this crisis to:

- the advance of science and technology;
- the de-christianisation of the West;
- the religious pluralism in a global village;
- the exploitation of other nations by the western Christian nations;
- the sharp contrast between affluent Christians in the west and a poor third world, and
- the patriarchy of the western churches over the third world churches.

In the end, in my opinion, Bosch (1991) has made a valuable contribution to a postmodernistic understanding of a postmodernistic theology. But I do feel that something is lacking in Bosch's seven perspectives. The weakness in Bosch's contribution lies within the fact that he **did not utilise the social linguistic construction** of knowledge enough. Hence, Bosch (1991:486) disregarded the locally, historically and culturally determination of truth. He affirmed the universal truth claims of the Christian community, but, as I have already shown, this stance is not in harmony with postmodernistic social construction discourse as epistemology. His respect for a genuine dialogue is, however, an important strength of his work.

I will now turn my attention to the contributions of Dill (1996) and Van Huysteen (1996) as these two exponents of theology in a postmodernistic paradigm cannot be ignored.

5.2.5 Post-foundationalism in postmodernistic theological discourses

In my view, Dill (1996) has convincingly argued that postmodernistic social construction discourse as epistemology does not necessarily imply that theological communities have to abandon their theological traditions. Dill quoted Van Huysteen (1996) to show that postmodernistic discourses and modernistic discourses **relate in a dialectic way** and are therefor **inseparable and dependent on each other.**

> From this perspective, postmodernistic thought is undoubtedly part of the modernistic, and not only modernistic thought coming to its end. Seen in this way, the modernistic and the postmodernistic are also an unthinkable part of one another because the postmodernistic shows itself best in the to-and-fro movement between the modernistic and postmodemistic...in other words, the relentless interrogation of our foundationalist assumptions.

> (van Huysteen 1996, quoted by Dill 1996:240)

This dialectic dependency between modernistic and postmodernistic discourses has profound and significant implications for a postmodernistic theological discourses. Like Dill (1996), I truly found the various theological distinctions of Van Huysteen (1996, quoted by Dill 1996) valuable. Van Huysteen distinguished between **'foundationalism'**, **'non-foundationalism'**, **'fideism'** and **'post-foundationalism'** in theological discourses. For the sake of clarity, I quote Van Huysteen's explanation of these terms:

> **Foundationalism**, as is generally accepted today, is the thesis that all our beliefs can be justified by appealing to some item of knowledge that is self-evident or beyond doubt. Foundationalism in this epistemological sense therefore always implies the holding of a position inflexibly and infallibly, because in the process of justifying our knowledge claims, we invoke ultimate foundations on which the evidential support systems of our various convictional beliefs are constructed. These 'foundations' for our knowledge are accepted as 'given', and therefore treated as a privileged class of aristocratic beliefs

which - as we use them to justify our positions and views - serve as terminating points in our argumentative chains of justification.

Non-foundationalists...deny that we have any of these strong foundations for our belief systems and argue instead that our beliefs all form part of a groundless web of interrelated beliefs. In a strong reaction against modernist and generic notions of rationality, non-foundationalism also highlights the crucial epistemic importance of community, the fact that every community and context has its own rationality, and that any social activity could in fact function as a test case for human rationality. In its extremist form non-foundationalism will imply a total relativism of rationalities, and in a move that will prove to be fatal for the interdisciplinary status of theology, will claim rules for different modes of reflection.

Fideism: At the heart of this brand of non-foundationalism we often find fideism as the uncritical, almost blind commitment to a...set of beliefs....In theology certain forms of fideism and foundationalism certainly go hand in hand when the boundaries between *trust* or the personal faith we have in God, and *the set of beliefs in which we hold this trust*, become blurred or hazy. In theology the basic fideist move therefor happens when a specific set of beliefs in which we hold our faith commitment to God, is first isolated in a very definite protective strategy, and then confused with faith in God itself. What is believed and trusted here is not so much God, but *our own* various sets of beliefs *about* God, *about* the nature about God, *about* God's actions in the world, and *about* what we see as God's will for us and for our world.

...**a post-foundationalist** theology wants to fully acknowledge textuality, the epistemically crucial role of interpreted experience, and the way that tradition shapes the epistemic and non-epistemic values that inform our reflection about God and what some of us believe to be God's presence in this world. At the same time a post-foundationalist notion of rationality in theological reflection claims to point creatively beyond the confines of the local community, group, or culture towards a plausible form of interdisciplinary conversation.

> Post-foundationalism in theology is therefore revealed as a variable third
> epistemological option beyond the extremes of foundationalism and anti- or
> non-foundationalism [author's italics].

> (van Huysteen 1996, quoted by Dill 1996:242-243)

Reflecting on these distinctions set out by van Huysteen, Dill (1996) commented
on **post-foundationalism in theology** as an appropriate choice for a
postmodernistic stance in theology and I heartily agree. Dill (1996:243)[24] wrote:

> In this point of view, Van Huysteen is loyal to his view that a postmodern
> theologian can move to and fro between modernism and postmodernism. The
> fact that Van Huysteen choose a standpoint of faith, although he is critical
> about fixed dogmatic creeds, is to me a major advantage to his approach. The
> fact that Van Huysteen values the inter-disciplinary context in order to
> investigate epistemological and hermeneutical premises critically suggests a
> definite renewal in theology.

I believe that Dill and Van Huysteen's discourses, take into account the voices of
various discourses that may constitute a scientifically acceptable postmodernistic
theology. To my mind, these different voices are:

- faith as a linguistic construction,
- critical reflection on dogma,
- the social basis of epistemology,
- the historical, local and cultural basis of linguistic constructions,
- hermeneutics (language, deconstruction, construction),

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[24] Met hierdie standpunt is Van Huysteen getrou aan sy siening dat 'n postmodemistiese
teoloog heen en weer kan beweeg tussen die modernisme en die postmodernisme. Die feit
dat Van Huysteen kies vir 'n geloofstandpunt, maar dan wel krities is teenoor vaste
dogmatiese leerstelling, is vir my 'n groot winspunt in sy benadering. Die feit dat die
interdissiplinêre konteks vir hom so belangrik is ten einde kritiese ondersoek na
epistemologiese en hermeneutiese uitgangspunte te doen, dui op 'n besliste vernuwing vir die
teologie.

(Dill 1996:243)

- objectivism and relativism,
- an interdisciplinary context,
- the Biblical text,
- the role of subjective experience in religion,
- the theological tradition,
- the dialectic tension between modernistic and postmodernistic discourses.

In the following section I would like to shift the focus to practical theology as an academic discourse.

5.3 Practical theology as academic discourse

5.3.1 Introduction

I do not intend to elaborate extensively on the issue of: **practical theology as academic discourse.** Scholars such as Heyns and Pieterse (1990), Pieterse (1993), Wolvaardt (1993) and Dill (1996) have dealt with the issue in depth. I will only comment on those aspects of the issue that are, to my mind, the most relevant for the purposes of this study.

Following the example set by Burger (1991), most recent authors have divided the practical theological community of South Africa into three different schools of practical theology (Wolvaardt 1993; Pieterse 1993a), namely:

- the confessional school;
- the correlative school, and
- the contextual school.

The distinctions between these three schools are found in each school's view of the relationship between the concepts **'theory'** and **'praxis'**. These two concepts, in their turn, involve a vast number of interrelated themes like:

- a researcher's view of theology and of Scripture, which can be very complex;
- meta-theoretical themes that are shared between practical theology and other human sciences;
- contextual issues, and
- the experiential reality (Pieterse 1993a; Wolvaardt 1993).

Let us now turn to these three schools.

5.3.2 The confessional approach

The confessional school views the Bible as the only source of knowledge and in applying Scripture to the praxis, it almost ignores the contextual issues or the praxis. The Bible is the norm and functions as a doctor's prescription (Dill 1996). Pieterse (1993), Wolvaardt (1993) and Dill (1996) have pointed out the problems with regard to this approach. One problematic aspect of this approach is the following:

> Approaches like the confessional approach...almost exclusively utilise internal Christian sources of knowledge on and experience of the revelation. To my mind, it leads to an unhealthy exclusivity that excludes both new insights and criticism from the pastorate...assumptions and points of view must rather be verifiable, also for external criticism, in order to remain contextually relevant.
>
> (Dill 1996:168)[25]

The **praxis** is enmeshed and involved in human and social processes, and in this sense the praxis overlaps with the human sciences. The **confessional** approach of practical theology remains an isolated and isolating approach that is mostly irrelevant to our society's problems. Pieterse (1993a), Wolvaardt (1993) and Dill (1996) have elaborated extensively on this approach's problems. Hence, the idea

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[25] ...[B]enaderings soos die konfessionele benadering...bedien hulleself byna uitsluitlik met interne Christelike bronne van kennis en ervaring oor die openbaring. Na my oordeel gee dit aanleiding tot 'n ongesonde eksklusiwiteit wat sowel nuwe kennisinsigte as kritiek uitsluit vir die pastoraat...aannames en standpunte moet eerder toetsbaar wees, ook vir eksterne kritiek, sodat dit kontekstueel relevant kan bly.

(Dill 1996:168)

of practical theology as applied theology has been discarded completely (Wolvaardt 1993). This approach may, however, continue to be used in foundationalist circles.

5.3.3 The contextual approach

The contextual approach emphasises the praxis. This approach tends to neglect Scripture as the norm of practical theology (Pieterse 1993a). This approach considers a society's political, economic, developmental, ecological and medical problems to be the main focus. The only norm that relates to Scripture is the ancient and theological confession: 'Jesus is the Lord'. This confession is the guideline in the contextual approach's struggle to liberate a country or an oppressed group of people, or to transform a society (Pieterse 1993a:116-126).

The weakness of this approach is its reluctance to theorise on a theological level (Dill 1996). What difference is there between this approach and the ordinary human sciences or humanistic organisations? Liberation theology in South Africa (cf. The Kairos Document) is an exponent of this approach (Pieterse 1993a).

5.3.4 The correlative approach

The correlative approach in practical theology endeavours to incorporate the theological tradition and the praxis simultaneously.

> On the one hand, it adheres to a normative theology that acknowledges the acts of God in Christ through the Spirit as a compass of life...On the other hand, it considers empirical observations and controls as just as important in order to ensure that practical theology, in applying theological presuppositions, actually resembles reality. A theory for practical theology is thus only plausible where there is some correlation between deductive, normative theological truths and inductive empirical observations.
>
> (Dill 1996:113)[26]

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[26] Aan die een kant word daar vasgehou aan 'n normatiewe teologie wat die handelinge van God in Christus deur die Gees erken as rigtinggewend vir die lewe....Aan die ander kant word empiriese waarnemings en kontroles net so belangrik geag om die werklikheidsgetrouheid van die praktiese teologie te verseker in die toepassing van die teologiese aannames. 'n Teorie vir die praktiese teologie word dus alleen moontlik waar daar 'n korrelasie tussen

In the correlative approach, the quest for scientific validity is a sensitive issue (Pieterse 1993a:28, 109; Pieterse 1990:3–12). The exact formulation of the object of practical theology is important because the object of practical theology relates to the scientific validity of practical theology. The exact definition and object(s) of the study of practical theology were for many years an open issue in the practical theological community (Watkins 1992:48).

In searching for scientific authenticity, some members of the practical theological community studied practical theology as 'human communication in service of the gospel' (Pieterse 1993a:2). These members of the practical theological community confined the object of practical theology to 'human communication in service of the gospel' because 'human communication' involves historical acts that can be the object of research (Pieterse 1993a:44). 'Such a communicative-act framework allows for sufficient interfaces between theology and other sciences, and more specifically for points of contact between practical theology and other operational sciences' (Wolfaardt 1993:30).

Although the object of practical theology was 'human communication in service of the gospel', and as such it focused on human behaviour, practical theology remained a theological subject. Its theological character was maintained because it focused on 'human communication in service of the gospel' (Pieterse 1993a:3). Practical theology therefore had a definite transcendent orientation (Pieterse 1993a:30). Practical theology operated from this predetermined perspective, i.e. the biblical perspective. Hence, the intention and attributes of communication acts were evaluated from a theological perspective.

In connection of the scientific validation of practical theology, an advocate of empirical methodology in practical theology, Van der Ven (1994:36), stated:

> Methodological dilettantism in practical theology, however it may be legitimised
> by making an appeal to the specific nature of faith, puts the scientific status of
> practical theology at risk. The scientific prestige of practical theology within the

deduktiewe, normatiewe teologiese waarhede en die induktiewe empiriese waarnemingsindrukke is.

(Dill 1996:113)

theological faculty and, even worse, in the university in general, is not always
high enough to be taken as seriously as it should be in the academic
community.

Hence, regarding practical theology as an enterprise which studies **human
actions** which can be **operationalised**, enhanced the **scientific status** of
practical theology for the advocates of empirical methodology in practical theology.
For this practical theological approach, practical theology is an **operational
science** which investigates the actions of people (Wolfaardt 1993:24-29).
Operationalisation refers to the translation of relevant research factors in terms of
operations or measurable variables. It implies the transformation of these factors in
terms of observable, measurable and testable behaviour (Van der Ven 1994:40).
In this way, hypotheses can empirically be either falsified or validated (Pieterse
1993a:50). Hence, the discourses of:

- the modernistic inquiry paradigm and its epistemology, and,
- the subsequent sensitivity for scientific validity, together with,
- the discourse of theology,

co-construct the object of practical theology in terms of an operational science.

The above-mentioned operationalism must not lead the reader to a premature
conclusion that practical theology is still bound to positivism. Scientific
philosophers such as Popper, Kuhn, Gadamer, Ricoeur and Habermas have
influenced the epistemology of practical theology decisively (Pieterse 1993a). The
scientific philosophy of Ricoeur was utilised to soften positivist methods. Ricoeur's
methodology involved three stages within a hermeneutic framework where
interpretation and explanation were complementary entities. It contained the
stages of participatory interpretation, explanation followed again by participatory
interpretation (Pieterse 1993a:88). Habermas' contribution stressed the notion that
participants in dialogue must be free and equal and that scientific knowledge must
be emancipatory (Pieterse 1993a:90, 96). Hence, the **correlative** approach of
practical theology had a hermeneutic framework and it was a move towards a post-
positivist stance (Dill 1996).

Post-positivism implies critical realism. Reality is out there, but cannot be fully understood. Post-positivism is a modified objectivism. Absolute objectivity is impossible and the observer always influences the observed reality because he/she cannot be wholly separated from it. Observation is always an interpretation in the light of a (sub)conscious theory (Pieterse 1993a:23). **Objectivity, however, remains a principle that can be enhanced by modernistic empirical research** methods.

Van der Ven (1994:37), reflecting on a hermeneutic-empirical approach, wrote:

> To begin with the hermeneutic principles, I do not see any conflict between a
> hermeneutic and an empirical approach in practical theology. For me the
> hermeneutic approach comes first. It establishes the framework within which
> the empirical research has to be conducted. Without saying that, the empirical
> intradisciplinary model would lead us to brute positivism, naked empiricism,
> stupid objectivism.

I value the following elements in the **correlative** approach of practical theology:

- The emphasis on the **praxis** has led to several benefits:
    - it has made us aware of the tendency of the confessional approach to ideologise certain theories;
    - it utilises the expertise of other human sciences which has led to inter-disciplinary co-operation;
    - it has freed practical theology from its theological isolation;
    - it has made us aware of the value of the very people to which theology are applied;
    - this has led us to become aware of the danger of hierarchy and power;
    - it has emphasised the value of the voices and expertise of the people who are the 'objects' of study;
    - the context is thus always valued and verified.

- By keeping the Scripture in focus, correlative practical theology has remained a theological enterprise distinct from the human and social sciences.
- The correlative approach has tried to be critical of its own assumptions. Hence, its call for a post-positivist approach and the broadening of rationality are to be valued.

I do, however, have the following **reservations** about the **correlative** approach:

- Like Dill (1996), I question the underlying modernistic epistemology of the correlative approach.
- This approach has not (yet) taken adequate notice of the relational and social construction of knowledge (cf. Gergen 1994).

I will now turn my attention to an approach in practical theology which I deem appropriate for a postmodernistic epistemology.

5.3.5 An approach based on social construction discourses

In his recently published thesis, Dill (1996) has made a valuable contribution to the continuing dialogue on the scientific discourses of practical theology. As the reader will have noticed, I agree with on the issue **of postmodernistic social construction discourse** as **epistemology**. [I have dealt with the issue of epistemology in Chapter 3]. I therefore regard it to be unnecessary to elaborate extensively on Dill's argument. Dill (1996) distinguished between five different approaches:

1. The **confessional** approach, with the following proponents:
   - E Thurneysen;
   - JJ de Klerk;
   - C Trimp;
   - J E Adams.
2. the **correlative** approach, with the following proponents:
   - G Heitink;
   - J A van der Ven.

3. the **contextual** approach, with the following proponent:

- G Otto.

4. the **hermeneutic** approach, with the following proponents:

- J Firet;
- H J C Pieterse;
- D J Louw;
- D Capps;
- G C Gerkin;
- H J Veltkamp.

5. the **constructivist** approach, with the following proponent:

- De Jongh van Arkel.

Dill (1996) expressed his appreciation of De Jongh van Arkel's (1987, 1991) epistemology as a totally new approach. The following quote from De Jongh van Arkel (1987) clarifies Dill's response. In quoting Watzlawick (1984:10) De Jongh van Arkel (1987:197) wrote:

> There is a growing awareness that the so-called reality that we find is the *construction* of what we believe we have discovered and investigated. 'In other words, what is supposedly found is an invention whose inventor is unaware of his [her] act of invention, who considers it as something that exists independently of him [her]...' From these ideas flows the dictum that scientific, social, individual, and ideological realities are invented (constructed) as a result of the inevitable need to approach the person...from certain basic assumptions that we consider to be 'objective' properties of the real reality...[author's italics].

In 1991, De Jongh van Arkel stated his **epistemological views** in **social constructionist** terms:

> It can be of great value to practical theology to view human systems as systems that exist only in the domain of meaning or inter-subjective linguistic realities. We work with communication networks that are discerned in and

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through language. The effect is that the domain of meaning could be described as a linguistic or a dialogical domain. **Meaning and understanding are socially and inter-subjectively constructed** [bold mine].

(De Jongh van Arkel 1991a:71)[27]

For Dill (1996), this approach by De Jongh van Arkel heralded a **postmodernistic epistemology** that viewed the generation of knowledge as a **relational and social construction process**.

In Dill's (1996) overview of the above-mentioned approaches, he came to the conclusion that these approaches, although they are essentially modernistic approaches, show signs of the emergence of a new paradigm and thus of a new epistemology. After reflecting extensively on the epistemology of the modernistic paradigm and after exploring the epistemology of each of the above-mentioned approaches in practical theology, Dill (1996:224-225)[28] proposed a **sixth approach for practical theology** - an approach that is based on **postmodernistic social construction discourse as epistemology:**

In my research, I have shown...that the enormous epistemological **dilemma of modernism,** i.e. **subject-centred thought,** has also influenced practical theology. The dilemma is that modernistic man relies primarily on his rational insights to achieve knowledge...and does **not consider the broad context sufficiently.** This leads to **serious reductionism and an attenuation of**

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[27] Wat egter vir die praktiese teologie van groot waarde kan wees, is om die menslike sisteme te sien as bestaande slegs in die domein van betekenis of intersubjektiewe linguistiese realiteit. Ons werk met kommunikatiewe netwerke wat onderskei word in en deur taal met die gevolg dat die betekenisdomein as 'n linguistiese of dialogiese domein beskryf kan word. **Betekenis en verstaan word sosiaal en intersubjektief gekonstrueer** [italics mine].

(De Jongh van Arkel 1991a:71)

[28] In my ondersoek wys ek...dat die groot epistemologiese **dilemma van die modernisme,** naamlik **subjekgesentreerde denke,** ook neerslag gevind het in die praktiese teologie. Die dilemma hiervan is dat die modernistiese mens primêr staatmaak op sy eie redelike insigte om kennis op te doen...en **nie die breër konteks genoegsaam in ag neem**...nie. Dit lei tot **erge reduksionisme en 'n verskraling van lewensmoontlikhede.** Teenoor hierdie beperkte epistemologie stel ek eerder 'n postmodernistiese epistemologie van die **'kommunale konstituering van kennis'** voor. Gergen se sosiale konstruksieteorie is die basis van hierdie epistemologie en ek bou dan ook my voorstel vir 'n nuwe basisteorie vir die praktiese teologie/pastoraat hierop [author's bold].

(Dill 1996:224-225)

possibilities. Over and against this limited epistemology, I propose a postmodernistic epistemology of the **'communal constitution of knowledge'**. Gergen's social construction theory is the basis of this epistemology and I build my proposal for a new basic theory for practical theology on this epistemology [author's bold].

I heartily support Dill in his proposal because his approach corresponds with my views on epistemology (cf. Chapter 3).

Before closing this section I will briefly refer to Müller's (1996) publication. Müller's (1996) book, *Om tot verhaal te kom,* was a move towards a postmodernistic epistemology. Müller (1996:15-16, 32-33) situated his **narrative involved approach**[29] within an **eco-hermeneutic paradigm** - a paradigm resembling **second order cybernetics**. Müller (1996:16, 33)[30] outlined the implications of his eco-hermeneutical paradigm for the pastorate in the following terms:

> The implications of an eco-hermeneutic paradigm for the pastorate is far-reaching. It locates the pastorate within a **social constructionist paradigm**. The pastor and the persons in therapy become **co-constructors of a shared reality**. Hence, the pastor is not the only and infallible representative of the 'truth', but a co-player in the story of the search for the truth....According to this approach, knowledge is not a psychological construct within the observer, knowledge is rather a shared construct within an interpretative community. I gladly support this approach to the development of the [pastoral] model of narrative involvement. [bold mine].

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[29] Dit word nou duidelik waarom 'n eko-hermeneutiese paradigma byna vanselfsprekend tot 'n model van *narratiewe betrokkenheid* moet lei (Müller 1996:15).

[30] Die implikasies van 'n eko-hermeneutiese paradigma vir die pastoraat is verreikend. Dit plaas die pastoraat binne 'n **sosiaal-konstruksionistiese denkraamwerk**. Die pastor en die persone in terapie word **mede-konstrueerders van 'n gedeelde realiteit**. Die pastor is hiervolgens nie die enigste en onfeilbare verteenwoordiger van die 'waarheid nie', maar 'n medespeler in die verhaal van die soeke na die waarheid....Volgens hierdie benadering is kennis nie 'n psigologiese konstruk binne-in die waarnemer nie, maar 'n gedeelde konstruk binne 'n interpreterende gemeenskap. By hierdie benadering vind ek graag aansluiting vir die ontwikkeling van die model van narratiewe betrokkenheid [bold mine].

(Müller 1996:16, 33)

Although Müller (1996) did not adhere consistently to the epistemological requirements of the social constructionist paradigm (cf. 1996:87), he made a conspicuous and valuable shift towards a postmodernistic epistemology.

As the reader will see, choosing postmodernistic social construction discourse as epistemology inevitably influences the dialogue on the so-called **'theory'** and **'praxis'** distinction in practical theology (cf. Müller 1996). In the next section I will deal with this distinction.

5.3.6 'Theory' and 'praxis'?

An elaborate theoretical discussion of the relation between theory and praxis is beyond the scope of this study. I will reflect only briefly on the issue in the light of postmodernistic social construction discourse as epistemology.

The now well-known bipolarity and tension between 'theory' and 'praxis' is well documented by other authors (cf. Nel 1991). To my mind, this kind of bipolarity or dualism is akin to a modernistic epistemology (cf. Dill 1996), because this bipolarity presupposes an observer who is operating from a certain theoretical viewpoint, observing an objective praxis. In postmodernistic epistemology, the distinction between 'theory' and 'praxis' is impossible, because:

- 'theories' do not exist as pre-fabricated entities in the minds of people ready for dispatch (cf. Kotzé 1994);
- 'theories' (discourses) are products of the 'praxis,' (the social linguistic construction process) (cf. Gergen 1994);
- the 'praxis' (the social linguistic process) is inevitably interpreted and constituted by 'theories' (discourses);
- 'praxis' is 'theory formation', and 'theory formation' is 'praxis' (cf. Müller 1996:1);
- 'theories' (discourses) are never fixed or stable entities; discourses are always in a process of alteration; and
- 'discourses are both the major theoretical object and the method of practice' (Lowe 1991:47).

Hence, the distinction between 'theory' and 'praxis' is quite artificial (cf. Müller 1996) and in postmodernistic epistemological terms, impossible (Dill 1996).

In this study where postmodernistic social construction discourse is utilised as epistemology, I described the research process in epistemological terms. Therefore, **'theory'** and **'praxis'** resembles the **one and same process** of the **ever changing social construction process of knowledge**. Hence, postmodernistic epistemology functions as a normative element in this research methodology. **Epistemology is the critical discourse.**

Since this research was a practical theological enterprise, another normative element was whether this research was a theological enterprise (Veltkamp 1988). The chosen epistemology inevitably influenced the nature of communication, and to be more precise, the nature of the communication of the gospel. The voices of the participants were discourses that co-constructed, with other discourses, new alternatives in their lives and new possibilities in pastoral therapy concerning extra-marital affairs.

In the next sections I will attend to pastoral therapy as an academic discourse.

5.4 Pastoral therapy as academic discourse

5.4.1 The terms: 'Pastoral therapy' and 'Pastoral counselling'

I prefer the terms 'pastoral therapist' and 'pastoral therapy' to the terms 'pastoral counselor' and 'pastoral counseling'.

My preference for the term pastoral therapy is based on the fact that both the terms 'pastoral' ($\pi o\iota\mu\eta\nu$, $\pi o\iota\mu\alpha\iota\nu\omega$) and 'therapy' ($\theta\epsilon\rho\alpha\pi\epsilon\upsilon\omega$) are biblical terms (Newman 1971; Jeremias 1975a). Furthermore, scholars in the pastoral therapy field are using the term pastoral therapy (Dill, 1996; Louw 1993). The term **'pastoral therapy' corresponds with the meaning of the term 'pastoral counselling'** (De Jongh van Arkel 1991b; Strunk 1993). For a discussion on the distinctions between terms such as 'mutual care', 'pastoral care', 'pastoral

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counselling' and 'pastoral psychotherapy', the reader is referred to De Jongh van Arkel (1991b, 1993) and Browning (1993).

Pastoral therapy (pastoral counselling) has its own separate history. A lengthy discussion of the history of the pastoral therapy movement is not within the scope of this thesis; hence, for a detailed discussion of the history of pastoral therapy, the reader is referred to De Jongh van Arkel (1993, 1991b); Heitink (1979:23-74); Louw (1982:8-15); Van Wyk (1987:42-55); Strunk (1993:14-25); Stroeken (1991:4-11) and Louw (1993:5-21).

I resume the theme of pastoral therapy as an academic discourse.

5.4.2 Modernism regarded pastoral therapy as unscientific

The reader must bear in mind that **Freud**, the founder of modernistic psychology, viewed religion as primitive and neurotic. He initiated the drawing of a strict border between psychology and religion and thus between psychotherapy and pastoral therapy. Modernistic psychology severed the fabric of human thought and behaviour from culture and thus from religion, which Freud and his followers considered to be unscientific (Kvale 1992b). Many psychologists followed Freud's views on religion. True to the epistemology of the modernistic era, they chose the modernistic scientific route.

> Psychoanalysis was an extension of the Enlightenment, in some ways its most ambitious effort. Freud described it as a science. He encouraged the belief that he *knew* how the mind worked. For many of Freud's followers, psychoanalysis was *The Truth* [author's italics].

> (O'Hara & Anderson 1991:21).

Furthermore, 'Like the best psychotherapy theories of the day, early family therapy theories tried to transcend the particularities of race, culture, ethnicity and gender in favour of a broad and universally human mode of thinking' (Doherty 1991:39).

> In psychology, behaviourism and humanism became two sides of the same
> modern coin which led to the abstraction of man from his specific culture. Both
> behaviour and consciousness were dissociated from their content, from the
> intentional object of human activity. The cultural content is then taken as the
> accidental and local, the psychological processes as the essential and the
> universal.
>
> (Kvale 1992b:44-45)

Modernistic psychologists believed that they studied their clients in an objective
mode and operated on the assumption that their findings were universal truths and
inherent to all humans, irrespective of the cultural context (Doherty 1991:40). The
consequence of the modernistic epistemology of modernistic psychology was that
religious discourses (as an essential part of cultural discourses!), **were
regarded as unscientific,** and were therefore taboo in the offices of
psychotherapists. A transcendent world was no longer an option (Pieterse
1993a:14). The positivism of modernistic psychology's epistemology regarded
theology as an unscientific enterprise and tried to marginalize theology.

> Among philosophers, logical positivism from the 1920s to the 1940s asserted
> that scientific discourse provides the norm for all meaningful language. It was
> said that the only meaningful statements (apart from abstract logical relations)
> are empirical propositions verifiable by sense data. Statements in ethics,
> metaphysics, and religion were said to be neither true nor false, but
> meaningless, pseudo-statements, expressions of emotion or preference
> devoid of cognitive significance.
>
> (Barbour 1990, quoted by Dill 1996:15)

Hence, the so-called sciences regarded theology as unscientific (Louw 1993:383).
This was also the fate of pastoral therapy (Strunk 1993). Pastoral therapy reacted
to this state of affairs. This is the issue discussed in the following section.

5.4.3 The influence of modernism on pastoral therapy: Power

Theology rejected the claim of positivism which regarded theology as unscientific and it rejected the marginalisation of theology. Theology was, however, not untouched by positivism. Positivism influenced theology in its methodology (Pieterse 1993a). Modernistic epistemology led to foundationalist theology with its positivistic methodology which regarded the Bible as a source of objective theological truth.

Le Roux (1996) reflected on the stance of biblical exegesis in the South African context and showed that the local theological scientific enterprise is still bound and limited by positivism:

> Exegesis is about certainties. In other words: the immanent approach reflects a Cartesian quest for sureness and certainties. Descartes wanted a clear principle that could serve as axiom or primary principle of his 'mathematical' philosophy....philosophical certainty had to be of such a nature that there could be no uncertainty about it....Descartes' goal was to influence biblical science right up to the present. Many biblical scholars still yearn for...scientific certainties. The written text is the only fixed certainty; the reader must not impose something from outside the text onto the text; what can be said about the text must always be verifiable; what is extracted from the text must be clear certainties; when the text itself does not mention historical facts, then historical comments are inappropriate. A consequence of Cartesian thought was the subject-object-relationship. In any scientific enquiry, the subject holds a superior position *vis-à-vis* the passive object....The subject is always the most important: he exerts power over the object and can manipulate it. This subject-object-scheme is still held to be legitimate by many scholars.

(Le Roux 1996:45)[31]

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[31] Eksegese het met sekerhede te maak. Anders gestel: iets van 'n Cartesiaanse soeke na vastigheid en sekerheid word in die immanente benadering weerspieël. Wat Descartes wou vind, was 'n duidelike prinsipe wat as aksioma of eerste beginsel vir sy 'wiskundige' filosofie kon dien... filosofiese sekerheid moes van so 'n aard wees dat geen twyfel daaroor kan bestaan nie....Descartes se ideaal sou tot vandag toe die Bybelwetenskap beïnvloed. Baie Bybel wetenskaplikes streef steeds...na wetenskaplike vastighede. Net wat in die teks staan, is seker en vas; niks moet van buite af ingedra word nie; wat oor die teks gesê word, moet te

Positivistic methods still play a superior and dominant role within the **reformed theological community.** Reformed theology still cherishes objectivity, certitude and the absolute authority of the Bible (Pieterse 1993a:58). Within **fundamentalist circles,** the authority and infallibility of the Bible are associated with scientific and historical infallibility (Wes-Kaapse Moderamen van die Ned Geref Kerk 1997). Hence, a positivistic methodology has led to a positivistic type of revelation theology (Pieterse 1993a:58).

This type of theology inevitably found its way into the rooms of pastoral therapists. The pastoral therapist was regarded as the expert on the Bible and his/her theological dogma functioned as a fixed and divine reference point, as the ultimate agenda of pastoral therapy. This fixed and divine reference point (of the modernistic paradigm) became the parameter of the pastoral encounter, and was set as the eventual, actual, and sometimes hidden, but always the ultimate agenda of the pastoral conversation (cf. Louw 1986; Virkler 1992). In the context of (secular) family therapy and in connection with the underlying theme, Monk (1996:8) wrote:

> The establishment of correct or 'objective' standards [of behaviour] leads the
> therapeutic professions...to move, deliberately or inadvertently, into the role of
> classifying, judging, and determining what is a desirable, appropriate, or
> acceptable way of life.

There is also a direct link between knowledge and power. Clinebell (1984:142) phrased the link between power and knowledge in the following way:

> **Confrontation** is an **indispensable skill** in much pastoral counselling,
> involving the sensitive use of **the minister's authority** - both the **authority of**
> **his** role and the 'rational authority'...derived from his **competence as**

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alle tye gekontroleer kan word; wat uit die teks gehaal word, moet duidelike sekerhede wees; indien die teks geen duidelike historiese feite vermeld nie, is historiese opmerkings onvanpas. 'n Gevolg van die Cartesiaanse denke was die subjek-objek-verhouding. In elke wetenskaplike ondersoek staan die subjek half meerwaardig teenoor die passiewe objek....Deurgaans is die subjek die belangrikste; hy het mag oor die objek en kan dit manipuleer. Hierdie subjek-objek-skema is nog steeds vir vele geldig.

(Le Roux 1996:45)

ethical guide [bold mine].

Dill (1996:98) reflected on Foucault's view of power and he stated that all discourses are loaded with knowledge and thus with power.

> For me it is important to...discover how enmeshed the relationship between power, knowledge and truth is. There is a recursive relation between these phenomena; the kind of power that I exert, relates to my kind of knowledge...

This is valid for theological discourses too. Hence, a positivistic theology puts the pastoral therapist in a superior and thus powerful position (Dill 1996). The pastoral therapist has to correct a person if he/she is outside the boundaries of the fixed agenda (Louw 1983), according to such positivist theology.

To conclude: Modernistic psychology regarded religion, and thus pastoral therapy, as unscientific. Theology reacted and embraced a positivistic methodology which led to foundationalist theology. Foundationalist theology claimed that the pastoral therapist was the expert on the Bible. His/her expertise jeopardised the power relationship between pastoral therapist and client. Pastoral therapist and client were not free equals: the knowledge of the pastoral therapist became the source of the pastoral therapist's power to control the therapeutic relationship.

A **narrative approach in pastoral therapy** may lead to some answers. In the next section, I will turn my attention to the effect(s) of postmodernistic thought and of postmodernistic epistemology on pastoral therapy.

5.4.4 The influence of postmodernistic thought on pastoral therapy: Equality

The above-mentioned positivistic stance and power mode of pastoral therapy must somehow be softened in the postmodernistic paradigm. I agree with Wolfaardt's

remarks in this regard:

> Whatever is turned into an absolute - be it the intellect, human beings, nature or the Word - that absolute is elevated above critical reflection....this takes the form of purely authoritarian repetition of formulas....In theology too a positivist approach is not tenable.
>
> (Wolfaardt 1993:21).

The **pastoral counselling movement** in the United States and in Europe was acutely aware of the complexity of the relationship between pastoral therapist and client and of the relationship between theology and psychology (Adams 1973, 1976; De Klerk 1975; De Klerk 1978; Clinebell 1984; Firet 1968; Dill 1996; Heitink 1979, 1991; De Jongh van Arkel 1987; Stroeken 1991; Vossen 1991; Zuidgeest 1991; Van der Ven 1991; Louw 1993). This movement endeavoured to resolve the issue of power and hierarchy in the therapeutic relationship in **various** and **diverse** ways.

The practical theological community refined the 'object' of practical theology. The concept of 'communication acts' was qualified and refined by the concept 'in service of the gospel'. The exact nature of these 'communication acts in service of the gospel' was refined even more by emphasising the **free and equal** conduct between people (Wolfaardt 1993:32-33). It opposed any hierarchical abuse of power (Pieterse 1993a:7). Thus the **free and equal** conduct between people has its theological parallel in the Kingdom of God when the Kingdom of God is seen as peace, justice, freedom and salvation (Wolfaardt 1993:32-33).

To my mind, this refinement of the object of practical theology related in a remarkable fashion to the epistemological requirements of postmodernistic social construction discourses. It had implications for the **process** and **content of pastoral therapy** in a postmodernistic paradigm. It may have far-reaching consequences for **the mode in which Scripture is utilised** in therapeutic settings.

Regarding the issue of power in a therapeutic relationship, Hoffman (1992:15), an exponent of narrative therapy, wrote: '...I found myself increasingly haunted by the paradoxes of power that beset the traditional methods of family therapy. They all seemed based on secrecy, hierarchy and control'. She then went on to say that the traditional modes of therapy kept the client at a distance because the therapist was the observer and the expert, and the client the observed and the ignorant. Stepping down from this superior position, she came closer to her clients.

> The attempt to honor where people stood and how they saw things became a constant reminder that participants in therapy had their own expertise. A value was placed, thereby, on a participatory experience validated by the expression of many voices, rather than reliance on the voice of an expert.

> Hoffman (1992:16)

Hence, a **narrative approach** in **pastoral therapy** may change the hierarchical relationship in therapy. The client is seen as the expert on his/her own life, and the pastoral therapist is no longer an 'untouchable' expert. The pastoral therapist's views, put before the client, can be accepted, altered or totally rejected by the client. Hence, there is an equality with regard to participation in the discourse, even though the parties may occupy different positions or roles and hold different views or values (Freedman & Combs 1996).

The **narrative mode in pastoral therapy** and the terms 'co-construction' and 'co-author', and the idea of a social construction of meaning, indicate a preference for **mutual linguistic interaction** between **equal** partners. This preference contrasts with a hierarchical situation where one participant is the senior expert and the other the junior ignorant (Drewery & Winslade 1996). Postmodernistic social construction discourse insists that people with 'expert' knowledge are not the only ones to whom one should listen when decisions are made. The **very people who are affected by the discourses of the 'experts' also have a valuable and indispensable contribution to the discourse** (Rossouw 1993).

Hence, a **narrative approach in pastoral therapy** may be a form of therapy that complies with one of the motives and ideals of the **Clinical Pastoral Education** in

the Netherlands:

> I think that one of the basic principles of Clinical Pastoral Education justly lies
> in the respecting the fundamental freedom and fundamental right to self-
> determination of the patient.
>
> (Van der Ven 1991:105)[32]

A **narrative approach** in pastoral therapy is one of the possible approaches that
complies with postmodernistic social construction discourse as epistemology. My
focus in this study was on **narrative therapy** as an appropriate **pastoral therapy
in a postmodern paradigm.**

5.4.5 Postmodernistic thought: A new scientific dialogue between secular and pastoral therapy

Postmodernistic social construction discourse and associate concepts like 'new
epistemology', 'second-order cybernetics' and 'social construction theory' have
challenged the view that modernistic science can study an objective reality (Kvale
1992b). Postmodernistic epistemology has advanced the notion of an inter-
subjectively and relationally created reality in language. Thus, **postmodernistic
epistemology accommodates** the possibility of **meta-physics and spirituality**
(Maree & Strauss 1994). Postmodernism also implies post-secularism, because
we have entered an era that is open to a reconsideration of transcendental matters
(Du Toit 1996:73).

Brueggemann (1993) has demonstrated that all **scientific** discourses are always
constructs where **imagination** plays an important role. The postmodern paradigm
stresses the notion that any form of knowledge, whether that knowledge takes the
form of a scientific paper, or the life story of a person, or theology, is the product of
social discourses and of imagination. Thus, whereas the modern paradigm

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[32] ik denk dat een van de grondbeginselen van de KPV-trainingen terecht gelegen is in de
eerbiediging van de fundamentele vrijheid en het fundamentele zelf-beschikkingsrecht van de
patiënt.

(Van der Ven 1991:105)

marginalized theology, the **postmodern paradigm now permits and accommodates theology quite positively** (Van Aarde 1995a). O'Hara and Anderson (1991:22) wrote: that religion '…may be useful, even respected as profoundly true, but true in a new, provisional, postmodern way'.

With the advance of postmodernism, interest in religion and its significance are increasing and there is a **new dialogue** between pastoral and secular therapy (Mc Minn 1994). Family therapists have noted an increasing concern with religious issues in family theory and therapy, a concern reflecting the larger culture's renewed interest in religion and a corresponding return to respectability for religious studies in academic circles (Vande Kemp 1991:71). Hardy (1996:13), reflecting on the 19th Annual Family Therapy Network Symposium held in Washington, D.C., on March 21 to 23, 1996, made the following statement about the contribution of Betty Carter (world famous psychologist) to the symposium:

> Carter finds herself returning to the virtues of community and religious life that have traditionally served as counterbalances to the values and power of workplace and marketplace.

Although the dearth in family therapy literature concerning the use of spirituality by therapists for their clients is still disconcerting (Kasiram 1997), and although only 5% of today's secular psychotherapists have received any training in dealing with religious issues in therapy (Butler 1990:34), there is a growing reconsideration of spirituality in family therapy literature (Tan 1996; Kotzé & Roux 1997). According to Butler and Harper (1994) who wrote from a social constructionist point of view, there has been increasing interest in the metaphysical discourses of religious individuals and how these discourses apply to therapy.

> The existing psychological literature has begun to take more seriously the potentially positive role religion and spiritual interventions can have in effective psychotherapy, especially with religiously committed clients.
>
> (Tan 1996:25).

It seems to me that the hostile border between religion and psychology is fading (cf. Eck 1996). Even from a modernistic scientific viewpoint with its focus on empirical results, the effectiveness of a spiritually based therapy such as that of Alcoholics Anonymous is now respected:

> But science teaches us a respect for empirical results, and during the past few years it has become increasingly apparent that Alcoholics Anonymous and the spate of spiritually based 12-step programs modelled on it have achieved some very respectable results indeed. These programs seem to have made a concrete difference in the lives of vast numbers of people with whom psychotherapy traditionally had mediocre results. They have shown that spiritual ideas like forgiveness and trusting a 'higher power' can help people to make changes every bit as profound as anything that goes on in therapy sessions.

(Simon 1990:2)

Discussing the relation between spirituality and secular therapy, Simon (1990:2) concluded:

> ...the rigid divorce between spirituality and psychotherapy may no longer be necessary...the two are more compatible than we once thought....therapy is, at its core, grounded in a set of ideas that it shares with most of the world's great spiritual traditions: the ever-renewing possibility of hope, the belief that the various travails of our lives have real meaning, and the faith that, in some final analysis, our existence matters.

We are witnesses of a new dialogue between psychotherapy and pastoral therapy. To my mind, it seems that **postmodernistic thought** has opened up an opportunity for **pastoral therapy** to be regarded as a **scientific discourse** in its own right.

In Chapter 6, I will focus on some practical issues of pastoral therapy in a postmodern paradigm and culture.

THE PRACTICE OF PASTORAL THERAPY IN A POSTMODERNISTIC CONTEXT

6.1 The propium of pastoral therapy in a postmodernistic paradigm

One of the most important questions in pastoral therapy is the following: 'What exactly makes a therapeutic conversation a **pastoral** therapeutic conversation?' This crucial question has dominated the literature on pastoral therapy (counselling) in the USA and Europe for many years. Pastoral counselling in the USA took on a more practical and psychological stance while Europe's pastoral counselling preserved a more theoretical and theological perspective (Heitink 1979; De Klerk 1978; Van der Ven 1991; Firet & Vossen 1991; Louw 1993).

The scope of this research does not allow me an exploration of the theoretical definitions of pastoral therapy. Various scholars have endeavoured to define pastoral counselling or pastoral therapy (Adams 1973, 1976; De Klerk 1975; De Klerk 1978; Faber 1971; Firet 1968; Capps 1984; Clinebell 1984; Gerkin 1979, 1986, 1991; Heitink 1979, 1991; Vande Kemp 1991; Veltkamp 1988; De Jongh van Arkel 1987; Stroeken 1991; Vossen 1991; Zuidgeest 1991; Van der Ven 1991; Firet & Vossen 1991; Browning 1993; Louw 1993; Dill 1996; Müller 1996).

A few illuminating remarks in the light of **a narrative approach in pastoral therapy** will suffice for the purposes of this study.

A narrative approach in pastoral therapy, as in narrative therapy, is concerned with people's individual social linguistic constructions of the self-narratives that constitute their lives. The approach involves a **hermeneutic process** (De Jongh van Arkel 1987; Gerkin 1986, 1991; Veltkamp 1988; Dill 1996) wherein the pastoral therapist and the client endeavour to co-construct new and alternative self-narratives in the light of the Greater Story of God (Gerkin 1986, 1991;

Veltkamp 1988; Müller 1996) - however **implicit** or **explicit** the Story of God may be (Dill 1996; Müller 1996). Hence, pastoral therapy concerns an 'individual, inalienable and irreducible theological hermeneutic' (Veltkamp 1988:118)[33]. In this process, the Story of God functions as a **normative story** (Veltkamp 1988:151). Herein lies the uniqueness of pastoral therapy:

> *The heart of our uniqueness is our theological and pastoral heritage, orientation, resources, and awareness. This is our frame of reference and the area of our expertise* [author's italics].

(Clinebell 1984:67)

The propium of pastoral therapy lies more in the pastoral therapist's **'being a Christian'** than in his **'doing rational theology'** - although the latter plays a vital role in pastoral therapy (Clinebell 1984:132; Veltkamp 1988:119, 155; Louw 1993:217; Müller 1996:30). The pastoral therapist participates in the conversation as the one who refers to the Greater Story of God. The clients choose to tell their stories to a pastoral therapist with the **motive** or in the **hope** that **their story will somehow relate to the Greater Story of God** (Van Wyk 1987:38; Veltkamp 1988:119). Hence, a person tell a **different story** to a **pastoral therapist** than to a **psychologist** (Veltkamp 1988:159). Both the story teller and listener (the pastoral therapist being the listener) co-construct the conversation as a theological conversation - even if the Story of God is not (yet) explicitly tabled by the pastoral therapist or the story teller (Veltkamp 1988:154; Clinebell 1984:123).

The client's knowledge and hope of the conversational setting as a pastoral setting (cf. Clinebell 1984:68) and the pastoral therapist's own story as a story *coram Deo*, and his listening to the client's story in the light of the Greater Story of God **inevitably constitute** the encounter as a **theological** encounter. The pastoral therapist links the story of the client with the Greater Story of God (Veltkamp 1988:119). These theological motives constitute the therapeutic conversations as **pastoral** therapeutic conversations.

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[33] "Maar daarnaast beschickt zij over een eigen, onvervreemdbare en onherleidbare theologische hermeneutiek" (Veltkamp 1988:118).

In the next section I expand on this theme. I elaborate on the theological tradition as a partner in the therapeutic relationship.

6.2 The theological tradition as a partner in the therapeutic dialogue

A theological tradition can function, through language, as a participant in a dialogue (Pieterse 1993a:91). Individuals who participate in a dialogue think and talk within a theological tradition. Hence, they engage in a real and lively dialogue with that tradition (Butler & Harper 1994). This implies that the theological tradition, i.e. the Story of God, becomes a conversational partner in the pastoral encounter.

> The identity of the pastoral conversation is inferred from the fact that God wants to be a conversational partner... The propium of the pastoral encounter must be sought in its trialogical character.
>
> (Louw 1993:205)[34]

We can treat the Great Story of God, i.e. our theological tradition, as (yet) another cultural discourse that participates in the conversation (Kotzé 1996b).

> ...[P]astoral work always entails a dialogical relationship between the issues and problems involved in the particular human situation at hand and the core metaphorical values and meanings of the Christian story.
>
> (Gerkin 1991:19)

Since our stories are co-constructed by various cultural discourses that compete with each other (Lowe 1991:45), it follows that our **theological tradition** can and eventually does **compete** with **other cultural discourses** (Veltkamp 1988:151). The pastoral therapist participates in therapeutic conversations with an awareness that people's lives are constituted through and within a **battle of discourses**

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[34] Die identiteit van die pastorale gesprek word afgelei van die feit dat God gespreksartner wil word...Die propium van die pastorale ontmoeting moet dus gesoek word in die trialogiese karakter daarvan.

(Louw 1993:205)

(Lowe 1991; Winslade et al 1996). Hence, pastoral therapy is per definition **critical** of other cultural discourses (Veltkamp 1988:127[35]). Furthermore, pastoral therapy is per definition **critical** of our theological constructions (Brueggemann 1993; Louw 1993).

In this battle of discourses, 'a **unique theology** [or **ethics**] **originates in the pastoral conversation that could only originate there and nowhere else'** (Veltkamp 1988:17)[36] because '**both** the particularity of **the situation** at hand and the horizon of meaning contained in **the Christian story** become open to **reassessment, reevaluation, and reinterpretation'** (Gerkin 1991:19).

> I do not only know my stories, but I am my own diverse stories. And so I am continually wondering how I must tell my own story: a male story; an American story; a Christian story; a career story; etc.. But at the same time I am continually revising these self-narratives by relating them to other stories, i.e. the story of women; a black people's story; a third world story; etc.. Within the multiplicity of self-narratives I can value one story or more above others by regarding it (them) as normative....I can decide to...make the Christian story my normative story....But I cannot divorce my normative story from other stories. 'The black story tells me how much my Christian story has been tainted by my white story...'.
>
> (Veltkamp 1988:151)[37]

The recursive, critical and dialogical character of pastoral therapy reminds me of Bosch's (1991:489) statement about the dialogical nature of Christian theology: 'Christian theology is a theology of dialogue. It needs dialogue, also for its own

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[35] "Pastoraat is per definitie maatschappijkritisch" (Veltkamp 1988:127).

[36] "In de situatie van het pastoraat ontstaat een theologie die alleen dáár en nergens anders kan ontstaat" (Veltkamp 1988:17).

[37] Ik ken niet alleen, maar ik ben ook verschillende verhalen. Zo ben ik voortdurend op zoek hoe ik mijn eigen verhaal moet vertellen. De mannen versie, de amerikaanse versie, de christelijke versie, die beroeps-versie, enzovoorts. Maar tegelijk ben ik steeds deze versies aan het herzien door ze te relateren aan andere verhalen: de vrouwen-versie, de zwarte versie, de derde-wereld-versie enzovoorts. Binnen deze veelheid kan ik één of meerdere verhalen een hoger gezag geven door ze als normatief te erkennen....Ik kan mij voornemen dat...het christelijke verhaal mijn normatieve verhaal zal zijn....Maar ik kan mijn normatieve verhaal niet afschermen van de andere. 'The black story tells me how much my Christian story has been tainted by my white story...'.

(Veltkamp 1988:151)

sake...'. Zuidgeest stated: 'The dialectic movement between listening to the congregation [client] and listening to the Scripture (the tradition), a commuting between these two shores is vital for pastoral therapeutical work' (1991:63)[38]. In this dialogue with the tradition, where the tradition is continuously interpreted and reinterpreted, we never arrive at final and exact truths.

> Rather, in this model, traditions are living, historical processes in which meanings, although rooted in primary images and symbolic metaphorical themes, continually interact with the changing situations of history to create new and highly nuanced understandings of their implications....Without such continual reinterpretation and metaphorical enactment, the Christian tradition would quickly become a dead tradition, unrelated to the problems and dilemmas of ongoing human life.
>
> (Gerkin 1991:19)

The pastoral therapist cannot control the outcome of the co-construction process in the pastoral therapeutic conversation. In modernistic times,

> ...we might have thought...that pastoral care could supervise the entire process from input to outcome....This has never, in my judgement, been the case. For that reason, the pastor... is enormously free of anxiety about the responsibility for the outcome....the subjects themselves must answer for the process.
>
> (Brueggemann 1993:63)

Hence, the central purpose of pastoral therapy is to engage in a dialogue with the discourses of the client in the light of the Story of God. Such pastoral therapeutic discourses regard the **theological tradition** as a **partner** in the dialogue (Louw 1993:205).

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[38] De dialectische beweging tussen luisteren naar de gemeente en luisteren naar de Schrift (traditie) 'een pendelen tussen deze twee oevers', is wezenlijk voor de pastorale arbeid.

(Zuidgeest 1991:63)

6.3 The pastoral therapist and ethical awareness in a postmodern paradigm

6.3.1 Introduction

Steckel (1993:30), referring to Browning (1976), wrote: 'Pastoral theology is a part of ethics.' The concern with ethics and morals in therapy is, however, not only the conspicuous ethical decisions such as confidentiality, or role expectations, or the individual ethical questions a client brings to the therapy session (Blanchette 1993). The issue is not only whether the therapist ignores or dodges moral values in the dialogue (Browning 1993). The key issue is the **pre-theoretical commitments** that co-constitute therapeutical discourses:

> Not only do implicit metaphors shape the ethical responses of family therapists, [but] particular models of the family, which are embedded in culture, also shape them. Neither families nor family therapists function in a historical vacuum; neither families nor therapists are disembodied systems or parts of systems floating in atemporal space. Both are shaped by and shape the social and historical settings in which they exist....Family therapy is an ethical enterprise. Failure to take seriously family therapy's social context raises an ethical issue. Social amnesia results in a covert imposition of values, which is as serious as overt imposition.
>
> (Dueck 1991:189)

In this section, I will reflect on three pre-theoretical commitments that comprise the ethical responsibility of the pastoral therapist. This responsibility involves three related levels of awareness.

6.3.2 The pastoral therapist's choice of the model of an ideal couple

Since this research focuses on pastoral therapy for and with couples affected by extra-marital affairs, one issue is the pastoral therapist's choice of an ideal couple. The pastoral therapist's choice of the **model** of an **ideal couple** or his/her model

of an adequate marital relationship, and thus his/her choice of what is inadequate, has ethical consequences.

Cultural discourses provide the pastoral therapist with norms for the ideal marriage or family. Philip Greven's typification of evangelical families in three categories each with their own characteristics indicates the potency of cultural discourses to constitute (ideal) types of families (Gerkin 1986:31-35). The pastoral therapist must consciously operate from an awareness of his/her ideal images and their cultural connectedness. Ethical awareness in pastoral therapy must, to my mind, include cultural and social awareness (cf. Vossen 1991:47-50). It should include a differentiation of self (Kerr & Bowen 1988; Fine & Hovestad 1987) in relation to the cultural/religious systems (Friedman 1985; Fowler 1987) within which the pastoral therapist was raised and functions.

To state it more clearly in terms of social construction metaphors: The pastoral therapist must know what discourses are, i.e. he/she has to be aware of the reification of institutionalised discourses; and the pastoral therapist has to be aware of what discourses do, i.e. he/she must be aware of the interpretative and constitutive power of discourses in the lives of people (Lowe 1991:45).

6.3.3 The pastoral therapist's own stages of selfhood and development of faith

The ethical awareness of the pastoral therapist also includes awareness of the pastoral therapist's own stages of selfhood and his/her development of his/her faith (Fowler 1981; Vossen 1991; Müller 1996). The emergence of awareness, i.e. of self-reflexive consciousness, comes about through a gradual and difficult sequence of developmental constructions. We begin our lives embedded in non-conscious dependence upon our parents and our environment. Gradually, we begin to differentiate ourselves as individuals with an awareness which can eventually develop into the critical self-reflecting stance that is so important for the therapeutic enterprise.

Fowler's (1981, 1987) definition of the **stages of faith** is a helpful discourse if one wishes to evaluate oneself in terms of one's own developmental stage. As the

reflexive capacities of a person develop, he/she **differentiates** him/herself more and more from the tacit and unexamined value system in which he/she was reared. A fundamental shift in self-reflection occurs when a person grows to a new kind of self-awareness, when he/she escapes from the tyranny of the evaluative expectations of significant others (Fowler 1981, 1987). This is the inauguration of a differentiation from the tacit unexamined belief systems that have, up till then, been the confirmation of one's identity. Till that escape, the self was a function of its significant social ties.

The inauguration of this differentiation from a tacit, unexamined belief system resembles, in many respects, a demythologising of one's own belief system, or, to put it in narrative terms, the deconstruction of some of the discourses that constitute the self. It involves growth into a **third party perspective** which allow, for the first time, the individual to claim his/her own authority over and against that of significant others. Reliance on the authority of significant others comes to an end, and the individual begins to examine shared beliefs and ethical values critically. This is a rather painful disruption of a hitherto taken-for-granted world view and may feel like the abandonment of one's own trusted community. The old tacit and unexamined value system is made explicit, and the individual scrutinises it for its intrinsic value, if any (Fowler 1981, 1987).

At this stage, symbols and metaphors are differentiated from the reality they represent. Symbols and metaphors lose their ideological power as the symbols and the metaphors are no longer seen to represent an absolute reality (Fowler 1981, 1987). This is the issue discussed in the next section.

6.3.4 *The pastoral therapist's awareness of the ethical mandate of metaphors*

Every discourse is composed of metaphors and each metaphor has an implicit ethical mandate (Dueck 1991:177-178). A pastoral therapist inevitably uses metaphors from his/her own life stories. These stories are constructed within many systems of meaning in his/her historical culture. Furthermore, some of the metaphors also come from the theories constituting his/her pastoral therapeutic practice. Given the metaphorical nature of therapeutic theories and practices and

the implicit ethical implications of metaphors, it becomes evident that ethical neutrality in therapy does simply not exist.

Take, for instance, the **self-differentiation theory** of family therapy (Aylmer 1986; Bowen 1978; Framo 1992; Kerr 1984, 1988; Richardson 1984, 1987). On an overt and explicit ethical level, Waanders (1987) argued that Bowen and his associates used self-differentiation as a moral point of reference, an assumption which has definite ethical consequences for people's commitment in relationships.

On a more covert and implicit ethical level, Bowen's preference for 'self-differentiation' as the ideal way in which a person should function in relationships, as opposed to emotional reactiveness, is a biased choice of **rationality** as the operational mode. Rationality is, however, associated primarily with masculinity, while emotionality and connectedness are regarded as more feminine traits. Hence, it is obvious that, at a pre-theoretical and metaphorical level, Bowen's preference for rationality renders his theory a gender-biased theory with definite ethical implications for therapy and for relationships (Dueck 1991:180). Furthermore, Bowen's theory of self-differentiation may tend to pathologise certain kinds of intimacy and it may be biased against some forms of the relationships between females (Cooper 1997:17).

With the **structural-systemic approaches** (Minuchin 1974), the implicit ethics of their metaphorical language is evident. The ideal relationship is characterised by connectedness, flexible boundaries and clearly defined sub-systems. The metaphors of the structural approach direct the way a couple should go, i.e. the metaphors are not ethically neutral.

The mere presence of language or metaphors in therapeutic discourses means that all therapeutic discourses are ethical discourses (cf. Hare-Mustin 1994)

6.3.5 *The pastoral therapist's awareness of the ever-evolving nature of metaphors*

Metaphors have an extraordinary power to re-describe reality. Ethical metaphors do not represent an absolute reality. Metaphors interpret and alter previous

metaphors and, in doing so, reinterpret and alter the previous 'reality' the original metaphors referred to. If metaphors re-describe 'reality', then the newly re-described 'reality' is in itself a novel 'reality'. With metaphors, we experience the metamorphosis of both language and reality (Van Niekerk 1994).

As I have already indicated, (secular and religious) images shift over time and space. According to postmodernistic social construction discourse as epistemology, the intrinsic meaning of a metaphor such as the **'reign of God'** or **'the will of God'** cannot be a fixed meaning that transcends generations, time and cultures. When we experience the 'reign of God' in our lives and use language to express this experience, we enter into an ongoing metaphor-generating process in which both our discourses and the 'reality', i.e. ourselves, change (cf. Gergen 1994). **Pastoral therapeutic discourses**, and thus **ethical discourses**, comprise a **creative component** that never reaches finality and is **always preliminary**, always appealing for a **new interpretation** of ourselves and our environment. This observation has enormous implications for the way pastoral therapists utilise theological or ethical metaphors in pastoral therapy. Hence, any ideal **theological image** of what a family or marriage should look like can never be universal or timeless.

Furthermore, marital and family relationships are changing rapidly within a postmodern culture (O'Hara & Anderson 1991; Gergen 1991; Doherty 1991; Ventura 1995; Erkel 1995; Taffel 1994, 1996; Wylie 1994a; Sandmaier 1996). We do not know exactly how the 'reign of God' is to be realised in a (postmodern) couple's life (Jordaan 1996). Confusion and a fragmentation of the norms and boundaries people live by seem to typify the situation in which Christian people find themselves (Gerkin 1991). In the co-construction of alternative life possibilities, it remains a **couple's prerogative** to author their own lives. Hence, a choice for the 'reign of God' or for 'agape' as the ethical point of reference cannot be a fixed and divine point of reference that determines the pastoral therapist's agenda within pastoral therapy.

Furthermore, a choice for 'the will of God' or for 'agape' as a conversational participant in the ethical issues of the pastoral therapy, must be made in such a way that all the participants in the therapeutic discourse keep their **critical and reflexive stance** (Wolfaardt 1993). Not all constructs of the 'reign of God' or the

'will of God' are sound and healthy ethical constructs (Louw 1993, Oxenhandler 1996). Hence, it is clear that the pastoral therapist, the theological-ethical discourse as partner in the dialogue, other emotional and relational discourses as well as the clients as participants must keep their **critical and reflexive stance** in the dialogue. Pastoral therapy endeavours to a therapy of analysing God (Louw 1993:87).

Bearing in mind postmodernistic social construction discourse as epistemology, knowledge of the 'reign of God' does not exist objectively. A true and objective reading of the biblical narrative of the 'reign of God', is impossible. All knowledge, and thus knowledge of the theological metaphor 'reign of God,' is a linguistic construct of relational discourses (cf. Sections 5.2.1 to 5.2.3). According to postmodernistic social construction discourse as epistemology, the discourse of the 'reign of God' operates as a partner in the pastoral therapeutic dialogue (cf. Section 6.2). The pastoral therapist and the client, with the contemporary discourses of their culture(s), enter into a dialogue with the biblical narrative, and construe a new contemporary meaning of the 'reign of God' and its ethical implications in their lives.

6.3.6 The pastoral therapist's awareness of reification: ethical ideologies

Ethical discourses are based on root metaphors. The reification of metaphors results in confusion, where ethical practices claim the status of reality and ideology (Freedman & Combs 1996).

Ethical awareness includes an awareness of the metaphorical rootedness of discourses and the tendency for metaphorical discourses of ethics to be reified into ideologies. It is therefore, the task of any pastoral therapist to analyse the relation between metaphors and reality critically to prevent the formation of ideologies (Van Niekerk 1994; Hare-Mustin 1994).

6.3.7   Ethical neutrality in therapy is an illusion. A personal theological-ethical choice

The possibility of ethical neutrality in secular or pastoral therapy is an illusion. It is impossible to engage in a dialogue on marriage, faithfulness and unfaithfulness without certain mental images of what constitutes an ideal (Christian) marriage. These images are not universal and timeless. They are related to a particular time, locality and history - that is, to a specific culture.

> At any point in time, there co-exist several different discourses that define what
> is expected of men and woman in relation to each other, and that produce
> feminine and masculine identities.

(Hare-Mustin 1994:24)

Therapists who claim to operate in an ethically neutral manner are either ignorant of the cultural connectedness of all images and metaphors, or, in a conscious evasion of moral issues, they are inevitably using their contemporary (capitalist and modernistic) culture's narratives in their discourses and thus imposing, unconsciously, certain (ideal) images. There is never any ethical possibility of neutrality: there always remains a question of whose and what culture's ideal images (Dueck 1991:189).

From a postmodernistic point of view, all ethical views are relative, that is no single value can claim to represent the ultimate truth. 'Thus, for postmodernists, judgements about discursive practices are based not on their truth value but on their function and ethical implications' (Hare-Mustin 1994:32).

This brings me to a point where it is apposite for me to reflect on **my own theological-ethical** views. I reflect briefly on theological-ethical meanings of marriage and divorce and then state my own theological-ethical views in this regard.

The meaning of the concept of marriage has undergone changes throughout the history of Christianity and I reflect on these meanings using the categories

supplied by Everett (1985). Everett (1985:35-56) distinguishes between four symbolic models of marriage, namely:

- marriage as sacrament;
- marriage as vocation;
- marriage as covenant;
- marriage as communion.

Each symbolic model contributes to a theological and psychological understanding of marriage and each has a distinctive impact on the way we approach marriage (Everett 1985:53). The focus of marriage within each of these models has shifted from an emphasis on the household to an emphasis on the couple/individuals, and from hierarchy to equality (Everett 1985:35-36).

Marriage as sacrament is a form of participation in the life of the church. Marriage is seen as a symbol of the macro-structure of the church (e.g. in Ephesians). Marriage is seen as a micro-church and as a household of faith. The church accomplishes its public mission through marriage. The household's service/love in the community is the church's service/love to the world (Everett 1985:37-38). According to Everett (1985:38-39) marriage as sacrament contains, however, certain weaknesses:

> The weakness of this symbol is its neglect of the very love that seeks publicity and structure. It places great empasis on the expectations of the church and less on the natural dynamics of love. The institution of marriage takes precedence over the emotional bond of two married people....In assuming that nature is already 'graced', sacramental approaches begin to expect too much of ordinary marriages....In the end a sacramental symbol can be an ideology for church control and a reduction of married life to institutional form.

Marriage as vocation implies that an emphasis on God's call or on God's purposes. Hence, marital life is a form of discipleship and it becomes a way of building the Kingdom of God (Everett 1985:41). This symbolic meaning of marriage puts less emphasis on marriage as an order of creation. It neglects the process of nature in marital life and elevates marital duties to acts of obedience to God (Everett 1985:42-43). One inevitable offshoot of the emphasis on vocation is the

pursuit of personal (economic) goals and, ironically, the progress of individualism and of consumerism (Everest 1985:43-44). In their turn, individualism and consumerism endanger marital commitments.

Marriage as covenant 'creates an analogue of the divine-human relation, or of the relation between Christ and the church....The covenant community that this creates tends to be set apart' (Everett 1985:45). Whereas marriage as vocation draws people to a certain goal, marriage as covenant draws people to a pattern of relationships and they maintain it out of covenantal obligation to God (Everett 1985:47-49). Everett (1985:49) reflects on the strength and weakness of marriage as covenant when he says:

> Its strength lies in the way it combines commitment and relationship. Its weakness, however, lies in its tendency to leave the natural energies of people behind for the sake of a lofty ideal that can become a deadening structure of obligation and exterior transactions.

Wherever people in covenantal marriages seek more equality and energising love, they inevitably move to **marriage as communion** (Everett 1985:49). In this symbolic meaning of marriage, the spouses stress the 'participation in the qualities they each have as persons. Marriage is not so much a product of their moral wills and intention as it is the manifestation of their inherent likeness' (Everett 1985:50). The focus is on love, emotional bonds, the mutual joy of a shared life and on each spouse's personal growth. Hence, their communion is a function of equality of power and not a function of an obedience to a transcendent reality. Hence, grace operates through nature. This model's weakness lies in its lack of permanence and commitment (Everett 1985:51-54).

In pastoral therapeutic practice it is difficult, if not impossible, to apply the distinctions made by Everett (1985). Everett's symbolic models, however, give me a greater understanding of the complexity of what is meant by a theological-ethical view of marriage. These symbolic models function as discourses and can exert tremendous power in the lives of spouses/couples.

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I now turn to the subject of **divorce**. In a debate with the Pharisees about divorce, Jesus affirmed that the marriage union belongs to human nature:

> But in the beginning, at the time of creation, 'God made them male and female,' as the scripture says. 'And for this reason a man will leave his father and mother and unite with his wife, and the two will become one.' So they are no longer two but one. Man must not separate, then, what God has joined together.
>
> (Good News Bible, Mark 10:6-9)

According to Jesus, God intended that the man and the woman should become one. God intended marriage to permanent. God joins a couple together and they become one flesh (Tetlow & Tetlow 1983:289). The biblical teachings imply that marriage is between one man and one woman and that spouses should enjoy sexuality within the context of commitment and loyalty, i.e. in the context of a marriage covenant (Efird 1985:84-84). Divorce is not an option for Christians except in the case of *porneia*, i.e. adultery.

> In the case of adultery, divorce was mandatory both in Judaism and in Roman law'. Jesus however, did not mandate it; he merely permitted it....So even in his exception, Jesus leaves the way open for the couple to continue together as man and wife.
>
> (Tetlow & Tetlow 1983:297).

This must lead us to conclude that Jesus (and Paul) taught that divorce is always wrong except in the case of adultery. The teachings of Jesus and Paul concerning marriage and divorce cannot be interpreted in an absolute and legalistic manner. Jesus and Paul were known for their opposition against all legalism (Jeremias 1975b:203-219; Ridderbos 1962: 241-258, 292-320; 1973:279-284; Goppelt 1981:110-111). There are still biblical scholars who legalistically deny the possibility of divorce (Efird 1985:87; cf. Tetlow & Tetlow 1983:301). Legalism in this regard has caused real anxiety and guilt in the lives of many Christians (Efird 1985:90).

> When the Church appears to forget that **morality is about people** and their joys and sorrows and what is truly good for them, it is no wonder that so many

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of our contemporaries expect no understanding from the Church, either of what makes them happy, their hopes and plans, or of what they fear and what worries and miseries they are going through.

Marriage considered as if it is the **only** good, to which all else must be sacrificed, is as liable to be as **tyrannical** as the contrary intolerance of natural human desires [bold mine].

(Oppenheimer 1990:5, 113)

I believe in the **value of marriage** as a covenant before God and, therefore, as a committed long-term relationship (Thielicke 1964; Heyns 1970; Wheat 1980; Louw 1983; Heyns 1986). I also believe that God has ordained the existence of the marriage/family and calls on its members to live in covenant relationships (Louw 1989:45-50). I believe that marriage is 'a positive, God-given, even foundational gift to individuals and society' (Efird 1985:83). Hence, I regard **extra-marital affairs and divorce as sinful and disruptive** and I believe that they are usually devastating to all relationships concerned (cf. Louw 1989:176-183). Hence, I accept the notion that 'children usually benefit from being raised in a family based around a positive parental relationship' (Halford and Markman 1997:xxv). I believe that children are usually (unprotected) victims of extra-marital affairs (cf. Louw 1989:181-183).

A theological-ethical question arises when we encounter people who are **suffering in marital relationships** (Efird 1985:90-93; Oppenheimer 1990:113). In those situations I cannot but operate on the basis of my above-mentioned theological-ethical choices about the value of a long-term committed marital relationship. This does not mean that I have to adhere to my theological-ethical constructions in such a way that they become the actual agenda of pastoral conversations, nor do I have to view my theological-ethical constructions as a fixed and divine reference point. Wherever theological-ethical constructions become a fixed and divine reference point a religious abuse of the client remains a real possibility in pastoral therapeutic conversations. Reflecting on a pastoral call based upon marital vows for an adherence to faithfulness in the case of marital disintegration, Oppenheimer phrased the possibility of (pastoral therapeutic) abuse in the following way:

> Fidelity cannot be applied as a kind of cement to mend holes in human relationships....Fidelity makes no sense as a substitute for something else which is presumed to be missing. It is the stuff of a good relationship....Married fidelity can go bad too. There are shrewish wives and battered wives, husbands who dominate or are dominated, tyrants and victims, proud of their faithfulness.
>
> (Oppenheimer 1990:19, 21).

It remains a reality that people can suffer within broken marriages. My **awareness** of my above-mentioned theological-ethical choice and of my tacit acceptance of the disguised cultural discourses that accompany such a choice, may, however, allow the possibility that I can **respect the life preferences** and relationship choices of the client involved (Hare-Mustin 1994). I elaborate on theological ethics with regard to a narrative approach in pastoral therapy in the case of affairs in Section 13.2.

In the next chapter, I deal with the phenomenon of extra-marital affairs.

EXTRA-MARITAL AFFAIRS

7.1 The focus of this research: pastoral therapy

The focus of this research was not extra-marital affairs as such. Other researchers have studied and documented the phenomenon of extra-marital affairs (Adler 1996; Atwater 1979; Bell et al 1975; Brown 1991; Elbaum 1981; Glass & Wright 1985, 1992; Hunt 1969; Kaslow 1993; Kell 1992; Lawson 1990; Martin 1989; Moultrup 1990; Penney 1989; Pittman 1990; Thompson 1983, 1984; Sprenkle & Weis 1978). The focus of this research was, first and foremost, the know-how of pastoral therapy, and specifically the know-how of a narrative approach in pastoral therapy, and, to limit the focus even more, the know-how of a narrative approach in pastoral therapy with people who were engaged in an extra-marital affair.

In the following section, where I attend to a 'definition' of extra-marital affairs, I am not so much concerned with the ontology of extra-marital affairs as with the discourses related to extra-marital affairs and what these discourses are doing to people. Hence, I am not concerned about what a discourse is, as much as with what a discourse does (Lowe 1991:45).

7.2 A 'definition' of extra-marital affairs

7.2.1 Is a definition of an extra-marital affair possible?

Descriptions of affairs differ greatly and include behaviour ranging from flirtation, light petting, falling in love, short-term extra-marital sex to a prolonged extra-marital sexual relationship (Elbaum 1981; Thompson 1983, 1984). The different meanings of affairs are co-constructed by the individual narratives of individuals and by the (unique) discourses in the different cultures in which those individuals function (Hunt 1969; Thompson 1983, 1984; Lawson 1990; Brown 1991).

A detailed analysis of the interpretations of affairs in different cultures is a task for anthropologists. I have limited myself to the discourses on affairs in western culture.

7.2.2 Culture constitutes the meaning of extra-marital affairs

A universal definition of extra-marital affairs is impossible (Hunt 1969). Lawson (1990) gave an extensive overview of the definition, meaning and significance of extra-marital affairs in different cultures, political states and times. She explained how difficult it is to give an exact or objective description of adultery or of an extra-marital affair. It is by no means clear what is meant by an extra-marital affair.

Can it be regarded as an extra-marital affair where one party of a couple that is not legally married but is committed to a long-term relationship is 'unfaithful'? Does a 'one night stand' constitute an extra-marital affair, even if the names of the lover(s) cannot be remembered? Could such an event be regarded as an affair in the case of a homosexual couple? Or could it be an affair if one party of a heterosexual couple is involved in a homosexual or lesbian relationship (cf. Elbaum 1981)? Is it an extra-marital relationship where there is no sexual involvement? Lawson (1990:37) reported that over 40% of the participants in her research indicated that they regarded their extra-marital relationship as 'adultery' even though they and their partners never had intercourse.

Does an extra-marital affair constitute immorality or deceit or theft or a crime? In Islamic countries, an extra-marital affair is considered to be theft. Lawson (1990:44) quotes Crozier (1935), an American legal scholar, who wrote: 'It is not immorality that is punished but theft. As the act of the wife, adultery is a revolt against the husband's property rights'.

Different countries have different legal definitions of 'adultery' and different churches have different views about what exactly makes an extra-marital relationship an extra-marital affair. Furthermore, most societies and cultures discriminate against women and regard 'adultery' by women as far more serious than 'adultery' by men (Lawson 1990:48).

Hunt (1969) quoted several anthropological studies showing that only a minority of cultures in the world do not permit extra-marital sex. Hence, in many cultures, it is culturally permitted for married people to engage in extra-marital sexual activity. This is more true for men than for women. I refer the reader to Lawson (1990) for a detailed discussion in this regard.

The definition, meaning and significance of extra-marital affairs are determined and influenced by the discourses in the **local culture**. Here I refer to discourses that are intimately related to one another when it comes to the description of an extra-marital affair, that is discourses relating to **gender, conservatism in values** and **religion.**

Women are far less likely than men to describe their extra-marital affair as a 'one night stand' or 'brief encounter' or 'casual affair'. This suggest that women tend to experience their extra-marital affairs as intimate love relationships. However, in the case of permissive women with a history of extra-marital affairs, women who adhere to the principles of individualism and self-actualisation often praised in western society, these women will more readily refer to their extra-marital affairs as 'one night stands' or 'brief encounters' or 'casual affairs.' On the other hand, conservative and traditional men are inclined to speak of their extra-marital affairs as 'one night stands' or 'brief encounters' or 'casual affairs' (Lawson 1990:54-55). Furthermore, people with a more religious orientation are more inclined to refer to their extra-marital affairs as 'adultery' and they believe more strongly in sexual exclusivity regarding their marriages (Lawson 1990:107).

In this section I have indicated that it is difficult to give a simple definition of an extra-marital affair. In the next few sections, I elaborate on some key descriptions of extra-marital affairs in a postmodern society and I give eventually a narrative description of extra-marital affairs.

7.2.3 Extra-marital affairs as the breaching of cultural boundaries

On a more formal note, Lawson (1990:37) gave the following description of an

adulterous relationship or an extra-marital affair:

> She or he [the unfaithful spouse] breaks the boundary around them - both the
> social circle placed around this particular pair set apart in the institution of
> marriage, and perhaps experienced, when the two became one couple. There
> are now three where there were two - the classic triangle. Not everyone,
> however, thinks there is such a magical encircling of the couple, nor does
> everyone desire it. Most people, however, do feel like this; that is, there still
> exists a broad consensus about the desirability of the intimate relationship with
> one Other [spouse], to be 'a couple' across class and ethnic lines....[they]
> desire a form of marriage.

Hence, an extra-marital affair is, for most people, the breaching of a cultural
boundary. This cultural boundary is constituted by (secular and religious) practices,
rituals and discourses in a local culture (Vande Kemp 1991:45).

7.2.4 Extra-marital affairs as extra-marital sex

Most authors, especially those who did their research in the late 1970's and early
1980's, after the so-called sexual revolution, focus on the sexual component of
extra-marital affairs. At that stage, the non-sexual components of an extra-marital
affair received little attention (Thompson 1983). A more recent contribution came
from Brown (1991:19), a scholar who retains the sexual definition of an extra-
marital affair:

> An affair is a sexual involvement with someone other than the spouse, which is
> hidden from the spouse....Affairs of the heart, which do not involve a sexual
> relationship, are not truly affairs - yet.

My own comments on Brown's definition are the following:

- Brown's description only operates in terms of extra-marital sex.
  Furthermore, according to Brown, emotional involvement does not count as
  an affair. However, I recall the case of Heidi. She contacted me and asked

for pastoral therapeutic help, because she was, in her own words, involved in an extra-marital affair. In our first formal conversation, it became evident that she was purely emotionally involved with another man - definitely not sexually. But, according to her own narrative, she experienced herself as being involved in an extra-marital affair and storied her experience accordingly. A narrative approach in pastoral therapy must respect the client's narrative of an extra-marital affair (Winslade et al 1996).

> Constructivism elevates the client's view of reality...to paramount importance in the therapeutic process. The application of constructivism to therapy makes the client's meaning system hierarchically superior to the therapist's theoretical orientation and/or beliefs. Constructivism, therefore, provides a strong rationale for respecting the pre-eminence of the client's world view. In practical terms, it emphasises the client's personal meaning system as the impetus for therapy.

> (Solovey & Duncan 1992, quoted by Held 1995:312)

- Secrecy is a distinguishing criterion in Brown's definition, but surely it is possible for an unfaithful spouse to be involved in an extra-marital affair even if the faithful spouse knows what is going on. This was the case with **Griet** and **Pine**. Pine informed Griet of his extra-marital affair and then continued with the extra-marital relationship. On the other hand, Pine denied that he was having a sexual relationship with the other woman.

- According to Brown's definition, the therapist decides for a client whether or not the client is engaged in an extra-marital affair. This kind of objectivism recalls the positivistic epistemology of the modernistic paradigm that put the therapist in an 'expert' role, a position that may lead to an imbalance in the hierarchy and thus of power in the therapeutic relationship.

> Structural family therapists emphasised the system over the individual, and the present over the past. And because they had expert knowledge of family transactional patterns, structural family

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> therapists, like Bowen, strategic and psychodynamic family
> therapists - all modernist in claiming objective, expert knowledge -
> believed it was their responsibility to establish the goals and set the
> direction for therapy.
>
> (Doherty 1991:40)

To conclude: There is much more to extra-marital relationships than sexual activity. A sexual description limits and restricts our understanding of extra-marital relationships.

7.2.5 Extra-marital affairs as a breach of trust

I was rather surprised to see that, for some couples, adultery is not so much a breach of sexual exclusivity, but rather a **breach of trust** and **honesty** (Pittman 1990:20). Scholars initially neglected the non-sexual components of an extra-marital affair. In the last decade, however, the emotional components and the breach of trust has received more adequate attention (Thompson 1983; Pittman 1990; Lawson 1990).

Some people do not seem to mind if their spouses have a 'one night stand'. They do not regard such a brief encounter as an extra-marital affair or as adultery, provided that the spouse involved **informs the other** of his/her intentions and plans. Hence, the boundaries do not focus on sexual exclusivity, but on honesty and trust (Pittman 1990:20-21). Adler (1996:42) wrote:

> [T]he commodity exchange in romance is no longer sex, but intimacy. Today
> the deepest betrayal is not of the flesh but of the heart. Hence, unfaithfulness
> is for some couples more a function of secrecy or deceit than that of sexual
> exclusivity.

The knowledge spouses have of one another's **intentions** is critical in determining what will and will not count as adultery (Lawson 1990:40). Lawson (1990:60) also stated: 'Sexual betrayal and deceit are two distinct wrongs, and often the latter is stressed over the former. It is this that makes the illicit quality central in defining what does or does not count as an adulterous relationship [author's italics]. In

some marital relationships, extra-marital sex is allowed with any number of people as long as the two spouses keep each other informed (Lawson 1990:92). For some couples, the way to an enduring relationship based on trust, honesty and love is to remove the sexual boundaries and to be open and honest about it - if there is no boundary to be breached, nothing can be broken (Lawson 1990:94). It seems as if sex can be separated from love and commitment, on condition that both spouses consent to this separation and are honest and open about it.

The cultural discourses of self-actualisation and self-fulfilment are important indicators in the above types of (open) marriages. If your marital partner does not satisfy all your needs, you are allowed to seek an extra-marital partner who can provide for those needs. Hence, the marital story is constituted by the discourses of romantic love, sex, self-actualisation, self-fulfilment, honesty and commitment (Lawson 1990:95).

Couples in such open marriages distrust the discourses of religion because especially western Christian doctrine and ethics demand sexual exclusivity. These ethical demands boil down to one spouse possessing the other. Possession implies exploitation, which means that one partner is violating the human rights of the other (Lawson 1990:99). The discourse of human rights is now co-constructing new modes of marital life and a new understanding of what actually constitutes an extra-marital affair. It remains worth noting, however, that about 20% of couples in Lawson's study in open marriages thought of themselves as having 'committed adultery' and felt guilty (Lawson 1990:103).

Pittman (1990:21) wittily said: 'Infidelities...do not have to be sexual....The unfaithfulness is not in the sex, necessarily, but in the secrecy. It isn't whom you lie with. It's whom you lie to'.

7.2.6 Kinds of affairs

Authors differ in their classification of extra-marital affairs (Pittman 1990; Brock & Lukens 1989). Brown (1991:28-45) differentiated between various kinds of affairs:

- **Conflict-avoiding affairs**. The motive of the unfaithful spouse is to draw attention to unmet needs. Usually these spouses are couples who genuinely

try to improve their marital life. To an 'objective' observer, these couples seem to be ideal couples. They are, however, struggling to communicate because they cannot face any conflict.

- **Intimacy avoidance affairs.** Although it is true that an affair can signify a loss and the deprivation of intimacy in all couples, in this kind of affair intimacy is the key issue. These couples fear intimacy and closeness. The affair is an attempt to jeopardise intimacy and to create distance in an attempt to reduce anxiety. I think this type of affair is related to the so-called neurotic styles. One of these styles is a lifestyle where the neurotic individual inhibits intimacy or trust because of the free floating anxiety that is provoked in an intimate relationship (cf. Coleman et al 1987:191 - 194).

- **Sexual addiction affairs.** The unfaithful spouse is trying to meet his/her sexual needs by sexual philandering. These extra-marital sexual affairs are not in-depth emotional relationships and usually there are many affairs (cf. also Martin 1989; Pittman 1990). [I elaborate on sexual addiction in Section 16.2.]

- **Empty nest affairs.** In this kind of affair, the marital relationship is emotionally bankrupt. The marital partners have led separate lives for many years and communication is poor. The affair tends to be a serious and emotional one and inflicts mortal damage to an already dead marital relationship.

- **Out the door affairs.** The affair is an escape-route from the marriage. The affair camouflages the real difficulties in the marital relationship and is an attempt to spare the faithful spouse the pain of blaming him/herself for the marital failure. The affair is perceived as the cause of the divorce, although this is not the case.

I find the various (modernistic) classifications and attempts to categorise affairs quite illuminating. However, I acknowledge that there is a temptation to exchange the conversational participant's story about the affair for my expert (academic) story about extra-marital affairs (Freedman & Combs 1996).

7.2.7 Affairs as narratives

The very people involved in extra-marital relationships are not always sure whether they have entered the domain of an extra-marital affair, or whether they are still on their way to an extra-marital affair. The **diversity** in the **personal** dimension in the **storying** of an extra-marital affair is evident in the following quote:

> A young woman, trying to understand herself, said with a note of desperation, 'Well, I suppose I am having an affair. I just do not know what is an affair, what is a relationship, what is anything in particular.'

> Adultery is, it seems, something strong, something of which the spouse is ignorant, and a 'relationship'. In America, one attorney said adultery was the word used by her clients when they were 'going to sue for adultery', while another said, 'Adultery is a broken promise, any promise you make to your mate.' A professor thought, too, that adultery was a broken promise, an important broken promise - to be sexually faithful - but it was also about deception. Adulterers may deceive their mates (or the person they are having an affair with) by feigning deep feelings as well as by lying or by remaining silent. A divorce consultant said firmly that 'while sex is a necessary component for an affair to be adulterous, not all extra-marital affairs are adultery. I do not count a one night fling....most people consider adultery as a substantial involvement with someone else.'

<div align="right">(Lawson 1990:36)</div>

Lawson (1990:11-21) examined the myth of adulterous love that surrounds extra-marital affairs. Distinguishing between the terms 'ideology', 'belief-system' and 'myths', she chose the term **myth** as the metaphor for 'a large, controlling image, that gives philosophical meaning to the facts of ordinary life, that is, which has organising value for experience'. According to Lawson (1990), we need myths to make sense out of events and simultaneously these myths control us. These myths exist in **narrative forms** - so much so that Lawson (1990:21) stated: 'But especially I wish to capture the idea of **adultery as story**, and a myth is, above all, a narrative' [bold mine].

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Referring to lovers in an extra-marital affair as story makers, she wrote:

> The...story makers....risk pain and suffering in order to live this story,
> especially since it is in living this story that...many...felt, sometimes for the first
> time, that they were 'really alive' and, even, *why* they were alive. Adultery
> 'renarrativizes' lives that have become empty of meaning without a sense of
> moving forward purposefully – lacking story....Thus I understand adultery *as*
> story, a particular drama central to Western culture, but always, because it is
> story, available for creative rewriting. The [lovers]...created, lived and narrated
> their own stories [author's italics].

(Lawson 1990:20)

The very persons involved co-construct, within the discourses of their individual
cultures, their extra-marital relationship as being an extra-marital affair or not.
Pittman (1990:21) commented: 'So when a man asks me whether something is or
is not an unfaithfulness, I suggest that he asks his wife'. Bearing in mind social
construction discourses as epistemology, I would like to give a **narrative
description** of an extra-marital affair. Extra-marital affairs are, to my mind, a
personal and **culturally** determined narrative. My **narrative description** of an
extra-marital affair is the following:

> An extra-marital affair is experienced and storied where one spouse
> engages in an extra-marital relationship (with or without sex) with the
> effect that one or both spouses begin to story their common and shared
> marital narrative as a imperilled story in which an individual spouse's
> narrative with the lover becomes more dominant than the shared marital
> narrative.

> Even in the case of a secret extra-marital relationship where the faithful
> spouse remains unaware of the existence of the extra-marital
> relationship of the unfaithful spouse, the unfaithful spouse minimises
> their common and shared marital narrative as a married couple. Hence,
> the unfaithful spouse's narrative becomes more dominant than the
> shared narrative. Where this happens, an extra-marital affair is a story

that is interpretative and constitutive of new events and meaning to all
the persons involved.

The secretiveness of an affair enhances the involved partners to story themselves
as a 'separate couple' - it has to do with the formation of a new boundary around
the two lovers and the formation of a division between the unfaithful spouse and
the faithful spouse (cf. Minuchin 1974). The extra-marital affair leads to a new
vitality, exciting and thrilling emotions and a new sense of meaning in life. The
extra-marital affair is 'our secret' and the two individuals involved begin to author a
shared story (Lawson 1990:19-21). The secretiveness of the extra-marital affair
enhances the linguistic construction of a shared story and it **enhances the
mythical and non-realistic** element of the extra-marital affair **story.**

The self-narrative of an unfaithful spouse plays an important part in her/his
linguistic construction of an extra-marital relationship. Whether one has already
had an extra-marital affair determines how easily one can narrate an extra-marital
relationship as an extra-marital affair. Hunt (1969) found that 50% of faithful
spouses that had never had any extra-marital affairs, think that to pick up a
married person at a bar and have sex with such a person constitutes an extra-
marital affair. But only 33% of spouses who have already experienced an extra-
marital affair story the same situation as an extra-marital affair. Hence, the self-
narrative of a person is interpretative and constitutive in a person's narration of an
extra-marital relationship as an extra-marital affair.

Elise was one of the participants in this research. She was a very attractive single
woman who yearned to find a suitable man to marry. She was a devoted Christian.
She met a married man one weekend and instantly fell in love with him. Elise had
not yet talked privately to the man for more than one hour when Elise and I talked
about her experience a few days later. The following excerpt of our conversation
concerns the **fantasy** dimension of her extra-marital relationship and her **anxiety**
about **whether she is involved in an extra-marital affair** or not.

[Elise was the single woman and Alex the married man with whom she was in
love.]

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Elise: *I hope that Alex (the married man) will phone me. I believe that it will be better if I can see Alex face to face. He has organised a reunion. I think it would be better if I could meet him at the reunion. Then I can try to assess* **my feelings more realistically.** *I hope he will do something that scares me off. But, on the other hand,* **I cannot wait for his telephone call. However, I hope he never phones** *me. It will only prolong my* **fantasies.** *It is terrible to work through this.*

Therapist: Are you saying that you are not sure whether or not this is an extra-marital affair?

Elise: Yes, but to some degree it might be an affair. I am worried.

Therapist: Are you afraid that this relationship may shift into an extra-marital affair?

Elise: Yes, I am afraid that it might evolve into one. Yes, I am afraid it might evolve into an extra-marital affair because it must not.

A further complication in the understanding of extra-marital affairs is the element of romantic fantasy (Pittman 1987; Virkler 1992). To complicate matters even more, even all our true stories are mythical stories. Memories or narratives are relational and linguistic co-constructions with mythical properties (Gerkin 1991:58). To describe these narratives as 'mythical' is to validate the non-realistic properties of these narratives. A pastoral therapist must constantly bear in mind that a client's **story** about an extra-marital affair **is a linguistic construction.** And all linguistic constructions are made up of metaphors (Du Toit 1987). Metaphors can only have meaning in relation to other metaphors. I refer the reader to what I said in Chapter 3. The pastoral therapist can never assume that he/she knows what the client has said or meant.

Elise was not sure whether she was involved with a married man, and I was not sure how she experienced or storied the relationship. We both knew that Elise suffered and yearned for some progression in the relationship.

The next brief excerpt came from the some conversation:

> **Therapist:** *Thinking about your thoughts - like what is it?*
>
> **Elise:** *I am in love....These thoughts are like an elephant that can trample me.*

A sentence like '**I am in love**' is almost entirely a metaphorically structured concept. Examples of the metaphorical nature of love are evident in phrases such as 'Love is madness,' 'Love is war', 'Love is blind'. Emotional concepts are not clearly delineated in our experience in a direct way and, therefore, we rely on external metaphors that are not directly related to the domain of love to express ourselves (Lakoff & Johnson 1980:85). This implies that a dictionary will not enhance our understanding of 'love'. It would be rather strange in a dictionary to see 'madness' as a kind of love (Lakoff & Johnson 1980). Understanding is thus not a function of individual metaphors or words, but rather of a domain of experience. Furthermore, metaphors reveal certain elements, but at the same time conceal other elements. New metaphors reveal new elements of a concept such as love and conceal already familiar ideas about love.

The meaning of metaphors is culturally determined and linked to past experiences and **can differ enormously**. It is possible for two individuals to understand the same metaphor in different ways. To say 'love is madness' may lead one individual to understand love as something wild, unpredictable, free of conventions and thus full of joy. Another individual may have a totally different experience of the same metaphor. For that individual it may seem as if love is something stupid and irresponsible and the metaphor may not fit into his/her experience of love (Lakoff & Johnson 1980:142). One metaphor can give new meaning to one person but may not yield a new meaning to a second person. It must be clear that metaphors do not represent the truth. **The real issue is not the truth or falsity of an extra-marital affair as a linguistic construction, but the meaning and inferences that follow from it and the actions it constitutes for the persons involved.**

Elise was not sure whether she was in love. On the other hand she was sure. She did not know whether the love was real or not. She knew however it was a

dangerous situation, although it was a fascinating experience. Recall for a moment our last quote:

> **Therapist:** *Thinking about your thoughts - like what is it?*
>
> **Elise:** *I am in love....These thoughts are like an **elephant that can trample me.***

Elise experienced herself as being in love, but stressed the perilous aspect of the relationship. At this stage I can **extend my narrative description** of an extra-marital affair to include the **lover's** perspective:

> An extra-marital affair is experienced and storied where a **lover** engages in an extra-marital relationship (with or without sex) with a married person to the effect that the lover begins to story a 'common and shared' love narrative. This narrative has the potential to be interpretative and constitutive of future events and stories. It is a perilous story that can trample all the persons involved like an elephant could.

The pastoral therapist must constantly be on his/her guard against a modernistic and positivistic epistemological stance. It is not a pastoral therapist's prerogative to determine whether or not an extra-marital relationship is an extra-marital affair. A narrative approach in pastoral therapy works with the story of the client. In an effort to genuinely use postmodernistic social construction discourse as epistemology, and in an effort to stay true to a narrative approach, a pastoral therapist must **validate** the client's **story** as the **only tool** in the therapeutic relationship. He/she must try to maintain his/her **not-knowing** stance (Anderson & Goolishian 1988; Freedman & Combs 1996).

In the next section I reflect briefly on some of the main reasons for extra-marital affairs.

7.3 Reasons for affairs

> Our unhappiness is not in our marriages, but within us....romance
> is so mysteriously and magically automatic, it doesn't produce
> awareness inside the person. It changes people's lives without
> changing them.
>
> (Pittman 1990:250)

7.3.1 Introduction

There are many discourses that co-constitute extra-marital relationships (Adler 1996; Atwater 1979; Bell et al 1975; Brown 1991; Elbaum 1981; Glass & Wright 1985, 1992; Hunt 1969; Kaslow 1993; Kell 1992; Lawson 1990; Martin 1989; Moultrup 1990; Penney 1989; Pittman 1990; Thompson 1983, 1984; Sprenkle & Weis 1978).

Every extra-marital affair is unique and the reasons for it are unique. A narrative approach in pastoral therapy allow for this uniqueness in every case. I will, however, briefly mention **some** of the **more common reasons** why people engage in extra-marital affairs. We may look upon these reasons as cultural discourses that lead people to engage in extra-marital affairs.

7.3.2 Complementarity in personalities

Kaslow (1993) treated the symmetry and differences (and thus complementarity) in personalities as reasons for a spouse to engage in an extra-marital affair. Although her thoughts were grounded in a modernistic epistemology, this remains a discourse among other discourses that has to be considered.

If marital partners are **too similar** and too serious and hardworking, their marital life could end up a dull and boring business. If partners are both histrionic and narcissistic, the emotional intensity in the relationship could damage their marriage (Kaslow 1993:2). **Joe** and **Joy** may be an example of a couple that are too similar

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and too serious, hardworking and meticulous. Joe was particularly neat, precise, rigid, dull, non-communicative and lacks a sense of a playfulness. Joy experience a sense of deprivation in terms of communication, eros, filia and sex. She expressed her need for passion, fun and communication as reasons for her commencing an extra-marital affair.

On the other hand, if a couple is **too different** in their personalities, their compatibility may be endangered. Kaslow (1993:3) gives an example of a couple where the one spouse was histrionic or narcissistic and the other was obsessive compulsive:

> The histrionic person senses the organized, perfectionistic individual has the stability and structure to help keep him or her 'grounded' and to bring order to the chaos he or she creates. In a reciprocal emotional neediness, the striving, highly structured person perceives the dramatic, expressive person as a fun-loving, free spirit who introduces a *joie de vivre* lacking in his/her life and he/she 'comes alive' - feeling strangely exuberant and vital. Such pairings of opposites occur with great frequency. Later 'the virtues' (*raison d'être* for the coming together of a pair) may 'become the vices' (the qualities that tear them asunder). The histrionic's outbursts change from being charming displays of emotions to being dreaded triggers that escalate [into] seething disputes. The fastidious one's rigidities, tidiness, obsessing over doing everything just right on time, become tedious and too restrictive for the more flamboyant partner, and the embers of the fiery romance cool down.

Pine mentioned that he is a perfectionist and emotionally controlled type of person and that **Griet** is rather emotional and inclined to tantrums. He recalled their courtship in the early years as happy and exciting. Griet's emotionality attracted him and that he was the anchor in her life. In the beginning, her emotional swings spiced up his life and he found her tantrums quite cute. Initially, her tantrums boosted his masculinity, because he experienced himself as the rescuer who could handle her emotionality in an amused and humorous way. She was fond of his steadfastness. However, as the years went by, he became irritated with her narcissism and tantrums. It was no longer cute and it did not benefit their relationship.

> **Griet:** *My husband and I believe that God has put us together. I do not know*
> *why God has put an emotional person together with a non-emotional*
> *person. We were very happy at times.*

Her emotionality and his rationality, which initially attracted them to each other, became the main source of their alienation.

7.3.3 Ego needs

Kaslow (1993:6) stressed, among other reasons, the need to **gratify the ego** as a reason why a spouse embarks upon an extra-marital affair. All the exciting aspects of an extra-marital affair, like adventure, (pseudo) intimacy, sexual experimentation, the feeling of being appreciated and understood, etc., have an **ego-gratifying function** which stands in sharp contrast with the rejection, conflict and criticism at home.

Penney (1989) based her whole argument in her book *How to keep your man monogamous* on ego-needs. The **male ego** needs sex, power, achievement and conquest, i.e. masculinity needs nourishment. The **woman** needs love, loving and being loved. When these needs are not met in the marital relationship, the man or the woman may turn to an extra-marital affair in order to nourish his/her needs. The man's primary ego need is an affirmation of his masculinity. This is the topic discussed in the next section.

7.3.4 Masculinity and extra-marital affairs

Recollecting the myth of romantic love and adultery as it has evolved over centuries in the western world, Lawson (1990:16) contemplated the role of masculinity as a reason for extra-marital affairs:

> For the man, much remains unchanged. The would-be lover can still feel the
> thrill of embarking on a quest for good. In achieving his quest, he conquers
> another man's wife or, perhaps, another woman who is forbidden him because

> he already has a wife. All manner of boundaries are breached; he is a rebel,
> choosing people, places, and moments that might minimise danger and yet
> meet deeply felt psychological needs. He wins her because of his own
> potency; he *merits* her. He may win her because of his high status relative to
> hers, because of his charm, his looks, his sense of humour, his flattery of her,
> his money, or for many other reasons. He *feels* it is entirely his own
> achievement. In modernistic times, people gain much of their selfworth from
> their work - indeed, the identity of men may be so bound up with their
> occupation that when they are unemployed, they cannot say who they are; but
> in this relationship the lover is not dependent on his employer for
> congratulations or rewards - only on the lady for affirmation of his worth
> [author's italics].

The man's masculinity is somehow always in the picture during the formative
moments of an extra-marital affair. A man never engages in a relationship with a
woman who degrades his masculinity. 'Men...seek other women to feel good
about themselves' (Penney 1989:86). 'Once the ego [of the man] is undermined,
it's easy to meet another woman and say "my wife doesn't understand me" and
non-monogamy follows' (Penney 1989:90).

7.3.5 Feminism

The human rights movement and the growth of the discourses of individualism and
of self-fulfilment were some of the discourses that co-constituted the discourse(s)
of feminism.

The advance of **feminism** has had a major impact on the relational role definition
of spouses which has led to greater assertiveness among women and uncertainty
among men. The rising assertiveness of women has led the way for many women
to abandon their traditional 'assistance mode' of being and to engage in a 'power
mode' of being.

> Wives who had mother role models who asserted their influence on family
> decision-making in covert ways, suddenly have become unwilling to 'play that

game' and have become more openly assertive toward sometimes puzzled husbands.

<div align="right">(Gerkin 1991:35).</div>

Feminist critique brought along an uneasiness with white male dominance and a distrust in traditional forms of the marital relationship and roles (Gerkin 1991:39). This has led to an escalating power struggle between the two sexes. Power is a negative and corrupting force in any relationship (Foster 1985). Pittman (1987:49) wittily stated: 'You can't be married and right at the same time.'

> To be sure, the conflicts in marriages that end in divorce have not all been caused by, or necessarily related to, changes in consciousness on the part of women influenced by the **feminist critique** of marital icons. But there is ample evidence that this strong, and sometimes subtle, shift in consciousness has participated in loosening many of the traditional bonds that held American marriages together.
>
> <div align="right">(Gerkin 1991:37)</div>

To my mind, feminism has brought considerable benefits for our society and for marital life (cf. Jordaan 1998). Feminism is, however, not a neutral phenomenon. It functions as a discourse in our society and is therefore a constitutive power in the lives of millions of people - not only in the lives of women, but also in the lives of men. An offshoot of feminism is the ever growing **sexual assertiveness of women** - a phenomenon that has a profound effect on the phenomenon of extra-marital affairs. It is the topic of the next section.

7.3.6 The growing sexual assertiveness of women

Atwater (1979) distinguished between two basic scripts for women's involvement in extra-marital sex. The traditional script is characterised by the woman falling in love and motivated primarily by an unsatisfactory marriage. The second script (the 'humanistic-expressive script' in extra-marital sexual involvement) is characterised by women's **curiosity in extra-marital sex**, the desire for new experiences and

<div align="center">193</div>

for **personal growth** through such extra-marital sexual experiences. Women who are motivated by the 'humanistic-expressive script' to become involved in extra-marital sex are motivated less by dissatisfaction in marriage than by their personal desires (Atwater 1979:61-64). According to Atwater, the humanistic-expressive script was more dominant than the traditional script for women's involvement in extra-marital sex at the end of the 1970's.

Atwater's findings were not supported by the research done by Glass and Wright (1992). These authors found that women's main reason for extra-marital sexual involvement is love and not sex. Women appear to believe that love and sex go together and that falling in love justifies sexual involvement.

Kaslow (1993) stated that some married women escape from a culturally imposed prison that denies them their sexual initiative, and that an extra-marital affair does not weaken their marriage, but rather strengthens their marriage. This is due to the affair's capability to re-awaken their sexuality that had lain dormant and had been experienced as a loss. Some of these women saw their dilemma not so much as a matter of how to end the extra-marital affair, but rather as how to maintain both their marital and extra-marital relationships.

Baron and Byrne (1987:537) elucidated the **cultural implications** of the research of Masters and Johnson (1960, 1962, 1963, 1966) on human sexuality. According to Baron and Byrne (1987:537), 'the psychological implications of many of their findings went far beyond the physiological and anatomical details of their observations'. Reflecting on the differences in male and female responsive cycles after orgasm, they stated:

> The idea that women have the potential to experience multiple orgasms resulted in a reversal of the traditional perception of sex differences in sexual power. Suddenly, males were described as having limited sexual stamina, while females were clearly able to 'outperform them'.

> (Baron and Byrne 1987:537)

Lawson (1990:308) also stressed that **cultural changes** enabled women to become more involved in extra-marital sex:

> ...[T]here are many cultural and structural changes that make adultery more likely...Women...have begun to feel entitled to their own bodies; they have been freed to some extent to play with sex, to *be* as men always have been, free to explore their own sexuality and pursue their own desires...[author's italics].

Women's growing sexual assertiveness is one of the reasons for the occurrence of extra-marital sex. Adler (1996:42) stated that adultery among women seems to be increasing, which many regard as an unintended consequence of the feminism.

7.3.7 Unmet expectations

People marry each other full of expectations, ranging from what the qualities of the marital partner will be to the dream of a wonderful relationship. These expectations are mostly unexpressed, unrealistic and yet they are part of the initial unspoken marital contract. The intensity of romantic love or eros relates to these expectations. The more a person invests in eros, the more diverse and exaggerated the person's expectations are likely to be. When such expectations are not met - and mostly they are not - disappointment sets in and the initial marital contract comes under pressure (Pittman 1987). To translate it in narrative terms: **We each had a story in mind, but it wasn't the same story** (cf. Parry 1991). When this happens, some marital partners consider the possibility of an extra-marital affair to relieve some of the deprivation felt (Lawson 1990; Wheat 1990).

7.3.8 Affairs as a dominant narrative in western culture

With regard to the place of the romantic and adulterous myth in western culture, Lawson (1990:20), quoting Gramsci (1973) and Barthes (1976) wrote:

In the twentieth century, television has become a major carrier of mass culture reaching into the living room of almost every household - and many bedrooms, too - simultaneously and paradoxically diffusing a 'florid pluralism' and a small number of dominant, or - as Antonio Gramsci, the great Italian philosopher-revolutionary, called them - hegemonic ideologies that are powerful at every level, for both women and men...One of the most important of the narratives told by television is again, according to Roland Barthes, the story of adultery - not...just in fictional, dramatic form but also in talk shows and interviews. Describing an interview with an actor, Barthes wrote, 'The interviewer *wants* the good husband to be unfaithful: this excites him, he *demands* an ambiguous phrase, the seed of a story' [author's italics].

Abramson and Mechanic (1983, quoted by Baron and Byrne 1987:547) found in their research that:

If the typical X-rated movie is examined, it quickly becomes apparent that such **concepts as love, commitment, marriage**, and family are **absent**. Instead, **casual sex between strangers is presented as normative** behavior. This same concentration on non-relationship sex is also found to be characteristic of the mass media [bold mine].

Extra-marital affairs have become one of the most dominant narratives or discourses in western culture. This discourse has a profound effect on the lives of many thousands, if not millions, of couples and individuals.

7.3.9 Other important reasons

There are other important reasons why people engage in extra-marital affairs. These reasons include **gender relationships in postmodernistic culture** and discourses such as **eros, self-fulfilment, sex, the loss of agape** and **marital dissatisfaction.**

I will reflect on postmodern culture and these discourses in Chapter 8, in those sections that deal with pastoral therapy, extra-marital affairs and the deconstruction of these discourses.

PASTORAL THERAPY AND THE DECONSTRUCTION OF CULTURAL DISCOURSES WHICH CO-CONSTITUTE EXTRA-MARITAL AFFAIRS

8.1 Pastoral therapy and an awareness of cultural discourses

We live in a society where people's understanding of their relationships is shaped by and through the **cultural discourses** of psychology (Kvale 1992b), theology (Brueggemann 1993), economy, politics, entertainment and other cultural discourses (Lowe 1991; White & Epston 1990; Hare-Mustin 1994). People's life narratives are co-constituted by the discourses in contemporary culture.

> The newly born child is instantly bathed in a cultural 'soap'. From a narrative perspective, problems may be seen as floating in this 'soap'. The problems we encounter are multi-sourced, they are developed over a long period of time, and they come together through the medium of human language to construct and produce our experience.
>
> (Monk 1996:27).

Several cultural discourses that are related to our understanding of love and relationships have been reified into truths or have become institutionalised discourses that exert power over people (Freedman & Combs 1996, Lowe 1991). Hence, a narrative approach in pastoral therapy involves an awareness of the cultural discourses that co-constitute relationships and therapeutic theories and practices (Hare-Mustin 1994).

Minuchin (1991:49) did not seem to agree fully with his colleagues about the relation between narrative therapy and the deconstruction of **cultural** discourses:

> A more serious objection I have to constructivist therapy is its tendency to concentrate overmuch on the personal 'story' of the individual family and ignore the social context that may actually dictate much of the 'plot' of their

> lives - the institutions and socio-economic conditions that determine what they
> do and how they live....Their narratives of hopelessness and dependency have
> been co-written, if not dictated, by social institutions.

Narrative therapy does bear in mind those subjugating 'knowledges of power' that are sustained in the **local culture** (Kvale 1992b; White 1991; Monk 1996). In working with an individual client, a narrative therapist tries to **deconstruct** those **local cultural discourses** that are oppressive (White 1995). Minuchin (1991) is, however, correct in his judgement that the co-construction of a new story alone, without any other intervention, is not always enough to eliminate some oppressive and abusive powers in society or, at least, to free the client from them. Sometimes the pastoral therapist must also tackle those oppressive structures in the local culture.

Efran (1991:51) referred to two remarkable examples where a society's oppressive structures were changed by the means of discourses. Consider for a moment the actions of Martin Luther King and Mahatma Gandhi from a narrative perspective. It is remarkable that these two individuals did not change the oppressive structures of local cultures with military or any other concrete intervention. They opposed the institutionalised discourses that kept the oppressive structures in place with new alternative discourses. That is, they changed society's structures by means of discourses (Efran 1991:51).

I have already referred to White's own version of **deconstruction** (Chapter 4). It is, however, necessary to remind ourselves again about the relationship between **deconstruction** and the **taken-for-granted-realities in our culture,** i.e. **institutionalised discourses:**

> According to my rather loose definition, deconstruction has to do with
> procedures that subvert taken-for-granted-realities and practices; those so-
> called 'truths' that are split off from the condition and context of their
> production, those disembodied ways of speaking that hide their biases and
> prejudices, and those familiar practices of self and of relationship that are
> subjugating of persons' lives. Many of the methods of deconstruction render
> strange these familiar and everyday taken-for-granted realities and practices

by objectifying them. In this sense, the **methods of deconstruction** are methods that **'exoticize the domestic'** [bold mine].

(White 1991:27)

Hence, a **narrative approach in pastoral therapy** has to take note of those **domestic cultural discourses** that have been **reified** into **'truths' in our culture** which promote the **co-construction** and sustain the phenomenon of **extra-marital affairs**. A narrative approach in pastoral therapy tries to **deconstruct** those **cultural** discourses that co-constitute, but impede peoples' lives (Monk 1996). This process of deconstruction is enhanced by **externalising conversations** and **reflexivity**. Reflexivity involves a self-conscious, self-critical pre-occupation with linguistic constructions and their constitutive power (Lowe 1991). Although the postmodernistic metaphor **'reflexivity'** does not equal the modernistic concept of **'self-differentiation'**, it is related, on a certain level, with self-differentiation. Through a process of 'self-differentiation', pastoral therapists must differentiate themselves from these discourses to enhance their awareness of these cultural discourses in the therapeutic relationship (Fine & Hovestad 1987; Fowler 1981, 1987; Freedman & Combs 1996; O'Hara & Anderson 1991; White 1995; White & Epston 1990; Wylie 1995).

Although we do not know beforehand what the relevant cultural discourses may be in the lives of individuals (Anderson & Goolishian 1992), I believe that it is scientifically sound to focus on those cultural discourses which promote and sustain extra-marital affairs. I begin with a brief historical overview of pre-modern and modern culture and its discourses relating to family and matrimonial life.

8.2 Cultural discourses constituting family and matrimonial life

8.2.1 Introduction

The way families and marriages are organised changes over time and place. To grasp aspects of our contemporary discourses that constitutive family and matrimonial life, it is necessary to look at historical developments in this regard. I

comment on pre-modern, modern and postmodern forms of family and matrimonial life.

8.2.2 Pre-modern cultural discourses

People in **pre-modernistic** times did not have to battle with the same uncertainties as we now know. They were not exposed to the mass media which brings the world, and thus alternative cultures, into their homes. People made their living in the same place and pursued the same occupations over generations. They were accustomed to familiar and like-minded people. Most people never travelled to see the 'outside' world. They were not aware of any alternative cultures, beliefs, political and economic structures, and even alternatives in being human. Their own culture's stories, beliefs, symbols and customs were the only reality and norm (O'Hara & Anderson 1991).

These cultural discourses were dominated by a transcendent-immanent paradigm (Rossouw 1993), where the emphasis was on the transcendent and its clerical representatives in society. The church with its ordained clergy subjugated every aspect of society.

In those societies, the individual was regarded as part of multi-generational family and the family's needs overrode those of the individual. Children lived closed to their parents and the maintenance of family connectedness held a high priority.

8.2.3 Modernistic cultural discourses

The **modernistic** era dawned with the advent of rationalism, positivistic science, technology, and increasing communication. The mobility and migration of people, urbanisation and the advent of printing brought people into closer contact with different cultures. Pluralism began to replace monolithic cultures. New forms of government emerged and 'religion, values and world views ceased to be integral parts of the social environment and became matters of individual choice and conflict' (O'Hara & Anderson 1991:23). Although religion was not regarded as a science, religious institutions still claimed to proclaim truth and served as a source of identity for many. The modernistic era brought with it the birth of individualism.

The individual became significant. The individual replaced society as the locus of value. Thence followed the abolition of slavery and the rise of human rights. This rise of individualism was still tempered, though, by what was regarded as standard and normal. People had to fit into a given society to be accepted as members of that society (O'Hara & Anderson 1991).

8.2.4 Postmodern cultural discourses

Postmodern culture does not replace modern culture, instead, it is the critical baby of the mother that is modern culture. One cannot comprehend the baby without knowing the mother. The criticism of postmodern culture is, however, not a new rationalism that promotes singular truths (Dill 1996). Postmodernistic culture promotes cultural pluralism. Postmodernistic culture is not anti-establishment, it focuses on new possibilities. New possibilities, however, bring a plethora of choices. Maybe, in essence, this multiplicity is the core of postmodern culture (O'Hara & Anderson 1991). Postmodern culture touches every aspect of human culture - from biology to the arts.

> While modernism comprised an aesthetic of purity, clarity, order and analytical abstraction, postmodernism tends toward elaboration, eclecticism, ornamentation and inclusiveness....The pure, clean, even puritanical form of the modernistic art object is replaced by a postmodernistic sea of contending images in a media free-for-all, often combining painting, sculpture, photography, manufactured artefacts - even music, dance, video, mime - in one work.
>
> (Doherty 1991:40)

The late twentieth century has produced an array of technologies that are altering human existence. Telephones, cell-phones, faxes, satellite television, automobiles, aeroplanes, computers and the internet have shrunk the world and we now live in a global village. We engage with the cultures of the world on a daily basis. In this process, people's own monolithic cultures are exchanged for a **cultural pluralism** (Jordaan 1996).

On a social level, once familiar and like-minded significant others are replaced by many impersonal social contacts in the market place of a world economy. This phenomenon places an ever greater emotional burden on the intimate relationships in the family. Through the mass media, people are confronted with more information about wars, strikes, crime, famine, earthquakes, 'just causes', feminism and ecological crises. A century ago, people could live in one small village for a lifetime and were never confronted with these anxieties.

Simon (1991:2) uses the metaphor of a 'television remote control' to describe postmodern culture. The advent of channel television has inaugurated a vast array of choices of programmes. At the touch of a button, the viewer jumps from one place in the world to another, from one theme to another, and from genre to genre.

> What the habit of channel surfing has done is to shift the balance of power between the viewer and the realities beamed at us. The sheer profusion of choice and our ability to move so easily from one to another, undercuts the authority and impact of any particular message. The speed of the channel changer technology allows us to restlessly glance over scores of realities, while making it difficult to believe in the special importance of any one....we live...hyper aware of all the choices available to us, not only about what to watch on TV, but what to believe in and how to lead our lives. This awareness of the multiplicity of possible realities, along with the scepticism that authority and tradition have anything to tell us about how to tune in the events of our own lives, is the hallmark of...'postmodernistic' society.
>
> (Simon 1991:2)

Exposed to so many alternatives with regard to beliefs and even to being human, some people struggle to come to grips with their religious life, God and their own identity (Gerkin 1991:31-41). Jordaan (1996a:25) expressed the religious postmodern dilemma when he wrote:

> There are no more grand narratives nor the 'great story' that prevails for ever as the truth. Broad principles based on concepts such as one God; one truth; one uniting ethical consensus; the only and best way to live - these are

suspect. To put it differently: The 'ultimate foundations' that were given to us within the modernistic idiom of certainty have crumbled beneath a criticism of the kind of faith that was never to be questioned - it crumbled beneath a criticism of pedantic prescriptiveness and of the one and only doctrine. [39]

Some people take postmodern culture far less seriously. They enjoy the uncertainty and find the unashamed consumerism of buying products, and shifting beliefs and identity adventurous. 'They do not so much believe as have beliefs...you can see them move through different belief systems, cultures, life-styles, inhabiting them in rather tentative ways' (O'Hara & Anderson 1991:40).

At a social level, we have become embedded in a multiplicity of relationships....we ingest myriad bits of other's being - values, attitudes, opinions, lifestyles, personalities - synthesising and incorporating them into our own definition of self....we find it increasingly difficult to look inward to discover what we desire and believe in....We have gathered so many bits (or bytes) of being to create our selves that the pieces no longer mix well together....To look inward, then, is to risk seeing a maelstrom of partial beings in conflict....This is the experience of the world and self that I call 'social saturation'.

(Gergen 1991:28)

This **multiplicity in cultural discourses** has a **profound effect** on the institutions we know as **marriage** and family life. Postmodern culture is changing the scenario of the family and of matrimony.

In a postmodernistic cultural environment, all the members of a family, even a young child who attends nursery school, have their own busy schedules and individual objectives. 'The ordinary, daily confluence of multiple lives within one

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[39] Daar is nie meer meestervertellings of die 'groot storie' wat ewig vasstaan en waar is nie. Breë grondvestings wat setel in dinge soos één God; één waarheid; één samesnoerende morele konsensus; één beste manier van leef, is verdag. Anders gesê: Die 'ultimate foundations' wat so saakgetrou aan ons gegee is in die modernistiese idioom van sekerheid, het verkrummel onder die aanslag van 'n kritiese beskouing van geloof wat nooit bevraagteken word nie; van pedantiese voorskriftelikheid en van die enigste korrekte belydenis.

(Jordaan 1997:25)

household makes for a sense of fragmentation, as if the members of the family were being scattered by the centrifugal force of postmodern life' (Gergen 1991:29). The traditional experience of a normal family is, for many people, only the (hurtful) nostalgia of the past (Carter & McGoldrick 1989:4-25).

Traditional families had clear and definite boundaries. Everybody knew who was part of the family. In a postmodern, culture the boundaries and definitions of a family have changed. Migration and mobility have severed the bonds with parents, grandparents and other members of the family of origin. Busy individual schedules; divorce and remarriage; stepparents; with the children as 'mine, yours and ours'; the changing position of women in the workplace and in society; communal living; co-habitation and homosexual couples have changed the meaning and boundaries of 'family' for ever (Gergen 1991:30).

Gergen (1991:30) chose the term 'floating family' to describe this phenomenon: 'A person belongs to what could be called a *floating family*, which comprises a relatively formless array of familial relationships in a continuous flux' [author's italics]. People's emotional distance to family members (and to a spouse) differ over time. 'One may feel closely connected to those who share name and blood during Sunday dinner, yet on Monday feel more at home during lunch with a long-time working comrade, and even alienated from "my crazy family"' (Gergen 1991:30). Hence, many extra-marital affairs originate in the workplace (Adler 1996:42).

Two important contributors to this blurring of what it means to be in a family are cultural pluralism and the ever-increasing push of television to entertain and amuse. The media, in portraying a family, cannot rely on the portrait of a 'normal' family, nor on a 'normal' marriage, to entertain and fascinate the audience endlessly. The media have to reject the once ethical and valuable form of the family and of marriage because it does not amuse the television audience any more. The media then either creates a parody or comedy of the normal family and marriage, or on the other hand, explores culturally odd and uncommon forms of living (for example open marriages) in an attempt to hold the audience's attention (Gergen 1991:32). Hence, the norm and ideal of matrimony and of family became pliable and uncertain. New diverse and competing cultural discourses encourage and even enforce alternative ways of living that are subjugating the once

monolithic discourses of family and marital life (Lowe 1991:45). Cultural pluralism has produced so many alternative lifestyles that the norm and ideal of family or marriage have become indistinct (Jordaan 1996). Hence, any way of life and mode of relationship becomes 'okay' and the theological discourses about monogamous marriage are dominated by these new diverse discourses. The postmodern marriage and family are more prone to conflict than their modern counterpart. People's identities are embedded in the stories they are storying of themselves. These stories are co-constructions, the product of the **social discourses** of the **relationships** to which people are exposed. In a postmodern environment, the various family members are exposed to a vast display of different relationships, from the workplace to the characters in their favourite television series, from the mathematics classroom to peer groups, from a small group to e-mail conversations (Gergen 1991:32). This diversity of co-constructions, which constitute the identity of family members, invades the space we know as 'home'.

> The home, traditionally idealised as a refuge of harmony and serenity and common understanding, becomes the site of multiple confrontations and collisions between persons related by blood and marriage but not necessarily by gender- and age-group identification, ideology, family of origin, childhood community, educational institution, friendship or love affair.

> (Gergen 1991:32).

This postmodern cultural context and discourses explain some of the **diversity** in conflicts between spouses and it may co-constitute the genuine desire of so many spouses to find new meaning in a new extra-marital love relationship. To summarise: **The cultural discourses of love and of marriage have undergone significant changes over the past few decades.**

8.3 To conclude: Pastoral therapy and competing cultural discourses

It is against the background of these **competing diverse cultural discourses** (Drewery & Winslade 1996) of the postmodernistic era that the phenomena of monogamous marriage and of extra-marital affairs must be understood:

> A counsellor using the narrative approach wants to deconstruct the problem
> that is presented. He or she asks questions that give the client an opportunity
> to explore various dimensions of the situation. This helps to reveal the
> unstated **cultural assumptions** that **contributed** to the original construction
> of the problem [bold mine].

(Monk 1996:8)

Hence, a **narrative approach in pastoral therapy** has to attend to:

- the discourses/narratives of an individual couple or spouse, and to
- cultural discourses as institutionalised discourses (Lowe 1991:45).

In the following chapters, I focus on a narrative approach in pastoral therapy and
the deconstruction of some selected discourses in our culture that co-constitute
extra-marital affairs.

In doing so, I will try to remain true to my choice of postmodernistic social
construction discourse as epistemology and to not treat these cultural discourses
as 'objective truths' about extra-marital affairs.

THE DISCOURSE OF EROS AND
EXTRA-MARITAL AFFAIRS

9.1 The discourse of eros

9.1.1 Eros: Emotion or discourse?

Before proceeding, I would like to give a description of romantic love (eros). I found
the following two modernistic descriptions adequate:

> ...[Romantic love] refers to an intense, sometimes overwhelming emotional
> state in which a person thinks about a lover constantly, wants to spend as
> much time as possible with that individual, and is often quite unrealistic in his
> or her judgements about that person.

> (Baron and Byrne 1987:208)

> Eros is not always sensual, but it includes the idea of yearning to unite with
> and the desire to possess the beloved. Eros is romantic, passionate, and
> sentimental. It is often the starting point of marriage, being the kind of love
> lovers fall into and write songs and poetry about. It has been called
> rapture...exquisite pleasure...strong, sweet, and terrifying because it is so all-
> absorbing. Eros has a problem, however. It needs help because it is
> changeable and cannot last a lifetime all by itself. Eros wants to promise that
> the relationship will last forever, but eros cannot keep the promise alone.

> (Wheat 1980:59)

Romantic love does not mean that you love someone. It refers to 'being in love'.
'Being in love' is a psychological phenomenon where the lovers experience a
sense that they have found the ultimate meaning of life, that they have found a

missing part (Person 1989). When lovers are 'in love', they experience a superhuman emotional high or feelings of ecstasy. 'Being in love' includes the subconscious psychological demand that my lover will always provide me with this feeling of ecstasy (Virkler 1992).

It is common to think of eros as a kind of inborn and natural drive inherent to humans. This notion was propagated over many centuries in Greek mythology and philosophy, the Bible's Song of Solomon and other famous literature (May 1969). Some authors maintain the notion that romantic love is inherent to human nature and they argue that romantic love is found in all cultures (Grunebaum 1997). There is, however, 'disagreement about whether romantic love is a basic predisposition of human nature or merely a culturally induced phenomenon' (Person 1989:17).

The view of **eros as something inherent to human nature** is **at odds** with **postmodernistic social construction discourse as epistemology**. When we consider a topic such as 'romantic love', we must bear in mind that **'romantic love' is not a universal emotion, nor is it an inherent natural quality of humankind.** Hoffman (1992:12) challenged the notion that

> emotions exist inside people as discrete traits or states and that they are the same all over the world. Many people have no knowledge or record of the emotions we subscribe to; the *idea* of emotions is comparatively recent even in our own history. Social constructionists view them as just one more part of the complex web of communication between people and do not grant them special status as interior states [author's italics].

The notion of 'romantic love' is **socially constructed in local cultures** (Harré 1986:2-14). Diverse meanings of 'love' correspond with diverse discourses found in diverse local cultures.

> Clearly romantic love does not have the same priority or value in all cultures....Some cultures, for example, sanction the separation of passionate friendship and sex. Moreover, in any given culture, men and women are often socialised to different roles, values, and modes of [love]. The experience of

love, then, surely varies according to epoch, culture, class and caste, and even
gender.

(Person 1989:22)

In some cultures, people do not experience the kind of romantic love that is
nowadays regarded as so common in the western world. The difference between
the Japanese emotion *amae* and the West's emotion romantic love is an example
of cultural differences with regard to an 'emotion' such as *amae*/love (Morsbach &
Tyler 1986:289-305). The cultural meaning of 'love' is a theme for ethnographic
researchers rather than for psychologists who are looking for some inherent and
universal quality in people (cf. Heelas 1986:234-261).

> In order to experience romantic love, it is necessary to learn that such a thing
> exists. This emotion seems to occur only in cultures that expose their citizens
> to the appropriate models in fictional presentations and in real life.

(Baron and Byrne 1987:209)

**If romantic love is a product of linguistic constructions in a local culture, this
suggests the ethical implication that romantic love can be deconstructed.**

> [T]here is a range of emotional experience which is not naturally pre-existent
> but which, like intellectual and practical experience, is made available
> to...[people] via their acquaintance with cultural systems and the language,
> social rules and practices which such systems involve. This in turn raises an
> issue concerning the **ethics of the socio-cultural constitution of emotion**. If
> emotions do have a...dependence upon socio-cultural beliefs and values, then
> **this introduces the possibility of providing a revisionary moral analysis
> of emotions**, the results of which **enable us to select...emotions** which can
> be justified as of **most benefit to social relations** and of the individuals
> involved [bold mine].

(Armon-Jones 1986:82).

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Hence, 'romantic love' or eros is not a natural phenomenon inherent to humans. Eros is a cultural discourse and the ethical implication is that it can be deconstructed. Eros, however, has become **an institutionalised discourse** and is now an unexamined and taken-for-granted 'emotion' believed to be inherent and natural to being human by most people in western society (cf. Averill 1986:100).

In the next section, I explore the process of the institutionalisation of the eros discourse.

9.1.2 The institutionalisation of the eros discourse

Lovers have experienced **romantic love (eros)** over many centuries. The Bible describes eros in *The Song of Solomon*. Greek mythology came up with the god Eros. Plato wrote about Eros (May 1969). Eros has, however, not always been the only basis for choosing a marital partner, nor was it the basis for marriage. Although desirable in marriage, eros was, in previous centuries, not the basis nor the object of marriage. It was therefore quite feasible to marry for economic reasons and to consider romantic love less important.

In previous centuries, a person who considered a marital proposal, more often than not, dissociated agape from eros. Very often the pleasures of eros were sought outside the marital bond in an extra-marital affair. This frequently happened, especially in England, in the previous century (Lawson 1990:22-24). Nevertheless, the **eros discourse become more and more prominent**, so much so that the eros discourse today dominates other discourses relating to love and marriage (cf. Oppenheimer 1990:12).

Baron and Byrne (1987:209) referred to Dion and Dion (1975) and commented on the rise of the eros discourse:

> The idea of love arose in Europe in the Middle Ages, and it was thought to be
> a pure and holy emotion unrelated to sexual desire. It was not until the end of

the seventeenth century in England that it became generally accepted that an ideal marriage was based on love.

Since then, the romantic love discourse has gone through several stages (May 1969), and today romantic love is unimaginable without strong sexual overtones (Baron and Byrne 1987). Most marriages are now built on romantic love and a commitment of some form. Reflecting on romantic love and on commitment/agape, Lawson (1990:23-24) made the following illuminating comments:

> But eros and agape are not now [1988] divided into different spheres: both are desired...the decision to marry is based on both passion and intimacy coupled with commitment: these are the points of the triangle of the romantic love that provides the basis for marriage. No longer is it praiseworthy to yearn for another lady who is someone else's wife, but this ideal soulmate should be one's *own* wife. **Romantic love has become the most desired experience of life - the fantasy of the West**. Thus an ideal of Romantic Love has been bounded by the conventional form of marriage and a great modernistic myth - the Myth of Romantic Marriage - has been created.

> Central to the Myth of Romantic Marriage is thus the ideal of a love for another person - and only one - which will last. But for how long? Once the answer was clear: as long as both live. Now permanence cannot be separated from the ideal of love: permanence means as long as love lasts....

> Sexual exclusivity and permanence are the linchpins of the myth. Thus at the broad, dominant cultural level, people are expected to find - that is they should find - a love story within their marriages.... 'Happy ever after' is thus a phrase containing whole sets of ideas and images about a future, patterned not randomly but according to expectations and fantasies. **This is a commonly shared...story....It is the way in modernistic times to experience oneself as *good* - that is, as morally worthwhile. Loving and being loved, being 'in love', are virtuous conditions - the 'proper' goal for every adult and particularly for every woman. In this sense, the story is 'a public morality'...[that is]** to be spread much more widely across class and ethnic lines than ever before [author's italics, bold mine].

Power as an element of eros has been recognised for a long time. Plato referred to eros and said, 'Eros is a daimon', thereby signifying its power over lovers (May 1969). Although people have experienced the power of eros for centuries, eros has now became a social power of unknown fury. Although it is true that individuals are still sensitive to issues such as class, culture, economic viability etc., in their decisions regarding the choice of a marital partner, romantic love is, nowadays the only **publicly** acceptable reason to marry (Lawson 1990:67). Once people began to **institutionalise the eros discourse**, they tended to promote certain definitions about themselves, other people and relationships; and usually they do so without being aware of it (cf. Freedman & Combs 1996). The **discourse of eros** has become a dominating and **institutionalised discourse**. Through a historical **process of social linguistic construction**, the **discourse of eros** has become a taken-for-granted **reality**, a **power** in our society.

Practitioners of a narrative approach have to be alert to the power of this cultural discourse in the lives of the unfaithful spouse and of the affairee. The pastoral therapeutic process must in some way contribute to the deconstruction of the debilitating aspects of this discourse.

> In our culture, one must, in order to assess a love realistically, disregard or deny much of the kind of 'love propaganda' to which all young people are exposed in movies, magazines, television, and commercial advertisements of products. All these media present definitions of love that are distorted and misleading.
>
> (Landis & Landis 1977:111)

In the sections below, I would like to reflect on eros from a rather modernistic epistemology. I will, however, bear in mind that I am not talking of eros as an objective reality, but as a cultural discourse. I am not so much concerned with what a discourse is, than with what a discourse does (Lowe 1991:45).

9.2 The discourse of eros and the formation of an affair

9.2.1 Christians and the gradual formation of affairs

Although it is true that many extra-marital affairs are impulsive one night stands with little emotional investment, many extra-marital affairs evolve over a period of time. The decision to engage in an extra-marital affair is usually not a bolt from the blue - instead, it is only a vague possibility. This possibility evokes genuine guilt, especially among religious people.

> For Christians the most common way an affair begins is through a friendship, usually an innocent and well-meaning one. Though sex eventually becomes part of most affairs, the major motivation for the majority of Christians in affairs is the desire for a relationship, the yearning for a deep friendship....Because they [i.e. affairs] develop so gradually, they don't trigger the spiritual alarms they might if they were developing rapidly.
>
> (Virkler 1992:5)

The evolving, and at the early stages not deliberate extra-marital affair, grows out of many minute and albeit innocent decisions and actions. The (not yet) unfaithful spouse evades the moral issues in an attempt to minimise guilt (Brown 1991:22). The many minute (and innocent?) decisions and actions eventually lead to a situation where the extra-marital affair 'just happens' and the person has little control over his/her emotions and sexual desire. Lawson (1990:160) gives the story of such a woman:

> ...[A] beautiful woman who describes her infidelities as arising out of situations where she was quite out of control....As if she had had nothing to do with being in that situation at all. But, of course, she had made many tiny decisions (not perhaps at the level of consciousness) which led her where [she] was quite conscious that she avoided guilt by 'allowing' her sexual desire to grow until it 'swept her off her feet'. She knew she 'went along with' actions and situations which allowed her desire to grow until she could no longer resist it only verbally while her clothes were being taken off by her 'seducer'.

In other words, such persons do not feel they have made any decision to become involved in an extra-marital affair. Hence, they try to **minimise** their sense of **guilt** because they do not story themselves as persons who are authoring their own lives (cf. Virkler 1992:107-113). The lover authored their lives for them.

Atwater (1979) found different results in her research. Three-quarters of the women in her sample thought about the prospect of becoming involved in extra-marital sex before they actually did.

In the following section I deal with the amazing power of the discourse of eros - even in the lives of Christians.

9.2.2 The amazing power of the eros discourse

I have already referred to Elise's story in Section 7.2.7.

Elise was one of the participants in this research. She was a middle-aged and very attractive single woman who yearned to find a suitable man whom she could marry. She was a devoted Christian. She met a married man during a camp over a long weekend and instantly fell in love with him. On the day after the weekend, Elise wrote a letter to the man in which she revealed her romantic feelings. Before posting the letter, she consulted her Bible study group leader. The group leader cautioned her against posting the letter. Elise, however, posted the letter. Elise came to see me for a pastoral therapeutic conversation a few days later. Elise had not even talked to the man to reveal her romantic feelings and did not know what the man's reaction to the letter would be when Elise and I talked about her experience. The following is her love letter to her potential lover:

> *Dear Henk,*
>
> *Let me allow myself a few words to thank you for an un-forgettable experience. Without you, the weekend would not have been the same. I recall details of your actions during the weekend that fascinated me:*

- *you ushered people to their seats;*
- *you entertained us on the bus;*
- *the way you made up the teams;*
- *your reading of heart-breaking stories beside the camp fire;*
- *the way you conversed with the children, and*
- *your dependence on God for His protection.*

Thank you for the evening at The Berg; for the stylish presentation of the certificates and the presents...The name tags, each with a stunning quote revealing your style and compassion. I appreciate all your arrangements. You are an exceptional man with a noteworthy personality and general knowledge - a rough and stylish wanderer with a fine perceptivity and cultural finesse. A rare combination in a man. Your eccentricity fascinated me. You have pretty children and, unless I am not wrong, you have a seeking and restless heart. I may be wrong, but you experience inner conflict between your connectedness to your family and your wandering heart....

I hope and pray that you and your wife will soon experience the joy that is eluding you and that you will become more peaceful. I believe in miracles. I do not know you, but I hope that you will handle the revelations of my feelings more responsibly than I am. Forgive this revelation. I am doing it against my better judgement. I experience that I am rebelling against a beautiful moral truth: 'Joy is not to do what you want, but rather to joyfully do what you must do'....Look after yourself.

Greetings,

Elise.

I am not quoting this letter to show how Elise initiated the extra-marital relationship. Instead, I am concerned **with the powerful effect of the discourse of eros in her life**. Pittman stressed the powerful effects of eros in the lives of lovers. He went so far as to indicate that the effects of the discourse of eros in the lives of people who are in love is a form of temporary insanity:

> When people are 'swept off their feet', especially by a romantic, i.e. picturesquely unusual, stranger, the intensity is so exciting that they sign on for life. They are *in love*, personalizing this romantic excitement and hoping marriage will make it permanent. In-love is, of course, a form of temporary insanity....

<div align="right">(Pittman 1987:86)</div>

Elise had not even spoken to the object of her romantic love after the weekend and within a few days she was swept off her feet. Martin (1989:7) wrote a modernistic article on romantic addiction and he stressed the linguistic, i.e. the social constructionist, element of eros and its powerful effects:

> The romance addict is in love with the *idea* of romance. She is living a life of illusion. The romance addict believes that someday her prince will actually come. Often the fantasised focus of the addict's attention is unattainable. She is obsessed with the accoutrements of the relationship, but not with the actual relationship....The important element is the thrill of the fix....The addict is preoccupied with what kind of new romantic illusion can be created, rather than being present with the person [author's italics].

Postmodernistic social construction discourse as epistemology prevents me from labelling Elise a romantic addict. I am, however, amazed by the potency of the interpretative and constitutive power of the eros discourse. Could it be possible that Elise engaged in a **dialogue with a discourse** (not with a lover!) and that she and the discourse of eros co-constructed a **mythical linguistic construction** that could change the course of her life?

Elise was aware of the mythical and fantasy element in this linguistic construction of eros (cf. May 1969; Virkler 1992). But her knowledge of the fantasy element did not relieve her anxiety and inner turmoil.

> **Therapist:** *Before the weekend, did you know Henk well?*
>
> **Elise:** *No, I had no contact with him. It is bad. On the other hand, it is not bad....The Friday afternoon during the weekend the ladies took a bath in the river - in our bathing costumes. Henk gave me a daisy and said he likes to give daisies to people while they are still alive, and he said I am well built for a lady of my age....he said my eyes are beautiful. The afternoon upset me...The Saturday I struggled and the Sunday too....After the weekend I kept a diary. I wrote, 'Thank you for Friday. It feels like a **romantic dream**. You and I shared only fifteen minutes alone in a romantic atmosphere, I can hardly believe this....'*

From her letter and from our conversation it is evident that eros was not the only discourse on the horizon. In her letter to Henk she wrote *'I am doing it against my better judgement'*. Moral discourses were part of her story. The **genesis** of an extra-marital affair is a story of **battling discourses** (cf. Lowe 1991:45). Earlier in the same pastoral therapeutic conversation, the following was said:

> **Therapist:** *It seems as if you want to talk about extra-marital affairs?*
>
> **Elise:** *Yes, I have developed **feelings for a married man** and I **experience it as bad**. It is worse than being a lonely single woman....You know how it is with our sinful nature. It is bad because I **value matrimonial life**. I was married and I know what a wife endures if she suspects that her husband is unfaithful...I do not wish to cause Henk's wife these feelings.*
>
> **Therapist:** *Did you experience an extra-marital affair while you were married to your late husband?*
>
> **Elise:** *No, no, never....But now this man comes along and everything that he does, everything that he says, I am so excited about his whole being! And that is bad. **I have this fire burning within me and I am suffering while I am trying to handle it.***

During the same conversation she added:

> **Elise:** *I am keeping this diary for later reference. Maybe, when I read the diary later on, I can see, 'Good gracious woman! You have lost your head. Are you aware of what you have said?' I am visualising a marriage with this person....In my diary I wrote: I can think of nothing else than to be with you wherever you go...and to be your back-up in love. Where am I going to find somebody like you? I believe in miracles. I am asking God to give it to me. Thy will be done. But if you do not find the joy you are looking for, then I do not want it either....The Lord is giving me the strength to overcome the situation. Then the greatness of the Lord controls the situation. But, this afternoon I am feeling terrible. I am yearning for this man....*

Elise's theological-ethical discourses, her loneliness as a single woman and her eros discourse co-constituted her story. She phoned me in great anguish to speak about her inner struggle. The conversation was about her 'cognitive dissonance' (Baron & Byrne 1987; Hurlbert 1992). For a detailed discussion of the process of 'cognitive dissonance' in the lives of Christians who are involved in extra-marital affairs, I refer the reader to Virkler (1992:107-112).

Elise was a devoted Christian who came for pastoral therapeutic help during the formation phase of an extra-marital affair. Even though she knew that her romantic feeling was only a **'fantasy'**, she recognised the real danger it posed.

> Love is a good, but it is not the only good. It often comes into conflict with other goods such as reason, personal goals, family, and ethical obligations. And the power of romantic/erotic love can lead one - even knowingly - into a relationship fraught with conflict, into moral and emotional minefields.

> (Grunebaum 1997:300)

In a certain sense, Elise was helpless in the face of the power of the eros discourse. Pastoral therapy endeavours to deconstruct the cultural discourse of eros in order to enhance the ethical competency of the person engaged in an affair

to take more responsibility and to accept accountability for the effects of the (would-be) extramarital relationship (White 1989, 1991, 1995; White & Epston 1990).

9.3 The loss of eros in marital relationships leads to extra-marital affairs

The emphasis on romantic love as the ideal of matrimonial life is a complicating factor when it comes to maintaining the stability and permanence of a marriage. Two aspects of eros contribute to this complication. These two aspects are the **fluctuation in the experience of eros** and **gender differences in the experience of eros**.

Eros fluctuates in intensity over the **lifetime of a marriage**. This fluctuation is experienced by most couples, and, however different the individual couples' experiences, most couples' experiences are represented by the graph in Figure 8 (Worthington 1988:67; cf. also Louw 1983:50-54; Virkler 1992:23-24, 44-48; Wheat 1980:57-67, 84-96):

Figure 8: The fluctuation of eros over time

The prominence given to eros by young couples and the **loss of eros** over the first ten years of a marriage may lead many couples to experience **boredom** in the emotional and sexual elements of their marriage (Hunt 1969:54). I fully subscribe the following quote:

Another problem with marriage is romance, which seduces people into expecting too much. Romance is wonderful. It smells like a new car and fades about as fast. But it has nothing to do with real life. Most people of marriageable age have not learned the difference between love and romance - some never do....When people are 'swept off their feet', especially by a romantic, i.e. picturesquely unusual, stranger, the intensity is so exciting that they sign on for life.

They are *in love*, personalizing this romantic excitement and hoping marriage will make it permanent. In-love is, of course, a form of temporary insanity....

Many people want the magic of romance more than they want to be married. You can't have both - one is fleeting, the other for ever. Inflexible romanticists cannot tolerate the intrusion of 'unloving' or 'uncaring' emotions; therefor, anger becomes a crisis so intense that it overshadows the problem the anger was about, thus making problem-solving impossible. Some try to keep the magic alive by avoiding the mundanity of practical reality, instead stirring up startling and disorienting experiences to provide a picturesquely unusual setting for the increasingly mundane relationship. It may hold things together, but the cost is someone's or everyone's sanity [author's italics].

(Pittman 1987:66)

Hence, the experience of a loss of eros is one of the primary reasons for married people to believe that they are no longer in love (cf. Wheat 1980). This is due to the fact that too high romantic expectations are raised of the marital relationship. Many people expect that the phenomenon of 'being in love' will continue throughout their marital life. When the inevitable occurs and eros fades in the first few years, couples begin to question the quality of their marital love and they begin to consider the possibility that something is seriously wrong (cf. Virkler 1992).

These couples begin to believe that they are no longer 'in love' or that they made a mistake in marrying the marital partner in the first place or that their love has died (Wheat 1980; Botha 1992; Virkler 1992). When the possibility of another romantic

experience in an extra-marital relationship looms on the horizon, people are tempted to explore the new found exhilaration (Hunt 1969).

On average, most unfaithful spouses engage in an extra-marital affair in the **eighth year** of their marriage (Lawson 1990:173). There are, however differences in gender. Furthermore, the decade during which people married is also a differentiating factor. According to Lawson's (1990:173) sample, the **average duration of people's first marriages before they engaged in an extra-marital affair** was the following:

Decade married	Women (married years before an affair):	Men (married years before an affair):
Married before 1960	14.6	11.3
Married 1960 - 1969	8.2	7.9
Married after 1970	4.2	5.3
All marriages	**8.9**	**8.2**

Figure 9: The duration of people's first marriages before they engaged in an affair

It is conspicuous **that younger women have overtaken younger men** in the rapidity with which they begin with extra-marital affairs. Before 1960, women waited four years longer than men, but **after 1970, women waited one year less than men** (cf. also Adler 1996:42).

I think this phenomenon relates to several discourses in our society, i.e. discourses like:

- self-fulfilment;
- changing gender scripts, e.g. feminism;
- women's changing roles in the workplace;
- the evolving cultural shift in sexual awareness and assertiveness of women; and
- the loss of eros in the first 10 years of marriage.

Before I look at the loss of eros in extra-marital affairs, I would like to comment on gender differences in the experience of eros.

9.4 Gender differences in the experience of eros

There are notable **gender differences in the experience of eros** (Atwater 1979; Lawson 1990; Glass & Wright 1985, 1992; Virkler 1992; Davidson et al 1995).

Men express their love, other than in a sexual way, in more practical ways, i.e. by helping with the household and by being considerate. A woman's household duties are, however, not considered as showing 'love' - neither by men nor by women (Lawson 1990:65). For most women, love is the **verbal expression of affection** and the **sharing of deep feelings**. Hence, women consider verbal intimacy to be the supreme form of love. This 'feminine' or 'expressive' version (of love) is idealised in the wider culture. Hence men are urged to talk more, i.e. to reveal more of their inner selves like women do (1990:65). In **our culture**, we can speak of the **'feminization'** of love (1990:65). Hence, the intimacy discourse in our western culture is becoming a dominating narrative.

At the onset of a love relationship, both men and women find intimacy (i.e. verbal and sexual intimacy) quite fulfilling. Both are in line with the cultural script of love (Lawson 1990:65). However, a few years into the marriage, gender differences appear. Men, being sexually fulfilled, begin to minimise their verbal intimacy and to express their love in sexual and more practical ways (Botha 1992). Women on the other hand, tend to increase their need for verbal intimacy (Botha 1992).

Furthermore, in the middle stage of marriage, male sexual responsiveness begins to slow down and female's sexual responsiveness increases. The woman may become more demanding, while the man may experience a loss of virility as a loss of eros (Elbaum 1981). These gender differences in the expression of love is the origin of many marital conflicts and of extra-marital affairs.

9.5 The loss of eros in extra-marital affairs

The discourse of romantic love does not apply only to marital relationships; it also applies to extra-marital affairs (Martin 1989; Davidson, Darling & Norton 1995). Since many extra-marital affairs are primarily based on romantic involvement, the inevitable loss of romantic love over time in the extra-marital affair inaugurates the

affair's downfall:

> I could make a few generalizations about the nature of romance: it has little to
> do with love; it never works out for very long; the more illogical it is, the more
> intense it is, the sooner it becomes a disappointment...

<div align="right">(Pittman 1990:197)</div>

I will return to this phenomenon when I reflect upon the pastoral therapeutic conversations with faithful spouses in Chapter 12. The next chapter focuses on the deconstruction of eros discourses.

PASTORAL THERAPY AND THE DECONSTRUCTION OF THE EROS DISCOURSE

10.1 Introduction

Experiencing a loss of eros is terrifying to couples who are dominated by the eros discourse - that is, where a couple does not distinguish between agape and eros, and equate eros with agape or, regard eros as the sum of matrimonial love (Wheat 1980; Louw 1993). These couples do not expect that '...every marriage is a disappointment' (Pittman 1990:85). Spouses who narrate their matrimonial love story in terms of eros alone are be more inclined to have egocentric expectations and endure the relationship only as long as the 'self' benefits from the relationship (Louw 1983). When the individual experiences a loss of eros and is not aware that eros operates as a cultural discourse that dominates the couple's narrative, such an individual may try to end the relationship or may engage in an extra-marital affair (Pittman 1990; Botha 1992).

I sometimes use Liz Taylor's name in a metaphor that I created: **'The Liz Taylor syndrome'**. This is not meant to imply any personal slur. I do not know Liz Taylor personally. She is world famous and must be a great person - nevertheless, her 'story' as the public knows it is a helpful metaphor.

10.2 Deconstructing the eros discourse

Liz Taylor has so far married seven times. Each time she hoped for perfect and enduring love (eros). Several times she experienced a loss of eros and filed for a divorce and several times she married a lover, expecting love (eros) to last for ever. Several times she married lover just to experience the loss of eros again. I sometimes utilise the metaphor *'Liz Taylor syndrome'* when people are dominated by the eros discourse that, in the case of a loss of eros, they frantically

try to recover eros in their marriage, or try another lover, or file for a divorce or go for another marriage - hoping that this time they will love (eros) each other for ever. When they experience a loss of eros in an extra-marital affair or in a second marriage, the cycle tragically repeats itself.

Joy is a married woman who has had about thirty extra-marital affairs. In the beginning, **Joy** storied her extra-marital affair as a story that happens to her - i.e. she storied herself as a rather passive piece of wood on a fast running stream and the piece of wood had no alternative but to go with the stream. She storied herself as **a captive of extra-marital love**. She was unable to end the affair. If a specific extra-marital affair ended she would engage in a subsequent affair and she would not be able to prevent herself from doing so. In this way, she became involved in about thirty consecutive extra-marital affairs. She related to her story as a passive set of 'facts'.

Joy and I had utilised the 'Liz Taylor syndrome' metaphor in some previous conversations. Her lover's pseudonym in this case is Moses. The following excerpt was part of a reflexive conversation:

> *Therapist: Why did you engage in the extra-marital affair?*
>
> **Joy:** *With Moses [her extra-marital lover]? You have talked about the 'Liz Taylor syndrome'. **I wonder sometimes if it is something like that**. The ecstasy, I always feel on a high. If we had sex, it always felt like the first sex in my life. And that is so far removed from real life. It is more romantic and after a while it subsides. And after a while I discover **there is nothing permanent**. Then I feel empty. **I am afraid of this emptiness** when I meet Moses. I have to meet Moses again and I am not sure how I will feel.*
>
> *Therapist: Do you think it is this **'Liz Taylor syndrome'** that pushes you into extra-marital affairs?*
>
> **Joy:** ***I think so.** I do not know why I became so easily involved. I do not know now. It is as if, when the one relationship ends, then I already have another lover in mind. I have now decided to stay neutral. There must not be anyone with whom I may become much too involved.*

> **Therapist: Are you saying that you are not going to permit the 'Liz Taylor**
> **syndrome' to grab you by the throat and push you to do**
> **something that you as a person do not want to do?**
>
> Joy: *I must. I feel I have to. I do not know whether I am ageing. But, when it*
> *comes to Joe [her husband who does not know of the latest extra-*
> *marital affair], I have never experienced it (eros) with him.*
>
> **Therapist:** *Haven't you experienced a 'Liz Taylor syndrome' with Joe?*
>
> Joy: *No, and I do not think it will ever happen. This thing with Moses - it is*
> *so fresh in my memory. If it subsides, then I hope that I will never*
> *again yearn for it (eros). I hope to feel more satisfied with what I*
> *receive at home, even if it is not the excitement I have always yearned*
> *for.*
>
> **Therapist:** *Are you saying that you are going to downsize the romantic*
> *expectations of your own marriage and to become more satisfied*
> *about how matters are in your marriage?*
>
> Joy: *Yes, I must. I must try. Joe is not so bad. He wants sex daily,....*

When I introduced the 'Liz Taylor syndrome' metaphor, I endeavoured to alter the meaning of her story, i.e. to open up dialogical space for the co-creation of a new story or stories. A deconstructive approach in pastoral therapy focuses on the ambiguities and the gaps in the sanctioned or generally accepted meaning of a story (Freedman & Combs 1996:46). Hence, a deconstructive approach implies that a story has many possible meanings.

Joy experienced her story as a fixed and unchangeable set of events. If the reader reviews my questions in the above quote, he/she will notice that the introduction of the 'Liz Taylor syndrome' metaphor caused Joy to wonder about the meaning of her story. Let me repeat a small part of the above excerpt:

> **Therapist:** *Why did you engage in the extra-marital affair?*
>
> Joy: *With Moses [her extra-marital lover]? You have talked about the 'Liz*
> *Taylor syndrome'. I wonder sometimes if it is something like that.*

Deconstructive dialoguing implies that the pastoral therapist believes that a fixed story is not, in fact, a fixed story, but that it has many possible meanings. Joy began to examine her story for new possible meanings when she considered the

'Liz Taylor syndrome' metaphor and my questions. Hence, a narrative approach in a conversation leads to new meanings. Joy began to experience the problem-saturated story (White & Epston 1990) as something outside of her, i.e. the story became less of an inherent deficiency of her personality. Consider the following:

> **Therapist:** *Do you think it is this 'Liz Taylor syndrome' that pushes you into extra-marital affairs?*
>
> **Joy:** *I think so. I do not know why I became so easily involved. I do not know now. It is as if, when the one relationship ends, then I already have another lover in mind. I have now decided to stay neutral. There must not be anyone with whom I may become much too involved.*

The following question capitalised on this separation of Joy and the problem saturated story:

> **Therapist:** *Are you saying that you are not going to permit the 'Liz Taylor syndrome' to grab you by the throat and push you to do something that you as a person do not want to do?*
>
> **Joy:** *I must. I feel I have to...*

This kind of languaging on my part as the pastoral therapist reflects my awareness that the person is not the problem. The problem is the problem (White 1995). The above question enhances the idea that Joy can do something else with her life than that which the discourse of eros wants her to do. This kind of languaging is known as externalising conversations (Freedman & Combs 1996:47). It is a mode of talking that reflects a pastoral therapeutic **attitude** that persons can be separated from those taken-for-granted realities that besieged them (White 1995). In Joy's case, the taken-for-granted reality was her extra-marital affair which she experienced as something she could not end.

A dialogue in this externalising mode induces a process of **deconstruction** in which the person challenges the dominating story. In this way, the **eros discourse can be deconstructed** in the life of the **unfaithful spouse**. Joy eventually ended the affair.

I will continue with some examples in which we deconstructed the eros discourse. In the following reflexive conversation, **Spokie** and I reflected on our previous conversations. Spokie was a married woman who was engaged in an extra-marital affair. I will first give an extensive transcription of this particular reflexive conversation and afterwards I will comment on parts of this account.

Therapist: *We talked about graphics [i.e. eros' life cycle] and information - the whole thing about a **romantic cultural voice**[40]. Are you referring to that?*

Spokie: *Yes.*

Therapist: Was it valuable?

Spokie: **Yes.** *It helped me to evaluate the other [extra-marital] relationship too - and my own [marital] relationship. And it helped to distinguish between my [different] experiences.*

Therapist: *Are you feeling **more free**?*

Spokie: **Yes.**

Therapist: *Please explain. I am not sure what you are saying.*

Spokie: *[I am] more calm.*

Therapist: *Okay. The fact that we were talking about a **cultural voice of romance** - it causes you to calm down?*

Spokie: *Yes, because it is identified. Previously I did not scrutinise the relationship. However, when I am involved in one it is the only thing I take notice of. I did not recognise the various elements [of the affair]. I did not see the danger of certain aspects...**I became aware** of a **cultural voice** and of the **life cycle** of the '**Liz Taylor syndrome**'. [I became] aware of the statistics of how many marriages [formed out of extra-marital affairs] survive, of divorces...All **these led me** to a **process of contemplation**. It kept me from over-reacting. When I left [the therapeutic conversation], I had something to ponder.*

Therapist: Do you want to say something more about the 'Liz Taylor syndrome'?

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[40] In dealing with eros, I did not introduce the metaphor 'eros discourse'. I used the metaphor 'cultural voice' for the eros discourse. In this way Spokie and I talked about the eros discourse and what the eros discourse - as a 'voice in western culture', is doing to people. Hence, we talked about eros in terms of a discourse without ever using the word 'discourse'.

Spokie: *Only that is **shocking**, that it is **genuinely like that**, that it can happen[41].*

Therapist: *I was afraid that it ['the Liz Taylor syndrome'] could happen to you, but now you are aware of it.*

Spokie: *Yes. I am **wary about what can happen**.*

Therapist: *A while ago, you said it is as if **you were freer to be yourself?***

Spokie: *Yes. I can be myself, **make my own decisions** and, hopefully be **less emotional**. I can't say that it took away my emotions out of the whole situation [i.e. the extra-marital affair]. It **did not take away the romance either**. But I am aware of it and I am half analytic. I ponder in an analytic way on the situation.*

Therapist: *You mentioned a lot...We paged and looked through a **magazine** and I asked you to go to a **shopping mall**...What is your comment on that? Did it raise your consciousness [of romance as a cultural voice]?*

Spokie: *Quite. To a great measure it caused me at times to wonder about what am I reacting to: [am I reacting] to romance or to reality? And it is true - I realise how many influences are acting upon our lives and on our decisions.*

In my conversations with Spokie, I did not treat eros as an inherent and universal emotion of human beings. I have already indicated that all emotions are **socially constructed in local cultures** (Harré 1986:2-14). Diverse meanings of love correspond with diverse discourses found in diverse local cultures. Some cultures do not experience the kind of romantic love that is so common in the western world nowadays (Morsbach & Tyler 1986:289-305). Hence, eros is a socially constructed discourse in our western society (cf. Heelas 1986:234-261). For more detail about eros as a discourse, see the section **Eros: Emotion or discourse?** in Section 9.1.

In my conversations with Spokie, we talked about taken-for-granted realities such as 'being in love' and the implications of the institutionalisation of eros. We explored the implications of eros as a discourse that is socially constructed and how this view could alter her story about her extra-marital affair.

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[41] Afrikaans: 'Net dat dit skokkend is, dat dit regtig so is. Dat dit kan gebeur.'

In dealing with eros, I did not introduce the metaphor 'eros discourse'. I used the metaphor **'cultural voice'** for the eros discourse. In this way Spokie and I talked about the eros discourse and what the eros discourse - as a 'voice in western culture', is doing or saying to people. Hence, we talked about eros in terms of a discourse without ever using the word 'discourse' and we deconstructed the notion that eros or 'being in love' is an ontic reality that is so captivating that she is helpless to end the affair. Spokie valued this mode of dialogue. Let me **repeat** a small part of the above excerpt:

> **Therapist:** *We talked about graphics [i.e. eros' life cycle] and information - the whole thing about* **a romantic cultural voice.** *Are you referring to that?*
>
> **Spokie:** *Yes.*
>
> **Therapist: Was it valuable?**
>
> **Spokie:** **Yes.** *It helped me to evaluate the other [extra-marital] relationship too - and my own [marital] relationship. And it helped to distinguish between my [different] experiences.*
>
> **Therapist:** *Are you feeling* **more free?**
>
> **Spokie:** *Yes.*
>
> **Therapist:** *Please explain. I am not sure what you are saying.*
>
> **Spokie:** *[I am] more calm.*
>
> **Therapist:** *Okay. The fact that we were talking about a* **cultural voice of romance** *- it causes you to calm down?*
>
> **Spokie:** *Yes, because it is identified. Previously I did not scrutinise the relationship. However, when I am involved in one it is the only thing I observe. I did not recognise the various elements [of the affair]. I did not see the danger of certain aspects...***I became aware of cultural voice** *and of the* **life cycle** *of the* **'Liz Taylor syndrome'.** *[I became] aware of the statistics of how many marriages [formed out of extra-marital affairs] survive, of divorces...All* **these led me to a process of contemplation.** *It kept me from over-reacting. When I left [the therapeutic conversation], I had something to ponder.*

It is conspicuous that Spokie valued our dialogue in which we talked about the eros discourse as a discourse instead of seeing eros as an ontic emotion inherent

to all human beings (Hoffman 1992). It helped her to become less involved in the extra-marital affair and to evaluate both the significant relationships in her life.

Spokie, just like Joy, valued the use of the 'Liz **Taylor syndrome**' metaphor and she experienced herself as becoming more free to make her own decisions:

> *Therapist: Do you want to say something more about the 'Liz Taylor syndrome'?*
>
> *Spokie:*   *Only that is **shocking**, that **it is genuinely like that**, that it can happen.*
>
> *Therapist: I was afraid that it [the 'Liz Taylor syndrome'] could happen to you, but now you are aware of it.*
>
> *Spokie:*   *Yes. I am **wary about what can happen**.*
>
> *Therapist: A while ago, you said it is as if **you were freer to be yourself?***
>
> *Spokie:*   *Yes. I can be myself, **make my own decisions** and, hopefully be **less emotional**. I can't say that it took away my emotions out of the whole situation [i.e. the extra-marital affair]. **It did not take away the romance either. But I am aware of it** and I am half analytic. I ponder in an analytic way on the situation.*

In our dialogue, we linked two aspects of eros, i.e. we linked **eros as a discourse that does something to people** and the **fluctuating nature of eros** (the 'Liz Taylor syndrome'). We explored the long-term constituting effects of these two aspects in the lives of people who are engaged in an extra-marital affair. The above excerpt showed Spokie's new and slightly different way of storying the extra-marital affair.

In an effort to deconstruct the eros discourse in the life of Spokie, we talked about the prevalence of eros in our society, i.e. we talked about its covert operation in our western society. In order to do so, I asked Spokie to page with me through a **women's magazine**. This particular magazine contained many photos that depict the pervasive presence of eros in our society. We talked about what these romantic photographic images are saying to people.

Furthermore, I asked Spokie to visit a shopping mall and to look out for images,

advertisement slogans and window dressing that contain the eros discourse.

> **Therapist:** *You mentioned a lot...We paged and looked through a **magazine**[42] and I asked you to go to a **shopping mall**[43]...What is your comment on that?* ***Did it raise your consciousness [of romance as a cultural voice]?***
>
> **Spokie:** ***Quite. To a great measure it caused me** at times **to wonder** about what am I reacting to: [am I reacting] to romance or to reality? And it is true - I realise how many influences are acting upon our lives and on our decisions.*

She became aware that if a certain cultural group of people begins to talk in familiar ways and relate to each other in familiar ways, for example, 'I am in love', then this talks reflects and reinforces dominant discourses. In Spokie's case, it would be the eros discourse. Spokie became aware that

> ...because dominant discourses are so familiar, they are taken for granted and even recede from view. It is hard to question them. They are part of the identity of most members of any society, and they influence attitudes and behaviors...

<div align="right">(Hare-Mustin 1994:20)</div>

Hence, Spokie became more aware of the cultural connectedness of the eros discourse and of its dominant position in our society. This awareness is part and

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[42] In our conversation about the eros discourse, we referred to the eros discourse as the romantic voice of our culture. In an attempt to heighten her awareness of the all pervasiveness of eros in our western culture, we paged through a popular woman's magazine (Fair Lady, 28 May 1997). We examined the photographic images and discussed the presence of the eros discourse in the photos. She was amazed to become aware of the all pervasiveness of the eros discourse in a common popular woman's magazine. She became aware of the alluring but treacherous power of eros in our western culture.

[43] After our conversation on the 'Liz Taylor syndrome' and after we paged the woman's magazine (Fair Lady, 28 May 1997), I asked Spokie to go to a shopping mall to inspect the various shops' window dressing and to look for the presence of the eros discourse in those window dressings.

parcel of the process of deconstruction of dominant discourses like eros (White 1995). Eventually, she preferred to end her marriage and to live with her lover.

Heidi was another conversational participant who was involved in an extra-marital affair. She was married and experienced a great deal of distress. She left her husband on two occasions to live with her lover. Heidi and her husband came for therapeutic help. The following excerpt came from a reflexive conversation with Heidi:

Therapist: We also talked about the 'Liz Taylor syndrome', didn't we?

Heidi: Yes, that is true.

Therapist: Did it help you to become more free from romance?

Heidi: **Yes.**

Therapist: Is that so?

Heidi: **Definitely.**

Therapist: Definitely?

Heidi: Yes, **it caused me to wonder**...am I not merely part of the graph [of the loss of eros in marriage]?...[I wondered] whether my husband is the right man for me, **[I wondered] whether my lover is really so wonderful**....I could pull back and say to myself, **'Yes, I am not quite unique**, not so unique. **I am part of a large group of people [in the western world] going through the same process.**

*Therapist: Are you saying that **you are like many people in our society** that experience romance and **it was as if romance wanted to control you** instead of you controlling romance?*

Heidi: Yes.

*Therapist: **How was it to become the master of romance instead of** romance mastering you?*

Heidi: **It is liberating**...it gave me the opportunity to pull back and to say to myself that **I do not have to be captivated by this thing (the romance).** I pulled back and I could distance myself from it.

The above excerpt speaks for itself. Heidi realised that her romantic feelings are not something inherent to her personality or her extra-marital relationship. She realised that she was **'part of a large group of people [in the western world] going through the same process'.** She realised that she was dominated by the

eros discourse and that is only a **cultural** discourse - however fascinating the experience of 'being in love' may be. Heidi began to wonder whether her lover was really so wonderful. She felt liberated after she had taken more control of romance. Heidi and her husband resumed their marital relationship and she ended the affair.

10.3 Summary

In this chapter I treated eros as a cultural discourse that dominated the conversational participants. It enabled us to separate the conversational participants from the influence of eros. We achieved this by using externalising conversations using metaphors and reflecting on the cultural dimensions of the eros discourse. A **narrative approach** in our pastoral therapeutic conversations led **to the deconstruction of the eros discourse** that had hitherto dominated the conversational participants.

In the next section, I attend to the cultural discourses of sex, self-fulfilment and hedonism.

PASTORAL THERAPY AND THE DISCOURSES OF SEX, HEDONISM AND SELF-FULFILMENT

11.1 The meaning of sex: A cultural linguistic construction

Although sex is a physiological drive, **its meaning** is **socially constructed within a local culture** (cf. Hare-Mustin 1994). A human sexual ethos is linked to history. Every historical era produces its own sexual ethos (Du Toit 1996:74). Reflecting on the changes in the meaning of sexuality in the West, May (1969:39-40) made the following comments:

> In an amazingly short period following Word War I, we shifted from acting as though sex did not exist at all to being obsessed with it. We now placed more emphasis on sex than any society since that of ancient Rome....Where the Victorian didn't want anyone to know that he or she had sexual feelings, we are ashamed if we don't. Before 1910, if you called a lady 'sexy' she would be insulted; nowadays, she prizes the compliment....The Victorian man or woman was guilty if he or she did experience sex; now we are guilty if we don't.

I regard the above quote an example of the social construction of the meaning of sexuality as it shifts over time and in different locations. Another example of **a shift in the meaning of sexuality** in **our culture** is found in the advance of pornography. **Pornography** has contributed to the **depersonalisation** of sex.

> You discover the naked girls with silicated breasts side by side with the articles by reputable authors, and you conclude on first blush that the magazine is certainly on the side of the new enlightenment. But as you look more closely you see a strange expression in these photographed girls: detached, mechanical, uninviting, vacuous - the typical schizoid personality in the negative sense of that term. You discover that they are not 'sexy' at all but that

Playboy has only shifted the fig leaf from the genitals to the face [author's italics].

(May 1969:57)

The same quote refers also to the loosening of the link between eros and sexuality. The depersonalisation of sex inevitably leads to a loosening of the link between eros and sex, because eros is usually a relational concept. This is a phenomenon that gained momentum in the 1960's (Hunt 1969). Hence, some 'love' relationships are not intimate or emotionally involved relationships. In these relationships, sex is 'for the fun' - i.e. although two bodies are engaged in the sex act, the focus of the act is on the individual's physiological relief (Atwater 1979; Adler 1996; Lawson 1990).

The depersonalisation of sex and the loosening of the link between eros and sex are only two examples of the ever-evolving meaning of sexuality. However, the shift in the cultural meaning of sexuality as a social construction process is an extensive topic and the scope of this research does not allow a detailed discussion on this topic.

These shifts in the cultural meanings of sexuality became just another set of institutionalised discourses that pose as reality, i.e. people tend to regard sex as always like this or that (Freedman & Combs 1996). These discourses pose as reality, but they are actually linguistic constructions that relate to a certain local culture and time. **Pastoral therapists** have to be alert to the changing cultural discourses that co-constitute the meaning of sexuality.

In the following section, I reflect on our society's moral views on sexuality and how these views relate to extra-marital affairs, extra-marital sex and culture.

11.2 Cultural discourses co-constitute moral values and the meaning(s) of sex

In this section I reflect on the change in meaning or moral values in our culture. I limited my reflection to psychotherapy's contribution in this regard because

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psychotherapy is co-constructed by cultural discourses and our cultural meanings are co-constituted by psychotherapy's discourses:

> Without doubt, the psychologies and psychotherapies play an entirely significant role in reproduction of dominant culture. And, to a very considerable extent, this is entirely understandable. It is impossible for us to arrive at a vantage point from outside culture - and therefore outside of language and known ways of life - by which we might review our culture.
>
> (White 1995:45)

Freudian psychology before the sexual revolution of the 1960's, operated within the Judeo–Christian tradition regarding marital fidelity. Hunt (1969; cf. also Bell et al 1975) stated that, although Freudian psychology was famous for its denigration of the superego and one would expect that psychotherapists would promote extra-marital affairs, psychotherapists actually **considered marital unfaithfulness a pathological condition:**

> Until very recently, nearly all American psychoanalysts, psychotherapists, marriage counsellors, and social workers regarded extra-marital activity as 'immaturity', 'narcissism', 'character disorder', 'fragmentary superego', 'ever-present anxiety', and 'infantile love-needs'.
>
> (Hunt 1969:47)

Hunt (1969), however, proceeded, in his famous book *The affair: A portrait of extra-marital love in contemporary America*, to show that the majority of people who are involved in extra-marital affairs are not necessarily pathological. On the contrary, according to Hunt (1969:161), **psychologically healthy** persons can engage in extra-marital affairs.

It should be clear to the reader that narrative therapy does not adhere to the notion that pathologies are inherent in people (Monk 1996). Hence, **extra-marital affairs are not a question of pathology.** Extra-marital affairs are rather a matter of discourses that battle to gain power over people's lives. It is further, according to

postmodernistic social construction discourse as epistemology, a question of **ethics and moral values** (Doherty 1995).

Given the **cultural** meaning of sex, it was not accidental that the public and psychologists regarded extra-marital affairs as psychologically healthy in the **1960's** (Hunt 1969). The sexual revolution of the Sixties changed our society's view of the meaning of sex. The sexual revolution of the Sixties also changed our culture's moral values about sex and about extra-marital relationships. Cultural discourses determine(d) people's actions and their interpretations (Lowe 1991:45). The cultural discourses of the Sixties co-constructed the views of Hunt that psychologically healthy people can engage in extra-marital affairs. The cultural discourses of the Sixties determined what kind of behaviour could be regarded as pathological behavior or as healthy behaviour in the Sixties. Psychology, as a cultural discourse, co-constituted, with other cultural discourses of the Sixties, that an extra-marital affair was no longer to be regarded as pathological behaviour. Psychology as a cultural discourse 'de-pathologized' extra-marital affairs.

Popular psychology went on to boost the affirmation of the self, not only in terms of self-fulfilment, but also in terms of pleasure seeking, i.e. **hedonism** (Lawson 1990:117). A **new moral value** was born, i.e. the value of **self-fulfilment**. A self-adjusted and mature person was, according to several psychological discourses, a person who could take control of and brighten the mundanity and misery of everyday life in pleasure seeking - even if it meant extra-marital sex. These discourses changed people from 'being good' persons to 'feeling good' about themselves (Heitink 1991:21).

Western society has been heavily influenced by individualism which was partly fuelled by psychotherapy's belittling of the 'superego' and thus of moral values (Doherty 1995). This has led to a fragmentation of the moral fabric of the family and to a pluralism in values (Van Aarde 1995b). The advance of the mass media exposed families to a multitude of possibilities of (im)moral choices and types of living (O'Hara & Anderson 1991:40). Referring to traditional fathers' and mothers' familial, marital and household duties, and reflecting on spouses' commitment to

their families, Lawson (1990:117) stated:

> Hedonism is, thus, part of the fertile environment that has sustained the ideal of personal growth thrust forward as an appealing mythology by psychology....the new psychologies have exhorted them to pursue their own needs for self-actualisation, even if that means *abandoning...commitments to others* [italics mine].

This shift in moral values has had a profound effect on the cultural meaning of extra-marital affairs (Bell et al 1975). A **positive relation** between **self-fulfilment** and **extra-marital sex** has became a sign of personal growth and freedom:

> To one person...the excitement of extra-marital desire comes as an alien impetus that superficially beclouds or even dangerously threatens the true self...to another person, the outburst of desire is recognised - fearfully or enthusiastically - as an indication that **the real self is breaking through** a deceptive crust of institutional behavior [bold mine].

(Turner 1976:991, quoted by Atwater 1979:38)

Atwater (1979) found that the justifications that the married women in the sample gave for their first extra-marital sexual experiences were closely related to **self-fulfilment**. This emphasis on sexual relationships for the sake of self-fulfilment contrasts sharply with the traditional model of women's sexuality as a form of service towards men. The cultural shift in the meaning of personal happiness and freedom and in moral sexual values have co-constituted a new meaning of extra-marital affairs.

The psychologist Ellis (1969) wrote an article 'Healthy and disturbed reasons for extra-marital relations'. I decided to include an extensive excerpt from this article by Ellis (1969:160-161) to illustrate Lawson's remarks about popular psychological discourses that co-constitute the discourses of hedonism, self-fulfilment and of extra-marital sex.

Judging from my own [Ellis's] personal, clinical, and research experience, I would say that **the following standards of healthy adulterous behavior might be fairly valid:**

1. **The healthy adulterer** is non-demanding and non-compulsive. He prefers but he does not need extra-marital affairs. He believes that he can live better with than without them, and therefore he tries to arrange to have them from time to time. But he is also able to have a happy general and marital life if no such affairs are practicable.
2. The undisturbed adulterer usually manages to carry on his extra-marital affairs without unduly disturbing his marriage and family relationships nor his general existence. He is sufficiently discreet about his adultery, on the one hand, and appropriately frank and honest about it with his close associates, on the other hand, so that most people he intimately knows are able to tolerate his affairs and not get too upset about them.
3. He fully accepts his own extra-marital desires and acts and never condemns himself or punishes himself because of them, even though he may sometimes decide that they are unwise and may make specific attempts to bring them to a halt.
4. He **faces his specific problems with his wife** and family as well as his general life difficulties and does not use his adulterous relationships as a means of avoiding any of his serious problems.
5. He is actually tolerant of himself when he acts poorly or makes errors; **he is minimally hostile when his wife** and family members **behave in a less than desirable manner;** and he fully accepts the fact that the world is rough and life is often grim, but that there is no reason why it *must* be otherwise and that **he can live happily** even when conditions around him are not great....
6. He is sexually adequate with his spouse as well as others and therefore **has extra-marital affairs out of sex interest** rather than for sex therapy....

The good Judeo-Christian moralists may never believe it, but it would appear that **healthy adultery**, even in our supposed monogamous society, *is* possible [author's italics, bold mine].

The reader may have noted Ellis's gender biased view on 'healthy adultery'. In the above quote Ellis focuses on men and their sexual pleasures. It seems as if women operate only to please men's sexual interests:

> The permissive discourse is one that seems to challenge monogamy. It gives both sexes the right to express freely their sexuality. However, permissiveness has different effects for men and women because of their different positions in society. For men, permissiveness can mean open sexual access; for women, permissiveness can mean pressure to accede to men's urging for sexual activity.
>
> (Hare-Mustin 1994:33)

To my mind, Ellis (1969) tried to be ethically indeterminate, or morally neutral because he thought that a **neutral moral** stance equals **mental health** or that it constitutes a sound and professional clinical practice (cf. Pittman 1990). I have already shown that **all metaphors** (and thus all discourses) are **ethical** discourses (cf. Section 6.3; cf. Dueck 1991:177-201). There is no exception. Even a metaphor such as mental health has ethical implications (McNamee & Gergen 1992; Hoffman 1995; Wylie 1995).

Hence, the question is not whether Ellis's discourse is ethically neutral; the question is rather to which ethical discourses Ellis's discourse relates or refers? According to Ellis, the guideline for behaviour is that a person '**can live happily** even when conditions around him are not great...'. Hence, a person '**can live happily**' with extra-marital sex even if '**his wife...behave in a less than desirable manner**'.

I feel that Ellis's discourse refers to the **discourses of hedonism and self-fulfilment** (Doherty 1995). In the above quote, the interests of the individual are placed over and above the interests of all other significant others (Doherty 1995). No words, and no actions can ever be ethically neutral. An act like extra-marital sex inevitably has implications for the lives of the lovers themselves and for their family members.

As I see it, people's sexual choices do affect other people. Extra-marital sex, when it occurs in a marriage that has agreed to monogamy, should be considered problematic behavior...

(Pittman 1990:28)

Hence, the moral values of self-fulfilment and of hedonism are not ethically neutral, but are in competition with the value of commitment (cf. Sections 15.3 and 15.4).

11.3 Pastoral therapy and the deconstruction of the discourse of extra-marital sex

11.3.1 Introduction

Bearing in mind the cultural meaning of sex, pastoral therapists have to be aware of the individual's intimate, personal and personal interpretation of sex. Our postmodernistic culture with its ever growing diversity in values and preferences tends to complicate a pastoral therapist's understanding of the individual's sexual experience.

The case of **Joy** was very complicated. She had a long history of involvement in extra-marital sex. She was raped as a high school teenager by a close relative and his friend. After the trauma of the rape, she had numerous pre-marital sexual experiences and after she married, she engaged in numerous extra-marital sexual relationships. She tried to end her involvement in extra-marital affairs and sex and sought help from various therapists over many years. These therapists operated form different theoretical orientations. Joy had a short-lived extra-marital relationship with one of her therapists. She was suicidal and addicted to tranquillisers.

During 1996, Joy was treated by a reflecting team of the Institute for Therapeutic Development which utilised a narrative approach. I was her therapist at that stage and Joy and I had our conversations in the presence of the reflecting team. The team reflected, at the end of our conversations, on the content of our conversation. At one time, the team suggested that Joy should try to come up with **metaphors for the two conflicting but competing sides of her personality**. The one side of

her personality enjoyed what Joy called the 'ecstasy' of extra-marital sex. Joy named this side of her personality **'The Coin'**. The other side of Joy yearned to be a good mother to her children and to be a devoted Christian and a good wife. She named this side of her personality **'The Rose'**. The team and I utilised these metaphors in conversations with Joy to externalise the problem, that is, to separate Joy's identity from the problem (White 1989; White 1991; White 1995; White & Epston 1990). The therapeutic process with the reflecting team at the Institute for Therapeutic Development ended after ten months with a small party celebrating the new story and identity 'The Rose' had authored.

Six months later, Joy approached me for therapy for the same problem. She had relapsed into an extra-marital sexual relationship with her last lover. Hence, she became part of this research as a conversational participant. As the reader is about to see, I continued to use the metaphors 'The Coin' and 'The Rose' on some occasions.

11.3.2 *Externalising conversations: deconstructing the discourse of extra-marital sex*

In this section I focus on the deconstruction of the discourse of **extra-marital sex**. This discourse was part of many other discourses in the life of Joy. These discourses were, for example, discourses such as Joy's motherhood, her Christianity, her marital relationship, guilt and competency, etc.. Hence, although I focus on the discourse of extra-marital sex in this section, I also deal with other **related** discourses.

Initially Joy was suicidal, her life was governed by drugs and she suffered from headaches. She and her husband communicated as little as possible. Her husband did the cooking and washing and he cared for the children. She experienced herself as being neither a good mother nor a good wife. Because she is a Christian and is fond of local Christian radio broadcasts, she suffered from guilt feelings. I deal with her guilt in Section 13.4. Because she is both a Christian and a person who has had many extra-marital affairs, she was utterly confused about who she was. In the following reflexive conversation we reflected on our therapeutic conversations and we talked about her **confusion and how the**

naming of the problem (Winslade et al 1996) **helped her to form a new story and identity:**

>*Therapist:*   *In the beginning we began to talk about 'The Rose' and 'The Coin'. Did it help you?*
>
>*Joy:*   *Yes.*
>
>*Therapist:*   *Tell me more.*
>
>*Joy:*   ***In the beginning*** *before we began to talk about 'The Rose' and 'The Coin'....**I did not know how to express my feelings**....But, in naming it, then I could identify...when my thoughts went the one way or the other way. It was as if, after giving names to it, I could know in which direction my thoughts went.*
>
>*Therapist:*   *Was it easier to decide which way you want to go?*
>
>*Joy:*   *Yes.... well, I could see clearly that 'The Coin' was absolutely the wrong side...of my life....If I look back, then **it was 'The Coin' that attacked the 'The Rose' and 'The Coin' tried to influence 'The Rose' to go back [to extra-marital sex]**....I think it helped me a lot to categorise a part of myself as 'The Coin' or as 'The Rose' because there were only two ways to go, no middle way.*
>
>*Therapist:*   *Did it help you to feel less powerless and to be in a better position to decide what you yourself want to do?*
>
>*Joy:*   *I think so. It became more clear. I remember that my emotions and thoughts were confused. I can't remember it well, but I do know that I **was utterly confused**. I considered suicide at that time but now it does not even cross my mind....*

Differentiating between 'The Coin' and 'The Rose' enabled Joy to discern between two voices inside her. It helped her to begin to recognise her **preferred identity** (White & Epston 1990; White 1995), i.e. 'The Rose'. She was no longer 'the whore who was going to hell'. When she began to re-author herself as 'The Rose', she began to experience herself once again as a worthwhile person. However, it took her nearly two years to heal and to start to enjoy being 'The Rose'. In the beginning 'The Coin' totally dominated 'The Rose', telling Joy that she would never recover or be saved from hell. Gradually she began to experience herself more and more as 'The Rose' and she began to enjoy her motherhood. She took more initiative in

terms of household duties. In the following reflexive conversation we looked back on our conversations and how she was doing:

Joy: André, if I look at myself and inside me, then **I think I am on the right path. But something is lacking...**

Therapist: If you say that you are on the right path, **are you saying that you enjoy being 'The Rose'?**

Joy: Yes.

Therapist: Is it nice?

Joy: Yes.

Therapist: Tell me more.

Joy: I think, previously **I did not love my children that much.** They were there and that's it....But now they are everything in my life. Maybe they are too precious, but I will do anything to ensure that they succeed [in life]. Previously I thought that Fergi [i.e. her youngest daughter] was in a cul-de-sac - it just does not exist anymore. I have changed my mind completely and I want to help this child to succeed.

Therapist: Do you think that **your children can see 'The Rose'?**

Joy: Yes....definitely.

Therapist: What do they think about 'The Rose'?

Joy: To them, I am now different. I think I am now different to them. You will have to ask them.

Therapist: Is that so? **If you must guess, what do you think your children think of 'The Rose'?**

Joy: **Bernard** [her eldest son] **thinks I am the most wonderful mom.** And one evening, **Fergi said I am the most beautiful mother.** [Laughs].

Therapist: Is that so?....What does it do to you if Bernard says his mother is the most wonderful mom and if Fergi says her mother is the most beautiful mom?

Joy: It makes me very happy.

Therapist: Are you then enjoying being 'The Rose'?

Joy: **Yes.**

Therapist: How much?

Joy: Very, very much.

If we review the above excerpt, we see that Joy began by saying: 'I think I am on the right path. **But something is lacking...**' Then **I interrupted her**. Let me explain why I interrupted her. In our therapeutic conversations, Joy was nearly always inclined to talk about herself as a failure, as sinful, as a bad mother, or she complained about her husband. Furthermore, she nearly always focused on her extra-marital sexual relationship. Hence, her mode of talking fed 'The Coin', i.e. her storying of her self-narratives constituted 'The Coin'. This implied that her problem-saturated story dominated all aspects of her life (White & Epston 1990). When she began to say, 'But something is lacking...' she was again on her way to her problem-saturated story. I interrupted her because I wanted her to story (once again!) the story of 'The Rose'.

The reflecting team at the Institute for Therapeutic Development had decided to follow this 'linguistic strategy' (Kotzé 1996a). As the reader has seen, the rest of the above excerpt was a conversation about 'The Rose'. My role as 'conversational artist' (Anderson & Goolishian 1992:27) was to prompt Joy to tell the 'un-said', i.e. the not-yet-said (Freedman & Combs 1996). My questions and Joy's answers led to the co-construction of the story of 'The Rose', i.e. the story not yet told or the story that did not exist until now. This re-authoring confirmed Joy as indeed a good mother and as somebody who enjoys being 'The Rose'. Hence, together we de-constructed her problem-saturated story of 'The Coin' and we constructed her preferred identity, i.e. 'The Rose'.

In asking her what her children think of 'The Rose', I created an **audience** (Monk 1996; White & Epston 1990) that initially observed and eventually confirmed her new identity. These questions about what her children think of 'The Rose', were questions that explored the 'landscape of consciousness' (White 1989). These questions provoked not-yet-said answers that re-authored her identity.

Joy sometimes referred to **extra-marital sex** as **'ecstasy'**. She experienced extra-marital sex as different from marital sex. The following excerpt came from a therapeutic conversation Joy and I had. We were reflecting on the sexual 'ecstasy'

she experienced in her extra-marital affairs:

> **Joy:**   *I am trying to get away from the exhilarating **ecstasy** that I have always yearned for.*
>
> **Therapist:** *Are you trying to break away from the **ecstasy**?*
>
> **Joy:**   *I try not to think about it.*
>
> **Therapist:** *It seems to me that the **sexual ecstasy** was like a power that bound you, that paralysed you, that towed you away from a normal marital life? Is that the case?*

Joy somehow experienced extra-marital sex differently from marital sex. Sex with her many lovers was different from sex with her husband. The following excerpt showed something of our externalising conversations in this regard:

> **Therapist:** *The ecstasy is something that wants to pull you to **'The Coin'**?*
>
> **Joy:**   *Yes.*
>
> **Therapist:** *So, **'The Coin'** uses ecstasy? That is interesting?*
>
> **Joy:**   *That is rather horrible. One cannot describe it for another person. But I think it is the main reason.*
>
> **Therapist:** *How does it happen that 'the ecstasy' **cannot exert its power over you** and that **you can be you own true self** and make your own decisions?*
>
> **Joy:**   *I think it is [God's] grace.*
>
> **Therapist:** *Tell me more.*

'The Coin' used sexual 'ecstasy' to gain control of Joy's life and the 'ecstasy' of extra-marital sex fed 'The Coin', enabling 'The Coin' to dominate Joy. By metaphorically referring to sexual 'ecstasy' as a 'power' outside Joy and by linking the sexual 'ecstasy' to 'The Coin', I engaged in **externalising conversations** (White & Epston 1990). This externalizing mode of conversation separated Joy as a person from the problem.

> Externalising is rhetorical device that opens up a slightly different way of speaking about one's life….the device of externalisation helps to reverse the trend in psychology toward seeking more and more deficits in individual

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character and encouraging clients to relate to themselves as deficient human beings.

(Drewery & Winslade 1996:45)

Hence, narrative therapy does not 'treat' people by 'diagnosing' some inherent deficit to find a 'solution' (McKenzie & Monk 1996). A narrative approach is about a battle of discourses (Lowe 1991; Winslade et al 1998). Externalisation is, however, not a bag of superficial tricks (Muller 1996). It is instead a way of life:

I have to give you a warning - if externalisation is approached purely as a technique, it will probably not produce profound effects. If you don't believe, to the bottom of your soul, that people are social and personal constructions, then you won't be seeing these transformations. When Epston or White are in action, you can tell they are absolutely convinced that people are not their problems. Their voices, their postures, their whole beings radiate possibility and hope. They are definitely under the influence of Optimism.

(O'Hanlon 1994:28)

Hence, my point of departure was to avoid considering Joy as an inherently sinful person, i.e. to **hamartologise** the situation. We as pastoral therapists are tempted to hamartologise extra-marital sex because it is undeniably sinful. I remind the reader of Heitink's comment in this regard:

Instead of illuminating [the extra-marital affair's situation], pastors are tempted to become judgmental and raise the issue of guilt. This temptation is particularly strong when there is a so-called third party involved in a marital relationship...

(Heitink 1979:209)[44]

Although it is 'true' that extra-marital sex is a sin, I considered Joy as a person who was constituted by cultural and personal discourses. These discourses dominated

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[44] In plaats van te verhelderen laat hij zich verleiden tot beoordelen en het stellen van de schuldvraag. Dit gevaar dreigt vooral wanneer in een huwelijk een z.g. derde in het spel is.... (Heitink 1979:209).

her and she was helpless to end her extra-marital relationships (White & Epston 1990). Externalisation enabled me not to hamartoiogise her extra-marital sex and to engage with hope in a therapeutic conversation to deconstruct the discourse of extra-marital sex:

Therapist: We talked about 'The Rose' and 'The Coin'. Did it help you to view sexuality differently?

Joy: Thinking rationally I will nearly say, 'Yes'. I know how it [i.e. marital sex] must be. But it is as if my heart yearns for extra-marital sex.

Therapist: Is it 'The Coin' that is calling you?

Joy: Yes.

Therapist: Thinking rationally, how did your view of marital sex and extra-marital sex change in terms of 'The Rose' and 'The Coin'?

Joy: I know it is a fact: for the **'The Coin' it is those few minutes, that ecstasy. Then it is gone.** In my marriage, it must be accompanied more with love, it must have a deeper meaning and it must be something more permanent....That is how it ought to be. When my husband and I have sex **my thoughts go back to the extra-marital sex** I am yearning for[45].

Therapist: 'The Coin' wants to lie to you at the very moment when you have [marital] sex?

Joy: It is possible.

Therapist: 'The Coin' wants to tell you how marital sex ought to be.

Joy: It is possible, but it [marital sex] cannot be that way.

Through our therapeutic and reflexive conversations, Joy managed to experience the meaning of her marital sex more satisfactorily:

Therapist: It may be that good sex within marriage is often ordinary and not exciting?

Joy: If we [Joy and her husband] could have sex once a week then that would be **heavenly sex**.

Therapist: **Is it 'The Rose' that enjoys that type of sex?**

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[45] Joy enjoyed marital sex provided that it occurred once a week. An increase in the frequency did her experience of marital sex no good. She experienced it as dull and boring.

> Joy: **Yes. It is absolutely fantastic, but... [I interrupted her].**
>
> Therapist: *It is different from earlier times? Is it as if 'The Rose' has grown to enjoy your weekly [marital] sex?*
>
> Joy: *Yes. I think it is because I have sex with my husband [and not with someone else]; there is no accompanying stress and no guilt feelings afterwards.*
>
> Therapist: *And how is it?*
>
> Joy: *It is good but not good enough....*

I wondered what kind of cultural discourses constituted this difference in the meaning of marital sex and extra-marital sex in Joy's life. Two young men, one a close family member, raped Joy as a teenager and this experience may have influenced her interpretation of 'illicit sex' (cf. Herenbrink; Neeskens & Lammers 1985; Coleman et al 1987). Brown (1991:117) wrote:

> The high of sexual addiction is in the conquest. The excitement quickly gives way to guilt and shame. The roots of sexual addiction extend back to childhood experiences of abuse...the [sexual] addict learns to substitute brief sexual highs for feelings of emptiness, isolation, shame and low-self-esteem.

Joy and I tried to locate the cultural and/or personal discourse of sex that dominated her:

> Therapist: *I wonder how your marital sex would be if you have to make love in great secrecy [like extra-marital sex]?....*
>
> Joy: *Yes, you know, at one time - **it is a disgusting thought, but I wondered whether, if I and my husband divorce [and we could then have sex], it would not be totally different because then it would be illicit sex?***
>
> Therapist: *Oh! 'The Coin' tricks you to believe that **forbidden sex** is...*
>
> Joy: *[she interrupts]....**is better**.*
>
> Therapist: *...is better. Can it be?*
>
> Joy: *(Laughs)*

> **Therapist:** *It may be that 'The Coin' cheats you into believing that **forbidden sex***
> *is better?*
>
> **Joy:** *My experience is that it is better.*

I wondered where the idea that forbidden sex is better sex came from to master Joy? The display of erotic images and the portrayal of extra-marital sex as normative behavior in the mass media affects people's experience of their (marital) partners:

> There is another aspect of exposure to explicit sexual images, and that is the
> tendency to compare one's partner and one's sexual activity to that depicted
> on the screen. In an experience that involved exposure to explicit hour-long
> videotapes once a week for six weeks, male and female subjects were less
> satisfied with their partner's physical appearance and sexual performance.
>
> (Baron & Byrne 1987:550)

Joy told me she was never exposed to explicit erotic images in the media. She did however, tell me that **she had read a large number of romantic books** when she was a teenager.

> **Therapist:** *Did you read many love stories?*
>
> **Joy:** *Many, yes many. My mother was always furious because I did not*
> *want to do anything else but read [love stories]....*
>
> **Therapist:** *I wonder whether 'The Coin' uses these love stories to deceive you to*
> *believe that extra-marital sex is better?*
>
> **Joy:** *It may be.*
>
> **Therapist:** *I don't know?*
>
> **Joy:** *It is possible. I never thought about it in these terms.*

It may be that Joy's discourse of extra-marital sex evolved from the books she read, because discourses that exert power over people's lives are formed in this way:

> Far from being simplistic, narrative counseling is based on the understanding
> that problems are manufactured in a social, cultural and political context. The
> newly born child is instantly bathed in a culture 'soap'. From a narrative

perspective, problems may be seen as floating in this soap. The problems we encounter are multi-sourced, they are developed over a long period of time, and they come together through the medium of human language to construct and to produce our experience.

(Monk 1996:27)

Joy has freed herself of the dominance of the discourse of extra-marital sex. She has found joy in giving herself sexually to her husband and in experiencing his happiness. The discourse of agape (see Chapter 15) came into the picture:

Joy: *It may be. The [extra-marital sexual]* **ecstasy** *provided wonderful experiences.*

Therapist: *It was wonderful, but also something that tried to destroy you?*

Joy: *Maybe.*

Therapist: *I am not sure?*

Joy: *But it was very special for me.*

Therapist: *Okay, it was special...*

Joy: *But I* **do** *not* **think you get it [sexual ecstasy] in a marital relationship.**

Therapist: *I think that no one really gets it in a marital relationship.*

Joy: *Maybe I sought it [sexual ecstasy] outside my marriage. Now that it* **[ecstasy] is different within my marriage,** *I resign myself to the matter. I think I am beginning to...accept the more normal things [inside the marriage]...But* **Joe** *[Joy's husband]* **is happy, and it makes me happy if he is happy.**

Therapist: *Are you happy when you are making him happy?*[46]

Joy: *Yes.*

Therapist: *It seems as if* **'The Rose'** *is developing a special sexual side that is nice too?*

In my reflection on these reflexive conversations, I realised the inter-relatedness of the discourses that exerted power over Joy's life. The discourses of extra-marital sex (hedonism?), self-fulfilment, marital sex, motherhood, and agape co-

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[45] These questions relate to the discourse of agape.

constituted her story of many extra-marital relationships. The pastoral therapeutic conversations entered the battleground of discourses (Lowe 1991;45).

The discourses of **self-fulfilment** and of **hedonism** are at odds with most marriages as a long-term commitment (Pittman 1990; Lawson 1990, see Section 15.4). These cultural discourses co-constitute extra-marital affairs. Pastoral therapy has to take note of the cultural discourses of **hedonism** and of their **deconstruction**. The pastoral therapist must be **discursively present**, thereby maintaining a full awareness of the discourses at work in the therapeutic encounter (Monk et al 1996).

11.3.3 A disabling effect of modernistic reformed theology: A narrative perspective

In this section I reflect on some aspects of modernistic theology that are not conducive to the lover's ending an extra-marital affair. The reader must consider the following excerpt again:

> *Therapist: The ecstasy is something that wants to pull you to 'The Coin'?*
>
> *Joy:* Yes.
>
> *Therapist: So, 'The Coin' uses ecstasy? That is interesting?*
>
> *Joy:* That is rather horrible. One cannot describe it for another person. But I think it is the main reason.
>
> *Therapist: How does it happen that 'the ecstasy' **cannot exert its power over you** and that **you can be your own true self** and make your own decisions?*
>
> *Joy:* **I think it is [God's] grace.**
>
> *Therapist: Tell me more.*

Joy's answer, **'I think it is [God's] grace'** reflects her own version of hamartologizing her own nature, i.e. her view that she can do no good at all. This implies that it is not only pastoral therapists who are inclined to hamartologise extra-marital affairs, but the person involved also hamartologises the situation. Hence, the unfaithful spouse views herself/himself as inherently bad and sinful.

A narrative approach in therapy involves conversations that move between 'the landscape of action' and 'the landscape of consciousness' (White & Epston 1990). Usually, after exploring 'the landscape of action' the narrative therapist moves to 'the landscape of consciousness' to explore the actions/events implications for the person's identity as they are embedded in his/her story (White 1991). My question 'How does it happen that 'the ecstasy' **cannot exert its power over you** and that **you can be you own true self** and make your own decisions?', was a 'landscape of consciousness' question. Hence, Joy had to think about the events and their meaning for her identity. It was, however, conspicuous that Joy answered, **'I think it is [God's] grace'**. The 'credit' for her accomplishments was given to God. In asking this kind of 'landscape of consciousness' question I frequently encountered answers similar to Joy's answer [cf. the cases of Griet and Ronald]. This was especially the case where people adhered to foundationalism in their faith.

The answer Joy gave was a theologically sound answer - especially when it is seen from a modernistic reformed theological view. Reformed theology endorses man's sinful nature and all good works are credited to God (Vande Kemp 1991:66). Within a narrative approach in pastoral therapy, however, Joy's type of answer, **'I think it is [God's] grace'**, reflects the power of religious discourses to minimise people's own accomplishments. This type of religious discourse dominate people to the extent that God is always credited for good things while the self is blamed for the bad things (Kotze 1996a; cf. also Vande Kemp 1991:65-66). **Can it be that this kind of religious discourse inhibits people's ethical abilities?** If this is the case, then modernistic reformed theology, with its social-linguistic construct of man's sinful nature, actually limits people's potential to end an extra-marital affair.

Furthermore, Joy's type of answer, 'I think it is [God's] grace', **voided** the 'landscape of consciousness' question. This is usually the case with this type of answer [cf. the reflexive conversations of Griet and Ronald]. Hence, the pastoral therapist has to bypass the answer and prompt the conversational participant to tell the **'unsaid'** (Anderson & Goolishian 1988:380; Freedman and Combs 1996:45). Hence, I prompted Joy to story the not-yet-said by asking her to **'Tell me more'**.

In the next chapter I attend to pastoral therapy and the faithful spouse.

PASTORAL THERAPY AND THE FAITHFUL SPOUSE

12.1 Introduction

Extra-marital relationships usually have a limited 'shelf life'. This implies that, if the faithful spouse can outlive the affair, the marriage can be salvaged. In this section I deal with the life span and phases of an affair and with pastoral therapeutic conversations with the faithful spouse to enable him/her to outlive and to survive the affair - if that is what he/she prefers to do.

12.2 The life span and the different phases of an extra-marital affair

12.2.1 The life span of an extra-marital affair

Extra-marital affairs have a limited life span. The vast majority of extra-marital affairs last anywhere from a few months to a year or two (Brown 1991:24).

According to Hurlbert's (1992:107) research, the average number of days a woman knew her lover before she got into bed with him was 144 days, i.e. about five months. Women continued the extra-marital affair for an average of about 62 days, or about two months, after first having sexual intercourse (Hurlbert 1992:108). This study implied that extra-marital affairs lasted about seven months. Furthermore, the more emotion-based the extra-marital relationship was, the longer the lovers in this sample knew each other, the longer the relationship lasted. In addition, a woman's attitudes to sex (erotophilic versus erotophobic) correlated significantly with the time she remained in an extra-marital affair. The more erotophilic a woman was, the more lengthy the extra-marital affair would be (Hurlbert 1992:109).

Sex attitudes were related to a woman's decision to end an extra-marital relationship. As predicted, the more erotophilic or positive her attitudes toward sex, the longer the time she remained in an extra-marital affair....the association is true only for women in the sexual type affair. For women in the emotional type affair, sex attitudes appear to be unrelated to affair length....It may be that having an affair or remaining in one has a greater effect on a woman's...attitudes toward sex than the reverse.

(Hurlbert 1992:111-112)

Hunt (1969) found that the length of time elapsed before a couple engage in sex was related to several factors. The people in his sample who took a long time to build their extra-marital emotional involvement before they got into bed were people who had little pre-marital sexual experience, who had no previous extra-marital sexual experience and who wanted to adhere to their religious commitments and family values. Those people in his sample who spent little time in their extra-marital relationship before becoming sexually involved had had ample pre-marital experience, had had previous extra-marital sexual experiences, were free from religious inhibitions and experienced their marital relationship as cool and uninvolved. Hunt's (1969:137-138) survey yielded the following data about the length of an extra-marital affair:

- Between one tenth and one quarter of first affairs lasted only one day. A tenth lasted more than one day but less than a month. That is, about a third of first affairs lasted less than a month.
- Half of all extra-marital affairs lasted more than a month but less than a year and about one quarter lasted two or more years. Hence, about 75 to 80 percent of all affairs lasted less than a year.
- Subsequent affairs had an even more limited life span than first affairs.

Writing about **casual affairs** where there was **no emotional involvement**, Hunt (1969:193) stated that this type of affairs was short lived. He gave some reasons

for this phenomenon:

> Sooner or later, the vigorous flourishing phase of the affair gives way to a decline that ends in death, sometimes violently, sometimes as if in sleep. The simplest kind of decay takes place with little conflict or struggle; it's a premature ageing, a withering away that occurs in its very infancy. Casual, uninvolved affairs that undergo no development after the consummation are the ones that most often exhibit this early senescence; they offer little continuing reward beyond sexual pleasure, and this, powerful as it is, generally, is not enough to keep them going. For with consummation, the principal values of the casual affair disappear:
> - the excitement of the new situation,
> - the sense of adventure,
> - the challenge of the first physical intimacy,
> - the pride of conquest,
> - all inevitably lost.
>
> If nothing but sex remains, the relationship soon fades away...the extra-marital partner was more a useful object than a person, and little emotion was invested in him or her.

Affairs where the **discourse of eros** plays a **major part** may also be short-lived. The reasons for the decline of eros in this case may be different. As I have shown, the eros discourse boosts a linguistic construction of the lover's personality and image that is not in touch with the 'real' lover. It creates a fantasy world (Pittman 1990; Virkler 1992). Eros boosts a linguistic construct that depicts the lover as a 'fantastic' person, a 'fantastic' companion, lover, parent, sexual partner, listener and conversationalist. Most romantic affairs are welded together, not by who the lover really is, but by the idealised romantic image of the lover (May 1989; Hunt 1989; Martin 1989). Sooner or later, this linguistic construction begins to crumble, and the result is quite often a sense of disappointment that erupts into anger (Pittman 1987, 1990).

> Because the affair has meant so much to him, reality seems a shocking affront, a barbaric cruelty visited upon him by his beloved. Horrified and enraged that she is not at all what he supposed, he fights with her about it,

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demands that she be what he thought she was; she, in turn, is first wounded, then infuriated, at being found less than marvellous and ordered to improve. But as their clashes increase in intensity and frequency, so do their efforts to recapture the earlier illusions and satisfactions; they thrust each other away time and again, only to rush back into each other's arms. The mortal illness of the affair...is no quiet wasting away, but a series of fevers and convulsions interspersed with moments of blessed remissions...

(Hunt 1969:197)

People who engage intimately and emotionally in an extra-marital affair are usually committed to monogamy (Hunt 1969:171). Such a monogamous person is pulled in two directions. He/she yearns for a steadfast family life, being home, enjoying the kids and is reluctant to abandon it all for a new (untested) relationship.

For conscience-controlled people, particularly puritan-romantics who once had (or wanted to have) a totally committed and involved marriage, it is rare for the extra-marital affair to remain casual or emotionally limited. Instead, it tends to be a dynamic disruptive process that either grows by invading and claiming parts of the marriage, or is counter-attacked by it and driven off. For such persons, an extra-marital affair is neither an innocuous amusement nor a durable comfort, but a crisis that must be resolved one way or the other.

(Hunt 1969:171)

Alternatively, persons who believe in monogamy may want to transform the exhilaration and romance of the extra-marital relationship into a new marital bond, but they may be hesitant because they sense that romance is not a stable foundation for a marital bond. Also, in order to marry the new partner, the unfaithful spouse has to leave 'home' and children and even abandon old and trusted family and friendship ties (Hunt 1969).

To file for a divorce and to marry a new partner implies that the unfaithful spouse has to abandon monogamy as a (religious) value and at the same time embrace monogamy as a (religious) value. The unfaithful spouse inevitably lives with

cognitive dissonance (Baron & Byrne 1987). This process is not an easy one for the persons involved. Some Christians who are involved in extra-marital affairs try to escape the agony of cognitive dissonance by hastily seeking a divorce and marrying the lover as soon as possible. A process of ego defence mechanisms such as denial, repression and rationalisation accompany this process (Virkler 1992:101-112).

The very phenomenon which implies that an extra-marital affair is usually a secretive and deceptive relationship may undermine the stability of such a relationship or the prospects of a new marriage. If each partner has lived in deception once, what guarantee do they both have that the kind of deception during their extra-marital affair will not be repeated in a future marriage?   The consequences of this process are that the ambivalence and internal conflict soon begin to contaminate the extra-marital affair (Hunt 1969). The unfaithful spouse may postpone a final decision to leave his/her marital partner. This postponement inevitably puts pressure on the extra-marital relationship, as the lover comes up with fierce accusations such as, 'When are you going to leave your house and file for a divorce? You promised to do it in January but you have not, and it is already June!'

To opt for indecision is a choice against the extra-marital relationship. The end result is that the two lovers' romantic and idealised discussions give way to quarrels, anger, ultimatums and threats of desertion (Hunt 1969:226). The quarrels lead to a dissolution of the fantasy linguistic constructions and the end of the affair is near. If the extra-marital relationship dissolves at this stage, the unfaithful spouse is free of the discourses that have dominated him/her and finds it easier to resume the marital relationship.

If the extra-marital affair comes to an end prematurely, i.e. before the fantasy linguistic constructions are dissolved, these fantasy constructions may torment the person for many years to come (Virkler 1992; Hunt 1969). The unfaithful spouse may resume the marital relationship, but may mourn the loss of the extra-marital relationship (Virkler 1992).

When it comes to **pastoral therapeutic conversations** with the unfaithful spouse, I think that it is vital to be **aware of the phase of the extra-marital relationship.**

Friends, relatives and pastors can put tremendous pressure on an unfaithful spouse to break off the extra-marital relationship. However, if the **timing** of this break does not coincide with a deconstruction of the fantasy constructions, the unfaithful spouse may abandon the lover, but may continue to be tormented by the fantasy constructions (Virkler 1992). That is, the actual affair may have ended and the unfaithful spouse may never see the lover again, but the relationship may struggle on in the mind of the unfaithful for years to come.

12.2.2 The phases of an extra-marital affair: A limited shelf life

In pastoral therapeutic conversations, it is vital to foster the faithful spouse's hope (Capps 1995) that the extra-marital affair will subside within time. In this section, I summarise the process or phases of an extra-marital affair, of divorce and of reconciliation. I found Pittman's (1990:229-232) modernistic description of the **eight different phases of an extra-marital affair** enlightening and I refer briefly to his description:

Phase 1: The betrayal

> The unfaithful spouse engages in an extra-marital affair and keeps it secret. This induces confusion and distance in the marital relationship.

Phase 2: The Battle

> The unfaithful spouse denies the existence of an affair while the faithful spouse insists it does exist. This forces the unfaithful spouse to lie even more and the faithful spouse to play detective. Hence, they begin to play cat and mouse.

Phase 3: Blamelessness

> Each spouse blames the other for the situation and tries to prove his/her own innocence. Friends and relatives are triangled into the situation and both spouses disclose the mate's bad habits and embarrassing secrets. Everyone begins to believe the couple must get a divorce.

Phase 4: Emotional incongruence

The unfaithful spouse has found a new partner, experiences an emotional high and does not feel the loss of the marriage. The faithful spouse, however, is shattered, terrified of the future and outraged of the happiness of the unfaithful spouse.

Phase 5: Waking up

The deserted spouse begins to explore the outside world and discovers that life can go on without the unfaithful spouse - even better than before. The unfaithful spouse's romantic feelings come to an end and the new freedom vanishes. The deserted spouse is feeling more and more competent in life, getting emotional support from friends and relatives, and begins to see the advantages of being free. The unfaithful spouse realises the enormity of the financial and familial sacrifices of a divorce and the extra-marital relationship comes under pressure. The unfaithful spouse expects the lover to compensate for all the sacrifices the unfaithful spouse has made. Hence, the lover comes under pressure. After the separation/divorce of the married partners, the circumstances that fuelled the extra-marital affair disappear and the new circumstances are seldom conducive to sustaining the romance.

Phase 6: Human sacrifice

In desperation the unfaithful spouse sacrifices the lover and the lover becomes outraged, feeling used and abused.

Phase 7: The return of the unfaithful spouse

Almost always the unfaithful spouse will try to return to the marital partner. Suddenly the faithful spouse must decide whether the marriage has any future.

Phase 8. The mourning

> If the couple resumes the marital relationship, they celebrate. If the divorce
> goes through, each of them mourns his/her losses. The unfaithful spouse,
> who has lost the romance of the affair, the relationship with the lover and
> the marriage, mourns his/her double loss. The affair, once revealed,
> devastates the children and seems ridiculous to friends and relatives. The
> unfaithful spouse and the lover find that they are strangers to their
> significant others. Even if the couple divorces, the divorce may not end the
> marital relationship.

The reader has already met Griet, a faithful spouse, in Section 7.3.2 where I gave
some of her biographical information. In a reflexive conversation, I asked Griet
what in our mode of conversation enabled her to survive emotionally and to live
through her husband's extra-marital affair. The following excerpt reflects her
answer and our ensuing conversation:

> **Griet:** *The information [you gave me].*
>
> **Therapist:** *Okay, the information about the life cycle of an extra-marital affair and that 80% of all affairs do not survive? Did this information help you? Without the information it would have been much more difficult?*
>
> **Griet:** *Definitely.*
>
> **Therapist:** *So, information about affairs is important?*
>
> **Griet:** *Yes, it is very important.*
>
> **Therapist:** *Are you saying that this kind of [therapeutic] conversation would be poorer if I had not given you some information?*
>
> **Griet:** *Yes. You let me feel that many people experience the same circumstances and that I can work for a solution. I am not unique in my husband's having an affair. This has helped me greatly because otherwise I would...[ask] 'Where have I gone wrong?' and 'What have I done to chase him into another woman's arms?'...*

Knowledge of the limited life span of extra-marital affairs fosters the hope that, if
the faithful spouse can manage to stay emotionally healthy, he/she can outlive the

affair. In the following section I deal with a narrative approach to pastoral therapy in this regard.

12.3 Pastoral therapy and the faithful spouse: Outliving the affair

Many extra-marital affairs have a limited life span. I dealt with the topic in the previous sections. To my mind, this research report would be incomplete if I did not mention the benefits that the faithful spouse may reap if he/she tries to outlive the affair and thereby save the marriage - if saving the marriage seems appropriate. Many faithful spouses do not want a divorce but want to save the marriage (Adler 1996). Extra-marital affairs can have a life span from several months to a year or two. About 80% of all extra-marital affairs end somehow sometime (Pittman 1987). My practice has shown that extra-marital affairs have a limited life span and that the faithful spouse can, if he/she wants to, outlive the affair. Hence, it is not imperative that the extra-marital affair must end before any sensible work can be done to save the marriage.

Many authors differ from this point of view and feel that the unfaithful spouse and the lover must end the relationship before any therapy can be useful (Jagers 1989). (Virkler 1992:136) stated:

> A *total break is necessary*. Writers and counsellors are unanimous in this: The affair relationship has to be broken completely if the marriage is to have a chance of surviving [author's italics].

Authors are not, in fact, unanimous on this subject. Pittman (1990:201) proposed that the faithful spouse must hang on to the marital relationship while the unfaithful spouse is carrying on with the extra-marital relationship - if the faithful spouse wishes to do so:

> The person who has been betrayed may not even realise that the infidel is likely to return home. It is difficult to survive such a degrading and depersonalizing situation, yet there are advantages to holding on. Nothing the

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betrayed spouse can do will affect the romance [of the extra-marital affair], but the romance is time limited, and will most likely fall apart. The aggrieved partner might want to be there when that happens.

I advise spouses who are waiting for their mate's romance to end: do not try to out-romance a romantic. Don't bother to arouse jealousy. Don't try to get your partner's attention, increase your partner's guilt, or threaten some sort of unpleasantness. Just express your point of view and then go off and do whatever holds you together during this time.

Many faithful spouses try to outstay the extra-marital affair but **the problem is how to survive emotionally** while waiting for the affair to crumble (cf. Elbaum 1981). The story of **Griet** illustrates this emotional struggle, as she tried to live through the extra-marital affair over some time:

> **Griet:**   *God gave his Word and I take God at his Word and I am praying that their relationship - if it is only emotions they share - that their relationship will subside over time, that it will not deepen. But now, now I am in need of help. I need guidance, I am desperately in need of support to keep on believing, to keep on working, to keep on being positive.... I do not want to criticise my husband in bitterness....For me it is a process of strengthening myself on a daily basis, to keep on believing, just to keep on believing.*

Griet wanted to stay on despite the extra-marital affair but she struggled to survive emotionally.

People's narratives do not only interpret life events over time, they also determine their life narratives (White 1991, 1995; Gerkin 1991; White & Epston 1990). If a person's linguistic constructions are in the **linguistic domain of competency**, then the self-narratives will be narratives of competency and potency. However, if a person's linguistic constructions are in the **linguistic domain of risk and incompetence**, then the self-narratives will be narratives of risk and incompetence (Kotzé 1996a). Griet's story was a story in the linguistic domain of risk and incompetence. She needed hope (Capps 1995). A narrative approach in pastoral

therapy can facilitate this hope and can co-construct, with the conversational participant, self-narratives of competence:

> Narrative therapy requires an optimistic orientation. The main character in the plot is frequently positioned in the therapeutic conversation as the courageous victor rather than the pathologized victim, as a colorful individual who has vivid stories to recount rather than as a hopeless individual leading a pathetic life.

> (Monk 1996:4)

I have already shown in Chapter 6 that all metaphors are inevitably **ethical** discourses (Dueck 1991:177-201). Hence, a pastoral therapist must try to keep an awareness of **the linguistic domain** of the **therapeutic conversation**. If the client is using linguistic constructions that fit the domain of risk and incompetence and the pastoral therapist joins the client and utilises linguistic constructions of risk, then inevitably they will co-construct a narrative of risk and incompetence. Hence, **the pastoral therapist has the ethical responsibility to use metaphors that transfer the conversation from the linguistic domain of risk to the linguistic domain of competence** (Kotzé 1996a).

In follow-up conversations, Griet's metaphors tended to the linguistic domain of risk and incompetence. I listened attentively to her painful story in an effort to **validate** her story as the agenda of the conversation (Winslade et al 1996; Kotzé 1996a), an experience that helped her to regain agency of self and to become the author of her own life (Parry 1991). I then tried to shift the conversation from the linguistic domain of risk to one of competency by asking the following question:

> ***Therapist:*** *How did you manage to become more beautiful and more tranquil in the past month?*

Griet responded to this question by telling the story of her mastectomy and how she (and her then faithful husband) managed to **cope with the loss**. She recalled how many friends, relatives and pastors helped her through the crisis of adjustment and she became strong. Although she slipped back into the linguistic domain of risk at times, I felt that we ended the particular conversation in a domain of competence.

As a homework suggestion, I asked Griet to ponder the following question; 'What is it in yourself that is making you strong in the face of this turmoil?'

This question was a question that was intended to generate metaphors that were akin to the linguistic domain of competence. I wondered, however, how the now famous mottoes of narrative therapy, namely 'the not-knowing position of the therapist' and the 'client is the expert' (Anderson & Goolishian 1992; Hoffman-Hennessy & Davis 1993), fit into this mode of **strategically tailoring the domain of linguistic constructions.**

I wondered whether it was possible to adhere to the mottoes of narrative therapy in such a way that they could be reified into ideological and institutionalised 'truths'? Is it possible that the metaphors of narrative therapy can themselves be reified into 'absolute truths'? One paradoxical aspect of postmodernism is that it may itself fall prey to the same problems which beset modernistic thought. It is in danger of becoming a new totalising meta-narrative, of the very kind it sought to repudiate (Lowe 1991:47).

Although I was not sure what the **content** of Griet's thoughts would be, I **strategically** tried to transfer her linguistic constructions from the domain of risk to the domain of competence. A non-expert mode in narrative therapy is, to my mind, not at odds with the main concerns of narrative therapy.

> In narrative therapy, therefore, much of the skill of the therapist lies in attending closely to the ways we use language; to **the positionings we call people into by the words we use** and the ways we organize our sentences. The approach requires **intentionality** on the part of the therapist...skill in language use, and systematic attention to the hidden assumptions in the ways people tell their stories [bold mine].
>
> (Drewery & Winslade 1996:33)

I was the expert, not of the **content** of her linguistic constructions, but of 'the **process** of postmodernistic social construction discourse as the epistemology that underlie people's self-narratives (White 1997). I was the conversational artist

(Anderson & Goolishian 1992:27). Authors like Hoffman-Hennessy and Davis (1993) would probably object to the **strategic tailoring** of the **domain of linguistic constructions.**

When Griet arrived for the our next conversation, she tabled a list of twelve factors that she considered to be factors that were strengthening her. The majority of these twelve discourses were in the linguistic domain of   competence. As we talked through her list, the narrative that was co-constructed was the beginning of a narrative in which she could regain her agency of self.

During the conversation set out overleaf, Griet was still inclined to use metaphors that were akin to the domain of risk. The painful story of her husband's extra-marital affair kept those metaphors alive. The phenomenon of setbacks is common in narrative therapy and booster sessions are necessary to keep the alternative story alive (Monk 1996).

Although I **listened at length and attentively** to her story, I was still trying to keep the conversation in the domain of competence. Maybe we could co-construct new alternative visions of her self and **deconstruct** the self-narrative that constituted Griet as the pitiful victim (Gergen 1994).

> Unlike the Rogerian therapist, whose active listening is intended to reflect back
> the client's story like a mirror without distortion, the narrative therapist looks for
> hidden meanings, spaces or gaps, and evidence of conflicting stories. We call
> this process of listening for what is not said *deconstruction* [author's italics].
>
> (Drewery & Winslade 1996:43)

In the following excerpt of a pastoral therapeutic conversation with Griet, I utilised externalising questions in an effort to differentiate the person from the problem and to initiate the deconstruction of the problem-saturated story. As has been indicated before, the person is not the problem, the problem is the problem (White 1990).

> For the deconstruction of stories that persons live by, I have proposed the
> objectification of the problems for which people seek therapy....These

externalizing conversations 'exoticize the domestic' in that they encourage persons to identify...those stories and knowledges that guide their lives and that speak to them about their identity. Externalizing conversations are initiated by encouraging people to provide an account of the effects of the problem on their lives....with a special emphasis on how it has affected their 'view' of themselves and their relationships.

(White 1991:29)

This, then, is the conversation with Griet:

Therapist: *I want to ask you* **what is the influence of this extra-marital affair on yourself?**

Griet: *Firstly, as a woman, this situation is* **humiliating. Guilt feelings! Powerlessness!** *I think this situation has given me a feeling that I have received from God: I have to work hard to rescue this relationship. And I am the one who has to make the sacrifices. And the children are of the utmost importance.*

Therapist: *What is* **the influence of the extra-marital affair on the children?**

Griet: *It differs from child to child. Ted is like his dad. He can't share his feelings. He calls a spade a spade and refers to Dad's affair...as if the affair will soon subside, but no one knows how deeply the affair affects Ted. He is receiving psychological treatment. One night he threw a fit...I do not think that the extra-marital affair is alienating the children from their father. No, definitely not. But it is as if they are embarrassed and do not know what to say or do...The affair makes Jeni bitter, maybe it is because she is a female....John said to his Dad: "Go, take her [the lover] if you want her, but do not make us unhappy!"*

Therapist: *What does it let you* **believe about yourself?** *How does it affect you?* **What kind of person are you?** *The situation has a profound influence on the family, doesn't it?*

Griet: *I thought about all my wrongs in the past months.* **I feel I have failed him.** *I did not fail him for many years, only from November....It seems as if* **I can't say anything right or do anything right.**

Therapist: *What is it like to experience that you can't say or do anything correct?*

> **Griet:** *I think it is like my initial feeling when the bomb burst and he revealed to me that he is in love with Erica [i.e. his lover]. I feel **I have failed him as a wife**. But I think this feeling is vanishing; I read quite a lot about affairs and the Lord is leading me on wonderful paths - I am going up and down. I am feeling strong now, and I am ready to sacrifice everything. Until now, I was the woman he wanted and we had a wonderful relationship....*

In the above excerpt I focused on the problem's influence in Griet's life. In this conversation, I move to and fro between the 'landscape of action' and the 'landscape of consciousness' (White & Epston 1990). We explored what happened, i.e. what her and the children's actions in the face of this affair were - that is the 'landscape of action'. We also explored the 'landscape of consciousness' i.e. what the situation is saying to her identity (White & Epston 1990). These questions were questions such as the following: 'What does it let you believe about yourself?' and 'How does it affect you?' and 'What kind of person are you?'.

In the following excerpt we begin to move away from the influence of the problem in Griet's life, and we begin to move to Griet's influence in the life of the problem. Again we move between the 'landscape of action' and the 'landscape of consciousness':

> **Therapist:** *I hear you are saying - it is not that your husband said it - but, it is your experience that you are failing him....But I also hear you are saying that despite your negative experiences about yourself, **you want to feel good and sometimes you do feel good about yourself**.*
>
> **Griet:** *Yes, and the more I read about the subject, the more I read the Bible...tha more **I feel that I haven't failed him**. Maybe I have failed him because our marriage wasn't so perfect and I haven't done everything my husband asked for.*
>
> **Therapist:** *It seems as if you do not always believe that you have always been in the wrong?*
>
> **Griet:** *No. I do not believe it is all my fault. He said he can't handle my tantrums.*

> **Therapist:** *Even in these difficult times* **you still believe that you are just you and you are a nice person?**
>
> **Griet:** **Yes.** *I am reflecting it on myself.*

In the following excerpt, we were searching for a 'unique outcome' (White & Epston 1990). A 'unique outcome' contains the aggregate of events that may lead to a re-authoring of the self and of relationships:

> Unique outcome questions invite family members to select out those intentions and actions that contradict the problem-saturated description of family life, those 'timeless miracles' that would otherwise go unnoticed. This redefines the family members' relationship with the problem.
>
> (White 1989:41).

I found it rather difficult to identify only one conspicuous 'unique outcome'. We talked about events and ideas of the past that could redefine Griet in her current situation:

> **Therapist:** **Can you recall an event** *since November [the time when her husband engaged in an affair]* **when you felt good**, *when you felt that you were* **a charming wife** *and your husband enjoyed it?*
>
> **Griet:** *There were evening gatherings with mutual friends....If we are with them, we can really relax and laugh. There were many times, however, no one event was special. I think the happiest times we shared were those times when I cared for our grenddaughter. It was in November and December. We talked a lot about her....***Sometimes I have great confidence in myself.** *But then he would come home and barely say 'hello', as if he has no interest [in what happens] at home.*
>
> **Therapist:** **Tell me more about all your confidence.** *It corresponds with your feeling good about yourself, doesn't it? Tell me more.* **What happens? What are you doing then? How are you at such times?**
>
> **Griet:** *I think it comes from without too, not only from within:* **My children tell me how wonderful I am** *- they did it all their life....it led me to feel good about myself because* **I have always been a competent mother** *and still am now....[She went on to recall a lengthy and very*

stressful experience where her husband criticised her, then she proceeded with linguistic constructions akin to the domain of competence]. **Yes, my children and my friends consider me nice.**

Therapist: Was there a time since November wherein you felt good as his wife?

Griet: I have asked him several times to accompany me to the movies. But he has excuses....Then I leave him. Some evenings the children are out and then I do not prepare the evening meal. Then he asks me out to dinner at a restaurant. Nowadays he does not take me out anymore. I take a bath, put my make up on, but I won't ask him whether we can go out. I only sit in his presence and say, 'Dad, I haven't prepared dinner yet. What would you like? He will reply: 'Order a pizza or something.' Then I will cover him with a blanket on the couch and he will fall asleep.

Therapist: Were there times when he came home and fell asleep, **but you managed to feel good?**

Griet: **Yes, I listen to music.** I am very fond of music. Initially I wasn't upset because I did not know about Erica [the affairee]. Now I know about the affair.

Therapist: **Are there now times in which you experience yourself as good?**

Griet: Yes. Absolutely, absolutely. **I am a good friend and a good mother.**

Therapist: Yes, but if you have to focus on yourself as Pine's life companion? Do you experience yourself as his good life companion?

Griet: I always used to. He always called me 'Little star'. He let me feel that way. But since November he has not let me feel that way anymore. In Israel, we were considered 'the couple'. We complemented each other. We are very fond of nature. I remember our relationship as man and wife. The times we retreated to the bushveld - once, I was seven months pregnant - we slept in a sleeping bag and were just together. **He never went without me. We shared this until last December....I felt so good. I never felt inferior....**

Therapist: **It is as if you are proud of yourself, of who you are and who you have been? I hear you say, 'I am I and I am different?'**

Griet: Yes, I do not want to be like him. I do not went to be so terribly organised. I am I. If we went with friends on holiday, we could laugh and talk - everybody was himself.

> **Therapist:** *It seems to me that through all these years you could say to yourself, 'I am different, I am artistic, I am a nice spouse.* **It is as if the situation [affair] wants to rob you of your sense that you are nice? How do you resist the situation that wants to rob you of your goodness?**[47]
>
> **Griet:** *Only through the Word of God.* **God created me as a unique person.** *I am his child. He doesn't want me to be exactly like Pine....Pine loved me just as I was...I have put my feelings on paper: I am tired of hardship, but I trust that God has a destiny for my life. [He will] give me the strength and the love to keep on going...Lord, you know why you made Pine full of confidence, self-satisfied, positive in everything. Lord, why did you put us together?* **Through all these years he accepted me just as I am, and he enjoyed me.** *We had wonderful years.* **I was myself....**

In recalling past events, even events before the advent of the extra-marital affair, Griet re-described her identity: 'I am I'; 'God made me a unique person' and 'I am a good friend and a good mother'. Furthermore, in recalling these past events, Griet was **re-membered** to her marital partner (White 1997:22). It was these kind of conversations that co-constructed her story as a faithful spouse who can be proud of herself. In a later reflexive conversation, I asked her to reflect on the therapeutic conversations and she made the following comments:

> **Therapist:** *In other words, our way talking did not make you feel like the guilty party?*
>
> **Griet:** *Yes, yes. And the fact that you have asked me what is it that strengthens me and I could reply, it is the strength of the Lord...*
>
> **Therapist:** *So, we talked more about your strong points and less about the suffering, the tears, how terrible it is and that it [i.e. the affair] is not your fault?*
>
> **Griet:** *Yes, that was very important....You once asked me to go and write down what things were strengthening me....*

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[47] These questions comprise an externalising mode of conversation.

I kept the therapeutic conversations in the linguistic domain of competence and steered away from the linguistic domain of risk and incompetence (Kotzé 1996a). In the end, Griet survived emotionally and outlived the extra-marital affair. The affair ended and the couple resumed their marital relationship.

12.4 Pastoral therapy and the faithful spouse: Blaming the self

The faithful spouse usually experiences that he/she has failed the unfaithful spouse. This is especially the case where a woman is the faithful spouse, because of our society's double standards in this regard (Lawson 1990). Hence, these people often blame themselves for the unfaithful spouse's unfaithfulness.

Ronald was involved for more than two years in a secretive extra-marital affair. When he was in the process of ending the affair, he told his wife about the affair. In the following excerpt Ronald told me about **his wife's anguish and self-blame.**

> **Ronald:**　　....I accompanied my wife on the Thursday on a shopping trip and assisted her. Later on she suggested that we have lunch in a restaurant. I did everything I could to postpone the moment of truth. **We went home and there I told her. She was utterly upset.** My wife considers me the focal point of her life. She struggled to handle it. Eventually she said she will stand by me. She said it would be difficult to forgive me. **We did not sleep that night.**

His wife **Diana** blamed herself for his unfaithfulness:

> **Ronald:**　　....[W]e talked about a lot of things. **She** [i.e. Diana] **said** that whenever something like this [i.e. an affair] happens, **she must be to blame**....**I tried very hard to convince her not to blame herself.** It was something that I had committed, how could she be responsible [for the affair]? And...**she persisted in saying that she too had contributed**....It was difficult to explain the detail to her. I said to her she couldn't say it happened **because she was the one who transgressed**...But we talked. We talked about our sexual life. And we talked about time together. I am very busy and she is very busy....

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Diana's self-blame is evident from this excerpt. This blaming of the self does not happen in a cultural vacuum. The self-blaming is related to a discourse in our culture. This cultural discourse is something like this **'if your husband strays, you have to look for the flaw in your own life'** (cf. Pittman 1990:33-51).

During the same reflexive conversation with Ronald, we talked about self-blame and its connectedness to voices in our culture:

Ronald: .... Yes, my wife has many questions.

Therapist: It is one of **the most formidable myths in our society**. I call it a myth.

Ronald: Yes.

Therapist: It is a **myth to say, ' when my spouse strays it is my fault'**. It is totally a myth of our society and **it is kept alive by our society**.

Ronald: Yes.

Therapist: Books keep it alive, films keep it alive.

Ronald: Yes. Yes.

Therapist: Popular magazines keep it [i.e. this myth] alive...sometimes it may be true, but it is mostly a myth. A **woman begins to burden herself with this myth** and then **she begins to suffer under the [oppression] of this myth**. I wonder what it would be like if your wife could be **freed from this myth**, i.e. if she concentrate less on what had gone wrong and **focus on celebrating your wonderful new-found openness** [i.e. honesty]?

Ronald: **I must say the focus has shifted ... it is fantastic - I can't understand it.** The focus has shifted, you know, towards what you call **'a celebration'**.

Therapist: **[A celebration] of your [marital] relationship?**

Ronald: **Yes.**

Therapist: Congratulations, Ronald.

Penney (1989) was an exponent of the kind of discourse that claims that **'if your husband strays, you have to look for the flaw in your own life'**. She wrote a book entitled **How to keep your husband monogamous** in which she stated that it is the woman's responsibility to keep her husband from straying: 'The women

who are deserted are the women who love. The women who keep their lovers are those who practice the arts of love' (1989:iii). Pittman (1990) dismissed these kind of discourses as 'myths about unfaithfulness'. He mentioned **three myths** that relate to Penney's discourse:

1. The infidel must not 'love the cuckold; the affair proves it'.
2. The affairee must be 'sexier' than the spouse.
3. The affair is the fault of the cuckold, proof that the cuckold has failed the infidel in some way that made the affair necessary.

(Pittman 1990:33-51)

When Ronald visited me for the third time, he brought Diana along. I had a long conversation with Diana and we talked about the **three myths that relate to Penney's discourse**. Approaching Diana as a person who was subjugated by a cultural discourse and not as a wife who failed her husband, and through an externalising conversation, we deconstructed the discourse. Externalising conversations are a linguistic tool that enable the participant to move away from self-attack, incompetence, self-blame and self-judgement (Monk 1996).

Diana was freed from this discourse and the couple and I proceeded to plan how they could celebrate their reconciliation and the new-found intimacy in their marital relationship.

12.5 Pastoral therapy and the faithful spouse: Blaming God

12.5.1 Deconstructing foundationalist theological discourses

When the faithful spouse learns about his/her partner's unfaithfulness, the revelation triggers an intense crisis. The faithful spouse who seeks help in a pastoral therapeutic setting usually presents his/her life story, not only in secular terms, but also in religious terms. This is typical in a crisis:

In the situation of crisis we are confronted with our human vulnerability, our finitude, the utter impossibility or our deepest hopes and wishes. In that situation, a most elemental choice is forced upon persons that is at its core a

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religious or 'faith' choice. Either people must defend themselves... or they must open themselves to the unknown future, trusting in the power and care of God...

(Gerkin 1979: 32)

Stone (1976:8) stressed **the religious nature of a crisis:** 'No matter how the client depicts the problem - mental, psychiatric, interpersonal, or intrapsychic - **all crises are religious at their core**; they involve ultimate issues with which one must come to terms if one's life is to be fulfilling'.

A couple who share religious beliefs co-construct their marital system as a system where **God is a genuine member of the marital system** (Butler & Harper 1994). God is personified and talked to on a daily basis. It may be that a spouse talks more to God throughout the day than to the other spouse! These couples invoke God's guidance and protection through prayer and rituals (Butler & Harper 1994). These actions and rituals are discursive practices (Winslade et al 1998). The couple's religious linguistic constructions are both interpretative and constitutive for the marital story. This marital story is a shared narrative in which God is an active member who can perform all the actions that are regularly attributed to any family member (Butler & Harper 1994). Biblical narrative and other oral and written discourses from the local culture play an important role in co-constituting this marital narrative (Gerkin 1991:58-60).

In the religious marriage...the couple's words 'reveal the hand of God' in both the mundane and extraordinary events of life. God becomes an operant being whose purposes are intimately connected to the marriage and intimately involved in the course of marital history....Daily conversation empowers these beliefs and 'finds' God's influence in daily interactions. In the religious marriage, language ratifies the belief that God is a member of the marital system....in the religious marriage, God operates *more nearly and regularly within* the marital boundaries than perhaps any other person, including the extended-family members [author's italics].

(Butler & Harper 1994:278-279)

For religious couples who were raised in a pre-modernistic and modernistic culture, the religious linguistic constructs are objective realities and they play an important role in co-constituting their lives (Fowler 1981, 1987). Butler and Harper (1994) reflected on constructionism, the systems theory of self-differentation of Bowen and how a couple's perspective of God as a differentiated partner in the marital triangle can promote differentiation within the marital relationship. According to Butler and Harper (1994), it is possible for a spouse, in times of conflict and distress, to invoke God into a dyadic relationship, seeking allegiance with God in an effort to reduce anxiety.

To my mind, and if I may revert to a modernistic paradigm for a moment, this is regularly the case where a religious spouse is informed of the unfaithfulness of the unfaithful spouse. 'The spouse may tearfully approach God for understanding and support, and daily find from that relationship the strength to endure a turbulent marital process...' (Butler & Harper 1994:283).

Griet, who learned that her husband was involved in an extra-marital affair, in our first conversation expressed her need to find strength in the Lord. She was a deeply religious person who experienced God as a member in the marital system. Griet (and her unfaithful husband!) hold firm beliefs: 'This is how I feel, God has put us together'. God ordained their marriage.

She was, however, angry, because she believed that God had also ordained this extra-marital affair. She blamed God for the situation because all events in their marital life are of God's making. Griet experienced her blaming God as sinful. Inevitably, she had to deal with immense feelings of anger and guilt simultaneously while she had to turn to God for help. Griet suffered under the religious discourse of determinism.

The 'problem' of religious **determinism** functions as a cultural discourse. This discourse has the power to disempower people:

> The classic problem of freedom and determinism arose primarily because
> Christian theology posits an omniscient, omnipotent and beneficent God and at
> the same time holds humankind responsible for its decisions. I feel double-

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bound by this theology, but have been no more successful than Job at 'leaving the field.'

(Vande Kemp 1991:65)

Calvinist theological discourses usually blame the self for bad things that happen and give God credit for good things (Kotzé 1996a). Hence, the faithful spouse finds it easier to assume he/she has sinned than to consider the possibility that he/she is the victim of circumstances and of discourses in the church's discursive practice:

An almighty and omniscient God in an ontological sense sooner or later acquires sadistic characteristics. A theology that justifies absurd suffering in a kind of theodicy will also alienate people.

(Veltkamp 1988:167)[48]

Within the discourse of determinism, people are inclined to assume that they have sinned, a situation that often leads to depression (Vande Kemp 1991:66). **Griet was constantly asking: 'O God, why have you done this to me?'** The religious discourse, 'God is almighty and He determined the extra-marital affair', dominated her own life story. This discourse had a **pathogenic effect** on her life (Clinebell 1984:120, 125). Not all spiritualities are beneficial and functional in the lives of people (cf. De Jongh van Arkel 1987:267-268).

Griet and I continued our conversation and we talked about God. I asked her some questions about God such as the following:

- Is it genuinely God who has arranged this extra-marital affair?
- Is God like a chess player who plays chess with a couple pushing them like pieces on a chess board - the pieces having no choice whatsoever?
- Can God be powerless in some situations?
- Maybe God is also asking, 'Why did it happen?'

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[48] Een almachtige en alwetende God in ontologische zin krijgt vroeg of laat sadistische trekken. Een theologie die het absurde lijden rechtvaardigt in één of andere vorm van theodicee werkt evenzeer vervreemdend.

(Veltkamp 1988:167)

In our conversation about the above-mentioned questions, we reflected on **Jesus'
powerlessness** in the following story:

> Jerusalem, Jerusalem! You kill the prophets and stone the messengers God
> has sent you! How many times have I wanted to put my arms round all your
> people, just as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you would not let
> me.
>
> (Good News Bible Matt 24:37)

We reflected on this story, asking ourselves whether Jesus **wept** in
powerlessness? Could it be that God was weeping in powerlessness over this
extra-marital affair? Could it be that Griet was crying and God weeping with her
about this extra-marital affair?

We reflected on biblical texts that are probably neglected by our theological
tradition in this regard, that is, that God is not always almighty. Through this
process of questioning, i.e. **deconstruction** (White 1989), Griet began to puzzle
the contradictions, the gaps in her (and our culture's) knowledge or stories about
God and her relationship with God. In reflecting afterwards about our
conversations, I thought about Brueggemann's comments:

> People do not change, or change much, because of doctrinal...argument....or
> because of moral appeal....people in fact change by the offer of new models,
> images, and pictures or how the pieces of life fit together - models, images,
> and pictures that characteristically have the particularity of narrative to carry
> them. Transformation is the slow, steady process of inviting each other into a
> counterstory about God, world, neighbour, and self....What is yearned for
> among us is not new doctrine or new morality, but new world, new self, new
> future. The new world is not given whole, any more than the new self is given
> abruptly in psychotherapy. It is given only a little at a time, one text at a time,
> one miracle at a time, one poem, one healing, one pronouncement, one
> promise, one commandment. Over time, these pieces are stitched together
> into a sensible collage....Have we (the pastoral therapists) enough nerve,
> freedom, and energy to move beyond the matrix of modernity and its

confident, uncritical wholeness to trust the....biblical text to let it be our fund for
counterimagination?

(Brueggemann 1993:24).

Griet and I did not invent a new doctrine. The funding of bits of oddities in the
biblical text enabled her to re-story her religious story. Griet experienced God in a
new and reassuring way. It reminded me of Louw, who said that pastoral therapy is
a therapy of 'analysing God':

> The change that the pastorate endeavours is in the first instance a theological
> change. The basic hypothesis is that a change in people's view of God
> generates an essential change in people's attitude towards life and their
> understanding of the problems of their lives. Pastoral aid endeavours a unique
> therapy: a therapy of 'analysing God.'

(Louw 1993:87)[49]

Griet regained her hope and strength in the Lord. I can never be sure why and how
she construed hope out of the above excerpts of biblical narratives. I know the
content of my own social linguistic constructions of the texts we shared, but I also
know that I had no control over her social linguistic constructions (Gergen 1994;
Gerkin 1986, 1991). Brueggemann phrased the above process in the following
words:

> But consider what would emerge if the clergy accepted as their modest role
> the voicing of scripture material....without accommodation to what is...morally
> conventional...without accommodation to religious orthodoxy...but only uttered
> the voice of the text....And out of these little...pieces...come the stuff of new
> self-discernment, and eventually, of new self. That...conversation, however, is
> characteristically heard only a little at a time, without any large sense of where
> one is going. Over time, these little pieces may amount to an enormous

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[49] Die verandering in die pastoraat is in die eerste plek teologies van aard. Die basiese
hipotese is dat verandering van mense se Godsvoorstelling 'n wesentlike verandering
genereer ten opsigte van hulle lewenshouding en verstaan van lewensprobleme. Pastorale
hulpverlening beoog 'n eiesoortige terapie: die terapie van 'n 'teo'-analise.

(Louw 1993:87)

challenge to one's ego-structure, and if one is blessed, they contain the hint of a massive reordering of one's self....the therapist does not have to see everything or know everything in advance. It is enough to...let the true subject (the client) of these little pieces make judgements....Such therapeutic conversation is exceedingly difficult for those of us who are too sure, too settled, too established.

(Brueggemann 1993:21)

Brueggemann's comments reflect a **post-foundationalist** option in theology that is akin to postmodernistic epistemology (Dill 1996). In the next section I reflected briefly on foundationalism and people's timidity to talk critically about theological dogmas.

12.5.2 *Foundationalism and deconstruction: A safe road to post-foundationalism?*

The relationship between God and a spouse is a hierarchical relationship (Vande Kemp 1891:65). Christians are, in traditional theological discourses, people who choose to align themselves with the discourse of the 'will of God' as the supreme authority in their lives. A key concern in postmodernistic pastoral therapy is, however, that the **will of God** is usually presented in a **modernistic and positivistic way as the truth, if not as an ideology**. This is the case in foundationalist theology (Dill 1996).

As I have already stated, all theological discourses are built on root metaphors and depict faith-related realities in **historical metaphors**. The reification of metaphors results in confusion where theological metaphors are regarded as 'the truth' (cf. Section 5.2). When the theological tradition functions **uncritically**, the reality that is reflected in the discourses is reduced and restricted and the birth of a religious ideology is immanent (Van Niekerk 1994). It is therefore, the task of the pastoral therapist to view the **theological tradition as a partner** in the pastoral therapeutic dialogue (cf. Section 6.2), but then as a partner **whose voice may be critically analysed by all participants**.

Furthermore, power, disguised as authority, is a central theme and metaphor in the Protestant tradition, and it relates to the authority of the Bible (Vande Kemp 1991:64-69). The authority of the Bible functions more as a tacit unexamined truth and readers of the biblical text are not 'allowed' to ask questions or to develop a reflexive stance in their thinking. This leads to a community of believers for whom it is very difficult to participate in a critical conversation on the theological tradition (Fowler 1981, 1987). It is a community of believers who is constantly on the lookout for authoritative interpreters of Scripture who can judge between right and wrong.

Hence, pastoral therapists face a community that is trying to avoid a critical conversation about the influence of theological discourses in their lives. I feel that the process of deconstruction offers hope in this regard. **Deconstruction is less adversarial and less dogmatic.** It may be a safer road to a post-foundationalist theology. It is a process that is less overtly critical or confrontational (Monk et al 1996). Griet benefited from such a process of deconstruction.

In the next chapter I attend to pastoral therapy and the unfaithful spouse.

PASTORAL THERAPY AND THE UNFAITHFUL SPOUSE

13.1 Continued conversations with the unfaithful spouse: Listening

A **direct confrontation** with the **unfaithful spouse** as a mode of pastoral therapy is **not useful** (Virkler 1992). The unfaithful partner finds him/herself on a lonely island isolated from spouse, family, friends, church and even work colleagues (Pittman 1890). Hence, it is ironic that the unfaithful partner can only trust or talk to his/her extra-marital lover, the lover being the only friend who understands.

Spokie and **John** asked for help after Spokie had become involved in an extra-marital affair with a married man. Spokie and John had been married for 13 years and during this time John suffered repeatedly from depression. When they came to me for help, John had already attended pastoral therapeutic sessions with another pastoral therapist in an attempt to overcome his depression. Spokie had an outgoing personality and was adventurous and fond of the great outdoors. She experienced her husband as being dull, moody and listless. For many years she had felt imprisoned by John's depression and it frustrated her.

I had several conversations with each of them separately. John had an explicit agenda to win Spokie back and to revive his marriage. Spokie could not decide whether she should file for divorce or be reconciled with her husband. The decision-making process exhausted had her and she was quite confused. After two months of involvement in the extra-marital affair and after 5 pastoral therapeutic conversations, she decided to initiate divorce proceedings.

John and Spokie experienced themselves as Christians and both came from Christian families-of-origin. Spokie had a female friend who 'Bible bashed' her with texts. This 'Bible bashing' did no good. Initially, John joined the friend in this 'Bible bashing'.

The following excerpt is a reflexive conversation between Spokie and myself about the pastoral therapeutic process and content:

Therapist: *Did you experience that I heard you, that I listened to you?*

Spokie: *Yes.*

Therapist: *What has it done for you?*

Spokie: *It let me talk more and more.*

Therapist: *What does it do to you to be heard?*

Spokie: *It relieved me. It caused me...it took away, to a great extent, my aggression. I have been heard, I could talk. It seemed as if somebody understood, tried to understand. Somebody [the pastoral therapist] heard what I am saying, saw what I am experiencing. To a great extent you did experience what I had to experience. It caused me to became very calm. That is a relief. It is devastating to bear with these things and emotions and nobody listens to me and nobody understands what I am trying to say. Nobody listens to me.*

Therapist: *In listening to you, did it help to lessen your isolation, to be less alone?*

Spokie: *Yes, however, you did not enter my personal space.*

Therapist: *Was it as if you could talk uncensored, as if you could be yourself?*

Spokie: *Definitely.*

Therapist: *And how did you experience it?*

Spokie: *I had the feeling that you understood me.*

Therapist: *What has it done to you?*

Spokie: *It relieved me....At last! At last there is somebody that tries [to understand], somebody that understands....I wasn't judged beforehand.*

Spokie valued my listening mode of therapy. It relieved her aggression and she felt that somebody understood her at last. This experience relieved her isolation. Nearly all the **conversational participants** valued the fact that I listened intensely to their stories, whether they were unfaithful spouses or faithful spouses. It follows that the pastoral therapist must, through a process of empathising and understanding, become the unfaithful spouse's second 'best friend'.

We do this by being a friend rather that a critic. I am **not** suggesting that we become **moral relativists**, but that the guilty person knows that we understand the pain he or she is feeling and the difficult situation he or she is in. Confrontation has the right biblical goal, but the wrong method of reaching that goal....I believe empathy is more helpful than condemnation of the believer's sin. What the person is doing is sin; however, reiterating it in a combative or confrontational fashion is likely to...terminate that counsellor's ability to minister to him or her. **Empathising with the pain and sense of entrapment** the counsellee is feeling, or allowing the counsellee to confront his own behavior, **is more likely to encourage that person to open up and share the struggle more fully** [bold mine].

(Virkler 1992:123)

I will attend to 'confrontation' at later stage. In this section I am dealing with the issue of 'listening to the unfaithful spouse'.

I agree that the pastoral therapist can only help a unfaithful partner if **the conversation is an ongoing process**. According to the chosen postmodernistic epistemology, dialogue is the only way to come to new meaning and new alternatives. It is only through continued dialogue that the pastoral therapist and the unfaithful spouse can embark on a social de-construction process to de-construct those discourses that are keeping the unfaithful spouse captive (White & Epston 1990; White 1991, 1995). Let us go back to the reflecting conversation:

Therapist: *What did you appreciate in my mode of conversing? What must I do more of and what must I do less of?*

Spokie: *For me it was **important** to **experience a degree of calmness**.*

Therapist: *Were you calm or did you experience me as calm?*

Spokie: *I was calm and experienced you as calm and it meant a lot to me.*

Therapist: *Why did it mean a lot to you?*

Spokie: *I think I **expected scolding and reproaches**.*

Therapist: *From me?*

Spokie: *Yes, because the person [i.e. the pastor] must reprimand you because you have been very 'naughty' now. It is, however, delightful to be able*

> *to talk and the other person [the pastoral therapist] is relaxed about*
> *the subject and he allows you to be yourself, to explore yourself, to*
> *prospect the situation, to learn some facts about the situation - like*
> *those graphs. It meant a lot.*

Therapist: **Are you saying it is important not to reprimand you?**

Spokie: *Yes, not to bulldoze me deliberately.*

Spokie came to the first session expecting to be reprimanded by the pastoral therapist. Encountering the opposite, she valued the calm and peaceful attitude of the pastoral therapist which allowed her to express her views freely. Later on in the same conversation, we explored the same topic:

> **Therapist:** *If you think about the manner of our conversation, what would you say*
> *about it, that is, not about the content, but about the manner of*
> *conversation?*
>
> **Spokie:** **Your mode of peacefulness and of calmness,** *I think it was*
> *transferred to me...*
>
> **Therapist:** *I refrained from talking a lot. How was it?*
>
> **Spokie:** *Personally it did not embarrass me, because I like to talk. It let me talk*
> *and the periods of silence...**gave me the opportunity to ponder***
> ***what I have said and what I am about to say....***

As I have shown, acts (i.e. listening, being peaceful and calm) can be read as texts (Gerkin 1986; Veltkamp 1988) and therefore as discourses. The discourse of peacefulness and calmness co-constituted meaning that enabled Spokie to talk freely. The importance of the 'acts' of 'peacefulness and of calmness' is not so much in the befriending of the unfaithful spouse, although this is important too (Virkler 1992), but rather in the meaning it constitutes. It constitutes a space for the unfaithful spouse to talk (Freedman & Combs 1996).

The goal of **postmodernistic pastoral therapy** is **not** simply to empathise or to let the unfaithful spouse talk freely so that the pastoral therapist can befriend the unfaithful spouse in order to confront him/her at a later stage. **Virkler** (1992), who is a **modernistic pastoral therapist**, proposed that a pastoral therapist must listen to the unfaithful spouse's story in order to befriend him/her and **thereby** to earn the

right to **confront** him/her at a **later** and appropriate time.

In a modernistic paradigm, stories 'function as conveyers of objective knowledge' (Gergen & Kaye 1992:166). Seen form postmodernistic social construction discourse as epistemology, however, **the telling of a story is not simply the re-duplication of already known facts about previous events.** The 'facts' of a story do not exist beforehand in a kind of reservoir in a person's mind (Veltkamp 1988:112[50]). Every re-reading of a history and every re-telling of a story is a new creation, a new linguistic construction of new alternative stories (Le Roux 1996:50).

> The goal of [postmodernistic and narrative] therapy is to participate in a conversation that continually loosens and opens up, rather than constricts and closes down. Through therapeutic conversation, **fixed meanings**...are given room, broadened, **shifted**, and **changed** [bold mine].

> (Anderson & Goolishian 1988:381)

In postmodernistic pastoral therapy we are **not looking for the 'facts' of the story.** I studied a great deal of the literature on extra-marital affairs. I am therefore tempted to listen for the 'facts' (given by the literature on extra-marital affairs) in the stories of unfaithful spouses. **I am tempted to view the 'clinical facts of extra-marital affairs' as 'objective realities' and to forget that these 'facts' tend to be reified into taken-for-granted realities** (White 1995). I am tempted to view eros, for example, as a fact and not as a discourse. Even our 'clinical facts' about extra-marital affairs are only constructions, i.e. **therapeutic stories**.

I am further tempted to listen with 'eros-ears' to the story of an unfaithful spouse. I can even be listening with modernistic ears and looking out for a postmodernistic discourse like eros:

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[50] 'Je verhaal vertellen is niet zomaar een emmer leeggooien. Vertellen heeft altijd iets van ordenen en interpreteren' (Veltkamp 1988:112).

> Our stories about therapy conspire to make us listen with ears cocked and our
> mouths to say 'Aha!' when we recognise a 'clinically significant item' -
> something that we know what to do with.

<div align="right">(Freedman & Combs 1996:43)</div>

Hence, a narrative approach in pastoral therapy begs for a constant awareness of
the difference between **local meaning versus universal or academic meaning** -
i.e. the difference between a **local dialogue** and a **psychotherapeutic dialogue**
(Gergen & Kaye 1992:168-172). In using the term 'local dialogue', I am referring to
the unfaithful spouse's personal story as it is presented in his/own metaphors and
images and vocabulary. The pastoral therapist must reside inside the story and
language of the client (Gergen & Kaye 1992:182). Pastoral therapists are
constantly tempted to exchange the unfaithful spouse's story for their own
therapeutic story about affairs.

Pastoral therapists have to remind themselves that to tell a story, and to listen to
that story, is to co-create a new story because we are **listening to the not-yet-said**
that did not exist beforehand. A postmodernistic approach in pastoral therapy
implies that therapy is

> a process of expanding and saying the 'unsaid' - the development, through
> dialogue, of new themes and narratives and, actually, the creation of new
> histories.

<div align="right">(Anderson & Goolishian 1988:380)</div>

Elaborating on the same theme, Freedman and Combs (1996:45) said the
following:

> Postmodernists...do not believe that the 'unsaid' is something that already
> exists. It is not lying hidden in the unconscious or waiting, fully formed, to be
> noticed and described....Rather, it emerges and takes shape as we converse
> with each other. Therefore, it matters what the therapists attend to as they
> listen. In other words, listening is not a passive activity. When we listen, we
> *interpret*, whether we want to or not [author's italics].

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Hence, the reasons why pastoral therapists in a modernistic paradigm try to keep the conversation going with a unfaithful spouse **differ on key epistemological grounds** from the reasons why pastoral therapists in a postmodernistic endeavour to continue the dialogue. Modernistic pastoral therapists listen to the facts of the story in order to befriend the unfaithful spouse in order to confront the unfaithful spouse at a later stage (Virkler 1992:123). Postmodernistic epistemology, however, **redefines the role** of the pastoral therapist in the conversation as follows:

> The process of [narrative] therapy is....a mutual search for understanding and exploration through dialogue of 'problems'. Therapy, and hence the therapeutic conversation, entails an 'in there together' process. People talk 'with' each other as opposed 'to' each other....the therapist and client participate in the co-development of new meanings, new realities, and new narratives. The therapist's **role, expertise, and emphasis is to develop a free conversational space** and to facilitate an emerging dialogical process in which this 'newness' can occur. The emphasis **is not to produce change** but **to open up space for conversation**....As dialogue evolves, new narrative, **the 'not-yet-said' stories**, are **mutually created**. Change in story and self-narrative is an inherent consequence of dialogue [bold mine].

(Anderson & Goolishian 1992:29)

Hence, the postmodernistic pastoral therapist's role is that of

> a conversational artist - an architect of the dialogical process - whose expertise is in the arena of creating space for and facilitating a dialogical conversation. *The therapist is a participant-observer and a participant-facilitator of the therapeutic conversation* [author's italics].

(Anderson & Goolishian 1992:27)

The unfaithful spouse tells her/his story in a different way to different people and in different contexts. Every re-telling of the story is a re-ordering and a re-interpretation, i.e. a re-creation of an alternative story in respect to the person to whom the story is told. The unfaithful spouse's conversation with the **pastoral**

therapist occurs in the light of the Greater Story of God (Veltkamp 1988:119). This constitutes the conversation into a **pastoral** conversation (Louw 1993:205).

A narrative approach in pastoral therapy implies a **certain form of listening** that is inevitably **linked to a postmodernistic epistemology**. It implies a **deconstructive type of listening** (Freedman & Combs 1996:46-47). Postmodernistic pastoral therapists listen to unfaithful spouses to invite them to relate to their life narratives, not as passively received facts, but as fictional and imaginative stories (cf. Gerkin 1991:58).

Deconstructive listening is guided by the principle that **stories do not have one core fixed meaning**. It rejects the traditional understanding that a story represents things in a literal way and that a story has only one meaning (De Villiers 1991; Polkinghorne 1995). Meaning always implies difference and deferred meaning (Du Toit 1987).

Pastoral therapists have to give up the idea that meaning is stable and that it exists in a language system ready to be displayed. Pastoral therapists must learn that meaning is not expressed directly by the client's particular utterances. Discourses involve metaphorical expression, and understanding may require a probing into what is said as well as into what is not said (Polkinghorne 1995).

Deconstructive listening implies that the pastoral therapist is looking for the unintended and unquestioned assumptions inherent in the story. The attention is rather on the gaps, silences and ambiguities in the story (Lowe 1991). It tries to reveal the taken-for-granted beliefs embedded in the story (White 1995). Hence, deconstructive listening can be seen as a form of demythologisation (Hartin 1986).

In this postmodernistic de-construction process, the pastoral therapist engages in a 'not-knowing' mode in the conversation (Anderson & Goolishian 1988). The pastoral therapist does not know beforehand what the discourses are that are subjugating the unfaithful spouse. The pastoral therapist is not the expert on the content of the conversation (White 1997).

> Pastors are people of stories. They listen intensively to the stories of Scripture
> and to the stories people now tell. They listen to both these kinds of stories

> with a prejudice, i.e. that these stories constitute meaning to each other. What
> kind of meaning? That is not for the pastor to know beforehand. The pastorate
> involves precisely this co-seeking of [new] meaning.
>
> (Veltkamp 1988:196)[51]

Although the pastoral therapist does not know beforehand what the content or the outcome of the conversation will be, he/she remains, however, the **expert of postmodernistic epistemology**, i.e. of the **process of storying** (White & Epston 1990; White 1991, 1995; Parry 1991; Freedman & Combs 1996) and he/she remains the **expert on discourses** and what discourses do to people's storying of their own life stories (White 1997; Lowe 1991; Wylie 1994; Monk 1996). To conclude: Listening is an active process in which pastoral therapist and unfaithful spouse co-construct new alternative meanings.

In the next section, I reflect on modernistic ethics and their effects on the pastoral therapeutic conversation.

13.2 Theological ethics and the unfaithful spouse

13.2.1 The unfaithful spouse and modernistic theological ethics: confrontation

Most pastoral therapists will, in the event of an extra-marital affair, confront the unfaithful spouse and urge him/her to quit adultery because it is against the Ten Commandments (cf. Virkler 1992). However, a direct confrontation is of no use when it comes to extra-marital affairs. In a reflexive conversation, **Andreas**, a husband who had had an extra-marital affair a year or two before and who was on

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[51] Pastores zijn verhalenmensen. Zij luisteren intens naar de verhalen van de Schrift én naar de verhalen die mense van nu te vertellen hebben. Zij luisteren naar beide soorten verhalen vanuit het vooroordeel dat die iets voor elkaar te betekenen hebben. Welke betekenis? Dat is niet vooraf te zeggen. Pastoraat is nu juist het samen op soek gaan naar die betekenis.

(Veltkamp 1988:196)

the brink of another affair, said:

> **Andreas:** Yes...to me it was **very important that religion, although you are a**
> **pastor, did not dominate [our conversation].** Throughout our
> conversations, we touched on [some] occasions on religion...but you
> did **not open** the **Bible** and say, **'Hey, you shall not commit**
> **adultery'**, nor did you command, 'Do this or do that'....
>
> **Therapist:** Was it important?
>
> **Andreas:** Yes, for sure. **I would have felt a total resistance if you had said the**
> **Bible says you must not commit adultery.** Full stop. Finish. What is
> your argument? **I would not have come back**....I would certainly not
> come back.

Virkler (1992) is a pastoral therapist working within a modernistic paradigm. He
studied the pastoral therapeutic process in connection with extra-marital affairs.
Nevertheless, even Virkler acknowledged that a **direct confrontation is of** no
use.

I remind the reader of Virkler's (1992:6) comment on the following **myth:** if a
person is an evangelical believer, a strong biblical confrontation will usually cause
him or her to stop the affair:

> Scores of evangelical pastors could testify that this usually does not work -
> generally it only results in losing a parishioner. By the time an affair has
> become apparent to others, it has usually reorganised a person's perceptions,
> values, and emotions to such a degree that a strong biblical confrontation will
> only build a wall between the person and his or her confronter [author's italics].

This 'wall' between the pastoral therapist and the unfaithful spouse can stall the
conversation and the unfaithful spouse will not return for further therapeutic
conversations (Virkler 1992). I refrained from pushing my personal linguistic
constructions of theological ethics as the **agenda** or the **goal** of therapeutic

conversations. Spokie appreciated it:

> **Therapist:** *What does it do to you to know that I am a pastor[52] and to experience that I understand you?*
>
> **Spokie:** *I never saw you in the role of a pastor, nor did I experience you as such.*
>
> **Therapist:** *That is interesting. Tell me more. I seldom experience myself as a pastor in [therapeutic] conversations.*
>
> **Spokie:** *I do not experience you that way [i.e. as a pastor]. I have not once experienced you as a pastor. I think **a person experiences a pastor** as somebody **with a definite agenda**[53]. That is how I experienced my female friend - she has a pastor's agenda[54]. She **must be successful because God is expecting success** from her and **she is not going to give up until she succeeds** [in ending my extra-marital affair]. That is her agenda.*
>
> **Therapist:** *What did her **fixed agenda** do to you?*
>
> **Spokie:** *It put me through hell. It totally bewildered me.*
>
> **Therapist:** *Are you saying that a **fixed agenda** from a pastor **will be of no help?***
>
> **Spokie:** *Yes, because I am experiencing emotions. One moment I am terribly emotional and haunted by guilt feelings, and when I escape the [emotional] situation, **I am furious because I have not succeeded in anything**. All I have is this terrible guilt feeling.*
>
> **Therapist:** *And you are no nearer to an **ethical solution**?*
>
> **Spokie:** *No.*
>
> **Therapist:** *Is that so?*
>
> **Spokie:** *Yes. That is how I experienced my friend.*

---

[52] In Afrikaans: 'dominee'. Dominee is the title for ministers of the Dutch Reform Church. In this study I use the word pastor as a translation for dominee because, in my society, the word 'pastor' is widely used to designate the clergy of Afrikaans and English speaking churches.

[53] Spokie introduced the concept of a 'definite agenda' (Afrikaans: 'doelbewuste agenda'). I never brought up the concept before she did.

[54] Spokie's friend is a committed Christian who tried fiercely to convert Spokie with a direct confrontation by quoting biblical texts. The friend even threatened to end their friendship of eighteen years. Eventually the friend did break the friendship.

Therapist: *Would you say about **my mode of talking**, i.e. **without a fixed agenda**, [did it] **help you more** to ponder **ethics** than your friend's [fixed agenda] method?*

Spokie: **Yes, because it did not make me angry.** *I can calmly ponder the issue. I am not in an emotional state. I can think sensibly about our conversation.*

Therapist: *Something more about the fact that I did not have a fixed pastor's agenda? Can you think of something else?*

Spokie: *Look - I know you have the same aim as anybody else and that is why I came to you. But **you do not force me**. You gave me room: it is not necessarily the right thing. I do not have to go back to John [her husband].*

Therapist: **So, am I leaving the door open for a divorce?**

Spokie: **Yes, if it must** *happen.*

Therapist: *And how is that?*

Spokie: **That is important.** *At the end of the day, I have to stick to my choice. Nobody else can make this decision for me. I appreciated it time and again whenever you said that it is not you who are to carry on with either of the two choices [i.e. to stay married or to divorce and marry my lover]. That is **very important** to me....*

Therapist: *It was as if you came with a prejudice about pastors and fixed agendas and if we had talked about God in the first or second session, it would not have been okay.*

Spokie: *Yes. **Look, I know I am [morally] wrong.** I expect that you are going to tell me. **I expect that you are going to overburden me with the Bible.***

Therapist: **Yet, I did not do it.**

Spokie: **Yes. It causes me to be calm.** *I know that the moment you are going to say it to me and we are going to talk about it, I can relax. I have a calmness about your mode of doing it.*

Therapist: *Maybe I am never going to confront you with the Bible **because you already know Bible**. Honest, honest. Maybe we must **continue to talk about ethics the way we did**...I have heard that **a fixed agenda** with which you are already acquainted **will only stall the conversation**. That would be useless.*

Spokie: *Yes. That is the case.*

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In Section 5.4.3 entitled **The influence of modernism on pastoral therapy: Power,** I reflected on direct confrontations as a mode of pastoral therapy that is akin to modernistic theology. The modernistic pastoral therapist as an expert on theological ethics assumes he/she knows beforehand what is the God-given ethical way to go and moulds the conversation accordingly (Adams 1973; Louw 1986; cf. Rossouw 1993; Pieterse 1993a).

> Confrontation is an indispensable skill in much pastoral counselling, involving
> the sensitive use of the minister's authority - both the authority of his role and
> the 'rational authority' (Fromm) derived from his competence as ethical guide.
>
> (Clinebell 1984:142)

The fixed and divine 'objective standard of ethics' functions as the actual, although sometimes hidden, **fixed agenda** of the modernistic pastoral therapist. Although some pastoral therapists [such as Clinebell (1984) and Louw (1993)] were sensitive to hierarchy and the abuse of power in pastoral therapeutic relationships, their 'rational authority' put them in a 'one-up' position: they inevitably exert power in the therapeutic relationship (Wolfaardt 1993). I have already shown why this therapeutic mode is unacceptable in a postmodernistic pastoral therapeutic conversation (cf. Section 5.4.3).

Ronald, a husband who was **unable** to end his extra-marital affair, said the following about **direct confrontation:**

> **Therapist:** *How would it have been if I did not understand you?....*
>
> **Ronald:** *....I know all of them [i.e. the fourteen pastors of the various congregations in his town]. I did not have any confidence that they would understand me, and that they would not condemn me. But as for you, I knew you have a special ministry [i.e. pastoral therapy where affairs are concerned]. I knew you have counselled many people with the same problem. I knew you would not condemn me. I knew you would listen to me.*

> *Therapist:* Was it vital that I did not condemn you?
>
> *Ronald:* Yes. Yes.
>
> *Therapist:* So, it was important?
>
> *Ronald:* Yes, absolutely.... That is why I came to you. I knew here is somebody *that is not going to condemn me, he is going to help me. A person [i.e. the unfaithful spouse] cannot go to just any pastor.* I am sorry to discredit them, but *I think there are pastors that just don't understand this kind of thing*....But you listened carefully. And maybe *it is of the utmost importance to listen carefully* and I think you have done it right: You didn't say much. But what you have said in the end counted for a lot.....*It is of no use to condemn someone like me [i.e. the unfaithful spouse].*

Ronald dismissed the use of direct confrontation or the use of the pastor's 'rational authority,' i.e. his expert knowledge. He valued a non-confrontational and listening stance in the pastoral therapeutic encounter.

The phenomenon of **power** in a pastoral therapy conversation is a complex business and the relationship between pastoral therapist and client is inclined to become hierarchical. People enter a therapeutic conversation with a certain set of ideas about the role of a therapist and they have certain expectations about the kind of help they are about to receive, i.e. they enter with discourses that are prescriptive. The client's **position call** on the pastoral therapist as the theological expert or as the ambassador of God influences the power balance in the conversation. Position calls and responses to them form the basis of the therapeutic relationship (Winslade et al 1996).

An **awareness** of the process of **position calling** enhances the pastoral therapist's ability to create the equality in the relationship that is so vital for a genuine co-authoring process.

> · The stance of co-authoring does not need to imply that we give up our authority as professionals. We do not withdraw completely from the authoring role in counselling relationships. But we do endeavour to use our authority in ways that put our weight behind the client's preferences for agency in his own

life....The narrative alignment we seek is *against* problems, against isolating, deficit-inducing discourses, and *for* people [author's italics].

(Winslade et al 1998:63).

The pastoral therapist must be **discursively present**, thereby maintaining a full awareness of the discourses at work in the therapeutic encounter in order to avoid an exertion of power (Monk et al 1998).

Virkler (1992), in pleading for a genuinely empathising stance, proposed that pastoral therapists have to mould the conversation in order to search for possible 'mistaken beliefs' and other factors that generated the dissatisfaction in the marriage and/or induced the extra-marital affair. His proposed manner of therapy resembles a cognitive approach. According to Virkler (1992), the **pastoral therapist** is still the **expert on theological ethics.** Although the pastoral therapist must not confront the unfaithful spouse directly, the pastoral therapist must **earn the right to eventually talk about ethics through empathy and careful listening.** According to Virkler (1992), the unfaithful spouse will only listen to a pastoral therapist's ethical view after the pastoral therapist has listened to the unfaithful spouse's story.

For Virkler, the **timing of a conversation on ethics** is the vital factor. The correct timing of a conversation on theological ethics is only when the unfaithful spouse knows that the pastoral therapist genuinely cares. A misjudgement in terms of the timing only causes the unfaithful spouse's ego defences to become more rigid.

Virkler (1992:125) acknowledged that theological arguments are not appropriate and proposed 'a **confrontation**' that is **linked** to the unfaithful spouse's '**dissonance**':

> Theological arguments may be effective with a few, but probably the majority
> of those who became deeply involved in affairs will be unmoved by scriptural
> arguments....For a **confrontation** to be most **effective, it** must **come from**
> **within the person.** By careful listening and the use of empathy statements,
> the counsellor can often find a number of ways in which the **affair** is producing

dissonance and pain rather than pleasure. **Each of these may become a motivation eventually to leave the affair** [bold mine].

Virkler (1992:125-128) then proceeded to list factors that can induce dissonance and pain in the unfaithful spouse's life, and he elaborated on each of these factors. The following is a summarised list of these factors:

- a sense of guilt because of all the lies and deception;
- isolation from family and friends;
- the loss of other emotional support systems;
- the loss of balance between work, recreation, spiritual activities, etc.;
- the loss of control over recreational time in that the unfaithful spouse is always waiting for the next telephone call or clandestine date;
- the low possibility of marrying the lover (only 20 percent, cf. Pittman 1990);
- the low survival rate of second marriages, i.e. of unfaithful spouses who manage to marry the lover, 75 percent fail (cf. Pittman 1990; Hunt 1969); and
- the possibility of contracting life-threatening sexually transmitted diseases.

Virkler (1992) argued as follows: if a dialogue on the above-mentioned factors fails to persuade the unfaithful spouse to abandon the extra-marital affair, the pastoral therapist must first raise the issue of the unfaithful spouse's **level of commitment to the marriage**, and if that fails too, secondly he/she must mention **the differences between infatuation (eros) and committed** love. If all else fails to persuade the unfaithful spouse, the pastoral therapist must raise the issue of the **cost of divorce** in terms of family life, children and finance.

According to Virkler, the pastoral therapist must table the above topics as the **agenda** of the therapeutic conversations as a **mode of 'confrontation'** (1992). It is evident that a pastoral therapist must stick to theological ethics as the ultimate agenda. This has profound effects on the therapeutic process in terms of power

and hierarchy:

> The establishment of correct or 'objective' standards [of behaviour] leads the
> therapeutic professions...to move, deliberately or inadvertently, into the role of
> classifying, judging, and determining what is a desirable, appropriate, or
> acceptable way of life.
>
> (Monk 1996:8)

Furthermore, according to Virkler (1992:133-134), a pastoral therapist must adhere
to theological ethics as the ultimate agenda. The following quote is an example of
Virkler's proposed confrontations:

> If a counsellee contends that he or she cannot stop the adulterous behavior, it
> may be useful for the counsellor to ask, 'If you and your lover were preparing
> for a sexual encounter, and the Lord, or your mate, entered the room, would
> you be able to keep from carrying out your love-making?'....'Have you ever
> seen anyone flout God's laws and end up truly happy?'

This mode of therapy, however, **disregards** the life experiences of the unfaithful
spouse. That is, it **disregards** the **context of practical theology**. Hence, Virkler's
(1992:133-134) proposed pastoral therapeutic model resembles the **confessional**
approach in practical theology (Pieterse 1993a; Wolvaardt 1993; Dill 1996). The
confessional approach views the Bible as the only source of knowledge and in
applying Scripture to the praxis, this approach almost ignores the **contextual
issues** or the **praxis**. According to this approach, the Bible is the objective norm
and functions as a doctor's prescription (Dill 1996).

In Section 5.3.2, I have dealt briefly with the problems that besiege the
confessional approach. The confessional approach is outdated (Wolfaardt 1993). It
may, however, continue to be used among foundationalist circles (Le Roux
1996:45; Pieterse 1993a:58). This modernistic mode of therapy holds that the
pastoral therapist is an objective observer and the expert holder of objective
knowledge, and the client becomes the one to be observed and is treated as
ignorant.

To conclude: a modernistic approach implies an adherence to theological ethics in such a way that the pastoral therapist's view of the will of God becomes the ultimate agenda of the therapy. It follows that the context of the unfaithful spouse is ignored. This stance jeopardises the power balance in the therapeutic relationship.

13.2.2 A narrative approach and theological ethics: a hypothetical way

The reader will see that a narrative approach in pastoral therapy has a much **more nuanced** way of dealing with the **ethical issue**. This ethical difference is **only intelligible if the difference between a modernistic and a postmodernistic epistemology is clear** (cf. Sections 3.2 and 3.3). I resume the reflecting conversation between Spokie and me:

> **Therapist:** *Would you like to say something about [giving] advice.*[55]
>
> **Spokie:** *I think I expected some kind of advice, however, you must be cautious with advice because it could again ignite my aggression - that is, if your advice is no longer mere advice, but rather bulldozing. You said things without giving me direct instructions. You made comments that caused me to wonder about things.*
>
> **Therapist:** *In other words, I did not give you directions, or pushed you into a direction. Did I?*
>
> **Spokie:** *You left me with ideas to ponder and to find my own way.*

In reflecting on Spokie's comments and on the literature, I am intrigued to see how close she came to describing a postmodernistic mode of therapeutic conversations. I remembered that, while she was talking in our reflexive conversation, I had the impression that she had already read and understood the discourses that co-constituted this research report.

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[55] The Afrikaans word I used was: "raadgee."

Andreas and his wife came for therapy after they had struggled for many months to resolve his wife's inability to forget Andreas's past extra-marital affair. She remained suspicious about the possibility of another affair. In a therapeutic conversation with Andreas alone, Andreas shared his secret with me. He was in the process of becoming emotionally involved with another woman. I met the couple several times and Andreas ended his emotional involvement with the other woman and the couple resumed their marital life. At one stage we had a reflexive conversation. In reflecting on the reflexive conversation I had had with **Andreas**, the same ideas as those that Spokie mentioned, emerged:

> **Andreas:** *You listened to my total story and it was nice to share it with you. I felt - as I said when I left on Friday - like a free man. I felt as if I had thrown off a yoke...the fact that I could share it with somebody that understands and who has empathy with the situation...*
>
> **Therapist:** *Did you experience that I understood you?*
>
> **Andreas:** *Yes, because **you on no occasion whatsoever said this is right and that is wrong.***
>
> **Therapist:** ***Was that important?***
>
> **Andreas:** *Yes, it was **very important,** because you did not side with one party...You did **not give me directions** to do this or to do that. On the contrary...**I had the opportunity to work through the problem on my own...***

Andreas and Spokie valued **the hypothetical way** in which I presented ideas, leaving it open to them to **decide their own course.** A narrative and postmodernistic approach in pastoral therapy endeavours to honour the **praxis,** i.e. the unfaithful spouse's individual needs (Dill 1996). I found Doherty's reflections on these matters quite enlightening:

> The exploration of moral issues in therapy does not occur mainly inside the head of the therapist playing moral philosopher or moral judge. It occurs in the heart of the **therapeutic dialogue,** in conversations in which the therapist listens, reflects, acknowledges, questions, probes and challenges - and in which **the client is free** to do the same and to develop a more integrated set

of moral sensibilities. Morality emerges for all of us from **social interaction** punctuated by **moments of personal reflection**[38]. Morality, in the words of the sociologist Alan Wolfe, is 'socially constructed': 'Morality thus understood is neither a fixed set of rules handed down unchanging by powerful structures nor something that is made up on the spot. It is a negotiated process through which individuals, by reflecting periodically on what they have done in the past, try to ascertain what they ought to do next...Moral obligation [is] a socially constructed practice' [bold mine].

(Doherty 1995:37)

Furthermore, a narrative approach in pastoral therapy where a pastoral therapist voices his/her (theological) views and then gives the client a chance to comment on those views, changes the hierarchy in the conversation. A **narrative approach in pastoral therapy** prefers the **mutual linguistic interaction** between **equal** partners to a hierarchical situation where one is the senior (expert) and the other one the junior (ignorant) (Drewery & Winslade 1996). Andreas and Spokie were quite outspoken about their rejection of the notion of a pastoral therapist's giving directions.

To conclude: the therapist's views, put before the unfaithful spouse, can be accepted, altered or totally rejected by the unfaithful spouse. Postmodernistic epistemology acknowledges equity in dialogue, even though the conversational partners may hold different positions, roles, (theological) views or values.

13.2.3 Narrative pastoral therapeutic conversations are inevitably ethical discourses

If one reflects on the reflexive conversation between Spokie and myself, it is obvious that we did not talk explicitly about theological ethics, i.e. about God's will. In our reflecting conversations, however, she **experienced** our conversations as

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[38] Spokie said, 'You left me with ideas to ponder and to find my own way'. Andreas said, 'I had the opportunity to work through problems on my own...'

ethical conversations. We were not dodging the ethical questions. We resumed the theme of ethics at a later stage in our reflexive conversation:

> **Therapist:** *What would you say **about the manner** in which we talked about **ethics?** What was important?*
>
> **Spokie:** *Again I think you left [the decisions] to me. **You did not compel me to follow your pre-determined ideas.** We talked calmly about it and you gave me an opportunity to...**become aware** that what I am doing and saying is not a **'cultural voice'** - it is **ethics. That is, to try to discern between the two** [i.e. 'cultural voice' and her own ethical acts].*
>
> **Therapist:** *In other words, the fact that you could put some **distance between yourself** and the **'cultural voice'** caused you to **think about your ethical acts.***
>
> **Spokie:** *Yes.*
>
> **Therapist:** *Are you saying that you are **more free to ponder** ethics?*
>
> **Spokie:** ***Yes, because I can discern a 'cultural voice' and I can eliminate it and focus on other things, that is on ethics.***

In reflecting on her comments, it might be said that the key concern in connection with ethics is **not** the **obvious ethical decisions** of the unfaithful spouse. The **key issue** is, instead, the **ethical constituting force of any dialogue.**

Dialogue has an extraordinary power of re-describing reality or people. Dialogue interpret and alter previous stories and by doing so, interpret and alter previous reality. The new co-constructed story is in itself a novel story. This is an alternative story with an alternative ethical stance and views. With dialogue we experience the metamorphosis of the story, i.e. the self and its relationships (cf. Van Niekerk 1994; Parry 1991). Pastoral therapy implies that we enter into an ongoing linguistic co-construction process in which stories and the reality they resemble, i.e. ourselves and our relationships, change (cf. Gergen 1994). Hence, the ethical stance or views of the unfaithful spouse inevitably change through the mere engagement in dialogue - even if the pastoral therapist and unfaithful spouse do not talk directly about God or about conspicuously theological-ethical issues such as divorce or breaking off the affair.

Reflecting on narrative therapy and the constituting force of dialogue, the following quote is apposite:

> We do not assume that people's identities are primarily stable and singular, which is the basis of many [modernistic] descriptions of identity formation in personality theory and counselling practice. For us, who people are is a matter of constant contradiction, change, and ongoing struggle,....Narrative therapy seeks to harness such ideas about the power of language and how the self is formed and reformed. This is an ongoing process, and one that is never finished.
>
> (Drewery & Winslade 1996:34-35)

Hence, pastoral therapeutic conversations are inevitably ethical discourses. They involve creativity in the generation of new meaning and new ethical stances that never reach finality and they are always preliminary, always appealing to a new interpretation of the unfaithful spouse and his/her relationships.

13.2.4 The ethics of a narrative approach cannot be ethically neutral

Spokie experienced the conversations as pastoral therapeutic conversations **without an explicitly religious agenda**.

> **Spokie:** *I never saw you in the role of a pastor, nor did I experience you as such.*
>
> **Therapist:** *That is interesting. Tell me more. I seldom experience myself as a pastor[57] in [therapeutic] conversations.*
>
> **Spokie:** *I do not experience you that way [i.e. as a pastor]. I have not once experienced you as a pastor. I think **a person experiences a pastor as somebody with a definite agenda**. That is how I experienced my female friend - she has a pastor's agenda. She **must be successful because God is expecting success** from her and **she is not going to give up until she succeeds** [in ending my extra-marital affair]. That is her agenda.*

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[57] In Afrikaans: dominee.

Spokie never saw me in the role of a pastor, nor did she experience me as such. This does **not mean** that our conversations were **ethically neutral.** Spokie, **being a Christian**, knew beforehand that she was transgressing the theological values that apply in a **Christian** marital relationship. Spokie said, '**Look, I know I am [morally] wrong**.' However, I do not think that it was only her pre-conceptions that constituted the conversation as an ethical conversation. There is much more to it.

Pastoral therapy is an ethical enterprise because it cannot but happen through language. Language is composed of metaphors and each metaphor has an implicit ethical mandate. Hence, ethical neutrality in therapy simply does not exist. The **mere presence of metaphors** in a therapeutic conversation makes **the conversation an ethical conversation**. I cannot participate in a dialogue without certain images of an (ideal) marriage or family. Spokie is, just like me, a member of the Dutch Reform Church. Further, she comes from a conservative Christian and Afrikaans culture. **It is never a question of ethical neutrality**, but always a question of whose and what culture's ideal images (cf. Section 6.3.2). These images are not universal and timeless images. They relate to a particular time, vicinity and history - that is to a **specific culture. Ethical neutrality** in pastoral therapy (or in secular therapy!) **is an illusion** (Dueck 1991:177-201).

Eros is a metaphor for a phenomenon that is akin to western culture's experiences of love. In my conversations with Spokie, I utilised the *'Liz Taylor syndrome'* metaphor to refer to eros as a discourse:

> **Therapist:** *Okay. The fact that we were talking about a **cultural voice of romance** - it causes you to calm down?*
>
> **Spokie:** *Yes, because it is identified. Previously I did not scrutinise the relationship. However, when I am involved in one it is the only thing I observe. I did not recognise the various elements [of the affair]. I did not see the danger of certain aspects...**I became aware** of **cultural voice** and of the **life cycle** of the **'Liz Taylor syndrome'**. [I became] aware of the statistics of how many marriages [formed out of extra-marital affairs] survive, of divorces...All **these led me** to a **process of contemplation**. It kept me from over-reacting. When I left [the therapeutic conversation], I had something to ponder.*

This metaphor ('Liz Taylor syndrome') is **not ethically neutral**. This metaphor came from my own life story. I was, for many years, engaged in marriage enrichment weekend seminars. In this period, I became aware of the potency of eros when it comes to marriage. I also became aware of the pitfalls that eros holds for people who cherish irrational expectations of their marital relationship. Several books opened my eyes to the treacherous nature of eros (cf. Pittman 1990; Louw 1983; Lawson 1990; Person 1988).

In reflecting on various marriage enrichment seminars and the ideal images of marriage that each of these seminars portrayed, I became aware of **eros** as the **primary ideal model** of marital life - even in Christian marriage enrichment seminars (cf. Campus Crusade for Christ's marriage enrichment seminar). These seminars propagated a **mixture** of western culture's notion of **eros** and the **theological** notion of agape as the ideal for marriage.

> Not only do implicit metaphors shape the ethical responses of family therapists, particular models of the family, which are embedded in culture, also shape them. Neither families nor family therapists function in a historical vacuum; neither families nor therapists are disembodied systems or parts of systems floating in atemporal space. Both are shaped by and shape the social and historical settings in which they exist...
>
> (Dueck 1991:189)

Since **eros** is basically a **selfish orientation** (cf. Louw 1983:50-54) that complies with the individual's desire for self-fulfilment, and since **agape is an unselfish orientation**, I began to wonder about the compatibility of eros and biblical agape in Christian marriages. If these two discourses (eros and agape) are compatible in a Christian marriage, then the question remains as to the relation between eros and agape. **Both these discourses have profound effects on the course of and satisfaction of a couple's marital life** (Lawson 1990:23-26; Louw 1983:50-62). A more detailed exploration of the relationship between eros and agape follows in Chapter 15.

The introduction of the 'Liz Taylor syndrome' metaphor is thus **not a (theologically) ethically neutral** move (cf. Dueck 1991:175-178). A deconstructive conversation about eros has the power to shape people's marital lives, i.e. it has ethical consequences. The deconstruction of eros shifts the emphasis to the relationship between eros and **biblical agape** - even if agape is not the topic of the conversation. Conversing about eros, even **without an explicitly religious agenda**, remains a **theological-ethical** conversation because we co-constitute an alternative meaning for **biblical agape**. Agape is also a discourse that exerts its power over people and their relationships. 'Discourses...offer us positions in patterns of relationship with other people' (Drewery & Winslade 1996:36). Hence, a pastoral therapeutic conversation about eros inevitably constitutes an alternative meaning for biblical agape. In its turn, the altered meaning of agape constitutes alternative patterns of relationships.

The ethical connectedness of metaphors is not only evident in conspicuously ethical metaphors such as the 'Liz Taylor syndrome' metaphor. Since language as such is life-constituting (White 1995, Parry 1991; Van Niekerk 1994; Gergen 1994; Dill 1996; Drewery & Winslade 1996), it follows that **any statement or question has ethical consequences** (White 1989; White & Epston 1990).

Therapists who claim to operate in an ethically neutral manner are either ignorant of the cultural connectedness of all images and metaphors, or in their conscious evasion of moral issues, they are inevitably utilising contemporary (capitalist and modernistic?) culture's discourses and thus imposing, intentionally or unintentionally, certain (ideal) images - with inevitable ethical consequences. The pastoral therapist's chosen **model** of an **ideal couple** has ethical consequences (White 1995:19).

> Family therapy is an ethical enterprise. Failure to take seriously family therapy's social context raises an ethical issue. Social amnesia results in a covert imposition of values, which is as serious as overt imposition.

(Dueck 1991:189)

The pastoral therapist must participate in the conversation with **an awareness** (cf. Vossen 1991:47-50) of his/her **ideal images** and its cultural connectedness, and

with an awareness of the (theological) ethical constitutive power of metaphors, sentences and questions (cf. Sections 6.3.1 to 6.3.7).

13.2.5 A narrative approach cannot be ethically ideological

Pastoral therapy has a vested interest in **theological ethics** (Adams 1973; Capps 1984; Dill 1996; Dueck 1991; Gerkin 1979; 1986, 1991; Heitink 1979; Louw 1983, 1986, 1993; Veltkamp 1988; Virkler 1992; Wimberley 1994). The individualism pursued in the modernistic era has led people to believe that they are free in a world where 'everything goes' to 'just do it'. Postmodernistic thought, however, stresses anew the importance of people's relationships and the ethical consequences of their actions on those relationships (Van Aarde 1995b:29). Hence, narrative therapy is a therapeutic enterprise which places a high value on ethics:

> I do not think that there is any constructionist position that can escape a
> confrontation with questions of values and personal ethics. In fact, according
> to my understanding, the constructionist position emphasises these questions,
> and elevates this confrontation. So, the idea that constructionist positions lead
> to a state of moral relativism - where there's no basis for making decisions
> about different actions - doesn't fit with what I know of this position.

(White 1995:14-15).

Because narrative therapy is an ethical enterprise, it is, on a certain level, a therapeutic discourse that renders itself very useful as a pastoral therapeutic enterprise. However, on another level, the **kind of ethics** that narrative therapy constructs in a dialogue is **at odds** with the **fixed and dogmatic** version of modernistic ethics - be it **theological** or any other version of modernistic ethics.

I must add that we do not have an authentic or original and absolute version of **biblical** ethics. We may have a contemporary fixed and dogmatic set of ethics, but this discourse of ethics is not an authentic biblical version. We do have ethical discourses that are products of our culture. Our contemporary ethical discourses

seem fixed and dogmatic, but this is an illusion. Absolute ethical truth is that truth where people forget the history of metaphor formation. An awareness of the metaphorical nature of ethical language may shield us against the formation of ethical ideology (Van Niekerk 1994).

Ethical discourses, as part of **theological** discourses, are always on the move, never settled, nor fixed and always preliminary. People's understanding of the will of God changes in relation to the metaphorical changes in their culture (Van Aarde 1995b). Our contemporary ethical discourses are only part of the history of discourses and will eventually change through the social linguistic constructions of communities.

> It should be kept in mind that....the interpretation of a tradition such as the biblical and Christian tradition is a continuous, living, dynamic process. The goal is not to arrive at the one *exact, forever true* understanding of the core meanings of the tradition in some ahistorical sense. Rather....tradition [implies] living, historical processes in which meanings, although rooted in primary images and symbolic metaphorical themes, continually interact with the changing situations of history to create new and highly nuanced understandings of their implications [author's italics].
>
> (Gerkin 1991:19)

Hence, the **non-dogmatic theological ethics** of a **narrative approach in pastoral therapy** correlate with the ethical stance in **narrative therapy.**

Metaphorical speech is always preliminary, always conscious of other possible signification(s) and of other realities. Hence, metaphorical speech does not insist on being univocal but has to respect and allow for different voices (Van Niekerk 1994). In this sense, metaphorical speech allows for the interests of the unfaithful spouse. Hence, a pastoral therapist who consciously views all discourses as metaphorical speech respects the views of the unfaithful spouse. **Metaphorical speech is love** (Van Niekerk 1994). This is valid, not only for a conspicuous metaphor such as the 'Liz Taylor syndrome', but for all our words. My personal reflection on the remark, 'Metaphorical speech is love', is that it is one of the most important contributions of a narrative approach in pastoral therapy.

My **theological-ethical** choice for the 'reign of God' as it is shown in agape-relationships is, in a certain sense, an open-ended choice (Dueck 1991:201; Gerkin 1991:19). Agape cannot be a fixed and divine reference point that determines the pastoral therapist's agenda. In the co-construction of alternative life possibilities, it remains Spokie's prerogative to author her own life.

13.2.6 Postmodernistic theological ethics as 'common sense'

Gerkin (1991:56-62) proposed that people do not use moral reasoning or theological-ethical logic to determine their actions but they would rather intuitively make use of their **'common sense.'** A person's 'common sense' is not a self-sufficient entity but rather relates to the common sense of the community in which the person lives. This communal 'common sense' is shaped by a community's religious and secular metaphors, narratives and traditions. 'Common sense' is thus a fusion of many narratives of which the theological tradition may be one.

The following excerpt from a reflexive conversation may be seen as a conversation about **'common sense':**

> **Therapist:** Okay. The fact that we were talking about a **cultural voice of romance** - it causes you to calm down?
>
> **Spokie:** Yes, because it is identified. Previously I did not scrutinise the relationship. However, when I am involved in one it is the only thing I observe. I did not recognise the various elements [of the affair]. I did not see the danger of certain aspects...**I became aware of cultural voice and of the life cycle of the 'Liz Taylor syndrome'.** [I became] aware of the statistics of how many marriages [formed out of extra-marital affairs] survive, of divorces...All **these led me to a process of contemplation.** It kept me from over-reacting. When I left [the therapeutic conversation], I had something to ponder.
>
> **Therapist:** Do you want to say something more about the 'Liz Taylor syndrome'?
>
> **Spokie:** Only that is **shocking**, that **it is genuinely like that**, that it can happen,

Therapist: *I was afraid that it [the 'Liz Taylor syndrome'] could happen to you, but now you are aware of it.*

Spokie: *Yes. I am wary about what can happen.*

Therapist: *A while ago, you said it is as if you were freer to be yourself?*

Spokie: *Yes. I can be myself, make my own decisions and, hopefully be less emotional. I can't say that it took away my emotions out of the whole situation [i.e. the extra-marital affair]. It did not take away the romance either. But I am aware of it and I am half analytic. I ponder in an analytic way on the situation.*

As the reader may have observed, theological ethics do not surface explicitly in the above excerpt. However, this does not imply an absence of theological ethics in the pastoral therapeutic conversations with Spokie. According to Gerkin (1991:67-71) theological ethics, as we know it, is available in **two modes or discourses:**

The first is the **rational and logical discourse** of the ethical discourses of theology. These rational discourses are usually only accessible to **theologians**.

Secondly, **ordinary people** do not appropriate ethics by means of logical discourses, but they **operate intuitively** within **cultural narratives** that contain ethical metaphors and images, i.e. they operate with **'common sense'**. People live in cultures and cultural metaphors or traditions constitute their lives. A person is not so much an interpreter of a cultural tradition as he/she is interpreted by the cultural tradition.

These narrative ethical metaphors and images do not exist in a pure theological form. They are rather a fusion of theological and cultural metaphors, images and narratives, so much so that in real life the **theological and cultural** elements of these **ethical images** cannot be distinguished (Gerkin 1991:65). Pastoral therapists must be prepared to discern the presence of ethical issues that are **embedded in** metaphors, images and narratives and to co-reflect with clients on those metaphors, images and narratives.

Gerkin (1991:68-69) argued that the pastoral therapist, to engage in an ethical discourse with a client, has to do so using the metaphors, images and narratives of

contemporary culture. Furthermore, the pastoral therapist has to engage in a dialogical relationship between the contemporary problematic discourses of the client and the core metaphor values and meanings of the Christian narrative. This dialogue is a hermeneutic and interpretative dialogue where the relevant 'horizons fuse' and it creates a new understanding that is unique to the situation, i.e. a new ethical stance.

> **Therapist:** *In other words, the fact that you could put some **distance** between yourself and the 'cultural voice' caused you to think about your ethical acts.*
>
> **Spokie:** *Yes.*
>
> *Therapist: Are you saying that you are more free to ponder ethics?*
>
> **Spokie:** *Yes, because I can discern a 'cultural voice' and I can eliminate it and focus on other things, that is on ethics.*

Although **theological ethics** did not surface explicitly (Dill 1996; Müller 1996) in our conversation, it did prevail in the conversation in an **implicit way** (Kotzé & Botha 1994; Müller 1996). Spokie experienced our conversation on romance (cultural voice and the 'Liz Taylor syndrome') as an **ethical** conversation. This was accomplished by a conversation about **'common sense'** (Gerkin 1991:48-66).

13.2.7 Externalisation: enhancing the unfaithful spouse's ethical abilities

The reader must bear in mind that part of the research problem was whether a narrative approach in pastoral therapy can **enhance the ethical competency** of the spouse engaged in an affair to take more responsibility and accountability for the effects of the extramarital relationship and the future of the marriage.

The following excerpts from the reflexive conversations between **Spokie** and myself and between Heidi and myself indicated that they had experienced some enhancement of their ethical competency.

Therapist: *What would you say **about the manner** in which we talked about **ethics?** What was important?*

Spokie: *Again I think you left [the decisions] to me. **You did not compel me to follow your pre-determined ideas.** We talked calmly about it and you gave me an opportunity to...**become aware** that what I am doing and saying is not a **'cultural voice'** - it is **ethics.** **That is, to try to discern between the two** [i.e. 'cultural voice' and her own ethical acts].*

Therapist: *In other words, the fact that you could put some **distance** between **yourself** and the **'cultural voice'** caused you to **think about your ethical acts.***

Spokie: **Yes.**

Therapist: *Are you saying that you are **more free to ponder ethics?***

Spokie: **Yes, because I can discern a 'cultural voice' and I can eliminate it and focus on other things, that is on ethics.**

The following excerpt came from a reflexive conversation with Heidi:

Therapist: *We also talked about the 'Liz Taylor syndrome', didn't we?*

Heidi: *Yes, that is true.*

Therapist: *Did it help you to become **more free from romance?***

Heidi: **Yes.**

Therapist: *Is that so?*

Heidi: **Definitely.**

By metaphorically referring to eros as a cultural voice and as the 'Liz Taylor syndrome' I engaged in an **externalising conversation** (White & Epston 1990). Externalising is rhetorical device that opens up a slightly different way of speaking about one's life (Drewery & Winslade 1996:45). Hence, narrative therapy does not 'treat' people by 'diagnosing' some inherent deficit to find a 'solution' (Drewery & Winslade 1996:41). I did not treat Spokie and Heidi as individuals who are sinful or who have character faults. Before the sexual revolution of the 1960's psychotherapists treated people who engage in extra-marital affairs as neurotics, narcissists or as immature people (Bell et al 1975). A narrative approach is about a battle of discourses (Lowe 1991; Winslade et al 1996). Spokie and Heidi faced cultural discourses that were interpretative and constitutive of their stories.

The counselor does not see the person as embodying the problem. Externalising conversations help to locate the problem within the beliefs of the culture from which the problem emerged.

(Monk 1996:28)

Viewing these discourses as the culprits and viewing Spokie and Heidi as persons who have been dominated by these discourses enabled me to talk to them in an **externalising** mode. This mode of conversation **freed** them to think about ethical matters. O'Hanlon's (1994:28) description of externalisation remains one of the best descriptions and I quote it again:

I have to give you a warning - if **externalisation** is approached purely as a technique, it will probably not produce profound effects. If you don't believe, to the bottom of your soul, that **people are social and personal constructions**, then you won't be seeing these transformations. When Epston or White are in action, you can tell they are absolutely convinced that people are not their problems. Their voices, their postures, their whole beings radiate possibility and hope. They are definitely under the influence of Optimism.

A narrative approach in pastoral therapy endeavours the deconstruction of the cultural discourse of eros in order to enhance the ethical competency of the person engaged in an affair to take more responsibility and to accept accountability for the effects of the (would-be) extramarital relationship (White 1989; 1991, 1995; White & Epston 1990).

The language of externalising conversation deliberately speaks of problems as being outside of the responsibility of the client and in the world of discourse. But it would be a mistake to speak all the time as if people were not moral agents in their own lives. We do not want to convey the idea that human beings are no more than tumbleweed blown about by the winds of discourse.

(Winslade et al 1996:70)

Externalisation enabled Spokie and Heidi to distance themselves from the eros discourse.

13.2.8 Ritualisation: enhancing the unfaithful spouse's ethical abilities

It was not my intention to explore extensively the theme of rituals and their therapeutic application nor does it fall into the scope of this study. However, since all acts or events - even those of rituals - are readable texts and therefore constitutive of people's storying processes, **rituals are** related in a profound way to **social constructionist ideas in therapy**. A **ritual** may be regarded as an intense, experiential-symbolic sequence of events that recreates or transforms **identity**[58] (Gilligan 1993:239). **Symbols** are often used within rituals. Hence, a symbol is the smallest unit of a ritual (Van der Westhuizen 1993:14). The sequence of events or collection of symbols within a ritual are usually united by a **guiding metaphor**. Rituals empower individuals to externalise self-negating images, voices and behaviours and to rediscover and to claim their own voices, visions and bodies (Gilligan 1993:252). **A person may perform a ritual act** by casting off an old identity and taking on a new one, or, to state it in more social constructionist terms, **by re-storying his/her life**. Rituals can be used to end dysfunctional and rigid behaviour (Van der Westhuizen 1993:19), or to remove a stigma from an individual (Imber-Black 1989:159).

In the following case, we utilised **a ritual to enhance the unfaithful spouse's ethical abilities**. Ronald, a middle-aged executive, had a full-blown sexual affair with his secretary. Ronald came for pastoral therapeutic help in order to end an extra-marital affair that he desperately wanted to end, but found himself unable to end. Ronald was a very committed Christian, a man with definite standing in his work environment and in his neighbourhood. He was a leader in his local congregation and served in various prominent positions.

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[58] I do not use the metaphor **'identity'** in an ontological sense, i.e. in the sense that a person owns an identity (cf. Gergen 1994). I use the metaphor **'identity'** in a narrative sense, i.e. a person's stories are constitutive of his/her identity.

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He had made several attempts to end the extra-marital relationship. He found himself powerless in the face of the seductiveness of his lover. He experienced that she controlled the relationship and he was unable to break free. The extra-marital affair caused him much anxiety and unhappiness. He lost his self-confidence and his creativity. He loved his wife dearly and did not want to hurt her or lose her. Throughout the time when he had the extra-marital affair, Ronald continued with his church activities; he attended worship services and prayed to be delivered from the extra-marital affair. It was all in vain. His normal religious activities could not give him adequate support in his attempt to end the extra-marital affair. He had no one he could talk to. Ronald heard me speak on the topic of extra-marital affairs on the radio. He then decided to seek my help.

During the initial conversation, Ronald presented his story in **religious** terms and metaphors. He storied himself as a **religious failure**. His was an extremely painful experience. He experienced the extra-marital affair as a **gross sin** that **annulled his relationship with God**. This story dominated his life and his ethical abilities:

> What is happening is that the stories we are telling ourselves about what is happening are disabling. These are stories in which the client is positioned, or subjected: he is not the actor but the passive recipient of the given positioning. The narrative counselor looks for alternative stories that are enabling...[authors' italics].
>
> (Drewery & Winslade 1996:42)

People who seek help in pastoral therapeutic settings usually present their life stories, not only in secular terms, but also in religious terms. This is particularly true of crises (Gerkin 1979; Stone 1976). Ronald sought a solution in his faith. **His faith-story**, however, **disabled and dominated him**. Ronald's religious story became - apart from the extra-marital affair - a discourse that disabled him: he storied himself as a religious failure who was unable to end the extra-marital affair. Hence, two discourses dominated this man: that of his failure as a Christian and that of the extra-marital affair itself.

Staying true to the principles of narrative therapy, **I respected and accepted his story as a religious story** and my questions, comments, and hypothetical

statements were made **in the light of the Story of God**, i.e. in the light of the Scriptures and of our church's confessions. At one time during the first conversation, **I asked Ronald in what way he celebrates his holiness before God.** He was baffled by the idea of 'celebrating his holiness before God' while he was struggling to end the extra-marital affair. I proceeded to present him with a copy of **The Heidelberg Catechism** and asked him to consider **Question and Answer 60** of the Catechism[58]:

> **Question:** How are you righteous before God?
>
> **Answer:** Only through a genuine belief in Jesus Christ, in such a way that even if my conscience accuses me of gross violations of all God's commandments and even if I did not obey even one commandment, and even if I was still continually inclined to all evil, God nevertheless gives me, without my meriting it in any way, the perfect indemnification, righteousness and **holiness** of Christ. He imputes this grace to me as though I had never sinned, as though I had accomplished all the obedience that Christ has accomplished for me. I share in this benefaction inasmuch as I embrace it with a faithful heart [bold mine].

> (Algemene sinodale kommissie van die Ned Geref Kerk 1988:200)

Because he had been a devoted Christian for many years, Ronald had the **rational pre-knowledge** of the dogma of the above quote from The Heidelberg Catechism. He was, however, far removed from an **existential experience** of this dogma. I therefore suggested that he should somehow **celebrate his holiness.** I suggested to **Ronald** that he should **design his own ritual** (cf. Imber-Black 1989:153) that could help him **to experience himself** as a **holy person** in Christ. I

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[58] **Vraag:** Hoe is jy regverdig voor God?
Antwoord: Slegs deur 'n ware geloof in Jesus Christus, só dat al kla my gewete my aan dat ek teen al die gebooie van God swaar gesondig het en nie een daarvan gehou het nie, en dat ek nog gedurigdeur tot alle kwaad geneig is, skenk God nogtans aan my sonder enige verdienste van my kant, uit louter genade die volkome genoegdoening, geregtigheid en **heiligheid** van Christus. Dit reken Hy my toe asof ek nooit sonde gehad of gedoen het nie, asof ek self al die gehoorsaamheid volbring het wat Christus vir my volbring het. Aan hierdie weldaad het ek deel vir soverre ek dit met 'n gelowige hart aanneem.
(Algemene sinodale kommissie van die Ned Geref Kerk 1988:200)

prompted him to **create a symbol of his choice** in his office that could enable him to experience his holiness - **his office** was the place where he, time and again, lost control and gave in to the seductiveness of his secretary.

During our second appointment, Ronald reported that he had succeeded in terminating the extra-marital affair. The following excerpt represents our reflection on the initial and first therapeutic conversation:

> **Therapist:** *Ronald, are you saying that our first conversation was like a switch that initiated it [i.e. the end of the extra-marital affair]?*
>
> **Ronald:** *Yes. Today I clarified it for myself, I think it was the switch that initiated a chain of events. I cannot say why, but **just taking the step of talking to somebody**...it was very difficult [to take the step of talking to somebody]. That step that I took....I think it set everything in motion.*

It is conspicuous that Ronald did not respond to my question. He did not refer to our first conversation. He referred to his act of **'taking the step of talking to somebody'.** This act was part of the switch that started the process of healing. Ronald's words reminded me of Veltkamp's (1988:188) view that the **pastoral encounter itself** is a **metaphor for an encounter with God.** Ronald's decision to come, his 300 km journey, his act of greeting me and his act of entering my study was part and parcel of his recovery, i.e. his re-storying. Later on in the conversation, he stressed the fact that he could not place any confidence in his local pastors. They would simply not understand. His journey to me and his conversation with me was, to my mind, his re-entry into his relationship with God: the **pastoral encounter itself** was a **metaphor for an encounter with God.**

I resume with the reflexive conversation:

> **Ronald:** *There were a few things that you said that were important. At that stage you said that I must experience my holiness. Do you remember you said it?*
>
> **Therapist:** *Yes.*
>
> **Ronald:** *The question from the Heidelberg Catechism and its answer. You said I must try to **obtain a symbol** that could **confirm my holiness** time*

*and again....[Before our first conversation] I realised that I cannot solve this problem [to break off the extra-marital affair]. For a long time I thought I could handle it all by myself. I will solve it alone. You know, I must only end the affair and that is it, then I can get out and nobody would know and I can go on with my life and all will be well. I thought so. But after the many attempts to break off the affair, I realised that I cannot break it off on my own. I need someone else [to end the affair]....***The conversation we had on my holiness.** *Look,* ***[previously, before our first conversation], every time I sinned I went back to the Lord and I confessed and I accepted the Lord's promise that my sins were forgiven and that I am holy before him. I knew it [in a cognitive sense],** but when you talked to me and told me how God is looking at me, how I am before God -* ***It just captivated me. I cannot tell you why it was different** from those times when I said it to myself when I was alone and on my own [before our conversation]. But,* ***it [i.e. my holiness] was of the utmost importance....***the same evening [after our conversation] I went to the Lord and confessed and gave my life again to Him, telling Him he is the Potter and I am the clay. He must change my life because it is a mess.*

During this reflexive conversation, Ronald storied in detail how he had ended the affair and what had happened. I decided to exclude his lengthy tale and to stick to those parts of the story that relate to the theme of **ritualisation.**

Therapist: *Did you succeed in finding a **ritual** or a **symbol** in your **work place** that could remind you of your **own holiness**?*

Ronald: *I did, you know, **it was such a fantastic idea** and I applied it. I...**went to my office** and sat down and **I wondered what I could utilise** as a symbol. I looked around at the plants and cupboards and other things. Then **I hit on the idea of installing a cross somewhere in my office.** I am going to attach a cross - it does not have to be a big one. I will fix a small cross somewhere in my office. It will be a symbol, and **I told my wife.** I told my wife that you suggested that I should obtain a symbol and **she said she will find me a small cross** (laughs).*

Ronald ended the extra-marital affair after **experiencing** his holiness in his office - the office which was the place (or symbol) of his defeat. According to the above excerpt from our reflexive conversation, Ronald was delivered from the extra-marital affair when he experienced himself as a holy person, i.e. when he storied himself as a holy person in his office. He managed to experience his holiness through a symbol.

Ronald stated that, as a devoted Christian, he had the **cognitive knowledge** of a Christian's holiness in Christ. **He did not, however, experience** his holiness prior to our conversation and to his planning to put up a cross in his office. Gilligan (1993:245) reflected on the appropriateness of rituals in cases like these: 'It is precisely in those cases where **cognitive understanding is of little or no value** that **rituals may especially be indicated**' [bold mine]. Müller (1996:6) also indicated the value of rituals in this regard: rituals may assist people to experience cognitive religious beliefs in a profound way.

According to Imber-Black (1989:153), a therapist must discover which symbols are appropriate and which carry enough familiarity. A therapist must suggest ideas that 'fit' and have the potential to create a new and unfamiliar identity, i.e. an 'unfit' identity. Hence, the appropriate symbol would be a symbol or metaphorical action that could connect Ronald with the familiar, while it could also lead Ronald to the unfamiliar (Imber-Black 1989:161). Ronald and I explored various symbolic or metaphorical ways in which he might 'celebrate his holiness in Christ' - a familiar idea that was totally unfamiliar. His idea of putting up a cross in his office was his own idea. The 'cross' and 'holiness' were familiar metaphors/symbols. Ronald's being holy was, however, a totally unfamiliar idea to him.

The fact that Ronald's **wife** became part of the planning process in creating the symbol deserves our attention. White and Epston (1990:114) stressed the value of creating an **'audience'** for the client - an audience consists of the witnesses of a new identity that assists the client in his/her re-authoring process.

> The issue of who else to include is especially important since...a ritual takes
> place at the intersection between two worlds: the public and private, or the
> inner and outer. Persons performing a ritual act are not only reorganising their

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inner world but also declaring to others a new social self. Witnesses not only observe a person's declarations but also participate in and validate the creation of a new social and psychological identity.

(Gilligan 1993:248)

The symbolic action of creating a cross for his office enabled Ronald to re-author his identity and to end the extra-marital affair. In this case, **a symbol enhanced the unfaithful spouse's ethical abilities**, enabling him to end the extra-marital affair. The couple found the idea of a symbol of holiness so intriguing that Ronald's wife also came up with the idea of displaying a photo of themselves as a married couple on Ronald's desk in his office. There Ronald would see it everyday – and the lover would too:

Ronald: *My wife did something, something that is silly and rather insignificant. No not silly - I mean she did something trivial that many people do. On Sunday **she brought a photo that depicts us as a couple** and said to me: "**Display it on your desk** [in your office]." After all that had happened, **I put the photo of my wife and me on my desk** and looked at my wife on my desk. **I saw how pretty she is and it made a difference.***

Therapist: *Is it as if you are celebrating your marriage on a daily basis?*

Ronald: *Yes. That is the case....*

Therapist: *Ronald, are you saying that we do not comprehend the meaning of symbols like photos on office desks?*

Ronald: *Yes, yes, absolutely.*

Therapist: *What does a symbol like this mean to you?*

Ronald: *When I look at the photo of my wife on my desk it reminds me all through the day, of her. **The photo brings her into my work space.** I also think it is a deterrent - it can't be otherwise, for people who enter my office with other ideas [i.e. with the idea of sexual seduction].*

Symbols as a part of ritualisation enabled Ronald to end his extra-marital affair and to resume his marital relationship.

13.3 The unfaithful spouse and secrets: to tell or not to tell

The meaning of marriage in western society has changed dramatically in the past 50 years. People, especially women, have become sexually liberated and their number and variety of sexual partners has increased. Although sexual fidelity is still prized as part of a monogamous relationship, the main emphasis in fidelity today is not on sexual fidelity but rather honesty, intimacy and increased and open communication (Lawson 1990:261). Hence, **deceit has become the greater sin**, greater than sexual unfaithfulness. **Honesty has displaced virginal honour** (Adler 1996:44).

The world of marital unfaithfulness is, however, embedded in lies and deceit. This is not conducive to the mutual trust and honesty that is so vital in contemporary marital relationships. The one unavoidable question the unfaithful spouse has to face is whether he/she must **tell the faithful spouse** about the affair **before** the faithful spouse **discovers** the secret by some other means. The way the faithful spouse is informed about the affair is vital for the future prospects of the marital relationship (Pittman 1990). There are, however, gender differences in this regard:

> ...[M]en reported their wives as suffering more from discovering their husband's affair before being told than if the husband proffered the information first. Thus, the consequences were reported as negative *three times* as frequently by men whose wives discovered their affairs before being told as by those who volunteered the information. Yet, for husbands, how they learned was, by comparison, relatively unimportant [author's italics].

(Lawson 1990:237)

It seems natural to infer that the pastoral therapist must try to establish a therapeutic context in which the parties involved can feel safe and free enough to have the courage to speak the 'truth'. Therapists differ in their opinions when it comes to the question of whether or not to keep the secret of an extra-marital affair (Kaslow 1993). Pittman (1990:65) advocated the revelation of the secret. 'The

process of therapy must be an honest one. Issues of betrayal cannot be addressed through secrecy and further betrayal' (Brown 1991:27).

Secrecy in an extra-marital affair is not a neutral act. Secrecy constitutes the extra-marital affair in a positive way but it constitutes the marital relationship in a negative way.

> The clandestine element may appeal to...them [i.e. the couple engaging in the affair], for different reasons. Having a rendezvous secretly may re-establish one's sense of separate identity if he/she has felt too enmeshed and resents always being part of the same dyad....to have a secret from significant others means one is a distinct person with his/her own thoughts, feeling and knowledge.
>
> (Kaslow 1993:5)

Pittman (1990:48) also acknowledged the constitutive aspects of secrecy:

> It must be kept in mind that affairs thrive on secrecy. The conspiracy and adventure and tricks produce an alliance in the affair, while the lies and deceit increase the discomfort at home. All of us feel bound to those who share our secrets, and uncomfortable with those to whom we are lying. The power in the affair may be in its secrecy. The weakness of the marriage may be in its avoidance of issues.

An **affair that is kept secret** from the faithful spouse can, **even after many years after the has affair** ended, **isolate** the unfaithful spouse **within the boundaries** of his/her marriage. Even if the two spouses become best friends after the affair has ended, the past secretive affair remains as a boundary generator that isolates the unfaithful from the faithful spouse (Pittman 1990; Minuchin 1974). From a narrative point of view one could say that the memory of the affair exists as an important story of the unfaithful spouse's life. This secretive story cannot be shared with the faithful spouse. Their supposed common and shared story remains, in part, two separate stories. This is an experience that does not enhance marital satisfaction (Parry 1991).

It is not only secrecy that is constitutive for the extra-marital affair and the marriage. The **disclosure of the secret** also affects the affair and the marriage in a profound way:

> [The extra-marital affair] has its own dynamics and demands its own loyalties. Unless the lover is pressing that the spouse be informed, either because he/she wants the whole thing to be 'open', or because a divorce and another marriage is planned, the involved spouse, in speaking of his or her affair, betrays and in a sense, exploits the lover, just as the two of them have already betrayed the wife or husband. The boundaries around both the marriage and the love affair are breached in the telling.
>
> (Lawson 1990:252)

In this section I deal with **Ronald's disclosure of his secret** to his wife and with **Joy's decision to keep her secret** from her husband. Both Ronald's and Joy's marriages survived the extra-marital affair.

Ronald initially found my suggestion of disclosing the secret unacceptable. Eventually he disclosed the secret and went through a short period of turmoil with his wife. Eventually their marital bond revived. At our second appointment, Ronald reported that he had succeeded in terminating the extra-marital affair. The following excerpt represented our reflection on the initial and first conversation and it concerns **the disclosure of the secret:**

> **Ronald:** At one point [during our first conversation] you suggested that I must tell my wife [about the extra-marital affair] and I said: **"Definitely not! No never!"**

Ronald proceeded to tell in detail how it came about that he told his wife about his secret affair. It was such a lengthy story that I decided to select only those parts that are relevant to the topic of secrets:

> **Ronald:** ....I accompanied my wife on the Thursday on a shopping trip and assisted her. Later on she suggested that we have lunch in a restaurant. I did everything I could to postpone the moment of truth.

> ***We went home and there I told her. She was utterly upset.*** *My wife considers me the focal point of her life. She struggled to handle it. Eventually she said she would stand by me. She said it would be difficult to forgive me.* ***We did not sleep that night.*** *There was a good chance that the whole story could be disclosed on the following day [i.e. the affairee threatened to expose Ronald]. My wife and I decided that, if the affair became known, I would resign my job and we would move to somewhere else and then see what would happen.*

Therapist: ***She remained loyal to you*** *and will move with you?*

Ronald: ***Absolutely.***

Therapist: *That is special, isn't it?*

Later on in the same reflection we took up the theme of secrets once more and we talked about **the effects of disclosing the secret:**

> **Ronald:** *....I told my wife about my visit to you. She asked me about our conversation and I told her that you said that if I tell her about the affair then she will stand by me and that* ***our marital bond will be much stronger afterwards.*** *You know...***I experienced it in a profound way.*** *My wife stood by me and* ***our relationship entirely*** *- I can't say it germinated, but I would say,* ***it ignited....***

> **Therapist:** *I suppose that* ***the intimacy between you two must have increased*** *a hundred times.*

> **Ronald:** ***Our relationship better by a 1000 percent*** *[because I told her about the affair]. Surely my wife does suffer. She is asking questions, you know, why did I consider another woman?*

The above experience of Ronald's confirmed Pittman's opinion in this regard. Pittman (1990) dealt with the issue of extra-marital affairs, morality and mental health and believed that the disclosure of the secret always benefits the marital relationship. According to Pittman, many mental health professionals regarded the topic of extra-marital affairs not as a mental health issue, but rather as a moral issue and therefore not as part of the agenda of psychotherapy. Therefore, psychotherapists must decline from making moral judgements. Furthermore, according to Pittman (1990:25-26), psychotherapists believe that

> [m]ental health is attained when the restrictions of moral judgements are overcome. Whatever frees one from making sexual restraint must be mentally healthy....**Affairs are the healthy, normal expression of normal impulses. Marriages must learn to accommodate them**....Some psychotherapists believe that we are supposed to free people from guilt....**we must be neutral** in order to protect our patients from the guilt that we therapists are inadvertently arousing [bold mine].

Pittman (1990) vehemently opposed this discourse of psychotherapy and **pleaded for an open, honest** and bold moral stance against affairs, **even in therapy**. Furthermore, Pittman (1990:46-47) felt that it is very difficult for people to work on their marital problems when the extra-marital affair is kept secret by the unfaithful spouse. **Extra-marital affairs are fuelled by secrecy** and threatened by exposure because the secret functions as a barrier between the husband and wife but the **revelation of the secret creates vital intimacy** in the marital relationship. Although the honesty almost inevitably generates a crisis in the beginning, it is usually the starting point for the marriage to become better. Ronald's experience was an explicit example in support of Pittman's views.

Pittman (1990:65) advocated the immediate revelation of the secret because it favours the future prospects or the marriage:

> To date, I have not had anyone die or kill anybody or even get divorced over the revelation of a secret unfaithfulness if the unfaithfulness is now past. I'm sure it happens, but it must not be very common. By contrast, all hell breaks loose over infidelities that are continuing, or those that are known but lied about.

Pittman adhered to modernistic epistemology. Hence, Pittman's views operate as therapeutic truths that are valid over time and space, i.e. as universal, general and timeless truths (cf. Brueggemann 1993:5). This kind of therapeutic knowledge devalues the very persons involved in an extra-marital affair, i.e. it neglects the context (cf. Dill 1996).

Although Ronald experienced the disclosure of the secret in a positive way, his experience cannot be generalised as a rule. Many couples' experiences differed. Lawson (1990:243) found that 'as many as 40 percent of women, compared with only 30 percent of the men, were clear that telling had had adverse consequences for their marriages'.

Joy had had many extra-marital affairs. Although her husband knew of some of her previous affairs, he was unaware of the latest affair that had lasted for two years. **Joy never told her husband** of her latest extra-marital affair. It took Joy nearly two years to end her extra-marital affair. Although I suggested that she confide in her husband and share her secret with him, she refused. She said that she did not want to hurt her husband again. She eventually ended the affair without ever telling her husband.

Kaslow (1993) strongly recommended that therapists do not to break the secret of an affair because the secret belongs to the lovers. She advised therapists to respect the lovers. Quoting Rogers (1951), Kaslow (1993) felt that a client must be allowed to keep his/her secret until the anguish of bearing it exceeded the shame of revealing it. Müller (1996) also respected the preferences of the client. Although I had witnessed the benefits of disclosing the secret in the case of Ronald, I agree with Kaslow and I respected Joy's choice not to tell her husband. In the next few paragraphs I reflect on my view.

Secrets and lies are parts of stories. Secrets and lies are stories. Secrets and lies are, just like other stories, social constructions. **Postmodernistic social construction discourse** as epistemology does not regard a story told in therapy as the 'only objective truth' because an 'objective truth' does not exist. Any life story is always a **mythical life story** because a life story never mirrors or resembles a life nor the 'truth' (Gerkin 1991:58). Although a narrative approach in pastoral therapy views the story as a mythical story and thus not as the 'objective truth', it values the mythical story - **even a deceitful story, as the legitimate and valuable life story of a person** (Kotzé 1996a).

Whenever a spouse chooses to lie in a marital relationship and in the therapeutic encounter, it is not the task of the pastoral therapist to uncover and expose these lies (Kotzé 1996a). Although lies do sabotage the mutual trust between the

spouses, a narrative approach in pastoral therapy is more interested in the lies as part of the life story of a person. There is always method in the madness. What may seem to be 'madness' to the pastoral therapist or to the faithful spouse, may be 'method' for the unfaithful spouse. A narrative approach in pastoral therapy is concerned with questions such as the following:

- Why is it 'method' for the dishonest party?
- Which discourses are constitutive for the unfaithful spouse's deceitful stories?
- What are these discourses doing to the unfaithful spouse (Lowe 1991)?

Instead of bulldozing the unfaithful spouse with whatever may be the 'truth', it may be more beneficial to **explore the lie as a genuine part of the story**, as the socially constructed 'reality' within which the unfaithful spouse lives (Kotzé 1996a). The lie is part of his/her narrative within which he/she is trying to make sense of things at this time and in this place. A narrative approach in pastoral therapeutic approach honours the lie not only as a lie - that would embed the therapy in a positivistic and modernistic paradigm where 'truth' is objective and attainable - but rather as a story (1996a) in which certain beliefs are embedded (Parry 1991).

This does not mean that lies, indirectness and circuitousness enhance mutual trust and reconciliation in the marital relationship. It may actually endanger the marital relationship in fuelling destructive assumptions on the part of the faithful spouse. Seen from the perspective of postmodernistic social construction discourse as epistemology, assumptions are lethal in any marital relationship (Krasner & Joyce 1991:134-138).

To conclude: There seem to be two therapeutic views. The one view advocates the notion that the disclosure of the secret is a prerequisite for marital reconciliation and for success in therapy (cf. Pittman 1990). Ronald's experience relates to this view. The second view respects the unfaithful spouse's preference to keep the secret (cf. Kaslow 1993). Joy's experience relates to this second view. To my mind, the latter view is more akin to a narrative approach in pastoral therapy,

because the pastoral therapist takes into account:

- the imprisoning and constitutive effects of discourses in the life of the unfaithful spouse (Lowe 1991); and
- the context, i.e. the person involved (Dill 1996).

This stance does not imply that a narrative approach in pastoral therapy supports and sustains the secret in the life of an unfaithful spouse. It does, however, view the unfaithful spouse positively and hopefully (O'Hanlon 1994). It **sides** with the **unfaithful spouse who is deceitful** and **seeks to deal with those discourses that keep the unfaithful spouse captive and dishonest** (White 1995). A narrative approach in pastoral therapy **eventually tries to deconstruct those discourses in order to set the unfaithful spouse free.** A narrative approach is about a battle of discourses (Lowe 1991; Winslade et al 1996). In this way the unfaithful spouse's ethical abilities may be enhanced.

13.4 The unfaithful spouse and the sense of guilt

The unfaithful spouse has to manage his/her sense of guilt by means of discourses that reduce anxiety and guilt. The unfaithful spouse either has to stop the affair to reduce his/her sense of guilt or, if he/she continues the affair, has to find ways of managing his/her sense of guilt.

> It is commonplace for guilt-ridden people, after an unfaithfulness, to distance their unsuspecting mate, whose love makes the guilt-ridden [person] feel even guiltier. The greater the discomfort, and the more trusting the mate, the greater the distance needed to protect the unfaithful from being overwhelmed by guilt. At the same time, the *unfaithful will seek out the only person who can relieve the guilt - the affairee* who was an accomplice in the act, the one who can assure that no wrong has been done. *The unfaithful and the affairee are thus trapped behind imaginary enemy lines,* hiding from the poor trusting cuckold who gets somehow turned into the source of painful guilt. *The **guilt** therefore **undermines** the marriage, and **fuels** the affair* [italics and bold mine].

<div align="right">(Pittman 1990:62)</div>

I have already referred to Joy's circumstances (cf. Sections 10.2; 11.3 and 13.2.8). Joy had a history of ongoing extra-marital relationships. Because she was a devout Christian, her involvement in these relationships caused her much distress. After the therapeutic conversations she had had with the reflecting team at the Institute for Therapeutic Development had ended, she relapsed into an extra-marital relationship with the same lover. **Guilt-ridden and crushed by her anxiety**, she came to see me. **I listened attentively for a very long time** to her story. After our first conversation, we reflected on our conversation and on the mode of therapy. The following dialogue is an excerpt of our reflexive conversation:

Therapist: *I have said very little. What did our conversation mean to you? What was it like to be here?*

Joy: *I am relieved...I thought you would be deeply disappointed in me, but then I experienced that you understand what I tried to tell you. I am not sure if I can call it compassion. But, if I had been in your shoes, I would have said: 'Hey, you, come on, make a decision!' But you haven't done that. You followed a different route. You are patient - like the Lord, very patient, just like the Lord.*

Therapist: *And what did you experience?*

Joy: *Well, when I leave here tonight, I will feel much better than when I came.*

Therapist: *You feel better?*

Joy: *I will go on my knees and thank the Lord. It is as if a burden has dropped off me. I entered into the conversation trembling, but now I feel relieved. I didn't know what to expect....But it would have been of no help if I had lied and pretended I was doing fine...*

Therapist: *In our conversation, what should I have done less?*

Joy: *Nothing, you could have done nothing less. You have done much more than I expected. I am so used to and tired of the psychological treatment, going from one therapist to another. **I am tired of those days when a therapist said, 'You must decide what you want to do. You change your life now, you are a new person...and if you do not do it, you are now going straight to hell. So, make your decision now!'** But you have never approached me with such an*

> ***aggressive attitude. You have listened to me and you have tried to understand me.***
>
> ***Therapist:*** *What would have happened if I had insisted that you must turn around and change now, or go to hell?*
>
> ***Joy:*** ***Maybe it would have depressed and discouraged me more because I feel that I can't give up the extra-marital affair.*** *I would have felt a failure…I think it would have utterly discouraged me.*

I had refrained from hamartologizing the situation (Heitink 1979:209). Joy was a devoted Christian and she knew that her extra-marital affair was ethically wrong. The sense of guilt of devoted Christians who engage in extra-marital sex must be tremendous:

> People whose allegiance is to the puritan-romantic ideal of marriage, and who prefer totality and intimacy in a love relationship, are likely to regard the first extra-marital sex act with a mixture of terror and fascination; for them it is a consummation of almost sacramental - of heretical - character that will profoundly and irreversibly change them, even if no one else ever knows about it.
>
> Many of them, shortly after the first unfaithfulness, suffer physical or emotional ailments caused by guilt. These include insomnia, hysterical crying, inability to eat, vomiting, diarrhoea, migraine headaches, inability to concentrate, compulsive hand-washing and general depression.

> (Hunt 1969:95, 130)

Joy had two problem saturated stories. The first was that of the extra-marital affair and the second that of guilt and anxiety. I attended to both these discourses and I tried to attend to these two discourses bearing in mind postmodernistic social construction discourse as epistemology.

A **modernistic and positivistic** ethical stance leads a pastoral therapist **to hamartologise** the situation. I have already indicated (in Chapter 5) that modernistic epistemology has led to foundationalist theology with its positivistic

methodology which regards theology as the source of objective theological truth (Rossouw 1993; Pieterse 1993a).

Hence, the modernistic pastoral therapist's 'objective knowledge' of theological ethics would, in the conversation with Joy, have led him/her to impose his/her ethical views as the fixed and divine point of reference of the pastoral interview. His/her 'objective knowledge' of theological ethics would become the agenda of the conversation. Working within this paradigm, the pastoral therapist would have had to 'correct' Joy because her actions were outside the boundaries set by the reified and institutionalised ethical discourses (Adams 1973; Louw 1983).

> Most of the prevailing pastoral approaches consider the role of the pastor as that of spiritual expert. He approaches clients' problems in an objective, rational and empirical mode when he discriminates between types of problems, the causes of problems and solutions to problems. Acting descriptively and eventually prescriptively, poses the danger that the pastor can force his ideas on the client. Instead of co-operatively seeking wisdom, the pastor will point out a certain interpreted truth as the 'correct truth'. This kind of objective, universal solution is meeting with more and more resistance...

(Dill 1996:169)[60]

A modernistic epistemology puts the pastoral therapist in a hierarchical and powerful position because there is a recursive relationship between knowledge and power (White & Epston 1990; Dill 1996). The influence of modernism on pastoral therapy jeopardises the power relationship between pastoral therapists and clients. Pastoral therapists and clients are not free equals: the knowledge of the pastoral

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[60] By die meeste **heersende pastorale benaderings** word die rol van die pastor as dié van 'n geestelike ekspert gesien. Hy benader kliënte se probleme op objektiewe, rasionele en empiriese wyse, in die onderskeiding van sowel tipes probleme, oorsake van probleme en oplossings vir probleme. Deur deskriptief en uiteindelik ook preskriptief op te tree, is die gevaar groot dat die pastor se idees aan die kliënt opgedwing word. In plaas daarvan dat daar saam na wysheid gesoek word, word 'n sekere geïnterpreteerde waarheid gewoonlik as die 'regte waarheid' aangedui. Sulke objektiewe, **universele oplossings** het egter al hoe meer teenstand begin kry... [author's bold].

(Dill 1996:169)

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therapist becomes the power of the pastoral therapist which controls the therapeutic relationship (Dill 1996).

Let me resume the story of Joy. Joy's sense of guilt and anxiety was allayed to some degree. Can it be that my mode of **attentive listening** and following her story led to her feeling more free and relieved? It seems as if my listening allowed her an experience of **being loved** ('loved' in the sense of agape) **and respected**. She experienced that I loved her, and through this experience, she experienced the love of God. I think that the process of attentive listening created a space where Joy could be her own audience and be compassionate with herself:

> [The client's] own compassionate hearing of her story is more significant than my hearing....By willing to hear her story on her terms, without imposing any knowing from a place of expertise, I have opened up room for her to be **compassionate with herself**....Through careful listening and attentive reflection, summarising, and paraphrasing, the counsellor invites the client to listen to himself in a new way, to be an audience to his own production of self, to hear him speak in ways that will engender growth and courage, resourcefulness, and hope.
>
> (Winslade et al 1996:64, 66)

It reminds me of the positive relation between successful therapeutic techniques and empathetic therapists who established the strongest therapeutic alliances with their clients experienced the greatest success, no matter which kind of treatment they used. These observations were true for depressed clients (Cooper 1997:17). I feel that attentive listening is a narrative pastoral therapist's tool to be empathetic with his/her conversational participant. In narrative therapy, however, the focus is not on some kind of emotional catharsis, the focus is rather on battling discourses (Winslade et al 1996).

Maybe, **love** (agape) is **to listen attentively to another person's story** and **love is to respect the client's story as the only agenda of the conversation**. It implies that the pastoral therapist must not force his/her own agenda and story to

become the agenda of the conversation. The same theme was evident when our conversation continued:

> **Therapist:** *What in my mode of doing - I said very little - helped you?*
>
> **Joy:** *I am not sure whether it is your tranquillity? Or your few words of encouragement? It is the fact that you have listened to me. I experienced that you listened to me.*
>
> **Therapist:** *And what does it do to you when I listen to you?*
>
> **Joy:** *I know you have compassion. I know you genuinely want to help me.*

I said very little. But it is not only words that can 'speak'. Our actions are also readable 'texts' (Gerkin 1986). I had no control over Joy, or any person for that matter, would have interpreted my actions (Gerkin 1986). Joy constructed her interpretation of the meaning of my actions out of the context of **our combined** actions and words.

I recall Gergen's (1994:262-268) comment on the social construction of meaning: an isolated utterance acquires meaning only when another person supplements the utterance with a phrase or action. An individual can never convey meaning. Another person is required to supplement the words or action and only then does the original utterance acquire meaning. Meaning is a function of relationships. Meaning is not generated by an action and reaction as if the action and reaction each has its own particular meaning. Meaning is not the sum of the meanings of action and reaction. The action only acquires its meaning through the supplementary reaction. Meaning is born out of joint action. The point is: **Joy and I co-constructed meaning through words and actions, i.e. a new narrative that is constitutive for her life story.**

> **Joy:** *You are peaceful and I feel you understand me. I do not know why. But it is as if you understand me and the Lord understands too.*
>
> **Therapist:** *What did you experience when I understood you?*
>
> **Joy:** *I am happier. I have more peace of mind because there is somebody who understands, somebody whom I can talk to. Somebody that will not shut the door in my face and think I am possessed by the Devil.*

*Surely, you remember that **I had thought I was possessed by demons** and that **I was bewitched**.*

The **loneliness** of the **unfaithful spouse** leapt out at me when I reread the above transcription. When I considered the fact that Joy is a devoted Christian and I thought of her history of about thirty consecutive extra-marital affairs and of her recent relapse into an extra-marital affair, and her sense of guilt and anxiety, I wondered whether we as pastoral therapists know how deep the loneliness of such persons can be. The unfaithful will seek out the only person who can relieve the guilt - the affairee who was an accomplice in the act (Pittman 1990). The actions of attentive listening and of respect for the unfaithful spouse's story are part of readable texts, texts that are bridge-building discourses. **Attentive listening freed the unfaithful from her loneliness.**

In reflecting on Joy's sense of guilt and loneliness and on the actions of the pastoral therapist as readable texts, I became aware of the powerful text Jesus created when he passively let the women of ill repute to wash his feet with her tears and to dry them with her hair at the banquet in Simon's house (cf. Luke 7:36-50). Together, Jesus and the woman, de-constructed her sense of guilt and loneliness. Their **actions** were a hermeneutic process that de-constructed her old story and constructed a new story, thus breaking her loneliness and creating a new fellowship. Afterwards, that is, after her isolation had ended and after they had experienced a new fellowship, Jesus said: 'Your faith has saved you; go in peace (Luke 7:50, Good News Bible). For Jesus it was *koinonia* first, then forgiveness.

Furthermore, it is obvious that Joy experienced her faith in the first or second stage of Fowler's 'stages of faith'. Joy's linguistic construction of faith corresponds with a mythical pre-modernistic faith (Fowler 1981, 1987; Nicol 1994b). As a pastoral therapist, I had to bear the linguistic construct of her 'stage of faith' in mind remembering that Fowler's 'stages of faith' are only maps of the territory; they are not the territory (Hurding 1995:294).

She was at one time anxious about whether she had been taken over by the Devil or not. She appreciated the fact that I did not think that she was possessed by demons:

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Therapist: It means a lot to you that I do not think you are possessed?

Joy: *Yes, yes...you have meant a lot to me and I am not suicidal anymore.*

Therapist: What would have happened if I had accused you, or said you had been taken over by the Devil?

Joy: *If you had said I was possessed by demons...But then I would have asked you to set me free of those demons.*

Therapist: Yes, but I never thought you were possessed by demons. I never thought that. What did it mean to you?

Joy: *It gives me some satisfaction that I do not have to worry about such a possibility and that I am, maybe, just a person who wants to be accepted and loved. I think you reveal and radiate a lot of the Lord's love. I see it and feel it. That is how I experience you.*

The scope of this research does not allow me to elaborate on **the phenomenon of demonic possession.** A few remarks (from a postmodernistic epistemological viewpoint) will, however, be illuminating. Demonic possession is associated with religious fundamentalism (Ivey 1993:182). Both demonic possession and religious fundamentalism are associated with the first or second stage of Fowler's stages of faith (Fowler 1981, 1987). The phenomenon of demonic possession needs to be acknowledged and respected because, in the end, demonic possession is a most powerful discourse in the lives of people who operate on a mythical faith construction.

> Whether demons are seen as metaphysical beings or as a mythological interpretation of insanity, in both cases they are experienced by the patient as an invader who has gained possession.

> (O'Grady 1989, quoted by Ivey 1993:185)

Ivey (1993:182) referred to **demonic possession as a cultural discourse.** I would like to do the same, but in doing so, I do not make any ontological statement in an effort to negate (or claim) the ontological status of demonic possession. The ontology of demons was not part of this research. In the context of this research, I would rather refer to the constitutive power of the discourse of demonic

possession. Hence, I am not so much concerned about what a discourse **is** - i.e. demonic ontology - than with what a discourse **does** to people (Lowe 1991:45).

Can the reader imagine what would have happened if I had insisted on the discourse of demonic possession in Joy's life story? It is evident from Joy's remarks that an insistence on a discourse of demonic possession in her life story would have had utterly destructive effects. Consider for a moment Joy's first or second stage of faith according to Fowler's 'stages of faith' (1981, 1987). A discourse such as demonic possession has tremendous constitutive power in the life of a person such as Joy whose story is embedded in a pre-modernistic and thus mythical linguistic construction. As a pastoral therapist I had the **ethical responsibility** to bear in mind that all metaphors are ethical metaphors because metaphors are constitutive of people's lives (Dueck 1991:189). The insertion of the demonic possession discourse could have had serious consequences for Joy's life.

The above ethical choice (i.e., not to include the discourse of demonic possession) is an example of **theological-ethical accountability** in a narrative approach in pastoral therapy. The narrative pastoral therapist cannot rely on a stable and objective (modernistic) dogma about the devil for guidance on the spur of the moment. My choice not to introduce the demonic possession discourse in the life of Joy on my own account was not an ontological statement, nor did I negate my theological tradition's modernistic dogma about the devil. My choice was constituted by an awareness of the ethical constitutive power of all discourses. There are no ethical manuals about the devil in the life of Joy that can be memorised for moments like these. Hence, a pastoral therapist who uses a narrative approach has to think on his/her feet. To state in social constructionist terms: Pastoral ethics is socially constructed ethics (cf. Doherty 1995:37).

The very moment Joy said, '...I had thought I was possessed by the demons and that I am bewitched', I had to respond **quickly**. Hence, the ethical choice not to sustain the discourse of demonic possession was determined, not so much by our theological tradition, but by postmodernistic social construction discourse as epistemology, i.e. by what discourses do to people. Hence, **pastoral therapeutic discourses**, and thus **ethical discourses**, comprise a **creative component** that never reaches finality and **is always preliminary and temporary** (cf. Doherty

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1995:37). In another situation, with another client, I might have responded differently - each situation calls for its own individual fresh ethical response.

In the next section, I deal with the question of the **use of Scripture** in a **narrative approach** in pastoral therapy and, as the reader will see, how it helped Joy to find a sense of peace and forgiveness and how she was relieved of her sense of guilt.

A NARRATIVE APPROACH IN PASTORAL THERAPY AND THE USE OF SCRIPTURE

14.1 Introduction

The use of Scripture in a pastoral conversation is a complex matter (Dreyer 1991b; Louw 1993). The scope of this research does not permit an elaborate exploration of a modernistic use of Scripture in pastoral therapeutic conversations (cf. Van Wyk 1987:42-55, 64-77, 185; Heitink 1979:23-57, 135-189, 274-284, 354-366; Louw 1993:375-445). I have, however, reflected briefly on this issue in Section 5.4.3.

Chapter 14 must be read in the light of my choice of postmodernistic social construction discourse as epistemology (Section 3.3) and in conjunction with Sections 5.2; 5.4.3 and 5.4.4; 6.1and 6.2; 6.3.6; 13.1; 13.2.1 to 13.2.6; and 13.4.

14.2 The Bible as a collection of stories

In one of our reflexive conversations, Joy mentioned that her **meditative experience** of **Luke 7:36-50** was a very valuable experience that had helped her to experience a sense of peace and forgiveness:

> ***Therapist:*** *What should I have done more in our conversation?*
>
> ***Joy:*** *I think **you should have given me some more biblical texts**.*
>
> ***Therapist:*** *Is it important that I provide you with biblical texts?*
>
> ***Joy:*** *Yes, it is important. I will **never forget Luke 7:36 - 50**.[61] It will always be on my mind. I still **re-experience** that text occasionally.*

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[61] Luke 7:36-50 is the narrative of the woman who came in when Jesus and Simon the Pharisee had dinner. The woman stood behind Jesus crying and she wet his feet with her tears. Then she dried his feet with her hair, kissed them and poured perfume on them. Eventually Jesus said to her, "Your sins are forgiven...go in peace".

Therapist: *So, these biblical texts helped you to experience God in a very special way. What helped you the most: those [private] experiences with God through biblical texts **or** the therapy?*

Joy: *I think **both**. I do not think I can distinguish between the two.*

Therapist: *How would it have been if I hadn't provided you with biblical narratives?*

Joy: *I think I would have missed something because I would not have had those experiences with the Lord.*

Therapist: *Okay, you feel that to talk about God and the Bible is valuable to you.*

Joy: *For sure.*

Therapist: *Even if you are struggling [with guilt]?*[62]

Joy: *I was genuinely struggling [with guilt].*

Therapist: *But within your struggles you valued the Bible and conversations with biblical themes. Why?*

Joy: *Because I believe the Lord walks with me...Sometimes I wonder whether an organised **retreat** could have helped me to come up with other views.*

Therapist: *You have **conducted your own private retreats** on Sunday mornings. You were alone with the Lord and alone with those biblical narratives. **Were they special?***

Joy: *For sure! For sure! I have written it down somewhere...*

During my narrative pastoral education I wondered intensely about modernistic theology and its potential to be used in an abusive way in pastoral therapeutic conversations (cf. Clinebell 1984; Louw 1993; Dill 1996). I wondered about a useful mode of utilising Scripture in pastoral conversations. Although I was aware of how modernistic pastoral therapists usually utilise the Bible in pastoral therapeutic conversations, I was unsure about the possibilities of using Scripture within a postmodernistic epistemology.

Joy and I never used an open Bible directly in our conversations. I gave her certain biblical narratives to meditate on and contemplate and coached her on how to conduct her own private retreats and, in the following conversation, we reflected on

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[62] The reader must remember that Joy had had a history of many extra-marital affairs over an extended period. She was a devoted Christian who listened to Radio Pulpit on a daily basis - an activity that must have aggravated her sense of guilt before God.

her experiences during her private retreats. I suggested Luke 7:36-50 to Joy in 1996, while she was in therapy with the reflecting team at the Institute for Therapeutic Development. I was her pastoral therapist at that stage. I coached her on how **to meditate** on this text. Joy mentioned that **she had found a remission of her sense of guilt** during her **private meditative retreats** when she meditated on the narrative of Luke 7:36 - 50.

The way a pastoral therapist uses the Bible in therapeutic conversations is inevitably linked to the pastoral therapist's

- view of Scripture (Veltkamp 1988; Adams 1973, 1976; De Klerk 1975; Dill 1996; Dreyer 1991b; Louw 1993);
- epistemology (Dill 1996; Kotzé 1996b);
- 'stage of faith' (and of client's stage of faith) (Fowler 1981, 1987; Dreyer 1991b);
- anthropology (Van Wyk 1987:55-62; De Jongh van Arkel 1993; Louw 1993);
- missiology (Bosch 1991), and
- other discourses.

Although all these discourses - and there are many more (Dreyer 1991b; Louw 1993) - are related to each other, I do not intend to reflect on all of them. Bearing my chosen postmodernistic epistemology in mind, I will, however, briefly reflect on a **view of Scripture** that correlates with a **narrative approach in pastoral therapy.**

Veltkamp (1988:140) valued the **Bible** as a **'collection of stories'** and showed how theology - especially reformed theology - had undervalued the narrative aspect of these biblical stories. Theology utilised the biblical stories not as stories, but utilised the stories to construe a normative Christian dogma (cf. also Brueggemann 1993:69-70; De Klerk 1996a, 1996b).

In a world view that becomes more and more coloured by the natural sciences, there is little place for most biblical stories with their wonderfully mythical character. On the one hand, [theology] clung tenaciously to the stories as facts, on the other hand, the biblical stories were translated into moral values

and meanings. It was only recently discovered that, in both these approaches, the biblical stories were, as stories, unjustly treated. A story is more than a fact, and it is more than a mere packaging of meaning. Fundamentalism and de-mythologizing are more closely related than it seems at first sight.

(Veltkamp 1988:140)[63]

De Klerk (1996a, 1996b) valued most of the Bible as a collection of narratives and pleaded for a literary approach in reading the text, '[I]n as far as a case could be made for the idea of the literariness of texts [in general], in the opinion of many scholars, the Gospels (as well as other biblical narratives) actually fare well and show some fine literary qualities' (De Klerk 1996b:218). Reflecting on various modernistic and literary approaches in biblical exegesis, De Klerk (1996a:205) concluded:

The **biblical narrative scholar** has choice of a number of literary approaches....Wherever our choice may fall, let us operate free from the restrictions of customary biblical interpretation, and be sensitive to the sentiments of **a genuine literary reading of the text**. Let the charge not be levelled against us that biblical scholars do not make the most sensitive **readers** of biblical texts [bold mine].

Veltkamp pleaded that we must value the **biblical stories as stories because:**

[a] story does not describe an existing reality; instead it creates a new reality. This insight from the literary studies is also fundamental in our understanding of the Bible. In the Bible we are confronted with poetic texts – not poetry in the

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[63] In een wereldbeeld dat in toenemende mate natuurwetenschappelijk werd ingekleurd pasten de meeste bijbelverhalen met hun wonderlijke mytische karakter nog maar slecht. Naast een krampachtig vasthouden aan de verhalen als feiten treedt dan een vertaling van de verhalen in waarden en betekenissen. Het is een taamlijk recente ontdekking dat in *beide* benaderingen het verhaal als verhaal onrecht wordt aangedaan. Het verhaal is meer dan feit, maar ook meer dan verpakking van betekenis. Fundamentalisme en ontmythologisering zijn meer verwant met elkaar dan op het eerste gezicht kan lijken [author's italics].

(Veltkamp 1988:140)

sense of 'verse' or in contrast to prose, but poetry in the sense of 'creativity,' i.e. in contrast to 'mere description'. A poetic text creates a new reality via the instrument of metaphors.

(Veltkamp 1988:141-142)[84]

Hence, if a reader of the Bible values and reads the biblical stories as stories, he/she thereby becomes involved in a creative process in which the biblical story invites the reader to participate in a co-construction of a new and alternative self-narrative and a 'new' construct of theology (Brueggemann 1993:12-25, 68-69; Firet & Vossen 1991:123). Hence, the viewing of the Bible as 'a collection of stories' is appropriate to postmodernistic epistemology. This particular view of the Bible complies with a **narrative approach in pastoral therapy** because

...[one] prominent quality of a story lies in the fact that a story can create space. You can live within a story, you can wander within a story and find your own place in it. A story confronts but does not oppress; it inspires but does not manipulate. A story requires us to face an encounter, to enter into dialogue and to experience a mutual exchange of that which lives at our deepest level.

(Nouwen 1981, quoted by Veltkamp 1988:168)[85]

I realise, however, that there is much more to say about a narrative view of Scripture and that it is not simple theme with easy answers (De Klerk 1996a, 1996b). This is especially true in a postmodernistic paradigm (cf. Section 5.2),

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[84] Het verhaal beschrijft niet een bestaande werkelijkheid, maar het brengt scheppend een nieuwe werkelijkheid tot stand. Dat inzicht uit de literatuurwetenschap blijkt ook fundamenteel te zijn voor het verstaan van de bijbel. In de bijbel worden wij geconfronteerd met poëtische teksten - niet in de betekenis van 'dichterlijk' en in tegenstelling to proza, maar in de betekenis van 'scheppend' en tegengesteld aan 'beschrijvend.' Een poëtische tekst schept nieuwe werkelijkheid door het instrument van de metafoor.

(Veltkamp 1988:141-142)

[85] Eén opmerkelijke eigenschap van het verhaal is dat het ruimte schept. In een verhaal kun je wonen, je kunt erin rondwandelen en er je eigen plaats in vinden. Het verhaal confronteert maar onderdrukt niet; het inspireert maar manipuleert niet. Het verhaal noodt ons tot een ontmoeting, een dialoog, en wederzijdse uitwisseling van wat ten diepste in ons leeft.

(Nouwen 1981, quoted by Veltkamp 1988:168)

The next question is whether narrative pastoral therapists have at their disposal a method of dealing with the Bible that will **honour** the biblical stories as **stories.**

14.3 Meditation and the open-endedness of biblical stories

'Bible study' is a rational and modernistic mode of Bible reading because it looks for the deeper or exact meaning of the text (Le Roux 1996:42-44). Hence, 'Bible study' resembles **structuralism**, which conceived of meaning as a product of deep, unchanging structures that manifest themselves in the surface of texts (De Klerk 1996a; Polkinghorne 1995). The bible student analyses the surface structure of the text to reveal the inner and real meaning of the text (Dill 1996). It follows that 'Bible study' does not honour the biblical stories as stories and it is therefore not normally an appropriate method in a narrative approach in pastoral therapy.

Meditation is not so much concerned with the correct 'exegesis' (Foster 1989, 1992). Although meditation is a very old way of relating to the Bible, I feel that its approach is not a modernistic approach. Meditation concerns **fantasy and imagination** (Foster 1989, 1992) - phenomena that are not reinforced in the rational context of positivistic reformed theology (Vande Kemp 1991:69).

> Since **meditation** is a training that combines paying attention, opening one's heart, and remaining clearheaded even in the midst of emotional upheaval, it **integrates...worlds in the therapeutic process,** the ability to think and let go at the same time. Contrary to some popular misconceptions, the goal of meditation is not to destroy the intellect but to free it from the constrictions that limit the expression of its full potential....in other words, **our experienced reality is a construction, conditional and constantly changing** [bold mine].

> (Rosenthal 1990:40)

A **meditative and contemplative** reading of the text (Tan 1996; Foster 1989, 1992; Müller 1996; Toon 1993; Hudson 1995; Job 1994) **honours** the biblical stories **as stories** and resembles a **narrative mode of reading the Scriptures** (Brueggemann 1993:67-71). In meditation, a person utilises his/her **imagination**

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and visualises him/herself as one of the biblical characters in the story and identifies with a character and adopts the perspective, feelings and attitudes of the characters (Foster 1989, 1992; Veltkamp 1988). Of course, we know this imagined construct is not reality - just like all other linguistic constructions are not reality. Brueggemann (1993:13) discussed the epistemology of the modernistic and postmodernistic paradigms and demonstrated that all knowledge, whether in the modernistic or postmodernistic paradigm, consists not in settled certitudes but in the actual work of imagination:

> By imagination, I mean very simply the human capacity to picture, portray, receive, and practice the world in ways other than it appears to be at first glance when seen through a dominant, habitual, unexamined lens....Thus all knowledge, I insist, is imaginative construal, even if disguised or thought to be something else. The world we take as 'given' is a long established act of imagination that appears to be...the only legitimate [view]....It follows, then, that long-imagined 'givens' can indeed be challenged, and a 'countergiven' is attainable.

Brueggemann (1993:18-25) argues that the Christian faith can fund bits and pieces of biblical stories to the imagination of people enabling them to construe an alternative countergiven view of themselves and their reality. Our meditative imagination simply deepens our **participation** in that reality which it seeks to create (Hudson 1995:67-68). Hence, in meditation, we become participants in the biblical story:

> In meditation we experience ...the 'contemporaneity' of Scripture. The past does not merely parallel but actually intersects the present....the Bible becomes all over 'autobiographic' of you.

> (Foster 1992:154)

Veltkamp (1988:233) explored the function of the parables of Jesus in pastoral therapy and valued the parables' potency to invite the reader to become a **participant** in the Story of God:

The parable as a metaphor acts as an invitation to the listeners to break open their own situation and to revise their own vision of reality. At the same time, **the open structure of the parable offers the listeners positions and roles whereby they can become participants** in the story. Without the participation of the listener, the story is not finished; it has an open end. The new vision which develops from this is experienced by the listeners as a revelation: their own individual story is broken open and changed by the Story of the Kingdom of God [bold mine].

Hence, if we view the Bible as a collection of stories, then the open-endedness of the stories invites the reader to become a participant in the story and to co-construct his/her own novel reality.

Wimberley (1994:26) used some narrative therapeutic terms such as 're-authoring' and 'preferred story' and claimed that his pastoral counselling model for **using Scripture in pastoral counselling** had a narrative character. He utilised biblical stories to 'challenge the actual negative personal mythology that the counselee has brought to pastoral counselling'. Reviewing his method, it is clearly counselling on a **cognitive level** when he **challenges** the **beliefs** (negative personal mythology) of the client. To my mind, his model resembled the modernistic and positivistic principles of Rational Emotive Therapy (Fourie 1992) more than those of narrative therapy. He was far removed from the social construction theory that is the underlying epistemology of narrative therapy.

Although Virkler (1992:137) used the word 'meditation' when he prescribed certain selected biblical texts for the unfaithful spouse to read and memorise, his mode of pastoral therapy and of utilising the Scripture resembled a modernistic theology and a confessional approach in practical theology. Virkler's intention in prescribing certain texts was to confront the unfaithful spouse with a certain dogmatic version of biblical ethics.

Clinebell (1984:129) recommended that pastoral therapists should use meditation if they deemed it suitable. Clinebell stressed the **imaging** component of meditation. It is, however, conspicuous that Clinebell's recommendation of meditation was not based on postmodernistic epistemology.

In reviewing the matter, I feel that the method of **meditation and contemplation** is **an appropriate method** to use the Scriptures in a narrative approach in pastoral therapy because of its open-endedness. The outcome of the meditation is the meditator's prerogative. Rosenthal contrasted the **meditative therapist** with **therapists who are using modernistic methods** and stressed the **open-endedness of meditation:**

> Some therapists [i.e. modernistic therapists] like to shoot their arrows, tipped with the sharpness of theory, through the trees straight at the target. Clients are often amazed by this feat. They are also, however, often left behind. The **meditative therapist** walks alongside people through the forest of their lives....Even though such therapists may use a map, the map does not get in the way of new discoveries. Nor does the map preclude a change in direction or discourage exploration of the forest's uncharted wonders.

> (Rosenthal 1990:71)

Joy found extraordinary comfort in her meditation on biblical narratives. She contemplated those narratives all on her own. Tan (1996:25-26), reflecting on Foster's (1989; 1992) **meditation guidelines** and **its application** to **psychotherapeutic practice** and, referring to Ellis (1993), wrote:

> It may be interesting to note, however, that recently even Albert Ellis, long-time critic of dogmatic, absolutist devout religion or 'religiosity', stated that 'the Judaeo-Christian Bible is a **self-help book** that has probably enabled more people to make more extensive and intensive personality and behavioral changes than all professional therapists combined' [bold mine].

As a pastoral therapist working from a narrative approach, I wonder whether **meditation and contemplation** are not **undervalued** as **narrative means** of reading the Scriptures.

PASTORAL THERAPY AND THE FUTURE OF THE MARRIAGE: THE AGAPE DISCOURSE

In the film, *The bridges of Madison county*, the lover eventually had to leave
the county and his married mistress. He said to his mistress, 'Come with me'.
She replied, 'I can't. If I go with you we will lose it all'.

15.1 Introduction

In Chapter 15 I deal with extra-marital affairs and issues relating to **marital
dissatisfaction** and to **marital therapy** in this regard. I also attend to **agape as a
discourse that co-constitute marital relationships.**

15.2 Marital unhappiness and extra-marital affairs

15.2.1 Marital (un)happiness in narrative terms

The happiness of a marital relationship is difficult to measure in objective terms. I
have shown in Chapter 3 how complicated 'objectivity' can be. Any researcher is
bound to the narrative views of the two spouses on their own marital happiness
and to his/her own linguistic construction of the couple's story (cf. Chapter 4).

Lawson (1990:19), referring to Rose (1984), defines **marital happiness** in
narrative terms:

> For Rose, marriages, which she calls 'parallel lives', are not so much
> objectively measurable as happy or miserable but share or fail to share a story.
> Sharing an imaginative construct or story line, the marriage that from outside
> appears quite disjointed may be experienced as smooth and unruffled.

This implies that a marriage which seems 'objectively' miserable can be experienced by the two spouses as a shared story and thus as happy. Hence, a happy marriage is composed out of a shared story, i.e. both spouses experience their marital stories as stories in which both spouses are main characters.

An unhappy marriage is probably a marriage in which, for example, Prince Charles recruited his partner (Lady Diana) to be a mere character in his story. Hence, Diana was not experiencing a shared marital story in which she and Prince Charles were the main characters. She was only an auxiliary and supplementary character in his story (cf. Parry 1991).

In the event of an extra-marital affair, the faithful spouse is demoted to fulfil an auxiliary character in the couple's story and the lover is promoted to become a main character in the affair story.

15.2.2 Affairs and marital dissatisfaction

The reader can read this section in the light of Reasons for affairs in Chapter 7.

The literature on affairs has found a positive link between marital dissatisfaction and the prevalence of affairs (Hurlbert 1992; Thompson 1983; Kaslow 1993; Penney 1989; Brown 1991; Lawson 1990). These findings were not consistent, however, Thompson (1983) quoted several studies that did not find a positive relation between marital discord and extra-marital affairs. Pittman (1990) denied that every extra-marital affair is inevitably a reflection of marital discord. He discarded the notions underlining Functional Family Therapy that view an extra-marital affair as a function of the dissatisfaction in the marital relationship.

Virkler (1992:6) rejected the view that there is always a linear and positive relation between marital dissatisfaction and extra-marital affairs:

> Having a good marriage reduces the chances of an affair. But those involved
> in affairs - particularly men - will often say they had good marriages and that

dissatisfaction with their marriages was not the reason for extra-marital involvement.

There seem to be **gender differences** in the experience of marital discord and the prevalence of extra-marital affairs. **Men's** dissatisfaction in their marriages focuses more on sex and their involvement in extra-marital affairs correlates more with sexual than with emotional matters (Penney 1989).

Women, on the other hand, tend to become involved in extra-marital affairs because of emotional dissatisfaction in their marriages and because of the emotional intimacy they find with a third party (Brown 1991:8 - 9). Women see sex as following from emotional intimacy, while men see sex itself as a road to intimacy (Brown 1991:8).

All authors do not support the above mentioned gender-differentiating views unanimously:

> The data...indicate some **women** do take the sexual initiative, that many
> consciously decide to engage in extra-marital sex, that many do not equate
> sex with love, and that almost all engage in sexuality for their own pleasure,
> not as a service to others. All these actions contradict the traditional model. In
> an era of rapid and extensive change in women's roles, any monolithic model
> of women's behavior, such as has been offered in the area of sexuality, is
> likely to be conceptually and empirically inappropriate. Instead of looking for
> uniformity in all women's lives, it seems more fruitful to be alert to a variety of
> patterns [bold mine].
>
> (Atwater 1979:63)

Although Pittman (1990) also acknowledged the possibility of a connection between marital dissatisfaction and the prevalence of affairs and admitted that many therapists accepted this connection and tailored their therapy to these assumptions, he took a more moral stance and held the unfaithful spouse alone responsible for the extra-marital affair.

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Marriage is a long and unending process of adaptation. A spouse soon finds her/him self confronted with the reality that the marital partner is not precisely the ideal person that lived in her/his romantic linguistic constructs. And a process of adaptation is inevitable. The spouse has to accept the flaws of the marital partner and/or make some changes in his/herself and his/her communication patterns in an effort to meet the other's needs. An affair is yet another possible way to adapt to meet those needs which the marital partner cannot meet. Whatever the outcome, and however misguided the effort, **an affair is an attempt at problem solving** (Brown 1991:8-9).

> The need for validation that is absent in marriage is a common cause of extra-marital coitus. In fact, some affairs are not sexual in nature but revolve around a man or a woman seeking affection and comfort from a significant other. An individual who has many affairs may have difficulty with intimacy and vulnerability, issues that a stable relationship implies. **Usually, the most common cause of sustained extra-marital relations is overt or covert marital discord**. A common symptom of covert discord is diminished sexual interest by one or both marital partners [bold mine].
>
> (Elbaum 1981:492)

Hunt (1969:232-237) proposed that those extra-marital affairs that **last a long time** are the consequence of **marital discord**. This is especially true where the lovers have a puritan-monogamous approach and are looking for a long-term stable relationship, but where their marriages suffer to produce the expected happiness, friendship and satisfaction. If the extra-marital affair delivers more than romance and a 'good sexual time', i.e. if the extra-marital affair offers satisfactorily those emotional rewards the lovers yearn for, and if the marital relationship does not deliver these emotional rewards, people with a puritan-monogamous approach may reach a point where they make a break.

The presence of an ongoing affair distorts and exaggerates the problems in a marriage and it is very difficult to work on solving marital problems while the extra-marital affair continues. This is especially the case where the affair is kept secret (Pittman 1990). Although there is not always a linear and positive relation between marital dissatisfaction and extra-marital affairs, **pastoral therapists** have to deal

with the **possibility of unmet needs in the marital relationship** as some of the causes of the affair. This is especially valuable when the marital couple decides to continue with their marriage and to seek marital therapy (Virkler 1992:120).

Sometimes the unfaithful partner may not be motivated to reconsider the possibility of marital therapy in order to be reconciled with the faithful partner. The blissful experience of the new romantic love is too important. One powerful motivation that may cause the unfaithful partner to re-examine the shortcomings of the marital relationship is when the unfaithful spouse understands that if people do not understand which factors contributed to the downfall of the first marriage, there may be no way to protect a future marriage from the same fate (Virkler 1992). In reflecting on Virkler's above statement, I wondered whether the therapeutic manoeuvre of instilling this motivation is not manipulation and thus inappropriate for pastoral therapy in a postmodernistic paradigm (cf. Wolfaardt 1993).

15.3 The discourse of agape

15.3.1 Agape as a cultural discourse

'Love' is **socially constructed in local cultures** (Harré 1986:2-14). Diverse meanings of love correspond with diverse discourses found in diverse local cultures (cf. Morsbach & Tyler 1986:289-305). Hence, the cultural meaning of 'love' is to be found in local cultures. Agape as a discourse of committed love in western society is a discourse intrinsically formed in Christian communities.

The theological tradition, creeds and liturgical formulations of a denomination are part of the cultural system in which a person's metaphors about matrimony are formed. These theological discourses emphasise a spouse's responsibility and life-long commitment to a relationship, a commitment that is supposed to overcome the loss of eros and hardships a couple encounter in their matrimonial life. The liturgical formulas used at religious wedding ceremonies are examples of the verbalisation of the discourse of agape (Algemene Sinodale Kommissie van die Ned Geref Kerk 1988; Kerk van die Provinsie Suider-Afrika 1989).

Although the attainment of commitment through agape is often a struggle, those Christian couples who comply with the demands implied in this discourse benefit from renewed efforts to work through conflicts and disappointments. A Christian couple's marital vows are made in public before family, friends and the congregation and these different systems join in the festivities of the wedding reception. The couple's commitment is thus backed by a whole community. The commitment to monogamy is further enhanced by the theological metaphors of the 'church as the bride of Christ' and the relationship between the spouses resembling the relationship between 'Christ and his body'. The covenant of marriage is therefore rich in metaphorical and historical sense (Vande Kemp 1991:55). This explains the phenomenon of people's sensitivity to public opinion when divorce becomes an option. It also explains why a couple or a spouse considering divorce or in the process of divorce, experience a painful sense of alienation from God.

In the next section I attend to agape as a discourse of commitment in a long-term marital relationship.

15.3.2 Agape as commitment

In this section, I am not so much concerned with the essence or nature of agape, as with the discourse of agape, i.e. what a discourse does to people (Lowe 1991:45). Agape as commitment is a well-known and famous cultural discourse that exerts power over people (Louw 1983, 1986). It is, however, beneficial to look at a brief description of agape as commitment. Krasner and Joyce (1991:143-144) formulated a valuable and detailed description of commitment. Below, I provide an edited summary of their view of commitment:

1. Commitment can only be grasped through testing rather than through a monological belief or stance.

2. Commitment is motivated by a desire for will to reciprocity (to give and take). It is never simply a value, feeling, or principle but a relational dynamic of indebtedness without undue guilt.

3. Commitment is an order of giving, trusting that what is received will be valued, redemptive, reciprocated, credited, or at least duly noted, considered, and in time returned in due measure.

4. Commitment is a capacity to delineate one's own terms and to validate the merit of another person's stance, however adversarial.

5. Commitment between a couple is the primary basis of marital ethics.

6. Commitment is never the genesis of a relationship of trust. Commitment is the long-term consequence of a long-term sequence of intended choices, a series of dedicated decisions to invest in a person and to experience the reciprocity of such actions.

7. A failure of commitment is signalled by actions such as abuse, exploitation and unfaithfulness.

8. Religious rituals have long been used to incarnate the meaning of commitment. Rites such as baptism, communion and marriage are embodiments of commitment if people take the responsibility to let their actions and words resemble the metaphorical reality of the ritual.

9. Commitment is a dialectical and dialogical caring stance whose consideration of the I holds parity with the consideration for the You.

10. Relational balance is predicted on the understanding that making a claim on oneself can be an expression of giving, a contribution to the well-being of a spouse, relatives and friends instead of a selfish act.

11. Commitment is the outcome if, when we speak, we mean what we say, we do what we mean, and we rely on others to do the same.

It follows that agape cannot be objectified, psychologised or theologised. It can be known only through a genuine encounter between two persons (Krasner & Joyce 1991:142).

Couples who set out in their marriage with total commitment are less likely to engage in affairs. By far the most extra-marital affairs occur among people who agree to be 'free' in their marriage (Lawson 1990:103). Lawson (1990:107) also found that those for whom religion was the most important are also those who remained most frequently faithful; and, vice versa, those for whom religion was of no importance were also those who had the most liaisons. This is not an infallible rule. In Chapter 1, under the heading **The prevalence of affairs**, I have already shown that extra-marital affairs prevail even among the clergy. I do however, accept that there is a positive correlation between a commitment to religious values and a commitment to agape.

The extraordinary prevalence of extra-marital affairs tells us that the **discourse of agape is not the only discourse around**. Satir (1967) commented on the schism between people's overt compliance with agape on the one hand and their (rather astonishing) engagement in extra-marital affairs:

> Almost any study of sexual practices of married people done today reports that many marital partners do not live completely monogamously....**The myth is monogamy. The fact is frequently polygamy** [bold mine].

> (quoted by Hunt 1969:283)

The prevalence of extra-marital affairs indicates a conflict between the discourses of **agape** and discourses such as **eros, extra-marital sex, self-fulfilment hedonism, filia** and other relevant discourses.

In pastoral therapeutic conversations with unfaithful spouses and with faithful spouses the unfaithful spouse's level of commitment to marital vows and the faithful spouse's commitment to an unfaithful spouse who had committed adultery somehow came up in the conversations (Louw 1986).

15.4 Pastoral therapy and the discourses of self-fulfilment and agape

The discourses of agape and self-fulfilment are not only operative in the private lives of people. These two discourses also operate actively within the four walls of the therapy room (cf. Hare-Mustin 1994).

Heidi struggled to make a final decision concerning her marriage and her extra-marital affair. Being a professional and a career woman, she valued self-fulfilment. She storied her marital relationship as one in which she could not attain self-fulfilment because her husband inhibited her. On the other hand, she felt that she could attain self-fulfilment in her extra-marital relationship. She came from a Christian background and she felt guilty about her plans to abandon her husband and family life. The following quote is an example of her struggle:

> **Heidi:**   *I think I always had this lack [of happiness in my marriage] but I could not put my finger on it. I thought, o well, that is how life is....Suddenly I began to talk to [other] people and I met this person [her extra-marital lover]....It opened my eyes because it is something better....It concerns the children and many other things, but* **at the end of the day one must not feel responsible for the children.** *In ten years time they will anyway have left home...and then* **I have wasted my life....I do not want to take a decision on responsible grounds.** *Although one must be accountable in the situation, one must* **not act at the expense of oneself.** *It seems very selfish.*

Later on in the some therapeutic conversation she came back to the theme of self-fulfilment:

> **Heidi:**   **Must I be responsible for the rest of my life** *[for my husband] and do* **what everyone expects** *me to do? Or must I take the chance and* **taste the happiness** *[of love in a new marital relationship with my lover]? Maybe, it will be as you say, this [romantic] happiness [of the extra-marital affair] will subside....It is so difficult to reach a decision -*

> *if only I could leave my husband for a while and share my life with my lover for a while....Sometimes I think that my husband inhibits me....inhibits in the sense that I cannot do what I like, I cannot live my own free life. My husband cannot empathise with my work or whatever else. I want to study further. It is, however, not part of my husband's 'make-up'.*

The discourse of eros caused Heidi to value the extra-marital relationship and to devalue her marital relationship:

> The affair partner has inevitably fallen into the trap of making unfavourable comparisons between his or her mate and the lover. Because the intensity of the **infatuation love** is so much greater than that of mature **committed love**, the affair partner may hereafter view normal marital feelings as boring and dull, and may never be satisfied with his or her marriage again.

> (Virkler 1992:143)

Furthermore, Heidi found herself in a battle of discourses (Lowe 1991; Hare-Mustin 1994). She was caught between the discourses of **self-fulfilment** and of **sacrificial love, i.e. agape as commitment**.

'Self-fulfilment' and 'the self' are not ontological essentials in the lives of people. These concepts are the products of social interchanges in the western context. Many other cultures do not speak of 'self' as it is known in western society. Individualism belongs to a specific, relatively recent, western cultural and historical context where the 'self' functions like an independent island, self-sufficient with definite boundaries and in no need of its neighbours. Some feminists have criticised these metaphors and are suggesting a 'self' with 'connections, relationships and interdependence. The self is here no longer the absolute point of departure; it is not a self-contained entity, but a network of...relations' (Kvale 1992b:43).

On the other hand, Hare-Mustin (1994) criticised the discourse of **sacrificial love/agape** as just another discourse that upholds the privileged and powerful position of men in marital relationships, i.e. it is a discourse that intends to keep women in their traditional roles as submissive housewives. Some feminist scholars were negative about women spending their lives only to benefit husband and children (Loader 1996:114).

The discourse of 'self-fulfilment' sustains, among other discourses, the ever growing **individualism** in western society. This latter discourse has a profound effect on how people experience their marital lives and spouses. Dueck (1991:190) gave an example of the negative effects of this discourse on family and marital life:

> In traditional societies, the individual is assumed to be an integral part of the community....The needs of the family are assumed to overrule the needs of the individual....In liberal societies [read modernistic or postmodernistic societies], the individual is viewed as needing to be released from oppressive communities. Self-realisation is the goal. Society and family are there for the sake of individual development. There is no ethic of sacrifice for another generation [or spouse].

Doherty (1995), in his noteworthy book *Soul searching. Why psychotherapy must promote moral responsibility,* explained how psychotherapy contributed to the growth of this self-centred individualism. Freud identified the seat of psychological problems as the super-ego, the bearer of a culture's moral consciousness. Psychotherapy endeavoured to liberate the individual from her/his oppressive super-ego and from tyrannical morality. Hence, psychotherapy contributed to the rise of the individual self (Doherty 1995).

Lawson (1990:25) referred to the discourse of self-fulfilment as the **Myth of Me** and indicated how this discourse often clashed with the discourse of the romantic marriage:

> Self-development need not lead to estrangement from the chosen Other [spouse],...but, alas, for many, and particularly for women, the pursuit of selfhood often does involve conflict since their self-interest is so frequently 'at

odds' with the interest of their family members - both husband and children. Thus it may become difficult to achieve the Myth of Romantic Marriage ideal while embracing a program to develop the self....If this life partner [spouse], too, is simultaneously engaged in the same quest [of developing the self], the chances of fitting facets becomes remote indeed....Hence, the Myth of Me, instead of being encompassed within the marriage story, may...compete with the Myth of the Romantic Marriage. Perhaps it still overlaps with part of the marriage story, but it may also offer a justification for breaching the boundaries of the marriage and for living a different story, the story of adulterous love, where, perhaps because it is a theme of such importance in the West, it seems to the adventurer that the self may best be found.

Reflecting on psychological and spiritual wholeness, Clinebell (1984:31-32) criticised self-fulfilment in severe terms:

Since wholeness is always relational, self-fulfilment is a psychological impossibility. Growth pursued egocentrically, for its own sake, becomes a *cul-de-sac*... Growth occurs in *covenants-of wholeness* with others. These are relationships in which there is mutual commitment to nurturing each other's growth...[author's italics].

In the therapeutic conversation with Heidi, we talked about the long-term effects of the self-fulfilment discourse. The following excerpt was part of the therapeutic conversation:

> ***Therapist:*** *I can hear that you are finding yourself in a rather uncertain stage of your life and that you are struggling with the ethical issue whether you must give **preference to yourself** or to **your family**. May I sacrifice my family for my own benefit? This is your ethical struggle. I can hear that you are scared to follow your own head and to do your own thing. You are sensitive about the [ethical] issue.*

Later on in the same therapeutic conversation I commented:

*Therapist: You are referring to **two famous discourses**[66] or 'beliefs' in the world. The one discourse is this emotional or romantic expectation of marriage and the other one is the ideal of self-fulfilment. These two discourses are very famous in the West and our society boosts both of them in a profound way. The problem is that **these two discourses clash in a marital relationship**. To be married implies, in a certain sense, to surrender yourself. 'You can't be married and right at the same time.'[67] To be married implies to surrender something of yourself permanently. It means to feel that you come second...I sacrifice and do not benefit at all - this is part of marital life. The question is in **what sense** we are **prisoners of these two discourses** of the western world? Are we free?....*

In a reflexive conversation Heidi mentioned that she found **self-fulfilment and related issues** (i.e. **agape**) **significant** in our therapeutic conversations. The following excerpt reflect some of her ideas on the matter:

Therapist: What themes?

*Heidi: Things like...it is not **what the other partner means to me**, but...what **I can do for him**...*

Therapist: Are you referring to the beautiful value that self-fulfilment and individualism cannot build a relationship, but an agape commitment can build it?

Heidi: Yes.

Later on in the reflexive conversation, Heidi referred to, as she named it, some 'essentials' of a marital relationship, i.e. marital love as composed out of eros, sexus, filia and agape. [At our very first meeting Heidi inquired about what she called the 'essentials of marital love' and we talked about eros, sexus, filia and agape. We also explored the fluctuating 'nature' of eros, sexus and filia - and we

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[66] I did not used the metaphor 'discourses' in other therapeutic conversations. I normally used metaphors like 'cultural voice' when I referred to discourses. Heidi, however, was a highly educated woman and it made good sense to use the metaphor 'cultural discourses' in our therapeutic conversations and in our reflexive conversations.

[67] cf. Pittman 1987

discussed the 'nature' of agape]. In the following excerpt she reflected on two discourses, i.e. **self-fulfilment** and **agape**:

> *Heidi:* *I think...my problem...I came to a stage in my life where I **sought more self-fulfilment**. I know you stressed self-fulfilment...i.e. **self-fulfilment cannot really produce any happiness**. You know, it is that kind of love [agape] that I **can give to another person** that **creates happiness....***

In a later reflexive conversation, we looked back on our conversations:

> *Therapist: What part of your personality did you come to know better during the past few weeks, i.e. since you and your husband resumed your marital relationship?*
>
> *Heidi:* *I think that I learned **more about that part of my personality that wants to give**.*
>
> *Therapist: And how is it?*
>
> *Heidi:* *It is **fulfilling**. It is...*
>
> *Therapist: Is it almost a **Mother Theresa fulfilment**?*
>
> *Heidi:* ***Yes....definitely. It is like buying something for somebody else instead of for myself. It is more delightful to give** to that person [i.e. for her husband] **and to see the happiness** [of my husband].*

To summarise: Heidi entered therapy struggling with the **discourses of eros and of self-fulfilment** on the one hand and the **discourse of agape** on the other hand. Our therapeutic conversations identified these discourses as local cultural discourses that had reified into ontological truths (Freedman & Combs 1996). We explored the powerful and subjugating effects of these discourses in the lives of the people sharing our culture (Lowe 1991). This led to a deconstruction of these discourses and Heidi was freed to make her own decisions. She dismissed the discourse of self-fulfilment and embraced once again the discourse of agape. Her choice brought its own a new kind of self-fulfilment, i.e. the self-fulfilment that accompanies agape.

Hare-Mustin (1994) criticised the traditional discourse of marriage where love is seen as taking care of somebody. According to Hare-Mustin (1994:31), this discourse still subjugates women:

> In the traditional discourse of marriage, love equals taking care of somebody. Men are expected to do this by economic provision, women by personal services and putting the other ahead of herself....Women are expected to give of themselves to men and children....at the expense of [women's selves]....For women, love equals selflessness... [they] measure [themselves] by [their] commitment to others.

The latter quote does not imply that Hare-Mustin opposed the discourse of agape. According to Hare-Mustin (1994), all views are relative and no value can claim to be the ultimate truth. On the question of whose values dictate the therapeutic conversation, Hare-Mustin suggested that the choice of values is the result of a social construction process, i.e. a dialogue. The therapist has to participate in this dialogue with 'self-reflexivity' about the assumptions that accompany cultural discourses (Hare-Mustin 1994). This must not lead to the assumption that whatever emerges from the social construction process is ethically worthwhile:

> I don't believe that all moral beliefs are created equal. The moral consensus of the world's major religions around the Golden Rule - do unto others as you would have others do unto you - is a far better guide to moral living than the...morality of self-interest in mainstream American society.

(Doherty 1995:41)

I participated in the dialogue with Heidi believing in the value of committed long-term relationships. My awareness of my ethical choices and of the assumptions that underlie these cultural discourses, opened the possibility to respect Heidi's preferences in life and in her relationships (Hare-Mustin 1994). On two occasions Heidi left her husband to live with her lover. I tried to follow her agenda in our therapeutic conversations and not to impose either my agenda or the agape discourse on her. At that time, I helped the Heidi and her husband in individual conversations to negotiate a peaceful divorce. In the end, Heidi decided to adhere

to the agape discourse after considering the discursive practices of **self-fulfilment** and of **agape**.

In reflecting on these matters, I recalled Doherty's memorable remarks concerning individualism, self-fulfilment, the lack of commitment to interpersonal relationships and psychotherapy's role in therapy and in shaping western culture:

> In the past, we [psychotherapists] naively believed that we were not moral
> consultants and moral learners..., that we could keep our hands clean of the
> moral residue from client's decisions, and that we could escape indefinitely the
> responsibility to define our ourselves morally in our professional roles to our
> clients, our colleagues, and our communities. **We can no longer hide behind**
> the wizard's **veil of clinical objectivity and moral neutrality**. The **culture we**
> **helped to shape** for a hundred years **is in crisis**, partly because people
> believed **what we** [psychotherapists] told them about the good life. I try to
> show...that psychotherapy has the resources to contribute to the formation of
> a new cultural ideal in which **personal fulfilment** will be seen **as part of a**
> **seamless web of interpersonal** and community **bonds** that **nurture us** and
> **create obligations** we cannot ignore and still be human [bold mine].

<div align="right">(Doherty 1995:20)</div>

Heidi's comments concerning her newly found self-fulfilment confirmed that self-fulfilment can be part of one's commitment to significant others. She said: '**It is like buying something for somebody else instead of for myself. It is more delightful to give to that person** [i.e. to her husband] **and to see the happiness** [of my husband]'.

In the next section I focus on the relation between equality in the therapeutic relationship and the client's embrace of the discourse of self-fulfilment.

15.5 Equality in the therapeutic relationship and the client's self-fulfilment

I must address one more question, namely, 'What is the relation between the client's preference for self-fulfilment and the pastoral therapist's honouring of equality in the therapeutic conversation?' I have already reflected on power issues in the therapeutic relationship:

- Pastoral therapy and extra-marital affairs (Section 1.7);
- Pastoral therapy as academic discourse (Section 5.4);
- The pastoral therapist and ethical awareness in a postmodernistic paradigm (Section 6.3); and
- Pastoral therapy and the unfaithful spouse (Chapter 13).

In all these sections we have seen that it is untenable for a pastoral therapist to take up a hierarchical and a 'one-up' position in the therapeutic relationship. This is even more true in pastoral therapy using a narrative approach. Hence, **equality in the therapeutic relationship** is one of the **pillars** of a narrative approach in pastoral therapy (Drewery & Winslade 1996; White 1995; White & Epston 1990; Monk 1996).

Self-fulfilment can be regarded as an ontic quality of modernistic life or it can be regarded as a discourse, i.e. as a social construction that exerts power over people's lives. Hence, the discourse of self-fulfilment can subjugate people. This has the implication that people who yearn 'to do their own thing' can actually be 'slaves' of the cultural discourse of self-fulfilment (Lowe 1991).

Equality in the pastoral therapeutic relationship must not, however, be equated to a subconscious embrace of the discourse of self-fulfilment. **The pastoral therapist can, in an effort to not impose his/her values and morals onto the client, surrender the client to subjugation to the self-fulfilment discourse** - i.e. the pastoral therapist can 'impose' the value of western individualism on the client. In this case, the pastoral therapist promotes the dominant cultural discourse of self-

interest (Doherty 1995). It follows that the client is not free to make ethically sound decisions.

In our last reflexive conversation Heidi and I talked about our therapeutic conversations. We reflected on the process of **deconstructing cultural discourses**. The following excerpt reflects something of this process:

Heidi: *You know, if people become engaged [in an extra-marital affair], if they are hooked and grow in such a thing [i.e. an affair]...to shift their ideas must be a great challenge.*

Therapist: *[To think in terms of discourses] makes it easy, because **I do not think you are naughty, or cantankerous, or sinful or difficult**. When you enter my office, I know you are a **nice woman** who is **subjugated by discourses**, that is by **voices**, by **cultural voices**. If I can **pull these cultural voices off you** like pulling a pack of wild dogs away from you, and you can settle down, take a deep breath and **make up your own mind**[68]...*

Heidi: *Yes.*

Therapist: *That is how I view [the problem]. I pull away those cultural voices that hit and hit and hit you until you get lost. [These cultural voices] bite and bite you like wild dogs. **I pull these dogs away and Heidi can become free to choose ethically whatever will be in the best interest of herself and her family**.*

Heidi: *Yes.*

Therapist: *Does it make sense? That is what happened?*

Heidi: *Yes. I have said it in other words, but **it is precisely what you have said just now**. I could not make a decision. I was totally indecisive and the whole time I heard all these things [i.e. the cultural voices or discourses]....*

Heidi was freed to make up her own mind in the interest of herself and her family when she reflected on all the relevant cultural discourses. In this case, the

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[68] The metaphors 'pack of wild dogs' and 'cultural voices' refer to fact that ideas in our society are not ontological realities but they are rather socially constructed ideas that exert power over people's lives.

discourse of self-fulfilment was one of the relevant discourses that was deconstructed.

15.6 Pastoral therapy, externalisation and the discourse of agape

Externalisation is a narrative therapeutic mode of conversation that separates the problem from the person (White & Epston 1990). Externalisation can be effective in marital therapy, i.e. in a therapeutic conversation with couples. by means of externalising conversations, the couple can be separated from their marital problem and the spouses can side as a team against the problem (cf. Müller 1996).

Andreas and his wife Loni came for therapy complaining about marital problems. They regarded the problem as the result of an extra-marital affair Andreas had had about two years before. Loni was still suspicious and she was unsure about Andreas' commitment to their marriage. She spied on her husband and periodically searched his belongings for some evidence of another extra-marital affair. Andreas hated Loni's paranoia and he distanced himself from her. This, in turn, led Loni to become quiet and brooding. The couple's attempt at communication failed.

In our therapeutic conversations, we called their problem 'the mud'. The following excerpt was part of a reflexive conversation. The couple's comments give us a picture of how a marital couple may experience externalising conversations:

> *Therapist: We talked at length about the problem, that is the problem of your family-in- law, the old extra-marital affair, the suspicion, the distancing and the spying that violates privacy and so on. Then we have gave the problem a name. We began to refer to the problem as 'the mud'. Did it help you?*
>
> *Andreas: Yes.*
>
> *Therapist: Could you tell me more? I wonder how you experienced it?*

Andreas: *Because...we generated a metaphor...'The mud' became the issue that we could attack....We[69] could attack 'the mud' and it was no longer an issue that was near us.*

Therapist: *Okay?...Did 'the mud' take the problem a little bit away from you?*

Andreas: *No, it did not take the problem away. I think it changed the problem so that we could better identify the problem - [something] that we could not have done on our own....*

Therapist: *Loni, do you want to say something about 'the mud'? I am talking about the metaphor of 'the mud' - what did it do to you and what did it mean to you?*

Loni: *You know, the metaphor of 'the mud' helped me to understand Andreas better....I think the fact that you have given it a name, i.e. 'the mud' put us on one side, together, against the 'the mud'[70]. I am not sure how to explain it, but it strengthened us against it.*

Therapist: *Against 'the mud'?*

Loni: *Yes, against 'the mud'. Yes, definitely.*

Andreas and Loni experienced that the problem had somehow changed. The problem was no longer an inherent deficit of their personalities or of their marital relationship (O'Hanlon 1994). The problem had become something outside of them. This enabled the couple to form a team against the problem. Andreas said; 'We could attack "the mud"'. Loni said that the metaphor 'put us on one side, together, against the "the mud"'. Hence, the externalisation of the problem enhanced their awareness as a couple and it formed them into a team that could tackle the problem. The externalisation of the problem promoted **their commitment**, i.e. their **agape**. It also boosted their reconciliation.

In reflecting on the matter, I realised that **externalisation is not an ethically neutral mode of conversation**. A pastoral therapist who uses externalisation

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[69] The reader will note that Andreas did not use a singular pronoun. He used the plural 'we'. This was an indication that the externalisation had caused him to story himself in such a way that he sided with his wife against 'the mud'.

[70] In Afrikaans she said: 'Ek dink die feit dat jy dit 'n naam gegee het dat dit modder is, het ons half bymekaar geskaar'.

inevitably enhances the couple's experience of themselves as a team, i.e. the pastoral therapist locates the couple in the sphere of the **discourse of agape**.

Externalising conversations are useful conversational 'tools' in pastoral therapy, because pastoral therapy has a vested interest in the discourse of agape.

A NARRATIVE APPROACH AS A REDUCTION
OF HUMAN LIFE?

16.1 Introduction

In this chapter I deal with the possibility that a narrative approach in pastoral therapy can be a reductionistic approach, i.e., it can reduce human life to discourses alone. Hence, it can ignore other major factors contributing to the generation of extra-marital affairs.

16.2 Pastoral therapy and the biological-psychological aspects of an affair

Despite the statistical evidence that more than half of all married men and women will, sometime in their married life, have to face the reality of an extra-marital affair, society as a whole still proclaims monogamy to be the norm. This ambivalent attitude towards extra-marital affairs will continue to ensure that extra-marital affairs are a secretive phenomenon (Kell 1992).

This secretive element of extra-marital affairs functions as a booster of the emotional anxiety and thrill of the involved lovers (Martin 1989:7; Lawson 1990:193-195). The emotional anxiety and thrill accompanies a physiological arousal that is associated with the activation of the sympathetic nervous system (Levinthal 1983). According to Levinthal (1983), the bodily signs of physiological arousal are the following:

- The heart rate accelerates and the volume of blood pumped by the heart increases;
- Blood vessels to the gastrointestinal tract constrict, but blood vessels to the muscles dilate;

- The person breathes more deeply and more rapidly;
- The eyes' pupils dilate to allow an increased amount of light to enter the eyes;
- The epinephrine level rises and the effect is that the level of blood sugar rises to supply more energy to the muscles.
- The hands may tremble and the face flushes.

(Levinthal 1983:334-337)

The secrecy of an extra-marital affair contributes to the above mentioned bodily signs as evidence of physiological arousal. Physiological arousal plays an important part in the lovers' experience of the intensity of eros and sexuality (Baron & Byrne 1987; Martin 1989). Schachter and Singer (1971b, quoted by Levinthal 1983) studied the relationship between physiological arousal and human emotions. In their well-conducted and now famous study, they not only found a positive relationship between human emotions and physiological arousal, but they also found the following relationship between physiological arousal, cognition and emotion:

- Given a state of physiological arousal for which an individual has no immediate explanation, he will label this state and describe his feelings in terms of the cognitions available to him...the same state of physiological arousal could be labelled 'joy', or 'fury', or any other of a great number of emotional labels, depending on the cognitive aspects of the situation [bold and italics mine].

- Given a state of physiological arousal for which an individual has a completely appropriate explanation..., no evaluative needs will arise and the individual is unlikely to label his feelings in terms of the alternative cognitions available.

(Levinthal 1983:334)

Reflecting on these discourses, I think that a pastoral therapist must bear in mind the (possible) relation between **secrecy, physiological arousal** and the interpretative and determinative potency of the **eros discourse and/or sex discourse** (Coulter 1986:122). Let me explain.

It is evident that most people who engage in an extra-marital relationship experience anxiety. Secrecy enhances the anxiety. The anxiety increases when the two lovers are on their journey to meet each other at a secret venue hoping to stay undetected. The corresponding physiological arousal is the basis of this amplified emotional anxiety. Once they meet, the lovers (may) attribute their physiological arousal to the cognitions available to them in the new situation, that is, in terms of the **social context** of **eros** and **sexuality** in the love relationship (Heelas 1986:233-261). Hence, the **secrecy** that initially evoked emotional anxiety and its counterpart, physiological arousal, and the **social context** have a profound effect on the lovers' experience or **storying of eros and love** (cf. Coulter 1986:122). The physiological arousal is socially interpreted in terms of the prevailing cultural love metaphors (cf. Heelas 1986:233-261).

If the lovers have the ability to discriminate between fear/anxiety and their feelings of eros/sexuality, this positive relation between secrecy and eros/sexuality may not exist. If they do not, the lovers story their physiological arousal as eros. Hence, physiological arousal plays a role in the storying of eros. The storying of eros is not only a relational linguistic construction. I wonder whether Gergen's (1994) **relational** social constructionist epistemology is not a **reduction** of human life to discourses alone (Doherty 1991). Secrecy, physiological arousal and social context have profound effects on how people story their relationship (Heelas 1986:252-261). The storying of an extra-marital affair may be more than a relational social construction. The pastoral therapist must be aware of this possibility.

In the next sections, I attend to extra-marital affairs as romantic and as sexual addiction.

16.3 Pastoral therapy and extra-marital affairs as addiction

16.3.1 The biological chemistry of sexual and romantic addiction

In reviewing the literature on extra-marital affairs, I learnt that there may be a **chemical addictive** element in people's involvement in extra-marital affairs. In this section, I reflect on this possibility.

Addiction is the out-of-control search for a mood change - either happiness or the avoidance of pain. Conducting extra-marital affairs can be addictive behaviour because the unfaithful spouse or the lover yearns for a romantic and often dependant relationship, in order to avoid pain or intimacy and to bring about the desired mood change (Martin 1989).

Referring to the chemical aspects of romantic addiction, Martin (1989:8-9, referring to Liebowitz 1983 and Rosenbaum 1984) summarised some of the research findings:

Research in the past ten years has shown there is even a chemical side to romance addiction....A substance known as phenylethylamine (or PEA) is released in the brain when a person becomes involved in a romantic situation. The PEA molecule, which is considered an excitatory amine, bears a striking structural similarity to the pharmaceutically manufactured stimulant amphetamine....The initial period of psycho-sexual attraction produces increased concentrations of the neurotransmitter-like substance phenylethylamine. The brain responds to this chemical in much the same fashion that it would to amphetamines or cocaine. Infatuated lovers seem to experience boundless energy, elation, and a remarkable sense of well-being....After a short time...lovers begin to recognise that their relationship is on a plateau....In chemical terms, the pleasure of falling in love is derived from steady increases in the rate of PEA production. When the rate of PEA production begins to level off, the honeymoon is over....The ecstasy of the relationship is over and depression, as well as the pain of withdrawal takes over. The love addict may go on to another new, exciting, tantalizing, infatuation relationship.... As the addict progressively loses control over the ability to stop or start their behaviour, the person moves away from the truth and compliance to their values and morals...Broken relationships, wrecked homes and marriages, disease, dishonesty, and insensitivity to the needs and feelings of others become the norm [bold mine].

Thus far, I have referred to the chemical aspects of romantic addiction and how they relates to extra-marital affairs. There is, however, another side of the same coin, i.e. sexual addiction.

16.3.2 Extra-marital sex as sexual addiction

Following on from the research of Carnes (1983, 1989), Virkler (1992) distinguished between three levels of sexual addiction. **Level 1** comprises compulsive masturbation, sexual extra-marital affairs, pornography and prostitution. **Level 2** includes exhibitionism and voyeurism, while **Level 3** includes rape, incest and child molestation.

The pathologisation of deviant sexual behaviour is a complex and culturally determined process (Louw D A 1989; Coleman et al 1987). The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (fourth edition) (DSM IV) does not include a category for **extra-marital sexual addiction** and not all of the above sexual behaviours are included in DSM IV. DSM IV does not include extra-marital affairs or extra-marital sexuality as one of its categories. Hence, in the eyes of DSM IV, extra-marital sex between two consenting adults is not a pathological act.

Although DSM IV does not include **sexual addiction** with regard to extra-marital sex as one of its categories, this does not mean that sexual addiction is non-existent. According to my chosen epistemology, i.e. postmodernistic social construction discourse, DSM IV does not mirror reality, nor does it represent reality. DSM IV is a cultural socio-linguistic discourse - that is, it is a discourse that is determined by a local culture (cf. the history of DSM I to IV and the debate on homosexuality, Coleman et al 1987). The fact that DSM IV omitted to include the possibility of extra-marital sex as a form of deviant behaviour or as a form of addiction simply means that western culture has lent its consent to extra-marital sex between two consenting adults.

Furthermore, DSM IV does include certain forms of sexual behaviour as deviant behaviour. Examples are exhibitionism and voyeurism. DSM IV thus regards certain types of sexual deviant behaviour as 'addictive' - that is, as pathological. Hence, the possibility of **sexual addiction** as such does exist.

I do not, however, want to argue for a pathologisation of extra-marital sex. Many extra-marital sexual encounters occur between psychologically healthy persons (Hunt 1969). I do, however, think that some people may suffer from **sexual**

addiction and that they act out this addiction in the form off **extra-marital sex** (Virkler 1992). If the same persons would act out their sexual addiction in the form of exhibitionism, for example, it would be pathological, according to DSM IV.

The fact that DSM IV includes a category like 'sexual addiction' with various forms of sexual addiction, but neglects the possibility of 'extra-marital sexual addiction' must not allow us to close our eyes to the possibility that heterosexual philanderers may be sexual addicts (Martin 1989; Virkler 1992; Brown 1991; Pittman 1990). Commenting on **sexual addiction** in **extra-marital relationships**, Virkler (1992:18-21) gave the following description:

> Most sexual addicts show acceptance of a spouse or sexual partner(s) in direct relation to how such people meet their sexual expectations. However, addicts eventually become habituated to each sexual activity and want something more. They lead their partners into more and more degrading activities in order to satisfy their own obsession with sexual experience. Addicts may resort to multiple affairs, often simultaneously. Usually the affairs are not satisfying, and they want to move on to another relationship as soon as sexual intercourse is achieved with the new partner....As a sexual addiction progresses, more and more of the sexual addict's entire life is spent either planning to satisfy his or her addiction or actually satisfying it. Other relationships...become less and less healthy....This is similar to the progression in alcohol or drug addiction.

On the other hand, according to postmodernistic social construction discourse as epistemology, we as pastoral therapists must bear in mind that the term **'sexual addiction'** is only a metaphor that does not necessarily reflect reality. The metaphor **'sexual addiction'** does, however, have **ethical consequences**, i.e. it exerts a constitutive power (cf. Dueck 1981:177).

I have referred on several occasions to the story of **Joy** in this report. To refresh the reader's memory of her story, I will briefly go over some of the details of her story. Joy had a long history of involvement in extra-marital sex. She was raped as a high school teenager by her brother and his friend. Since the trauma of the rape, she had numerous pre-marital sexual experiences and after she married, she engaged in about **thirty consecutive** extra-marital sexual relationships. Thirty

consecutive sexual relationships are a quite a number of sexual relationships for a woman still in her thirties. She was a devoted Christian that experienced severe cognitive dissonance. She tried to end her involvement in extra-marital sex and sought help from various therapists over many years, but all in vain. The following excerpt comes from a reflexive conversation Joy and I had near the end of my research:

> **Joy:** *I would like to believe it, this time may be the first time that I do not think who is going to be my next lover. In previous relationships I **always wondered who was going to be the next lover**.*
>
> **Therapist:** *Do you mean that you always wanted **another lover**?*
>
> **Joy:** *Yes....It was as if it happened **automatically**. Another lover came in the previous one's place. That is the way it was. I always knew that sooner of later, there would be a time of intense suffering because these things [affairs] are not permanent. Especially if the other person is a married person.*

Later on in the same conversation, we turned our attention to the **ecstasy element** of her extra-marital sex:

> **Joy:** *I am trying to get away from the **exhilarating ecstasy** that I have always yearned for.*
>
> **Therapist:** *Are you trying to break with the ecstasy?*
>
> **Joy:** *I try not to think about it.*
>
> **Therapist:** *It seems to me that the sexual ecstasy was like a power that bound you, that paralysed you, that towed you away from a normal marital life? Is that the case?*
>
> **Joy:** *It may be. The [extra-marital sexual] **ecstasy were wonderful experiences**.*
>
> **Therapist:** *It was wonderful, but also something that tried to destroy you?*
>
> **Joy:** *Maybe.*
>
> **Therapist:** *I am not sure?*
>
> **Joy:** *But it was **very special** for me.*
>
> **Therapist:** *Okay, it was special...*
>
> **Joy:** *But I do not think you get it [sexual ecstasy] **in a marital relationship**.*

Reflecting on the story of Joy, I cannot but wonder about the possibility of a **chemical romantic addiction** or of a **sexual addiction** that is acted out in extra-marital sex:

> Married women who are Sexual Addicts are harder to identify. Because sexual addiction is less 'acceptable' for women, they experience greater shame about their behaviour, and thus go to greater lengths to hide their addiction - from the therapist and from their spouse. If the therapist is not familiar with sexual addiction, several years may go by without surfacing this major issue.

> (Brown 1991:38)

Joy's stories about her many extra-marital sexual relationships may be more than social linguistic constructions. They may also reveal a pattern of sexual addiction.

16.4 Narrative therapy as a reduction of human life

Under the heading, **The storied nature of human life** in Section 4.2, I indicated that Gergen's (1994) discourse on the **relational** social construction of knowledge is a controversial stance. People's social constructions of their own stories may mostly be the product of social relationships, but I have indicated that food and other chemicals may have a profound effect on people's moods and thoughts, i.e. their narratives. Gergen's discourse may lead us to **ideologise** social construction discourses and to **reduce** people's narratives to discourses alone.

> Postmodernistic family therapy's emphasis on language, meaning, and narrative has enriched the field enormously, made it a more collaborative enterprise, and released us from the burden of finding the correct systemic interpretation of a family's problems. But therapists can overemphasise language and conversational narrative at the risk of reducing patterns of behaviour like physical abuse and incest to nothing more than the subjective and equivalent 'stories' of the participants.... If it is not careful, postmodernistic family therapy may end up engaging in just another modernist reduction of

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family experience, this time to discourse and the deconstruction of discourse....Perhaps a little modernist expertise is helpful at times.

(Doherty 1991:42)

A narrative approach in pastoral therapy may be **too reductionistic** to fully understand Joy's experience of extra-marital affairs. She may suffer from **sexual addiction** or **chemical romantic addiction**. It may be that there is more to affairs than the social construction of stories. Pastoral therapists must be aware of this possibility. We must be aware of the possibility that even our epistemology, i.e. postmodernistic social construction discourse, can be reified into a 'truth' and become just another institutionalised discourse, an ideology (Lowe 1991:45). These few caveats do not mean that a narrative approach is useless in the face of addiction. On the contrary, narrative therapists and 'addicts' may co-author new alternatives (Winslade & Smith 1996).

THEMES FOR FUTURE DIALOGUE

17.1 Anthropology and a narrative approach in pastoral therapy

One of the main concerns of modernistic pastoral therapy about psychotherapy was the latter's embrace of the inherent human potential or power of their clients, i.e. humanism (Adams 1973, 1976; De Klerk 1978; Heitink 1991). Humanism was one of the ideologies of modernism (Du Toit 1996:72). Taken at face value, narrative therapy seems to proceed along the same lines as modernistic individualism and humanism. This is not the case. **There are important differences between humanistic psychotherapy and narrative therapy:**

> [**Discourses**] are the frameworks we use to make sense of the world, and **they structure** our relations with one another. Seen in this context, power is not the 'possession' of particular persons, nor is it a finite quantity so that the more power is possessed by certain persons, the less there is for others to exert... This understanding of the operation of power is quite different from the **humanistic interpretation** that is familiar to most counsellors. In **humanistic discourse**, the ideal person is positioned as a kind of 'prime mover'.... The well-functioning person in the humanistic mode is one who is 'in control of his life', a person who has choices and makes them consciously. Our [**narrative**] **theory** suggests that healthy personal positioning is quite **different** from this, but we do not want to say that persons have less power. Indeed, **making meaning is a serious and ethical business** in which what each of us does counts, and we have no option but to take notice of each other.... no one has complete power over himself or his environment, and... we live in social contexts where many different, often potentially conflicting, **discourses operate. Discourses...offer** us positions in patterns of relationship with other people. Discourses often come to have a prescriptive function [bold mine].

(Drewery & Winslade 1996:35-36)

Hence, modernistic psychotherapy bolstered the potential inherent resources of the individual, while narrative therapy deconstructs and co-constructs discourses. We as humans are bound to a linguistic mode of living, i.e. we are bound to discourses and we live at the mercy of discourses. Bearing in mind postmodernistic social construction discourse as epistemology, and given the fact that theological (and other cultural) discourses interpret and constitute people's lives, I am more at home with a narrative approach in pastoral therapy than with the humanistic approach of modernistic psychotherapy.

In any therapeutic approach, the therapist utilises a certain **anthropology**. In **pastoral** therapy, however, we are inevitably confronted with the question of anthropology (Adams 1976; Heitink 1979, 1991; Browning 1993; Louw 1993). Anthropology relates to ethics (Louw 1993:117). I have indicated that a narrative approach in pastoral therapy has a vital interest in postmodernistic ethics - a stance that reflects a certain anthropology that relates to theological anthropology (Kotzé 1992). This link is, however, in the context of a **narrative approach** in **pastoral therapy**, open to further dialogue and exploration.

A narrative approach in pastoral therapy involves a certain anthropology. A narrative approach in pastoral therapy does not 'treat' people by 'diagnosing' some inherent deficit to find a 'solution' (Drewery & Winslade 1996:41). The following crucial quote reflects the fact that a particular anthropology is congruent with narrative therapy:

> **If you don't believe, to the bottom of your soul, that people are social and personal constructions**, then you won't be seeing these transformations. When Epston or White are in action, you can tell **they are absolutely convinced that people are not their problems**. Their voices, their postures, their whole beings radiate possibility and hope. They are definitely under the influence of Optimism [bold mine].

(O'Hanlon 1994:28)

A narrative approach is about a battle of discourses and how people participate in the battle (Lowe 1991; Winslade et al 1996) and not about inherent deficits in people (McKenzie & Monk 1996). Hence, the anthropology of a narrative approach

in pastoral therapy cannot accommodate entirely the anthropological slogan 'man's sinful nature' of modernistic approaches in pastoral therapy (cf. Louw 1993:102-157). On the one hand, Louw (1993:103) criticised this 'hamartologizing theology'. On the other hand, his entire approach endorsed it.

A narrative approach in pastoral therapy raises many anthropological questions. To my mind, the dialogue on the theme of anthropology in a narrative approach in pastoral therapy is open to further co-constructions. I am not suggesting that we must try to discover some objective anthropological truths in Scripture. In dialogue with our theological tradition, and in dialogue with various cultural postmodernistic discourses about our humanity [e.g., 'people are social and personal constructions' (O'Hanlon 1994:28)], we will (inevitably) co-construct a new theological anthropology.

This new co-constructed theological anthropology will not be just another true and stable doctrine. True to postmodernistic social construction discourses as epistemology it will be a preliminary, temporary and culturally bound anthropology. It will be a local anthropology.

17.2 Equality in the therapeutic relationship and the client's self-fulfilment

Pastoral therapy as such values an equality in the therapeutic relationship between pastoral therapist and client (Pieterse 1993a; Van der Ven 1991). A narrative approach in pastoral therapy emphasises an equality in the therapeutic relationship even more (Dill 1996) because it views the client as the expert. Therefore the therapist participates in the dialogue from a not-knowing position, i.e. the client knows what is best for his/her life (Anderson & Goolishian 1992). Hence, a narrative approach in pastoral therapy values the client's self-fulfilment.

If we view self-fulfilment as ontologically 'good', i.e. as a positive ethical value and if we honour it as the right of the client to embark on a road to self-fulfilment, then it makes sense to honour the client as the expert of his/her life. However, if we view self-fulfilment as a local western cultural discourse of the twentieth century that can exert power over people's lives, then this very discourse may

oppress people and imprison them (Lowe 1991:45).

I have indicated that the client may suffer under the burden of the self-fulfilment discourse and abandon his/her marriage and family in order to 'live my own free life and to do my own thing' (Section 15.4). In this case, the client's expertise and freedom are misguided expertise and freedom. The client is actually a victim of the self-fulfilment discourse. Doherty (1995:30-31) reflected on the clash between self-fulfilment and marital commitment in therapeutic conversations:

> Therapists treating individuals who are in distressed marriages are in a powerful position to encourage or discourage marital commitment. The assumptions embedded in the very language of therapy can move people away from their marital commitment. Every time therapists ask questions in the order of 'What are you getting out of this marriage?' and 'Why are you staying?' they implicitly encourage divorce by focusing on a self-interested cost-benefit analysis of what the client is deriving from the relationship....I want to be clear here: self-interest is a valid and even necessary component of a marital commitment decision. My concern is that self-interest is often the only language accepted in therapy when an individual is making fateful decisions about ending a marriage [bold mine].

(Doherty 1995:30-31)

If we view 'self-fulfilment' as a local western cultural discourse of the twentieth century that dominates people's (i.e. the client's and the therapist's!) lives - even in the therapy room (Hare-Mustin 1994), then the value of equality in the therapeutic relationship becomes a blurred issue. Many questions arise if we view self-fulfilment as a dominating cultural discourse that dominates therapist and client. I wonder what the outcome will be of a dialogue on the relationship between 'equality in the therapeutic relationship', and 'self-fulfilment as a dominating cultural discourse'.

WHAT I HAVE LEARNT

18.1 Introduction

According to postmodernistic epistemology, local communities construct their own truths. These truths cannot be singular or universal truths. Hence, in this concluding chapter, I report some of the insights that I have gained from a narrative approach in pastoral therapy with extra-marital affairs. These insights involve local knowledge and may not be applicable to all situations. For a more detailed discussion of the issue of local knowledge I refer the reader to Sections 3.6 to 3.7.

18.2 Pastoral therapy and the discourse of eros

I have learnt that eros is not an inherent part of human nature, nor does it exist in all cultures. Eros is, like all other human emotions, a local and social linguistic construct that has been institutionalised into an ontic reality. When it is perceived as an ontic reality, the discourse of eros exerts tremendous power over people and their relationships in the western world (Sections 9.1 and 9.2). The discourse of eros is one of the main forces in the constitution of extra-marital relationships. Hence, the discourse of eros dominates people, in the first place, urging them to engage in extra-marital relationships, and, in the second place, the discourse of eros dominates unfaithful spouses to such an extent that they are not free to choose their own course of action or thought (Section 9.2.2).

A narrative approach in pastoral therapy has enabled me and the conversational participants to deconstruct the cultural discourse of eros to some degree. This set the conversational participants free to ponder the course of their (ethical) actions. It enabled them to decide for themselves which way they wanted to go in their marital relationships. Hence, they accept more accountability for their actions and

their effects on family members (Chapter 10).

18.3 Pastoral therapy and the discourses of hedonism, self-fulfilment and extra-marital sex

The meaning of sex is not a fixed entity. A local community co-constitutes the meaning of sex. In western society, the discourses of hedonism and of self-fulfilment play an important role in the co-construction of the meaning of sex. Hence, the meaning of sex differs over time and space. The meaning of sex operates as a cultural discourse that exerts power over people's lives and relationships. In western society, the meanings of marital sex and extra-marital sex may differ. Extra-marital sex is probably co-constituted by the discourses of hedonism and self-fulfilment (Sections 11.1 and 11.2)

I have learnt that a conversational participant and I could deconstruct the discourse of extra-marital sex. This deconstruction freed the unfaithful spouse to re-author her preferred identity and to engage in her preferred marital relationship (Section 11.3).

18.4 Pastoral therapy and the faithful spouse

I have learnt that most of the faithful spouses wanted to save their marriages. Fortunately, extra-marital affairs have a limited life span (cf. Section 12.2). Most faithful spouses experience the breach of trust as devastating. They feel worthless, rejected, and blame themselves for the unfaithfulness of the unfaithful spouse and are prone to depression (cf. Sections 12.3 and 12.4). If they can survive and outstay the extra-marital affair, they may save their marriages. The problem is, however, how to survive emotionally and physically in these stressful situations. Cultural myths/discourses in western society co-constitute the faithful spouse's blaming of the self. It is possible to deconstruct these discourses (cf. Section 12.4).

Furthermore, the faithful spouse usually tells the story in the linguistic domain of risk and incompetence. This storying is constitutive and interpretative of future events and of the self and relationships. Hence, this storying incapacitates the

story teller and the devastation and stress increases to the point where the faithful spouse abandons any hope and quits the marital relationship. A narrative approach in pastoral therapy is aware of the constitutive effects of all metaphors. In conversations with the faithful spouse, it is possible to transfer the conversation from the linguistic domain of risk and incompetence to the linguistic domain of competence (cf. Section 12.3). The faithful spouse then begins to story the self as competent and he/she survives and lives through and beyond the limited life span of the extra-marital affair. Hence, the chances of saving the marriage increase.

In this storying process, religious discourses play an important role because the faithful spouse usually turn to God for help. Some religious discourses, however, may actually disable the faithful spouse (cf. Section 12.5). In such cases, it may be necessary to deconstruct those discourses. Christians who adhere to foundationalist theology are usually not keen to criticise their own dogmas. Deconstruction may offer a mode of conversation that is comfortable for these Christians. Deconstruction is less adversarial and less dogmatic. It is a process that is less overtly critical or confrontational (cf. Section 12.5).

18.5 Pastoral therapy and the unfaithful spouse

18.5.1 Pastoral therapy and hamartologizing the extra-marital affair

Hamartologizing the extra-marital relationship usually leads the pastoral therapist to confront the unfaithful spouse with modernistic knowledge of theological ethics. This mode of pastoral therapy is of no use in the case of extra-marital affairs (Section 13.2.1) In modernistic pastoral therapy the therapist listens emphatically to the 'facts' of the story in order to befriend the unfaithful spouse. This enables the pastoral therapist to confront the unfaithful spouse at a later stage (Virkler 1992).

In a modernistic and positivistic paradigm the essential and dogmatic 'truth' about marriage and affairs functions as a fixed and divine ethical reference point in the pastoral therapeutic encounter. The pastoral therapist's linguistic constructions of the will of God function as the ultimate agenda of the therapy. Hence, the 'biblical

truth' becomes the eventual, actual, and sometimes hidden, but always the ultimate agenda of the pastoral therapist. This modernistic pastoral agenda replaces the agenda/story of the unfaithful spouse and the pastoral therapist has hamartologised the situation (Sections 1.7.1 to 1.7.3 and 13.4). The unfaithful spouse - being 'bulldozed' - is defenceless before such an 'onslaught' and he/she often terminates the therapeutic conversations.

A modernistic approach implies an adherence to theological ethics in such a way that the pastoral therapist ignores the context of the unfaithful spouse. This stance jeopardises the power balance in the therapeutic relationship. A direct theological confrontation of the unfaithful spouse as a mode of pastoral therapy is not useful because the unfaithful spouse usually terminates the therapeutic conversations (Section 13.2.1). This means that an open Bible in a pastoral therapeutic conversation with an unfaithful spouse can do more harm than good.

I have learnt that a narrative approach in pastoral therapy honours the story of the unfaithful spouse as the agenda of the therapy. Hence, the unfaithful spouse experiences herself/himself as 'being heard'. This experience is vital for the continuity of the dialogue - and dialogue is the only means of co-constructing alternative and preferred ways of living. I elaborate on this theme in the following sections.

18.5.2 Breaking the unfaithful spouse's isolation

The unfaithful spouse experiences devastating loneliness and isolation and can talk to nobody except the lover. This isolation is caused by western society's ambiguity towards extra-marital affairs. Western society is fascinated by romance and the idea of an extra-marital affair. On the other hand, western society condemns it and shuns the unfaithful spouse. Hence, the unfaithful spouse can only talk to the lover. This process sustains the extra-marital affair. It is of the utmost importance to be aware of the unfaithful spouse's isolation and loneliness. The pastoral therapeutic conversation must be an open space where the unfaithful spouse can talk freely. The emotional intimacy that is co-constructed in the pastoral conversations must be superior to the intimacy in the extra-marital relationship - if it is attainable. In this way the pastoral therapeutic conversations

free the unfaithful spouse from his/her isolation. The pastoral therapist must become one of the unfaithful spouse's confidant(e)s.

18.5.3 Pastoral therapy: Listening as deconstruction

I can only help the unfaithful partner if **the conversation is an ongoing process**. According to the chosen postmodernistic epistemology, dialogue is the only way to come to new meaning and new alternatives (Brueggemann 1993; Dill 1996; Gerkin 1991; Hoffman 1990; Hoffman-Hennessy & Davis 1993; Kotzé 1994; Kotzé 1996a; Mahrer 1995; Monk 1996; Wylie 1994b). It is only through continued dialogue that we can embark on a social de-construction process to de-construct those discourses that hold the unfaithful captive (White & Epston 1990; White 1991, 1995).

In a modernistic paradigm, stories 'function as conveyers of objective knowledge' (Gergen & Kaye 1992:168). Seen from the perspective of postmodernistic social construction discourse as epistemology, however, the telling of a story is not simply the re-duplication of already known facts of previous events. The 'facts' of a story do not exist beforehand in a kind of reservoir in unfaithful spouse's mind. Every re-telling of a story is a new creation, a new construction of new alternative stories (Le Roux 1996:50). To **listen** to that story, is to co-create a new story because I am **listening** to the not-yet-said that did not exist beforehand (Anderson & Goolishian 1988:380). In other words, **listening is not a passive activity**. Whenever I listen, I interpret (Freedman and Combs 1996:45).

Deconstructive listening is guided by the principle that stories do not have one core and fixed meaning (Polkinghorne 1995). Deconstructive listening implies that I search for the unintended and unquestioned assumptions inherent in the story. The focus is on the gaps, silences and ambiguities in the story (Lowe 1991). Hence, deconstructive listening can be seen as a form of demythologisation (Hartin 1986). To conclude: Listening is an active process in which the unfaithful spouse and pastoral therapist co-construct new alternative meanings (Section 13.1). In this sense, listening is an **ethical** activity. It is co-constitutive and interpretative for the unfaithful spouse.

18.5.4 Pastoral therapy and listening: guilt and love

Furthermore, the unfaithful spouse's sense of guilt and anxiety is allayed to some degree via my mode of attentive listening. Listening leads the unfaithful spouse to the experience of being loved and respected. In its turn, this experience causes the unfaithful spouse to experience the love of God (Section 13.4). The process of attentive listening creates room for the unfaithful spouse to be his/her own audience and to be compassionate with himself/herself (Winslade et al 1996:64, 66).

May be, **love** (agape) in **pastoral** therapy is to listen attentively to another person's story and love is to respect the client's story as the only agenda of the conversation. It implies that the pastoral therapist must not force his/her own issues to become the agenda of the conversation (Section 13.4).

18.5.5 Pastoral therapeutic conversations without the Bible can still be theological-ethical conversations

I have learnt that unfaithful spouses do not want to talk explicitly about theological ethics, i.e. about God's will. In our reflecting conversations, however, conversational participants **experienced** our conversations as **ethical** conversations. Although we did not open the Bible and although I did not refer to biblical texts, we were not dodging the **theological-ethical** questions (Section 13.2.3). It seems as though the key concern in connection with ethics is **not** the **conspicuous ethical decisions** of the unfaithful spouse. The **key issue** is, instead, the **ethical constituting force** of **any dialogue.**

Dialogue has extraordinary power to re-describe reality or people. Dialogue interprets and alters the previous stories and in doing so, interprets and alters the previous reality. The new co-constructed story is in itself a novel story. This is an alternative story with an alternative ethical stance and views. In dialogue, we experience the metamorphosis of a story, i.e. the self and its relationships (cf. Van Niekerk 1994; Parry 1991). Pastoral therapy implies that we enter into an ongoing linguistic co-construction process in which stories and the reality they represent,

i.e. ourselves and our relationships, change (cf. Gergen 1994). Hence, the ethical stance or views of the unfaithful spouse inevitably change through the mere engagement in dialogue - even if the pastoral therapist and the unfaithful spouse do not talk directly about God.

An important question emerges at this point: Does it mean that pastoral therapeutic conversations with unfaithful spouses are not necessarily **theological-ethical** conversations?

16.5.6 Pastoral conversations are not ethically neutral but inevitably theological-ethical conversations

Pastoral therapy is an ethical enterprise because it cannot happen other than through language. Language is a composition of metaphors and each metaphor has an implicit ethical mandate (Dueck 1991:177-178). Hence, ethical neutrality in therapy simply does not exist. The **mere presence of metaphors** in a therapeutic conversation **renders the conversation an ethical conversation. Ethical neutrality** in pastoral therapy (or in secular therapy) **is an illusion.** I cannot participate in a dialogue without certain images of an (ideal) marriage or family. It **is never a question of ethical neutrality**, but always a question of whose and what culture's ideal images. These images are not universal and timeless images. They relate to a particular time, place and history - that is to a specific culture. The pastoral therapist's choice of the **model** of an **ideal couple** relates to theological discourses (cf. White 1995:19). I have learnt that I must participate in the therapeutic conversation from an **awareness** (cf. Vossen 1991:47-50) of my **ideal images** and their cultural and **theological** connectedness, and from an awareness of the ethical constitutive power of all metaphors, sentences and questions (cf. Sections 6.3.1 to 6.3.7).

Eros is a metaphor for a phenomenon that is akin to western culture's experiences of love. The discourse of eros co-constitutes an extra-marital affair in some way. In a pastoral therapeutic conversation with the unfaithful spouse, we inevitably talk about the discourse of eros. Eros is a selfish orientation that complies with individualist self-fulfilment, while biblical agape is an unselfish orientation in marital relationships (Louw 1983:50-68). If these two discourses (eros and agape) are

compatible in a Christian marriage, then the question remains as to the relation between eros and agape. Both these discourses have profound effects on the course of and satisfaction in a couple's marital life (Lawson 1990:21-28; Louw 1983:50-68).

A deconstructive conversation about eros has the power to shape people's marital lives, i.e. it has ethical consequences. The **deconstruction of eros** shifts the **relationship** between **eros** and **biblical agape** - even if agape is not the topic of the conversation. The deconstruction of eros co-constructs an alternative meaning for biblical agape. Hence, a pastoral therapeutic conversation about eros, even **without an explicitly religious agenda,** remains a **theological-ethical** conversation because the discourse of agape alters its meaning (Section 13.2.4)

I have found Gerkin's (1991:58-62) distinction between the logical ethical reasoning of theologians and the common sense of ordinary people enlightening. **Ordinary people** do not appropriate **theological ethics** by means of logical theological discourses, but they operate intuitively within **cultural narratives** that contain **ethical** metaphors and images, i.e. they operate with **'common sense'** (Gerkin 1991:49-62). These narrative ethical metaphors and images do not exist in a pure theological form. They are, instead, a **fusion** of **theological** and **cultural** metaphors, images and narratives; so much so, that in real life the theological and cultural elements of these ethical images cannot be distinguished (Gerkin 1991:56-64). Hence, a person's **'common sense'** is not a self-sufficient ethical entity but rather relates to the **common sense of the community** in which the person lives. I have learnt to look out for the presence of ethical issues that are **embedded in** the cultural metaphors, images and narratives and to co-reflect with unfaithful spouses on those metaphors, images and narratives (Section 13.2.6).

As a pastoral therapist, I participated in the therapeutic conversations listening to the problematic discourses of unfaithful spouses and to the core metaphors, values and meanings of the Christian narrative. These dialogues are hermeneutical and interpretative dialogues where the relevant **'horizons fuse'** and they create a new understanding that is unique to the situation, i.e. a **new ethical stance** (Gerkin 1991:20-21). Although **theological ethics** did **not** surface **explicitly** (Dill 1996; Müller 1996) in our conversations, it did prevail in the conversation in an **implicit way** (Kotzé & Botha 1994; Müller 1996).

Furthermore, people's stories do not exist in their heads in a pre-packed format ready for despatch. Every telling of a story is a re-telling - not in the sense of duplicating the previous and existing story, but in the sense of co-constructing a new story. Out of a rather loose aggregate of events in the (un)faithful' spouse's life and in the presence of the therapist's being and story, a new story is told (Freedman & Combs 1996) This new story is a co-construction of a novel reality and identity. In the event of the therapist being a **pastoral** therapist, the (un)faithful spouse stories her/his story inevitably in the light of the Story of God. Hence, all stories told in the presence of a pastoral therapist are religious stories, i.e. novel religious co-constructions (Sections 6.1 and 6.2).

18.5.7 *Pastoral ethics cannot be ideological: Socially constructed ethics*

Because narrative therapy is an ethical enterprise (White 1995), it is, on a certain level, a therapeutic discourse that renders itself very useful as a pastoral therapeutic enterprise. However, on another level, the **kind of ethics** that narrative therapy constructs in a dialogue is **at odds** with the **fixed and dogmatic** version of modernistic theological ethics. I have learnt that a narrative approach in pastoral therapy has a much more nuanced way of dealing with the ethical issues in the lives of unfaithful spouses. I learned that I can only understand socially constructed ethics if I understand the difference between a modernistic and a postmodernistic epistemology (cf. Sections 3.2 and 3.3) and the metaphorical nature of all speech (Sections 3.3; 5.2.2 and 5.2.3; and 6.3.4 to 6.3.7)

Conversational participants valued **the hypothetical way** in which I presented ideas, leaving it up for them to **decide their own course** (Section 13.2.2). I have learnt that a narrative approach in pastoral therapy enables me to honour the unfaithful spouse's personal needs (Dill 1996). Hence, I learned that a narrative approach in pastoral therapeutic conversations with unfaithful spouses cannot be ethically ideological. That is, I may not impose my theological-ethical constructions on the unfaithful spouse, simply because we do not have an authentic or original version of biblical ethics. We may have a contemporary fixed and dogmatic ethic, but these ethical discourses are not authentic biblical versions. We only have

ethical discourses that are products of our culture. Our contemporary ethical discourses seem fixed and dogmatic, but this is an illusion. Ethical discourses, as part of theological discourses, are always on the move, never settled, never fixed and always preliminary. People's understanding of the 'will of God' changes in relation to the metaphorical changes in their culture (Van Aarde 1995b). (I do not intend to elaborate on these ideas as I have already explained it in Sections 5.2 and 6.3). Hence, I must bear in mind that I cannot absolutize my version of biblical ethics (cf. Section 13.4). The above idea implies that ethics in pastoral therapeutic conversations with (un)faithful spouses are **socially constructed ethics**:

> The exploration of moral issues in therapy does not occur mainly inside the head of the therapist playing moral philosopher or moral judge. It occurs in the heart of the **therapeutic dialogue**, in conversations in which the therapist listens, reflects, acknowledges, questions, probes and challenges – and in which **the client is free** to do the same and to develop a more integrated set of moral sensibilities. Morality emerges for all of us from **social interaction** punctuated by **moments of personal reflection**[71]. Morality, in the words of the sociologist Alan Wolfe, is 'socially constructed': 'Morality thus understood is neither a fixed set of rules handed down unchanging by powerful structures nor something that is made up on the spot. It is a negotiated process through which individuals, by reflecting periodically on what they have done in the past, try to ascertain what they ought to do next... **Moral obligation [is] a socially constructed practice**' [bold mine].

(Doherty 1995:37)

Furthermore, I have learnt that metaphorical speech is always preliminary, always conscious of other possible   signification(s) and of other realities. Hence, metaphorical speech cannot insist on being univocal but has to respect and allow for different voices (Van Niekerk 1994). In this sense, metaphorical speech allows for the interests of the unfaithful spouse. **Metaphorical speech is love** (Van Niekerk 1994). In my personal reflection on the remark, 'Metaphorical speech is love', I consider this statement as one of the most important contributions of a narrative approach in pastoral therapy.

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[71] Spokie said: 'You left me with ideas to ponder and to find my own way.' Andreas said: 'I had the opportunity to work through problems on my own...'

My theological-ethical choice of the 'reign of God' as it is shown in agape-relationships, is, in a certain sense, an **open-ended choice** (Dueck 1991:201; Gerkin 1991:19). Agape **cannot** be a **fixed and divine point of reference** that determines the pastoral therapist's agenda of the conversation. In the co-construction of alternative life possibilities, it remains the unfaithful spouse's **prerogative** and **accountability** to author his/her own life.

18.5.8 Externalisation enhances the ethical abilities of the unfaithful spouse

I have learnt that externalizing conversations are a rhetorical tool that enable me to not hamartologise unfaithful spouses' situation. Externalisation enabled me to view these people, not primarily as sinners but as victims of powerful cultural discourses. Furthermore, externalizing the problem, i.e. separating the client from the problematic discourses, enhances the ethical abilities of the client to accept more accountability and take responsibility for the self and its relationships (Sections 10.2; 11.3.2 and 13.2.7).

18.5.9 Ritualisation enhances the ethical abilities of the unfaithful spouse

I have learnt that all acts or events, even those of **rituals and symbolic** actions, are readable texts and therefore constitutive for people's storying processes. Therefore rituals and symbols relate in a profound way to social constructionist ideas in therapy (Gilligan 1993; Imber-Black 1989). People involved in extra-marital affairs may perform a ritual act to re-story their lives.

I have also learnt that rituals and symbols can help people to **existentially** experience their **rational** religious beliefs to such an extent that they re-story themselves. Rituals are appropriate social constructionist tools to help unfaithful spouses to re-story themselves in terms of **familiar** religious beliefs that are experientially unfamiliar (Gilligan 1993). If unfaithful spouses can experience a new religious identity by means of a ritual or a symbol, it enhances their

theological-ethical ability to accept more accountability for their actions (Section 13.2.8).

18.5.10 A narrative approach and the unfaithful spouse's secret

Must the unfaithful spouse keep or disclose the secret of the affair? I have learnt that there are opposing therapeutic views. The one view propounds that the disclosure of the secret is a prerequisite for marital reconciliation and for success in therapy (cf. Pittman 1990). The second view honours the unfaithful spouse's preference to keep the secret (cf. Kaslow 1993). To my mind the latter view is more akin to a narrative approach in pastoral therapy, because the pastoral therapist honours

- the imprisoning and constitutive effects of discourses in the life of the unfaithful spouse (Lowe 1991); and
- the context, i.e. the person involved (Dill 1996).

This stance does not imply that a narrative approach in pastoral therapy supports and sustains the secret in the life of an unfaithful spouse. It does, however, view the unfaithful spouse positively and hopefully (O'Hanlon 1994). It sides with the unfaithful spouse who is deceitful and seeks to find those discourses that keep the unfaithful spouse captive and dishonest (White 1995). A narrative approach in pastoral therapy eventually tries to deconstruct those discourses in order to set the unfaithful spouse free. A narrative approach is about a battle of discourses (Lowe 1991; Winslade et al 1996). In this way the unfaithful spouse's ethical abilities may be enhanced (Section 13.3)

18.6 A narrative approach in pastoral therapy and the use of Scripture

A conversational participant that read the biblical stories as stories became involved in a creative process in which the biblical story invited the reader to participate in a co-construction of a new and alternative self-narrative (Section 14.2; cf. also Brueggemann 1993:41; Firet & Vossen 1991:123). If we view the

Bible as a collection of stories, then the open-endedness of the stories invites the reader to become a participant in the story and to co-construct his/her own novel reality. Hence, a view of the Bible as a collection of stories is appropriate for postmodernistic epistemology. This particular view of the Bible complies with a narrative approach in pastoral therapy (Section 14.2 and 14.3).

Furthermore, a conversational participant benefited from a meditative and contemplative reading of the text (Section 14.2). Meditation honours the biblical stories as **stories** and resembles a narrative mode of reading the Scriptures (Brueggemann 1993:67-71; cf. also Nicol 1994b). In meditation, a person utilises his/her imagination and visualises him/herself as one of the biblical characters in the story and identifies with a character and adopts the perspective, feelings and attitudes of the characters (Foster 1989, 1992; Veltkamp 1988). This imagined construct is not reality - just like all other linguistic constructions are not reality. Meditative imagination deepens the person's participation in that reality which it seeks to create (Hudson 1995:67-68). Hence, in meditation, we become participants in the biblical story.

In reviewing the matter, I feel that the method of meditation and contemplation is an appropriate method to use the Scriptures in a narrative approach in pastoral therapy because of its open-endedness. The outcome of the meditation is the prerogative of the person who meditates (Sections 14.2 and 14.3).

18.7 Pastoral therapy and the discourses of self-fulfilment and agape

A narrative approach in pastoral therapy with people who are involved in extra-marital affairs usually encounters the discourses of **self-fulfilment** and of **sacrificial love, i.e. agape as commitment** (Section 15.4). The discourse of self-fulfilment is a local cultural discourse that has been reified into an ontological truth. The discourse of self-fulfilment sustains the ever-growing individualism in western society. This discourse has a profound effect on how people experience their marital lives and spouses (cf. Dueck 1991:177-201), because it is usually in conflict with the discourse of agape (Louw 1993:50-68). A conversational

participant struggled with the discourse **of self-fulfilment** on the one hand, and **the discourse of agape** on the other hand.

The deconstruction of the discourse of self-fulfilment frees people to make their own decisions. This leads people to embrace the discourse of agape. But how do we know that the discourse of agape is ethically, spiritually or psychologically healthy? I have learnt that I cannot participate in pastoral therapeutic conversations free of discourses. Therefor, I had to make up my mind in terms of preferred (theological) discourses. With Doherty (1995;41) I believe that the discourse of self-fulfilment is not the best choice and I prefer the discourse of biblical agape:

> I don't believe that all moral beliefs are created equal. The moral consensus of
> the world's major religions around the Golden Rule - do unto others as you
> would have others do unto you - is a far better guide to moral living than
> the...morality of self-interest in mainstream American society.

I believe, in congruence with my **theological tradition**, in the **value** of committed long term **marital relationships** (Section 6.3.7). My awareness of my ethical choice and of the assumptions that underlie these discourses (Sections 6.3.2 to 6.3.6), have hopefully opened the possibility of **honouring conversational participants' preferences** in terms of their life and of their relationships (Hare-Mustin 1994).

18.8 Equality in the therapeutic relationship and the client's self-fulfilment.

Equality in the therapeutic relationship is one of the pillars of a narrative approach in pastoral therapy (Drewery & Winslade 1996; White 1995; White & Epston 1990; Monk 1996). Hence, the client's self-fulfilment is of the utmost importance in therapeutic conversations. I have learnt that the discourse of self-fulfilment is not only operative in the private lives of people. This discourse operates actively **within the four walls of the therapy room** (cf. Hare-Mustin 1994) and it may

My theological-ethical choice of the 'reign of God' as it is shown in agape-relationships, is, in a certain sense, an open-ended choice (Dueck 1991:201; Gerkin 1991:19). Agape cannot be a fixed and divine point of reference that determines the pastoral therapist's agenda of the conversation. In the co-construction of alternative life possibilities, it remains the unfaithful spouse's prerogative and accountability to author his/her own life.

18.5.8 Externalisation enhances the ethical abilities of the unfaithful spouse

I have learnt that externalizing conversations are a rhetorical tool that enable me to not hamartologise unfaithful spouses' situation. Externalisation enabled me to view these people, not primarily as sinners but as victims of powerful cultural discourses. Furthermore, externalizing the problem, i.e. separating the client from the problematic discourses, enhances the ethical abilities of the client to accept more accountability and take responsibility for the self and its relationships (Sections 10.2; 11.3.2 and 13.2.7).

18.5.9 Ritualisation enhances the ethical abilities of the unfaithful spouse

I have learnt that all acts or events, even those of rituals and symbolic actions, are readable texts and therefore constitutive for people's storying processes. Therefore rituals and symbols relate in a profound way to social constructionist ideas in therapy (Gilligan 1993; Imber-Black 1989). People involved in extra-marital affairs may perform a ritual act to re-story their lives.

I have also learnt that rituals and symbols can help people to existentially experience their rational religious beliefs to such an extent that they re-story themselves. Rituals are appropriate social constructionist tools to help unfaithful spouses to re-story themselves in terms of familiar religious beliefs that are experientially unfamiliar (Gilligan 1993). If unfaithful spouses can experience a new religious identity by means of a ritual or a symbol, it enhances their

theological-ethical ability to accept more accountability for their actions (Section 13.2.8).

18.5.10 A narrative approach and the unfaithful spouse's secret

Must the unfaithful spouse keep or disclose the secret of the affair? I have learnt that there are opposing therapeutic views. The one view propounds that the disclosure of the secret is a prerequisite for marital reconciliation and for success in therapy (cf. Pittman 1990). The second view honours the unfaithful spouse's preference to keep the secret (cf. Kaslow 1993). To my mind the latter view is more akin to a narrative approach in pastoral therapy, because the pastoral therapist honours

- the imprisoning and constitutive effects of discourses in the life of the unfaithful spouse (Lowe 1991); and
- the context, i.e. the person involved (Dill 1996).

This stance does not imply that a narrative approach in pastoral therapy supports and sustains the secret in the life of an unfaithful spouse. It does, however, view the unfaithful spouse positively and hopefully (O'Hanlon 1994). It sides with the unfaithful spouse who is deceitful and seeks to find those discourses that keep the unfaithful spouse captive and dishonest (White 1995). A narrative approach in pastoral therapy eventually tries to deconstruct those discourses in order to set the unfaithful spouse free. A narrative approach is about a battle of discourses (Lowe 1991; Winslade et al 1996). In this way the unfaithful spouse's ethical abilities may be enhanced (Section 13.3)

18.6 A narrative approach in pastoral therapy and the use of Scripture

A conversational participant that read the biblical stories as stories became involved in a creative process in which the biblical story invited the reader to participate in a co-construction of a new and alternative self-narrative (Section 14.2; cf. also Brueggemann 1993:41; Firet & Vossen 1991:123). If we view the

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have far-reaching consequences for therapeutic conversations and for clients' relationships.

Self-fulfilment can be seen as an ontic, ideal quality of (post)modern life or it can be seen as a discourse, i.e. a social linguistic construction that exerts power over people's lives and relationships. Hence, **the discourse of self-fulfilment can subjugate people**. This implies that people who yearn 'to do their own thing' in extra-marital relationships can actually be 'slaves' of the cultural discourse of self-fulfilment (Section 15.5).

I have learnt that equality in the pastoral therapeutic relationship must not, however, be equated with the subconscious embrace of the discourse of self-fulfilment. **The pastoral therapist can, in an effort not to impose his/her values and morals onto the client, surrender the client to the subjugation of the self-fulfilment discourse** - i.e. the pastoral therapist can 'impose' the value of western individualism on the client. In this case, the pastoral therapist promotes the dominant cultural discourse of self-interest. **Is such a client free to make ethically sound decisions?** I do not think so (cf. Dueck 1991; Doherty 1995; cf. Section 15.4).

18.9 Externalisation and the discourse of agape

I have learnt that externalisation as a therapeutic mode of conversation has vital possibilities in pastoral marital therapy. It enables a couple to form a team against the problem and it enhances the couple's commitment (Section 15.6). Hence, **externalisation is not an ethically neutral mode of conversation** in marital therapy. The pastoral therapist who uses externalisation inevitably helps the couple to experience themselves as a team against the problem (Müller 1996), i.e. together the pastoral therapist and the couple co-construct their marital relationship in the linguistic domain of the **discourse of agape**. Discourses exert power over people's lives. **Externalizing conversations 'surrender' the couple to the 'mercy' of the agape discourse that exerts its power over them and can heal their marital relationship** (Section 15.6).

Hence, externalising conversations are useful conversational 'tools' in pastoral therapy because pastoral therapy has a vested interest in the discourse of agape (Louw 1993).

18.10 A narrative approach in pastoral therapy must not be ideologised

Gergen proposed that self-narratives are not a function of the self but of social interaction with other people. Self-narratives are maintained, sustained or altered in a network of reciprocating identities (1994). Gergen's radical view of 'relational self-narratives' and his rejection of the idea that a person possesses a core identity is a controversial stance (O'Hara 1995; Neimeyer 1995). Gergen's emphasis on the exclusive relational aspects of self-narratives may be a reduction of human life to discourses (Doherty 1991). In this case, we ideologise postmodernistic epistemology and a narrative approach in pastoral therapy.

We have seen that a person's self-narratives are also influenced by a multitude of biological and chemical factors - i.e. by the individual's own brain processes and not by social relationships alone (Section 4.2.2). I have learnt that lovers may story their physiological arousal as eros. Hence, physiological arousal plays a role in the storying of eros. The storying of eros is not only a relational linguistic construction. Secrecy, physiological arousal and social context have profound effects on how people story their relationships (Section 16.1). The storying of an extra-marital affair may be more than a relational social construction. The pastoral therapist must be aware of this possibility.

Furthermore, I learnt that there may be a **chemical addictive** element in people's involvement in extra-marital affairs (Section 16.2.1):

> Research in the past ten years has shown there is even a **chemical side** to romance addiction....A substance known as phenylethylamine (or PEA) is released in the brain when a person becomes involved in a romantic situation.

(Martin 1989:8)

People may suffer from sexual addiction, acting it out in extra-marital sex (Section 16.2.2). The fact that DSM IV includes a category entitled 'sexual addiction' with various forms of sexual addiction, but neglects the possibility of 'extra-marital sexual addiction', must not close our eyes to the possibility that sexual philanderers may be sexual addicts (Martin 1989; Virkler 1992; Pittman 1990). The stories of people's involvement in extra-marital relationships may be more than social linguistic constructions.

> If it is not careful, postmodernistic family therapy may end up engaging in just another modernist reduction of family experience, this time to discourse and the deconstruction of discourse....Perhaps a little modernist expertise is helpful at times.
>
> (Doherty 1991:42)

A narrative approach in pastoral therapy can be **too reductionistic** to fully understand people's experience of extra-marital affairs. The pastoral therapist must be aware of this possibility (Section 16.3). These few comments do not mean that a narrative approach in pastoral therapy is useless in the face of addiction. On the contrary, narrative therapists and 'addicts' may co-author new alternatives (Winslade & Smith 1996).

18.11 A more personal reflection on postmodernistic theology

In this concluding section I reflect on postmodernistic theology (cf. Sections 5.2.2 to 5.2.5). I would like to refer to a conversation I had with Breytenbach (1997), dean of the Faculty of Theology at the University of Berlin. Breytenbach reflected on the theological history of the churches in Europe in the post World War II era and on **the effects of postmodernism on the church**. He mentioned that the church in Europe had abandoned the eschatological kerugma of Jesus in favour of a horizontal message. According to Breytenbach, this abandonment of the eschatological kerugma was 'n fatal mistake - it inaugurated the end of the church in Europe. The church tried to regain favour by engaging in humanitarian aid

programmes. This was another mistake. The church could not compete with the professional secular institutions that were involved in relief programs. The church's **abandonment of its eschatological kerugma** and its second rate humanitarian relief programmes **cost the church dearly**: it has become an irrelevant institution (cf. also Louw 1993:1-92).

In reflecting on Breytenbach's opinion, I became aware of the utmost responsibility that rests upon the shoulders of theologians in a postmodern culture. We are the 'tradente' (Nicol 1994a; Breytenbach 1997), that is, **we are the bearers of the theological tradition of the unique eschatological proclamation of Jesus** (Goppelt 1981,1:43-138; Jeremias 1975b,1:42-313). I view the postmodernistic era as a vital opportunity for the Christian message and believe that postmodernism is creating a climate, however risky, that will revitalise spirituality (cf. Section 5.2.3). 'It is a dangerous road, but in the domain of faith, there are no real safe roads....We must stimulate the wonder [about our faith] and keep our conversations going - in this way we are on the road to greater richness' (Nicol 1997:12)[72].

As postmodern 'tradente' we must take up the challenge **while holding on to the revelation of God in Scripture** (Section 5.2.2). Bearing in mind that **Scripture is not the same as (our socially constructed) theology**, I believe that theology cannot continue as a modernistic theology (Van Aarde 1995b).

Like Van Huysteen (1996), I believe that postmodernistic theological discourses and modernistic theological discourses **are related in a dialectic way** and are therefore **inseparable and dependent on each other** (Section 5.2.5). This indicates creative tension with our theological tradition, and I believe that this tension is a genuine indicator of a postmodernistic paradigm shift. Like Bosch (1991:489), I acknowledge the **tension** between Christianity's claim of Jesus Christ as the only way and the paradoxical notion that Christians cannot set limits to God's saving power and that God is (maybe, who knows?) constantly at work in ways that pass human understanding (Section 5.2.4).

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[72] 'Dit is 'n gevaarlike pad, maar op die geloofsterrein is daar nie regtig veilige paaie nie....Ons moet die wonder [oor ons geloof] stimuleer en met mekaar in gesprek bly - so is ons op pad na groter rykdom' (Nicol 1997:12).

Having said this, I must utter a word of caution: We as postmodernistic theologians must not consider ourselves too wise. According to postmodernistic social construction discourse as epistemology, **it is scientifically sound** to state that even epistemological paradigms are the product of social discourses (Sections 3.3.2 to 3.3.4). And, as we have seen, social discourses are always changing. **This implies that (all) paradigms have a limited shelf life - the postmodernistic paradigm too!** The postmodernistic paradigm and its epistemology **will eventually and inevitably be replaced by something else** (Maree & Strauss 1994). The following quote is a timely and vital reminder of the **fluidity of our postmodernistic epistemology:**

> It is important...to turn a reflexive, deconstructive lens on postmodernism itself, and to examine some of the gaps, silences, and ambiguities which pervade its own discourse....One paradoxical aspect of postmodernism is that it may *itself* fall prey to the same problems which beset modernistic thought. It is in danger of becoming a new totalising metaphor-narrative, of the very kind it sought to repudiate....There is an important distinction between *relating* society to discourse and *reducing* society to discourse....So it is important at this time to *engage* with postmodernism rather than dismiss it or embrace it [author's italics].
>
> (Lowe 1991.48-49, 51)

As 'tradente' of the theological tradition, **we** must bear the **fluidity of our postmodernistic epistemology** in mind. **We cannot absolutize the postmodernistic condition, nor postmodernistic epistemology and certainly not postmodernistic theology.** That would be modernistic and **un-scientific** in the light of postmodernistic social construction discourse as epistemology. In the postmodernistic fluid situation we may not sell our first-born rights for a bowl of soup - the bowl of soup, however insight-provoking, liberating and unavoidable, is not a guaranteed pot of gold. The bowl may be empty.

Hence, the postmodern 'tradente' has the responsibility of passing on the theological tradition to the next generation in such a way that, although the tradition will be re-authored in postmodernistic terms, the tradition is **congruent with the biblical** kerugma for the Christian community (Loader 1997). This is

necessary because the **postmodern paradigm** with its postmodernistic epistemology **will eventually be superseded** and will be only part of the **history of discourses.** De Klerk (1996a:195) noted:

> It is interesting that since 1980 there seems to be a new trend in some narrative literature, which for the moment we may call 'neo-postmodernist' literature. It seems to be reacting to postmodernistic extremes, with a re-evaluation of the importance of realism....This may again be nearer to the sentiments of biblical narratives.

Lowe (1991:48-49, 51) and De Klerk's (1996a:195) remarks remind me of a statement made by the apostle Paul. Paul pondered on eternal and everlasting issues and wrote:

> Love is eternal. There are inspired messages, but they are temporary...there is knowledge, but it will pass. For our gifts of knowledge and of inspired messages are only partial; but when what is perfect comes, then what is partial will disappear....What we see now is like a dim image in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. What I know now is only partial; then it will be complete - as complete as God's knowledge of me.
>
> Meanwhile these three remain: Faith, hope, and love; and the greatest of these is love.

<div align="right">(I Corinthians 13:8-13, Good News Bible)</div>

A NARRATIVE APPROACH AS A REDUCTION
OF HUMAN LIFE?

16.1 Introduction

In this chapter I deal with the possibility that a narrative approach in pastoral therapy can be a reductionistic approach, i.e., it can reduce human life to discourses alone. Hence, it can ignore other major factors contributing to the generation of extra-marital affairs.

16.2 Pastoral therapy and the biological-psychological aspects of an affair

Despite the statistical evidence that more than half of all married men and women will, sometime in their married life, have to face the reality of an extra-marital affair, society as a whole still proclaims monogamy to be the norm. This ambivalent attitude towards extra-marital affairs will continue to ensure that extra-marital affairs are a **secretive** phenomenon (Kell 1992).

This **secretive** element of extra-marital affairs functions as a **booster of the emotional anxiety and thrill** of the involved lovers (Martin 1989:7; Lawson 1990:193-195). The emotional anxiety and thrill accompanies a **physiological arousal** that is associated with the activation of the **sympathetic nervous system** (Levinthal 1983). According to Levinthal (1983), the bodily signs of physiological arousal are the following:

- The heart rate accelerates and the volume of blood pumped by the heart increases;
- Blood vessels to the gastrointestinal tract constrict, but blood vessels to the muscles dilate;

- The person breathes more deeply and more rapidly;
- The eyes' pupils dilate to allow an increased amount of light to enter the eyes;
- The epinephrine level rises and the effect is that the level of blood sugar rises to supply more energy to the muscles.
- The hands may tremble and the face flushes.

(Levinthal 1983:334-337)

The secrecy of an extra-marital affair contributes to the above mentioned bodily signs as evidence of physiological arousal. Physiological arousal plays an important part in the lovers' experience of the intensity of eros and sexuality (Baron & Byrne 1987; Martin 1989). Schachter and Singer (1971b, quoted by Levinthal 1983) studied the relationship between physiological arousal and human emotions. In their well-conducted and now famous study, they not only found a positive relationship between human emotions and physiological arousal, but they also found the following relationship between physiological arousal, cognition and emotion:

- Given a state of physiological arousal for which an individual has no immediate explanation, he will label this state and describe his feelings in terms of the cognitions available to him...the same state of physiological arousal could be labelled 'joy', or 'fury', or any other of a great number of emotional labels, depending on the cognitive aspects of the situation [bold and italics mine].

- Given a state of physiological arousal for which an individual has a completely appropriate explanation..., no evaluative needs will arise and the individual is unlikely to label his feelings in terms of the alternative cognitions available.

(Levinthal 1983:334)

Reflecting on these discourses, I think that a pastoral therapist must bear in mind the (possible) relation between **secrecy**, **physiological arousal** and the interpretative and determinative potency of the **eros discourse and/or sex discourse** (Coulter 1986:122). Let me explain.

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