RE-AUTHORING NARRATIVES IN A DIVORCE RECOVERY MINISTRY

by

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ABSTRACT

This study began from the pain of a woman going through divorce and experiencing invisibility in the church. Through conversations with divorced people in a small research group and a participatory research process, the study brings together the narratives of literature, narrative therapy and pastoral care to challenge the dominant discourses of divorce and its influence and effects on people's lives and the communities in which they live and worship. From the study has grown a healing ministry with people who are divorced, which has begun to turn around their experience of invisibility and isolation into an experience of community, inclusion and care.
CHAPTER ONE

THE RESEARCH STUDY
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THE RESEARCH STUDY

1. INTRODUCTION

As I begin to write this study I am aware that I have very little experience upon which to draw in the areas of separation and divorce. I am a married woman of more than 30 years duration, with practically no story of divorce in my background, either friends or family.

In the early 1980's I began a career as a Hospice Nursing Sister. At that time I had very little experience of caring for dying patients. However during the next 15 years patients and their families taught me to listen, to stay with them in their pain, to realise that any answers that I thought I may have where mine and not theirs. However if I was ready to journey with them, I could listen to and learn from their knowledge and understanding. I would want to honour all those people who were courageous enough to allow me into the stories of their latter days and to teach me (Heidegger [1954] 1968:15). They now give me the courage to believe that I can embark upon another journey with people in pain. A journey which could try to help co-create alternative stories (White and Epston 1990) for people who are divorced and their children.

I bring this experience to this study – the story of my past that has been enriched by people in need. This is a personal experience that has enabled me to challenge discourses that separate the personal and the professional (Weingarten 1997:xii). I trust I can offer that experience to people in other kinds of need through this study and into the future. I would hope that this study, whilst paying attention to academic requirements, will honour those who have contributed to my story both in the past and the future and through that contribution so honour my own experiences.
I am now employed full time by a large Methodist church as a Pastor of Counselling. My function is to co-ordinate and participate in pastoral care activities. Pastoral Therapy and Divorce Recovery are two of those activities.

2. THE INSPIRATION TO THE STUDY

Jeanine was one of the first young women to come to me for therapy in my position as Pastor of Counselling. She came to find support and care for herself and her children as “my life feels like it is falling apart”. It was her struggle and her story as she went through a very “messy” divorce that became the inspiration for the programme that we have at the moment. It was not only listening to her pain and the struggle of the separation and divorce that touched me deeply, but the exclusion and invisibility of her situation that she experienced in the church and from the community of believers. Some communities of faith accept divorce far more readily than others. Others do not accept divorce at all. Whilst acceptance of divorce may be acknowledged within the broader church, it is individual behaviours and responses toward people who are divorced that tell the story of acceptance and understanding within the community of believers. It is the community’s perception of divorce that greatly influences the process of healing and adaptation (Peck and Manocherian 1989:335).

I remember Jeanine recounting during one of our conversations:

*Last night I went to a church function with some people that I know – a bring and braai. I was so fed up because no one seemed to realise that it was almost impossible for me to keep my eye on the children (they were 4 years and 1 year at that time) and to cook my own meat as well. I was so busy with the children that when I came back to the braai someone had taken my meat. No one offered to help me either cook or watch the children. In the end I just collected the children and went home.*

These “moments of insertion” (being inserted into or directly confronted with these moments) really began to challenge and traumatise me as a pastoral therapist (Cochrane, De Gruchy and Petersen 1991:18). I was distressed to think that this young woman, struggling with the pain of her divorce, could be made to feel invisible or
unwanted by members of our church. At the same time I felt challenged to do something about it from my position as Pastor of Counselling within the church. From a contextual perspective I am challenged not only to work with divorced people, but also to begin to transform the culture or the church community (Graham 1996:114) so that they will relate differently to divorced people. Otherwise the marginalisation already experienced by this young woman and others like her will continue.

Pastoral Therapists cannot but take a position when engaging with people in pain and suffering. Ethically this position means a commitment to transformation, positioning oneself on the side of those suffering and against all oppressive or exploitative practices.

(Kotze and Kotze 2001:3)

3. THE BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

It would be easy to minimise the pain and distress experienced by Jeanine in the context of South African violence and poverty. However, it could be argued that pastoral care is needed not only in "moments of insertion" but also when the community of faith is struggling to be faithful to its prophetic task.

South Africa is said to have one of the highest divorce rates in the world. According to Statistics South Africa (1998) a total of 35,792 divorces were recorded in South Africa during that year. The modified divorce rate for married couples was 662 per 100,000 of the population. My church is attended by mainly white people who, according to those same statistics have the highest divorce rate per population group. The modified divorce rate for white people is 1416 per 100,000 of that population group. Statistics of divorced people within the church is not recorded accurately on our data base, but it could be extrapolated using the above figures that for our congregation of 4000 there is the possibility of their being 57 new divorces each year within our congregation. That does not take into account divorces from previous years from which people are still trying to recover.
Prophetic ministry has to be in tune with the realities of the world and not simply a preservation of the old (Gerkin 1991:71). If the divorce rate is so high why are we as a church not offering supporting and pastoral care for those people? It was as a direct result of this “moment of insertion” that I believe that the concept of divorce recovery was birthed in our church.

Each Sunday the values of our Church are printed on the weekly bulletin. We are struggling to be faithful to the following values in relation to people who are divorced:

- We must care for each other.
- We must treat every person with dignity and respect.
- We must seek the lost because the lost matter to God.

Pastoral care is challenged to engage in equipping individuals and communities with the resources they need to respond to the complexity of changing conditions of life and relationships (Graham 1996:52).

Responding to the pain and distress Jeanine and I began to talk to Ministers in the church. I began to speak about divorced people at our twice monthly management meeting, using the authority I have within the church to speak for the marginalised and oppressed. I also encouraged Jeanine to make an appointment to speak to the senior minister about the issues of divorced people in the church. We later had meetings Jeanine, the senior minister and myself. Apart from counselling we as a church had little else to offer to divorced people in their pain. Another church in our proximity was running a divorce recovery programme to which I began to refer people struggling with divorce. At a later time the person who was running the course told me that it was people from my own church community that were filling the available places on the course.

Following discussion at meetings with Jeanine, myself and the ministers, it was decided to “import” a divorce recovery programme that a colleague had written for
Sue Skidmore. Kl. Th.-specializing in Pastoral Narrative Therapy.

her Masters in Social Work (Harnes-Smith 1987). This was generously and freely given. It was decided to run the programme two or three times per year according to need.

Two other courses are also offered within our province (Grissom 1996 and Klakkers 1990), but they are costly and run by “experts” in theology and counselling. Whilst the courses themselves have been helpful to the individuals who attended, they offered little challenge to the communities (especially religious communities) to whom divorced people belonged. Upon completion of the course the people who are divorced return to the same community where they had experienced marginalisation previously.

The pastoral care that resulted from the discussions between Jeanine, the ministers and myself was a pastoral care that was negotiated (Sevenhuijsen 1998). The results of that care did not involve a patronising “self-other distinction”, but rather the beginnings of a “participatory consciousness” (Heshusius 1994:17) through which we came to a wider knowledge and understanding of divorce, by a way of care and love rather than by means of separation. Many friends and family underplay the impact of divorce and become tired of hearing the same story (Peck and Manocherian 1989:340). It is through conversations of openness and receptivity between individuals and groups that a greater wholeness is being created in our church (Rossouw 1993:899). Care is not only being taken of those who are married but also of those who are separated and divorced.

Bosch (1991:439) refers to a theology from below where “doing commitment” grows from self-other participation and not from the privileged position of knowing reflected in western theology. This programme in its current form has grown from the needs of people who are divorced in our church community. To care in an ethical way challenges us as a church to care with people, moving away from paternalistic overprotective care (Sevenhuijsen 1998).
At the time of writing the second course on divorce recovery is running. This happened as a result of the conversations that took place within the inspiration to the study. One or two divorced people have offered to care for people going through divorce as a means of offering support to them.

4. RESEARCH CURIOSITY

It was as the divorce recovery programme began to run that I started to question whether I had not done exactly the same thing as Jeanine had spoken of. That of not hearing what divorced people had to say. I had been influenced by the cultural discourses of believing, however caringly, that programmes written by “experts” were what divorced people needed. I believe that I am a good listener but I had not until this point really heard what it was that divorced people had to say. It was at this moment that I decided to set up a research study for my dissertation. One woman who is divorced said to me “at last we will be heard” when I expressed an interest in exploring divorce recovery for my dissertation.

I became curious about how, if people who are divorced could be given a voice through storying their experiences, what a divorce recovery programme or ministry would look like?

I wondered how people who are divorced could story the “not yet said” (Anderson and Goolishian 1998) of the marriage and divorce and so begin to re-author their own narratives (White 1995).

I also wondered if through this study we could, as a research group, deconstruct the dominant discourses (Lowe 1991:45) which constitute “divorced people” in the world to bring a wider understanding for ourselves of societal discourses.
I also wondered if and how the members of the research group, having found their voices could influence and challenge the congregation’s discourses about divorced people and how this could be brought about.

How these research curiosities developed and changed, will be described as part of the telling and reflecting upon the process of participation with the research group.

5. QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

For the purpose of this study I have chosen to use a qualitative approach to research (Denzin and Lincoln 1994). Qualitative research is multi-method in its focus, studying things in their natural setting whilst trying to make sense of the meanings that people bring to them. I did not want to study divorce as a social phenomenon in a distanced manner that told of the facts and figures of divorce. Rather I preferred to listen to people who are divorced in a way that afforded richer descriptions of the effect of divorce and recovery from it, thus contributing to the pastoral care of people who are divorced.

Qualitative research implies:

An emphasis on processes and meaning that are not rigorously examined, or measured (if measured at all), in terms of quantity, amount, intensity, or frequency. Qualitative researchers stress the socially constructed nature of reality, the intimate relationship between the researcher and what is studied, and the situational constraints that shape inquiry. They seek answers to questions that stress how social experience is created and given meaning.

(Denzin and Lincoln 1994:4)

Qualitative research can be difficult to define clearly as it has no single theory or method that is clearly its own. Denzin and Lincoln (1994:3) describe it thus:

Qualitative researchers use semiotics, narrative, content, discourse, archival and phonemic analysis, even statistics. They also draw upon and utilise the
approaches, methods and techniques of ethnomethodology, hermeneutics, feminism, rhizomatics, deconstructionism, ethnographies, interviews, psychoanalysis, cultural studies, survey research and participant observation amongst others.

For the purposes of this study I have chosen to use a “bricolage” (Denzin and Lincoln 1994:2) of interconnected methods. A bricolage as defined by Denzin and Lincoln is a close knit set of practices that provides solutions to a problem in a concrete situation. The bricolage therefore can be the provider of the solution. The close knit set of practices or bricolage are, research as care, research as stories, the narrative approach to research, the feminist perspective and research as participation. I trust these approaches will enable the research group and myself to have a greater understanding of divorce, its effects and the journey toward recovery.

6. RESEARCH AS CARE

White (1997) when speaking about people who meet together to construct alternative knowledges, talks of “communities of acknowledgement” and Epston (quoted by Dixon 2000:341) speaks of “communities of concern”. Alongside the purpose of the study, I hoped that through the meetings, the stories of the participants would be heard, acknowledged and that a community of concern would develop. The community of concern that I hoped would develop would care for each other and for others who would become part of a programme in the future.

The invitation to become part of the research group was extended to also provide an opportunity for the team to come together and form a deeper bond. I myself had been a group member in a colleagues qualitative research group (Hudson 2000) and had experienced a deepening relationship with other group members during the conversations that took place. My hope was that this could happen for this group.

I also had the experience that during the same group (Hudson 2000) the participation had the profound effect of making deeper meaning of my own spiritual and life experiences. My experience of a previous non-participatory research project had been
one of involvement with little or no benefit to me as a participant. My desire for the
divorce recovery group was that there would be benefit for them both personally and
in their ministry within the church.

During the last year people offering Pastoral Care from our centre, including myself,
have begun to co-create a pastoral model of care for the centre. This model uses the
metaphor of weaving as its foundation. The framework of the weaving loom
represents theology, narrative practice, pastoral care and the epistemology, which
underpins our care. It is into this model that I would like to weave this study – and the
research process. This study could be a “thin description” (Morgan 2000:7) of pastoral
care unless woven into the richer descriptions that our pastoral care model can afford.
If creative narrative practices, a feminist theological perspective, the careful and
respectful weaving of divine and human narratives and a self-reflective stance can be
woven through this study, then I trust that this study will be perceived and accepted as
care. Care, because I trust that those who participated gained self-direction and self-
understanding from the weaving of experiences, theoretical understanding and
practice.

Sevenhuijsen (1998:131) describes care as the “repairing of citizens so that they can
once more take part in their normal social participation”.

I believe that this can have the effect of reducing people solely to their social
functionality and not to a sense of wholeness. In a pastoral care setting care becomes
more than a repairing of citizens. It can become a making of meaning through
opening the conversation for the

most significant conversations to be heard and understood, and for the most
significant others to be included in the construction of meaning, even when the
significant other may be the Other, who is known by many names, whom
some call God.

(Griffith 1995:124)

During the conversations in the study I invited the Other into the dialogue so that the
story of God, became a conversational partner (Botha 1998:160) thus opening
opportunities for research participants to weave divine and human narratives
(Anderson and Foley 1998). It is through the weaving of both the divine and the human narrative that the participants discovered greater meaning for themselves in their own stories and the stories of their faith.

7. RESEARCH AS STORIES

I encouraged the telling of stories during this study as a valuable way of documenting research.

Ballard (1994:22) would contend that:

"Stories are as important, relevant, valid, reliable, meaningful and generalisable as any other writing that is referred to as research."

People who come to this study bring their stories with them, stories which relate the experiences they are having at the moment and have had in the past. I wanted to strive to care through listening for stories rather than delving for historical facts or psychological symptoms (Anderson & Foley 1998:51). If the stories that people, who are divorced, bring to this study remain central, then caring means listening for experiences told through narratives and becomes a source from which to do theology.

This study opened up the understanding of real and lived stories and experiences that people who are divorced have, rather than the pre-determined categories that researchers believe are important. The stories of the research group constituted what divorce recovery should look like and they became the authors of the story of divorce recovery in our church.

8. THE NARRATIVE APPROACH

This study is also influenced by narrative approaches and some of the narrative practices will be incorporated into the study. Each research participant’s story was dealt with from a “not knowing” perspective (Anderson & Goolishian 1992:27). “Not
knowing” required me to move away from the expert role of researcher or therapist and encourage the research participants to become the experts in the understanding and telling of their own story. I attempted to participate from a position of curiosity, not asking questions to which I already have the answer (my answer) or asking a question to which I want a particular answer (Freedman & Coombs 1996:44). This stance means that my knowledge is to be considered no more important or valid than that of the rest of the group.

The client has local experiences, while the therapist has general experiences.

(Andersen 1993: 321)

My experience is one of diverse experiences when having conversations with people and listening to their stories. Within a diversity of experiences comes the ability to care for people in a way that is mutual rather than from the expert position of the “professional”.

Heshusius (1994:19) suggests that if we want to free ourselves from objectivity we need to turn toward a participatory mode of consciousness. This stance entails a forgetting of self that no longer allows for the privileged status of being the knower or the expert. The act of knowing therefore becomes an ethical act. The research group are not someone with which you can bombard questions with questions, but a group which allows you near to them and their story. It is the privileged status of mutuality and ethicality.

Participatory consciousness [is] not ‘about’ something or someone; [it refers] to ‘being with’ something or someone.

(Heshusius 1994:19)

In this sense ‘being with’ people who are telling their stories of divorce and recovery from it, is one of the tenants of narrative approaches that was used in this study. An approach that I trust was respectful, trustworthy and accepting.
Anderson and Foley (1998:45) have this to say:

Listening carefully and responding accurately to the story of another is a true ministry. To be understood and accepted by another person is a treasured dimension of human living. It is also the first movement of any kind of care.

Care of a person is not possible without careful listening. To be not listened to, to be not heard is seen as uncaring and disrespectful. Careful listening helps the other person to feel respected, understood and cared for.

I hoped that careful, respectful listening to stories created a sense of "being with" the members of the group.

I also hoped that through the use of narrative approaches with the group such as externalising conversations, tracing the history of the problem, discovering unique outcomes and thickening the alternative story and thus beginning to re-author lives (White 1995) these practices could be incorporated into a divorce recovery ministry.

9. A FEMINIST PRACTICAL THEOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

In the Pastoral Care Centre we are choosing to offer pastoral care from a feminist practical theological perspective. Feminist practical theology takes as its starting point the experiences of women and men, and their interaction with each other, with God and with society as a source from which to do theology (Isherwood and McEwan 1993:76). The church model of liberation, within which feminist theology sits, speaks of a church, which grows out of the people. These communities of faith arise from the grassroots and champion the cause of the people. In this study I attempted to place the experiences of the research group as central, alongside the stories of their lives and their relationship with God as a means to enrich our understanding of divorce and recovery from it. Using this perspective became instrumental in the co-creation of
fresh understanding of theology in the light of the group’s experience of divorce and the church’s response to it.

According to Ackermann (1996:42) a feminist theological perspective is based on seeing things from the outer circles or from below rather than from a theory that has legitimised “from above” practices and forms of oppression that includes racism, sexism and colonialism.

Ackermann (1996:43) further argues that feminist practical theology is a critical, committed, constructive, collaborative and accountable reflection on the theories and praxis of struggle and hope for the mending of creation based on the stories and experiences of women/marginalised and oppressed people.

To this end the stories of the research group recounted in this dissertation became the means through which to do practical theology from a feminist perspective. This method of practical theology has a natural connection with the qualitative approach to research adopted in this study. The qualitative research used in this study mirrors well the collaborative, inclusive and caring components of a practical feminist approach and as such brings strength to the study.

Feminist theology also promotes the idea of growth and becoming. Through this study I therefore tried to promote the idea of people who are divorced growing and becoming and seeing things from the outer circles of the research groups experience rather than “from above”. The divorce recovery ministry has the opportunity to develop from a dialogue between scripture and tradition on one side and the concrete daily living experiences of people on the other.

Graham (1996:53) writes of the aims and objectives of pastoral care from a feminist perspective, whether it is the relief of distress and problems or a means of establishing social justice. In this study I attempted to bridge that dichotomy through building up the members of the research group so that they could exercise effective ministry in our congregation and in the wider community. Effective ministry would not only
mean the relief of distress but a sense of being heard and understood within the church and establishing a means of justice for all. Graham (1996:54) goes on to describe her survey of the shifting paradigms of pastoral practice in a move towards a diversification of practices which include therapeutic, sacramental and clinical. I was interested to see the diversity of pastoral care practices that emerged as a result of this study.

Furthermore Cochrane, De Gruchy and Peterse (1991) advocate the use of a pastoral-hermeneutical circle in which the moments of insertion, social analysis, theological reflection and pastoral planning are used to develop practical theological approaches towards social and personal transformation. I found this model to be particularly helpful and one with which I and the research group developed levels of empathy and one which produced fruitful outcomes for divorced people in our church. It was through becoming more aware of "moments of insertion" (see page 2), taking our belief in Jesus Christ as redeemer, liberator and Lord and exploring our understanding of divorce from a social and faith perspective. It was through this process that the pastoral planning of care with divorced people in our church emerged.

Heitink (1999) has this to say:

In this light practical theology must be understood as a form of political theology and leads toward the concept of "practical theology as critical theory". Important themes are the theory-praxis relation, norms and values with a focus in our time on justice and injustice and a praxis of liberation. Within this perspective the spotlight on changing the existing situation becomes the primary interest of practical theology.

In research influenced by a feminist perspective it is a common consequence that the researcher is changed by the research. This has been my experience before. Although I was not involved in formal research when caring for dying patients and their families – the consequence of that care profoundly influenced my view of life and death, deepened my compassion and capacity to care and so has sustained me in my life. I will take the opportunity to reflect upon the changes that I experience in the last chapter.
10. RESEARCH AS PARTICIPATION

Authentic participation in research means sharing the way that research is thought about, decided upon and practised (McTaggart 1997:28). Participation in this research process means that the research group at the least participated in the collecting of the data and its analysis and had some control over the outcomes of the research process.

Participatory research focuses the participants towards the subtlety of power that exists in all groups and in this case research groups. My intention was to create a participatory, power-sharing environment. Reflecting on this in later chapters will tell if this has been the case and how ethical or accountable this has been.

Participation in this study was for some of the group an opportunity to “make a difference” in society or in the church. Social improvement through participatory action research is beyond the reach of individuals. However as participatory action research groups work together to change their language, their social relationships and provoke changes in their personal circles of family and friendship they can slowly begin to make a difference.

McTaggart (1997:34) has this to say:

[individual action researchers change themselves, support others in their effort to change and together work to change institutions and society.

I trusted that this “bricolage” of approaches, qualitative research, research as care, stories and participatory action research, drawing upon narrative and feminist theological perspectives, when pieced together, provided a vision for the future of ministry to divorced people.

11. THE RESEARCH JOURNEY
As I began the research journey, I invited others to accompany me along the way. I could not undertake this journey alone or in isolation from others because of my growing belief and understanding about the social construction of relationship (Gergen 1994:253). I am coming to understand that through mutual interdependence with my fellow human being a bigger, fuller picture can develop than the one that I could develop from the position of independence and individualism. I therefore invited people who are divorced, authors of literature, the church in which I work and my own experiences to accompany me on this journey.

My initial purpose for this study was to give voice to the voiceless (Isherwood and McEwan 1998:87) - to give those people who are divorced an opportunity to have agency and to speak about their experiences within the church. I had hoped that by beginning this journey theirs would be strong voices amongst the many voices of others.

11.1 Step one – Exploring other programmes.

As a first step on the research journey I explored and read about other programmes available in the vicinity, particularly those in pastoral care settings. Several churches in the community adjacent to our church i.e. within a 100 km-radius offer divorce recovery programmes. These programmes are of eight to ten week duration and are run as teaching sessions for members of that churches congregation and for others outside the congregation. Until this point our church offered little in the way of programmes for divorced people. Many of the people who are divorced in our church have either not been part of a programme or had attended courses elsewhere. The story of each programme will be explored from the perspective of the model of pastoral care previously outlined, i.e. feminist theology, narrative practice and pastoral therapy within a qualitative research approach. This is in line with the weaving metaphor followed by the centre in which I work. As a centre we try to weave the stories of people, theology, the way we practise together into a spirituality of wholeness (Rossouw 1993), a spirituality that has meaning for the whole person and the lives that they are living.
11.2 Step two - Inviting participants.

I invited five divorced people who expressed an interest in storying and re-storying (White 1995) their divorce, relationships and recovery from divorce. The group who were invited had previously been part of the first divorce recovery programme in the church. Three of the group had previously been on other divorce recovery programmes prior to the programme run in our church. Three of the group are now offering support to others on the divorce recovery journey. All of them were seen as being well on the road to recovery having had counselling and/or been on one or more recovery programme. I was keen to have gender balance in the group because of mistrust of the opposite gender that had been an issue in the first divorce recovery programme run in the church. Participants were given written information and had the research process explained to them (Appendix one).

11.3 Step three - negotiating the journey.

At the first group meeting the research project was discussed in detail with the participants. My initial research curiosity was explored and any curiosities and purposes from their perspective, woven in. In a spirit of power sharing, the goals and aims of the study were constantly revisited, to ensure that the participants were co-creators and beneficiaries of the study.

11.4 Step four - hearing their stories.

The group’s conversations focused on the stories of people experiencing divorce, including their own. If people live by stories, then therapy is about stories and language (Botha 1998). I perceive my role to be in assisting a “transformative dialogue in which new understandings are negotiated together with a new set of premise about meaning” (Gergen 1994). As a narrative therapist I search for meaning through deconstructive conversations (Wolfreys 1998) negotiating “unique outcomes” through the telling of neglected and unstoried events. During a series of conversations
each participant had the opportunity to tell their story. My role in the conversation was to ask questions in such a way that “taken for granted” understandings could be deconstructed or taken apart with the object of creating greater understanding and therefore greater meaning for the individual and the group.

I attempted to conduct the interviews through an attitude of openness and receptivity in order to create a deeper level of kinship between myself and the group in what Heshusius (1994) calls a participatory mode of consciousness. Mutuality and ethics are embedded in a participatory mode of consciousness. The group became not just someone to study or bombard with questions but a group who allowed me to come near to them and their stories. Through being aware of and attempting to resolve power relations helped me to forget about myself and so fully listen to the group in order to try and understand how to turn society and in this case churches into better places for divorced people (Heshusius 1994).

11.5 Step five – deconstructing societal discourses.

Using the concepts of social construction theory and narrative practices the stories brought to the research interview was deconstructed for two main reasons. Firstly to make visible those discourses in society which impinge upon and try to subjugate the lives of people who are divorced. Secondly to enable re-authoring of preferred ways of being with the research participants.

White (1991) defines deconstruction in the following way:

Deconstruction has to do with procedures that subvert taken-for-granted realities and practices. These so-called “truths”, those disembodied ways of speaking that hide their biases and their prejudices and those familiar practices of self and of relationship that are subjugating peoples lives.

In what Botha (1998) would describe as the “battle of discourses” the pastoral therapist or researcher has the ethical responsibility to position themselves on the side of the subjugated and against oppressive and exploitative practices (Cochrane, DeGruchay and Petersen 1991).
Graham (1996) supports this further when she speaks of a participatory process in which therapists collaborate with people in challenging oppressive discourses and negotiating ways of living ethically accountable lives.

Dixon (1999) suggests that we also deconstruct the research metaphor in such a way that the research participants will benefit from the conversations and will be able to make a meaningful contribution towards the process. This will enable the local knowledges and the diverse knowledges of the participants and myself to be woven together into a richer tapestry of understanding that will benefit both the participants and myself.

11.6 Step six – reflecting on the group sessions.

After each group session I wrote either from audiotapes and notes a summary of that session. This was given to the group in the interests of transparency and accountability. I also wrote narrative letters to the group thus “extending the conversation” (Epston 1994). At the next interview changes to the summary and questions raised from the letter added to the conversation.

11.7 Step seven – co-constructing a divorce recovery ministry.

A final group session gave opportunity for the group to review the sessions and to reflect upon the divorce recovery ministry in its present form. Conversations took place that facilitated the weaving of old and new stories of divorce recovery, in the light of new meanings and understandings, co-constructed through this study.

11.8 Step eight – Personal reflections.

As the study drew to its conclusion, I took the opportunity to reflect upon this study and the way that I have changed as a result of it. It is by reflecting in action and reflecting on our reflecting in action that the practice of therapy and participatory
research can in itself be “a source of renewal” (Schon 1983). I also took the opportunity of self-reflexive inquiry (Gergen & Gergen 1991) through conversational participation between and amongst the research group and myself. This increased the range of stories and possible constructions of divorce and ministry in our society and church.

11.9 Step nine – reporting the research.

In my position as Pastor of counselling I have a monthly meeting with the Minister who has oversight of Pastoral Care in our church. I presented the study to him along with my co-researchers. This took the form of a conversational presentation, where future developments of the divorce recovery ministry were discussed and plans put in place for implementation of those developments. Reflections from this meeting are to be found in chapter five.

11.10 Step ten - Writing up the research.

The research was written up and rewritten as the study developed.

11.11 Step eleven – reading the research.

As the study came to its conclusion each of the research participants had the opportunity to read the dissertation and give feedback. Errors in information were amended, names changed to preserve anonymity and feedback received on content and style of writing.

The steps of the research outlined above were not pre-planned and then implemented, but rather they developed in this fashion as they were co-constructed by the research group. This in line with the spirit of collaboration and participation as outlined at the beginning of this chapter.

The following chapters will address points along the research journey.
Chapter two will explore divorce and how the church and society contribute to recovery from divorce.

In Chapter three I will give attention to the expertise of divorced people, whilst listening to the stories that they have to share.

Chapter four pays attention to the children affected by the divorce.

Chapter five begins to develop a ministry with divorced people in the church in the light of the stories that have been told in previous chapters.

Chapter six – the final chapter will give space for reflections upon the stories, the ministry in its current form and some personal reflections from and about myself.

In the next chapter I will discuss and explore some of the wealth of literature available concerning divorce and recovery from it. I will also pay attention to the influence of society and the church in recovery from divorce.
CHAPTER TWO

DIVORCE, THE CHURCH, SOCIETY AND RECOVERY
CHAPTER TWO
DIVORCE, THE CHURCH, SOCIETY AND DIVORCE RECOVERY

1. INTRODUCTION

This chapter is concerned with exploring and discussing some of the wealth of literature available about divorce and recovery from it. There is insufficient space and time within a dissertation of this kind to explore all the many avenues of divorce and the wealth of writing that has been published about it. I have chosen therefore to look only at articles relevant to that purpose. I have read work which comments on the process of divorce, the emotions and responses to divorce and the influence of the church and society on people’s experience of divorce. I have also chosen to look at the effect of divorce from a gender perspective and how it effects the lives of children. I have begun to look at some of the material available, which can contribute to peoples recovery from divorce before hearing in the next chapter what those people who had experienced it first hand had to say. I begin with the premise that all people deserve care especially from the church when their lives are in turmoil. I believe that is what I am called to do by God and that I am in a position as a full time employee of a church and as a student of Narrative Pastoral Therapy to do something about giving voice to those in pain.

2 DIVORCE

According to the Oxford English dictionary divorce is described as the legal dissolution of a marriage. This short explanation does not take into account the wide variety of emotions and experiences that people who are divorced go through or the legal and financial wrangles that can take place. Divorce is a crisis that carries emotional trauma with it and potentially has long-term negative effects on the whole family (Haffey and Cohen 1992:142). Society treats divorce as a legal event that requires the participants to know more about the law than understanding the dynamics of broken relationships. The legal profession is the primary caretaker of people going through divorce and separation. People going through divorce are expected to make
rational, fearless and self-confident life changing decisions at a time of their greatest vulnerability and confusion (Haffey and Cohen 1992:142). As I have spoken with people experiencing recovery from divorce they refer back to decisions made regarding finance, career, children and relationships. Those decisions have often been to their own detriment and at times to the detriment of others and which they now know would have had a different outcome had those decisions been made within a supportive community or made at a later time when they were thinking more clearly.

2.1 The process of divorce

Divorce has often been likened to grief with differing “stages” representing specific psycho-social losses in the divorced persons life. Florence Kaslow (1995:271-283) describes seven stages of the divorce process. The emotional divorce, the legal divorce, the economic divorce, co-parental divorce and the problems of custody, community divorce, religious divorce and psychic divorce. As in all staged models individuals do not necessarily go through every stage. Bereaved people have helped me to question the value of stages through which people travel as they journey through traumatic times. They have helped me to discern how sometimes stages can be helpful to both therapist and the person experiencing loss as a framework within which to understand what is happening. At the same time they have also taught me that stages should not be used as an inflexible model through which to squeeze people. Rossiter (1991:143) found that clients do not experience their recovery in stages. Rather the number of “good days” gradually exceeds the number of “bad days”.

The impact of divorce may be seen as a time of adjustment to the loss of a spouse and to the gaining of a new life style. The loss of the spouse, social status and perhaps children has a direct influence upon the rearranging of the roles of each of the partners (Diedrick 1991:33). Understanding the story of the divorce and the ending of the relationship can be helpful in caring for the person appropriately. Amato (2000:1270) would however argue against the outcome of divorce always being a downward trajectory from which it is difficult to recover. He maintains that divorce benefits some people and leads others on only a temporary downward path and that people
vary considerably in their response to divorce. Some people who are divorced have commented to me that “it is like being let out of a cage”. Divorce for people having those experiences would be experienced as freedom rather than devastation, whilst others experience total and utter devastation at being rejected by their partner.

2.2 Divorce and the emotional response to it

Divorce is far more than the ending of one person’s relationship with another. It can be a time of great pain, anger and rejection and according to the Holmes and Rahe (1967) scale of stressful life events is second only to the death of a spouse. Blomquist (1996:161) would argue that divorce is an experience of an even deeper kind of death or series of deaths, which confronts the person with a sense of brokenness, with limits to relationships, which were thought to be limited only by death. It brings to the surface woundedness that is related not only to the present but also to the past and the future as well. It brings into question taken-for-granted concepts of personal, religious and social meaning.

In conversations with both bereaved and divorced people it would seem that the experience of divorce for many people is more stressful and painful than the death of a spouse. The ending of relationships through divorce is civilised at best (Nichols 1998:101) and filled with fury and vindictiveness at worst (Kaslow 1995:272). People who experience the emotions associated with divorce may well have similar feelings as those of widowed people, but the intensity for people going through divorce seems to be increased. Anger can become hatred and bitterness and sadness increase its velocity to revenge.

Divorce can also bring with it a sense of failure. Failure as an individual, as a person in relationship, as a parent and for those who believe, failure as a child of God. Not only is their a sense of failure from the people who are divorcing, but that same sense from the wider society and from within the church.
Pastors spoke about their personal commitment to the sanctity of marriage and most pastors framed divorce as a public acknowledgement of personal failure by at least one of the parties.

(Gonzalez 199:148)

In my opinion to be married is seen by many to have reached the pinnacle of adulthood, to have moved away from childhood and to be old enough and mature enough to begin a life that is separate from parents and to begin to form a family of ones own. To have not been able to achieve that can be construed as a failure. In our achievement oriented society failure is a difficult emotion to manage. Failure can be made even more difficult to manage when the Church and society add fuel to those feelings by also seeing the breakdown of marriage as a failure.

The losses associated with divorce can be the loss of the dream of marital bliss, of intimacy rather than acrimony, the loss of the parenting role, of money, of community and of attachment (Hagemeyer 1986:240). The experience of loss may be different for each partner according to whether they were the one who left the relationship or the one who was rejected. The stages of letting go has been defined as alienation, break-up, mourning and disentanglement for the partner who leaves and shock, grief, rage, distancing and indifference for the partner who has been rejected (Pam & Pearson 1998:xii).

It is though careful listening to the stories of people who are divorced that care that is individual and appropriate can be offered. Understanding some of the possible stages and the emotional responses of people who are divorced brings with it care that is non-judgmental and non-prescriptive. If care is to be truly appropriate, account needs to be also taken of gender perspectives.

2.3 Women and men who divorce

Women and men are socialised differently in our society and therefore come to divorce with different needs and requirements. Lund (1990:63) states that most authors of divorce therapy literature disregard the differences between women and
men. Kaslow (1994:272) has made important contributions to the understanding of the divorce process, but in outlining the stages of divorce pays no attention to gender differences. In my own search through the literature I found some articles on a feminist perspective of divorce therapy (Lund 1990, Haffey and Cohen 1992, Carbone 1994) and another article written from a "difference" perspective which included women and men (Diedrick 1991:33-45). Landman (1986) counselled a group of non-custodial fathers in order to enhance their role adjustment. Feelings of guilt and rejection were said to prevent them from maintaining constructive relationships with their families.

To understand the differing needs of women and men in the divorce situation can make recovery from the trauma of divorce better tailored to each one's requirements and therefore more effective. I had a research group of mixed gender so understanding divorce from differing perspectives was important.

Divorce brings with it major identity transitions especially for women. Women are socialised to take on both the subordinate and the nurturing role within the family, existing for others. In assuming this traditional role women develop dependent roles, being only aware of what others want, rather than what they want, so losing touch with their own identity (Lund 1990:59). This can create difficulty within the marriage and a challenge once outside the marriage. For women not able or not wanting to rise to this challenge remarriage can seem the only option. Men on the other hand are said to have a more positive marriage experience than women with the opportunity for multiple paths to life enhancement and economic independence, with poor adjustment levels post divorce (Lund 1990:61). Should these poor adjustment levels continue, again marriage can be seen as a better alternative.

Diedrick (1991:36) is of the opinion that women face more stressors than men because of gender differences in income, social activity and single parenthood. However there is evidence to say that females fare better in adjusting to divorce than do men (Wallerstein and Kelly 1980) and that these differences are long lasting.
Understanding divorce from the perspective of different genders will ensure that care is gender appropriate and pastorally effective.

2.4 The children of divorce

Judith Wallerstein in an interview with Waters (2001:42) warns that divorce affects children far more negatively than people really imagine. Divorce can be an escape hatch for parents, but it marks children for life robbing them of childhood and their ability in later life to form intimate relationships. However not all researchers agree with Wallerstein concerning the long-term effects on children. Hetherington (quoted by Waters 2001:43) agrees with Wallerstein concerning the short term effects of divorce on children, but would argue that most children are close to normal after the second year especially if they have moved from a very conflictual home environment.

Waters (2001:45) in the interview with Wallerstein, has this to say about the needs of children in a family with problems:

Wallerstein has brought to the public's consciousness (and that of therapists) the fact that kids don't care how fulfilled their parents are or how good their sex life is. They want their parents to be decent to each other, stay together and provide a nurturing stable home. She has shown us how the needs of parents and children often diverge.

Peck and Manoucherian (1989:343) contend that children adapt differently to the impact of divorce. Some adapted well and others had more difficulty. They argue that it is not divorce per se that creates disturbances but the special circumstances that come from the divorce situation. Namely the loss of a parent, ongoing conflict between parents and the nature of post divorce parenting arrangements. Whatever the conclusions may be, it is clear from rising divorce statistics that couples will continue to end their marriages and children will continue to be exposed to the stressors of those break ups.

Once the separation and divorce is complete many couples will try to “remain good friends” often for the sake of the children. Nichols (1988) has done some re-thinking
about what he calls the myth of the friendly divorce and argues instead for civility within divorce. He argues that the “friendly divorce” may be harmful for children.

Children are especially keen at picking up lying on the part of grown-ups, and for divorcing parents to maintain a façade of friendliness when the emotional basis for it is not there is a rather clear species of lying. Smaller children may be mystified, feeling but not being able to express a sense of bewilderment. If we want our children to learn to hide their feelings and not deal as candidly as possible with circumstances as they encounter them, this is one good way to teach them.

As the divorce rates rise so the numbers of children affected will rise also. Statistics South Africa (1998) tells us that more than 45,000 children were part of parental divorce in 1998. Over 16,000 children, one third of the total childhood statistics came from divorce situations in white families in 1998. Our church membership is still mainly white people. We have more than 300 children attend children’s church each Sunday. There are no clear statistics on our database but teachers from children’s church have a sense of the numbers of children coming from divorced homes from the pattern of attendance. Many children attend alternate weekends when they are spending the weekend with the custodial parent and therefore cannot attend on the alternative weekend when they are with the non-custodial parent.

Anderson and Johnson (1994:91) contend that it takes more than loving parents to raise a child in a non-divorce situation. I believe that it will “take a village to raise a child” (African proverb) especially where divorce has split the parents. It takes a community committed to their well being to help to nurture them and give them a sense of care and belonging (Anderson and Johnson 1994:91). I trust that as a congregation we can become a “village” for all our children, but more especially for those from homes that are broken and struggling. I see this as a very important ministry that we as a church can provide.

3.THE ROLE OF THE CHURCH
The role of the church has traditionally been seen as the place where marriages take place, 44% of all marriages in South Africa still take place in church (Statistics South Africa 1998) and where pastoral care can be offered. As the divorce rate has continued to rise the church has found itself not only marrying people, but also to pastorally caring for those whose marriages have come to an end.

The aim of pastoral work is to bring the gospel of Jesus alive by means of caring actions (De Jongh van Arkel 1999:116). The church can position itself as a “caring” church, one who cares for people in trouble or it can position itself as the upholder of the “laws”. It is a fine balance between the two. However I would wish to position myself as a pastoral carer and a representative of my church by acting more as Jesus himself would have done, when He cared for the sinners and tax collectors, rather than upholding the letter of the law as the Pharisees did.

3.1 The dilemma within the church

Most religious denominations understand that divorce exists in society, but it is whether the concept of divorce exists within any particular denomination that creates thorny theological debate. Most of the Pastors involved in a research group concerning divorce and re-marriage (Gonzalez 1999:146) saw the demographics of their churches as being family orientated, that is married couples with children. All Pastors involved felt that the divorce rate in their church was well below that of the national average. I began to question when reading that statement whether the low rate of divorced people was due to pastoral care for couples when their relationships were in trouble and which reconciled all marriages in trouble? Or I wondered if it was not the total opposite of patriarchal exclusive practices within the church, which did not encourage the attendance of what Graham (1998:141) called “diverse families”. His article calls into question the normative interpretation of what it means to be family, husband and wife and two children and pleads for a broader understanding of what it means to be family in today’s society, single parent or same sex relationship.
For those theologians who wish to honour the liturgies of their churches and at the same time the experiences of their congregations, some were able to do so by conceptualising divorce as "marital death" (Gonzalez 1999:147). Marital death is seen as the end of a covenant which was intended to be life long, but which still can be ended even though the relationship partners are still alive. Death is seen not as the death of a partner, but the death of their relationship, a relationship that has come to the end of its life and can carry on no longer.

Gonzalez (1999:147-148) explored different concepts of marital death. The first was that death took place in a marriage only with the death of one of the partners and adhered strictly to the letter of the marriage ceremony. Even when abuse is taking place in the marriage, divorce is not permitted in some denominations. This in my opinion inflicts further pain and isolation on the marriage partner, whether that is the husband or wife. It can leave both the abused partner and the abuser isolated and abandoned by the church, or the abuse problem in the marriage addressed by church rules rather than pastoral caring.

The second was that divorce could be accepted as a result of marital death, which has been brought about by breaks in trust, bonds between the couple. The trust bonds can be adultery, abandonment or abuse. At the opposite end of the scale Gonzalez (199:147-148) found in his study that for some pastors marital death can also be seen to have occurred when the legal courts grant a divorce.

From a theological perspective it would seem that the question concerning divorce is more problematic for some denominations when it comes to the question of re-marriage. Divorce up until the point of re-marriage can be tolerated at best and ignored at worst. It is only when couples are wishing to re-marry that some denominations find themselves questioned. It is at that point that the unquestioned vows of life long commitment are exposed and called into question. Some denominations are unhappy to re-marry people who are seen to have sinned and broken a covenant relationship with God. The idea of divorce as sin can only increase the pain of an already painful situation. In order to cope with the idea people whom
have spoken to see divorce as something that just happened, a mistake, in order to preserve her or himself from further agony.

Blomquist (1986:165) would argue

Perhaps we are stretching the Genesis passage regarding two becoming one to meet our cultural/current societal expectations for the institution of marriage. Perhaps what the Genesis texts do is affirm the relationality of women and men rather than the institution of marriage per se....To maintain that a marriage be held intact regardless of spiritual, physical and psychological violence within it is quite another story. In my opinion, the latter relationship is a “broken” marriage just as much as one that finds itself in the divorce court.

The dilemma for the church is to remain true to the call of the gospel and to the covenant that people make before God. However it is a rocky theological pathway that has to be negotiated. My personal belief is that marriages deserve to be reconciled if at all possible. There have been times in my own marriage where it has been difficult. However I have been fortunate that abuse or bonds of trust have never been broken. My belief as a pastoral therapist is obviously coloured by my personal beliefs. However, even when couples feel unable to work toward reconciliation, I believe that my role is to help them work toward a civilised separation, so that the pain and bitterness can be minimised rather than fuelled. I can by my own actions add further rejection by declining to work with couples or individuals who feel unable to reconcile their marriage. This I would not wish to do.

3.2 The concept of family in the church

For those people who belong to a faith community the concept of family can be frequently heard preached from the pulpit. Few things can be more painful than to feel excluded by the indiscriminate use of a word, which is meant to be inclusive. Gonzalez (1999:148) in his research with a group of pastors regarding their perspective on divorce and remarriage has this to say:
In every church there were messages from the pulpit and/or from different organisations within the church that convey support for marriage.

Family invites us to belong, to be part of, whether that is in a sociological or theological sense. To be sitting, listening to the sermon, when your own understanding of family has been dismantled through divorce is to be directly excluded. One member of our congregation said to me recently “When you are divorced or a single parent in the church, you become invisible. There is a lot of talk about families and we are not family now”.

Soskice (1996:112) writes of invisibility, which coupled with voicelessness, quietens subordinate groups. The aim of this study is to give voice to divorced people who had previously become invisible and voiceless in the church.

Speaking of “family” from the pulpit can strongly convey support for marriage even when the “family” spoken of may well be the family of God. If the church does not have a sense of inclusiveness in its language those who are already sensing exclusion will have their sense of being excluded magnified. This can be a further point of pain for the person who is divorced. Through careful explanation of “family”, a multiplicity of perspectives can be explored, which can create a sense of inclusivity. Browning (1995:80) argues for the church to elaborate a new authoritative love ethic for families in crisis. He further contends that the church and its pastoral care can play a significant role in giving grounding to a family form that stands between the modern and the post-modern family. The love ethic is one of equal regard and mutuality for all types of family.

I only know that the traditional, normative meaning of family has influenced my personal understanding of family. My upbringing and the societal influence of my life so far have influenced this understanding. It is when “family” is preached from the pulpit that I wonder how others sitting in the sanctuary experience it. Is there a sense
of inclusion or exclusion? Burr (1995:7) would contend that when people talk to each other that reality gets constructed. Knowledge is not something that people have but something that people do together (Gergen 1994:237).

4. THE ROLE OF SOCIETY

As members of a congregation we are all members of society and are thus influenced by it. Not only will the church have influence upon our thinking and reasoning, but society itself will construct the way that we think, feel and make meaning (Gergen 1991:89). Marriage and divorce are well-accepted societal rituals that we as members of society partake in. Despite indications to the contrary, marriage continues to hold importance in the organising of society and remains one of the fundamental pillars of the church (Botha 1998:31). However, given the high divorce rate and the rate of remarriages ending in divorce one may agree with Worthington (quoted by Botha 1998:31)

Apparently, the institution of marriage is not as endangered as some people claim; however the permanence of individual marriages is in peril.

It would seem that even though marriages do not work out on the first occasion, the pressure to be married remains. I believe that there is a growing discourse in our society to say that if a marriage does not work to abandon it and to look for the next partner. One person said to me “There is a lid for every pot – I haven’t found mine yet”. Looking for the perfect fit can send people on a journey of looking for the perfect partner. Institutionalised views regarding coupledom tells people that they have to be one of a couple for example restaurants seldom lay a table for one. The discourse of coupledom may well have started with the interpretation of God identifying the loneliness of man and so creating a mate to help him.
4.1 Societal discourses about marriage and relationship.

Societal discourses, (Hare-Mustin 1994:19) also impact upon marriage and ultimately divorce. As books, magazines and television influence the society in which we live the social discourse of romantic love influence our views and beliefs about what marriage should look like. If marriage doesn't measure up to the media's version of love and relationship, unfavourable comparisons are made which breed discontent and dissatisfaction. Partners who come for therapy with relationship problems make complaints such as "She never says that she loves me", "I would just love it if he surprised me with a big bouquet of flowers or a trip overseas", "Everybody else's partner does it". Discontent with comparison of our marriage and societies version can either lead to divorce or dissatisfaction within the marriage.

It may be true to say that marriage as a metaphor remains in the modernist era whilst relationships struggle to find a voice and a position in a post-modern world. The western world remains heavily influenced by one version of how to be in relationship with another person that is through marriage. The orthodox position of male breadwinner and domestic wife has been taken up by the church, not fully realising that the bourgeois family was a product of the industrial revolution and the differentiation between paid work and working at home (Browning 1995:73). I believe that post-modernism is infiltrating the concept of relationship as more young people now choose to "live together" before or instead of marriage.

To be in relationship is a strong societal discourse. If the relationship is not within marriage then to have a partner outside of marriage is the only kind of relationship there is. The trauma of role transition in the divorce process can leave people, especially women feeling like "non people" (Lund 1990:61). Many of the people who come on programmes for divorce recovery struggle with their identity if not in relationship, either married or living together.

Society brings pressure to bear upon us all with regard to marriage and relationship. Identity is closely linked with being in relationship with another person. The role of
helping people to recover from divorce is to assist in exposing those dominant societal discourses, subjugating other alternative knowledges, and to help in the search for a multiplicity of understandings, which help them to live life to its fullest extent.

5. DIVORCE RECOVERY

Recovery from divorce is estimated to last approximately three years (Hetherington 1982) and can be a long and arduous road. A variety of approaches can be taken in aiding the recovery from divorce. These include therapy either individually or in a group, divorce recovery programmes or a journey of individual independence. At some point however if the trauma becomes sufficient, help of one kind or another is sought. Even if the more formal route of therapy is not sought, a sense of community or support from family members is important in the healing journey. Support from family, friends and organisations such as the church is crucial for people going through divorce and trying to adjust to it. Without such support the overall adjustment is more difficult (Peck and Manocherian 1989:340). For many church members divorce can be not only an emotional but a spiritual crisis as well. Emotional and spiritual recovery is therefore essential. Tapping into spiritual strength can facilitate healing (Nathanson 1995:180). Knowing that God and the community of God accept one can facilitate healing in ways that some other approaches cannot.

5.1 Therapy for divorce recovery

The stages of divorce from the emotional divorce and up to and including the religious divorce (Kaslow 1995:271-283) are all seen to be happening during the time of the divorce proceedings and are a time of legal involvement. This is a time not only of the legal experts but also the therapy experts. Both adults and children can find themselves in therapy with professionals as they struggle to come to terms with a bewildering array of emotions and feelings, rather than with someone who has travelled the road before them and is journeying toward healing her or himself. Some
of the professionals may have had little personal experience of divorce and at the same time be coming from a paradigm of the professional is the expert.

Gergen (1994:239) when talking about therapeutic narratives contend that in a modernist paradigm people's narratives are classed as inaccurate and it is only the narrative account of the professionals that are afforded credibility. This in contrast to programmes and ministries which have divorced people in them and therapy paradigms that place the client as the expert and where the therapist is in the “not knowing” position (Anderson and Goolishian 1992:27)

Gergen (1994:238) argues that the health professional today is largely from the modernist context and functions as a scientist. Traditional therapeutic approaches such as these are trained to work from an individualistic perspective may be blind to the social conditions and societal influences that pervade and support the problems. The traditional modernistic approach can favour a form of person blame, which can be insensitive to the client and the edition of the personal narrative that they carry (Gergen 1994:239). Having a societal perspective in therapy broadens the narrative and lessens the blaming approach.

In contrast adults can also find themselves in a pastoral setting which is religiously oppressive. For some religious denominations divorce is seen as a sin and because of this tremendously negative connotation, divorce seen as sin only adds to the anguish of an already agonising situation (Blomquist 1986:164). The pastoral setting can have its own narratives and favour a form of person blame that is oppressive in God’s name. To my mind this is one of the worst kinds of oppression that can happen.

No matter from where help is sought, secular or pastoral, all therapists need to be aware of their influence in the therapeutic environment. Waters (2001:42) in his interview with Judith Wallerstein remarked upon the educating of traditional therapists. The educational system had taught therapists that if the relationship was in trouble, divorce was the best option, especially where children were involved. This was felt to have influenced the rate of divorces in the United States. Unfortunately such data is not available in South Africa.
5.2 Narrative pastoral therapy

People come for assistance to a church setting for a variety of reasons. Many come not only with the struggles and problems of relationships with partners, but also of struggles of relationship with God in the light of relationship problems. A narrative pastoral approach, as is a narrative approach, is concerned with people’s self-narratives that constitute their lives. The pastoral therapist and the client collaborate in co-constructing a new and alternative narrative in the light of God’s story (Anderson and Foley 1998:39). The purpose of therapy in the pastoral care centre in which I work is not to down load religious information onto the client, but rather to listen to the client in a way that allows for empathic conversations. From a feminist perspective there is an emphasis on love and a centralising of the experience of the person seeking help, whether the story of God is implicit or explicit in the conversation. God is not seen as a judgmental God, but one who faithfully wants the best for the loved one. Neither is God seen as the fossilised God of patriarchy. Rather God is seen as the living and moving God that is concerned with recognising human experience at its deepest level (Isherwood & McEwan 1993:72). The clients are assisted in deconstructing the image of the God of revenge and retribution, which creates more pain and rejection, to explore a picture of God who is concerned for them in their pain and wants the best for them. The God of the beatitudes who blesses the broken hearted, poor in spirit and those who mourn, rather than condemns them (Mark 5:3-10).

From a feminist theological perspective, rooted as it is in the rich and varied experiences of women, it draws from process thought and liberation theology. Process thought (Whitehead quoted by Isherwood and McEwan 1993:63) puts experience as central and invites us to recognise human experience at its deepest. The experiences brought to therapy are to be placed central in the conversation so that the voice of the person in pain is truly listened to. This in contrast to the explicit assumptions of professional knowledge of the traditional therapist, where the client’s experience may be decentralised in favour of the expert knowledge or the assumptions of theologians concerning right or wrong.
Pastoral Care of people who experience problems in relationships requires that it is actively welcoming, rather than condemnatory or neglectful. Care and support needs to be loving and empathic to those people who experience the marginalising effects of being a divorced person and who may not be accepted as belonging to the “family” (Graham 1998:167). The very act of providing welcome to people who come for support and care is the first step on a journey of acceptance and belonging. If our faith brings us into contact with the real life experiences of people on a daily basis, then a contribution can be made which will help to restore a sense of wholeness. Graham (1998:167) contends that families who are negotiating a divorce need special welcome and attention rather than condemnation and rejection. It is when we as carers are isolated from those who need the care that it is easier to make up rules about people with whom we have no contact. As I journey with people in need and listen carefully to their stories I find it is almost impossible to be judgmental about them or their circumstances.

Theology in a post-modern world challenges us to move from being right to doing right (Rossouw 1993:903). Christian practices that cause suffering and degradation are not worthy of the name Christian. Gerkin (1997:89) comments that the primary focus of pastoral care should be the care of all people through life’s ups and downs. He goes on to argue for a sense of mission toward neglected and overlooked people in the community and the role of the pastor as one of mediator and reconciler (81). Caring for those who are overlooked and neglected is an important aspect of my work. I see my role and the role of the pastoral centre in which I work, as one of mediating “between individual believers and the community of Christians” (Gerkin 1997:81).

5.3 Programmes for divorce recovery.

There are a variety of programmes or workshops available to people who are divorced, some in the vicinity, in which I live and work, and others, which I have read about.
Most of the programmes I have explored are pre-prescribed and follow stages of loss and grief or deal with issues of self-esteem. All are designed to help individuals recover from the effects of divorce, but take little account of societal influences and are very "self" centred.

Grissom (1996) presents a programme called divorce care, which is based on videos presented by "experts" in the field of ministry and writing. It also has a support group component built into it and personal study and reflections for between the sessions. It has a Christian foundation and is designed for use with church congregations. Several members of my church have attended this programme and have benefited from it.

Klakkers (1990) offers a Christian based programme called Divorce Restoration piecing together your broken self. This is based on Kubler-Ross's stages of dying or loss. It is a well-known course in South Africa and several people known to me have benefited from the contents of the course.

Francis (1997) compares a seven-week divorce recovery programme and an on-going bereavement group to illustrate the process of interpersonal emotion management. The findings from the study concluded that despite differing definitions, outcomes for the respondents were very similar.

Some workshops are offered as crisis intervention (Davidhoff & Schiller 1983) run over a six-week period and have run for seven years without pause.

All the programmes that I explored are modernistic in their approach and are content pre-prescribed. The feedback from members of the congregation has been about the value of the programme for them as individuals, however programmes do little to create contextual changes especially within the religious community of which I am part.
5.4 Pastoral Care for divorce recovery

From a pastoral perspective it is coming alongside people who are in pain, which is best guided by a theological perspective which is embedded in a relational view of God, rather than a structured academic theology. We cannot do theology as though we lived in some abstract realm divorced from reality (Isherwood & McEwan 1993: 68). The structured theology of the academic world is one voice amongst many that can present a map of working with God’s people. I believe that the theology of relationship with God and with people is the one that will bring healing for those who suffer. Families who are going through divorce need special affirmation and welcome so as to understand the reasons for divorce and to affirm God’s love on the face of adversity (Graham 1998: 142). Furthermore the children should receive special support from the leaders of children’s church and youth so that the church can become the “village” that children need (Anderson and Johnson 1994:91).

As people go through the divorce process there are many ways that people can receive care and support. The aim of such support can be directed towards making meaning, (Blomquist 1986) bringing healing (Gonzalez 1999) or to bring forth and thicken those stories, which do not support or sustain problems (Freedman & Combs 1996:16).

From a narrative pastoral perspective I would wish for all of those things to happen. It is true to say that all families, even the traditional two-parent norm are under enormous societal pressure in today’s South Africa. If we believe the social constructionist view point that all forms of knowledge are historically and culturally specific, then marriage and the breakdown of marriage is influenced by the post apartheid South Africa in which we live. It is almost impossible to expect that relationships can fare well in a country that has been torn apart by cultural hatred and misunderstanding. However, as we begin to re-build the country, perhaps we can make a contribution to the re-building of lives torn apart by divorce. Recovery from the effects of divorce, both for parents and children, is possible. I believe that as a church we have a contribution to make, that will be healing, that will enable those
concerned to make meaning of and so move toward a future that will benefit themselves and society at large. In this way I believe that as a church we will be truly doing the work of God.

In this chapter I have attempted to explore the many facets of divorce, which influence and affect recovery from divorce or which hinder the recovery process.

In the next chapter I will try to give voice to those people who have expertise but from another paradigm. However if both generalised knowledges of written discourses and the local knowledges of people who are divorced can be woven together I trust it will provide a rich tapestry of understanding in recovery from divorce. For those who are trying to recover and for those who are journeying with them.
CHAPTER THREE

THE NARRATIVES OF DIVORCED PEOPLE
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1. INTRODUCTION

This chapter tells the story of the people in the research group, the story they brought of divorce, their recovery from it so far and how through the conversations that took place ideas for a divorce recovery ministry began to emerge.

It was through the meetings of the research group that I hoped to give “voice to the voiceless” (Isherwood & McEwan 1998:87). By inviting the voices of a group of people who are divorced into a research group and thus into this study I wished to write about their experiences and their ideas and so give them a voice which could be heard amongst the many other voices that speak about divorce.

From a social constructionist viewpoint knowledge is not contained within the individuals mind, rather knowledge is part of a co-ordinated activity of individuals which are used to accomplish agreed upon purposes (Gergen & Gergen 1991:78). In this way by taking account of the voices of people who are divorced and others that have written about divorce I trusted that a broader understanding of divorce and recovery from it, could emerge.

In order for the voices of the research group to be “seen” in the text I will type the voices of the research participants in a different font. Whilst I was participating in the group, but more especially in the writing of text and letters, ideas, thoughts and perspectives would shift and emerge. In the interests of transparency and accountability I would like to add my reflections from time to time in another font. I would however want to keep the voices of the research group central to this chapter in order that they can be heard and be “seen”.

I offer all these voices and those of divorce authors to this study so that woven together they can enable reflections on the “not yet seen, not yet heard and not yet thought of” (Anderson 1993:308) into the planning of a divorce recovery ministry.
1.1 The beginning of the study

For the purposes of this study, five people whose relationships had ended in divorce were invited to become part of a research group. Three of the five people in the research group are members of a support team, to whom I refer other people who are struggling with divorce, for extra care and support. I also knew the members of the group, who will be introduced later, in relationships prior to the research group. Four of the five are members of the church in which I work – the fifth worships at another congregation locally. I had had a therapy relationship with the same four church members during the last eighteen months and the fifth person had attended a divorce programme last year, which I co-facilitated. The entire group knew each other prior to the start of the study, either from attending a divorce recovery programme together or by attending church. Some of them were in the same cell group. There were three women and two men who agreed to participate.

We met for a preliminary meeting to discuss participation in the research, the process of the research and issues such as confidentiality. All five agreed to participate and as a group, expressed interest in participating in the research from the start. A participatory approach was in line with my own desire to study divorce from the perspective of power sharing.

McTaggart (1997:27) when speaking of participatory action research has this to say:

Put simply, action research is the way in which groups of people can organise the conditions under which they learn from their experience and make this experience accessible to others.

One of the group, Ossy who will be introduced later, said at this first meeting;

*My main reason for belonging to this group is so that we can make a difference for other people going through divorce.*

At the first meeting the approach to the research was discussed and set up. An information sheet was given to each person (Appendix one). Following discussion and
answering of questions, goals were formulated and decisions made as to the format of the study. I expressed my hope that each of the group would benefit from the research. Times, dates and places of meetings were discussed and agreed upon. Each person signed a consent form (Appendix two).

Although I was the person to initiate the meetings I was hopeful that following the initial meeting, power in the group would be on a more shared basis. The principle of participatory action research is essentially a group activity, but can be problematic when people with different power, status and influence are part of the same group (McTaggart 1997:29). I believe that because I practise as a narrative pastoral therapist and most of the group had been to me for therapy, they had already experienced a collaborative approach within the therapeutic context. However, I wished by even small means to make the sharing of power possible. In this context we met on six occasions. The sessions were all held in each other's homes, sometimes my home and sometimes the home of one of the group members. We sat together round a coffee table in comfortable chairs, in an environment, which was relaxed and inviting.

In this chapter I will write about the approaches used in the group meetings to enable the stories to be told, the stories of the group as they emerged and how the stories became re-authored so that they could make a significant contribution to a ministry of divorce recovery within our congregation.

I was keen to introduce the participants to the reader, but in a way that was sharing of power and in keeping with the participatory spirit of the study. To that end I asked each person to write a few sentences about themselves. In this way the group introduced themselves, rather than being introduced by a third person and so their voices became heard from the beginning. The introductions are not changed in any way from the original way they were written by the participants.
2. INTRODUCING THE PARTICIPANTS.

Ian - 38 - married for 12 years, divorced for 2.5 years. Have two beautiful daughters aged 6 and 10 - after my own heart. Divorce should have been a four-letter word. It's a dirty thing that poses as a freedom thing - children hurt - I am hurt and in my opinion, although I cannot speak for her, so does my ex spouse. A situation with far reaching hurt, desolation, psychological turmoil and heartbreak. The work involved in trying to gain respect and honour from one's offspring, society, family, friends, colleagues and ex-spouse as a single parent, far outweigh that of the work involved in trying to rescue a strained marriage and although some days are better than others - it's a daily pain.

Ossy - born 14/11/49 =51 age. Met wife 01/04/69 at 19 years. Married 31/8/74 aged 24 years. Two children a boy born 05/11/75=25 years and a girl born 07/05/79=22 years. Divorced in March/April/May 1995 at age 46. We worked as business partners for 17 years, 14 years as a married couple and 3 years as a divorced couple. Unless a married couple know what they are up against and they treasure their marriage, don't work in a business together - a cautionary note.

Joy - married and divorced three times. First marriage 13 years - single for 8 years. Second marriage 3 years single for 4 years. Third marriage 1 year 4 months. I have 4 children all born from the first marriage. One twin - a girl deceased. There are three surviving children. A girl aged 33 years, a girl aged 30 years and a boy aged 28 years. I am the granny of a boy aged 4 years. The length since the last divorce is 3 years 6 months. I did try to reconcile a year after the final decree but the relationship finally dissolved after 4 months. The length of time since this final separation has been 21 months.

Jeanine - (I don't like the surname, only keep it for the children's sake.) Age 32 and a very lot (birthday cake please on 17th August.33 WOW) Length of marriage is a difficult question. The marriage lasted a year longer due to a drawn out legal wrangle. Part 1 Married 4 years and a tiny bit. Part 2 Separated 1 ½ years and a little less. In total the paper document shows 5 ½ years and some days. Length of time since divorce - technically since termination of the contract 1 year 5 months, but I feel divorced since the separation just short of three years. I have two stunning children - gender very important GIRLS!!!!. Eldest daughter is 6 years. I have established a really good bond with her, which was not very strong when the separation occurred. She has had play therapy - secular and now at Northfield, she has blossomed at Northfield. She has also been going to OT for the past two and a half years. Youngest daughter is 3 years and does not know what a fulltime father is or that Mum and Dad were married.
Debbie - born in 1956. I met my husband when I was 18. We went out together for 4 ½ years. We planned to get married in December 1978 but I got cold feet. We married the following December 1979. I have 3 children - a boy 19 years, a girl 17 years and a girl 9 years. We were divorced in September 2000.

3. GROUP MEETINGS

The group met for a total of six sessions spread over a period of four months. We used different homes according to the needs of the group. On one occasion we came to my home, on another occasion we met at Debbie’s home because she was recently discharged from hospital following an operation, but on most occasions we met at Jeanine’s home so that she did not have to find baby sitters for her young children. The group decided this by listening to each other’s needs and this became an ethical power sharing practice in itself.

Several different ways of telling and recording the stories were used. These ideas were discussed and decided amongst us as a group, sometimes it was my suggestion and sometimes the suggestion of another group member. The different ways included writing the stories, e-mailing the stories, speaking the stories, drawing the stories and re-writing the stories in letters. All meetings were audiotaped with prior consent of the group.

The first meeting involved the setting up and discussion about the research process and an agreement between group members to write their divorce story, send it to each other via e-mail in preparation for the second meeting. The second meeting began the process of the group telling their stories of divorce. The third meeting included a group discussion from the points raised in a narrative letter based on the transcript of meeting two. The fourth meeting was spent diagrammatically representing the divorce journey both the past and the thoughts and ideas for the future. This was a suggestion from a group member with whom I had used “pictures” before. The fifth meeting was spent conversing about letters sent to the group’s children and the final meeting in reflecting upon the research process.
3.1 Reflecting on the dominant story

Using the practice of "the client is the expert" (Anderson & Goolishian 1992) the members of the group agreed to write the story of their divorce and send it to each other via e-mail. This was done in the interests of transparency, so that all of us as co-researchers were aware of all conversations. Gergen (1999:221) says — "We relate — therefore I am". It is through relationship that society is held together in a system of significance for the individual (Gergen 1994:263).

Writing the stories was a traumatic experience for many of the group and one which brought back the painful memories of the ending of relationship. For many of the group, telling the story was experienced as a backward step in the story of their divorce (see Gergen 1994:195). I believe that for most of the group it was an unpleasant surprise to discover how painful the retelling of the story could be, when they believed that the divorce was something from which they had begun to heal and move forward.

Ian began to reflect this as he spoke about his divorce and writing about it.

*I started and restarted my story about 10 times because I didn’t know where to start. When I remembered back to the past I was teary, I was angry all those old emotions — but they are not old emotions, they’re still present. So I really battled to try and compose it and pull it all together — there was just too much to try and condense it. It was painful. Even when talking to close friends, there are certain issues that when I talk about them I get out of breath, I start getting shaky and I just can’t talk any more — I shut it out. I think that I have a lot of healing to do — a lot more than I thought previously. I still receive antagonism regularly [from my ex-wife]— it effects me in a big way — there is a big problem between me and my ex-wife. So I am still in the middle of a struggle. I’m still deep in the middle.*

Ossy also reflected similar thoughts and feelings when writing his story.

*When I looked back there was so much sorrow, that there were times in the writing that I actually cried. I looked back and thought of the waste of life, of spirit, of everything over so many years. Divorce for me is hell. The hell of being in a place [of sorrow] and of not knowing where I was in going in my*
Sue Skidmore. M Th.-specialising in Pastoral Narrative Therapy.

life. Getting involved in all kinds of things that were not really me, like pubs
and boozing every single night which was fun but which was destructive.
The hell of not having a home, my home was gone after 17 years. Of losing
the most important person in my life, who seemed to have my best years and
who gave up on me, stabbed me in my back turning the dagger around and
pulling out my very guts. This opened up fear, loneliness, extreme sadness,
loss almost destruction. This person had the best I could give but could not
accept my faults and instead of choosing to get outside help in order to keep
our family together, chose divorce.

During this time I was reflecting upon and questioning the effect of re-traumatising people. One
or two members of the group were having nightmares as a result of returning to the story. Prior
to studying narrative therapy I would have been comfortable with the emotional intensity of
hearing such raw pain, but I am now questioning the ethics of asking people to return to the
problem saturated story. I am beginning to question other ways of hearing the story. I resolved
to reflect with the group at a later time and to reflect upon the outcome of this request to write
the divorce story in a later chapter.

Gergen (1994:190) contends that once an endpoint to a story has been established it
more or less dictates the events that figure in the account and the events then are
placed in ordered arrangement. It was by asking the group to tell their story of divorce
that the dominant story was invited. However, it is through hearing the problem
saturated story that other lived experiences outside the dominant story can be
identified and exposed (White & Epston 1990:15). Those alternative stories provide a
rich and fertile source for the generation of new meanings and possibilities.

Debbie’s story had strong elements of the dominant story of her married life and
subsequent divorce. At the same time however we began to hear an alternative story
in its embryonic stages.

It’s going to sound terrible when I say that I found the story quite easy to
write, because I hid it for so long. When it did come out I tried to explain
why I had to leave, trying to let everyone know that I had done my best and
the reason I was doing it because it looked like I was deserting a very sick
man. My husband is an alcoholic. I didn’t want people to think that I was
this horrible person – leaving this man who needed me, but I was desperate.
I used to stand by the back door praying – just saying help me. We were
loosing our home, I had lost my car. I was just really desperate – I felt at
times that I couldn’t breathe. He was never aggressive. When we got
divorced he said but I have never beaten you or had an affair – he was a
good person. He used to drink and forget what he was like and he just
embarrassed the kids – it was just horrible. I feel now as though I have been let out of a cage – the stress was so bad – it’s like a weight off my shoulders.

My hope was that as the dominant stories were told, that alternative stories would emerge, providing hope and a future and at the same time a rich resource for the generation of an expanded divorce recovery ministry.

Whilst sharing the experience of writing the story down, all members of the group chose to share some part of their own story. Joy told a story of how the reality of her dreams as a young girl getting married, were shattered.

I married my prince at the age of 19 years. This was to be my ultimate happiness. The reality of life proved something different. What happened was when I was in hospital having the twins [our second children] I found out that he had been out with my boss’s daughter. I knew that there was the possibility of the twins dying [one subsequently did] and said to my husband that she [the boss’s daughter] had brought unhappiness and that she would go through the same hurt as me. She later died when her husband pushed her through a window. My husband said “You witch you killed her”. Maybe if I had overlooked the flirtation things may have been different. When we eventually got divorced the first thing he said was “You’ll never get anyone in your life, you’re not pretty enough, not elegant enough”. So I went out and showed him – that was the reason I had so many relationships [after we divorced]. He also told me that I wasn’t an educated person, you don’t have a degree, you’ll never get on in life. It was like a shock and I thought no I can’t survive.

Gergen (1994:196) when writing about narrative forms, speaks of the “happy ever after” narrative which is widely exemplified in traditional courtship. It would seem that Joy had been influenced by this narrative in her young life as I suspect many young people still are.

Jeanine chose to author her story in a different way because of not wanting to return to that painful place. She had the benefit of studying narrative therapy in a lay course and so chose to use those newly learnt skills in order to protect herself.

I was very apprehensive to write my story because I have had to deal with a large number of issues, some very painful experiences that have dragged on almost fortnightly over two years. My story is reflected from the perspective of how divorce has influenced my life and how I have influenced divorce. As
I reflect I realise that divorce has been a part of my life for a very long time, since the inception of my marriage. The death of my partnership devastated me and I found myself in the grief cycle, going through all the phases over and over again. Later I was faced with a devastating court action, which saw "fear and anxiety" trying to dominate my life. This single action although devastating saw the birth of a "new partnership" – a relationship with God. I have been saved since the age of 11 years but have never had a relationship with God.

The externalisation of the problem (White & Epston 1990:16) seeing divorce as something that is external to oneself, can help people to become separated from their stories, to begin to experience personal agency, to see the problem as the problem and not themselves and take intervention in their own lives. Having externalising conversations (Drewery & Winslade 1997:44) with oneself or with others is a first step in creating space for a different understanding of the problem.

The practices associated with the externalising of problems helps to free persons from saturated descriptions of themselves and to begin to develop a new relationship with the problem (White and Epston 1990:65). In doing so these practices help to foster a new sense of personal agency and to assume responsibility for new directions and choices in their lives. When Jeanine was telling her story she was able to identify a new relationship with divorce and the changes that had made in her life.

Sue - What has bought those changes [that Jeanine was aware of] about?  
Jeanine - I think the whole thing - divorce has put me on a journey - I see divorce as an opportunity - an opportunity to reach out and help others.

By externalising "divorce" as a concept Jeanine had been able to objectify it as something over which she had influence, rather than divorce having total control over her and her life (White and Epston 1990:38)

Following the meeting I transcribed the taped recording and from this transcription I composed a narrative letter (Epston 1994) to the group using questions that were designed to deconstruct the problem and situate it in context (White and Epston 1990:65) (Appendix three).
3.2 Telling of narratives

As the meetings progressed the conversations moved between regressive and progressive narratives. Gergen (1994:195), in writing about narratives, identifies three different forms of narrative, which he argues can be converted to linear forms as they shift over time. They are the stability narrative, the progressive narrative and the regressive narrative. The stability narrative is one that remains unchanged over time, life simply goes on. The progressive narrative is an incremental narrative, which links events together so that the movement of the story is seen as moving forward. On the other hand the regressive narrative depicts a downward slide, a backward step in the story being told. Until the retelling of the story of divorce many of the group believed that they were living a progressive narrative. At this time it seemed that the telling of the divorce stories was creating more difficulties than it was helping them. I have reflected upon the ethical position of this previously in this chapter and will do so again in a later chapter.

On reflection, however I could detect that we spent time weaving between dominant and alternative stories, but it was the group’s experience that the dominant story was taking up the conversational space.

By the time the group were approaching the fourth meeting they were expressing a desire to spend more time talking about moving forward or re-gaining a sense of a progressive narrative.

Joy - It's sad when harping on the bad times comes through.
Jeanine - We can change it as a group.
Ossy - I'm now beginning to strive to care for others. I've spent time on getting to know myself.

It was as I was listening to the tapes as I transcribed that I began to hear the voices of the group more clearly. The desire to move on from the dominant, problem saturated story was evident and I wished to respect the place where the group were. As the researcher I had a responsibility to co-construct the alternative narrative and an ethical responsibility to journey with them to a place of alternative and richer stories. At the
beginning of the next meeting I raised my concern that members of the group wanted progression within the telling of their stories. They acknowledged their desire to move forward and to begin to explore stories of hope and a future.

3.3 Searching for the alternative story

The fourth meeting looked at the facets of divorce. By the end of the third meeting some of the group began to ask if we could use other than oral means of communication in the group meetings. Some of them know that I have small boards that I use in therapy to write or draw with my clients and were keen to try this out. The group chose to draw a picture of the divorce journey.

A river, with many obstacles and boulders along its path represents the divorce journey. On the riverbanks are some lifelines and also other obstacles such as swamps. The group were able to closely identify with this picture as a journey they
themselves had been on and were all able to identify the spot on the drawing where they felt they were at the present moment.

Joy - I am close to the dam.
Ian - I am further back from there.
Debbie - I am just about to settle under that tree!
Jeanine - I am swimming in the dam with the fish

I hoped that through the use of pictures the group would be able to stay connected to the emerging desire for an alternative story. The group expressed a desire that by seeing the emerging picture they also could see the journey that they had undertaken so far.

It was as a result of drawing the divorce journey that the group began to dream of the future. At the same meeting the group expressed a desire to draw a "future picture" - a place where they saw themselves working towards and where they all hoped they would be. The picture represents dry land with trees growing on it. Joy said at this time;

I want to be on dry land - both feet on the ground instead of floating about in that river!
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I want to be on dry land – both feet on the ground instead of floating about in that river!
When the group were drawing the divorce journey they used the metaphor of “bobbing about in the river” [represented by the head in the water at the top of the picture]. This represented how they all at times, felt as though they were drowning in the emotional turmoil of the divorce. This was a metaphor with which they all identified. Joy’s discussion about dry land in the future picture was an alternative picture which stood against the dominant metaphor of “bobbing about” in the turbulent water of the divorce story.

Each of the trees on the future picture represents a quality that group members held onto in order to see themselves through the divorce journey — qualities such as the will to survive, faith, courage and determination. The fruits below the trees are representative of qualities that members of the group felt they had gained as a result of going through the journey.

Pictures of this nature can act as a support and motivation to encourage people to reach the new destinations that they aspire to (Morgan 2000:98). The drawings of the future can act as a prophecy and be kept in a place that can be referred back to. I know that Joy carries the pictures with her and looks at them frequently.

During the meetings the group had been able to move from a problem saturated story to an alternative story. This had been achieved through telling the story and using narrative approaches such as externalising conversations (White and Epston 1990:17) and through the writing of letters.

4. LETTERS AS RESEARCH

Letters were used extensively throughout this study with the intention of “extending the conversation” (Epston 1994:32) outside the group meetings. Letters as a research method (Denzin and Lincoln1994: 421) were used amongst the research group, to the children of the group and from myself to the group. In each case one of their merits is to equalise the relationship between all concerned, whether those concerned are directly or indirectly involved in the study.
The letters were constructed in such a way that externalising language was utilised around some of the dominant discourses (White & Epston 1990:39). The letters took on the task of deconstructing (Wolfreys 1998) some of the dominant discourses that are present in society about divorce. I was intrigued during the conversations to hear about the many facets or characteristics of divorce. Some of the group saw the “hell” side of it, some the “reality” and others the “opportunity”, whilst others the sadness and loneliness. In the first letter that I sent to the group I began to ask some deconstructing questions about divorce and its influence.

Does divorce try to overshadow your life and the contributions that you are making? Will divorce speak only of the pain that it caused or will it start to think about relief, loss of burdens and struggles.

This began to open the conversations towards exploring another less dominant, less problem saturated story of divorce, the beginnings of an alternative, that of release and growth.

It was through the letters that the questions were directed towards societal issues thus attempting to take the conversation from a personal to a societal level. My use of deconstructing questions was intended to help the group to broaden their own understanding of societal discourses regarding coupledom and marriage. Through the letters I was able to challenge some of those “normalising truths” about relationships, marriage and community in a way that could be considered a counter-practice to cultural and societal beliefs (White & Epston 1990:75).

In the same first letter I began to ask deconstructing questions about the themes that had arisen in the conversation.

Where do the ideas about relationship come from? Is it society or the church or our families that tell us that we are not whole unless we are in relationship?
Do you think the communities [referring to church and clubs] we speak of are challenging the idea of 'good fences make good neighbours? Do you think that there are assumptions that go with the marriage story – like 'happily ever after' or other kinds of assumptions?

The counter-practices of asking deconstructing questions were designed to open up space for the group to re-author or re-constitute themselves and their relationships.

The group members were soon heard to be saying:

*Joy* - *I thought relationship was husband, wife and two kids.*

*Jeanine* - *I have chosen a community which has allowed me my own view. It's about belonging even though I am not the same.*

*Debbie* - *I knew a woman who was 30 years old and desperate to get married.*

Following each session, which was taped and transcribed, I composed a letter to the group. In these letters I took the opportunity to summarise and to reflect upon the session. I tried to write down some of the main thoughts or discourses that emerged during the conversations and to introduce reflection as a means of thinking further about what has already been said. Wherever possible I tried to use the language of the group.

4.1 Unexpected and surprise letters

One of the unexpected and surprise uses of letters emerged early in the study. Four of the five participants had access to e-mail and used this medium to communicate with each other and with me in between meetings. The group, with a little prompting, always ensured that the fifth member was given copies of these e-mails either by fax or by taking copies to the house. On reflection there was poor opportunity for Debbie to respond back to the rest of the group, which she acknowledged later, left her feeling a little isolated. In retrospect more care should have been taken to ensure that Debbie had an opportunity to respond.
Some of the e-mails were concerned with building a support network and messages of care, concern, gratitude and good wishes were frequently sent to one another. From the perspective of pastoral care with its four traditional functions of healing, sustaining, guiding and reconciling (De Jongh van Arkle 1999:137), I began to see a sustaining ministry happening between some of the group members. Others in the group felt unable to be involved in extra communication through letters due to pressure of work. A sustaining ministry ("to stand by") involves forming and maintaining a relationship with distressed people that will give them a sense of support and comfort. This was evident in some of the e-mails.

*Ian* - Thank you all so much for allowing me into the group, I am tremendously blessed and privileged to be part of such a discussion.

*Jeanine* - Dear group, I was wondering if we can try to contact Ian. I am concerned.

Other e-mails took the form of informal journalling as the group sent information and thoughts to one another in between meetings. Two of the group reflected on ideas from the letters that they had received giving thought to some of the questions posed.

*Jeanine* - Dear group. I was reflecting on some of the questions Sue had asked us in reference to relationship and community....... 

*Ian* - Community.......Well I hope that I have added something here and not simply expressed what might be obvious to us all!

Journalling can be a powerful way of giving account of personal experiences and can be utilised as a method of information gathering in a research context. Writing thoughts and ideas down can be seen as writing or talking ourselves into existence (Davies 1996:18).

As Myerhoff (quoted by Dixon 2000:351) says:

Unless we exist in the eyes of others, we may come to doubt even our own existence
Ian remarked at one point

*It is good to be involved in something that was meaningful for a change. The interaction between group members could only grow into something great.*

5. RE-AUTHORING THE GROUP’S STORIES

As the group told their narratives time was spent exploring some of the themes that had arisen in the conversations in the first and second meetings from the members stories of divorce. Themes such as finance, relationship, community, childhood, and children all surfaced. Themes of this nature are not uncommon in the writings about divorce. Florence Kaslow (1995) in her writing about divorce and the divorce journey identifies many of the same themes as those identified by members of the group. In a narrative letter to the group I began to discuss with them some themes that had caught my attention.

*As I look through the transcript of yesterday’s conversation (a copy of which is attached for you) a few themes caught my attention. I would like to explore these further with you through this letter. I would also like to put to you as a group a few thoughts mainly in question form. I hope that this will open up our thinking in the next conversation about the views and influence of society on divorce and I also hope will add to our thinking for the divorce recovery programme.*

It was from those themes that a number of discourses (Freedman and Combes 1996: 42) seemed to emerge during that conversation with the research group. Discourses are taken-for-granted knowledges about issues that effect society and individuals. From well acknowledged work in the field of divorce such as that of Kaslow (1995) there are responses to divorce that have been taken-for-granted “stages of response” to
divorce. From the stories that emerged during the first meeting it seemed that the members of the group were also influenced and effected by them. The themes and discourses that accompanied them are now discussed in the next part of this chapter.

5.1 The painful side of divorce

During the conversations with the group the painful side of divorce was very evident, what White (1991:122) calls a dominant story. Time and time again the pain experienced by group members, as they struggled to overcome the issues, dominated the conversation. There was the pain of separation and grief, of betrayal, of failure, of anger, of accusations and of devastation (Kaslow 1995:272). The group spoke of the same emotions as identified by Kaslow, often during the telling of their story.

Ossy - Divorce made me loose the purpose that turned the cog of my wheel, my reason for living. The anger at signing over 80% of everything to me ex-wife and the mistake of not putting it into a trust for the children. The uncertainty of life, choosing to leave a well established business 3 years after divorce and leaving it to the ex-wife/business partner and investing it into a new venture just to loose the investment 6 months later because I didn't have the correct frame of mind to make those kinds of decisions that would make it work.

Joy – Then one day after 13 years of marriage he came home to advise me that he had been to an attorney to seek a divorce. The words sounded so ugly and feelings overwhelmed me and I crashed like a shattered glass. This could not be true. I begged and pleaded with him that with some serious help we could make it. The day came when the final decree was granted. I will never forget the date – 31st December 1980. I was totally devastated.

Debbie - I am angry that my husband allowed his drinking to get so out of hand and yet at the same time I feel sorry for him. From the day that I went to his parents for help and to talk about the problem he has despised me and now hardly speaks to me, because I went to his parents.

Jeanine - I followed a course of action of dealing with a large number of painful experiences that dragged on with different turns almost fortnightly for over two years.

Ian - There is still a lot of anger and unforgiveness in my heart. At the time [of the divorce] because of the trauma I just said “I don’t care just have it all”. Then only a couple of months down the line it starts eating at you –
giving up everything you have worked for and you start thinking that she is reaping all the rewards of your hard work and I am at the bottom trying to get up again.

As I write this section and reflect upon what is being said here I see an opportunity for opening up an externalising conversation with the members of the group. Externalising conversations constitute the problem as the problem, which allows for distance between the person and the problem. By doing so it encourages more discussion about the problem and so the pain of the problem is also heard.

(Davies 1991:43) however would argue that problems such as those expressed by the group is because agency is lost. The stories begin to tell narratives about us that are disabling. The person is positioned and becomes the recipient of that position. The position of “I am angry” for example is accepted because we feel unable to move it. It is through allowing for space in the conversations and acknowledgement of the position that agency is reclaimed.

In the more than 30 articles I read about divorce, the voice of the person who is divorced is rarely heard. Even in the literature the voices of divorced people were not given space in the text or if they were they made appearances as “case studies”. In this way agency is lost and the pain and strong emotions are ignored.

Divorce was studied, (Kaslow 1995:271) (Peck and Manocherian 1989:335) treated, (Everett and Volgy 1991:508) long term studied, (Waters 2001:40) analysed, (Gleck and Pearson 1985:179) theologised (Nichols 1998:101) (Gonzalez 1999:141) seen as an intervention (Hill 1999:49) (Kissman 1992:323) and guided by theories (Donovan and Jackson 1990:23). I was heartened to find that on one or two occasions the voices of research participants were given space on the pages of the articles. (Campbell 1995:185).
I began to wonder how voices of divorced people could be heard and how the pain of the ending of relationship could be acknowledged without "therapising" it, trying to "make it better" or minimising it. During a talk recently given by one of our ministers in the church, he advocated a nurture group for people experiencing painful issues surrounding divorce. I began to wonder what the nurture group might look like and if we could incorporate it into a divorce recovery ministry. At a subsequent meeting the idea was introduced for discussion. The group felt that if it was similar to this research group people could only benefit.

5.2 Conversations about gender

Because the group was of mixed gender, inevitably issues around gender arose during the conversations. Issues raised alternatively caused discussion and laughter in the group. Gender appeared in the guise of women and men's roles in relationships, in the marriage relationship and seemed at other times to be almost invisible in the conversation.

Jeanine - Women look after the kids, even when a working mother. You get some help but it's your role. I am a career woman - marriage can't adapt to it.

Ossy - My responsibility was to make a proper living, so that the women were not put into the pressure of an executive position. I see the man as the major income earner. The wife is doing the menial task at home. The man makes sure that the business is going on whilst she made sure the household goes on.

It was as I was transcribing the tapes that some gender issues really stood out for me. I wanted to challenge some of the issues that were raised and felt that the conversation as it took place was not the right moment. Epston (1994) says that letters can allow for transparency and lets the reader see what the narrator understands and can challenge some painful things that are more easily absorbed in private. I was concerned about the dominant discourses of sexism, that of the women's role being prescribed as the homemaker and the man's role as that of the major income earner. As a career woman myself I have been blessed in my relationship with my husband to experience
mutuality in our relationship. As a couple we have taken steps in our relationship to ensure that mutuality can exist. Those steps have centred on communication and open discussion. To be supported in my choice to not be a housewife and to follow a career has been something, which I believe has been the strength of our relationship.

In a letter to the group following that meeting I began to explore some of those issues with them.

_I am curious about “gender issues”. Do you think that “gender issues” are visible only from your own gender perspective? Men see the men’s side and women the women’s side? Or can we develop bi-gender vision?_

The group made very little response to the questions posed in the letter and I did not take up my ethical responsibility as the group leader at that time to bring this issue to the fore. This upon reflection was an omission that brought poverty to the study.

Isherwood and McEwan (1993:123) writing from a feminist theological perspective have this to say when discussing a woman’s place:

Lack of procreative choice has often served the purpose of confining the so-called kept woman to the home...the work women do within the home is not classified as such; it is simply ‘housework’ and ‘wifely duties’. Women have traditionally provided a comfortable and secure private sphere from which men go to make their mark on the ‘real’ public world. His achievements are noted on marble; hers are overlooked and taken for granted.

At a later time Ossy when reflecting upon his journey to recovery had this to say about being a member of the research group and the divorce recovery programme in relation to gender issues.

_As a male and sticking with the whole programme from beginning to end there were experiences that were somewhat uncomfortable. At times there were moments of vulnerability, not that I didn’t expect it or that I am_
complaining about it. However it seemed to me that there were some misunderstandings and assumptions made about me. This is a concern for me for more sensitive individuals who may attend the course later. On the other hand some individuals brought to the groups attention that my being in their space has helped them with their gender attitude [Ossy helped some of the women with their hatred of men].

From a feminist perspective it is unusual for a man in a group to feel discomfort with gender issues, it is more frequently the females that have such experiences. I am curious how it was that Ossy helped women to explore their gender discourses and men in the group were not helped with theirs. All of us are influenced by discourses in our society. Part of my role, as a facilitator and narrative pastoral therapist is to help to develop bi-gender vision in relation to gender discourses. I believe that I did not accomplish this task and that the group were the poorer for this omission. In retrospect I would take more time to address gender issues as and when they arose in a group.

I am concerned as a researcher and a narrative pastoral therapist with whether it is relevant to introduce issues such as gender differences that do not appear to be of concern to groups with whom I work. If I do not take a prophetic role and address issues that are hidden in discourses, then there is the potential for me to become an accomplice to those discourses which are influencing and affecting people’s relationships.

5.3 Opening the conversation to God

The five members of the group all attend church and belong to church groups. Faith, church and God were frequently mentioned in the conversations. Faith and God seemed to be personal beliefs that sustained them in times of difficulty.

Jeanine - My relationship with God gave me strength [during the divorce and since that time]. When I spend time in devotions I feel so much better. It really uplifts me.
Debbie - Faith has made me another person – a new person it’s restored my life [faith has helped Debbie both during and since her divorce].

Joy - God in my life has sustained me. God sees a lot of potential in me [Joy feels she is growing and developing during the last year].

Ossy - I came to peace with myself when on the Emmaus Walk [a spiritual journey organised for the Church] – I was able to hand over my troubles to God. I was in touch with my deepest self.

Although the group did not go deeply into the story of each person’s faith, we were able to accept the others’ version of the Other in the conversations. There is sometimes the “entrainment of knowing” (Griffiths 1995:126) that comes from “knowing what God is like for you because I know your religious denomination”. However for some of the group there was still struggle in relationship with God.

Ian - A big issue for me is about my faith life. I don’t pray often enough. I read my bible maybe every second week. God feels far away at the moment. My faith journey is SO slow at the moment.

For Ian his struggle with God has been ongoing with other struggles in his life. Ossy asked questions of Ian during the conversation.

What are you doing about your faith life and community from the faith point of view?

The group responded by inviting Ian to the cell group meetings of which they were all part.

During the group conversations about God, I provided space so that the members could tell their stories as they experienced them and this included the story of God in their lives. Justice for people is when they can tell their story from their perspective and in the way that they want (Griffith 1995:124). The group were able to listen to each other and each other’s stories. As members of the group listened to each other and their picture of God (Hudson 2000:23) I believed there was hope that justice can prevail in all aspects of their lives. Listening and being heard was a big need for
members of this group. Listening to all aspects of the story, including God, without being misheard, introduced the concept of justice into the conversation.

5.4 Relationships

I was interested in the group’s concept of heterosexual relationships and how it had tricked some of the group into believing that it was only about being married. This was a theme in the conversation that took place in the third meeting.

Jeanine - In the beginning I was focused on partner relationship.

Debbie - I have always been a romantic person – the kids would grow up and you would spend time with the husband and have fun. A partner is someone you grow old with – it gives me security.

It was through narrative conversations and through objectifying Relationship (White 1995:66) via the first letter that the other versions of Relationship became visible.

Do you think that Relationship would like to have you believe that a partner is the only relationship worth having or that children or God can be a good substitute? Or is it tricking you into thinking that if you are in any relationship that is enough?

The group became aware of the pressure that existed from society, from families, from the church to get married. The married relationship seemed to be the normative standard of society, with other relationships standing outside that norm. Relationships of different kinds served to influence loneliness but only served as a “deviation”, rather than an eraser of loneliness. There was also some evidence of the social discourse of “coupledom” (Grobbelaar 2001:87), that society is geared towards
couples and the difficulties that exist on having a social life when single. This became visible when group members spoke about the difficulty of adjusting as a single person after the divorce. When deconstructing this during a group session the group had this to say.

Debbie - I have forced myself as a single person to go out. It's very difficult but I don't want to go backwards. People in your life are very important.

Ossy - I took myself to pubs to watch sport. After 2 beers I didn't feel so lonely.

Using Relationship as a metaphor we began to speak about it in a letter.

If Relationship could speak, will it talk of the problem version or the caring version of itself? Does it disguise the caring version of itself more frequently? Would the Relationship confess that it had been in intensive care long before the divorce or will it speak of sudden shock if we interview it?

The use of metaphors or externalising assisted in describing the relationship between the person and the problem. It was through externalising Relationship that the group began to realise the multiple realities of Relationship. It is through using language in a different way that possibilities are increased in conversation.

White and Epston (1990:82) contend:

Rather than privileging univocal word use, polysemy is embraced. More than one line of interpretation or reading at any one time is encouraged, and through decreasing our linguistic resources, the range of possibilities is broadened.

The group were also encouraged to think of a relationship that they had experienced before, such as with friends and family that sustains them and the qualities that they were in touch with when with this person. Using the narrative concept of re-
membering conversations (Myerhoff 1982:101) helped to thicken the emerging alternative story of multiple relationships.

Ian - I have an excellent communication with my Mum. There is a deep understanding between us. She would say (Laughing) "Ian is a wonderful boy".

Jeanine - My children have put me in touch with learning how to show love.

Debbie - A close friend helped me a lot. She would see determination [value Debbie's determination]

I am beginning to reflect upon how to incorporate relationship into the divorce recovery course. At the moment the course is focused on the individual with no mention of relationship except perhaps the one that has ended or is in trouble. Would inviting Relationship and especially different forms of relationship into the course begin to bring forth alternative and richer descriptions of people's lives?

It would seem that the group as a representation of society responded to marriage or intimate relationship as something that gave their life meaning and order. So it is that we understand and have meaning within relatively structured sequences (Gergen 1994:268) such as marriage. It may be difficult therefore to understand "relationship" in a different context such as with friends, children, nature, and selves and with God, particularly when societal discourses are so dominant.

5.5 Community

Divorce has the effect of isolating the people concerned. Because of the pain, the singleness in a society geared for couples, negative attitudes of friends and family and the lack of understanding of the effects of divorce, people who are divorced become more and more lonely. The group spoke of loneliness and not feeling accepted by society.
Ossy - The shock of leaving home, being in a room on my own, I felt horrible - not a worthy person. The saying goodbye when the children leave after a visit. The way I found relief was going to the pub. I ran away from loneliness - I watched rugby on the T.V. in the pub.

Ian - You want to prove that you are acceptable. Having someone with you helps with that. Being alone makes you unacceptable or unaccepted.

Jeanine - Everybody wants acceptance. I couldn't verbalise what I wanted, but I realise that it's the crux of everything - to be accepted.

Howard Snyder (1983:128) in his writings about the church as a community speaks of the crisis of community in society, where people are more and more separated from each other through walls and fences. He further advocates that the way that community is built is through shared time together.

Real community means shared time, shared priorities and some level of economic sharing, some genuine economic mutual dependence. Whilst specific patterns of such sharing may vary, koinonia in the New Testament sense does not exist without this level of shared life. Such life finds its real meaning in the balance of shared worship, nurture and witness.

The challenge for us as a church is to be inclusive of everyone who comes through our doors, and for us to be inclusive in both our words and our actions. In order to develop a sense of community we have, as a large church, begun to form cell groups. These are small groups that meet together in each other's homes during the week to worship God and to support and care for each other. Most small groups have people who are divorced as members but many divorced people have continued to feel isolated in those cells because of others' lack of awareness of their situation. Recently we have formed two cell groups following the end of the divorce recovery programme, made up of people who are divorced and which offers support and care in a mutual way amongst the cell members. Mutual care is the foundation of pastoral care (De Jongh van Arkel 1999:119) and is the means through which meaningful community can begin to be formed.
The group really struggled with the concept of community. Some saw it as friends, some as the church or the people in it, some as the area in which we live. One frustrated group member commented:

_Ian - This seems a lot of waffling about nothing!_

Anderson & Foley (1998:7) contend:

> When the stories we tell conceal rather than reveal our understanding of ourselves and our world, they isolate us from others. When, however, the aim of storytelling is to interact with others and identify common ground, stories have the potential to build authentic communities of shared meaning and values.

This is in line with the narrative approach of “communities of concern”. It is through taking steps towards identities in relation with others that becomes possible in community (Freedman & Combs 1996:237). As the meetings progressed the members were able to identify themselves, not in isolation but in relation to one another and to the church and so community began to be formed. Every voice needs a community in which to be heard. It is only then that resistance to dominant discourses can be faced (Weingarten 2000:390).

6 MOVING FORWARD

As the meetings of the group came to an end there were several thoughts and ideas that began to emerge, both at a personal level and ideas for the future of divorce recovery within the church.

6.1 Personal learning

As the alternative story emerged some of the group began to take on a sense of excitement about their own future. The comments came from either e-mail communication or from the last meeting.
Jeanine - I am excited about building the alternative story for myself. There is a great wealth of material that I will treasure as a source of comfort and hope. Being part of this group has helped me to be with people. I had isolated myself. I found the letter writing very good.

Ossy - I have learnt and grown through this group. Hearing other people's pain has helped me to grow. Other people have different problems from mine. It has helped me to understand myself better and be happier with where I am coming from.

Joy - The input from this is better than going through the divorce recovery programme, because we were able to share more in a smaller group.

Debbie - I used to block things out terribly that is how I dealt with it. I have grown in confidence through the letters and others compassion. Being part of this group has helped me to talk about things and to shed the past and work towards the future.

For some members however there was a need to bring the talking and the group to an end.

Joy - I've puked my guts out – there's nothing left. It's like having a virus that's gone.

Ossy - The input has been beneficial because I was able to reflect but I want to walk away from it now.

6.2 Benefit of the study?

At the last meeting we took the opportunity to reflect upon the study and the meetings of the group. All of the members of the group had experienced other kinds of groups, particularly divorce recovery programmes where the numbers were larger – in average groups of 15 to 20 people. The group reflected upon the difference they had experienced.

Debbie - I would never have said half the stuff in that large group that I did in here. There is more learning and more healing in the end in this small group.
Ossy - In the big group you are fighting for your space. Here you can choose whether to speak or not.

Jeanine - In the divorce recovery group I was shooting my mouth off. I didn't have to work in the big group, whereas here it has really challenged me, with people nurturing me at the same time.

Joy - I think the writing about the story has been of most benefit to me. You can waffle by talking - but writing you have to focus. It made us think about other people.

6.3 How recovery has begun to happen

One of the issues that did not become clear during the group meetings, perhaps because it was still too close, was how the members of the group felt they had recovered. To this end I wrote to each of them ten weeks later asking the question about recovery. I received replies from three of the group via e-mail.

Joy - What helped me firstly was the acceptance of my divorces by the church, especially Northfield (the church we all attend) by making way for a divorce recovery programme. This programme helped me a lot because of the issues that were discussed in depth such as self-esteem, forgiveness and God's perspective on the subject. During the last programme I was able to bring out anger using narrative ways of working. Being able to interact with other divorced people and the support given to children. All this contributed to tremendous growth. The support, dedication and encouragement to keep going from counsellors like yourself and others, our ministers and others from within the study group who made themselves available. The formation of cell groups especially for divorced people to encourage us spiritually. From all that it is now so much easier to give that hope to others in deep despair during separation and divorce. There is hope and a life that needs to continue and everyone has a right to that life. I am definitely in a much better place of recovery.

Ossy - The initial reason for going on the divorce recovery course and your study group was to share my divorce experience. It was also to assist others who are contemplating divorce, going through divorce or living with divorce so that they can have a better understanding of the repercussions and the effects of divorce. And for the input to be turned into workshop and counselling material helping others to progress more easily. The group meetings helped me realise that I was not alone - that others have worse
cases, thereby helping me to be thankful for my bag of troubles. It helped me to understand people who are in a bad way. I learnt quite a lot about human behaviour that will help me through life and work situations. At present I am getting on with life more positively as my spirit has lifted incredibly because I have become more focused.

Jeanine - What did help, with your guidance was finding a new direction and focus – that of supporting the hurting- knowing that was what I wanted to do. All the supporting I am able to participate in has really helped with my own healing, helping others, giving hope and support. At the same time I have been able to reflect back on my own progress and through the stories of others have been able to find “new alternative stories” to build into my own story. The research group did aid with a “voice” and at that time was very healing. Over the three years I have had therapy, anti-depressants, I have found a community through the narrative therapy course, I have read books, established a new support structure in my personal life and have received financial support from my family beyond my wildest expectations. Through all this – getting to know myself, my ways, being accepted and loved by my children and learning that I am OK has been the main foundation of my healing. This was possible when I became aware of what it meant to be in relationship with God.

As I read through these e-mails I became aware of the length of the journey and that one approach would not be the sole factor that brought recovery from divorce. A divorce recovery ministry would need a host of different approaches to be made available and that each person in trying to recover would require support and pastoral care at many levels.

6.4 Helping others

One of the questions that I asked of the group at the last meeting was

How do you see yourself helping others following the end of this study?

Some of the group felt a definite call to work in the Pastoral Care Centre in pastoral therapy, whilst others wanted to develop a pastoral caring role, but less formally.
Jeanine - I want to work with really hurting people. My focus is changing from just being in cell. I need to give my attention to those who are hurting. I want to offer care and support to those going through separation and divorce. I hope to be involved in pastoral therapy at some time in the future.

Ossy - My priority is my business. I lead a cell group for divorced people and I will continue to do that. I don’t want to study or do anything very formally. I just want to act as a sponge for people.

Joy - I am a plant sewing another seed. The more groups we have - the more we can help to start the ripple effect. We are pebbles in a pond, which can begin to create ripples in our church.

6.5 Ideas for a divorce recovery ministry

Debbie and Jeanine responded to a request for ideas about the future of a divorce recovery ministry. Some of the ideas were to add to the ten-week divorce recovery programme and others were for support and care outside the programme. The following were the suggestions made by members of the research group and which were incorporated into the ministry, which is outlined in Chapter five. As the divorce recovery ministry is part of a pastoral care ministry the suggestions have been recorded under the headings of mutual care and pastoral care (De Jongh van Arkle 1999:119)

Ideas for mutual care

- Approach people who are going through divorce and may be in too much turmoil to make the first move.
- Make a call or visit to those who fall out of a group. Perhaps a little care may help them to come back.
- Meet the person at the door for the first meeting to ease the “first time” nerves.
- Help people to feel as though they belong by making a call during the week to see how they are.
- Some “fun times” are needed for parents and their children to maintain that sense of belonging.
• Someone to walk alongside people, to meet at the church or at the coffee shop.

Ideas for pastoral care

• Offer different kinds of groups for people at different times of the divorce journey. For example programmes for those who are further on in the journey to recovery and small groups for those who are still in lots of pain.
• Parenting workshops – especially for divorced parents.
• Food parcels as an outreach for families struggling financially. Donations can be made and received anonymously.
• Ensure that divorced people know about the care-line (out of hours) telephone contact, so that they can ring and speak to someone when in pain and be offered support care and prayer as appropriate.
• Regular prayer meetings for hurting people – in this case divorced and separated people.

These ideas have been incorporated into the divorce recovery ministry that is set out in Chapter five.

At the time of writing Jeanine is involved in ministering to people in pain as they journey through divorce. She is a co-facilitator in a small therapy group and is working towards becoming a pastoral therapist.

Ossy is leading a cell group for divorced people and is also involved in a “job seekers” ministry in the church. Joy is also leading a cell for divorced people and was co-facilitator on the last divorce recovery programme.

Debbie is offering support to people with whom she works as they travel the divorce journey.
Ian felt unable to continue with the group after three meetings. He is struggling with several other problems in his life as well as trying to recover from divorce. Members of the group keep in touch with him personally and via e-mail. Ian and I are meeting again to have further conversations about the dominant stories, which are trying to influence his life.

I have tried to give voice to the members of the research group, to pay attention to their experiences of divorce and recovery from it and so to use those experiences in conjunction with the voices of other narratives, in the development of a divorce recovery ministry.

In the following chapter the story of the group's struggle with the influence of their divorce on their children will be told. This came about during one the meetings and became for the group one of the most meaningful parts of the whole study.
CHAPTER FOUR

INVITING THE CHILDREN
CHAPTER FOUR

INVITING THE CHILDREN

1. INTRODUCTION

During the last meeting together as a research group I asked the group members to reflect upon the study and to say what had been the most meaningful part of the study for them. Without exception the group said it was the time spent talking about the children and the letters that were written to each other’s children as a result of the meetings.

It was as part of the fourth meeting that we began to speak more about the children. Using the narrative letter written following the first meeting (Appendix 4) where the group told their story of divorce, the children were re-invited into the conversation through asking questions about how they, the parents felt the children would respond to the group’s conversation about them. Morgan (2000:77) in writing about re-membering conversations, a word coined by Barbara Myerhof (1982) has this to say.

When people are faced with a problem, they often experience isolation and disconnection from important relationships. Re-membering conversations are intended to re-dress this.

It was through the narrative process of re-membering that the parents became re-connected with their children in the story of divorce.

This re-membering was, for Ossy particularly, very painful as he spoke in the meeting about the difficulties of wanting to do what was best for his children, without hurting them. It seemed that this was done at times to his own detriment.

_I was in a lost world. I wanted my kids to have at least one area where there was stability and that in my mind is with Mum, with a house and a place to stay. Not like me when I was young [Ossy’s parents also divorced and this created great financial hardship and difficulties in having a place to stay for Ossy and his mum]. They [my ex-wife and kids] asked me to come round the_
first Christmas and there was no way I was going to be there. My wife had all her family and my kids were there and then I would have to leave. It was better in the end that I didn’t go. I went to Cape Town to the Waterfront and ate ribs and veg. It was horrific, horrific, horrific.

From the first meeting the children were frequently spoken about and so were part of the conversations, but it was at this fourth meeting that we spent time discussing the influence and effect of divorce upon them. Through talking about the children they became significant participants in conversations about divorce and its effects. A full chapter has been dedicated to them because they were such a significant part of the study. In the early discussion and planning this was not the original intention.

1.1 Responding to the pain

Following this meeting where the children were spoken of I was very touched by the level of anguish that was being expressed in the group concerning the children. I began to reflect upon the anguish and how I could respond to it. The anguish of separation being expressed is something with which I can identify as I am separated by distance from my own daughter and grandson. I was uncertain what to do about it and so I contacted my supervisor to discuss it. I was wondering how to respond to the group in a way that was caring, pastoral and narrative. In the discussion that ensued we began to consider using narrative letters from the group to each other’s children. Letters and especially e-mail is a method of communication that I have used to deepen my relationship with my daughter and my grandson and so I began to wonder if writing to the children would have a similar effect for the children and the parents of the group.

To this end I composed a narrative letter to the group prior to the next session and sent it to the group members via e-mail.

Dear group

I have just reflected on the last meeting about the children as soon as possible because it touched me so much. I suppose because I am a parent and grandparent myself and also because my daughter is so far from me.
I was wondering as you read through the transcript of the meeting (which is attached for you) what goes through your mind as you listened to each other’s stories about your children.

If you are able to reflect to one another through e-mail before our next meeting I would appreciate it. I was wondering if it might be useful to write a letter to our children to inform them about ideas of care and love as well as concerns that we walk about with.

Would they like to know how much we worried about the effects of divorce—how difficult it was to negotiate a working relationship with them and the parent/partner you divorced? How we do not find it easy to find the guidelines to help us steer through the stormy waters? Will they appreciate the financial contributions you made to their lives and their education? Do they need some information to value the “invisible” contributions you made to their lives that have never been spoken of?

As always, heartfelt thanks for your words and your commitment. Special thoughts and prayers to you Debbie as you go into hospital on Friday. Also thanks to you Ossy for sharing about your children—it touched me deeply.

With blessings

Sue.

These questions all re-suppose that a conversation will take place with the children. However if a conversation does not take place immediately, simply thinking about such questions can often motivate a person to initiate them. Even if a conversation does not take place, it can help the person to behave as their preferred version of themselves when around the person, in this case their children. In this way the children can become an unknowing audience (Freedman and Combs 1996:238)

Discussion took place at the next meeting as to whether this was acceptable to the group and will be recorded later in this chapter.
2 GETTING TO KNOW THE CHILDREN

All the members of the research group had children. Their ages at the present time range from the eldest at 33 years, then in age order 30, 28, 24, 22, 19, 17, 10, 9, 6, and the youngest who is three years old, a total of 12 children.

Joy is the mother of the three older children. They were teenagers at the time of her divorce and are now adults, one of them now also a parent themselves. Jeanine has two children and Debbie three and both have custody of their children, with access for the fathers of the children. Ossy’s children are now adults. Ian is the father of two children and has regular access to them.

In their introduction of themselves in chapter 3 the members of the research group each spoke of their children, often in glowing terms. It was obvious from their introductions that the children were important in their lives.

Ian - I have two beautiful daughters – after my own heart. I love spending time with my kids.

Ossy - I have two children a boy and a girl. My daughter is overseas and my son is now living closer to me in J’Berg.

Joy - I have four children. One twin, a girl a twin deceased. There are three surviving children, two girls and a boy. The bond between my children and me is so strong; they have been my source for survival to carry on.

Jeanine - I have two stunning children – gender important GIRLS!! . My children have been the greatest gift I have received, through them I have learnt so much, especially about love.

Debbie - I have three children a boy and two girls. My children are very loyal to me.

The members of the research group all see or speak to their children on a regular basis. Most of the group have a very good relationship with their children although some struggles still continue.

Ossy - My son is now in Johannesburg, though I hardly ever see him, but we are building our relationship slowly but surely. When I spoke to my
daughter in the UK – she was saying – we spoke about the Dads tonight and you were voted the best Dad.

Wallerstein and Kelly (1980) when writing about divorce speak about divorce being seen as an answer to the parents problems and that divorce is not seen in the same light by the children. Peck and Manocherian (1989:343) have this to say about the reactions of children to divorce, particularly at different ages.

The consensus of many studies of all types of arrangements was that the younger the children are at the time of divorce, the greater the short term impact. However, in the ten year follow up to Wallerstein and Kelly's (1980) study, Wallerstein (1984) found young children who have no memory of the pre-divorce life adjust better over time than older children, who remember the family that was and consider the divorce the central event of their childhood.

The effect of divorce upon their children was something that troubled the group members considerably.

3. THE DOMINANT STORY AS PARENTS

With respect to her children Joy had been divorced from their father for 21 years. The children were 13, 10, and 6 years at the time of the divorce and though Joy was given custody at the time, they were eventually given into the custody of the father. She spoke of the time during the marriage and later after the divorce as a time of great pain.

The home became an unhappy environment for the children. Day after day they listened to violent arguments between their parents as we tried to justify the wrongs we were doing to each other. In the end the reason for the divorce was simple – irretrievable breakdown. The next thing was to break the news to the children then 13, 10 and 6. Our children were devastated. My children’s father went to gain custody of our three children. Another year of trauma passed and feeling so exhausted mentally and physically I finally conceded and signed my darling children over to their father. The children were so emotionally smashed by being torn between two parents that I felt it best to remove myself from the picture and so I moved to Natal hoping this would give some emotional stability to all our lives.
Many studies of divorce indicate that children require and need a good quality on-going relationship with both parents and that everyone benefits when there is shared parenting (Peck and Manocherian 1989:345). This would seem to be the case with Joy and her children as the relationship with her children was restored at a later date.

Ossy had been divorced from the mother of his children for 6 years. The children were 19 and 16 years at the time. The mother was given custody of the children. He walked away from the marriage with very little, in order that his children would not suffer the same experience he had in his own childhood. He explained it in his introductory story.

*When my Mum and Dad divorced, my Mum had nothing. We lived in a boarding house and I lived in the same room as her, eating cabbages and bread and using a communal bath. I wanted to keep my children under the same roof when we divorced, that they would not go without anything. I would rather go without. It wasn’t done to get praise but I had the fear that my kids would go through what I had to go through. Where I am annoyed is that the money for their education is gone – I never put it into trust. My daughter phones me now and says “Dad please help me” and I can’t, my daughter’s education is suffering. The worst was failing my children – children that I promised that I would never fail – now there is no family home, no celebrations, no dreams, nothing to look forward to in the years to come.*

Peck and Manocherian (1989) have this to say about non-custodial fathers:

*Divorce is painful for men who lose the day to day contact with their children. There may be a sense of rootlessness, loss and lack of continuity. Many men view themselves as inadequate for the care-taking role, especially when they have left the bulk of child rearing to the mother. Feeling at a loss, they gradually distance themselves from the relationship.*

Debbie finally left her marriage for the sake of the children. After years of trying to make the marriage work it was the effect that she believed the marriage was having on the children that lead to divorce.

*I have spoken a lot about what went wrong, because I didn’t want anyone to think that I was deserting a sick man. My husband is an alcoholic. My two*
older children and me have always been very open about it. One of the reasons that I left was that it was destroying the children - especially the little one. They don’t have much respect for their father – they go out to lunch just to get money from him. It upsets me that they do that. It’s difficult to explain to the kids.

Jeanine’s children were very small when she became divorced.

My husband left me the day after I went back to work after maternity leave. It will be three years in October. My children are still very young. I have had that responsibility from them being very young. My youngest daughter is 3 years and does not know what a fulltime father is or that Mum and Dad were married. She has just started on a sleepover with Dad and soon a full weekend. It’s Dads turn to form a bond now with her, he has focussed a lot on the older one and left her out, ran away emotionally quite a lot. She has structured visitation, which has increased gradually over the years from nothing to now nearly a full weekend. My eldest daughter is 6 years old and has been part of the divorce process and was affected badly by the divorce. [She] loves both parents and still desires Mum and Dad together as a family with her.

Anderson and Johnson (1994:64) advocate that although two parents are generally better than one for optimum child rearing, they also believe that the single parent family alongside other family can also provide what children need. In both Jeanine and Debbie’s situation they receive support from their parents to care for the children. Jeanine with financial support and Debbie with accommodation.

Ian has frequent access to his two daughters and sees them very regularly, however he has some concerns about his children and new relationships that they are having to build [Ian’s ex wife has another man in her life].

My relationship with my children has strengthened so much since the divorce. When they come around that is my relationship with them. I love having them around. I have them around as often as I can. The big thing that really worries me is the involvement of another man in my ex wife’s life and that of my children. What I hate is the secrecy surrounding him and the fact that I don’t know the man who my children live with.

The prominent writings about children and divorce and divorce that I studied, (Peck and Manocherian 1989, Wallerstein and Kelly 1980, Everett and Volgy 1991, Kaslow 1995) are mainly concerned with the reactions of the children of parents who were
divorcing. The perspective of the parent and their own feelings about the divorce are not frequently written about. In listening to the parents in the group, it became very clear that the children were important to them and that the pain they felt was not only the pain of their children, but also the pain they themselves experienced as parents.

Anderson and Johnson (1994:44) speak of our worldview changing when we become parents and go on to say

> Despite the pride and joy that many parents feel, the anxiety is real as well. The world is filled with danger, imperfection, intrigue, and evil. If it is a dangerous place for adults, it is certainly not safe for children. The urge to protect one's child from the world, or to clean up the world they will inhabit, brings parents into a new relationship with the world.

For many of the group there was a sense that divorce had somehow contributed to their children's unsafe world and this created extreme anguish for them.

Whilst members of the group were concerned about the effects of divorce on their children, they also spoke with a great deal of anguish about the effect on themselves as parents that the divorce brought. Of being absent at sports days, Christmas and other important family times.

It would seem from the comments of the group, anxiety about the world for themselves and their children, brought with it levels of anxiety and pain that were difficult to manage. Anderson and Johnson (1994:44) speak of crisis creating a schism in the traditional parental role of protecting the child from danger. It seemed from the group's conversation that divorce had created such a schism and had increased the level of pain and anxiety that they experienced.

It was discussed at the fifth meeting whether it would be appropriate for the group to write a letter to each of the other members' children. In this way we could invite the children to witness the care and concern of the parents who were members of the group. The group agreed to write to each other's children.
4 WRITING TO THE CHILDREN

The group was relieved to find a way of communicating with their children. It was agreed that each person in the group would write letters about each other that could be formed into a letter for their children. Following this, the group sent letters via e-mail to each other. Each child or set of children received via their parents a total of five letters, four from the other members of the group and a letter from me in which I tried to pull together points from the other group members. These were all sent in between meetings and were only discussed at the fifth meeting when we came together again. The letters seemed to stand against the dominant stories that the group had told of themselves as parents and encouraged the opening up of an alternative story for the group. A synopsis of the letters sent to each member's children follows here.

To Joy's family From the divorce recovery group,

Joy is such a sincere and caring person. Even with the disappointments she has been through, her first concern is for her children. This, despite divorce taking her children away, being ostracised and seen as an outcast by society - what an example to society. A wonderful trait I have noticed about your mum is her respect for others. This is a mum who gave up her happiness for her children. May your family life begin to blossom together.

To Ossy's family. From the divorce recovery group.

During the time we have known your dad we have heard a man unravel some deep hurts from his past. Most of the time he spoke about you his children and through his words always describes deep concern and love for you both. We are sure the family break up couldn't have been easy for any of you especially yourselves when you were teenagers. He left all the home comforts behind to try and ensure that you his children were provided for. His biggest regret and
sadness is his lost years with you. We see a man who has sacrificed everything to his detriment for the sake of his children. He is a kind and caring man, who hurts so much because he cannot give you everything that he would like to give you. We all agreed, your dad as well, that divorce is not the children’s fault. Sometimes it’s difficult to say who is at fault as there are so many stories around. Maybe it’s like looking at the same mountain but from different sides. Do you have any ideas how we can help children and the parent they don’t live with to understand each other and their needs?

To the family of Debbie. From the divorce recovery group.

We have only known your mum for a short while in this group, but we have found that she always longs to do what is best for you. Your mum never has a bad word to say about your father either – they just couldn’t stay together any more. This has taught some of us a good lesson because we don’t always see our own ex partners as good. She has taken her own pain into a recovery programme in order that she can become whole again in order to guide her family into the future. Your mum really tries to understand all sides of a situation. As a group we are trying to find ways of understanding all sides. We wondered if you have any ideas of how we can help all concerned as they go through divorce?

To the family of Jeanine. From the divorce recovery group.

Your mum has grown so much since we met her. Some of the men in our group have really helped her to get to like men again because she was very angry about being divorced. Now she has opened up her space and revealed her ideas and her passions we have found a beautiful person just bursting at the seams with so much to offer. One of the best things that you have given to her as children is your love and through you she has learnt to give love to others by helping hurting people. That is a really special thing to do for a mum. We
know her as a really caring mum who just wants to do the very best she can
for you two girls. She is a person with a lovely bubbly laugh and beautiful
smiling eyes.

To the family of Ian. From the divorce recovery group.

Your dad has come across as a man with a deep passion that showed when he
spoke of the miracle of your births. When he speaks of you his daughters his
whole face lights up. Ian displays unselfishness when he refers to anything to
do with your mum. He never puts her down and rather takes the burden on
himself. He feels deeply when he cannot give you all the things that you need,
but he provides so much love and care for you. We have met the Ian who is
open, honest and has a strength of character and of course someone who has
a lot of creative talent. We just pray that the bond between you will deepen as
you grow up. He is a very special person.

During the conversations at the fifth meeting we reflected upon the letters and their
impact. Some of the children been shown the letters by their parents and as a result it
opened up the opportunity for conversation about the divorce. Joy took the
opportunity to talk to her children about the letter. This was the first time that she had
spoken about her experience in 21 years.

Joy - I have had long telephone conversations with one of my children. She
had no idea I felt the way that I did. It has really helped to heal our
relationship after all these years.

Debbie also showed the letter and some of the comments from the rest of the group to
her older children and received a more mixed response.

Debbie - My daughter has read one or two - she didn’t comment. She
queried something about her attitude to her father.
This comes from some points sent by Ossy to Debbie’s children trying to put over a father’s point of view.

The remainder of the group chose not to show the letters and comments to the children at this time because the children were either too young or they were not sure of the response that they would receive.

Jeanine said – The thing is about the letters they are timeless- maybe they will reflect differently in a few years time. I will keep the letter and comments from the group until the children are older – maybe when they are 21.

Ossy – The question I have asked myself is how will my children receive this, how will they understand it?

Ian – Had a good cry over all your letters. Such a beautiful thing to keep for our children and very uplifting.

At this point of the study and as I write I have had no response from any of the children. I trust that at some time in the future we will be able to hear more of the voices of the children, to add to the many other voices that speak about the effects of divorce.

It was from these points and others that I composed the following letter, which was written to each of the member’s children of the group.

The letters used some of the same wording in order to begin to recruit the children as an audience and some of the comments from the group about each other. The letters are to be found in appendix 4, but for the benefit of the continuity of this chapter the letter to Ossy’s children is included here.

Dear Andrew and Amy,

We don’t know how long it will be before your Dad (Ossy) shows you this letter but we are writing to you to tell you a bit about him. We are sure that you already know him well but sometimes other people see him from a
different angle. We have all been meeting together with him to talk about divorce and how it effects everyone involved and so that we can look for a way to help parents and children when it happens.

We have known your Dad for some time now, but it was only when we began to meet together as a group that we realised how much he cares for you as a father. Coming from a divorced home himself we heard your Dad say that he didn’t want you to endure what he had to and so tried to make every provision for you, especially financially, even when things were really tough.

I wonder, as someone who hasn’t been divorced, when children are in the midst of separation and divorce, it is possible for them to understand everything that is happening? And in your situation, especially when someone like your Dad felt that the only way he could cope was by distancing himself? I wonder what your experience was of his distancing? Do you think that children get lost in the turmoil of divorce? How was this for you?

As a group meeting together we are trying to find ways of helping and supporting everyone going through a divorce. Do you have any ideas of how this could be done or how you would have liked such support to look like yourselves? Do you think divorce seems easier when you are small or is it no different whatever age you are? How can we help children and the parent who don’t live with together to understand each other and their needs? We would really like to hear about your ideas either now or at some time in the future.

With best wishes

Sue (from the pastoral care centre) and the rest of the group.

Inviting the children and writing a letter to them was also done in order to give the children an opportunity to speak and find their a voice, something that children often don’t have in situations of family crisis.
Griffin (1987:70) contends that the children see separation and divorce from a different view.

Adults, including the affected spouses, will primarily view the crisis as husband and wife no longer living together. The child will see what is happening as “Mummy and Daddy no longer live with me”.

In my Hospice experience I found that children were often excluded when parents were dying. I believe that at other times of trauma within a family the children are excluded from information and conversations. This is not done with malice but often with a desire to protect children or from a place of pain that allows little thought for the needs of others. It is at those times that children are silenced or not given a voice. I hoped that the children of the group could be given the opportunity to speak.

Another response from the group was of how much they appreciated the comments made about themselves, by other group members, as they received the letters.

The dominant story of divorce had lead the group to believe a different story about themselves and it was with relief and often tears that they heard and read about qualities that stood outside the influence of divorce and its problems. The group described each other to the children alternatively as concerned, determined, a person of courage, having a hidden “spark”, brave, with a deep passion and love.

*Debbie* - It was wonderful seeing how other people had got to know me.

*Joy* - I wondered how I had ever been named super-bitch of the millennium. People saw so much good in me. It was very encouraging.

*Jeanine* - I just wanted mooore. I was very touched.

*Ossy* - It was great to hear what people had to say about me and I read them over and over and over.

As the new and alternative stories of the group emerged through the meetings, the letters provided an opportunity to tell that story to an audience (White 1990:114). Although the original intention of the letters was to write to the children, through the
receipt of the letters via e-mail, the group became an audience and a witness to each other.

When speaking of recruiting an audience White and Epston (1990:114) has this to say:

The endurance of new stories, as well as their elaboration, is enhanced if there is an audience to their performance. There is a dual aspect to this. First, in the act of witnessing such performances, the audience contributes to the writing of new meanings, and this has real effects on the audience's interaction with the story's subjects. Second, when the subjects of the story read the audiences experience of new performance, either through speculation about these experiences or by more direct identification, they engage in revisions and extensions of the new story.

Taking some of the comments made by the group to their children I incorporated them into a letter. Debbie was seen by the group as sincere, open minded and committed, Joy as caring and reaching out to others, Ossy as self sacrificing and sincere, Ian as honest and open and Jeanine as a dedicated parent and Christian. I used these comments to explore through questions who else knows these things about them in an effort to thicken the newly emerging alternative story and to begin to spread the news. As a response to this I wrote a letter to the group to help with the revision and extension of the new story. In the covering e-mail I said:

I attach a letter to you. As I began to write the letter to the children I realised that you had formed an outsider witness group for each other. The questions at the end are designed to "thicken" the alternative story. The more people know about our alternative stories the richer that description becomes and the more the "problem version" [of pain and divorce] has to fade into the background. I began to wonder who; outside this group would know these things about you? Is there someone who could tell a story about you in relation to the qualities seen by the group? Who would that person be? Who do you think would be the least surprised to hear these things about you?
Freedman and Combs (1996:237) when writing about spreading the news of an alternative story which constitutes a person’s preferred view of themselves, has this to say about the therapy situation.

Although in the dominant culture therapy tends to be a secret enterprise, in the narrative sub-culture the people who consult us are usually enthusiastic about letting other people in on the process. When therapy becomes a context in which people constitute preferred selves, they have nothing to hide and much to show.

When people are influenced by a problem story in their lives they often experience isolation and disconnection from important relationships. I hoped that through the questions posed in the letter that the group members would begin to re-form members of their life club and thus rebuild their community. Significant members can include persons alive or dead, related or unrelated, real or imaginary (Morgan 2000:77). Members of the group began to comment.

**Ian - Children can see our hearts through others.**

**Joy - They can hear an outside point of view and it’s so much more positive.**

Re-membering conversations involve people deliberately choosing who they would like to have in their “life club”. Dominant problems can isolate people from important relationships and it is through re-membering that significant people such as children can be re-introduced into lives in a meaningful way. Although many of the group were in relationship with their children, there had been little discussion about the divorce and its effects. I believe that this was primarily because the dominant story had held sway and it wasn’t until the alternative story began to emerge that the group could consider re-introducing their children to those events that all of them had lived through. Some of the group chose to re-introduce their children immediately to the beginning of the re-authored story (White 1995:16) of divorce, whilst others because of age or relationship uncertainties chose to wait until later. For Ossy it raised more questions.
Ossy - Here is a group of people the children don't know that's put this type of thing together. Will this change their mind about me?

5. MOVING FORWARD

During the last few days I have been in contact once more with the group to find out about how things are, especially in relation to the children. These are the comments made by the members of the group that are relevant for this chapter. I begin with Ossy because it was from his pain that I believe we really explored the issues for the children.

Ossy - My emotions for my children have calmed down. I think this was because I opened up in the sessions and this helped me to reflect on my dilemmas. I released a lot of hurt that was inside. From a family point of view – participating has assisted me in coming to even better terms with my disappointments of the past and I am in a more peaceful frame of mind about the future and what family life means to me now. Also the realisation that as the life of the children progresses there are no controls of where the children live – overseas or somewhere else in the country. It’s not a case of becoming less caring – it’s just the acceptance of the situation.

Joy - The support that has been given to children in divorced families has really helped me and contributed to my growth and recovery.

Jeanine - My eldest daughter has had secular counselling to help her face up to the trauma. This was followed by a period of play therapy at Northfield. I saw my daughter become a really happy child. This was healing for my daughter and healing for myself to see my child change and coping after a long haul.

As I write this chapter I reflect upon how children can make such a valuable contribution to adults pain and problems if we give them a space in the conversation. Our societal discourses have us believe that children should be seen and not heard. I believe that, even though the children of this research group have not been directly heard, allowing them to be “seen” in this chapter has made a significant contribution to this study and to our understanding of children as they are caught up in the divorce situation. For that I thank them, even in their absence. By giving children the opportunity in this study to be included has opened up the ideas for children of parents who are divorced to be ministered to in our church.
In the next chapter I will discuss the ideas and thoughts that have evolved from this study and that will contribute to a divorce recovery ministry in our church.
CHAPTER FIVE

STEPPING STONES - A DIVORCE RECOVERY MINISTRY
The Stepping-Stones ministry is made up of a collection of ministries that serves the needs of all members of the congregation. Some of the stepping-stones or activities in the ministry are not solely for divorced and separated people. This was done after consultation with the participants of the research programme, because they preferred to be seen as an “integrated part of the church” and not as separate or in need of special attention. If ministries are exclusive for only one group of people within the church this can have the effect of maintaining the marginalisation that participants have already experienced. However, some of the activities of the divorced recovery ministries are solely for divorced and separated people. In this way aspects of inclusivity and exclusivity were balanced.

During one of the meetings with the research group we discussed the dilemma of having the spotlight on divorce and making the focus on divorce ministry so strong. In the beginning it was felt necessary to spotlight divorce, but after having been heard and the ministry beginning to develop, participants desired to focus on belonging and acceptance. The group began to believe that they did belong to the church, capturing this move from being centralised to becoming part of the congregation, I am reminded of what Ossy said:

*It was good to have the spotlight on us to get things started, but now I think the footlights are sufficient!*

3. ACCEPTANCE WITHIN THE CHURCH

At the beginning of this study I questioned the level of care that was offered to people who are divorced and separated in our church.

I believe that as a direct result of this study, the church in which we worship is gradually becoming a community in which concern for people who are divorced and separated can be found. This has been able to happen through the conversations with the research group and the willingness of our church to be open to people who are
divorced and separated. The life of the church has now become more open and accepting of people who are divorced and separated.

3.1 From ministers and management

The ministers and the management team have been very accepting of the idea of a divorce recovery ministry in the church and have welcomed the thoughts and ideas that have resulted from this study. In the early days of her separation from her last husband, Joy was very uncertain about her place or her welcome in the church. She remarked in the past that if the ministers did not want her in the church they had to tell her. However, in a recent meeting with the senior minister of our church she was able to verbalise this directly to him by acknowledging her change of ideas about acceptance in the church as follows:

Joy - What has really helped me was the acceptance of my divorces by the church especially ours. I feel as though I belong here now. I want to thank you for that.

Following the conclusion of the research group meetings, we asked for a meeting with the senior minister of our church, in order to discuss the research and the way forward for the divorce recovery ministry.

The senior minister listened to their experience of divorce and of being members of the research group and assured them of welcome in the church. He also took the opportunity to thank them for their support of me in the research that I was undertaking as a member of his staff. In this way he was able to contribute to the sense that the group had of beginning to feel more accepted, welcomed within the church and contributing to the ministries of the church. For a ministry with people who are divorced and separated to exist or to prosper, the church has to be open to being a community of concern for those people who are in “diverse relationships” (Graham 1998). Many churches will say, “all are welcome” when really they mean, “as long as they are like us”

Snyder (1983:129) would argue:
The church's most potent role as a community is in community building, particularly at the levels of family, church and neighbourhood.

People who are struggling with problems in relationships need to feel that they belong and are part of the church community. Up until this the beginning of the study and the subsequent meeting with the minister, the research group were sometimes uncertain of their place in the church.

The senior minister knew about the research and the developing ministry through meetings in the church. As a member of staff, I am also a member of the management team of the church. At these meetings I report on the outcome of all ministries for which I am responsible. This now includes divorce recovery. The management team consists of all the ministers in the church, both clergy and laity and covers all departments from worship to youth to children's church to cells to pastoral care and preaching. As the discussions take place in the meetings it has become clear that people who are separated and divorced are to be found in all walks of life of the church and in all departments. The youth pastor and the children's church minister as well as counsellors working in pastoral care, have their ministries influenced by the rate of divorce.

3.2 Through preaching and communion

Life in the church needs to be open and accommodating of all sections of the wider community. Following the earlier discussions at the beginning of this study, which have been written about in the earlier chapters of this dissertation, we have had a preaching series on marriage and divorce. The teaching was liberated and caring to the extent that one of our ministers invited those who are divorced to come to the rail to take communion first, before the remainder of the congregation. It was a great surprise to many present when almost half of the congregation stood up. During that preaching series, people who are divorced were also invited to give their testimony; one was an elder in our church. In this way our church leadership gave clear messages
concerning the acceptability of caring for people in relationship problems and not isolating and ostracising them.

As this study was in progress a divorce recovery programme was being held at the same time. Because of the conversations that were taking place in the research group, our awareness was heightened about the inclusion of other divorced people in our church. The facilitator of the divorce recovery programme is a trained social worker, counsellor and divorced person, offering ministry in the pastoral care centre. I was co-facilitating with her in the divorce recovery programme. We discussed with the participants who were part of that divorce recovery programme whether they would like to receive communion at the end of the programme. Unanimously they agreed. The ministers in the church were approached and very readily agreed to serve communion to the group and their children. Our ministers served communion to divorced people and to their children at the end of the last two programmes, in moving ceremonies which incorporated “letting go” of hurts and of the past so that they can begin to move forward.

Jeanine when she was part of the divorce recovery programme, prior to joining the research group, found this particularly helpful.

Jeanine – During the time of the study and before I have started a process of forgiveness. Pastoral guidance (a form of supervision) and communion at the end of the divorced recovery programme has aided in my healing.

Receiving communion has an important effect upon people who have previously experienced marginalisation, giving them a sense of inclusion into the community of believers.

3.3 Through cell life

As a large church of 4,000 members we are working towards relationships in small groups. At the present moment we have approximately 90 cell groups in our church – small groups that meet together for nurture, to grow together as Christians
emotionally and spiritually and to worship. Ideally, care of people in pain could take place in these small groups and for some members of our church; cell group is the place of mutual care where their pain can be heard and they can receive comfort and support. However for others, because they are constricted by the societal discourse of individualism — “I must bear this burden alone” — whether they are in a cell or not, they choose not to share their pain in such settings.

Because the cell movement in our church is still in its early days, members of our church are either not in a cell or some of the cell leaders are inexperienced in dealing with people in pain. Because of this it is necessary that other small groups are made available in the church setting to listen to people experiencing the pain of divorce and for whom time can be set aside to nurture and care.

3.4 Through specialised nurture cells.

As a result of the growing divorce recovery ministry and because people who are divorced do not always receive the care and support that they need in other settings, divorced people are now being invited into cell groups that are set up especially for divorced people. By doing this we as a church have intentionally been able to welcome into our church more than 20 divorced people and more than 35 children. They are now part of intergenerational cells, which they attend weekly. The cell makes space for children and their custodial parent. On some occasions it is the non-custodial parent who attends with their child. This has helped divorced people and their children to feel accepted as part of the church community. These specialised cells have divorced people as cell leaders. They have attended cell training and cell leaders meetings alongside members of our church community.

In the beginning it may be difficult for the divorced person, whilst still in pain to withstand the unintentional hurtful language of people who have no concept of what it is like to be divorced. It is as healing begins to happen that divorced people can begin to take their place again in mixed society. My hope would be that as we help divorced
people to heal they in turn could teach others to be more understanding of people who have problems in their lives.

4. PASTORAL CARE OF PEOPLE IN PAIN

People struggling with relationship problems in a church setting require pastoral care at a variety of levels such as mutual care, pastoral care and on occasion pastoral therapy (De Jongh van Arkel 1990:118). The Stepping-Stones Ministry offers care at all of those levels. Care can be offered in a pastoral therapeutic sense, in small nurture groups and through the mutual care of others who have themselves been on the divorce journey. Pastoral therapy has been discussed elsewhere in this study and so will not be addressed again at this point. I will begin by writing about small groups that offer nurture and support.

4.1 Small nurture groups for adults

The idea of small groups which provide nurture for people experiencing problems in their lives is in keeping with our churches value that as we become larger as a church we need to become smaller and meet in small groups. The divorce course, although a fairly small group in itself is almost the only option, apart from counselling, that people who are separated and divorced have open to them. The course can have people at all parts of the divorce journey attending. During the current course it is becoming obvious that some people have a greater need to tell the story of their pain than others do. We thus began to consider in the research group, a smaller group than the divorce group, where those people who are still in pain could have their stories heard and allow others who were ready to move beyond the pain towards healing to do so through the recovery course.

The concept of a small nurture group came from one of the ministers as he taught on the recovery course (Hudson 2001) and was eagerly taken up as a concept by the research group. The idea of the small nurture group would be particularly to allow the
telling of the painful, angry, resentful and bitter parts of the story, within a "community of concern". It is through the telling of the dominant story that stories can begin to be re-authored when subjugated knowledge and alternative stories of hope are developed (White 1995).

Blomquist (1986:166) speaks of the fear that divorced people experience and the period of gestation required for the person travelling the road of divorce recovery.

Despite the fear, it is the dark experiences which 'opens up to the next level of life' – the level where something new can begin to take root and send out its first tendrils reaching toward new life.

The journey towards new life is often a long and wearying process, as the research group were able to confirm. It carries with it the risk of opening up and exposing areas of pain and vulnerability and the real possibility of being rejected and wounded again. However it is through the route of discovering the alternative story that stands against the dominant story, that healing can begin to take place from within.

It is hoped that people in a small nurture group, whilst in the midst of the trauma of divorce, could have a similar experience of support and care that the research group members were experiencing. The sense of movement from pain toward healing can give them the courage to take bigger steps towards newness and healing. As with the research group members it may not always feel like healing has happened, but there is a longing for it. In this way hope can become real. (Blomquist 1986:167)

During the small nurture group the emphasis would be on listening in the first instance. Listening so that we try to understand, so that we can really hear their story. It is the first component of care.

Anderson and Foley (1998:45) have this to say.

It takes time and careful listening to get another's story straight and to communicate that understanding accurately and compassionately. The determination to create safe
environments to tell and re-tell our most intimate stories is the special gift of relationship in which care is the focus.

Members of the research group were able to reflect upon the differences between the divorce recovery course and being in a small group such as the research group of which they were currently part.

Debbie - In this smaller group [the research group] it's easier to talk than in the bigger group [the divorce recovery programme]. I am quite a shy person. Talking in big groups is not easy for me.

Jeanine - I didn't have to work in the larger divorce recovery group - whereas here in the smaller group it has really challenged me - with people nurturing me at the same time.

Overall the research group found more benefit for themselves by being part of a small group than in the larger group of the divorce recovery programme. They spoke of more healing for themselves as a consequence.

4.2 Mutual care and support

As a result of this study some people who are divorced have offered themselves to care for others who find themselves in similar situation to which they have been. These people offer care, companionship and friendship to those who are struggling with relationships and especially as they go through divorce. Pastoral care at a mutual level nurtures the development of ordinary people. Its primary focus is to care for people through the ups and downs of everyday life, and to create caring environments in which people can grow and develop to their fullest potential (Gerkin 1997:88). To this end, the people involved make phone calls, use the e-mail to communicate to each together, meet for coffee or wait for each other on the church steps to join each other for worship. All these caring approaches are designed to help the person feel that they are not alone in the journey they are involved in. It is specifically designed to stand against the reactions that people experience from society, that of being isolated and excluded. It is a deliberate plan to help the person experience inclusion and belonging.
In this way we are challenging the dominant societal discourses of coupledom, which if the person is not a couple brings with it isolation and loneliness.

5. CARING FOR THE CHILDREN

As I have already stated in Chapter four, the influence of divorce on the children was something, which created great anxiety for the research group. From the first divorce recovery programme offered by our church just prior to the commencement of the study, it was soon very apparent that we were neglecting the needs of the children. During the first divorce recovery programme held in the church the children were “babysat” so that their parent could attend. Once more we were failing to be faithful to our church values in relation to the children.

We must care for each other, we must treat every person with dignity and respect, and we must seek the lost because the lost matter to God.

Up until this time of the first programme we had begun to pay attention to the needs of adults and had ignored the needs of the children involved in the very same situation.

Anderson and Johnson (1994:111) when writing of the church as a sanctuary for childhood plead for the church to be a clear prophetic voice for the small and needy.

One of the ways that the church fulfils its purpose is by articulating clearly the vision of new humanity incarnated in Jesus Christ. It is urgent that the church be a clear prophetic voice for anyone who is small, weak and needy, not only because our children are in danger, but also because our response to them is the measure of our regard for all humanity.

It was one of the divorced members of our church community, who was not part of the research group, that came to talk to me about the needs of children in the divorce situation. He was aware that I was participating in this study and that I was writing
about divorce and recovery and came to plead for the needs of the children involved in divorce. He had been through divorce himself and had been awarded custody of his children twelve years previously and wanted to ensure that the children were given support and care also in anything we were discussing.

5.1 Pebbles — a ministry for children

It was from the conversation with the father who pleaded for the needs of children that I began to open up conversations with the research group at a meeting and the play therapists who are part of our pastoral team at a subsequent meeting. Following these discussions the play therapists worked together as a group in designing a ministry for the children of divorced and separated parents. Discussion and critique took place between members of the research group and the play therapists before the children’s ministry was ready for its first run. The children’s programme has been run in conjunction with the divorce recovery programme that has just completed as I write. It has been a great success for the children, who have been the ones to encourage their parents to attend the adult divorce recovery group regularly for their own sakes!

The content of Pebbles, as the ministry has come to be called, has dealt with the common issues experienced by children — the fantasies that they dream in their minds, the difficult issues they face — living in two homes, with two families, as well as the emotions that they experience. The children have explored issues through play, drawing, reading and games.

Two sessions in the Pebbles’ group are portrayed through puppet work, the puppets are employed as “unlicensed co-therapists” (Freeman et al 1997:172)

Co-therapists in the form of puppets and other toys or even imaginary or mythic entities can be called upon to support the therapist and enliven the conversation.

As the need for pastoral care of children has become more evident it has been decided within the Pastoral Care Centre to offer ministry to children through the form of children’s programmes on a regular basis. The concept of Pebbles has further
stimulated discussion for other small groups for children. Children with other needs such as the experience of loss through death of a parent, for children who have been involved in traumatic events such as hijacking and burglary and groups for children who are living in foster care and child care homes.

It is by welcoming and honouring children from all walks of life and with all kinds of needs that we can begin to truly call ourselves a sanctuary for children. As a church we are being true to our faith when we do as Jesus asked to "let the children come".

6 DREAMING THE FUTURE

It is now the beginning of 2002 and the ending of the written part of this study. During the first few weeks of this year there has been a meeting between the coordinators of various ministries. Pastoral Care of people who are divorced straddles across many other ministries and is influencing the content and approach used in marriage preparation, play therapy with family traumatised children, pastoral therapy with couples experiencing relationship problems and children's church. Divorce care and recovery is not able to work in isolation, but acts as a connecting mesh between several other ministries. It is ironic that the very thing that Divorce acts upon in individuals (isolation) has the very opposite effect (connectedness) when placed in a community of concern. In this way religious communities such as where this study happened, are ideal contexts in which isolation due to Divorce can be turned around towards inclusion and community. This is a unique opportunity that pastoral care and counselling has to offer divorced people. This is an expression of the widely accepted notion that pastoral care and counselling occurs within the context of a faith community.

The Stepping-Stones Ministry is a beginning -- a ministry that we hope will grow and develop and help the church to become a true community of concern for divorced and separated people and ultimately can show the way for other marginalised and oppressed groups.
I will conclude the writing of this study by addressing a letter to Divorce from Pastoral Care. Letters have been an important part of this study and it seemed appropriate to conclude it using some of the narrative practices that have helped to shape the future of divorce recovery in our church.
CHAPTER SIX

A LETTER TO DIVORCE FROM PASTORAL CARE
CHAPTER SIX
A LETTER TO DIVORCE FROM PASTORAL CARE

Dear Divorce

As this study draws to its conclusion I would like to formally introduce myself to you. My name is Pastoral Care and I believe that we have made some passing acquaintance during the time that Sue (the researcher) and the research group have been in conversation. I would like to take this opportunity to reflect upon the journey we have spent together in this study and to ask some questions of you that will help all of us that are involved to continue to plan for the future. I trust that this will help us to understand each other better in the future, particularly as I develop my own ministry of care as a result of this study. I know that you would prefer to be more incognito, but I am appealing to your better side, which I believe we all have, even you!

I have been privileged to get to know you more intimately during this study. Privileged because the more that I get to know you, the more I can understand you and your motives and so have the opportunity to counter those acts that people experience as traumatising. It has been of great interest to me that you are so multifaceted. The group spoke of you as hell, sadness, loneliness, despair and desolation. Just talking about you, had the effect of re-traumatising some of the group members. I could see that you had the effect of also drawing Sue into the painful experience rendering her stunned and speechless. I experienced some of your power at that moment and for a while you had me (Pastoral Care) almost playing into your hands. However, one of the group called upon narrative therapy and externalising conversations to assist in defeating your traumatising effects and so together narrative therapy, the group and I (Pastoral Care) were able to begin to expose you without such a traumatic effect upon the storytellers.

I began to wonder if you prefer to work collaboratively with societal discourses such as isolation, coupledom, and happy-ever-after-myths, rather than care and community? Powerful societal and religious discourses in our lives can render us
helpless, almost like puppets in their hands. Is this another trick you keep up your sleeve to stop us coming close to you and knowing you better? It was through the narrative conversations that the group and Sue had, that the dominant discourses began to show themselves and their relationship to you.

It is with some relief that I find that we have something in common. I also prefer to work collaboratively wherever possible. I am pleased to be able to frequently call upon community, care, compassion, inclusivity and respect amongst others, which I believe are in almost direct opposition to your own allies. I do not wish to set up a conflict situation. I think that you can manage to do that without my help. However, I would wish to understand you and your allies so that I can counter their negative effects on people's lives, wherever possible. The more I come to understand the dominant destructive side of you, the better I can respond. I thank God for the influence of narrative conversations in my pastoral care life. It is good to have such a like-minded companion.

In the beginning I knew very little about you, your influence and effects on people's lives, mainly because I have been busy struggling with issues in my own realm. I seem to be in conflict quite often, particularly when I am in a church setting, with Dogma. Dogma is a very powerful adversary and speaks with a very loud voice most of the time. Unfortunately I have a quieter voice, but when I speak with love and care, although quieter it has a way of appealing to peoples longings, desires and dreams and that is where, I believe, I am able to overcome your dominance and negative influence. I have a particularly good role model in Jesus Christ, which I choose to follow!

During this study I have been able to break free of some of the influences of Dogma, and so I have become better acquainted with you. I have been able to do this through conversing with the voices of literature and liberalism. I wonder if you, Divorce, and Dogma know each other well? Is Dogma able to contribute to the influence of your allies Isolation and Loneliness or are they not acquainted at all? I would appreciate further conversation about this in the future.
My being able to break free of those influences has also come about through linking up with qualitative research, narrative therapy and feminist theology and the stories that adults and children under your influence have to share. These are considerable allies in helping me to understand and know you better. The common themes from these areas such as collaboration, respect, inclusivity, mutuality, balance of power, transparency and ethical practices have been a source of great inspiration as I have tried to pastorally respond to your traumatic influence.

One of the meanest tricks that you get up to is the effect that you have on the lives of children when you are present in their parent’s lives. I have been delighted therefore that the children of the research group have played such a significant role in this study and that I, Pastoral Care am able to play a role in caring for them as well. I believe that as a church we are now beginning to say “children should be seen and heard”, because they have something important to say to us all. Divorce you made a good attempt to try and marginalise the children in this study, but fortunately through some of the practices of my colleague Narrative Therapy (letters, re-membering conversations to name but two) we were able to resist these marginalising effects!

I am wondering if over the years the Church may have short-changed itself by allowing the discourses of the secular models of care to be so influential in its care of individuals rather than communities? I do not wish to set myself up as the only answer, but I am beginning to believe that I, in all humility have something to offer that other contexts and Western models do not, namely communities of care and concern. The discourses of individualism have played into the hands of isolation and loneliness even in church communities. I, as Pastoral Care, stand with community and against the oppressive and marginalising effects of the dominant discourses of independence and individualism. The building of communities of care and concern is something, which we as a church are committed to, particularly as I now understand better the effect that you Divorce have in pandering to the discourses of isolation and marginalisation.
As this study has progressed I have been delighted to see healing and growth in several members of the group. I have you to thank for that Divorce, because as the group have exposed you and your tricks, those people who are part of our community of care and concern are beginning to see you for what you are.

The researcher (Sue) has come to know and understand you, Divorce and me, Pastoral Care much better and how we can work together in a way that brings healing and growth for those we effect. She is coming to understand that I (Pastoral Care) cannot reach out to you and those you effect, by isolating and ostracising you. Divorce you are welcome in our centre, but rest assured that we will also be working toward decreasing your influence in our community. I hear Sue dissuading couples from ending their marriages prematurely, whilst there is still hope because she now understands the havoc you can reek when you really get a stranglehold on people’s relationships. She has a greater understanding of the discourses that influence relationships and now tries to help those under your influence to gain a wider perspective on life and relationships.

For one or two members of the group there is now hope and a future, despite your very best efforts to bring despair and desolation. However once again I believe that I have to thank you. For at least one group member you have opened up pastoral caring opportunities, which I believe would not have been there had you not been present in her life. Sorry to gloat a little but, Pastoral Care 1 - Divorce 0! Because Divorce you have a way of quietening people I would like to let Jeanine have her say here.

To Pastoral Care – You have allowed me a voice – a voice that will never quieten again, you encourage this voice and you are full of love. My relationship with God has helped me to call upon narrative and give it a chance. Pastoral care is something that uses trust as an ally. Divorce does not. You pastoral care have ears that hear and really listen. Divorce – you don’t listen. I am healed, but a wounded healer – wanting to reach out to others. Jeanine.
For another member of the group (Debbie) the stranglehold of marriage was almost complete. Through narrative conversations she was able to realise that you, Divorce had helped her escape from a future without hope. This brought a sense of freedom and release for herself and her children and this sense of release is one, which diminishes your negative effects.

For some others in the group I have seen recently that once more you or your allies have been trying to gain a foothold in their lives. I believe that you have used the dominant discourse of Relationship or Coupledom to have them believe that they are nothing, if not in a relationship. One or two members of the group have fallen for your lies and deceit again, and are now struggling with issues that they felt they had resolved. Pain and despair, shame and guilt are trying hard to gain influence in their lives, but I am pleased to let you know that despite your best efforts and those of your allies, myself and community are supporting, caring and communicating with them in their struggle. I know that at one point Dogma tried to get a look in, but was defeated and I was called in as a preference! What a triumph!!

Divorce, I would now like to give you notice: Now that Dogma is on the run and care is growing, your days as a powerful negative influence in people’s lives in our church are numbered. I do not have all the answers but rest assured that those who have experienced my love and care will help to make that available to others in the same situation. As more and more people recover from your effects and influence and not only recover but heal, so I and the community in which I reside will be able to care and support others on the journey that you start. We do not wish to ignore pain, rather we wish to stay with people in their pain and not add to it by anything that we do or say.

Finally, Divorce. I would wish to say to you that because of your presence in our church and the opportunity to get to know you better, the care that we are offering is more appropriate, more compassionate, more sensitive, more visible. Your presence is influencing other areas of my ministry such as marriage preparation, pastoral therapy, play therapy for the children, children’s church, preaching and communion.
For that I thank you.

With kind regards and looking forward to working with you in the future.

Yours in the interests of healing and growth.

Pastoral Care.
Re-Authoring Narratives in a divorce recovery ministry.

Information sheet for research participants.

Thank you for your interest in this study about the effects of divorce on peoples lives and the development of a programme to support those people experiencing the end of relationships and marriages. I would like to negotiate with you the terminology used during the research and the purposes of the research at the first meeting. After you have read this information sheet I would like to give you the opportunity to participate or not. If you decide to participate I thank you in advance. If you decide not to participate, I thank you for the time you have given up to attend this first meeting.

The aim of the study
This study is being undertaken as part of the requirement for a Masters degree in Practical Theology – with a specialisation in Pastoral Narrative Therapy. The aims of the study are:

1. To explore the influence of divorce on the lives of people.
2. To explore the ideas of society and of the church regarding divorce and how those discourses have affected and informed us.
3. To co-construct with research participant’s alternative stories that would inform us in telling our preferred stories of divorce, relationships and being single.
4. To develop a new model of divorce recovery through the use of narrative practices.

Participants needed for the study
Five people who have experienced the end of their relationships through divorce will be included in a group discussion, telling their stories of how they experienced divorce and recovery from divorce.

What will be required of participants
If you agree to take part, you will be asked for your consent to use the information discussed in the group sessions, for the study.

I would ask you to attend six group sessions of about one and half-hours each. I would wish to negotiate that the sessions are recorded and/or notes taken. Following each session a typed summary will be either faxed or e-mailed to you. You will have the opportunity to edit the summary. The summaries will be used as an introduction to the next session and any comments or amendments attended to.

Confidentiality
The information obtained during the group session will be discussed with my study supervisor and will be used in the study. A summary of the sessions will be made available to you at the end of the study. Otherwise information obtained will remain confidential within the group.

Results of the study
Results of the study may be published. You may request to have your name changed and any distinguishing factors distorted to preserve your anonymity.

Should you have any further questions I can be contacted at the Pastoral Care Centre 011 425 0844 or via my cell 083 676 0423.

This study has been approved by the Department of Practical Theology, Unisa and the Institute for Therapeutic Development.

My supervisor is Elmarie Kotze (D Litt et Phil) Tel. No. 012 460 6704
Appendix two

Re-Authoring narratives in a divorce recovery ministry.

Consent Form.

I have read the information sheet concerning the study and I understand what it is all about. I have had my questions and concerns answered to my satisfaction and know that I can ask for further clarification at any time.

I know that:

1. My participation in this study is voluntary.
2. I can withdraw at any time without prejudice to my involvement in any ministry in the church.
3. The information collected will be kept in a safe place, not available for others outside the confines of the study without my express permission.
4. There will be no payment or compensation for my participation in the study.
5. Sue’s supervisor will read the material.
6. Personal information supplied by me will remain confidential throughout the study.

I am willing to participate in this research study.

______________________________  _____________
(Signature of participant)        Date

______________________________  __________________
(Name in capitals)                (Signature if witness)
30/6/01

Dear group,

I want to thank each one of you for the time we spent together yesterday on the first of our conversation together. I was very touched by the effort that each one of you took to write the story despite it having been very painful for you at times. You spoke of how sitting and writing had made you cry, helped you to realise how big a story there was to tell — “there was too much to condense”, how hard it had been — “but I’m glad that I’ve done it”

I was also touched when you spoke of realising where you had been, that you had coped and that at the end one of you spoke of “being survivors”

- I also wondered if you were to meet a group like yourselves what you would say about them? Do you think you would say that they were courageous or brave or coppers or would you think that they had other qualities. I wonder what those qualities would be. Perhaps we could discuss that the next time we meet?

I would like to try and make a summary of the conversation - but if there are things that I have left out I feel sure that you will say so! I would also like to put to you as a group a few thoughts mainly in question form. I hope that this will open up our thinking in the next conversation about the views and influence of society on divorce and I also hope will add to our thinking for the divorce recovery programme.

As I look through the transcript of the conversation yesterday (a copy of which is attached for you) a few themes caught my attention. I would like to explore these further with you through this letter. However if there are other themes that are emerging for you as you read perhaps we can discuss these as well at our next meeting?

One of the themes that seemed to emerge was of stories from childhood. Stories such as not having a home when parents divorced or coming from a home where there was “little love shown” and the effects that had on the choices that were made in partners when marrying and the choices made at the end of the relationship.

- I was wondering what ideas from childhood were helpful to you as you made choices about relationships. Were there some choices that got in the way of relationship either at the beginning or the end or are there some choices that worked for you and your relationships?

Through the stories that were told about the different marriages there were a whole variety of different stories. As you look through your own and others stories I am curious as to what goes through your mind.

- If you look at marriage from the five stories that have been told I wonder what beliefs we carry with us about marriage. Where do you think these beliefs come from?
- Do you think that they come from your own story, that of your family or more generally from the society in which we live? Having told your own story, how do
you think that story may differ from the one that we could ask your family to tell or even the story we could ask society to tell?

- Do you think that there are assumptions that go with the marriage story - like "happily ever after" or other kinds of assumptions? Maybe assumptions about the role of men and women in marriage for example or other assumptions you have become aware of?

Finances seemed to rear its head quite frequently, whether it was in relation to having a job, or linked to maintenance, making provision for children or just not enough of it!

- Do you think that there are some taken-for-granted ways of living that add to the pressure of finance problems that keep "financial problem" alive and well and continuing to live in your lives?
- Or is it just not sufficient finance that creates the problem. I began to wonder from my own perspective as well!

I think, "relationship" was a main player in our conversation. Lack of relationship seemed to attract loneliness and aloneness into our lives. Several of you commented "I don’t want to be on my own" and "I would like a partner in my life" Some of you also commented how having deeper relationship with your children, a community of like minded people and God had helped in the sensation of aloneness.

- Do you think that "relationship" would like to have you believe that a partner is the only relationship worth having or that children and God can be a good substitute, or is it tricking you into thinking that if you are in any relationship that is enough?
- Where do the ideas about relationship come from? Is it society or the church or our families that tell us we are not whole unless we are in relationship?
- I wonder if being accepted is part of being in relationship, whether it is with our partners, with our children, with God or in a community of like minded people? How important is acceptance in the way we feel about the stories that we tell about ourselves. What influence do you think acceptance has in our lives and our relationships?
- If relationship could speak, will it talk of the problem version or the caring version of itself? Does it disguise the caring version of itself more frequently? Or does the caring version of the relationship have a short-term memory?
- Or has relationship blinded us to the pain to hold onto as long as possible? Does it have an addictive side to it or is it a kind part that wants to see us happy?
- When reflecting on relationship will it have anything to say about the good bits or does it only want us to remember only the nasty bits? Would the relationship confess that it had been in intensive care long before the divorce or will it speak of a sudden shock if we interview it?
- Can you think of a relationship that has been sustaining you the person you want to be? What are you in touch with about yourself when you are with this person? If you were to see yourself through this person’s eyes, how would you describe yourself?

The concept of community was also frequent in our conversation.
• Do you think that being in community is a good enough relationship? What does being in community give you that other relationships don’t?
• Do you think that these kinds of communities we speak about are challenging the idea of “good fences make good neighbours”

I believe that all of you spoke about your children at some point in the conversation. The conversations around children ranged from meeting their educational needs – providing for their future, having good relationships with well adjusted adults, about leaving the marriage because it was destroying the children and concern over another man in the lives of children that you didn’t know.

• I began to wonder if your children could hear you speaking in that way, with love and concern for them – what they would say about you as both parents and as people?
• Will they be surprised or not surprised at all to get to know this side of you?

Finally I was intrigued to hear of the many different characteristics that you see divorce having. Some of you saw the “hell” side of it, some the “reality” and others the “opportunity” whilst others the sadness and loneliness.

• If we were to build a picture of divorce – how many different facets do you think it would have. ?
• If we gave divorce a chance to speak, what kind of future do you think it would like to plan for you? What reputation would it like to carry with you?
• Will divorce speak only of the pain it caused or will it start to think about relief, loss of burdens and struggles?
• Does divorce want to speak only of failure? Is there a triumph side to it?
• Does divorce try to overshadow your lives and contributions that you are making? Or does it talk with respect about you?

I look forward to meeting again with you tomorrow evening and hope that we can discuss some of these questions further as we try to grapple with not only our own understanding of divorce but that of society in general.

In the meantime sleep well for those of us who burnt the midnight oil at the expense of making meaning!!

Love Sue xx
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