EXPLORING AND STORYING PROTESTANT CHRISTIAN WOMEN'S EXPERIENCES LIVING IN SEXUALLY UNHAPPY MARRIAGES

by

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DECLARATION

I declare that **Exploring and Storying Protestant Christian women's experiences living in sexually unhappy marriages** is my own work and that all the sources that I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.

Name: _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

DEDICATION

I dedicate this thesis to all the brave Christian women who live in sexually unhappy marriages. It is my prayer that this work will break their isolation, voice their pain and honour their resilience.

And if erotic love is too important to be repressed, it is also too important to
be devalued, for to devalue love is to devalue life itself.

(Leonard, G 1989:81)

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SUMMARY

This research project arose from my journeys with Protestant Christian women who were living in sexually unhappy marriages. In South African Protestant faith communities there is the expectation that Christian marriages will experience sexual fulfilment. For many Christian women however, sexual unhappiness becomes their reality. Sexuality is cocooned in silence not only within the church, but also in many Christian marriages. This leaves many Christian women (and men) with little or no recourse to address sexually unhappy marriages.

My research journey briefly explored the social construction of sexuality within the history of Christianity to see which discourses underpin current constructions of White Christian female sexuality. This participatory feminist action research journey centralised the voices of present-day contexts: Protestant Christian women, as well as clergy, were invited to share their understandings and interpretations of matrimony and sexual practices in relation to their faith. With the help of narrative therapeutic practices, some of the dominant social and religious discourses that constitute White Christian female sexuality were explored, deconstructed and challenged.

This research journey aimed to penetrate this silence and to invite Christian women, who are living in sexually unhappy marriages, to share their experiences. This exploration included the faith predicaments and relational complexities, challenges and dilemmas Protestant Christian women experience when living in sexually unhappy marriages. This feminist-grounded action research explored the effects and consequences which living in sexually unhappy marriages held for the co-searchers.

KEY TERMS

Adultery; feminist discourses; Foucault; gender roles; participatory theology; pastoral care; patriarchal discourses; power relations; Protestant Christianity; sexually unhappy marriages; social construction; narrative therapeutic approaches

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Reinharz (1992:258-260) argues that it is an accepted practice in feminist research methods in social research to include personal experiences and to write in the first person singular. As Reinharz (1992:258), I have followed this research approach because it reflects 'the research process as a lived experience'. I have chosen to write in the first person singular and have incorporated my own definitions of certain terms. To elucidate a greater understanding of the text regarding the possible meaning I have attached to these terms, I have included a glossary of terms. The definitions – my own, or taken from other sources – are provided as follows.

Biblicist approach

In this thesis, the term 'biblicist' refers to an approach in pastoral care and counselling which uses a Bible based stance (*sola scriptura* - only the Bible) in a very legalistic, prescriptive and non-negotiable manner. King (1990:448) defines a biblicist approach to pastoral care as 'fundamentalist pastoral care [which is the] literalistic and legalistic use of the Bible as an authoritative pastoral resource for interpreting, diagnosing, and responding to human problems and crises'.

Post-biblicist approach

A 'post-biblicist' approach refers to an approach in pastoral care which uses the Bible in a participatory manner (Kotzé & Kotzé 2001:7). As Kotzé and Kotzé (2001:5-9), I understand participatory pastoral care as a social practice: an inter-related conversation in which religious documents (in particular, the Bible), theological traditions, and context all participate. My use of the term post-biblicist should not be read as non-biblical; rather, the Bible is used in relation to context and lived experiences.

Extra-marital sex

Extra-marital sex refers to *sexual intercourse*[1] outside of marriage. This is usually seen as unacceptable or sinful in terms of the traditional understanding of biblical prescriptions as languaged and/or understood in most traditional Protestant Christian discourses.

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[1] Generally in this study, in line with accepted practice, I use italics for emphasis, but sometimes need additional emphasis and then use both italics and bold. This practice reflects the complexity of experience and thought.

Non-marital sexual practices

I use the term 'non-marital sexual practices' as an umbrella term: it includes any *physical and non-physical-contact*, sexual relations and sexual practices that fall outside the boundaries of a legal marriage as understood in biblical terms. These include pre-, post- and extra-marital sexual intercourse as well as any other *non-physical-contact* sexual action, for example, phone sex or internet/virtual sex.

Definitions regarding sexuality

As in my MTh dissertation (Spies 2005:x), I have used the American Evangelical Lutheran Church's definitions of sexuality, as formulated in *Human sexuality and the Christian faith – Episcopal edition* (1991). These definitions resonate with my understanding of these terms:

> **'Human sexuality'** is far more than 'sex' (popularly used to refer to sexual intercourse), although it includes that. Sexuality cannot be reduced to specific acts, urges, or drives. It is an aspect of who we are as human beings, whether or not we engage in activity that is considered 'sexual'. Our sexuality involves our way of living in the world as male and female [or inter-sexed] persons. We are bodies created by God, sensual and sensuous human beings who yearn for relationships with others.

> **'Sexual intercourse'** – or the shortened version 'sex' - refers to those intimate acts of sexual attraction, expression and union that involve the genital organs and which can lead to a sexual climax. Such actions may or may not include penetration of the penis in the vagina.

I use my own definitions for the following terms:

Co-searcher(s)

I prefer to use the term 'co-searchers' for the women who journeyed with me as we, together, searched for greater understanding and meaning. Researchers frequently use the term 'co-*re*searchers', a term which seems to imply searching and *re-*searching. But since there was so little material available on this topic, '*search*' rather than 're-search' seemed a more apt description. The 'co-searchers' and I searched and pioneered unspoken 'virgin' territory together, a process which involved more searching and less re-searching.

Sex

Sex (used on its own) refers to the biological differences between males and females. In this thesis, in order to promote readability, 'sex' might also be used as a shortened version of 'sexual

intercourse': for instance, 'pre-marital sex' instead of 'pre-marital sexual intercourse', and 'extra-marital sex' instead of 'extra-marital sexual intercourse'.

Gender identity

Gender identity is not *biologically or genetically* determined by sex - that is, located in a person's maleness or femaleness - but is **culturally** conditioned. But since these cultural prescriptions are often based on the biological sex of the individual, they frequently reflect a belief system of how men and women *should* behave because they are male or female. A person's gender identity or role is thus not always synonymous with his or her biological sex. Gender identity refers instead to how we perceive ourselves and how we live out or express our identities and roles as males and females.

Life-giving

The term life-giving refers to any action or discourse that promotes or results in a constructive experience of well-being. It influences an individual or a relationship at an emotional/spiritual/ physical/intellectual and ethical level and is *beneficial* for all participating or influenced by it.

Life-denying

The term life-denying refers to any action or discourse that negates or denies a person's sense of self. It influences an individual or a relationship at an emotional/spiritual/physical/intellectual and ethical level in a way that is *destructive* for all participating or influenced by it.

Life-restricting

The term life-restricting refers to any action or discourse that restricts or limits the possibility of constructive growth. It influences an individual or a relationship at an emotional/spiritual/physical/ intellectual and ethical level in a way that is *restrictive* for all participating or influenced by it.

All live-giving, life-denying or life-restricting experiences or discourses are thus determined by the context(s) of the persons involved and by their understanding of how this experience or discourse impacts their sense of well-being.

Sexually unhappy

Sexual unhappiness describes a spiritual, emotional or physical state and is characterised by unfulfilled needs and desires, or the inability to fully realize preferred sexual potentialities.

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CHAPTER ONE
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1.1   THE RELIGIOUS AND THEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND OF THE RESEARCHER

This study draws on my personal experiences as a South African Protestant Christian woman as well as on my experiences as a Narrative Practitioner and a Pastoral Therapist. Although Methodism has been my primary spiritual home for the past decade, I had spent the previous thirty five years worshiping in the Dutch Reformed Church. In 2004 I enrolled for an MTh degree at the University of South Africa (UNISA) in conjunction with The Institute of Therapeutic Development (ITD). This journey shaped and broadened my faith constructions and spirituality as a local preacher, a pastoral therapist and a narrative practitioner in private practice.

Throughout this time – in both the Dutch Reformed and Methodist faith traditions, as well as during my MTh degree research – I became increasingly aware that sexuality is shrouded in silence.

1.2   THE SILENCE

My MTh research journey had enabled me to explore with Christian women their constructions of sexuality. Their stories confirmed the silence which envelops sexuality in most religious/faith communities (Spies 2005:5), and thus mirrored my own experience of this silence. During this time I also became aware of the desire among women, especially religious women, to explore and voice their understanding of their sexuality in relation to their faith constructions. Some Christians find it difficult to live according to biblical prescriptions regarding sexuality. This difficulty is exacerbated by the confusion that arises from the silence surrounding sexuality within most faith contexts in South Africa.

I started to address this silence after completing my MTh. In line with feminist practices, I began to facilitate workshops on Christianity and sexuality. Reinharz (1992:178) concurs with Bristow and Esper's assertion (cited in Reinharz 1992:178) that public awareness must be raised by deliberately seeking avenues to introduce research findings into the social-political sphere as well as into those arenas where access to professional literature is unlikely. But while many of the workshop participants expressed a desire to discuss sexual matters with a 'professional' and more specifically, to do so within their religious context, few had had this opportunity. Burridge (1985:14) confirms

that '[f]or a Christian couple a *Christian* sex therapist who would be able to pray with them as well as give therapy would be ideal - but such are few' [emphasis mine].

Many Christians believe that they should base their sexual expressions on ideas which are perceived as religious morality, and interpreted in terms of 'pious behaviour' in their understanding of Scripture and that of their faith communities. According to Burridge (1985:10), 'most Christians would agree that biblical principles should play an important part in their ethical base, assisted by the Christian tradition and Spirit-guided reason'.

Many Protestant[1] Christian women shared with me that they voice (and sometimes live and practice) their sexuality in specific ways, in order to be in line with what they believe is acceptable in the eyes of the church. Slowinski (1992:138) suggests that '[t]he Bible is the usual starting place and often the final authority for formal Western religious teachings regarding sexuality and what constitutes proper behavior'. Although I came across this approach in many conversations with women, I also learnt about experiences seldom spoken of – those stories of sexually unhappy marriages and non-marital sexual practices that would not have fitted into any biblical description of 'proper behaviour'. As these alternative stories were voiced to me, I became a 'witness' to the previously unspoken. Women shared these unspeakable stories with me in different situations: in social contexts, during workshops and in my private practice. Many of them were Protestant Christian women who were living in sexually unfulfilled marriages; some had even chosen to engage in extra-marital sex as a result. It became apparent that while their beliefs might be compatible with the accepted norms - in terms of the dominant traditional religious teachings regarding sexual practices - their sexual practices were often in conflict with these norms and were therefore unspeakable. This discrepancy – the gap between the religious norm and their sexual practices - often caused feelings of alienation, isolation and condemnation.

White and Epston (1990:19) use Foucault's ideas on dominant discourses to explain conformity to the accepted norm in terms of the effect of the 'normalizing gaze' or judgement of the dominant discourse on our behaviour. Payne (2000:70) also builds on Foucault's ideas of conformity. He argues that this normalizing judgement 'provides for a system of social control in which persons' performances are judged according to certain standards or specifications' (Payne 2000:71). This

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[1] Reference to Protestant women or Protestant traditions and contexts in this thesis is referring to White South African women or contexts from Afrikaans or English speaking Protestant traditions, unless otherwise indicated.

system of social control does not judge a person so much for an offence or a wrongdoing, but rather judges a person for behaviour that departs in any way from the norm and the rules. Social control can thus be seen as system of power which recruits people into an active role in their own subjugation and results in them 'actively participating in operations that shape their lives according to the norms or specifications of the [dominant discourse], thus policing their own behaviour' (Payne 2000:71). This study reveals that, in contrast to Payne's notion of 'policing' behaviour, in many cases Christians - especially Christian women - will 'police' what they *portray or voice* as their beliefs, but then engage in alternative and even conflicting practices to their stated religious beliefs. This is especially the case regarding sexuality, for instance, non-marital sexual practices.

This contradiction between belief and practice might suggest that religion is a constitutive force which constructs and maintains Christians' **voiced** beliefs and understanding, yet enables them to resist the 'normalizing gaze' (Foucault 1977:177-179) of religion when engaging, for example, in extra-marital sex. I wondered whether this is a case of dissociation or detachment - what Weingarten (2010b) calls 'dis-regulation' - from their religious beliefs.

The term dissociation, as used above, does not refer to the definition as used in Mental Disorders, such as Borderline Personality Disorder, Schizophrenia or in Post Traumatic-Stress Disorder, but rather a dis-association from the reality that is prescribed and accepted as the relevant dominant religious discourse. This dis-association refers to living *with and in* an alternative reality. It thus differs from the generally lived (and approved) religious reality. This difference begs the question: Is such dis-association 'psychotic', or does it merely expose the multiplicity of religious 'realities' as experienced by different Protestant Christian women?

With regards to sexual practices, Foucault (1994:167-168) suggests that religion holds within it both a constituting force (dominant discourse) as well as a resistance to it. Within South African Protestant churches the constituting force - or 'policing' - of sexuality is not only done by individuals on a personal level, but is often also done by the faith communities as a collective. Many Christian women I spoke with, in both pastoral conversations and in social contexts, expressed their frustration with the church's silence surrounding sexuality. I believe the church 'speaks' volumes about sexuality without uttering a word or a sound – maybe at best just a sigh. Weingarten (2010b) comments on the work Danieli (1998) has done with regards to multigenerational trauma and silence, and the way this silence 'map' is passed on down the generations:

> Silence is a key mechanism by which trauma in one generation is communicated to the next. Silence can communicate a wealth of meanings. It is its own map: Don't go there; don't say that; don't touch; too much; too little; this hurts; this doesn't. But why the territory is as it is cannot be read from the map of silence.

<div align="right">(Weingarten 2004:14)</div>

Other women voiced to me their frustration that when the church does speak about sexuality or interpret Scripture regarding sexuality, it is usually done from a biblicist position; is usually aimed at 'policing' sexuality (especially female expression of sexuality); and is very prescriptive in terms of gender. It is almost impossible to ignore the prescribed gender roles for men and women (husbands and wives) within the church.

This frustration and confusion is intensified by the fact that we live in a secular world which is sexually saturated: a world seemingly insatiable for explicit sexuality void of any relationship (Yancey 2003a:3-4; Craig & Stander 2009:16). The emphasis on sexuality is omnipresent in most Western communities; it permeates all spheres of our lives, and bombards us with messages about a sexuality that takes place mostly in the absence of stable and mutually respectful relationships. These messages are very different from those given by the church (Wasserman 2008:13). Yancey (2003b:1) calls this 'the modern reductionistic approach to life' but continues that '[a]t the same time, I know of no greater failure among Christians than in presenting a persuasive approach to sexuality'.

Although there is a deafening silence regarding sexuality within churches, this silence is often experienced as 'the absent but implicit'. White (2007:267-268) developed Derrida's ideas of 'the absent but implicit' and Foucault's ideas on power by suggesting that in 'the operations of "modern power" [and in] a system of modern power, social control is established through the construction of norms about life and identity and by inciting people to engage in operations on their own...'. White explains that we can only make sense of what things are by contrasting them with what they are not. Carey, Walther and Russell (2009:321) expand on this:

> The notion of the 'absent but implicit' is based on Derrida's ideas about how we make sense of things, about how we 'read' texts and how the meanings that we derive from texts depend on the distinctions we make between what is presented to us (privileged meaning) and what is 'left out' (subjugated meaning).

Hence the absent but implicit '[i]s not in the original description or expression, but as implied by it' (Carey et al 2009:321). Such absent but implicit ideas are exposed in the widely-held view held that 'Western religions have spent millennia inflicting shame, guilt, repression, and punishment upon human sexuality – especially women's sexuality' (Haught 1997:1). Western religions, which include Christianity, present a sex-negative story in 'a long chronicle of religious hostility to lovers – for no rational reason' (Haught 1997:1). It would seem as if many congregants believe that the church promotes this understanding of sexuality, even if their clergy do not support such sex-negative views. In the Sexual Happiness survey, my online survey (Annexure 6), 76% of survey respondents (68% identified themselves as Christians from the Protestant traditions) had not heard one sermon on the goodness of sexuality and intimate relations in the past *three years*. It would seem as if historically the church has embedded sexuality in restriction, shame, guilt and especially repression (Foucault 1994b:297), and that this is often still seen as the dominant approach by most churches (Spies 2005:3). For the purposes of this research project, I will take the discourse which has embedded sexuality in restriction, shame, guilt and repression as one of the dominant discourses that informs Christian views on sexuality.

When one examines biblical and religious prescriptions regarding sexual abstinence outside marriage in the light of today's society, Protestant Christians are confronted with many challenges: How do couples deal with sexual challenges and incompatibility - for instance, major differences in libido or one partner being a-sexual - especially if this only comes to the fore after marriage is entered into? Is the biblical prescription of monogamous marriage as a precondition for sexual intimacy still attainable or realistic today? Has the church sexualized the institution of marriage? How relevant are biblical prescriptions - especially with regard to sexuality - in Christians' lives today and, by implication, in pastoral care? How do the extra-marital sexual practices of Christian women relate to their faith constructions, prescriptions and understandings? How do Christian women's faith convictions co-exist with non-marital sexual practices, such as infidelity? Are Christians who engage in non-marital sexual practices, re-interpreting the traditional teachings (biblicist views) of their faith communities? Do they re-interpret Scripture to ensure that text and context becomes compatible, thus moving to post-biblicist views? McClintock Fulkerson (1994:143) argues that the same part of Scripture or text could either be 'the enslaver or the liberator' – depending on the context of those who read it. Or might it be that such Christians dissociate from their faith prescriptions?

Reflecting on how Christians understand and relate to their sexuality in the presence of their faith constructions, I became curious about the effects of such understandings. I wanted to explore those dominant discourses which act as vehicles to carry Protestant Christians' incorporation or dissociation of their faith in terms of their sexual actions and choices, especially when this involves non-marital sexual practices. How does a pastoral caretaker listen ethically to the sexual practices of Christians, especially when these are in conflict with biblical prescriptions? What ethical challenges and complexities do sexually unhappy marriages pose for both those who experience these, as well as for the caretakers who listen to these stories during pastoral care? How should biblical prescriptions, understandings and interpretations be in conversation with sexually challenged marriages or extra-marital sexual practices? Can biblical prescriptions, as traditionally understood by South African Protestant Christian faith communities, converse with non-marital sexual practices, or does this necessitate a post-biblicist ear? All these abovementioned curiosities regarding Christians and their sexual practices led me to formulate my research question.

1.3   RESEARCH QUESTION

In South African Protestant faith communities there is the expectation that Christian marriages will experience sexual fulfilment. For many Christian women however, sexual unhappiness becomes their reality. Moreover, sexuality is not only cocooned in silence within the church, but also in many Christian marriages. This silence often leaves many Christian women (and men) with little or no recourse. This research journey aims to penetrate this silence and to invite Christian women, who are living in sexually unhappy marriages, to share their experiences. This research journey was guided by the following research question:

What faith predicaments and relational complexities, challenges and dilemmas do Protestant Christian women in South Africa experience when living in sexually unhappy marriages and what are the effects of these on their lives?

I saw this research journey as a process of inviting Christian women to join in conversations which hopefully would promote an understanding of the faith discourse involved and of the complexities and challenges that sexually unhappy marriages faced, as well as acknowledging different understandings of biblical and religious prescriptions regarding the discourses surrounding sexuality.

It is important that this study should not be seen as harbouring a preconceived expectation of a '*correct*' understanding of the Bible. It could be argued that such an expectation - that presupposes

change *from or to* prescribed biblicist views, or attempts to alter post-biblicist views - could be fundamentalist and prescriptive in itself. Such an expectation would be in direct conflict with my social constructionist and feminist views which allow for a multiplicity of truths or 'multiple constructed realities' (Freedman & Combs 1996:22). It is crucial to me that post-biblicist views are not seen as 'The Truth' or as the measuring stick by which other understandings should be evaluated. Nor do I want to suggest that biblicist views *should* be seen or not seen as the accepted norm. My aim is rather that diversity in understandings be respected and appreciated – thus creating a spirit that I have named *co-versity*. I hope that interaction between diverse and even opposing views might create the space for rich descriptions which will promote tolerance and the opportunity to learn from one another whilst accepting, respecting and enjoying our diversity instead of seeing differentness as difference (conflict) or indifference. The challenge is thus to meet in our diversity in order to create co-versity.

In this thesis I do not argue dogma or biblical prescriptions, but rather engage in participatory ethical reflection which explores the effects of the co-searchers' sexual choices and practices on their identity, their relationships and their faith constructions. I also explore the effects of the various understandings/truths that co-searchers held regarding dogma and biblical prescriptions, and how these have impacted their faith practices, marriages and constructions of their sexuality.

To facilitate the research question, I identified the following research aims:

1.3.1 Exploring and storying Protestant Christian women's understandings regarding their faith prescriptions for marital sexual relations and sexual fulfilment

Exploring and storying Protestant Christian women's understandings regarding their faith prescriptions for marital sexual relations and sexual fulfilment had at heart to identify and clarify Protestant Christian women's current understandings and interpretations of biblical prescriptions for Christian marriages regarding sexuality. I participated in enquiring conversations with co-searchers and clergy to identify and clarify *how* they understood these prescriptions and *not whether* they represented the official dogma or doctrine of the participants' church denominations. Thus, these understandings and interpretations will not necessarily reflect the *official* policies, but will rather focus on how biblical prescriptions and interpretations are understood and implemented by participating congregants. Nevertheless, as the official dogma is often absent but implicit, it is frequently the dominant discourse that constitutes Christian beliefs regarding sexuality.

This research journey includes the beliefs and ideas that congregants hold regarding dogma. Such beliefs and ideas were explored in conversations with Christian women and clergy members of the Protestant traditions as well as in a brief literature study regarding Protestant Christian traditions, prescriptions and understandings of Christian marriage, sexuality and its sexual practices. Part of this exploration included how pastoral care is done with regards to sexuality. The inclusion of clergy voices enabled me to provide a richer description of the contexts in which Christian women face their sexuality in terms of their faith constructions.

1.3.2 Identifying and exploring the understandings and interpretations of Protestant Christian women and their faith communities in terms of non-marital sexual practices

I wanted to create a space through narrative conversations for the co-searchers (Protestant Christian women) to speak the previously unspeakable: to voice their understanding and, if applicable, their experiences of non-marital sexual relations.

1.3.3 Exploring how Christian women who live in sexually unhappy marriages negotiate the meaning of such a relationship

Part of the conversational journey we undertook involved exploring and challenging those life-denying or life-restricting experiences that resulted[2] when the dominant prescriptive religious discourses marginalised a co-searcher in her experience of herself as a sexual being. This research journey used narrative pastoral conversations to create a context in which a co-searcher could negotiate alternative narratives for life-denying and life-restricting experiences of her expression and fulfilment of her sexuality, should she wish to do so. The emphasis was not on effecting change but on opening up space for conversation. It was important to me that the co-searchers should be able to voice their personal and private ideas about sexual fulfilment, and to challenge the dominant discourse regarding marital sex. Although the possibility of change was present, I regarded it as more important to create new spaces of understanding. It was not so much whether a co-searcher negotiated a new or other preferred ways of relating sexually, but rather that space was opened for her to entertain the *possibility* of understanding in new ways. In this context, change could also be the result of an exploration of the effects of the dominant discourses. This could alter and/or enrich the co-searcher's understanding of marriage and sexual happiness as a Christian woman.

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[2] Terms such as resulted, caused or contributed used in this text should not be read in terms of a cause and effect epistemology, but rather as used within narrative inquiry as discussed in Section 1.7.3. Thus to explore the effects of a discourse in terms of its constitutive power.

1.3.4 Exploring the effects and consequences of sexually unfulfilled marriages

I used narrative conversations to explore with co-searchers the effects and consequences of living in a sexually unfulfilled marriage. I wanted to story the relational complexities, challenges and dilemmas which stem from sexually unhappy marriages. Moreover, I also wanted to create a space where stories of hope and new-ways-of-relating could be voiced and embraced if such stories occurred. It was important for me to assist co-searchers in co-constructing rich and thick descriptions of their new-ways-of-relating to dominant discourses. I hoped that such co-constructions would create life-giving attitudes towards sexual happiness which could be woven into their narratives.

1.3.5 Summary

Context - specifically the South African Protestant context in which Christian sexuality operates - formed an important departure point for this study. The aims I formulated to guide this study were specifically intended to expose those dominant discourses regarding Christian sexuality which are present but not explicit. Although many of the beliefs and understandings Christians hold regarding sexuality are not formulated in church policy or any other form of documentation, they continue to circulate and transfer from one generation to the next. Many of these 'absent but implicit' constituting discourses are held as 'the truth', even when life-restricting and life-denying to the person's experience of self and others. I hoped that these research aims would assist in the co-construction of alternative narratives and would benefit the process of pastoral care regarding sexuality. Moreover, I wanted to encourage dialogue and understanding regarding sexuality in relation to faith traditions. Such dialogue would hopefully create and mobilise tolerance, co-versity and respect for diversity in theological approaches to sexuality and in pastoral care in South Africa.

1.4 DELIMITATION OF STUDY AREA

This study included members of the Protestant Christian churches of South Africa: namely, women who are or were living in sexually unhappy marriages as well as clergy members. This research addressed heterosexuality within the Westernised culture of South Africa.

I live in the Western Cape and thus would have preferred to include both Coloured and White Christians in this research project. However, after having conversations with Christian women from 'traditionally Coloured' areas, I became aware of a vast difference between the ways White and

Coloured faith communities' approach sexuality. It would seem as if the silence enveloping sexuality within church communities is almost impenetrable in the Coloured churches. I realised that, due to cultural differences and the complexity of such boundaries, I would not be able to do justice to this within a doctoral thesis. The cultural difference regarding sexuality should be an independent study. To include it here would have complicated this research beyond comprehension. Thus, this study thus does not address cultural diversity as such.

Waldegrave (1990:19) argues that culture is 'not learned or understood by scientific observation, but experienced by living'. In line with this view, I have focused my research on the faith traditions familiar to my personal cultural background and whose language of instruction is known to me: westernised, predominantly White Protestant heterosexual Christians with English or Afrikaans as their first languages.

In this research project I have focused specifically on the Protestant tradition. There is a vast difference in the way Catholic, Charismatic and Protestant Christian traditions engage with sexuality and their understanding of legitimate sexual practices. They differ greatly on issues such as birth control, recreational sexual practices versus pro-creational sexual practices, solo sex (masturbation) and most other topics regarding sexual practices.

I have restricted my research to heterosexual marriages. I am aware that many Protestant Christians have same-sex partners and enter in civil unions: these may or may not be sexually unhappy. Due to the complexity and conflicting positions Protestant churches hold in terms of gay unions, and the varied dogmatic positions towards homosexuality, such unions are not included in this study. I believe that justice cannot be done to this complex issue if included in a study which will focus mainly on heterosexual understanding and practices of sexuality within marriage. This issue requires a separate study.

An extensive body of knowledge within feminist theology exists that challenge the patriarchal discourse. This body of knowledge, with which I agree, is in resistance of the historical dominant patriarchal discourses within South African faith communities. The focus of this research journey, however, was on the lived experiences of the co-searchers. Not one of the co-searchers experienced the feminist resistance story before their participation in this research journey. Patriarchy was consistently the dominant experience and story. It was the co-searchers' experience that patriarchy still has the last word within their churches, their training, their marriages and their social structures.

I therefore mostly focus on the patriarchal discourse and not the discourse of resistance to patriarchy as developed by editors such as Jeanne Stevenson-Moessner (1996; 2000; 2008), Nancy Ramsay (2004), Christie Cozad Neuger (1996; 2001). The understatement of the resistance discourse should not be interpreted as it being of less importance or less valuable to the exploration of sexual discourse, but rather as previously not experienced by the co-searchers.

1.5   WHY THIS STUDY?

I argue that we understand and make sense of our world through a process of social construction. Moreover, that our meaning-making is governed by discourses which circulate in a given period and context (Foucault 1976b:94-95). Thus one of the main tasks of pastors and pastoral caregivers is to educate – a task that requires relevant and adequate theological reflection:

> This reflection needs to be able to help [people] to develop interpretive principles and useful methods for maintaining the trialogue between their own life experiences [including sexuality], the theological traditions, and the radical cultural shifts.

> (Neuger & Poling 1991:42)

In order to reflect on life experiences and theological traditions we need not only to explore previously held constructions about sexuality - thus examine biblicist views - but also to reflect on how Christians today engage with understandings regarding their sexuality. It is important to find ways in which pastoral care can be done that will be both life-giving to Christians - thus relevant in terms of their contexts - yet still remain life-giving to their faith.

Nelson (2010:100) petitions that legalist ethics should be challenged and that a love ethic should be embraced when we work with sexuality. Nelson (2010:100) sees our sexuality as '…God's way of calling us into communion with others through our need to reach out, to touch, to embrace-emotionally, intellectually, and physically', and therefore argues that a sexual ethic grounded in love need not be devoid of clear values and sturdy guidelines, but rather embracing God's intention for our sexuality. Such an approach was especially important when working pastorally with Christian women who have newly formulated constructions of sexuality. Moving beyond a legalistic ethic supported and enabled them to make meaning of their sexuality and how this relates to their faith contexts. In research, as in pastoral therapy, we need to explore, understand and, if possible, build

bridges between different theological discourses. This study attempts to do just this: to build bridges between biblicist and post-biblicist views regarding Christian sexuality and sexual fulfilment and even non-marital sexual practices. Poling (2006:52) argues that '[i]f the ideas and practices of religious communities are damaging individual believers and their families according to Christian norms, then we have a responsibility to bring these realities to the attention of religious leaders for reexamination'.

This study was also motivated by my desire to challenge the patriarchal norms and prescriptions given to gender and sexuality. I stand in solidarity with practical theologians who have developed an ethic of resistance to patriarchy, especially in terms of gender and sexuality. I embrace an ethic that views men and women as equals because gender matters. Farley (2010:158) summarises eloquently:

> When women-persons and men-persons, or persons of the same sex, or persons of unspecified sex, come together in respect, love, passion, or tenderness, it matters to each of them who the other is – in respect to gender and in every other respect.

I am in agreement with Cochrane, De Gruchy and Petersen (1991:15), who argue that 'no one does theology from a position of theological neutrality'. Therefore, in order to promote transparency and ethical accountability, I need to state the presuppositions from which I approached this research journey.

1.6   DISCURSIVE POSITIONING

This research journey was borne out of my experiences as a pastoral therapist in private practice as well as being a narrative practitioner and a local preacher in the Methodist church. There was also another dimension to my curiosity regarding sexually unhappy marriages. I was confronted with circumstances that undermined the sexual happiness of my own marriage: My husband developed major chemical depression. Not only did the depression have major consequences for his libido and sexual functioning, but so also did the medication. These personal experiences encouraged me to be more aware and curious about how other women deal with sexually unhappy marriages. Reinharz (1992:260) suggests that 'experience can be the very starting point of a study, the material from which the researcher develops questions, and the source for finding people to study'. In a certain sense this was true for this study: in the presence of Depression, I became a research companion for

myself. Nevertheless, despite my own experience, the central focus remained the women who approached me as a pastoral therapist to share their experiences of sexual unhappy marriages.

It is not uncommon for people with a specific problem to develop an interest in the related subject (Lemmer 2005:4). I realise that '[s]tarting from one's own experience violates the conventional expectation that a researcher be detached, objective and "value neutral"' (Reinharz 1992:261). Hall (1996:28) also warns against the impossibility of 'value neutral' research as a researcher's 'context will inevitably be constitutive of the data they collect and of the way in which it is interpreted and analysed'.

I do not enter into this research from a 'value neutral' perspective. The research methodology I have employed is in line with the epistemology and the discursive voices that informed my understanding: namely, a social construction discourse, a post-modern approach to practical theology, and a participatory approach to pastoral care in the presence of a gender sensitive discourse.

1.6.1 Social construction discourse

Sexuality remains an area of deep inner conflict even though longstanding and deeply ingrained ideas about gender and sexuality are being challenged nowadays by many schools of thought (Green 1992:vii). This idea of the past being reflected in the present resonates with my social constructionist positioning and has led me to regard our understanding of sexuality as a social construction. Ussher (1994:150) argues that sexuality is 'constructed at the level of culture and history through the complex interrelationship of many different social and historical factors'. The influence of historical, cultural, and social processes is present in the construction of our 'reality' and our understanding of our world. Ussher (1994:150), Freedman and Combs (1996:23) and Burr (1995:3) regard these influences as indicative of a social construction discourse. One such constituting process is religious teaching:

> …beneath the surface of many persons' sexual self-awareness lies attitudes and norms shaped by centuries of religious teaching. Although these attitudes and norms frequently run counter to more contemporary information this does not always lessen their force or their influence in people's lives.

> (Green 1992:vii)

Although my approach emphasises social constructionism, I do not imply or reason that our sexuality is *only* socially constructed. Genetics play a major determining role in many issues regarding sexuality; for instance, sexual orientation, sexual identity and level of libido. I believe that for the vast majority of people, being homosexual or heterosexual, or how important sexual contact might or might not be, is genetically determined: it is not a choice, but a given. Nevertheless, the social meanings we give to our sexuality and the ways in which we express our sexuality are very much shaped by our socio-religious discourses.

Because our understanding and meaning-making is a social construction governed by discourses, this research project regards the assumed presence of constituting discourses as a crucial departure point. Rachel Hare-Mustin (1994:20) defines a discourse as 'a system of statements, practices, and institutional structures that share common values', such as the church. I would define the term 'discourse' briefly as a belief system which constitutes our sense of reality. Foucault (1972b:131-132) suggests that different people may view the same discourse differently. Some might interpret and accept a particular discourse as 'the truth' and others might not. Usually a dominant discourse is regarded by most members of a society as 'the truth'. Those people whose belief systems do not fall within the dominant discourse often become marginalised.

Garner and Worsnip (2001:211) argue that the established Church continues to seek and retain the orthodoxy and patriarchal rule which Jesus challenged in his day. In my experience, the converse is also true: orthodoxy and patriarchal rule - as dominant discourses - hold the church captive thereby perpetuating 'truths' about sexuality within the church. This captivity fuels my desire to challenge the *status quo* by exploring Christian sexuality and pastoral care from a feminist and gender sensitive perspective.

1.6.2 Feminist Theology: Feminist and Gender Sensitive discourses

Most religious Scriptures and other historical documentation do not reflect the dignity of women. Similarly, sexuality is often portrayed as something shameful and sinful. For many centuries, the Church has viewed sexuality and the body's pleasures - especially the sexual female body - with grave suspicion (Nelson 1992:38-39). A feminist theological approach enabled me to move forward with greater gender sensitivity. I wanted to explore and to voice the stories of sexually unhappy Christian women and thus to make space for those stories which are mostly ignored or seen as taboo within our faith communities.

According to Nelson (1992:47), 'feminist scholarship reminds us that the literature of our western [sic] philosophical and religious traditions largely reflects the body and sexual meanings of male experience, though men have assumed those meanings to be generically human'. Feminist theology was borne out of a desire to challenge these assumed meaning, more especially the notion of man as the 'norm' of what it means to be human (Isherwood & McEwan 1994:9-10). Feminist theology thus provides a useful interpretative key which:

> ...begins with an attitude of suspicion towards existing doctrines and interpretations of the scriptures, centuries of male scholarship, which has quite naturally seen the world through men's eyes and experiences, [and] cannot be accepted unquestioningly as normative for women.

> (Ackermann 1994:198)

Isherwood and McEwan (1994:9-10) provide us with a useful definition of feminism as a social analysis which reflects on societal inequality, rather than simply as demanding equal access for women in an unequal society. Feminism is thus a vehicle for women to own and express their experiences without feeling alienated: it gives women space to accept their experiences as legitimate in a patriarchal world (Isherwood & McEwan 1994:9-10).

Feminism incorporates endless possibilities of stories and texts of both genders and beyond. These multi-texted possibilities speak of a post-modern view of reality, which sees 'reality' as socially constructed and could include a multitude of realities, which can be multi-levelled (Freedman & Combs 1996:22; Burr 1995:4).

Feminism thus has multiple story lines. I identify with the reformist feminists who advocate mutuality between the sexes and 'recognise the importance of examining "her-story" as well as "his-story"' (Keane 1998:123). This mutuality resonates with my desire to be ethical in my research and practice. I even prefer to move beyond feminism to a position which I call a 'gender sensitive ethical stance'. My ethical stance compels me to challenge oppressive discourses and to negotiate ethical ways of living (Kotzé & Kotzé 2001:8), as well as to give a voice to the marginalised and unheard. It is an inclusive approach that is gender sensitive. Hoffman (1990:7) suggests that this generates a more balanced cultural repertoire for both genders. Consequently, she prefers to position herself as 'gender sensitive' rather than 'feminist': so do I.

This inclusivity of both sexes resonated with my pastoral commitment towards women as well as men. We do not live in separate worlds: we share space and interact and influence each other's constructions. Landman's (2002:26) ideas of 'partnership theology', combines well with my gender sensitive approach. Partnership theology invites both men and women to be heard and to participate in a gender-sensitive society which allows both men and women to express and experience themselves as persons rather than as a particular gender. This approach differs significantly from patriarchy which is specifically based on gender, and privileges males (Bons-Storm 1998:11). Feminist theologians do not accept patriarchy as the final word, and therefore offer an extensive body of knowledge in resistance to patriarchy (Farley 2010:114-115), however for the purpose of this research journey, patriarchal ideology is regarded as the most dominant discourse within South African Protestant churches as the voice of resistance was absent amongst the research participants.

Patriarchy has been the dominant discourse in both religious and scientific 'truths' for many centuries (Kotzé 2002:14-15; Bons-Storm 1998:10-11). I wish to challenge this position by exploring our understanding of Christian sexuality and the socialisation processes that constitute Christian sexuality through the lens of feminism and respectful gender sensitive awareness. This discursive position is in line with a participatory approach which aims to give a voice to the previously unheard or marginalised (Kotzé 2002:18).

1.6.3 A participatory approach to practical theology

My post-modern understanding of theology enables me to position myself within a participatory approach. This stance recognises a multiplicity of realities, especially the voices of the disempowered, the marginalised, and the previously silenced (Kotzé 2002:18). A participatory approach to practical theology sits well with me, as it embraces the notion of a contextual approach with an emphasis on 'doing' theology. It is no longer adequate only to 'speak' theology; rather, we need to *do* theology. Rossouw (1993:903) suggests that the doing of theology implies the participation of many knowledges and contexts. This requires a shift 'from being right to doing right' (Rossouw 1993:903). The implications for practical theology is that there needs to be a corresponding shift in focus - from a biblicist approach to a participatory approach - and space opened up for a multiplicity of realities.

Herholdt (1998:221) argues that '[t]ruth is relative to the questions that we may ask and the needs that we hope to fulfil, [as] it is influenced by the intellectual climate and cultural categories of every period'. The Church frequently creates 'theological truths' which are declared as scriptural, but which in actual fact are interpretations. This is especially apparent when exploring our understanding and interpretations regarding sexuality. Such interpretations have the potential to marginalise and silence those who fall outside the dominant discourse of such biblicist ideas. Nelson (1992:37) observes 'that religion is a very ambiguous human enterprise' which can either be life-giving or very dangerous. This is especially so in the arena of human sexuality where many people are tempted to claim ultimate sanction for what are in fact humanly constructed beliefs and practices. Such beliefs and practices then have the potential to become prescriptive 'truths' - fixed instead of flexible – and thus life-denying rather than life-giving. A helpful way to address marginalising practices arising from legalist ideas is through a participatory approach to pastoral care.

1.6.4   A participatory approach to pastoral care

Neuger and Poling (1991:42) suggest that one of the consequences of conservative theological methods and doctrines (such as a biblicist approach used in pastoral care) is that churches are becoming increasingly irrelevant in the lives of many people. There is a very real need for pastoral therapists to create the space for contextual ways of understanding by means of a participatory rather than a biblicist or a legalistic approach to pastoral care. We need to find:

> [t]herapeutic models of care in the quest for individual wholeness [that can replace what now] are [being] seen as a repressive and negative emphasis on sin and conformity to Churchly discipline…

> (Graham 1993:211)

Legalistic approaches and biblicist ideas are often aimed at human sexuality. This is not surprising, especially as 'the body is still a great source of anxiety, and we typically want desperately to control that which we fear' (Nelson 1992:42). One way for a pastoral therapist to address this fear is to create the space for the unspoken to be voiced and the not-understood to be explored.

Gaddy (1996:86) elaborates on the idea of bodily sins as being worse than others:

> [m]ost people (in both church and secular society) reserve their harshest judgements for physical acts of wrongdoing – especially physical actions involving sex [with adultery as] the ultimate scandal!

Yet, when one studies Jesus' approach to sexual sins, a very different approach transpires. Even though Jesus '…never condoned sexual immorality, Jesus consistently responded to persons caught up in sexual immorality with mercy' (Gaddy 1996:86). The fact that Jesus did not condemn or judge, but rather acted with grace (Yancey 2003a:9-10) invited me to re-look at the traditional approaches to sexuality, adultery and infidelity.

This study takes seriously the discursive effects of religious discourses on sexuality. As such, it attempts to address Green's (1992:viii) concern that:

> ...[c]ounselors [who] may be unaware of the diverse ways religious beliefs impinge on sexuality may be professionally unequipped to address the specific religious beliefs and attitudes that influence sexual functioning and sexual health.

Many religiously-induced inhibitions and fears which contribute to sexual problems - shared by believers and non-believers alike - are often not obvious yet are nonetheless present (Green 1992:viii). This study attempts to make implicit the absent, and thus is of importance not only to Christians, but to all persons; it is of importance to practical theology in general and pastoral care in particular as well as all related social sciences.

1.7   RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Qualitative research is the most useful vehicle for this research journey, especially because I am concerned with social constructions. Denzin and Lincoln (1994:2) define qualitative research is as '...multimethod in focus, involving an interpretive naturalistic approach to its subject matter [which attempts] to make sense of or interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them'.

In my attempt to understand such phenomena or social constructions, I embraced a variety of research approaches (multimethod): for instance, participatory action research as well as feminist research. As participatory action research typically moves from doing research *on* people, to doing research *with* people (McTaggart 1997:29), I journeyed *with* people in my research rather than doing research *on* people. This required making a shift from the traditional notion of the researcher as the expert.

1.7.1   Co-searchers as experts

According to Anderson (1997:95) and White (1999:29), in the therapeutic relationship clients are the experts on their own lives. The 'client as expert' requires a shift in stance: from *doing on* to *doing with*. This shift releases the therapist from being the 'expert' and is deeply respectful towards the client. This shift holds true in the research environment too. Research participants (co-searchers) who share their knowledges and stories with a researcher should be honoured as the experts of their experiences and lives. Research participants (co-searchers) are gracious in allowing researchers to journey with them in their lives. This is even truer in view of the very private nature of this research topic. The researcher comes alongside co-searchers as they journey with the knowledges, experiences and stories relating to the researcher's research question. Thus the expertise of the co-searcher(s) and the researcher(s) are combined and merged:

> A client [and co-searcher] brings expertise in the area of content: a client [and co-searcher] is the expert on his or her life experiences….When [co-searchers] are narrators of their stories, they are able to experience and recognize their own voices, power, and authority. A therapist [and researcher] brings expertise in the area of process.

> (Anderson 1997:95)

Doing research *with* people rather than *on* people is a respectful and ethical approach to research as it privileges and values the contributions of co-searchers. This stance also resonates with a post-structuralist approach: it does not see the researcher as an objective expert, but as a co-author of narratives (White 1999:57). By encouraging co-authorship, the researcher encourages the co-searcher to exercise agency regarding the knowledges and understandings they exchange. Anderson and Goolishian (1992:29) suggest that the therapist [or researcher] adopts 'a "*not knowing*" [stance] which positions [the researcher] in such a way as always to be in the state of "being informed" by the [co-searcher]'. This 'not knowing' stance pre-supposes the abandonment of the notion of the researcher as the expert. Thus the researcher does not enter into a conversation with 'preconceived opinions and expectations' but rather with genuine curiosity:

> ...[and] positions him- or herself in such a way as always to be in the state of 'being informed'....[A]s dialogue evolves, new narratives, the 'not-yet-said' stories, are mutually created.

> (Anderson & Goolishian 1992:29)

This mutual exploration and co-authoring of stories is collaborative, which allows the researcher 'to grant primary importance to the [co-searcher's] world views, meanings, and understandings' (Anderson & Goolishian 1992:30). The researcher's decision to relinquish the position of 'expert' in the research situation for a 'not knowing' stance speaks of a willingness to share power in the research conversation.

1.7.2   Power relations in research

My desire to honour and respect the co-searchers in this research journey was supported by my understanding of power. Foucault's (1984b:193-203) work on power and punishment and the effect of the normalizing judgement greatly informed my work. Foucault (1976b:94) argued that power cannot be seen as something in itself, but manifests itself instead through the evidence that can be found in everyday interactions:

> [Power] is never localised here or there, never in anybody's hands, never appropriated as a commodity or piece of wealth. Power is employed and exercised through a net-like organisation. And not only do individuals circulate between its threads; they are always in the position of simultaneously undergoing and exercising this power. They are not only its inert or consenting target; they are always also the elements of its articulation. In other words, individuals are the vehicles of power, not its points of application.

> (Foucault 1976a:98)

Foucault's (1976b:94-96; 1984b:193-203) ideas about power sensitised me to power relations within research situations and, more particularly, to how power might come into play between myself, as the researcher, and those with whom I journeyed during this research journey.

In traditional research, it is often assumed that a researcher has privileged knowledge, with the result that she/he may be elevated to an 'expert position'. This position of knowing implies that in the power/knowledge relationship the researcher is superior to the research participant and thus should or could exercise dominance. Subjects of power thus become objects, even though '[t]hey did not receive directly the image of the sovereign power; they only felt its effects – in replica, as it were – on their bodies, which had become precisely legible and docile' (Foucault 1977:188). Research conducted in this way holds the possibility of reducing participants to docile bodies. Such a view –

in which the researcher is the 'expert' – is neither respectful nor honouring of the research participants. Hence my deliberate choice of participatory action research as it supports doing research *with* people and not *on* people (McTaggart 1997:29). The doing *with* implies and prescribes an egalitarian relationship and a sharing of power and knowledges in such a research journey. It invites accountability of the researcher as this journey is negotiated: this promotes equality.

Participatory action research also resonates with my preferred approach to pastoral care - a participatory approach - which is based on participatory ethics as developed by Kotzé (2002:7). Participatory ethics with regards to pastoral care invites previously unheard voices to the world of theology (Kotzé & Kotzé 2001:8). As the voice of women's sexuality is largely silent within most churches, I believe that inviting these voices into the realm of practical theological research is a way to do research ethically. I invited the voices of women and of their sexuality into speech by using narrative inquiry as a subtype of qualitative inquiry.

1.7.3   Narrative inquiry

The narrative research situation (also known as narrative inquiry) is a relational system and process in which the participants and the researcher(s) become conversational partners in the telling, inquiring, interpreting and shaping of their narratives (Anderson 1997:95). Narrative inquiry offers 'manageable and holistic views of human complexity that seemed to have escaped the burrowing and narrowing nature of other research traditions' (Webster & Mertova 2007:ix).

As a qualitative research method, narrative inquiry includes the greater context, and 'attempts to capture the "whole story", whereas other methods tend to communicate understanding of studied subjects' (Webster & Mertova 2007:4). It explores problems as forms of storytelling which involve characters with both personal and societal stories. Webster and Mertova (2007:4) explain that 'it requires going beyond the use of narrative as rhetorical structure, to an analytic examination of the underlying insights and assumptions that the story illustrates'. Narrative inquiry is thus more than just telling and listening to a story, but involves 'retrospective meaning-making – the shaping or ordering of past experiences' (Chase 2000:656). As such:

> …narrative can tap [into] the social context or culture in which [stories] take place. Just as a story unfolds the complexities of characters, relationships and settings, so too can complex problems be explored in this way.

> (Webster & Mertova 2007:4)

Narratives are the construction and reconstruction of personal and societal stories. Narrative research is de-construction of such personal and societal stories in the presence of dominant discourses. Narrative research '…does not strive to produce any conclusions of certainty, but aims for its findings to be "well grounded" and "supportable", retaining an emphasis on the linguistic reality of human experience' (Webster & Mertova 2007:4). It is these rich narratives that assisted me to achieve my aim of co-constructing rich and thick descriptions of the participant's experiences and the effects of living in sexually unhappy marriages. Chase (2000:651) describes narrative inquiry 'as an amalgam of interdisciplinary analytic lenses, diverse disciplinary approaches, and both traditional and innovative methods – all revolving around an interest in biographical particulars as narrated by the one who lives them'.

Since narrative inquiry is 'set in human stories' (Webster & Mertova 2007:1-3), it was thus the obvious choice for this research project. Webster and Mertova (2007:2) assert that 'it is well suited to address issues of complexity' which are cultural and human centred, because 'of its capacity to record and retell those events that have been of most influence on us'. Narrative inquiry enabled me to explore the ways the co-searchers experience and make meaning of their sexuality through their stories:

> People make sense of their lives according to the narratives available to them. Stories are constantly being restructured in the light of new events, because stories do not exist in a vacuum, but are shaped by lifelong personal and community narratives. Narrative allows researchers to present experience holistically in all its complexity and richness. [It] illustrates the temporal notion of experience, recognising that one's understanding of people and events changes.
>
> (Webster & Mertova 2007:2)

Narratives are the construction and reconstruction of personal and societal stories. People's stories do not exist in a vacuum, but are shaped by the contexts in which they develop and live. Narrative research is thus the de-construction of such personal and societal stories in the presence of dominant discourses.

1.7.4 Contexts and invisible dominant discourses

An awareness of the contexts in which stories regarding Protestant sexuality are developed and maintained was a core issue in this research. As contexts are shaped by dominant discourses and vice versa, the contexts and dominant discourses in which these operated have had to be brought to the foreground.

Within Protestant faith communities, sexuality often operates in silences and in absences, and is therefore unseen and unspoken. But although it operates in invisibility, it is still there. Davies (1993:153) uses the metaphor of a pane of glass to describe the invisibility of discourses. It is only when the glass fractures or breaks that one's attention is drawn to the glass – until that point, the glass was invisible. Similarly, discourses are usually invisible to people. This is especially true of discourses regarding sexual pleasure and religion. Due to the silence in which this subject has been ensconced and how it has been controlled by the patriarchal system in our society and churches, it is only when we come across a situation in which we are unable to accommodate or adapt to a given discourse (for example, in a sexually unhappy marriage) that we start to become aware of the discourse.

This invisibility makes it even more important to create an awareness of the contexts and the dominant discourses in which the stories of the research journey have operated. These contexts include the co-searchers' personal contexts as well as the greater contexts in which they live. Lacey and Luff (2001:2) suggest that '[q]ualitative research [i.e. narrative enquiry] is particularly good at answering the "why", "what" or "how" question' and exploring the relationships between the various themes that might arise from explorations. These relationships do not only refer to personal relationships, but often to unseen institutional and organisational structures and relations which shape the ways we live and work, love and play (Maguire 2001:59). In this research journey I explored with co-searchers their relationships with self, others, faith and the greater South African community in which their faith communities exist.

This involved a close examination of discourses by uncovering or deconstructing the meanings of a phenomenon (Thorne 2000:1) as human experience is shaped, transformed and understood through linguistic representation or storying the narratives of the participants.

For Webster and Mertova (2007:10), the 'appeal of narrative method lies largely in its ability to explore and communicate internal and external experience'. As I, Flaskas and Humphreys (1993:37), also argue that using narrative as a therapeutic or research process is useful because it recognises the role of the cultural meanings and beliefs that underpin the process of change and intervention. The discovery of these cultural meanings (which includes faith construction) and underlying discursive processes will help me in the analysis of data. This research journey involved exploring these stories, and uncovering the cultural discourses and the ways in which these were embedded in faith contexts.

1.8   RESEARCH PROCEDURE

My research was supported by a literature study, narrative conversations, an online survey compiled by me (Annexure 6) as well as South African statistics when available and relevant. One of the greatest challenges I faced was the lack of useful and relevant literature in terms of sexuality and the Protestant faith, and more especially with regards to the congregants' lived experiences and contexts. Moreover, most of the knowledge regarding sexuality within faith contexts was embedded in discourses which were not formally verbalised or documented – thus implicit but not spoken.

1.8.1   Absence of contextual literary resources

One of the most striking characteristics about this research process was the lack of data available for a *South African context* with regards to sexuality and the lived experiences and understandings of congregants. Subject searches in both the UNISA and Stellenbosch University libraries' databases for adultery/marital infidelity/extramarital-sex cross-referenced with - Christianity/marriage/sex/ religion/female sexuality/South African Protestant - generated minimal literature. When I cross-referenced the search with a South African context, I was able to only locate two useful sources.

The absence of contextual South African literary sources was indicative of the degree of silence regarding sexuality. A participatory research approach enabled me to break the silence about sexually unhappy marriages. The use of narrative inquiry in the process of research created the possibility of changing what has been unspoken and unspeakable to that which is voiced. This approach creates space for those who are marginalised and lends an ear to unheard voices (Kotzé 2002:18). I used a variety of data collection processes to create space for the unspeakable to be spoken.

1.8.2 Data collection process

Most data for this research journey was generated and collected by conversations based on narrative therapy practices.

1.8.3 Narrative therapy practices

I used narrative therapy interviewing practices during my conversations with co-searchers. Their narratives enabled us to access their experiences and the underlying discourses in which these experiences and stories were embedded.

A narrative or story can be understood as an account of a person's life as told by himself or herself (White & Epston 1990). A narrative includes specific experiences of events in the past and present (as storied by the co-searcher), and those that she/he predicts will occur in the future. White and Epston (1990:10) argue that a narrative is connected in a lineal sequence to develop this account.

Webster and Mertova (2007:10) explain that stories have 'the capability of crossing the boundaries between research and practice .... encompassing factors of time and communication in change, which may be key features in dealing with complexity and human centredness'. Narrative therapeutic practices aim to generate dominant stories as well 'new or alternative' stories – those vital and previously neglected aspects of the person's story - which can be incorporated as alternative knowledges (White & Epston 1990:15-17). Since 'people make sense of their lives according to the narratives available to them' (White 1991:28-29), stories are 'constantly being restructured in the light of new events, because stories do not exist in a vacuum, but are shaped by lifelong personal and community narratives' (Webster & Mertova 2007:2). These personal stories intrigued me and enabled this research journey.

1.8.4 The participants

Most of the participants in this research journey (whom I interviewed) are women who contacted me through my private practice and invited me to journey with them. Many of them had inquired about my research topic for my MTh which dealt with the sexual constructions of Christian women. This gave them the courage to engage me in conversations about their own sexuality and the struggles and challenges they live with. In a sense this research journey chose me, rather than vice versa.

There were six different groups of participants in this research journey: namely, the women whose stories served as the core of this research; clergy members; and a third group which included respondents in an electronic survey (Annexure 6), respondents to questionnaires previously administered (Annexure 7) other social contacts and clients' experiences shared in my private practice over the past six years.

I used the term 'co-searchers' to refer to the women who shared their stories with me (see Chapter Four). Their stories were the focal point of this research journey: through their stories we co-searched to find meaning and new understandings regarding sexually unhappy marriages. The inclusion of clergy members and their experiences - as documented in Chapter Three - provided the contextual backdrop against which the stories of the women should be read. Towards the end of this research project I compiled an electronic survey to explore more fully the prevalence of dominant discourses which I had encountered in the co-searchers' stories. The terms 'participants' and 'respondents' will be used for those women who shared in this journey via the electronic survey and other means which will discussed in the latter part of this chapter.

1.8.5   Selection of co-searchers and participating clergy

After many conversations with women about their sexually happy or unhappy marriages, I realised the need for a greater understanding of sexually unhappy marriages. Qualitative sampling seeks to engage information from specific groups and subgroups in the population (Hancock 1998:1). I therefore identified as potential co-searchers those Protestant Christian women who previously disclosed to me during pastoral conversations that they were living in sexually unhappy marriages. I engaged them in conversation and then invited them to participate in this research journey. I followed the same process with clergy members who previously inquired about or expressed an interest in my MTh research regarding the constructions of Christian women and their sexuality.

After the initial contact, I sent a letter of invitation to the potential co-searchers and clergy participants. This letter included the research topic as well as other relevant details about this research project, such as my commitment and aims for the study, consent forms as well as what would be expected of them as participants (Annexure 1, 2, 3, 4 & 5). Once the invitation was accepted, we engaged in explorative conversations during individual interviews. This was the main method of data collection in this qualitative participatory research project. In the following section I

will elaborate on the interview process that I employed to gather and document data for this research project.

1.8.6 Feminist interviews

Semi-structured or unstructured interviews were the primary source of data collection for this research project. Unstructured interviews enabled me to conduct these conversations with the degree of respect and sensitivity which this topic required and also allowed the co-searchers to speak about what was important and relevant to them in relation to this research topic. Unstructured interviews tend to include 'free interaction between the researcher and the interviewee, [which] typically includes opportunities for clarification and discussion' (Reinharz 1992:18). These interviews thus enabled me to access and document the women's very private and personal ideas, thoughts and memories in their own words, rather than in my own.

I also used semi-structured interviews in the data collection process. These consisted of 'a series of open ended questions based on the topic areas the researcher wants to cover' (Hancock 1998:9), but also allowed for the interviewee to respond with authenticity, lived experience and agency. Michael White (2007:269) calls this shared agency a 'social collaboration' which assists people 'to traverse the space between what is known and familiar [to] what might be possible for them to know about their lives and identities'.

The semi-structured interviews included an open-ended interview process which explores 'people's views of reality and allows the researcher to generate theory' (Reinharz 1992:18). Since very little has been written on this subject in South African Protestant Christian contexts, creating theory thus became very important. I included these open-ended interviews during the process of data collection as they produced non-standardized information (Reinharz 1992:19), thereby enabling me to document the differences in the narratives shared.

The number of interviews I had with each co-searcher and clergy participant was determined by the complexity of the story shared, as well as by how readily the trust relationship developed. Multiple interviews proved helpful for developing trust (Reinharz 1992:36) and allowed for more accurate and richer narratives to emerge than would have been the case in a single interview. Multiple interviews also created an opportunity to invite corrective feedback with regards to previously

obtained information summarised in the form of therapeutic letters, and enabled me to ask additional questions to elucidate information we had previously co-constructed.

1.8.7   The structure of the interviews

The initial interview was semi-structured: specific questions provided a framework for our journey and agreement on how we would use terms. I found it very helpful to have some structure in the initial interview because both the co-searchers and I were uncertain about what to expect from the process. The initial semi-structured interview was therefore re-assuring and assisted me in creating a space which could support conversations to be frank, yet comfortable.

The aim of the first interview was also to negotiate boundaries that would support and respect both the co-searcher and myself, whilst discussing private and personal experiences. Once we negotiated a way forward, we discussed the questions which had I formulated for the first interview.

The following questions guided the first conversation with co-searchers:
(i)   What, in your understanding, is a sexually happy marriage?
(ii)   In your understanding, what are the faith prescriptions for marital sexual relations and sexual fulfilment?
(iii)   What are your faith convictions and that of your faith community regarding extra-marital sexual relations?
(iv)   What is the sexual history of your marriage?
(v)   How do you live sexually in your marriage?
(vi)   How would you describe the sexual happiness of your marriage?

The following are some of the questions that guided the subsequent conversations with co-searchers:
(vii)   What makes your marriage sexually happy or unhappy?
(viii) How do you engage sexually outside your marriage?
(ix)   How do your sexual practices relate to your faith convictions?
(x)   What are the effects of your sexual practices on your faith experiences?
(xi)   What are the effects of your sexual practices on your relationship with God?
(xii)   What are the effects of your sexual practices on your relationship with yourself? Do they have an effect on your identity?

(xiii) What are the effects of your sexual practices on your relationship with your husband?

(xiv) What meaning do you give to your sexual practices?

(xv) What are the effects of your sexual practices on your relationship with your children?

(xvi) What are the effects of your sexual practices on your relationship with others?

(xvii) Do your sexual practices hold specific predicaments, dilemmas or challenges in terms of your faith?

The interviews with participating clergy were guided by the following questions:

i) Who or what informs your understanding or interpretation of Christian heterosexual sexuality?

ii) When and how was this understanding formed?

iii) Do you know specific Scripture that deals with sexuality?

iv) How does your church address the subject of sexuality in your home congregation?

v) What, in your understanding, is a sexually happy marriage?

vi) What, in your understanding, are the faith prescriptions for marital sexual relations and sexual fulfilment?

vii) What are your faith convictions and that of your faith community regarding extra-marital sexual relations?

viii) Would you be comfortable discussing sexual issues with your congregants? Please motivate.

In most cases, the subsequent interviews were less structured than the initial interview. In these interviews I used both landscape of action and landscape of identity questions. White (1995:31) defines the landscape of action as those experiences of events 'that are linked together in sequence through time and according to specific plots'. These obtain the history of the narrative. The landscape of identity 'has to do with the interpretations that are made through reflection on those events that are unfolding through landscapes of action' (White 1995:31). The landscape of identity is also referred to as the landscape of consciousness or meaning in White's earlier work. White (2007:80) explains that '[t]he concepts of landscape of action and landscape of [identity] bring specificity to the understanding of people's participation in meaning-making within the context of narrative frames'. It was this *specificity* that was of importance to my research and the meaning the co-searchers made of it within their experienced faith consciences. White (1991:28-29) believes that we make sense of our lives through stories, both the cultural stories we inherit as well as the personal stories which we construct in relation to our cultural stories. Included in these cultural stories will be stories from our religious contexts. A core issue in this research journey was to explore with the co-

searchers the meaning they had constructed from the interplay of faith stories and their individual stories of their own sexuality. The conversations with the co-searchers were documented and reviewed by means of notes and summarising therapeutic letters.

1.8.8   Documentation of data

As the primary source of the data collection was by means of narrative, the documentation of data was a very important aspect of the research process. David Epston (1999:95) comments on the fact that since the spoken word is often fleeting, capturing it on paper is a way to make the spoken word more permanent:

> Conversation is, by its very nature, ephemeral, as the spoken word fades and disappears quickly. However, the written word endures through time and space, bearing witness to the [conversation].

(Epston 1999:95)

The 'ephemeral' nature of our interviews made accurate transcription very important indeed. Once I had transcribed an interview, I wrote a summarising letter based on the transcription notes, which I sent to the particular co-searcher or clergy participant for review. They were invited to reflect critically on the content of each letter and to respond, correct, omit or add to the content. Epston (1994:96–100) refers to such letters as an 'expansion of the conversation'. These letters created the opportunity to privilege the participants' viewpoints and invited corrective feedback, as well as providing space to reflect on and explore the meaning(s) of the conversations further. These letters not only served as documented records and summaries, but also as a further exploration of the conversation, and as an invitation for further responses. Finally, the letters promoted transparency and accountability in the research procedure (Epston 1999:100).

1.8.9   Sexual Happiness online survey

At the time of this study, very few sources were available that deal *specifically* with South African Protestant Christians and sexuality. It was of great importance to me to invite into this study the voices of Protestant Christian women, specifically those in the South African context. It was also important to explore the dominant discourses regarding Christian women and sexuality which I had encountered in this research project as well as in my private practice over the past six years.

During the research interviews with the co-searchers, specific dominant discourses came to the fore in all the stories. These dominant discourses and themes presented with frequent regularity. ***After*** completing the data analysis of the interviews, I became curious about the commonality of the dominant discourses which presented in the data obtained by the interviews. It left me with the question if the dominant discourses and themes only occurred in this specific group of women - namely, sexually unhappy women participating in this research journey - or if these discourses circulated in the larger population of South African Protestant Christian women. I also became curious about the incidence of sexually unhappy Christian marriages. This led to the compiling and launching of the Sexual Happiness online survey (Annexure 6).

1.8.9.1 *The aim of the survey*

This survey was not developed as a scientific tool, but rather as a way to 'test the water'. This survey did not comply with the required methods for a scientifically developed statistical survey (Mouton 2001:102-103) but it's purpose was to create a space where Christian women could participate and respond anonymously by sharing information regarding their understanding, experiences and practices of sexuality. The primary aim of this survey was thus *not to focus* on the statistical data that emerged, but rather on the *stories and discourses* that might be indicative of Christian women's experiences. Since the focus of this research journey was qualitative, it is not necessary to discuss the theory or quantitative research procedures used in the development of surveys.

The results of this survey were not used to make statistical deductions or to prove a hypothesis. The stories and discourses that emerged from the results of this survey were compared and explored in the presence of the stories of the co-searchers who shared their experience with me in research interviews. In this way, the primary focus remained the data that was obtained during interviews with the co-searchers.

1.8.9.2 *Conducting the survey*

This survey was conducted anonymously online from October 2009 to April 2010. South African Christian women were invited to participate via a general electronic mail message to acquaintances, colleagues, friends and family in my electronic address book. This electronic message contained a very brief overview of why I was interested in the survey and provided potential respondents with an

electronic link to the survey. I requested that the recipients of the electronic message forward it to their female contacts who are Christians and who might want to participate in the survey. Many of the respondents forwarded this invitation to their contacts in their electronic address lists. This survey was circulated thus and completed by women throughout South Africa. I therefore assume that it included women from both rural and urban areas who have access to the internet.

1.8.9.3   The respondents of the survey

The survey was complete by 139 South African women and represented age groups from 18 years to 66+.

87,7% of respondents were Christians, of whom 64,2% identified themselves as Protestant Christians. The majority of the Protestant Christian respondents were married (78,7%).

The majority of Protestant Christian respondents were in the age group 36 – 45 years (36,4%) and 46 -55 years (30,7%).

1.8.9.4   Results of the survey

Only my promoter, a statistician and I had access to the results. None of the respondents were traceable and their identities remained anonymous. The statistician used the survey category *Protestant Christian* to filter the results. This enabled me to explore the results of my target group, namely Protestant Christian women and their responses.

The most surprising result of this survey for me was the number of women who were willing to participate. It would seem as if women have a need to share their experiences and display a willingness to share information of a sexual nature, provided they can participate anonymously. I recommend that a scientifically developed survey, dealing with the South African Christian context and sexuality, would be of great service to those who deal with sexuality within Christian pastoral care.

As I explored the survey results of the target group (Protestant Christian women), I became aware of similarities between the discourses and experiences of those who participated in the survey and the co-searchers who had shared their stories with me. These parallels will be shared in the later chapters

of this work. Dominant discourses which presented in the survey were interwoven in the stories of the co-searchers where relevant after the process of data analysis. Any spelling or typing errors in remarks and quotes of respondents were edited to promote greater understanding and readability of the text. However, the data collected during *individual interviews* with the co-searchers and clergy are the focus of this research and serves as the primary and central data source.

The process of data collection and recording of the interviews with the co-searchers was followed by the data analysis process.

1.8.10 Data analysis of interviews with co-searchers and clergy

Lacey and Luff (2001:6) describe grounded theory - a methodology in qualitative and qualitative data analysis - as a 'way of thinking and conceptualising data'. Hancock (1998:5) expands on this approach:

> The main feature of [grounded theory] is the development of new theory through the collection and analysis of data about a phenomenon. It goes beyond phenomenology because the explanations that emerge are genuinely *new* knowledge and are used to develop new theories about a phenomenon [Hancock's italics].

New theory is developed when a researcher recognises new ideas and themes from what people and institutions (including religious institutions) have said or from events which have been observed. But space needs to be opened up for new theories to emerge. In time, such new theories could enable researchers and pastoral workers to approach existing problems in new ways. Until now, very little research has been done on sexually unhappy marriages in a South African Protestant context:

> In South Africa, academic interest in marginalised sexuality has focused almost exclusively on homosexuality and, where it has focused on heterosexuality, it has done so overwhelmingly in the context of HIV/AIDS and gender-based violence.

> (Steyn & van Zyl 2009:10)

Thus in a certain sense this research project enters 'virgin' territory in terms of the South African Protestant context. It has created new theory in terms of new knowledge and new ways of understanding. Hopefully, it will also encourage new ways of doing theology in the presence of sexuality.

A key feature of grounded theory 'is the simultaneous collection and analysis of data using a process known as constant comparative analysis' (Hancock 1998:6). Data is transcribed and explored for content immediately following data collection. As ideas emerge from the analysis these are included in future data collection for further exploration. The shared therapeutic letters (Section 1.8.8) enabled me to incorporate the new ideas and thus to expand the conversations. In this way, grounded theory research could provide researchers with information regarding women living in sexually unhappy marriages. This could enable understanding and caring for such women (and indirectly the sexually unhappy marriages) differently and in a new way altogether.

1.8.11 Method of data analysis of the research interviews

The 'mass of words generated by interviews' (Lacey & Luff 2001:3) needed to be transcribed, described, summarised – often verbatim – and then organised. The following stages and processes were included in this research project:

(i) Familiarisation with the data through review, reading and listening.

(ii) Transcription of recorded material or interview notes.

(iii) Organisation and indexing of data for easy retrieval and identification.

(iv) Ensuring the anonymity of sensitive data.

(v) Identification of themes.

(vi) Development of provisional categories.

(vii) Exploration of relationships between categories.

(viii) Refinement of themes and categories.

(ix) Development of new knowledges and incorporation of pre-existing knowledge, such as that acquired in the literature review.

(x) Testing of emerged knowledges against the collected data.

(xi) Report writing: arrangement into the subsequent chapters of this thesis.

The identification of themes and underlying discourses formed an important aspect of this research project. I tried to identify possible relationships between the various themes and then to relate discourses and actions to the participants' narratives (Lacey & Luff 2001:6). Narrative conversations were the means by which we identified discourses, and the role which cultural meanings and beliefs (the discourse) played in the process of change and intervention (Flaskas & Humphreys 1993:37)

White (2007:25, 210) refers to Foucault's ideas regarding discourse and their constitutive effects. Within any specific culture there are different and competing discourses. Some discourses have a dominant and privileged position; others are marginalised. In an area as contested as sexuality, it is crucial to de-construct discourse(s), to unpack those taken-for-granted knowledges that have shaped attitudes and behaviour and to allow alternative stories to present themselves. Morgan (2000:46) defines deconstruction as '[t]he pulling apart and examining of "taken-for-granted" truths'. Freedman and Combs (1996:57) call this process of deconstructing dominant discourses 'deconstructive questioning':

> Deconstructive questioning invites people to see their stories from different perspectives, to notice how they are constructed (or *that* they are constructed), to note their limits and to discover that there are other possible narratives.

Through this process of deconstructive listening / questioning, space was opened up for the alternative or marginalized discourses to be heard

1.9   ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Dealing with the subject of sexuality necessitated a special awareness of the researcher's ethical responsibility, not only to the participants in the research, but also to the readers of the text. In most societies sexuality is seen as a highly private matter - a matter not often spoken of, especially not in explicit terms. I am therefore acutely aware of the possibility that many readers of this text might not expect the text to be frank. Some parts of this thesis contain text that is of a sexual nature and discusses sexual practices which fall outside traditional Christian prescriptions of sexuality. I am concerned about the possibility that some readers might find this material offensive or perhaps even detrimental to their constructions of sexuality. Readers who are not de-sensitised to text of this nature might feel that such frank text violates their spiritual values. I therefore include a sensitivity warning:

Please note that this thesis contains text that is of a frank sexual nature. Many of the sexual practices storied might be regarded as falling outside of traditional Christian prescriptions of sexuality. Some readers might find this offensive, in particular, the material in Chapter Four.

The ethical considerations of researching sexuality in relation to faith constructions held specific challenges for me as the researcher. Since the core of this research journey involved an exploration of the co-searchers' faith and its relationship to their sexual practices, I had to consider how could I engage with them in ethical ways? Keeping the ethical considerations forefront enabled me to travel with the co-searchers as they explored their understanding of their theology: in particular, their sexual practices in relation to their theology; their understanding of their faith (biblical) prescriptions; and their personal meaning-making within their sexual relationships. I found that it was crucial to be aware of the different interpretations of biblical and religious prescriptions and to create a space in which all interpretations could be heard. This required great sensitivity on my part. I am in agreement with Slowinski (1992:143) who is of the conviction that '... [when a researcher] engages a … [co-searcher] in a discussion of religious and … [sexual] beliefs, they are entering into a deeply personal area that needs great caution'.

A person's religious orientation is often what gives meaning to their lives, and any questioning or challenging of such fundamental assumptions about life values can be threatening (Slowinski 1992:143). In our society, while sexuality is seen as a highly private matter, it is often informed by the dominant discourses of our faith societies:

> The culture of sexuality is largely non-verbal, and though it is shared, it is shared through networks of contact and communication between couples themselves. These meanings are also 'public' and therefore 'shared' as other aspects of culture are, but are not publicly shared in the same way that other 'cultural' meanings are.

> (Thornton 2003:17)

As Nelson, (2010:102), I am aware that we often find ourselves caught between the private and public dynamics of sexuality in our society, especially in the presence of contradictions between what is publicly said and what is privately experienced. Such discrepancies hold the potential to make participants feel exposed and vulnerable. This was very relevant to my research journey, as most of the co-searchers' faith communities follow a confessional approach to religion and very specific ideas regarding sexual practices.

According to Wolfaardt (1992:6), the focus of a confessional approach (frequently reflected in Reformed theology) is the study of the Bible. This is seen as the sole source of knowledge (*sola scriptura*) and the norm for our behaviour. Within a confessional approach, Scripture is studied, and

the insights which the person gathers regarding what the world should look like (the norm) are brought to the world; the believer then attempts to bring his/her practice into line with the Bible (Wolfaardt 1992:7).

My awareness of dominant religious discourses and how these might affect the participants made me very sensitive to power-relations and normalizing judgments. In White's discussion (2007:25, 102, 134, 267-269) of Foucault's (1977:177-184) work, he sees the process of 'normalizing judgment' as:

> ...a mechanism of social control that incites people to measure their own and each other's actions and thoughts against norms about life and development that are constructed within the professional disciplines.

These ideas about 'normalising judgment' and how it conscripts people into self censorship will be discussed in greater depth later in this thesis.

Foucault's (1977:135-141) work on power refers to the impact of institutional power on the individual. This aspect of power is particularly relevant when considering the co-searchers' narratives, especially as they were outside the dominant religious discourses regarding sexually happy marriages. Throughout this research project it was very important to be aware of the possible effects which being outside of the dominant discourse - being marginalized - could have on the co-searchers' sense of well being, their relation to their identity as well as on their faith.

1.10   CHAPTER OUTLINE

The stories of the co-searchers are organised according to context and discourses and documented in chapters. The outline of the chapters is as follows:

Chapter One maps the journey travelled.

Chapter Two is dedicated to an overview on literature regarding the contexts from which Christianity constructed its understandings of sexuality and marriage customs. This overview includes how sexuality has been seen historically in the traditions from which Christianity developed, as well as by current theology, specifically within a modern confessional theological approach. I also briefly review how sexuality has developed as an independent socio-science (sexology).

Chapter Three is a summary of findings from the exploratory conversations with clergy regarding the understandings that congregants and clergy have regarding sex, marriage and extra-marital relations. Constituting dominant discourses regarding Christian marriages and sexual practices were identified and explored in order to create a backdrop against which co-searchers' stories could be explored and understand.

Chapter Four is dedicated to telling the stories of the co-searchers' experiences whilst living in sexually unhappy marriages. Part of the conversational journey we undertook involved exploring and challenging the dominant discourses that were present in these stories. Chapters Four centralises the co-searchers' ideas and understandings.

Chapter Five explores the effects and consequences of sexually unhappy marriages. I unpack the dominant discourses and how these operate in the co-searchers' lives. This process of 'unpacking' or deconstruction involves. I explored with the co-searchers the effects and consequences which living in a sexually unfulfilled marriage held for them. I story the relational complexities, challenges and dilemmas which stem from sexually unfulfilled marriages. These include extra-marital sex as well as stories of hope and new ways of relating.

Chapter Six, entitled *Reflections on the journey with sexual unhappiness*, reflects on the different voices which participated in this research journey. These voices included: the historical voices; the present-day contexts; the voices of co-searchers; and my personal experiences and the research process. I also reflect on the changed narratives that emerged in the process of this journey. This includes the co-searchers and clergy participants' reflections on their participation in this research journey. To conclude, I reflect on ways forward for this research, which include suggestions regarding practices to facilitate greater awareness and respectful practices in the pastoral care of sexuality.

CHAPTER TWO

EXPLORING SOCIAL CONSTRUCTIONS OF CHRISTIAN SEXUALITY: A LITERATURE OVERVIEW OF HISTORICAL AND CURRENT PROTESTANT CHRISTIAN TRADITIONS

2.1 INTRODUCTION

Chapter Two is dedicated to an overview of literature regarding the contexts from which Protestant Christianity constructed its understandings of sexuality and marriage customs. This summary includes a brief historical overview of social practices relating to marriage and sexuality from which Reformed theology developed, as well as exploring present day Protestant faith traditions and practices. Also included is a brief overview of how sexuality developed as an independent science - sexology. In an attempt to be transparent I will illuminate the types of lens through which I read these texts: social construction; awareness of patriarchy; power relations; and deconstructing dominant discourses.

Sexuality has proved to be a very complex social construction to research: it demanded a literature study which included sources from theology, history, philosophy, sexology, anthropology and medical science. Freedman and Combs (1996:23) define social construction as a process in which people construct their realities as they live them. These 'realities' include beliefs, laws, social customs, habits of dress and diet: all the things that make up the psychological fabric of 'reality'. Following Freedman and Combs, I position myself within a social constructionist discourse and therefore view our understandings of sexuality to be socially constructed. It is thus important to explore the historical traditions and the social sciences that have constituted Christian sexuality. The aim of this exploration is to enhance current understanding of the meanings attached to sexuality, sexual actions and marriage.

Social construction is viewed by Freedman and Combs (1996:23) and Burr (1995:3) as the ways in which we commonly understand the world or 'reality'. It follows then that the categories and concepts we use to create understanding are historically and culturally specific (Burr 1995:3-4; Foucault 1972b:131-132). This understanding of 'reality' therefore necessitates an exploration of historical contexts that contributed to the current constructions. I support Drewery and Winslade (1997:34) who argue 'that to make sense of how other people are understanding their lives, we need to understand their background - the contexts, stories, histories they habitually relate'. In an attempt

to 'understand their background', I need to explore the background contexts that have shaped Christians' understanding of sexuality.

2.2.   SEXUALITY AS A SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION

Gergen (1985:266) defines social constructionist inquiry as principally concerned 'with explicating the processes by which people come to describe, explain, or otherwise account for the world (including themselves) in which they live'. In accordance with this definition I argue that our understanding and making sense of our world is a social construction and that our sense-making is governed by discourses.

My understanding of dominant discourses is informed by the work of White and Epston (1990:20) who adopted many of Foucault's ideas regarding discourse and its constitutive effects. Foucault (1972a:48, 55; 1972b:131) reasons that discourse should not be seen as absolute, as if a belief system were objective or was based on intrinsic facts. Instead, one should recognise that discourse consists of constructed ideas that are allotted the status of a truth. Following Foucault's work, White and Epston (1990:19-20) explain that '[t]hese "truths" are "normalizing" in the sense that they construct norms around which persons are incited to shape or constitute their lives'. It would seem that there are many such 'truths' within a Christian religious context and that these 'truths' prescribe what is regarded as acceptable or 'normal' sexual behaviour for Christians.

Along with Foucault (1972b:131); Burr (1995:3-4); Freedman and Combs (1996:23); Fredman and Potgieter (1996:50); and Ussher (1994:150), I take the position that the frameworks (discourses) that influence the meanings given to sexuality are socially and culturally specific:

> Our culturally available and appropriate stories about personhood and about relationship have been historically constructed and negotiated in communities of persons, and within the context of social structures and institutions. Inevitably, there is a canonical dimension to the stories that persons live by.
>
> (White 1991:28)

Because I view sexuality as a social construction, the way people express and live their sexuality will be greatly influenced by the social frameworks and systems (referred to as discourses in this research journey) to which they subscribe, for instance, religion. Moreover, the ways in which we make meaning are not only culturally specific, but also set in a specific historical time frame. Drewery and Winslade (1997:34) are of the view that 'we make sense of our lives in the context of

our social history, shaping stories about the groups we belong to and about how we came to be who, how and where we are'. In order to understand how Christians make meaning of their sexual practices today, we need to explore the historical context from which these developed and how these have influenced the way we '"come out" of our bodies to be in the world' (Drewery & Winslade 1997:34). Steyn and Van Zyl (2009:4) argue that the way we 'come out of our bodies' can be seen as:

> We express our sexualities through a diverse range of subjective experiences, filtered through social frameworks of ideologies, theories, politics and ethics. Sexuality gives meaning to our experiences of ourselves in different and varied contexts and social milieus – even as our desires may seduce us beyond the social discourses provided for us to make sense of ourselves. Sexuality is more than sex; it is the entire way we 'come out' of our bodies to be in the world.

Greater understanding of sexuality within the context of the Protestant Christian faith requires the deconstruction of discourses, especially those which are supposedly scriptural/biblical but are actually social constructions. This will include the deconstruction of power relations, patriarchy and the prescriptions to which Christian ascribe:

> …to understand scientific explanations of [human] sexuality, sexual etiquette and moral values, an analysis of values underlying patriarchy and the established bases of power in the contemporary society provide more clues than any direct empirical investigation of biology and psychology.
>
> (Nicolson 1994:7)

Understanding human sexuality thus involves much more than an understanding of biology: it requires a definition that recognises that human sexuality is 'subject to layers of psychological experience mediated by personality and socialization, and sexuality and gender divisions are themselves socially constructed' (Choi & Nicolson 1994:2; Farley 2010:133,135). Similarly, Freedman and Combs (1996:22) describe 'reality' as a multiplicity of truths found in the social construction discourse. If 'reality' is constituted and sustained by the dominant discourses and social processes in which we are engaged, it is thus multi-layered and multi-texted and, by implication, there could be multiple constructed realities (Freedman & Combs 1996:22). Such constructed realities can also be termed 'knowledges'. Burr (1995:8) regards these 'knowledges' as our current ways of understanding the world by means of the social processes we engage in. Thus, knowledge is

not viewed as a product of objective observation by the knower (researcher) of the known (co-searchers) but our 'knowledges' arise out of our interaction with other people.

Reinharz (1992:4) and Weedon (1987:12) support the idea of multiple constructed realities as formulated in feminist approaches to research. I too support the understanding of multiple constructed realities, which calls for a critical stance towards our taken-for-granted ways of understanding and defining the world (Gergen 1985:267; White 1991:27).

Weedon (1987:20) argues that social constructionism is strengthened by poststructuralist ideas and feminism, as it confronts taken-for-granted ways of understanding and allows for multiple constructed realities. According to Knowles and Elliott (1997:241), poststructuralist thought 'began to challenge structuralist claims to objectivity and comprehensiveness and…emphasized instead the plurality and deferral of meaning'. Thomas (2002:88) and White (1991:27) explain that a poststructuralist position contests the view that conventional knowledge is based on objective, unbiased observations of the world and definitions of it. It follows then that a poststructuralist epistemology opposes positivism and empiricism found in traditional science (Burr 1995:3; Nelson 1992:42; Gergen 1985:267-268). Such taken-for-granted ways of understanding is reviewed by a process of deconstruction. With deconstruction knowledge is not erased but rather taken apart. Derrida (1983:3) explains that:

> …the motif of deconstruction has been associated with 'poststructuralism'…But the undoing, decomposing, and desedimenting of structures, in a sense more historical than the structuralist movement it called into question, was not a negative operation. Rather than destroying, it was also necessary to understand how an 'ensemble' was constituted and to reconstruct it to this end.

The deconstruction of sexual practices and the taken-for-granted ways of understanding of Christian sexuality underpinned this research project. It is discussed in greater detail and in relation to the co-searchers stories in Chapter Five.

Social constructions, such as patriarchy and biblical prescriptions, are conveyed through many different means, but most powerfully through language. Richardson (2005:961) explains that '[p]oststructuralism links language, subjectivity, social organisation, and power. The centrepiece is language. Language does not "reflect" social reality but rather produces meaning and creates social reality'.

2.3   LANGUAGE AS SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION

Language is a social construction which defines and constructs people's lived experiences and realities. I support Drewery and Winslade's view of language as the tool people use for making sense:

> Language is not simply a representation of our thoughts, feelings, and lives. It is part of a multilayered interaction: the words we use [or not use] influence the ways we think and feel about the world. In turn, the ways we think and feel influence what we speak about. How we speak is an important determinant of how we can be in the world.

> (Drewery & Winslade 1997:34)

Mary McClintock Fulkerson (1994:72) argues that language should be understood by its location and the context in which it produces meaning. The 'correlational constituents of meaning are not simply the signified as concept, but signifying processes embedded in social relationship, which are not only embedded in but indistinguishable from social practices' (McClintock Fulkerson 1994:75). It is therefore important not only to explore language and the context in which it is created, but also to explore the discourses in which language is created thereby widening 'the range of signifying we explore to domains of meanings that incorporate statements and their relational effects' (McClintock Fulkerson 1994:77). I support McClintock Fulkerson's (1994:77) argument that we need to analyse 'situations of utterance as the intersections of differential systems of meaning and the rules that order them' in order to create understanding of the text. Such differential systems refer to the generation of meaning out of differences. In order to understand sexuality and how it is scripted in our society, we need to explore the religious roots and the other social differential intersections that construct discourses regarding Christian sexuality. Having said this, it is important to remind ourselves of the contextuality of text and understanding.

The Bible is a very important normative voice for Christian women's understandings of sexuality. Moreover, within Christianity there are also very specific discourses that constitute women's experiences of sexuality. Many of these discourses are scripted from supposedly biblical prescriptions as well as from other religious ideas. The social constructions which constitute our understanding of sexuality are often very complex issues in themselves, such as language and biblical interpretations (Snyman 2007:83-86). I am in agreement with König (1998:16-17), who argues that the different ways in which people read and understand the Bible become apparent when

Christian convictions are explored. Many Christians maintain that the Bible is the only source of their convictions, but it 'become[s] all too obvious how difficult it is to determine exactly what is in agreement with the Bible and what [is] not' when faced with different interpretations of biblical texts (König 1998:16-17). Although most Christians present their convictions as 'biblical', all convictions are still constructed within a specific context. There are many different approaches to hermeneutics and the interpretation of Scripture which I will not be exploring here as the focus of this research journey is on the *effects* of faith constructions. I will explore how the complexity of these social constructions has influenced women's lived sexual experiences in the latter chapters of this thesis.

White (1991:27-28) argues that not only will the *present* dominant discourses determine meaning, but so also will historical discourses - perhaps even to a greater extent. As this research journey is about Protestant Christian women's experiences, I needed to explore and deconstruct the socio-religious and cultural constructions in their historical context in order to understand more fully the way in which these have influenced the meanings given to sexuality. Since a social constructionist position challenges taken-for-granted ways of understanding and one of the more influential taken-for-granted ways of understanding is power, I have invited the lens of power relations into this study.

2.4   FOUCAULT: POWER RELATIONS AND DISCOURSE

This literature review was done with a keen awareness of power relations and how these operate in the construction of sexuality within the Reformed traditions. My understanding regarding dominant discourses, discursive practices and power relations was informed by Foucault's views (1972a; 1972b; 1984a; 1994) on power discourses.

Foucault's (1978:125) work on power is focused on the questions '…in what way does [power] happen and how does it happen, what are all the relations of power, how can one describe certain of the principal relations of power which are exercised in our society?' Foucault (1972b:141-142; 1976b:93) does not see power as a binary or in duality – such as 'ruler' and 'ruled by' - but rather as manifold and omnipresent. He reasons that power is not something in itself, but rather that power shows itself through the evidence that can be found in everyday interactions and social practices (Foucault 1972b:142; 1976b:94). Thus power is co-extensive with the social body (discourse), interwoven with relations, which simultaneously play a conditioning and conditioned role (Foucault 1972b:143). It was this conditioning and conditioned role of power by means of discursive discourse which particularly interested me during the exploration of the co-searchers' stories.

Foucault (1972a:55) conceptualised discourses in terms of bodies of knowledge and how there are historically specific relations between disciplines (defined as bodies of knowledge) and disciplinary practices (forms of social control and social possibility). Discourse, as used by Foucault (1972a:48-49, 117), does not refer to language or social interaction, but to relatively well-bounded areas of social knowledge. Foucault and followers of his work argue that discourses construct reality, especially those discourses that are dominant in a society (White & Epston 1990:19-20). Discourses thus have discursive effects.

Foucault (1972a:117) defines discursive practices as '…a body of anonymous, historical rules, always determined in the time and space that have defined a given period, and for a given social, economic, geographical, or linguistic area, the conditions of operation of the enunciative function'. The crux of this study thus rested on a process of exploring the dominant discourses and their discursive effects on the constructions and practices of sexuality as experienced by Protestant Christian women. During the process of deconstruction and exploration of the co-searchers stories, we reflected on: the effects of such dominant discourses in relation to the sexual choices the co-searchers had made; how they understood their sexuality and the choices which they had made; and on the complexities, challenges and dilemmas which such dominant discourses had produced in their lives. Many of these dominant discourses operated in a subversive manner (White 2002:44). Since religious social constructions - such as those which govern the sexual practices of Christians - frequently have their roots in historical discourses, I needed to explore these historical dominant discourses and discover how they operated as constitutive and prescriptive forms of power, such as patriarchy.

2.5   DOMINANT DISCOURSES AS USED IN NARRATIVE PRACTICES

Foucault's work regarding power (1980:89-92), subjugated knowledges (1976a:82) and normalizing judgement (1977:177-184) was definitive in White's development of narrative therapy and has been applied and incorporated in the epistemology of narrative practices. White's application of Foucault's ideas informed and shaped the way in which I approached my exploration of dominant discourses in this research journey.

I use the discourse of subjugated knowledges to explore constituting discourses in the co-searchers' stories, as their knowledges were often silenced by the dominant discourse of patriarchy. Foucault

(1972b:82) defines subjugated knowledges as '…a whole set of knowledges that have been disqualified as inadequate to their task or insufficiently elaborated: naïve knowledges, located low down on the hierarchy, beneath the required level of cognition of scientificity'. My understanding of this is that subjugated knowledges are often seen as being in opposition to what is historically seen as the 'truth'. The 'truth' is usually constructed by dominant discourses (Foucault 1972b:130-132).

Foucault (1972b:92) regards dominant discourses as those beliefs which enjoy truth status. Following Foucault (1972b:133), White and Epston (1990:20) argue that 'truth' should not be seen as absolute - as if a belief system is objective or is based on intrinsic facts. Instead, one should recognise that 'truth' consists of constructed ideas that are allotted the status of a truth. Foucault (1972b:94) reasons that '…we are also subjected to truth in the sense in which it is truth that makes the laws, that produces the true discourse which, at least partially, decides, transmits and itself extends upon the effects of power'. He concludes that we are 'judged, condemned, classified, determined in our undertakings, destined to a certain mode of living or dying, as a function of the true discourses which are the bearers of the specific effects of power' (Foucault 1972b:94). I understand this to mean that all beliefs systems are governed by certain constraints, rules, conditions or possibilities and that 'these mean that discourses always function in relation to power relations' (McHoul & Grace 1993:39). Within these power relations and 'truths' lies a constitutive force, and therefore White and Epston (1990:19-20) argue that '[t]hese "truths" are "normalizing" in the sense that they construct norms around which persons are incited to shape or constitute their lives'. In this chapter I will explore the historical 'truths' regarding sexual practices as prescribed by Christianity and in Chapter Three I will explore present day 'truths'. Chapters Four and Five will explore how these 'truths' have been 'normalizing' and constitutive in the co-searchers' stories.

Following Foucault's (1972b:130-133; 1976b:92-97) ideas on power, I argue that a significant factor in all relationships is the operation of traditional and modern power. White (2002:36) elaborates on Foucault's distinction between traditional and modern power. According to White (2002:26), traditional power is 'appropriated by certain individuals and groups….This is a power that is understood to exist at a defined centre, and that is exercised from the top-down by those who have a monopoly on it'. In contrast, modern power 'recruits people's active participation in the fashioning of their own lives, their relationships, and their identities, according to the constructed norms of culture' (White 2002:36). White expands on the difference between traditional and modern power and how it operates:

> [Traditional power] establishes social control through a system of institutionalised moral judgement that is exercised by appointed representatives such as the church, while modern power establishes social control through a system of normalising judgement that is exercised by people in the evaluation of their own and each other's lives [i.e. one's personal faith convictions].

> (White 2002:44)

Although both traditional and modern power are constitutive of sexuality, the 'normalising judgement' that is at work in modern power is particularly insidious and pervasive in our intimate lives and relationships. In the patriarchal system we see evidence of the social control of sexuality through both traditional and modern power.

2.6   PATRIARCHY AS CONSITUTING DISCOURSE

In the literature overview for this study, patriarchy has shown itself as a constant travelling companion and has provided a taken-for-granted way of how people understand sexuality. In fact, it quickly became apparent that the history of sexuality is inseparable from the patriarchal system. According to Isherwood and McEwan (1994:12), in the past (and even at present) many of these socialisation understandings and constructions for women were defined and determined by patriarchy, which represented and privileged the voice of White, educated men. Weedon (1987:13) explains that due to gender relations, women were absent '…from the active production of most theory within a whole range of discourses over the last 300 [sic] years'. This absence makes it crucial to question those discourses that excluded women and which were based on male constructed knowledges only. As Weedon (1987:20), I argue that it is important to question 'how social power is exercised and how social relations of gender, class and race might be transformed', which 'implies a concern with history'.

Within Christianity and the faith traditions which have shaped it, we find patriarchy as a constituting discourse which exerted almost absolute power. The patriarchal system was seen (and is often still seen) as a God-given order which should be followed blindly. Keane (1998:122) offers a concise definition of patriarchy in its most basic form as 'rule by the father' and argues that patriarchy perpetuated a 'system of male domination at the expense of women'. Patriarchy stems from a patriarchal interpretation of the creation story as portrayed in Genesis 2 and 3, which interpreted God to be solely male (Isherwood & McEwan 1994:39). Furthermore, the woman was created from man and is therefore secondary and inferior in human creation (Farley 2010:42). Lastly - and probably the most damning in Isherwood and McEwan's (1994:39) opinion - the male God, having made the

perfect world, has it shattered by a disobedient woman. Patriarchal practices are discussed in greater detail in the latter part of this chapter (Sections 2.7.1 & 2.10.1).

As Lemmer (2005:13), I consider sexuality to encompass our past, our present and our future, as it is passed on from generation to generation. It is therefore not only private and individual property, but also collective. To create greater understanding about sexuality and how it operated in ancient times, it is important to take note of and regard the philosophies and practices regarding sexuality in those contexts. Isherwood and McEwan (1994:37) suggest that '[i]f we open windows on the past and look carefully at what is has to tell the present, we enter into a living relationship with the past'. In the overview provided in the next section I have attempted to enter a 'living relationship' with how sexuality has been practiced in the past.

2.7 AN OVERVIEW OF LITERATURE REGARDING SEXUALITY AND MARRIAGE IN HISTORICAL WESTERN RELIGIOUS CONTEXTS

Different religions have different approaches towards sexuality, and there is a definite difference between how Western Christian customs and discourses have shaped sexuality and the approach of Eastern religions towards sexuality. Foucault (1978:118-119) observed one specific difference regarding sexuality between the West and the East: many Eastern societies define sexual relations as an art - an art that seeks to create sexual pleasure that is at its most intense and as long-lasting as possible - whereas in the West it is 'completely different':

> One finds in many Eastern societies, one finds also in Rome and in ancient Greece, quite a series of very numerous discourses on this possibility, [sexual pleasure as an art] searching, in any case, for the methods by which one will be able to intensify sexual pleasure. The discourse that one finds in the West, as least since the Middle Ages, is completely different.

(Foucault 1978:119)

As this study is limited to that of South African *Protestant* women, I will not discuss the different approaches towards sexuality found in religions in the East and the West. The focus of this study, and the overview of literature, is on the discourses that informed Protestant Christianity regarding issues pertaining to sexuality.

Within many religions, and especially within Protestant Christianity, marriage is regarded as the only legitimate space for sexual intercourse (Foucault 1984c:176-178). This overview will therefore focus on customs regarding marriage. I argue that Christians' understanding of sexuality is not *only* based on biblical prescriptions, but is also constructed by the contexts in which they live as well as by the greater historical contexts that contributed to such constructions. The literature overview deals with studies regarding the historical practices of marriage within Protestant religious contexts. It includes how marriages were organised and lived in, as well as other related issues such as virginity, adultery and divorce.

Working from an epistemology of social construction, my premise is that the practices and understandings which Christians have regarding sexuality must be understood against the historical canvas of Judaism and those cultures that influenced Judaism and, subsequently, Christianity. The identification of discourses underpinned this research journey. Based on the work of White (1991:28), I endeavour to make sense of the discourses circulating in current understandings of sexuality by exploring the historical contexts from which Christian understanding and practices of sexually developed. White (1991:28) argues that understanding is historically constructed and '…created within the context of social structures and institutions' and therefore it is '…inevitably framed by our dominant cultural knowledges', also called discourses. I am therefore in agreement with Coleman (2004:1) who asserts that although much of Christian history is understood from the early chapters of Genesis – the historical canvas of Judaism - many of these customs and rules came from the Near Eastern lands. Therefore, in order to paint a comprehensive picture of the historical contexts from which Christian beliefs regarding sexuality developed, Near Eastern customs also need to be considered.

In Coleman's (2004:50) discussion of marriage customs, he explains that Greek and Roman customs were quite similar to those of Judaism: '[j]ust as there were many parallels between the Mesopotamian rules for marriage and those of early Israel, so there were between the classical world and the Near East'. I am aware that there were differences within these different cultures. However, due to the specific focus of this thesis, I will give only a brief overview of these practices as described in various literature sources, and summarise the *most common concurring* practices of the Near Eastern lands, Judaism, ancient Rome and ancient Greece. For the purpose of this text I group these societies in the collective term, pre-Christian societies.

2.7.1. Marriage customs in pre-Christian societies

In the exploration of marriage customs, it is important to understand the social structures and discourses that governed pre-Christian societies. The extended family was the most important social structure in pre-Christian societies (Yee 2003:35; Coleman 2004:24). Families were organised in terms of patrilineal kinship as the locus of power and authority. Radford Ruether (1990:221) explains that this position was held and/or determined by the oldest living male of the family, thus a system of patriarchy ('rule by the father'). The system of patriarchy privileged men: ownership of goods and resources lay with the patriarch, who passed his assets on as a birthright on to his eldest son, according to the customs of primogeniture (Radford Reuther 1990:222). Endogamous marriages (marriages with one's closest kin) were the preferred form of conjugal union as these strengthened the lineage and guaranteed the greatest number of males available for conflict situations (Yee 2003:37; Dreyer 2005:734).

In pre-Christian societies, the *pater familias* (the eldest male in the family) had complete control over a household's resources on behalf of all his dependants (Yee 2003:35-37; Coleman 2004:24; Dreyer 2005:734; Weisse 2008:1; Foucault 1984c:72; Farley 2010:29). According to these authors, the family was organised in a specific hierarchy in which older siblings took precedence over younger siblings; the oldest son ranked above his other brothers; and brothers ranked over sisters. Unequal status in family relationships was thus based on gender: a husband had authority over his wife, and older brothers had authority over their younger sisters. Radford Reuther (1990:222) and Yee (2003:38) explain that a mother exerted her authority over her son in his younger years, but was eventually dependent on her son when her husband died. Russell ([1929] 2009:17) confirms that a 'woman had in no period of her life any independent existence, being subject first to her father and then to her husband'. After the death of her husband a woman would reside once more under a man, namely her eldest son. The discourse of patriarchy - where women are seen as lesser beings or with a particular gender role - became apparent in most of the co-searchers stories (Sections 4.6.4; 4.9.1 & 4.9.6.1). The patriarch also controlled all extended relationships, for instance, who his sons and daughters could marry, as well as his family's resources (Coleman 2004:24; Weisse 2008:1).

2.7.2. Marriage as an economic arrangement

In Coleman (2004:4-6) and Yee's (2003:38) research they have found that when a couple married in ancient Israel, as in other Near Eastern societies, love and romance were not important factors.

Instead, marriages of daughters were arranged and used to forge or strengthen alliances with other families. Patriarchs of ancient Israel were driven by their obligation to produce appropriate heirs as they had to father a nation (Coleman 2004:24; Yee 2003:38; Farley 2010:35). Israel took seriously the instruction to 'be fruitful and rule the earth', as related in Genesis 1:27-28:

> So God created human beings, making them to be like him. He created them male and female, blessed them, and said, 'Have many children, so that your descendants will live all over the earth and bring it under their control. I am putting you in charge of the fish, the birds, and all the wild animals.'

Yee (2003:38), Dreyer (2005:734), Isherwood and McEwan (1994:42) and Peterman (1999:163) confirm that a wife's primary contribution to a household was her sexual fertility. She had to bear legitimate children, especially sons, who would ensure claims to limited commodities such as land. The discourse of fertility and the bearing of children has been transferred from one generation to the next and is still a dominant discourse among Christians today. This discourse and its effects on the co-searchers' stories is discussed in the latter chapters of this thesis (Sections 3.6.4; 4.7.6 & 4.9.6.1).

Coleman (2004:2, 7-10) and Yee (2003:35-38) emphasize that courting was not the practice in pre-Christian societies: marriage was seen as little more than an economic transaction. In order to understand this discourse, one needs to keep in mind the status of women in ancient societies. A woman was seen as a possession and in the service of her father and, after marriage, her husband (Greenberg 1990:32; Weitz 2000:1; Radford Ruether 1990:222; Russell [1929] 2009:28; Isherwood & McEwan 1994:41-42; Dreyer 2005:737). The classification of women as property along with a man's other possessions is evident in the Ten Commandments: 'Do not desire another man's house; do not desire his wife, his slaves, his cattle, his donkeys, or anything else that he owns' (Exodus 20:17) and is an outflow from the discourse of patriarchy. The classification of women as property can also be seen in the Code of Hammurabi (circa 1800 BC), which is the earliest recorded legal system in the Western world (Weitz 2000:1; Coleman 2004:4-5). Greenberg (1990:32) contends that the implications of the discourse which classifies women's bodies as men's property become especially clear in the way rape cases were dealt with. Under the Code of Hammurabi, rape was defined as a property crime - theft from the victim's male relatives. A convicted rapist thus had to pay a fine for 'damaged goods' to the raped woman's husband or to her father, if she was not married (Weitz 2000:1; Greenberg 1990:32). Russell ([1929]2009:29) and Dreyer (2005:737) confirm that a man who had intercourse with the wife of another man was seen guilty of an offence against the property of the other man. The discourse of the wife - and her body - as the property of her husband

emerged mostly in subtle ways in the stories of the co-searchers, but at times in brutal ways - such as marital rape (Section 4.6.1).

The economic nature of marriage is also seen in the financial contract that was negotiated between the fathers of the prospective partners (Coleman 2004:7; Greenberg 1990:33-36). Fathers settled the bride price, payable to the bride's father, as compensation for the loss of his daughter's services. This financial contract included an 'endowment for the new bride with some possessions of her own for use in the new household, together with a dowry as a provision for the future should she be divorced or widowed' (Coleman 2004:7).

This endowment is similar to the practice of having a bridal trousseau. Breslow Sardone (2010) explains that 'throughout history, single young women all over the world have prepared for their change in marital status by accumulating a trousseau'. A traditional trousseau (stored in a hope chest traditionally made from cedar wood) included bridal accessories, jewellery, lingerie, toiletries and makeup, plus bed linens and bath towels for her new home. In South Africa, many women used to follow this practice until the 1980s. I expect that this practice became less relevant as women became more career-orientated and therefore more economically independent. From my own experience, on my way to church in the bridal car, my father gave me a valuable diamond; he said that I should keep this stone as financial security which I could sell it if ever I needed to leave the marriage.

My father's gesture should be understood in terms of the widespread occurrence of divorce in most Western societies. Throughout the ages, divorce was a constant variable of marriage.

2.7.3   Divorce in pre-Christian societies

Although marriage was taken seriously in ancient Near Eastern societies, divorce was still a common occurrence. Coleman (2004:11) maintains that '[a]part from adultery and barrenness, a man could change his partner more or less at will'. The Code of Hammurabi dealt with a wide range of divorce arrangements. In the main, these were intended to protect women and to ensure that they were not pushed out of their homes and left to starve (Farley 2010:36). Weisse (2008:1) explains that rules regarding divorce were organised in terms of the class of the wife and the position of the husband. If a citizen divorced a barren wife, he had to return her dowry; but if a commoner wished to divorce his barren wife, he had to pay her a third of a mina in silver shekels. A mina was a Babylonian weight

unit of approximately 1,26 pounds. The value of a mina of silver varied between $32 and $16 (approximately R256 and R126) in modern currency (Edwards 2010).

In Judaic custom, a man was allowed to divorce and remarry if his wife was barren, or if she committed adultery.

2.7.4　Adultery in pre-Christian societies

In Judaic societies, as in the Near Eastern societies, different standards and prescriptions regarding adultery are found for men and women (Spong 2000:89-90; Peterman 1999:163; Farley 2010:36). In ancient Israel if a married man engaged in a sexual act with an unmarried woman, it was not considered adultery; but if a married woman engaged in sexual intercourse with another man (married or unmarried), this was considered adulterous and both lovers were liable (Greenberg 1990:33; Spong 2002:3; Farley 2010:35). The rule was therefore, Greenberg (1990:33); Foucault (1984c:73); Coleman (2004:13) and Farley (2010:28) explain, that a woman could violate only her own marriage, while a man could violate only that of another man. Russell ([1929] 2009:29) asserts that these prescriptions clearly show that women's sexuality was seen as something owned by their husbands whilst the converse was not the case. Coleman (2004:51) and Farley (2010:28) draw our attention to the double standard regarding adultery for men and women: harsh judgement for adulterous women, but pardon for adulterous men. It would seem as if this double standard still exists in today's society, where women are still judged more harshly than men when it comes to unfaithfulness. This double standard was evident in the co-searchers' stories. Many women believe that women are judged much more harshly than men when they are involved in extra-marital sex. A husband's infidelity is often tolerated and rationalised, but a wife who is unfaithful is often regarded as devious and lustful (see Section 5.5.3).

Yee's research (2003:47) on societies operating under patrilineal and honour/shame-based ideologies revealed that adultery committed by the wife was usually regarded as a first-class offence. Adultery violated a man's absolute right to the sexuality of his wife and placed his paternity in question (Dreyer 2005:733-734). Adultery resulted in a considerable loss of honour, not only for the husband, but also for all those reciprocally involved in his honour: his lineage and extended family (Yee 2003:47).

2.7.5   A system of shame and honour in pre-Christian societies

Yee (2003:38) and Dreyer (2005:733-734) found that within Judaism men became honourable by virtue of their lineage. Adultery was thus a very threatening and disruptive prospect in a society governed by a patrilineal kinship structure. This necessitated the absolute certainty of patrilineage, which in turn led to very strict codes regarding sexual intercourse. Adultery was thus considered a grave sin and a moral crime, punishable with death by stoning of the adulterers. The strict codes regarding sexual intercourse also had a secondary function: to protect a man's honour (Dreyer 2005:733). An adulterous wife not only threatened certainty of patrilineage, but also her husband's honour. A cuckolded husband was shamed, not only as an individual, but also brought shame to his family (Yee 2003:47, 57).

Yee (2003:47) explains that the extent of a man's disgrace correlated inversely with the status of the one who shamed him: the lower the status, the greater the shame. As women had a much lower status than men - they were classified along with slaves and property - a wife's infidelity was seen as a gross violation of and injury to her husband's honour (Foucault 1984c:76). Patriarchy thus constituted the material basis of an ideology of honour and shame which legitimised this androcentric hierarchy (Peterman 1999:165-166).

Sexual transgressions left men exposed. Yee (2003:57) called such actions 'weapons of the weak', a clear reference to the power relations within patriarchal marriages. Yee (2003:49) concludes that sexual transgressions could be a way of resisting patriarchal power and therefore became an exercise of power. This conclusion seems to confirm Foucault's proposition that where there is power, there is always the possibility of resistance (Flaskas & Humphreys 1993:42). This discourse of resistance and how it presented in the stories of the co-searchers is explored in Section 5.4.6.

Russell ([1929] 2009:15-16) suggests that the need to prove fatherhood was the main reason for insisting upon the virtue of wives, and that the subjugation of women was regarded as the only means of securing their virtue. This policing of female sexuality in patriarchal societies was thus due to the fear of falsification of descent (Russell [1929] 2009:16). Greenberg (1990:33-36) supports this interpretation regarding the policing of women's sexuality and maintains that fidelity was the only tangible way in which a man could ensure his paternity of his children. It therefore follows that without female virtue, the 'patriarchal family becomes impossible, since paternity is uncertain' (Russell [1929] 2009:4).

The policing of female sexuality is evident in the strict rules to promote and regulate fidelity thereby hopefully ensuring paternity as well as in the insistence of virgin brides: female virginity was closely guarded and prescribed in patriarchal pre-Christian societies.

2.7.6   The importance of virginity in pre-Christian societies

Russell ([1929] 2009:17) suggests that '[i]t would seem that it is only with the introduction of the patriarchal system that men came to desire virginity in their brides'. Russell comes to this conclusion because, where a matrilineal system existed, young women were allowed to 'sow their wild oats' as freely as young men, but in patriarchal societies this was not tolerated. It therefore became very important in patriarchal societies - organised by patrilineage - to persuade women that all intercourse outside marriage was wicked (Yee 2003:38). Sexuality thus became a doubled-edged sword: women's sexuality was controlled not only by men, but also policed by women themselves. In this way women's sexuality - that is virtuous sexuality - became their means of survival. If they stayed virgins before marriage and thereafter remained faithful wives, their future was secure in terms of accommodation and access to resources. If not, they faced a very grim and uncertain future.

The Talmudic law prohibited sexual intercourse outside of marriage: this was seen as an act of promiscuity and immorality (Greenberg 1990:33-36). A very high value was placed on female virginity. Coleman (2004:35) reasons that this was not only because the woman was bestowing her virginity on her husband, and 'therefore guaranteeing the legitimacy of the subsequent child, but also because the rupture of her hymen, the blood on both bodies symbolized the mingling of two married persons into one flesh'. It was consonant with the legal procedure that a blood-stained cloth was regarded as proof that a wife had married *virgo intacta,* thus worthy of the bride price paid (Arthur 2002:28).

Coleman (2004:51) alerts us to the double standards governing sexuality in the classical world. Whereas '[w]omen were expected to remain virgin until marriage, but young men were not....[similarly] adultery by a man was no great matter, except with another citizen's wife'.

The power of such a discourse is clearly seen as it passed from one century to the next and from one community to another. In medieval Europe this practice of proving of virginity survived as a customary sign that newly-weds had consummated their marriage. Some modern day rabbis believe

the test should still be used. In some South African Black cultures the ancient tradition of virginity testing is still enforced, even though it is now illegal to test a girl under the age of eighteen in terms of the *Child Protection Act*. The practice of virginity testing was debated in *The Big Question,* a South African Broadcasting Corporation TV program (2005). Some participants in this discussion reasoned that virginity testing prohibits girls from becoming sexually active, thereby protecting the family's honour: a pure woman stands a greater chance to meet a man and is accepted in the community for having abstained from any misconduct. It was apparent that virginity testing was not only about the honour of the family or to prevent teenage pregnancies, but also about the price of the bride, thus involved the *lobola* system. A virgin bride commands a higher *lobola* price than a non-virgin (Spies 2006:88).

Russell ([1929] 2009:15) adds another interpretation to the understanding of the importance of virginity and the subsequent proof of paternity. He argues that as 'soon as a father recognises that the child is, as the Bible says, his "seed", his sentiment towards the child is reinforced by two factors, the love of power and the desire to survive death'. Russell ([1929] 2009:15) concludes that a man viewed a legitimate child as a continuation of his being and thus regards that man's affection for his child as a form of egoism.

For the people of Israel, the main purpose of sexual intercourse within the marriage was procreation as it was their duty to be fruitful and multiply (Genesis 1:28). Because of the strong emphasis on reproduction, all non-reproductive sexual practices as well as pre-marital sex were seen as 'unnatural' and not in God's will - thus sinful (Lemmer 2005:50). Although most feminist writers, for example Yee and Weitz, highlight many of the sex-negative attitudes we find in religions such as Judaism and Christianity, this is not the complete picture. While Judaism and its religious fathers might have frowned upon sexuality, there are many sex-positive texts in the Old Testament, even if these are seldom emphasised in either Judaism or Christianity.

2.7.7 Sex-positive attitudes in pre-Christian societies

Lemmer (2005:45-46) and Farley (2010:27-28) draws our attention to the sex-positive attitudes prevalent in both classical Greek and Roman society. The Greeks regarded sexuality as an elementary life force: sexual impulses were accepted as good. They worshiped various gods and goddesses of fertility, beauty and sexual pleasure and believed that these gods would bless them with

fertility and sexual virility. Youth and beauty were greatly admired: 'public nudity was common at many religious festivals, in civic processions and in beauty contests' (Lemmer 2005:46).

Similarly, in classical Rome sexuality was also seen as good. The Romans adopted many Greek customs and beliefs and worshiped Greek deities like *Eros* and *Aphrodite* as well as *Amor* and *Venus.* Sex was for procreation as well as recreation: the religions of both Greece and Rome allowed for the full expression of every human sexual potential (Lemmer 2005:49). Space was made for a variety of sexual practices: for instance, homosexual relationships were seen as 'normal', although in Roman society there was a law prohibiting homosexual relationships (Farley 2010:29), but it was not much invoked except as an excuse for blackmail' (Coleman 2004:52).

Greenberg (1990:21) discusses the encouragement and approval of marital sexual pleasure in some Jewish communities. The set of prescriptions pertaining to marital sexual pleasure was called *onah.* This Hebrew word referred to the wife's marital right to expect and experience sexual pleasure, thus the expectation that her husband would satisfy her sexually (Greenberg 1990:21; Farley 2010: 35-36). The system of o*nah* surprised me: it was one of the few sex-positive prescriptions I came across within a Western religious context that referred to *female* sexual pleasure. In ancient societies it was believed that a woman could only conceive if she experienced an orgasm during sexual intercourse (Craig & Stander 2009:60). In view of how important procreation was in those societies, I suggest that this might explain the system of *onah.*

There were also prescriptions regarding the quality and frequency of sexual intercourse. The Talmud introduced a general concept that a husband and wife may not consistently and unreasonably refuse sex with each other (Lemmer 2005:51; Greenberg 1990:22). This sex-positive doctrine is seen in Deuteronomy 24:5. The injunction that a newly wedded man should not go out to join the army or be taxed at home - and thus freed from all obligations for one year - was so that he could bring pleasure to his wife (Lemmer 2005:51; Greenberg 1990:22). Similarly, the New Testament expresses the notion that both the husband and wife should experience sexual happiness:

> A man should fulfil his duty as a husband, and a woman should fulfil her duty as a wife, and each should satisfy the other's needs. A wife is not the master of her own body, but her husband is; in the same way a husband is not the master of his own body, but his wife is. Do not deny yourselves to each other, unless you first agree to do so for a while in order to spend your time in prayer; but then resume normal marital relations. In this way you will be kept from giving in to Satan's temptations because of your lack of self-control.

(1 Corinthians 7:3-5)

The importance of sex in marriage in the Judaic tradition is reflected in the rules regarding divorce. A husband's sexual dysfunction - such as 'impotence or refusal of conjugal rights and certain diseases' (Coleman 2004:99; Farley 2010:34) - was one of the very few reasons that a wife could request a divorce. The discourse that prescribes sexual happiness within marriages is still circulating today (Section 3.6.5).

2.7.8 Summary

During the literature overview of historical marital and related sexual practices which shaped and informed Christians' ideas about sexuality, it became apparent that patriarchy was the most dominant voice in how marriage and sexuality were regulated. In the system of patriarchy, certainty of paternity was of the outmost importance: this contributed to the policing of female sexuality. Virgin brides and faithful wives were required (Russell ([1929] 2009:15-17). In her research, Yee (2003:38) links the policing of sexuality to the system of honour and shame that operated in Israel. A man's ability to control his subordinates was linked directly to his honour. An unruly daughter or wife was seen as bringing shame not only to themselves, but more especially to the patriarchs of the family. Men's honour was particularly vulnerable to the possible adulterous actions of women (Yee 2003:57). Therefore adultery was considered a grave sin and a moral crime, punishable with death by stoning of the adulterers.

Patriarchy and its containment practices - the policing of female sexuality within Christian communities - caused a shift from a sex-positive attitude to a sex-negative attitude. Marriage became the only legitimate space for sexual intercourse (Coleman 2004:165) and only heterosexual acts were allowed. This emphasis on virginity and sexual purity which led to the subjugation of sexuality - specifically women's sexuality - as the only means of securing virtue continued in religious patriarchal societies and reached its climax in the Victorian age (Russell [1929] 2009:16). In the next section I will explore some of the influential voices that have shaped Christianity's approach towards sexuality in order to understand how this shift, from sex-positive to sex-negative, could have taken place.

2.8 CHRISTIANITY AND SEXUALITY

The Christian doctrine of marriage emerged from elements of Roman law combined with fundamental ideas about human relationships contained in the Old and New Testaments (Coleman 2004:49; Farley 2010:38). During the Middle Ages, the medieval Church took over the supervision of marriages and thus prescribed policies and practices. According to Bullough (1992:3), '[t]raditional western [sic] Christianity was a sex negative religion, regarding sex[ual intercourse] as necessary for procreation, but emphasizing celibacy as the ideal'. However, it is important to note that this hostility towards sexuality is not so much a part of biblical texts as it is a major component of the Christian church's theology. Holtzhausen and Stander (1996:18-24, 160-164) suggest that many present day Christians still hold such negative attitudes regarding sexual desire and pleasure believing this to be the correct biblical interpretation.

2.8.1 St Paul's ethics on Christian marriage and sexuality

Russell ([1929] 2009:27-28) discusses St Paul's[3] view on marriage in his letter to the Corinthians. In 1 Corinthians 7, Paul responds to the curious practice of men having illicit relations with their step-mothers. He addresses this situation, guided by his belief that the Second Coming was imminent and that the world would soon come to an end. Russell ([1929] 2009:27-28) asserts that it is for this reason that Paul makes no mention of children whatsoever and that the 'biological purpose of marriage appear to him wholly unimportant'. Paul addresses the issue of fornication and marriage as follows:

> Now, to deal with the matters you wrote about. A man does well not to marry. (2) But because there is so much immorality, every man should have his own wife, and every woman should have her own husband. (3) A man should fulfil his duty as a husband, and a woman should fulfil her duty as a wife, and each should satisfy the other's needs. (4) A wife is not the master of her own body, but her husband is; in the same way a husband is not the master of his own body, but his wife is. (5) Do not deny yourselves to each other, unless you first agree to do so for a while in order to spend your time in prayer; but then resume normal marital relations. In this way you will be kept from giving in to Satan's temptation because of your lack of self-control. (6) I tell you this not as an order, but simply as a concession. (7) Actually I would prefer that all of you were as I am; but each one has a special gift from God, one person this gift, another one that gift. (8) Now, to the unmarried and to the widows I say that it would be better for you to

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[3] I am aware that there are many different interpretations of Paul's views on sexuality. However as this is not the focus of this research I will not explore or discuss such different interpretations and will stand with Russell's explanation.

continue to live alone as I do. (9) But if you cannot restrain your desires, go ahead and marry – it is better to marry than to burn with passion.

Russell ([1929] 2009:29) as Peterman (1999:170-171) understands this passage to suggest that marriage could enable the 'weaker brethren to withstand temptation'. He does not suggest that marriage is the preferred or more desirable state for Christians, nor does he take interest in the family: fornication holds centre stage in his thoughts.

In this letter Paul introduced an entirely novel view of marriage: namely, that it did not exist primarily for the procreation of children, but to prevent the sin of fornication (Farley 2010:38;41). Although this might not have been the most positive view of marital sexual relations, it at least broke the mould that marital sexual relations were for procreation only.

2.8.2   Early Christian doctrine of marriage

This section offers an overview of Christian attitudes towards marriage from the Patristic period – from approximately 100 A.D. until the council of Chalcedon in 451 A.D - until the Reformation (McMahon 2010:1). This period held the cohesion between Judaism and Christianity and many basic Christian concepts were birthed during this age (McMahon 2010:2). As this study's main focal area is not historical discourses of Early Christian doctrine, a brief overview will have to suffice. Coleman (2004:165), while acknowledging the difficulty of defining the doctrine surrounding Christian marriage, nevertheless suggests that the consensus between late medieval theologians and canon lawyers can be summarized as follows:

1) The celibate life in monasteries and convents was best of all, for those who had that vocation.
2) For everyone else, sexual intercourse was allowed only within marriage, which was instituted by God and intended to be lifelong.
3) Marriage came into being by the free consent of the man and woman, being of age, and not closely related, with the approval of their parents where available.
4) Christian marriage was to be supervised at the church door by the parish priest, who acted as the chief witness that there was free consent and no impediment through consanguinity, but other witnesses should also be present.
5) The priest should bless the couple either at the church, or at the bridal chamber. It was desirable but not essential that the exchange of vows should be followed by a Eucharist.

6) Consent to be married carried with it an agreement to consummate the marriage sexually, and that act together with the blessing made, the marriage sacramental and established the one-flesh bond.

Plato's dualistic understanding of body and soul greatly influenced the ideas of St. Paul and the Early Church Fathers: it 'has proven more important in Christian history than it ever was in Greece' (Coleman 2004:56) and had a major influence on Christians for centuries to come (Craig & Stander 2009:15; Farley 2010:32).

2.8.3. Spiritual Dualism

Nelson (1992:37; 2010:96) notes that though quite foreign to Jewish Scriptures and practices, Plato's philosophy was grounded in Hellenistic Greco-Roman culture and had a profound impact on the Early Christian church (Porcile-Santiso 1990:196; Casaleggio & Janse van Rensburg 2002:370; Craig & Stander 2009:15). This doctrine asserted that reality consists of two basic opposing elements, often spoken of as mind and matter (or mind and body), or good and evil, or reason and passion (Heyns 1982:201; Green 1992:37; Craig & Stander 2009:15; Farley 2010:32, 111-114). According to this belief, the mind had the ability to draw one closer to God, whilst the body held the potential for sin (Casaleggio & Janse van Rensburg 2002:370; Green 1992:37-38). This dichotomous view of body and soul implied that all functions pertaining to the body were viewed as being in conflict with the soul (Porcile-Santiso 1990:196; Farley 2010:32, 111-114). The sexual body - seen as temporal, corruptible and corrupting - was believed to be the particular locus of human sin.

Remnants of this dichotomous view of reality found expression in the Early church:

> The Church attacked the habit of the bath on the ground that everything that makes the body more attractive tends towards sin. Dirt was praised, and the odour of sanctity became more and more penetrating….Lice were called the pearls of God, and to be covered with them was an indispensable mark of a holy man.
>
> (Russell [1929] 2009:30)

St Augustine, and later Calvin, accepted Plato's ideas thereby entrenching them in Christian thinking (Casaleggio & Janse van Rensburg 2002:370). For instance, many Christians interpreted texts such as 1 Corinthians 7:25-38 as a condemnation of anything sexual.

This dichotomous view of body and soul, which excludes desire and pleasure from holiness (Bredenkamp 2002:346), is one of the most common themes evident in peoples' narratives today (Slowinski 1992:144). When parents discuss sexuality with children in their home contexts it is presented within a religious context - as a joyous gift to be celebrated - but with the emphasis usually on holy love and not on *Eros*, the erotic component of sexual relations (Slowinski 1992:144). I believe that this relegation of the erotic as part of our collective consciousness, placing sexuality in the dualistic split of body and soul, has been evident since the Early Christian centuries and frequently results in Christians - especially women - experiencing guilt and discomfort about sexual feelings, sexual desire and sexual pleasure. Lorde (2010:74) states that '[t]he erotic has often been misnamed by men and used against women. It has been made into the confused, the trivial, the psychotic, the plasticized sensation'. Nelson (1992:37-38; 2010:96) concludes that even though dualism contributed greatly to a sex-negative attitude in the church, it did not act alone. Dualism had a major collaborator: patriarchy.

To understand sexuality and how patriarchy has influenced sexual inequality within Christianity as we experience it today, we need to explore its roots. An exploration of the history of this 'sex-negative religion' inevitably leads on to St Augustine.

2.8.4   St Augustine

St Augustine, who converted from a pagan background, was tormented by his own guilty past. Due to his personal struggle with sexual desire, he connected the 'transmission of sin with the act of intercourse' and therefore 'proclaimed that sex for any purpose other than conceiving is a sin' (Yancey 2003a:6).

Bullough (1992:12-14), Porcile-Santiso (1990:196), Podimattam (2007:209-211) and Bacchiocchi (1991:1) discuss St Augustine's ideas of sin bringing concupiscence (a desire for sexual intimacy) to humanity. St Augustine believed that if it were not for original sin, shameful concupiscence would not exist. Once Adam and Eve had fallen from Paradise, they became conscious of the new impulse generated by their act of rebellion and this doomed them to an insatiable quest for self satisfaction, which St Augustine termed as concupiscence or lust (Bullough 1992:13; Green 1992:139 Farley 2010:41-42). According to Augustinian doctrine, matrimony would exist even if no one had sinned, but marital intercourse would be without the excitement of sexual desire (Porcile-Santiso 1990:196; Podimattam 2007:209). Bacchiocchi (1991:1) and Farley (2010:40-43) explain that it was

understood that without concupiscence, 'male semen could be introduced into the womb of the wife without the heat of passion, in a natural way similar to the natural menstrual flow of blood emitted from the womb'. For St Augustine, the satisfaction of lust through intercourse was a necessary evil required to bring children into this world. Thus, the only justification for sexual intercourse was procreation: '[s]exual intercourse always need[ed] an excuse. The pleasure it involves may be tolerated but never desired' (Podimattam 2007:210).

St Augustine's denial of male and female equality was another factor that contributed to women's repression of their sexuality. Porcile-Santiso (1990:196), Isherwood and McEwan (1994:48-49) discuss St Augustine's denial of women's equal status with men and how this teaching was extended by Thomas Aquinas. Radford Ruether (1990:222) explains that Aquinas accepted the biological theory of Aristotle, who taught that the male alone contributed formative potency in reproduction: the female was viewed as only the passive incubator of the male seed. Aristotle also argued that every male seed would normally produce a male and that females are born only through a defect in gestation (Weitz 2000:1). Men developed with sufficient heat, whilst women not, and were therefore under-developed males. Dreyer (2005:740) explains that '[t]he consequence of this way of thinking was that maleness and femaleness were not see as fixed. If men were inactive, they were in danger of becoming feminine and if women were very active they could generate sufficient heat to become more masculine. Therefore strict codes were implemented in terms of sexual activity 'in order to maintain some stability and to protect vigorous, dominant male sexuality' (Dreyer 2005:740).

Isherwood and McEwan (1994:48) encapsulate this philosophy: 'Aquinas cannot understand why God created this "misbegotten male"'. Weitz (2000:1) and Dreyer (2005:740) asserts that this faulty understanding of physiology – the defective female is the result of the male seed failing to form fully - framed females as physically weaker and less capable of moral willpower or intellectual insight than males. Other Greek scholars extended these ideas, declaring that a lack of heat makes women smaller, frailer, less intelligent, emotionally weak, morally suspect, and, as a result, a danger to men:

[Females'] defective nature, morally, mentally and physically, makes them non-normative humans, unable to represent the fullness of human nature. They cannot exercise dominion in society, but must be governed by the male as their head.

(Aristotle, quoted in Radford Ruether 1990:230)

Farley (2010:45) remarks on the work of Denis the Carthusian and Martin LeMaistre, who stood in opposition of the idea of sexuality as being sinful as they 'began to talk of the integration of spiritual love and sexual pleasure and of the intrinsic good of sexual pleasure as the opposite of the pain of its lack'. Although these ideas did not reverse the Augustinian tradition, it did weaken it and the effects of these new theories were felt in sixteenth century Reformation. Bullough (1992:14) concludes that St Augustine's influence was the most dominant one in the Western church. Church officials strove to inculcate these ideals in their members and they were eventually incorporated into Canon law, thereby essentially institutionalising the Augustinian view. It was only with the Reformation that we begin to see a shift in understanding (Porcile-Santiso 1990:197).

2.9   THE REFORMERS' INFLUENCE ON CHRISTIAN MARRIAGE

The Reformers - Erasmus, Luther, Calvin and Cranmer - were 'together responsible for a decisive change in the Christian perception of marriage' (Coleman 2004:176). As this thesis is concerned with Protestant attitudes and practices, I will focus on the contributions of Luther and Calvin.

The Reformers were disillusioned by the Church because they concluded that the medieval Church's teachings about sexuality and marriage totally mismatched the realities of life among Christians (Coleman 2004:176; Farley 2010:45). At the time of the Reformation, the Church taught that celibacy was best and that marriage was a concession for believers who could not remain celibate (Russell [1929] 2009:29; Coleman 2009:176; Farley 2010:46-47). Until then, Porcile-Santiso (1990:196), Isherwood and McEwan (1994:46) and Bacchiocchi (1991:1) explain church doctrine taught that the Fall was the cause of sexual and human sinfulness. The Reformers looked for a better solution - a doctrine filled with hope (Coleman 2004:176). The Reformers therefore revised the translations of the Bible which convinced them that the patristic views, as well as the views of the revered Augustine, ought to be questioned. They suggested that the creation ordinances in Genesis could be read in another way: namely, that 'God did not intend a man or a woman to be lonely but they were meant to be together and to have children' (Coleman 2004:177).

The Reformers set out to correct the patristic view of marriage - namely, that it was a concession to human frailty - to that of the goodness of marriage as ordained by God in paradise (Coleman 2004:177; Farley 2010:45). Although they could not prohibit celibacy, they dethroned it as the preferred state for Christians and emphasised that it could only be a vocation if God bestowed special grace on those called to be celibate. In fact, Calvin viewed imposed celibacy as 'an evil

imposition and a recipe for misery and frustration for people whose proper lifestyle was to be found in marriage' (Coleman 2004:177; Farley 2010 45-46).

Luther devoted much of his pastoral care to encouraging priests, monks and nuns to consider marriage rather that the confinement to a celibate state in their communities. Coleman (2004:179) argues that 'although Luther and Calvin took the view that marriage was preferable to celibacy they never quite lost the suspicion that sex even in marriage belonged to the lower nature, not really good in itself but at least partly a remedy for sin'. Luther's *Table Talk*, a collection of some of Luther's sayings as recalled by friends after his death, expresses this notion of sex as a remedy for sin particularly clearly:

> A preacher of the gospel, being regularly called, ought, above all things, first, to purify himself before he teaches others. Is he able with a good conscience, to remain unmarried? Let him remain so, but if he cannot abstain living chastely, then let him take a wife; God had made that plaster for that sore.
>
> (Luther quoted in Coleman 2004:184)

Calvin challenged the declaration of marriage as sacrament. He regarded marriage as a creation ordinance and therefore opposed the Church's attempt to 'define rules about the age of consent, consanguinity, restriction on marriage at certain liturgical seasons and the right to remarry after divorcing an adulterous wife [and judges it] as unfair interference with human rights' (Coleman 2004:189).

Even though the Protestant Reformation brought about a shift in attitudes toward sex (Yancey 2003a:8) - for instance, Luther's rejection of the church's proscription against marital sex for the sake of pleasure - and even though there have been modifications of Augustine's basic teachings by various Protestant writers, it would seem as if his ideas still contribute to Christians' understanding of their sexuality and will continue to do so in terms of what Christians perceive as 'moral or biblical' (Bullough 1992:15). This influence is evident in the present day language and attitude towards sexual sins (Bullough 1992:12; Coleman 2009:151). Isherwood and McEwan (1994:37) maintain that '[t]he norms of the Western world have been greatly influenced by its Judaeo-Christian heritage'. Yancey (2003b:5) too believes that the word 'immoral' is still used almost exclusively to signify sexual sins and that frequently the church will only exert church discipline for those who fail

sexually. I argue that this is reminiscent of how adultery was viewed in Judaism and Early Christianity (see Section 2.7.4).

Steyn and Van Zyl (2009:4) view sexuality as 'a deeply political issue, continually subject to various contesting discourses of moral regulation' and I therefore reason so too is the status and role of women and the controlling their sexuality. Isherwood and McEwan (1994:49-50) discuss the powerful influence Luther had on the religious constructions and regulation regarding the role of women. They believe that Luther perpetuated the degrading of women practised in patriarchal societies by insisting that women had to conform to the role-model of pious, obedient wife and mother under the supervision of a male: 'A woman is never truly her own master. God formed her body to belong to a man, to have and to rear children' (Luther[4] quoted in Isherwood & McEwan 1994:49).

Plaatjies (2003:19) found that many patriarchal expectations are still experienced today in the Reformed Traditions. For instance, women are expected to be timid, accommodating and complaisant and therefore girls are socialised in this way. Many feminist theologians argue that for South African Protestant women there are still very specific moral regulations based on their gender and faith.

2.10 MARRIAGE, SEX AND GENDER IN THE PRESENT DAY SOUTH AFRICAN CONTEXT

In the South African context, marriage, sexuality and gender cannot be examined or discussed separately (Steyn & Van Zyl 2009:4). I argue that the discourses of marriage, sexuality and gender are often created from discourses rooted in our religious past. Green (1992:vii) is also of the view that we are shaped by discourses rooted in our religious past:

> In our innermost being we continue to function with attitudes toward our body and our sexuality shaped in childhood by parents, teachers and peers who themselves were shaped by [discourses] rooted in the religious past. Some represent enduring wisdom about sexuality and personal life found in the Bible and other scriptures of our religious traditions.

Although I agree with Green, I am also aware of many life-restricting discourses regarding gender roles which are based on interpretations of Scripture or passed on in the name of religion. Isherwood

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[4] Luther, M 1933 p 327 in Kritische Gesamtausgobe, III. Weimar: Briefwechsel.

and McEwan (1994:18) alert us to the harm done to women when role expectations as laid down by organized religion are reinforced by societal expectations which advocate: '"family values" which literally translated means man the breadwinner and woman at the sink…'. Salo and Davids (2009:40) also encountered this discourse, with its very rigid and specific prescriptions for gender roles, in many South African religious institutions. I argue that prescriptive gender roles have led in turn to very specific prescriptions regarding sexuality, especially Protestant women's sexuality. These gender prescriptions are based on patriarchal views and are often rationalised by Scripture (Landman 2002:25; Müller 2008:2; Plaatjies 2003:219). Interpretations of biblical texts (dominant discourses) frequently assume the status of the 'truth', especially with regards to human sexuality and gender roles. As the meanings of gender are embedded in sexuality, a woman is expected to fill specific roles and tasks based on the fact that she is a woman. Similarly, there are specific roles and tasks laid down for men. Landman (2002:25) speaks about these prescribed gender roles in the South African context. Her research supports Isherwood and McEwan's (1994:31-32) contention that for many decades patriarchs used the Bible (and still do) to justify and maintain the constructions of the wife within the nurturing role. Once again, Luther[5] seems to endorse this nurturing role of women: '[l]et them bear children till they die of it. That is what they are for' (Luther in Isherwood & McEwan 1994:50). In Section 2.7.2, I discussed the importance that the bearing of children had in ancient societies; in the stories of the co-searchers this discourse shows itself in present day constructions (see Sections 4.7.6 & 4.9.6.1.)

Many Protestant churches still uphold and cherish the idea of the 'traditional family'. The husband is often seen as the primary breadwinner and the master of the home, with the wife as caretaker of the children and the homemaker (Landman 2002:25; Müller 2008:2; Plaatjies 2003:219; Poling 2006:51). These discourses reinforce those patriarchal practices that we have seen in Judaism and subsequent Christian societies. Landman refers to the prescriptions that guided women with regards to courting when she was a young adult in the 1970s. Many of these prescriptions were not verbalised, but implied. For instance, young Christian women were not at liberty to show romantic interest in a man, but had to wait for his approach and initiative (Landman 2002:25-26). It would seem as if there is a close link between viewing the woman as nurturer, and the exclusion of female desire and expression of female sexuality. Chapter Three explores these constructions in greater depth.

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[5] Luther, M 1933 p 328 in Kritische Gesamtausgobe, III. Weimar: Briefwechsel.

In Shefer and Foster's (2009:272) research on sexuality and the prescriptions for men and women, one male participant shared:

> I think it also involves culture and society....Men are supposed to initiate, I'm not saying it's right but...according to the demands of society and culture...it is expected of me to do all the initiating and dominate the situation.

Salo and Davids (2009:39-40) discuss how historical epochs in the South African context relate to gender. Like many others, they view 1994 as 'the accepted boundary marker of political and social transition from apartheid to democracy'. Nevertheless, although some social and cultural changes accompanied the political transition, 'other older cultural forms, specifically the cultural forms of gendered personhood...have in fact become reinforced through apparently new social practices...' (Salo & Davids 2009:40). Patriarchal power as a cultural, religious and socio-economic process and its interaction with gender and heterosexuality still frame the context of South African women today.

Gender stereotypes are still constantly being reproduced, reinforced and renovated. One only has to look at how Angus Buchan, at his Mighty Men Conferences (which draws more than 350 000 men at a time) invites men to take up their 'God-given position and power' as head of the family: 'Men have got to start to stand up and take their rightful place in their home, which is as prophet, priest and king' (Buchan 2010a). He explains that, in layman's terms, this means that men must put food on the table, protect their wives and discipline their children. The idea behind these conferences centres largely on helping men to reclaim their masculinity. 'It's almost like their masculinity has been stripped from them' explains Buchan (2010b). He continues: 'some of these youngsters don't know what the hang they are supposed to do [or] know what they are supposed to be anymore'. Kockott (2010) quotes Buchan when defending the exclusion of women from the conferences, '[w]hen men go off to war, women stay at home'. He then exhorted the audience to abandon wanton ways of the modern world, and spread the gospel of Christ. Chapter Five will explore the consequences of this discourse and how it presented in the co-searchers' stories.

I am in agreement with Isherwood and McEwan (1994:42-44); Landman (2002:25); Müller (2008:2) and Plaatjies (2003:219) who argue that the allocated and prescribed gender roles for women as home-makers and nurturers and men as the head of their homes are an outflow from patriarchal ideology.

2.10.1 Patriarchal Dualism

Nelson (1992:38; 2010:97) argues that the 'systematic and systemic subordination of women is the counterpart of spiritualistic dualism, for men typically have defined themselves as essentially spirit or mind and have defined women as essentially body and emotion'. Arising from this classification is the 'logic' that the higher reality - reason or mind - must dominate and control the lower - body and emotion (Green 1992:38-39 Nelson 2010:96). This dualism is also expressed in a sexist way by placing women in a secondary role within the Christian marriage (Slowinski 1992:144; Isherwood & McEwan 1994:39). In the South African context, this secondary role of women is especially evident in most Protestant churches.

Landman (1999:71) reflects on the influence which Andrew Murray and Abraham Kuyper had on the Reformed traditions and on how their patriarchal dualistic views extended within church policies. This influence is clearly evident in the arguments against women's suffrage in the Reformed Church of South Africa in the 1920's. It was believed and argued that only men as head of his family, and therefore the rightful representative, should be allowed to vote within the church. Landman (1999:71) relates how JD du Toit (Totius) headed a three man commission on this issue and concluded that '[t]he strength of a man settled in his head and chest, while a woman was strong only in her lower body'. It was also claimed that women do not have the same natural or developed sharpness of brain as men do (Landman 1999:71). Isherwood and McEwan (1994:18) infer that such sexist statements and attitudes made (and are still making) women the prisoners of their biology. Clearly, women within the church were often undervalued by definition as the 'other half' of humanity while men, as superior, were defined as the 'better half' of humanity (Isherwood & McEwan 1994:28-29). Thus with a woman's sex - being a female - became a prescribed role in terms of her being and sexuality.

If we take seriously Galatians 3:28: 'So there is no difference between Jews and Gentiles, between slaves and free people, between men and women; you are all one in union with Christ Jesus', then gender equality – and not sexism - is a 'truer expression of the heart of our common religious heritage' (Green,1992:39). Isherwood and McEwan (1994:15, 42) suggest that Jesus had a keen awareness of the worth of everybody and everything: Jew as well as Gentile; master as well as slave; women as well as men. And yet in most religious traditions, women experience the opposite: they do not feel equal or valued or that their dignity is respected (Isherwood & McEwan 1994:11).

Feminism, more especially the second wave of feminism which occurred in the latter third of the twentieth century (Nelson 1992:39), was borne out of concern for the dehumanisation of women. Feminist theology (Isherwood & McEwan 1994:28; Bons-Storm 1998:10) picked up on how this dehumanisation of women in a patriarchal church frequently left women voiceless in their faith contexts in terms of their sexuality. Their call was for justice for everyone, regardless of race, class or sex: 'Feminist theology recognises as one of its task the overcoming of old dichotomies and the ushering in of an understanding of pluralism which gives speech to the speechless, which empowers the powerless and which lets outsiders participate' (Isherwood & McEwan 1993:91).

Sexuality has been particularly voiceless within the South African Protestant context as a consequence of the embrace of patriarchy by both church and state. The patriarchal discourse was, and still is, often privileged in the Reformed church traditions within the South African context. Stereotyped gender roles are still being motivated and reinforced in the name of Christianity. The discourse of gender roles as a constitutive force was present in the stories of the co-searchers which are explored in Chapter Three, Four and Five. Gender roles proved to be especially constitutive in how Christian women experience and express sexual desire.

2.10.2 Sexual desire and gender roles

For many decades, women in South African Reformed religious contexts were taught to see their sexuality in terms of their roles as mothers (Plaatjies 2003:219). Steyn and van Zyl (2009:4) explain that '[w]omen's sexual autonomy is constrained by discourses that "fix" them in terms of a natural disposition towards emotion – romance, nurturing and maternity, as closer to nature and nurture'. I am in agreement with Choi and Nicolson (1994:2) who argue that although biology plays a significant part in the way human sexuality is defined, such a definition is 'subject to layers of psychological experience mediated by personality and socialization, and sexuality and gender divisions are themselves socially constructed'. One such social process is the different ways in which boys and girls are socialised. We are born with a specific sex (male or female) and are socialised according to the 'accepted' gender prescriptions for that sex. This socialisation process informs our ideas regarding our gender roles as well as our sexuality. Farley (2010:81) explains that in Africa '[b]oys and young men are taught that they both need and have a right to sexual intercourse with girls and women'. Girls and young women, however, 'are taught that they are to satisfy the sexual need of their husbands' and that their sexuality is reserved only for marriage (Farley 2010:81).

Although Farley is referring here to the Black Africa traditions, I have encountered a similar discourse within the White South African population.

According to Fredman and Potgieter (1996:51), boys are actively encouraged to engage in behaviour that affirms discourses of masculinity, autonomy, assertiveness and ambition. They argue that this influences boys' construction of sexual meanings and that boys are much more likely to organise their sexuality around the satisfaction of their needs. Zak and McDonald (1997:905) suggest that women are socialised differently and acquire a different sexual script from men. Gender role socialisation usually trains women to be passive in sexual activity and to wait for men to initiate sexual contact (Reilly & Lynch 1990:23; Blyth & Straker 1996:253; Farley 2010:1-2, 31). Peterman (1999:168) suggests that the prescription for wives to be passive in the sexual relationship stems as far back as the time of Plutarch, who believed '[a wife] welcomes her husband's approaches. To reject them would be disdainful. But to take the initiative herself is just as bad, being meretricious and impetuous'. Dreyer (2005:738-739) explains that being the passive one in a sexual encounter meant to symbolically submit to authority.

South African women, who are conditioned to believe that the sexual needs of their partners are more important than their own, often do not focus on their own sexual needs. Those women who challenge this discourse and verbalise their sexual needs are often confronted by disapproval and outright blaming and shaming. In the Sexual Happiness online survey (Annexure 6) conducted for this research project, three female respondents expressed their understanding with regards to sexual fulfilment for Christian women and how women should engage in sexual intercourse:

> [It is] God's gift, to be embraced and experienced not selfishly but givingly [sic].

> Cautious and a bit fearful of sexuality, thus the need for control - no sex before marriage, although nobody keeps to it. Sexual fulfilment is important, especially for men - they 'need' sex and women should 'give' sex dutifully, thus women's sexual fulfilment is not important.

> That women should always fulfil [their] husbands' needs.

Shefer and Foster (2009:275) also came across this discourse in their research. Sexuality and sexual desire are often portrayed as 'male domain, with relationship and love as women's arena'. Women experienced this discourse as a constraint on their expression of sexual desire. It even resulted in

male punishment when they did admit to sexual desire. One of their female research participants expressed her unease regarding sexual expression as follows:

> Even though women know they have the right to speak up, I am not comfortable with it….They [men] find it so easy to do it...because of the way it has been socialised...I know in my experience it is the opposite...It is not very easy to talk about it...It is just not part of me.

(Shefer & Foster 2009:275)

According to a religious discourse prevalent in the 1970s, women were encouraged to seek fulfilment in motherhood rather than in sexual expression and enjoyment. A review of how the literature of the Dutch Reformed Church portrayed the role of the Christian girl and woman in society and, by implication, their sexuality revealed that the ideal Christian woman was gentle, meek, soft-spoken, dependent, chaste, domesticated, accommodating of others' needs and not outspoken or opinionated (Plaatjies 2003:219). Isherwood and McEwan (1994:24) experienced the same dominant discourse:

> Role models in society encouraged women to internalize the understanding of what women 'ought' to be rather than what women are. Sex-role stereotypes, sweetly smiling females neatly turned out and proportioned, ever submissive, docile, helpful, as if developed according to a formula, replicate the pattern of domination and subordination: if one sex is defined as being submissive, if stress is laid on this quality, then it follows that the other sex is rightfully dominant.

Landman (2002:25) comments on how Christian women were also not supposed to express their sexual needs or desires verbally, especially if they were not married. Isherwood and McEwan (1994:39; 54) call this 'the Eve-trap': women were portrayed as the temptress, the seductress of men and therefore female sexual desire became taboo (Lorde 2010:73). I argue that framing female sexuality within a negative discourse leaves women with a dilemma: sexual intercourse is expected within marriage, yet they should not express sexual desire. This dilemma gives rise to a double-bind, namely women are not encouraged to explore their sexuality or to seek sexual fulfilment, but they are expected to engage in sexual activities within marriage. The idea of sex within the marriage is entrenched in most Western societies, and in some faith societies a marriage is seen as consummated by sexual intercourse.

2.11   SEXUAL INTERCOURSE AS CONSUMMATION OF A MARRIAGE

Once married, sexual intercourse seems to play a very important role between husband and wife. There is evidence that sexual intercourse was regarded as the consummation of marriage in Judaism (see Section 2.7.6). In Old Testament times, the young couple had to prove the consummation of their marriage by the showing of the blood-stained bridal garment or cloth:

> The blood on the garment or cloth would attest to her virginity, as the covenant of blood was cut 'by passing through pieces of flesh'. The two became one flesh; the marriage was consummated.
>
> (Arthur 2002:28)

Remnants of this practice and the belief that sexual intercourse must serve as the consummation of a marriage are still evident in some cultures and religions today. A marriage can even be nullified if the marriage has not been consummated. This is particularly evident in the Catholic tradition:

> Within the Catholic Church, a marriage that has not yet been consummated, regardless of the reason for non-consummation, can be dissolved by the Pope. Additionally, an inability or an intention to refuse to consummate the marriage is probable grounds for an annulment.
>
> Code of Canon Law

Most Christian communities hold the dominant discourse of marriage as a covenant in which the couple 'become one' (Gen 2:25). Foucault (1984c:179) suggests that this discourse was also evident in classical times. The Greek historian and Roman citizen, Plutarch (46 – 120 CE), stipulated the prescription and expectation that marriage would include sexual relations and pleasures. I reason that this dominant discourse is still present today and holds the expectation that a marriage will be consummated by the act of sexual intercourse and that thereafter a marriage needs to be *sexually* happy and well-adjusted. Coleman (2004:166) discusses how the traditional custom of 'private consent [to marriage] between the couple followed by sexual intercourse and cohabitation' created a marriage and this practice was adhered to until the eighteenth century. Free consent was an essential requirement for a valid marriage and had to be confirmed by witnesses. This consent not only referred to consent to take a person as husband or wife, but '…implied the future sharing of sexual intercourse between the partners' (Coleman 2004:166). It would seem as if sex thus became the requisition and legal demand in marriage.

Although I support the discourse of sexual intimacy within marriage, I have concerns about how this discourse is interpreted. I argue that the discourse of sex within marriage has become too prescriptive and has left no room for exceptions, such as those couples who might not consider sexual intercourse as important or central to their marriage. Moreover, this discourse could lead to marriage being regarded as the vehicle of sex: a Christian wife and husband's role and function is thus narrowed down to that of a provider of sex. The danger here is that marriage becomes sexualised and husbands and wives become the objects of sex. Within this discourse, sexual intercourse is supposed, prescribed, expected and required for *all* Christian marriages.

Many of these discourses seem to be circulation today. Even if the consummation of a marriage is no longer legally or otherwise required, most people expect that there will be a sexual relationship in marriage. This is certainly the case in many Western Christian faith communities where marriage is seen as the only place where sexual intercourse is allowed (Isherwood & McEwan 1994:121; Green 1992:41; Foucault 1976b:45). In this sense the Christian marriage has become sexualised.

2.12 SEXUAL INTERCOURSE MOVES FROM PROCREATION TO RECREATION

Talmudic law prohibited sexual intercourse outside the marriage and placed a very high value on female virginity (Greenberg 1990:33-36; Arthur 2002:24-30; Yee 2003:47-48; Russell [1929] 2009:17). In ancient times virginity and fidelity were of great importance: it was the only tangible proof to ensure a man's lineage. Sexual intercourse for women was thus only permitted within marriage. Fornication (sexual activity of an unmarried woman) and adultery (extra-marital sexual activity of a married woman) was punishable by death (Carter 2008:7; Coleman 2004:13, 51; Greenberg 1990:33; Russell [1929] 2009:29).

Russell ([1929] 2009:16); Coleman (2004:35) and Peterman (1999:168), are in agreement that the focus of sexual intercourse was procreation. In the main, love and companionship between a husband and wife were not seen as a priority - nor even as a possibility - due to the fact that women were seen as inferior to men (Radford Ruether 1990:222-223). At best, women were regarded as second rate citizens (if not as possessions) and, in most 'civilised' communities, there was no genuine companionship between husbands and wives (Isherwood & McEwan 1994:19: Farley 2010:29). Since women were seen as unable to make any contributions to spiritual and cultural conversations with men, friendship between husbands and wives in the patriarchal system was impossible, as friendship was only possible between equals (Radford Ruether 1990:222-223).

Similarly, recreational sexual intercourse with one's wife would imply a commonality, which was not considered (Coleman 2004:51-53).

Within the church, sexual desires were regarded as unholy and were invariably attributed to the fatal attraction of the female. Isherwood and McEwan (1994:39) suggest that this interpretation was based on the patriarchal interpretation of the creation story, where Eve is seen as temptress (Farley 2010:138). Since the male's impulses would supposedly drive him to sow his seed, often forcing him to act against the doctrines of the Christian church, these unholy sexual desires had to be controlled, and this was done through the 'castigation of female sexuality' (Ussher 1993:10). In this view, men were positioned as the active driving force – they were naturally sexual beings - whereas women were seen to be playing a key role in arousing male desire (Farley 2010:42,138). In contrast, female sexuality was not seen as natural but as fatal and flawed (Isherwood & McEwan 1994:54). Once again this placed women's sexuality in a double bind as both biblical and church tradition seemed to provide women with two ways of expressing their sexuality, either Virgin Mary or the whore: 'the pure Madonna, or as all encompassing and dangerously omnipotent whore' (Ussher 1993:10-11).

The focus on sexual intercourse for procreation continued until the sixteenth century when the Protestant Reformation brought a shift in attitudes: 'Luther scorned the church's proscription against marital sex for the sake of pleasure, and transferred to the home much of the respect that had been accorded the nunnery' (Yancey 2003a:8). Although the focus of sexual intercourse seemed to move from procreation to recreation, this shift was short-lived as these attitudes were challenged once more in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and culminated in the Victorian Age, when sexual desire and expression was once more repressed: '…even to the extent of covering the legs of furniture lest they arouse impure thoughts' (Yancey 2003a:8). In Foucault's (1984a:3) work, *We "Other Victorians"*, he observes that in the Victorian bourgeoisie, sexuality was once more carefully confined to the home and '[t]he conjugal family took custody of it and absorbed it into the serious function of reproduction'. Foucault continues:

> A single locus of sexuality was acknowledged in social space as well as at the heart of every household, but it was a utilitarian and fertile one: the parents' bedroom. The rest had only to remain vague; proper demeanor [sic] avoided contact with other bodies, and verbal decency sanitized one's speech.

> (Foucault 1984a:3)

In the twentieth century, Freud broke the silence regarding sexuality, a silence imposed by the Victorian and Christian morals (Foucault 1978:119; Farley 2010:54). Starting in the United States of America, this new openness towards sex was facilitated by a series of political, social and cultural shifts. This new social consciousness towards sexuality (epitomised in the Hippie slogan 'Make love, not war') and the development of contraceptive technology revolutionised attitudes towards sexual intercourse and the ways in which couples engaged in sexual practices (Miller 1992:79-80). One of the most profound and life-changing medical advances was the development of a reliable and reversible female contraceptive: the contraceptive pill for women.

2.13   RECREATIVE SEX DUE TO CONTRACEPTIVES

The development of contraceptive technology started a sexual and cultural revolution in the 1960's. The availability of female contraceptives meant that couples could plan their families. More significant was the fact that women were '[n]o longer forced into motherhood by their biology, women could choose how they wanted to shape their lives, planning when to have children and how many to have. This meant that women could pursue higher education and careers' (Cohen 2005:1). Controlling contraception also meant that women could embrace their sexuality like never before. Women now had more latitude to choose partners and determine the timing and frequency of sex thus giving females a kind of sexual autonomy that was unprecedented. Sexual intercourse was formally moved from the realm of procreation to recreation. Choices regarding sexual intercourse were possible, not only within a marriage but also *outside marriage,* without the fear or risk of an unplanned pregnancy (Farley 2010:7).

Because married couples were able to do family planning, this allowed many women to continue to work outside their homes after getting married (Cohen 2005:1). The discourse surrounding a woman's role as mother still remained however: once children were born, wives were expected to stay at home and tend to the children. In most White South African communities this was also the case until the 1980s.

In the twentieth century, the majority of South African married women had children. This was seen as part of their role as wives and married women. I can remember how, shortly after I was married in 1988, most friends and family would ask me when we were going to start a family. Children seemed like the expected and 'natural' progression after a couple got married. Steyn and van Zyl (2009:5) confirm my experience and argue that it arises from a commonly shared discourse which held that

for most people the core of marriage is to have a family: '[a]t the centre, reproductive marriage confers the prize and signifies the victory of the heteronormative'.

Thus, although the contraceptive pill gave women greater freedom in terms of when she had her children, it did not change her prescribed role as mother and wife. Discourses regarding gender roles still determined how she was allowed to behave or function, both within society and in her marriage. Women's sexuality was still embedded in their gender:

> If one considers that sexuality is tied up with gender and gender identity, with sexual orientation, libido, sexual behaviour and sexual fantasies, appearance and clothing, feeling attractive or cared for or alive, and intimacy and relationships, then the very fabric of sexuality cannot be separated from the very existence of personality.

> (Thornton, Potocnik & Muller 2009:158)

If the 'very fabric of sexuality cannot be separated from the very existence of personality' then it would seem that the discourse of 'wife as mother' also seems to have become inseparable from a woman's personality.

2.14 MARRIAGE AS AN ECONOMIC INSTITUTION

In the South African context, just as in the New and Old Testament times, marriage is still often viewed as an economic institution. In the late 1950s in South Africa, men were seen as the breadwinners and women were not supposed to have a career, other than to eventually become a wife and mother. The dominant discourse regarding mothers taking care of their children meant that women left their formal workplace (temporarily or permanently) after the birth of their children. This practice left many women financially dependent on their husbands (Landman 2002:25).

To illustrate trends regarding women's participation in the labour force, I draw on the United Nations (UN) Report (2010), *World's Women 2010: Trends and Statistics*. Although South Africa was not specifically included in this study, I work from the premise that South Africa will follow the general trends as seen in other sub-Saharan and developing countries, which were included in the UN report. One of the issues that are reported on is the representation and status of women within the formal and informal labour force. It was found that 'even with the recent increases for women [in the labour force], in 2010 [women's] labour force participation rates still fall below 50 per cent in

many sub-regions' (The World's Women: Work 2010:77-78). In sub-Saharan Africa, women comprise about forty five per cent (45%) of the adult labour force and in general, 'women's labour force participation is lower than men's at all stages of the life cycle. The narrowest gender gap is in the young adult years (ages 15–19), while the widest gap is generally from ages 30–34 through 50–54' (The World's Women: Work 2010:80). I argue that these statistics reflect the fact that many women, once married with children, either do not return to the formal labour force or they have periods of absence from the formal labour force, thus also a loss of income.

The UN Report also established that '[w]omen spend at least twice as much time as men on domestic work, and 'when all work – paid and unpaid – is considered, women work longer hours than men do' (The World's Women: Work 2010:75). More women than men work in vulnerable employment with low or no cash returns and they spend more of their time on unpaid domestic tasks (The World's Women: Work 2010:168). From these findings one can conclude that women still do most of the domestic work in their own households, which is mostly unpaid, thus leaving them dependant on their husbands or partners for economic survival.

Another important factor regarding women's economic dependence on their partners is the fact that women often earn smaller salaries than men. Until recently, most senior positions in the South African labour force were filled exclusively by males. In the *Power and Decision-making* section of the UN report (The World's Women: Power and decision-making 2010:111) a key finding was that in the 'private sector, women continue to be severely underrepresented in the top decision-making positions', and thus, by implication, are excluded from the higher paying positions. Because women earn lower salaries, they have had to subsidise their income with that of a partner or spouse.

Women's voices also seem to have been marginalized from decision making on the domestic front: 'married women from the less developed regions do not fully participate in intrahousehold decision-making on spending, particularly in African countries and in poorer households' (The World's Women: Poverty 2010:157). Report findings suggest that women did not participate in decision-making on the spending of their partner's money, or of *their own earnings*: '[t]he proportion of married women aged 15–49 not involved in decision-making on how their own earnings are spent is particularly high in some countries in sub-Saharan Africa (The World's Women: Power and decision-making 2010:170).

In the South African context, many women are still financially dependent on their partners. Langer (2009:1) suggests that it is only '[s]ince South Africa became a democracy [1994] there has been a very strong and very public focus on gender equality, providing opportunities for women to advance careers or simply to start one'.

Plaatjies (2003:219) suggests that the way South African Protestant churches view a Christian woman's role in society has helped to promote women's financial dependence. A Christian wife's role was that of homemaker, whilst the husband was seen as the breadwinner, or at least the primary breadwinner (Landman 2002:25). Husbands often expected their wives to exit the formal labour force once they started a family, to be the primary childminder and homemaker – a discourse often supported and re-enforced by faith communities (and by previously stay-at-home mothers). Although sexual intercourse became freer due to contraceptives, once they had children, it still remained the medium through which married women's bodies were trapped and controlled, thereby becoming 'vehicles of cultural [and religious] ideas and notions of etiquette' (Steyn & van Zyl 2009:6).

It would seem that a wife's financial dependence on her husband frequently played a major role in whether or not a woman remained in an unhappy marriage. For many women, divorce is not an option due to their financial dependence on their husbands, especially if they were not active in the formal labour market, as is the case for many White South African women in their forties and older.

In patriarchal societies, a woman's situation is often dire if she does not remarry after divorcing: her survival is usually dependent on the goodwill of her family (Coleman 2004:99). Today, as in the Early Christian societies, marriage, love and sex are often governed by financial dependence – especially in patriarchal households where women are financially dependent on their partners. Women are frequently forced to stay in abusive or unhappy marriages because divorce is simply not an economically viable option. For many women sex was linked inextricably to becoming a mother. Motherhood and sex therefore often become the factors that have the ability to entrap her and limit her future choices.

2.15   SEXUAL EXPECTATIONS FOR CHRISTIAN MARRIAGES

During the 1970s South African women actively started to pursue their own careers. More and more women became career-orientated and financially independent – even if only until their children were

born. Greater financial independence and the availability of contraceptives contributed to women viewing their sexuality differently (Cohen 2005:1). Farley (2010:6) argues that 'in addition to developments in theoretical disciplines, the rise in self-consciousness among women, especially in the last three decades of the twentieth century, has been a significant factor in the loosening of tradition sexual ethical norms'. A similar shift in female consciousness was experienced in South Africa. Sexual intercourse was no longer linked predominantly to procreation, but was also meant for pleasure. According to Cohen (2005:1), as women's position in society changed, they become more assertive in terms of their sexual fulfilment. Economic and social changes contributed to new perspectives regarding female sexuality. The new female sexual consciousness started to challenge '[d]ouble standards, oppressive and repressive gendered social and political patterns, male interpretations of female sexual ideals and destructive roles' (Farley 2010:6). For many, sexual fulfilment was no longer seen solely as the man's domain; women now started to claim and expect sexual happiness as well (McFadden 2003:1). The changed attitudes towards sexual intercourse and the availability of contraceptives meant that sexual intercourse moved out of the exclusive boundaries of a marriage, and pre-marital sex could be entered into without the risk of unplanned pregnancies (Farley 2010:50).

The shift in the function of sexual intercourse - from procreation to recreation - also brought a shift in the expectations of women regarding sexual pleasure and satisfaction, especially in marriage. Sex was no longer seen as a 'wife's duty' to bear, but rather as an important aspect of a marriage. McFadden (2003:4) suggests that women need to move beyond the discourse that limits their sexuality either to reproduction or to the avoidance of disease or violation. They should rather view it in a new and profoundly life-transforming way: body integrity and the embracing of desire, pleasure and sexual autonomy (McFadden 2003:4).

Yancey (2003a:25) warns that confining sex to marriage does not necessarily guarantee anything life-transforming or anything beyond physical gratification in our sex lives: 'It may, however, create an environment of safety, intimacy, and trust where the true meaning of sex, the sacramental meaning, may at times break through. Fidelity sets a boundary in which sex can run free'. For many women being married, even happily married, does not necessarily mean experiencing sexual happiness. Russell ([1929] 2009:174) suggests that a contributing factor to this sexual unhappiness is that many Christian couples do not have the 'knowledge on sexual matters that [they] ought to have, and often initial failures, due to this ignorance, make the marriage ever after sexually unsatisfying to both'. Russell continues that this misery 'results from [the Christian] policy of silence and decency'.

I find Russell's discernment regarding the sexual functioning in marriages extraordinary, especially if one considers the era in which he argued his case, namely 1929. His willingness to speak out and challenge Christian prescriptions in an era of silence regarding sexuality is, to my mind, both prophetic and inspiring. Foucault [1978:119) held the same view as Russell:

> In the West, we do not have an erotic art. Put differently, one does not learn how to make love, one does not learn to devote oneself to pleasure, one does not learn how to produce pleasure in others, one does not learn to maximise, to intensify one's own pleasure through the pleasure of others. None of that is easy to learn in the West, and our only discourse on and initiation to this erotic art is covert and purely private.

I reason that the private and covert nature of sexuality, especially among Christian women, feeds the silence surrounding sexuality. This silence exists in the presence of significant publications by theologians such as James Nelson (1978; 1992; 2010), Lisa Sowle Cahill (1996), Carter Heyward (1984), Christine Gudorf (1994) who addressed the search for sexual understanding within Christian communities (Farley 2010:10). However, is unlikely that congregants will read this material outside an academic sphere, and thus often be unaware of an alternative discourse to silence.

In the light of the greater sexual freedom and openness in our society, many Christian women have become frustrated with the discourse which suggests that married Christians automatically have happy sex lives and, if this is not so, they are not allowed to discuss it. Many Christian women who experience sexual difficulties are desperate to talk about their unhappiness in relation to their faith convictions, but few ever get the opportunity, especially not in their faith contexts (Burridge 1985:14).

The vast majority of Christian women who participated in my questionnaire regarding female sexuality (Annexure 7) indicated that they would not discuss their sexual challenges or issues with the ministers or even pastoral carers in their faith communities. Twenty seven out of thirty nine women (72%) said that they would not discuss their sexual problems with their minister. For most respondents, the fact that their ministers were male lay behind their reluctance: they felt too shy or uncomfortable to speak to him. Moreover, most of those who had discussed sexual problems with their ministers found it unhelpful. This perception is confirmed by Richards (1992:188) who observed that as recently as the 1960s it was not regarded appropriate for religious leaders, teachers and pastors to be concerned about the use of sexual knowledge and information. Consequently very little of this knowledge was passed on in religious observance and practices.

Similarly, issues relating to sexual ethics were dealt with in a somewhat dogmatic manner, with little opportunity for open exploration of fears and feelings and a rather heavy emphasis on certain rules and the correctness of behaviour (Richards 1992:188). This led me to question the pastoral counsellor's role and how we address sexuality in pastoral counselling. Foucault has made some interesting and very relevant observations regarding Christianity, silence and sexuality.

2.16   FOUCAULT'S VIEWS ON THE HISTORY OF SEXUALITY AND CHRISTIANITY

Foucault's work on the history of sexuality is seen as an influential and authoritative voice with regards to the history and operations of sexuality (Bernauer & Mahon 1994:145). Foucault intended to explore Christianity and sexuality (*The Confessions of the Flesh*), which would have been highly relevant for this study, but unfortunately he did not do so before his death. In the next section I refer only briefly to some of the contributions Foucault made to my understanding of the history of sexuality.

Foucault (1978:117) argued that sexuality had to be understood in the presence of two co-existing dominant discourses, namely the 'subject's misunderstanding of his own sexuality and the over-knowledge of sexuality in [Western] society'. The presence of these co-existing dominant discourses meant that, on the one hand there was a theoretical production of knowledge regarding sexuality - which Foucault sees as a speculative and analytical production of knowledge 'according to the general cultural plan' - yet on the other hand, there was 'a misunderstanding of one's sexuality by the subject' (Foucault 1978:117).

Following Foucault (1978:118), I argue that in order to understand the history of sexuality and how these discourses influence present day sexuality, one needs to explore the collective Christian socio-cultural knowledges of sexuality.

During the Greco-Roman period, sexuality was free and 'able to express itself without difficulties'; it was devoted to 'a discourse in the form of an erotic art' (Foucault 1978:120). Foucault argues that historians believed - or would like us to believe - that when Christianity became established, it interfered with the discourse of sexuality as an erotic art, and for the first time in the West, a great prohibition was imposed on sexuality. This imposition, which said 'no' to pleasure and thus 'no' to sexual intercourse, ultimately led to a silence on sexuality which was enforced by moral prohibitions (Foucault 1978:120). Foucault challenges the idea that Christianity introduced the constriction of

sexuality and argues that restrictions already existed in antiquity: '[p]olygamy, pleasure outside of marriage, valorisation of pleasure, and indifference toward children had already essentially disappeared from the Roman world before Christianity' (Foucault 1978:120).

Foucault (1978:120-121) following Paul Veyne, a historian of Roman antiquity who studied sexuality in the Roman world before Christianity, credits the Romans with the dominant ideas regarding sexual morality that later defined sexual ethics in Christianity. Roman sexual morality adhered to the rule of monogamy; regarded sexual intercourse as exclusively in service of reproduction; and disqualified sexual pleasure (Foucault 1978:120). Russell ([1929] 2009:18), as Foucault, argues that the principles of sexual morality, which are often attributed to Christianity, were already present in the Roman world before the appearance of Christianity. Foucault (1978:121) takes the argument further by insisting that Christianity brought with it new mechanisms of power to inculcate these moral imperatives which already existed. He reasons that when Christianity entered the Roman Empire it became the state religion, and thus sided with the mechanisms of power to a greater extent than with moral ideas and ethical prohibitions. Foucault therefore concludes that in order to explore the history of sexuality in the Western world since Christianity, we need to explore the mechanisms of power. Foucault (1978:121) calls this mechanism of power 'the pastorate'. (See Section 2.4 for Foucault's ideas on power and how it relates to this research.)

According to Foucault (1978:121), the representatives of the pastorate are those people in Christian society who fulfil the role of pastor/shepherd to others who are their sheep or their flock. He sees the pastor as the first introduction of this kind of power in the history of the Greek and Roman worlds (Foucault 1978:122). This kind of power is an individualistic power, in the sense that the 'good pastor is qualified as the one who watches over the individuals in particular, over the individuals taken one by one' (Foucault 1978:123). I interpret the power of the pastorate in present day discourse as the prescriptions of faith societies along with the power that these hold. The effects of the pastorate are discussed in Chapter Five (see Sections 5.4; 5.4.5 & 5.4.6).

The pastorate brought with it principles which had to be adhered to. Firstly, it became 'an obligation to seek one's salvation', which could only be done '….if one accepts the authority of another' (Foucault 1978:124). The acceptance of authority implied that one's 'actions had to be known' – that is, known by the pastor - which meant in turn that the pastor could demand 'absolute obedience' (Foucault 1978:124). The pastor had to teach the traditions, the writings, wisdom, morality and the truth. But in order for the pastor to teach and take care of his flock, he also must know everything

that his sheep do and what goes on inside the soul, the heart as well as the most profound secrets of the individual (Foucault 1978:125). In this way, Christianity:

> …found the means to establish a type of power that controlled individuals by their sexuality, conceived as something of which one had to be suspicious, as something which always introduced possibilities of temptation and fall in the individual.
>
> (Foucault 1978:126)

Foucault (1978:125) deduces that 'the pastorate brought with it an entire series of techniques and procedures concerned with the truth and the production of truth' and control. This research journey was particularly concerned with the production of such 'truths' about sexuality and its effects on the co-searchers, as explored in Chapters Four and Five.

Foucault gives some helpful ideas on how talk about sexuality has been silenced (Foucault 1976b:17). He argues that the repression of sexuality (such as during the Victorian era) necessitated the subjugation of sexuality at the level of language, in order to '….control its free circulation in speech, expunge it from the things that were said, and extinguish the words that rendered it too visibly present'. This subjugation resulted in censorship since, if people were not even supposed to pronounce the word, it was possible to ensure that one did not speak of sexuality, thus imposing a silence (Foucault 1976b:17). If sexuality is repressed and silenced, then the mere fact that one is speaking about it has the appearance of a deliberate transgression (Foucault 1984b:295). Ironically, Foucault too seemed to invite silence regarding sexuality in terms of the history of violence toward women (Farley 2010:56). This absence of gender ethics in Foucault's work is possibly because 'it has not been the subject of much historical attention, although awareness of it surely lurks in the prevailing gender inequality through each tradition and era' (Farley 2010:57).

Foucault's explanation could answer my question why the dominant discourse is able to silence South African Christian women so effectively regarding their experiences of their sexuality. If there is a reciprocal relationship between the dominant discourse and silence, the discourse enforces silence, and the silence in return maintains the discourse. In this way the silence contributes to and maintains the discourse of guilt, shame and repression that enfolds Christian women's sexuality:

> …sexuality is quite apparently the most prohibited thing one could imagine, we spend our time prohibiting children from masturbation, adolescents form having

sex before marriage, adults from having sex in this or that manner with this or that person. The world of sexuality is a world filled with prohibitions.

(Foucault 1978:129)

Ironically, the silence imposed on sexuality arising from the prescriptions regarding sexuality has resulted in an authorized vocabulary about sex. Foucault (1978:129) explains:

…in Western societies, these prohibitions were accompanied by a very intense, very large production of discourse – of scientific discourse, of institutional discourses – and, at the same time, of a concern, a veritable obsession with sexuality, which appeared very clearly in the Christian morality of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, during the Reformation and Counter-Reformation - an obsession which has not ended even now.

This 'authorised vocabulary' or discourse prescribed exactly how one could speak about sexuality, the language that had to be used to whom and in which contexts (Foucault 1984b:302). These prescriptions were at first defined by the Catholic pastorate, but towards the end of the nineteenth century it moved to the domain of sexual science - *sciential sexualis* (Foucault 1978:119).

Foucault (1978:117) speaks of this discourse as the theoretical production of knowledge regarding sexuality, which he also sees as a speculative and analytical production of knowledge 'according to the general cultural plan'. This theoretical knowledge, *sciential sexualis*, contributed to the understandings that Christians have regarding sexual functioning.

2.17   SEXUALITY DEVELOPING AS AN INDEPENDENT SCIENCE

Christians' understandings regarding sexuality are not only informed by religious discourses, but also by discourses and knowledge from scientific disciplines and the secular world. To understand the contexts from which present day understandings regarding sexuality developed will require a brief overview of the science of the sexual - sexology - as an autonomous discipline. The following overview will have to suffice as this is not the focus of this research journey; I do not suggest it to be complete nor comprehensive.

2.17.1 Sexology

According to Haeberle (1983:1) the concept of a special scientific and scholarly effort devoted to the understanding of sex was first proposed by the Berlin dermatologist, Iwan Bloch (1872-1922). Bloch also 'coined the new term for it: *Sexualwissenschaft'* (Haeberle 1983:1). It was felt, however, that this term - first translated as 'sexual science' - was somewhat misleading, and therefore the use of the term 'sexology' became preferable. Both Haeberle (1983:1) and Foucault (1978:118) make a distinction between the modern concept of sexology (i.e. the theoretical study of sex or *scientia sexualis*), and the older concept of erotology (i.e. the practical study of lovemaking or *ars amatoria*) which was found in Eastern societies, such as the erotological writings like the Kama Sutra and other Hindu love manuals. Historically, the science of sexology was not about the art of giving pleasure; it was a more theoretical understanding of sexual functioning. It would seem as if the silence regarding specific aspects of sexuality, such as *Eros*, was not only absent from religious contexts, but also in the scientific field of sexology. I postulate that the silence regarding erotic aspects of sexuality in both the scientific and religious reinforced each other, which made the discourse of silence almost impenetrable.

2.17.2 Modern day sexology

Haeberle (1983:1) traces the roots of modern sexology in various scientific disciplines, such as biological, medical, historical and anthropological research. Modern day sexology is more than just the study of the sex organs, penetration and positions of sexual intercourse: it also encompasses the biological, psychological, sociological, cultural and spiritual dimensions of sexuality (Lemmer 2005:16). Sexuality is about how we relate to other people in the totality of our being. By the turn of the twentieth century, the pioneering work of Havelock Ellis, Sigmund Freud, and Iwan Bloch had established the investigation of sexual problems as a legitimate science in its own right (Haeberle 1983:1; Lemmer 2005:59).

After the Second World War, sexology experienced a renaissance in the United States of America (USA) through Alfred C Kinsey's work. Kinsey's experience as a zoologist made him well-suited for the task of conducting a large scale, strictly empirical survey of actual sexual behaviour in the USA. Kinsey and his co-authors, in their two monumental studies - the so-called Kinsey Reports - *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male* (1948) and *Sexual Behavior in the Human Female* (1953), made a new, significant, and non-medical contribution to sex research. As these studies were also the

result of interdisciplinary teamwork, they were qualified to be called 'sexological' in Bloch's understanding of the term (Haeberle 1983:2).

Over the past few decades, scientific attention has shifted again to medical and physiological studies. Haeberle (1983:2) argues that this is due mainly to the impact of two other groundbreaking books - William H. Masters and Virginia Johnson's *Human Sexual Response* (1966) and *Human Sexual Inadequacy* (1970). Masters and Johnson concentrated on treating the sexual dysfunctions of the individual (or at most, the couple) thus largely neglecting the social and historical dimensions of sex.

Although Kinsley, Masters and Johnson, and Freud's work are regarded as the most influential and authoritative on sexuality, they only have a limited bearing on this thesis. I will not be focusing on the physical aspects of sexuality the work of sexologists but on the social constructionist aspects of sexuality and the faith experiences of women in relation to their sexuality.

Stayton (1992:203) remarks that we have learned more about human sexual behaviour and human sexual response in the last thirty years than we have ever known. Since much of this new knowledge is in conflict with traditional religious belief systems, our religious institutions will have to be challenged about its contribution to sexual education - or the lack thereof - if it wants to be relevant in addressing the sexual concerns of our time. Even though knowledge about sexuality has grown exponentially, the silence regarding sexuality persists within most faith communities. The question one is now left with is: Why does the silence within faith communities persist? What are the effects of this? It would seem as if this continued silence bears a sex-negative message.

2.18   BEYOND SEX-NEGATIVE RELIGION

I believe that humans are born as sexual beings - sexuality is part of our being (Lemmer 2005:16; Feuerstein 1989:4). We do not become male or female, but we are born male or female. I agree with Feuerstein's view (1989:4) that humans are 'flesh-and-blood beings, embodied spirits rather than disembodied ghosts'. As such, we need to embrace our bodily existence, recognising that we are sexual and passionate, and capable of desire, enjoyment and love.

The literature overview revealed that historically most religious and spiritual traditions have either ignored the fact that we are born as sexual beings - which enveloped sexuality with an a-sexual silence - or were antagonistically outspoken, giving rise to an anti-sexual attitude toward the flesh

(Feuerstein 1989:3). These anti-sexual teachings of traditional Christianity not only imply a rejection of sexus, but - more tragically - of *Eros*. I argue that the church in general, and pastoral therapists in particular, needs to move beyond a sex-negative religion to a sex-positive religion.

I understand an a-sexual approach to sexuality to be the dismissal or disregard of sexuality, whereas an anti-sexual attitude speaks of opposition and disapproval. A-sexual behaviour is thus the absence of sexual behaviour, and anti-sexual behaviour is deviant and out of the prescriptive norm. An anti-sexual approach holds the implicit message that sexuality, as sexual intercourse, is something negative and is to be avoided. Slowinski (1992:149–150) states that a primary task of our psychological development is to become aware of our sexual feelings, to understand them as natural, and to incorporate them into our sense of self. I agree, but would go a step further: this is a very important part of our spiritual development as well. As Lemmer (2005:2), Slowinski (1992:150) reasons that sexual feelings and desires are genetically programmed and hormonally based phenomena that are part of being human. I am in accordance with Foucault (1978:118; 1984b:104-105), who argues that the socialisation and control of sexual feelings and desire by cultural and religious norms endow special meaning to the experience, acceptance and expression of sexual feelings. The literature study revealed many historical sex-negative attitudes (Sections 2.8.3 & 2.8.4) that shaped and informed Christians' understanding of sexuality. As the focus of this study is on such discourses and the effects thereof, an exploration of these was very important.

2.19   SUMMARY

This research journey is concerned with the faith predicaments and relational complexities, challenges and dilemmas which Protestant Christian women experience when living in sexually unhappy marriages. As I view sexuality as a social construction, I needed to explore what were some of the factors (historical, religious, cultural and social) which contributed to the constructions Christian women hold regarding sexuality. The literature study aimed to provide a contextual background from which constructions regarding sexuality have developed. A greater awareness and understanding of such constructions should facilitate greater insight into the experiences of the co-searchers and how dominant discourses had constituted the meanings they had regarding sexual practices. The literature review provided valuable insight into the way these dominant discourses – in both past and present day theological traditions – have influenced Christian sexuality. It also highlighted those factors which could impact on the sexual happiness of marriages.

The literature overview was done through different lenses: social construction, post-structuralism, feminism and an acute awareness of power relations as informed by Foucault. As sexuality is such an extensive field, I focussed the literature review on practices regarding virginity, marriages, the status of women and adultery and on the dominant discourses which have constituted these practices.

In historical religious contexts, which I named pre-Christian societies, patriarchy played the most significant discursive role in terms of how sexuality and marital practices were organised. Patriarchy linked women's worth to their fertility – their ability to bear legitimate heirs. Sexuality became a woman's link to survival by means of marriage. Marriages were arranged and organised as an economic transaction: the wife was the commodity traded and her services were transferred from father to husband. This male 'ownership' was especially apparent in the strict codes regarding female sexuality. Virgin brides were required and a wife's fidelity was non-negotiable. Female sexuality was primarily under the control of either the father or the husband: Men decided on behalf of women regarding whom women will have intercourse with and when. I argue that this *disowning* of female sexuality became a dominant discourse throughout the centuries. Sex became something that is done **to** women, not **with** women. Sex became a wife's duty: a dominant discourse that is still circulating in the constructions of many Christian women and men today.

In the Old and New Testaments we find sex-positive injunctions, such as the practice of *onah* which was the premise that wives could expect sexual fulfilment in their marriages. But even this practice was linked to female fertility: it was believed that a woman could only conceive if she experienced an orgasm.

Plato's philosophy of spiritual dualism greatly influenced the way sexuality was understood and practiced in the Early Church. 'Reality' consisted of two basic opposing elements: mind and matter (or mind and body), or good and evil, or reason and passion. Bodily functions - especially sexuality were seen as a potential threat to spirituality and thus to be avoided. Christian theology has often justified the deprivation of sensual pleasure and the acceptance of celibacy as the ultimate goal. This discourse also contributed to Christian women's sexuality being associated with shame and guilt and repression.

St Augustine's ideas regarding sexuality - closely linked to Plato's philosophy - firmly established a sex-negative culture within Christianity. St Augustine believed that sin brought concupiscence (a

desire for sexual intimacy) to humanity: the satisfaction of lust through intercourse was a necessary evil to procreate.

For many centuries Plato and St Augustine's teachings shaped most dominant discourses regarding Christian sexuality. *Eros* was seen as sinful and dangerous: it was the anti-Christ and condemned. Female sexuality became the personification of *Eros*: subsequently, it had to be repressed and controlled. This discourse could provide us with a possible explanation why many Christian women (and men) find it so difficult to speak about sexual fulfilment as well account for the silence in which sexuality is enveloped. Although the Reformers challenged these ideas and endeavoured to create a more positive view of sex within marriage, according to some authors, they never quite lost the suspicion that sex - even in marriage - belonged to the lower nature: sex was not really good in itself but at least it could function as a remedy for sin. This discourse once more left women in a double bind: on the one hand sex was a gift of God, yet on the other the *Eros* part of sex was deemed unbecoming. Moreover, although sex was a gift from God, a woman never quite controlled her own sexuality. Hence, another double bind: sex was a gift over which she could not claim ownership.

The Reformers, although more positive about marriage, continued to frame a wife's role in terms of her biology. This contributed in specific prescribed gender roles within Christian marriage, also known as patriarchal dualism.

Patriarchal dualism prescribed specific gender roles for husband and wives: the husband as head of the home and primary breadwinner; and the wife subordinate (Poling 2006:51-52). The wife's role was to take care of the home and children. Framing the wife's identity as nurturer and caretaker constituted how she was able to express and experience her sexuality. This discourse often established a wife's economic dependence thus leaving her vulnerable in terms of a shared power base. Being voiceless and with little power in a marriage frequently deprived women of power to negotiate sexual challenges. If a wife was sexually unhappy and her husband unwilling to address the issue, she was trapped within the marriage, especially as divorce was condemned in most Christian societies until recently. This issue will be explored in greater depth in latter chapters of this work.

Christian sexuality was not only influenced by religion but also by discourses constituting society and science. In the past, the science of sexology provided mainly theoretical understandings of sexual functioning. It was only with the development of the female contraceptive pill in the 1960's

that sex moved out of the realm of procreation to recreation, and sexology focused more on the art of giving pleasure. Although women had a newfound freedom regarding their sexual practices in terms of planned pregnancies, many previously held discourses still controlled and constituted their constructions regarding what counted as 'appropriate' sex.

The literature overview convinced me of the importance of this study, but even more importantly, about *the way* in which this research should be conducted. Historically, female sexuality was voiceless within religious contexts or had spoken mostly with the voice of patriarchy. In this journey it was very important that I *centralise the voice of female sexuality*. I believe that only once these silenced voices are heard will we be able to access new knowledge and re-author women's narratives so as to build bridges between a confessional and participatory approach to pastoral care.

Chapter Three will identify and explore - voice - how current constitutive dominant discourses operate in Christian sexuality. It will journey with the understandings and contexts in which South African Protestant Christian women live with regards to their sexuality, matrimony and extra-marital sexual practices. Protestant clergy members will share how sexuality participates in the church, pastoral care and in the theological training of ministers: the dominant discourses operating in all of these areas will inevitably impact on how the co-searchers experience their own sexuality.

CHAPTER THREE

BREAKING THE SILENCE: VOICING HOW CONSTITUTIVE DOMINANT DISCOURSES OPERATE IN CHRISTIAN SEXUALITY

3.1   PREPARING FOR UNDERSTANDING

This chapter is dedicated to exploring and voicing how dominant discourses operate in the understandings and practices which South African Protestant Christian women have regarding their sexuality, matrimony and non-marital sexual practices. Chapter Three provides the contextual backdrop against which to read the co-searchers' stories (which will be shared in Chapter Four). I reason that only once we understand the dominant forces at work regarding sexuality in faith contexts, will we be able to appreciate and understand the relational complexities, challenges and dilemmas the co-searchers had to negotiate in their journeys with sexual unhappiness. Therefore, to promote greater understanding and meaning-making of the co-searchers' stories, the contexts and dominant discourses in these stories need to be brought to the foreground. The societal and religious context in which Christian sexuality operates is thus a very important departure point for this study. Following Foucault (1972b:143), I argue that contexts are shaped by dominant discourses. As researcher and pastoral therapist I 'read' the dominant discourses at work in the South African Protestant faith social context through the lenses of social construction (Sections 1.6.1 & 2.2.); power relations (Section 2.4); and feminism and gender sensitive awareness (Section 1.6.2). The contexts which I will explore are South African Protestant faith societies.

In order to explore the dominant discourses present in Protestant faith societies, I invited clergy to share their understandings regarding the operation of sexuality within their churches. I hoped that by exploring the clergy's experiences I might be able to unmask some of the dominant discourses which operate in faith communities and possibly also in the co-searchers' lives and how these could have co-constructed their understandings regarding Christian sexuality.

Many of the beliefs and understandings Christians hold regarding sexuality are not formulated in church policy or in any other form of documentation, although these continue to circulate and pass on from one generation to the next. Many of these 'absent but implicit' constituting discourses are held as 'truths' even when they are life-restricting and life-denying to the person's experience of self and others. Such 'absent but implicit' discourses (Sections 1.2 & 1.7.4) operate in a state of non-reflexivity: people are mostly unaware of these discourses even though they help constitute their

lives. By identifying some of the dominant discourses at work in South African White Protestant faith traditions - such as those surrounding gender roles and marital and non-marital sexual relations - I was able to listen to the co-searchers' stories with an acute awareness of how these dominant discourses had shaped and participated in their understandings around sexuality and what effects these understandings had had on their sexuality.

Chapter Three is thus a summary of the exploratory conversations I had with clergy in order to identify and explore dominant (as well as implicit) discourses which circulate in the formal structures of religion such as congregations and training seminaries. The conversations with clergy were done as a narrative inquiry (Section 1.7.3), and thus included an exploration of the social and cultural discourses in the stories. As a story unfolds in terms of the complexities of characters, relationships and settings, so too can complex challenges be explored by using narrative inquiry (Webster & Mertova 2007:4). Where relevant, I include literature to unpack the dominant discourses present in these conversations thereby extending the exploration and enhancing our understanding of these discourses interact with social constructions and contexts.

I include some comments and results and comments of the Sexual Happiness survey (Annexure 6) in the following sections in the hope that this will create a greater understanding of some of the constituting discourses which the clergy and co-searchers experienced in their stories as many of these discourses also presented in the survey.

The conversations with the clergy included an exploration of Protestant Christians' understandings and interpretations of biblical prescriptions for Christian marriages. These understandings, as formulated by clergy and co-searchers, are their *personal interpretations* and do not represent the official dogma, doctrines or church policies of their church denominations. The participating clergy members reflected on their *personal experience and understanding* of sexuality and on how they *perceive* their congregants and colleagues implement dominant discourses regarding sexuality. Many of these understandings and dominant discourses - though present - are often not voiced. Nevertheless, in their silent presence, they are still constitutive.

3.2.   THE ABSENT BUT IMPLICIT

Although official dogma regarding sexuality is mostly absent within church structures, it is nonetheless implicit, especially with regards to the dominant discourses that constitute Christian

beliefs regarding sexuality. In Sampson's (1989:11-12) discussion of Derrida's concept of *differance* he explains that:

> ...in whatever we take to be immediate and present there is always already absence....presence always contains absence....It is not that presence and absence are opposites, not there is *either* presence or absence, but rather that there is an inevitable defining of the one through the other: there is *both* presence and absence; absence inhabits and interpenetrates with presence [Sampson's italics].

(Sampson 1989:12)

Many churches are not outspoken about *hetero*sexual sexuality; it is mostly encapsulated in a private and silent space (Thornton 2003:17). It is often within this silence that Christians assign meaning to sexuality. In this research journey it is not only about *what* is said, but what is ***not said***. This silence regarding sexuality in relation to faith was not only found in churches and among congregants (Craig & Stander 2009:14-15; Russell ([1929] 2009:174), but also reflected in the paucity of resources.

3.3   THE ABSENCE OF RESOURCES

Although churches tend to discuss and formalise policy regarding their position towards homosexuality, heterosexuality however is mostly accepted as the norm - taken-for-granted - and therefore often not addressed. Heterosexual marital practices become almost invisible within the church (Yancey 2003b:1). The silence about ***heterosexual*** sexuality is not only found within South African Protestant churches, but also in academia (Steyn & Van Zyl 2009:10). This silence was also present regarding sexually happy or unhappy marriages. Although a vast body of knowledge regarding the ethics of sexuality is available, one seldom finds ***South African*** sources which deal with the sexual ***practices*** of Christians within marriage and more specifically within ***sexually unhappy marriages***. Literature regarding how White South African Protestant congregants experience and understand their sexual practices was not readily available at the time of this study: another indication of the silence regarding sexuality.

3.4   THE PARTICIPATING CLERGY MEMBERS

I invited the voices of clergy into this research journey because I reason that these would contribute to understanding the dominant discourses and contexts in which sexuality operates within South African Protestant congregations. The understandings that clergy hold regarding sexuality, how it is

taught in seminaries and congregations, and how pastoral care is done in terms of the sexual challenges that couples might experience are all important influences in shaping the co-searchers' experiences. I reason that the dominant discourses regarding sexuality which are present in churches will be discursive and co-constructing in the co-searchers' experiences. I argue that if we have an understanding of the discourses of sexuality within faith communities and of how sexuality is addressed in such structures, it will illuminate the relational complexities, challenges and dilemmas Christen women experience when living in sexually unhappy marriages. Thus, to enhance understanding for the co-searchers experiences, I explore present day dominant discourses in the church. Furthermore, I hoped that exploring these aspects would enhance the understanding of the discourses in which sexuality operates in terms of faith convictions, which inevitability would impact on the co-searchers' experiences and constructions – as well as the readers of this text.

Since completing my MTh study, many clergy have engaged me in conversations regarding that study and how I would develop that research even further. When I invited clergy members to join me in this research journey, I decided to approach those who already shown an interest in my work and the relationship between faith and sexuality. I interviewed three male and one female clergy. The male clergy are married, heterosexual individuals, aged fifty three, forty six and thirty five (at the time of their interviews). Two clergy are from the Dutch Reformed Church and the other from the Baptist tradition. The female clergy member is a forty year old gay minster, who recently entered into a civil union and was subsequently discontinued from her position within the Methodist Church. In the conversations with these clergy, as well as with other (mostly male) clergy with whom I had conversations regarding sexuality over the years, very similar stories and experiences emerged. Since my focus is on the co-searchers' stories, I will not include all these journeys at length. I will thus only reflect in detail on the two Dutch Reformed male clergy member's stories, *as these were the most representative of stories I encountered*. The themes (dominant discourses) discussed in this work are based on the participating clergy members' experiences, as well as those of clergy with whom I had formal and informal conversations over the past ten years. I have included those dominant discourses that occurred frequently and commonly shared.

I focus on the *male* clergy members' experiences because, within the South African Protestant context, the vast majority of clergy members are male. Ackermann and Bons-Storm (1998:4) suggest that in South Africa, 'practical theology is overwhelmingly a white male-dominated discipline'. However, because my focus is on the experiences of Christian women who are living in sexually unhappy marriages, I will only give a brief overview of the clergy's experiences. I will centralise the

dominant discourses and understandings which the clergy members encountered. This will act as a backdrop to the understandings that congregants - and co-searchers - hold towards sexual matters in relation to faith constructions. Where there was an exception to the experiences usually storied, I have included these as alternative stories to illustrate the complexity of sexual issues. It became clear that Rev. Ecclesia had different experiences in dealing with the sexual challenges of heterosexual congregants than the heterosexual male clergy participants. This was primarily because she was a *female* clergy member and then because she was gay. I will only include her experiences where these have direct bearing on heterosexual issues. Whilst Ecclesia was serving in her congregations, few of her congregants knew of her sexual orientation. Her congregants seemed to confide in her with ease, mostly due to the fact that she was female. Ecclesia was also very comfortable speaking about sexuality: being gay had forced her to think, explore and speak about her own sexuality and sexuality in general.

The clergy members' viewpoints do not necessarily reflect the official church policies of their churches. They reflect understandings held at grassroots level, thus how these clergy experience and understand their colleagues and congregants' engagement with such dominant discourses.

In the next section I relate the experiences of the participating clergy. Where clergy are quoted, their words are indicated by using text in *italics* and quotations marks. I also use excerpts from the conversation transcriptions or summarising letters that I wrote to the participating clergy members after each interview. In some instances it was necessary to adjust some of the excerpts from the summarising letters to enhance readability of this text. The adjusted summaries and paraphrases, as used in this thesis, were approved as an accurate reflection of the original text by the participating clergy. I indicate these with *italics* only.

3.4.1   Derick

Derick is a minister in the Dutch Reformed Church in the rural area of the Western Cape Overberg district. He has been with his present congregation for the past eighteen years. From 1980 – 1986 Derick attended Stellenbosch University. He received his theological training at its seminary, which is positioned within the Reformed tradition. Reflecting on his theological training, Derick commented that he now sees that his training was very patriarchal: '*women's voices were totally absent*'. Derick described the seminary's approach to theology at the time of his training, as '*confessional*'.

Looking back at his theological training, Derick felt that it was '*very conservative and, in the main,* [based on the premise of] *sola scriptura (only the Bible)'*. The Reformed tradition does not see the Bible as the only source of their theology, but also as the main norm for doctrine and life (König 1998:16-17).

3.4.2   Gerhard

Gerhard is a minister in the Dutch Reformed Church in the Cape Peninsula in an urban setting. He has been in the ministry since 2000; his present congregation is his third station. Gerhard studied at the University of the Free State from 1994 – 1999. At the time of Gerhard's studies, this seminary was also positioned within the Reformed tradition. As Derick, Gerhard described the seminary's approach to theology as confessional and experienced it as '*very patriarchal'*.

Gerhard shared that in his Theology class of twenty three, there were three women. He remarked that these women had '*a difficult time'* [*hulle het 'n harde tyd gehad*]. Some lecturers made their lives difficult: the message - mostly unspoken - was that women were not welcome in the seminary. In some instances one lecturer would even state outright that women should not become ministers. Gerhard elaborated that as a result of this pressure and hostility towards female theology students, one student changed her study course. One of the remaining female students interrupted her studies for personal reasons: she had fallen pregnant out of wedlock. Gerhard felt that the remaining female theology student was singled out and picked on by some lecturers. This aroused much '*rebellion'* in Gerhard. In his final year, Gerhard was the class leader of his group and '*often challenged lecturers about their unfair practices towards the female student'*. Isherwood and McEwan (1994:35) alert us to the way this discourse is at present in many churches:

> Even churches that accept women into the ministry often discriminate against them. They back this up with a theology based on age-old misogynist assumptions which have been discredited by modern research.

Common themes emerged during the conversations with these two clergy members as well as with the other clergy. Ryan and Bernard (2003:275) see themes as abstract and often fuzzy constructs which researchers identify before, during and after data collection. I was able to identify some of these themes arising out of my literature study. Other themes emerged from my conversations with the clergy and were identified by them. These themes represented dominant discourses which were

relevant to the construction of sexuality and sexually happy or unhappy marriages. In the next section I explore some of these themes. The participating clergy agreed with me that these themes could contribute to the constructions Christians form regarding sexuality and therefore important. Even though they might seem 'abstract and fuzzy' their effects were still constitutive.

3.5 DOMINANT DISCOURSES EMERGING FROM CONVERSATIONS WITH THE CLERGY MEMBERS

My conversations with the clergy members helped unmask some of the dominant discourses at work in faith contexts and, by implication, in the co-searchers' understandings of sexuality. One of the most pervasive was the discourse of silence.

3.5.1 The silence regarding sexuality in churches and theological training

Derick and Gerhard both experienced, during their theological training and in church contexts thereafter, '*a silence with regards to sexuality*'. When sexuality was addressed, '*it was usually in the negative: for instance, the dangers of pre-marital sex*'. Sexuality was never mentioned during Derick's theological training. The most explicit discourse was that sexual intercourse '*was reserved for the marital relationship*', with its focus on *Agape* love. As a minister, Derick had to address the sexual issues challenging the marriages of congregants who sought pastoral care and counselling from him. Derick shared that he often '*felt unequipped and frustrated by his lack of knowledge regarding sexuality*' and how to help couples to experience sexual happiness.

Some years after Derick's appointment to his first congregation, he started to attend marriage enrichment seminars. *For the first time as a minister he had the opportunity to explore the concept of sexuality and was able to discuss it within a group context.* Derick shared that he '*found this very liberating*'. He was especially touched and motivated by '*those speakers who had approached the subject with ease and naturalness*'.

Reflecting on his personal experience Derick shared that, even within his own marriage, sexuality was cocooned by silence. It was only after five years of marriage and after attending several marriage enrichment seminars with his wife, that they were able to discuss sexual issues with ease. Derick believed that it was especially because of his '*Calvinist upbringing that sexuality was enveloped in silence*'.

Foucault (1985:14) argues that the silence regarding sexuality within Christianity is due to the notion of shame. This shame has its origins in Early Christendom, which associated sex with evil, sin, the Fall, and death. Christianity prescribed 'monogamous marriage and laid down the principle of exclusively procreative ends within that conjugal relationship' (Foucault 1985:14). He suggests that down the ages, anxieties and exigencies have been carried over which left people with fear, a model of conduct, a stigmatized attitude and an example of abstinence. Foucault (1985:16) concludes that 'Christian tradition consigned pleasure to the realm of death and evil'. Following Foucault, I argue that the stigmatisation of sex caused the silence regarding sexuality which Derick and others experience in churches.

Gerhard's theological training did not deal with sexuality either, more especially the sexual challenges that married couples might face. In their final year ethics course, they had '*brief conversations about masturbation, contraceptives, abortion and pre-marital sex*'. *During these conversations the lecturer explained that masturbation is allowed, but only without sexual fantasising. The disapproval of fantasising was based on Jesus' statement regarding lust as found in Matthew 5:27-28:*

> You have heard that it was said, 'Do not commit adultery'. But now I tell you: anyone who looks at a woman and wants to possess her is guilty of committing adultery with her in his heart.

This modesty regarding desire and sexual fantasising resonate with the spiritual dualist views the ancient Greeks held regarding sexual desire (Section 2.8.3), thus provides an example of how dominant discourses can be transferred over many centuries. Casaleggio and Janse van Rensburg (2002:370) explain that according to the dualist views, the mind – the imagination in particular - was not supposed to be active in sexual intercourse. The practice of sexual intercourse had to be seen and executed merely as a function of the body, without images of desire. The dualistic philosophy prescribed that sexual relations had to be organised in such a way as not to induce images of desire. Plato's dualist split between mind and body was later promoted by Augustine (Section 2.8.4) and Calvin (Section 2.9), and subsequently passed on to later church fathers (Casaleggio & Janse van Rensburg 2002:370).

Interpretations of Scripture as well as dominant discourses such as spiritual dualism have been circulating for centuries, and continue to inform Christians' understanding regarding acceptable or

unacceptable sexual actions. Although the origins of such understandings are unknown, they nevertheless exert a constituting affect. This is clearly evident in the silence regarding sexuality within churches, in ministerial training and even in Christians' personal lives. In Gerhard's experience, there was a total silence in the church regarding sexuality: '*Sexuality was a taboo subject*'.

A few years after he graduated from theological seminary, Gerhard experienced this taboo first hand. At the time Gerhard was stationed at a church in Mossel Bay. Most of the congregants were elderly. Gerhard preached a sermon on '*Sometimes one does stupid things for those you love*'. In the message, Gerhard mentioned that he (as a newly married man) had bought some special lingerie for his wife as a way to show his love. There was a huge outcry from the congregation after this service. Gerhard received many letters of disapproval; he was even threatened with dismissal if he spoke about sex from the pulpit again: '*Surprisingly, most of the reactions came from female congregants*'. Only one woman thanked Gerhard for the message. She said that it was helpful that her husband had heard the sermon. One elderly lady shared with Gerhard that his illustration had upset her deeply: '*She and her husband of many, many years had never seen each other naked, nor had they ever been completely naked in each other's presence*'.

The negative reaction towards this service took Gerhard completely by surprise. He 'became very aware of the sexual connotations surrounding something even as ordinary as lingerie'. He realised that '*any reference from the pulpit to anything that might have a sexual innuendo, is taboo*'. Gerhard also believes that '*there was such an intense reaction because many of the congregants were hurting in terms of their own sexuality and were in sexually unhappy marriages*'. Gerhard's interpretation is supported by Nelson (1992:42), who argues that legalism (biblicist ideas) are applied to human sexuality and body issues, because 'the body is still a great source of anxiety, and we typically want desperately to control that which we fear'. This silence regarding sexuality within churches was also portrayed in the results of the Sexual Happiness survey. The question: *How often have you heard a sermon on the goodness of sexuality and intimate relations in the **past three years**?* yielded the following response: 55,1% responded that they had heard no sermons on this topic; 16,1% heard one sermon on the goodness of sex; and 14,2% heard two sex-positive sermons.

Gerhard remarked that he felt that within the elderly Afrikaans-speaking community, one does not speak about sex – a view shared by both Derick and Ecclesia.

After this experience Gerhard has never spoken about anything that could be seen as having a sexual nuance. This incident effectively gagged him in so far as sexuality is concerned. It was only later, quite a few years after this incident, that Gerhard preached on a sexual issue but in the context of sexual violence. Gerhard defines violence '*as any action that deliberately takes someone's voice away*'. Since Gerhard preached these sermons, a number of male and female congregants have shared with him their stories of being sexually violated or abused or being in sexually unhappy marriages.

Both Gerhard and Derick felt that their *initial theological training did not equip them adequately to care pastorally for people with sexual challenges*. The silence they experienced was shared by the co-searchers. This silence prohibited the co-searchers from seeking help within their faith contexts regarding their sexually unhappy marriages. Moreover, not only were they unable to speak to a minister or pastoral worker about their sexual struggles, this silence was often also present in their marriages and even in their social circles with their female friends. Sexual problems are often held captive in silence. This exacerbates the dilemmas and challenges women face when living in sexually unhappy marriages because these are then left unattended and unresolved. I believe that anything we keep secret carries an expectation of judgement. According to Bird (2002:77), secrecy can 'elevate a sense of shame, blame and fault'. I therefore reason that silence and secrets can be oppressive, as within secrecy oppressive power can flourish.

3.5.2   The absence in training of pastoral care of sexual problems

This research journey was in part motivated by my awareness of the silence regarding sexuality within many faith contexts. I was curious about the effect of this silence, and wondered how ministers dealt with it. I was intrigued by this silence and interested to know to whom Christians speak if they live in sexually unhappy marriages. I wondered if Christians speak to their ministers about sexual problems and if ministers were equipped to deal with such challenges. Derick answered the question: *Did your training as a minister equip you sufficiently for pastoral therapy, especially with regards to sexual problems*? with an unequivocal '*No*'. Derick commented that '*in his years of training, sexuality was never referred to, let alone discussed*'.

Derick felt that he, like Gerhard, had internalised this silence, with the result that speaking about issues of a sexual nature became taboo. Derick shared that, as a young minister, he would have been very uncomfortable in dealing with sexual matters. *As he became a more experienced minister and*

after serving for quite a period in one congregation, he was able to engage in such conversations. Derick felt that by gaining insight through his own intimate relationship with his wife and by attending marriage enrichment courses he had become more comfortable with sexuality. He also felt that being able to talk to other people on marriage enrichment courses about sexuality helped him to speak more openly about sexuality.

In pastoral conversations Derick learnt about the pain and hurt congregants experienced regarding their sexuality. Congregants shared the hurts caused by infidelity, sexual incompatibility between spouses and the sexual abuse they had endured as children. *As a result of witnessing this pain, Derick developed a sincere desire to assist such congregants and to make a difference in their lives. Pastoral care has become very important to Derick. He 'deeply respects the position of trust that pastoral care brings' and which congregants allow him to have in their lives.*

Derick shared this his respect for and appreciation of this trust, and the position of trust that he holds as a minister and pastoral caretaker, has made him willing to engage in pastoral conversations dealing with sexual matters with both male and female congregants. At the time of our conversations, Derick journeyed in pastoral care primarily with several female congregants who were trapped in sexually abusive relationships. Journeying with these women has made Derick '*aware of the need for information and workshops regarding sexuality and gender relations' and as a result of this took interest in my work*. He is convinced that not only will congregants benefit from such workshops, but his colleagues will also. Derick felt that most of the ministers he knew '*were not equipped to deal with sexuality - neither their own nor with sexual matters that might present themselves in pastoral conversations'*. He shared that he would like to challenge the silence regarding sexuality in the church and encourage people to engage in life-giving conversations about sexuality. Derick '*believes that there are many misconceptions and misguided expectations regarding the intimate relationship of a married couple and these should preferably be addressed before marriage'*.

My reflections on the challenges that Christian women living in sexually marriages encounter - more especially challenges arising from their faith convictions - focussed my curiosity on pastoral care and on how we can do pastoral care with women (and men) dealing and living with sexual unhappiness. I also wondered about the resources available to address sexual problems which will include a person's faith convictions and spirituality.

Gerhard shared that when he was studying at the University of the Free State, '*the curriculum did not include pastoral care regarding sexuality*'. He also completed an MTh in practical theology at Stellenbosch University. He felt that neither his undergraduate nor post graduate training equipped him adequately to provide pastoral care for those congregation members who were experiencing **sexual problems**. Gerhard engaged in private study in pastoral care of sexual matters. Books that were helpful to him were Linda Schierse Leonard's *Wounded Women: Healing the Father daughter relationship* (1982); Esther Perel's *Mating in captivity: Sex, lies and domestic bliss* (2006) and Rob Bell's *Sex God* (2007). He also attended a course of *Imago Relationship Therapy*, which focussed on relationships and couple's therapy.

I find it concerning that all the clergy with whom I spoke felt that they were not equipped by their training to deal with sexuality in pastoral care. Sexuality is part of being human. If the church holds on to prescriptions for sexuality - for example, regarding adultery - then the church, by means of its ministers and pastoral caretakers, needs to be able to deal with sexual issues. How can the church give guidance about sexuality to its congregants, and especially its youth, if it is mostly silent in a world (in the West) that bombards one relentlessly with sexuality? It also begs the question of how appropriate and effective - if at all - is pastoral care within our churches regarding sexuality?

Gerhard believes that most pastoral care within the Reformed traditions is done either in terms of the covenant, as found in the approach of Jay Adams or Clinebell's more liberal approach to pastoral care. King (1990:448) describes fundamentalist pastoral care as practiced by Adams, as distinguished 'by its literalistic and legalist use of the Bible as an authoritative pastoral resource for interpreting, diagnosing, and responding to human problems and crises'. This highly confrontational approach is directed by 'the inerrant, infallible, and authoritative Word of God and empowered by God's Spirit' (King 1990:449). The counselees are confronted with their sins. This is supposed to help them turn from sin to faith and righteousness. This approach views all persons as sinners who are responsible for their sinful behaviour. Even though some problems can arise from biological or accidental causes, according to this approach they mostly arise from sinful living patterns. I agree with Gerhard's response that '*such an approach will contribute to women (and men) not speaking out or voicing their struggles regarding sexuality, thus reinforcing the silence and isolation*'.

Clinebell's approach to pastoral care lies at the opposite pole from Adams'. Clinebell moved from focusing on what is wrong with a person or relationship to emphasising what is right and what is possible. According to de Jongh van Arkel (2000:94), Clinebell's theory shifted from a diagnostic-

treatment approach to a human development positive-potentials approach: a shift from a pathology model to a growth model. Clinebell (1984:25) named his theory a holistic liberation-growth model. The liberation-growth model has as its overarching goal to enable healing, empowerment and growth within individuals and their relationships (Clinebell 1984:26). In Gerhard's reflection of these two approaches to pastoral care, he felt '*neither of these was effective in dealing with sexual challenges*'. Richards (1992:187) argues that, coupled with the limitations that religious training historically imposed on sexual therapy, the pastoral worker is faced with another dilemma:

> Among the care givers in today's society the pastoral counsellor occupies a role that is considerably less clear than the role of psychologists, psychiatrist, social worker, or sex therapist. Historically the pastoral counsellor is seen to be 'connected' in some way with organized religion and religious institutions, and it is often assumed that he [or she] bears responsibility for seeing to it that clients who come to him [or her] are guided along pathways that are in keeping with religious traditions and the customary ethical norms associated with religious practices – no matter how vaguely or inconsistent these may be defined.

Does this assumption – to guide clients 'along pathways that are in keeping with religious traditions... - no matter how vaguely or inconsistent[ly] defined' add yet another layer to the discourse of silence?

I argue that the discourse of silence regarding sexually within churches is due to a combination of factors: historical sex-negative discourses, inadequate training of ministers in terms of sexuality, as well as the abstract nature of sexuality. It is exceedingly difficult to formulate or define exactly what should or should not be acceptable sexual practices for Christians. Moreover, how can couples be better prepared for the sexual aspects of married life? And should this preparation be done by churches? This dilemma is compounded by the un-speak-ability of sex within faith contexts.

3.5.3   Unspeak-ability of sex in marriages

Both Gerhard and Derick argue that the silence surrounding sexual challenges and the expectations which people hold regarding marital sex isolates people to the extent where this subject becomes unspeakable. When couples who experience sexual problems, have no-one to talk to, they become disillusioned, discouraged and hopeless (Craig & Stander 2009:139).

I explored with Gerhard the unspeak-ability of sex and how this can contribute to sexually unhappy marriages. Gerhard is of the opinion that '*many people avoid talking about sexuality because they are themselves in sexually unhappy relationships or marriages...*[and that] *men especially struggle with sexuality due to performance anxiety*'. He suggests '*that because men experience pressure to perform in all spheres of life - and especially in their workplaces - many men do not want to also have to perform in bed*'. Gerhard shared that men are conditioned to be physical: '*In our South African schools boys are rated according to their sport and physical ability. The less physical boys are not treated kindly. Chess and cultural stuff do not count*'. According to Gerhard, this discourse is very strong and is often carried over into men's understanding of their identity. Sex becomes the '*sport of adult men*' in which they must excel to be a '*great man*'. The front covers of many men's magazines – such as Men's Health – frequently promote this discourse in articles about how to be a better sportsperson, how to improve the male physique and how to improve men's sexual performance. Thornton (2003:11) supports Gerhard's opinion that our selfhood is directly influenced by our sexual practices:

> Sexuality, then, has its own cultural dimensions that shape its practice and the values associated with it. While many aspects [of] actual sexual practices are universally human, preferences and frequencies of acts are not. More importantly, the meanings of sexuality differs. Sexual meanings are central to concepts of self and of the person, and to the values we associate with others.
>
> (Thornton 2003:11)

Like Thornton and Gerhard, I consider our sexual functioning and experiences to have a direct impact on how we experience and see ourselves and others. Our sexual functioning has definite implications for our sense of identity – not only for men, but also for women too. Following in this vein I therefore argue that there should be safe spaces within church communities for both men and women to speak about sexuality, the discourses which operate within sexuality and how these affect individuals as well as couples.

In their reflection on the unspeak-ability of sexual issues and how this impacts marriages, Derick and Gerhard felt that the silence regarding difficulties with sexual functioning enables that myths and misconceptions to be perpetuated. For instance, the discourse that men are always ready for sex is closely linked to this discourse of physical ability and sport. This discourse is probably one of the most damaging to marital relations, especially when the couple reach their meno- and andropause. Derick shared that since the male menopause (andropause) is not frequently spoken about, many

couples do not understand the effects which decreased testosterone levels can have on a male's sexual functioning. Wasserman (2008:117), a well-known South Africa sexologist (alias Dr. Eve) challenges this discourse. In her experience 'men are not always ready for sex', as many factors can contribute to male disinterest in sex or a decrease in libido, including age (usually from forty years onwards); stress; and certain prescription medications. Derick believes, '*although many men do experience changes in their sexual functioning when they get older, very few are able to speak about it freely'*. It was only recently, at a men's only care group, that Derick spoke about this and then the men were able to speak about their fears and struggles.

Derick remarked that depression is another unspeakable issues. I too frequently found when doing pastoral care that when one partner is struggling with depression, and therefore taking an antidepressant, the affects of the medication on sexual functioning is often not discussed. Graham (2010:20-21) surmises that according to researchers, serotonin–boosting antidepressants (either serotonin reuptake inhibitors (SSRIs) or serotonin and norepinephrine reuptake inhibitors (SNRIs) could very well be dismantling peoples' relationships and marriages biologically. Fisher and Thomson's (2007:246) research has shown that 'serotonin-enhancing antidepressants can potentially jeopardise the ability to fall in love and maintain a stable, long-term partnership'. They caution 'that when individuals use serotonin-enhancing antidepressants, they can potentially jeopardize not only their sex drive but also these related neural mechanisms for romantic love and partner attachment' (Fisher & Thomson 2007:247). Depression was a major contributing factor to some of sexually unhappy marriages in this research journey. Chapters Four and Five explore depression and its effects on marriages in greater detail.

In their reflection on the unspeak-ability of sexual issues and how this impacts marriages, both Derick and Gerhard shared the view that less pastoral care of marriages would be needed if couples were prepared more thoroughly for marriage and if a greater openness towards sexuality was promoted. Sex needs to become speak-able within faith contexts.

3.5.4 Marriage preparation conversations

Derick and Gerhard argued that most marital and sexual problems could have been avoided by better marriage preparation which would equip the couple for the realities of every day married life and the frustrations and stress that couples face once the 'honeymoon' is over. It would seem, however, as if most ministers address general issues regarding married life – for instance gender

roles, financial management, mutual respect and communication - but mostly hesitate to address sexuality.

Richards (1992:188) supports this observation. As recently as three decades ago there was limited availability of sexual knowledge and information within religious circles, and it was regarded as inappropriate for religious leaders, teachers and pastors to make use of whatever knowledge and information there was. Moreover, sexual ethics would have been dealt with in a dogmatic manner with little opportunity for fears and feelings to be explored openly and a heavy emphasis placed on certain rules and correct behaviour (Richards 1992:188).

Derick usually approached marriage preparation conversations in a relaxed and informal manner (as did all of the other participating clergy). He would invite the couple to table any issues that they would like to discuss. He does not address the sexual aspects of the marriage within these conversations, even though he is very comfortable with discussing sexuality. He is concerned that he might be viewed as 'a "dirty old man" or as being perverse by initiating such a conversation'. This discourse places older men's sexual integrity under suspicion which, in turn, encourages silence. It also effectively gags male clergy members: any referral to sexuality, especially *Eros,* might be interpreted as '*being perverse or over-sexed'.* Recent exposure in the media of male clergy members sexually abusing young children has made society even more suspicious of male clergy members' agenda regarding sexuality. I suggest that this suspicion arises from what Foucault (1977:177-178) calls the normalizing gaze and judgement. The normalising gaze produces a system of social control in which persons' performances are judged according to certain standards or prescriptions (Foucault 1977:184). A person's actions are not judged so much for an offence or wrongdoing, but for any departures from the norm and the rules. The normalising gaze is internalised and making each person 'his own overseer, each individual thus exercising this surveillance over, and against, himself' (Foucault 1972b:155). In terms of the clergy's experience, the normalising gaze was internalised to the extent that it silenced them: They were not able to speak about sexuality without being labelled as a pervert or as a '*dirty old man'* by deviating from the norm of silence.

3.5.5   The normalizing gaze in marriage preparation conversations

White (2007:102) understands Foucault's ideas of the normalizing gaze as the system of modern power in which social control 'incites people to enact "normalizing judgement" on themselves and on others in an effort to reproduce specific norms about life and identity'. This 'normalizing

judgement' recruits people into playing an active role in their own subjugation by 'policing' their own behaviour (White and Epston 1990:71) and results in them 'actively participating in operations that shape their lives according to the norms or specifications of the…[dominant discourse]' (Payne 2000:71). This subjugation can be seen in Derick's self-imposed silence regarding sexuality in marriage preparation conversations.

It would seem as if the subjugation is twofold in these marriage preparation courses: it not only prevents the minister from speaking about sex, desire and pleasure, but it also silences the couple. Neither the couple nor the minister can take the risk of breaking the silence lest either party be suspected of perversion. Thus, in terms of Foucault's ideas, they silence themselves because they dare not depart from the norm of the not speaking about sexuality, more especially not the erotic aspects of sexuality.

Gerhard shared that he would only speak about sexuality *once the couple has given him a mandate - if they raised the issue'*. When sexuality was included in such conversations, it focused on the sacredness of sexual intercourse, the *Agape* side of love-making. Derick too does not address *Eros* or the erotic aspects of the intimate relationship. He will usually only speak of general principles - such as experiencing sexual intercourse as mutual respect, as support and as a gift from God. Derick avoids issues such as communication about sexual needs and ways to pleasure, or sexual problems, such as difference in libido. He feels his knowledge about '*the technical aspects of sex is too limited to give guidance to others'*.

3.5.6   Bodily-ness of sex as subjugation

Derick suggested that in marriage preparation conversations it is general practice only to address *Agape* love, and not *Eros*. I am wondering whether this might not carry the implication that *Eros* is a lesser form of sexuality, or even undesirable or sinful? I argue that the silence about *Eros* supports and re-enforces discourses of guilt and repression which characterise much of Christianity's history regarding sexuality (Haught 1997:1; Craig & Stander 2009:15). By including discussions about sexuality and more specifically, about *Eros* clergy can challenge the dominant discourse of guilt and repression, thereby making it permissible to speak about sexuality and thus to break the silence surrounding sexuality. The minister's own bodily-ness, however, may prove to be a stumbling block in the discussion of *Eros*. It would seem as if a great deal of desensitising is needed in order to speak about sexuality – an issue on which I will reflect in Chapter Six.

Gerhard was also reluctant to discuss sexuality with couples in marriage preparation conversations, but for different reasons. Most of the couples whom he sees in marriage preparation are younger couples. It is Gerhard's experience that '*post-modern young adults have a fierce sense of individuality and privacy*'. Thus, the silence in which such young couple's sexuality is cocooned, '*is not as much about shame or repression, but rather due to this extreme privacy in terms of their personhood and personal space*'. Gerhard commented that most young couples are very reluctant to speak about sexuality and seem to be very embarrassed and shy when he raises the topic. He usually speaks of '*exits out of marriages, thus situations that can cause either partner to emotionally or physically leave the marriage*'. This discussion will include giving and creating space for both partners in terms of their sexuality. I asked Gerhard whether he addressed *Eros* during such conversations. He does not, largely out of consideration for the couple and their shyness, but when a couple do have sexual challenges, they usually address these head on and discuss them openly with him.

I invited Gerhard to reflect on Derick's concerns about being seen as a '*dirty old man*'. Gerhard felt that '*society is much more aware and focussed on the wrongdoings of men with children than with women*'. Gerhard argued that '*just by being a man can put your actions under suspicion*'. Largely because of the discourse of '"*dirty old man*", *the older you are as a minister, the more difficult it becomes to speak about sex with congregants*'. He concluded that '*as you grow older, your sense of innocence is lost in the eyes of the community*'.

I link the '*dirty old man*' discourse with a discourse which sees male sexuality as instinctive. Hare-Mustin (1994:24) discusses the discourse that frequently men are seen as not having control over their sexual arousal or desire. This discourse suggests that 'men's sexual urges are…natural and compelling; thus, the male is expected to be pushy and aggressive in seeking to satisfy them' (Hare-Mustin 1994:24). In popular parlance, we often hear expressions such as 'boys will be boys'; 'a man is a man is a man' (Isherwood & McEwan 1994:31) and 'all men need to sow their wild oats'. This discourse is even assigned to teenage boys, who are often referred to as 'a bundle of walking hormones'. These idioms seem to imply that it is acceptable for men to express and pursue their sexual desires, because 'this is just the way men are'. This discourse also implies that men have no control over their desires and therefore they cannot be held accountable for any sexual indiscretions, therefore all men's sexuality should be considered with suspicion (Hare-Mustin 1994:24). During my exploration of this discourse, I realised that at the core of such thought is that men become animal-like in their response to sexuality: men react instinctively sexually, not rationally. The discourses

relating to the male sexual response as 'instinct' resonate with Plato's dichotomous view which split mind and body (as discussed Section 2.8.3). I argue that discourses like these are life-denying not only to men, but also to the interaction between men and women, especially with regards to sexual issues. They also continue to shroud sexuality in negativity and silence. Viewing men's sexuality as instinctive and 'natural' carries the implicit discourse that female sexuality should be the opposite - that women do not or should not experience sexual desire – and leads ultimately to men frequently being seen as sexual beings while women are not. This discourse regarding the supposed absence of female sexual desire became apparent in the co-searchers' stories, and often contributed to the absence of sexual fulfilment (as discussed in Chapter Four).

While male clergy experienced avoidance of sexual issues in marriage preparation conversations, theirs were not the only stories. It was interesting to learn about an alternative experience. In my interview with Ecclesia, it became apparent that not all clergy are silenced by bodily-ness of sexuality. It would seem as if being female indemnified Ecclesia from the restrictions that male clergy experienced, especially in terms of the 'dirty old man' discourse.

3.5.7 A different approach to marriage preparation conversations

In my conversation with Ecclesia, I asked her if she shared the experiences of the male clergy regarding their unease of speaking about sexuality in marriage preparation conversations. Ecclesia shared that her experience had been the opposite: '*I am quite at ease speaking about sexuality... being gay has forced me to face my own sexuality and speak about sexuality*'. Before Ecclesia went into the ministry, she was convinced that her sexual orientation was sinful. She therefore joined the Ex-gay ministry, an organisation committed to 'rectifying' gay orientation. Although this organisation did not 'rectify' Ecclesia's sexual orientation, it helped her to break the silence regarding sexuality. This enabled her '*to speak with openness about all aspects of a sexual relationship'.* Ecclesia discovered that discussing sexuality in group situations de-sensitised her to the discourse of silence. She also believes that being gay has enabled her to speak more openly about sexuality than most heterosexual people. In church societies gay people are often defined by their sexual orientation rather than by their personhood. Steyn and van Zyl (2009:14) are of the opinion because of the *hetero*normativety of sexuality within most societies, homosexual people often do not experience their sexuality as a matter of fact. They cannot ignore it as they could if they were within the norm of heterosexuality. Because of their orientation, gay people are 'othered' and forced to engage intentionally with the constructions of sexuality (Steyn & Van Zyl 2009:14).

Whilst Ecclesia served as a minister, her sexual orientation was mostly unknown to her congregants. Ecclesia shared: '*my gay orientation resulted in me engaging in marital preparation differently than the norm: I used a group context*'. She believed that *because she was single and celibate, she should only facilitate conversations and allow couples to engage and teach each other, rather than her trying to take an expert position*. Ecclesia would address *Eros* by speaking about sexual fantasies. She would then ask the couples to discuss this in private at home. Ecclesia shared that '*this invitation often led to a greater openness in the subsequent conversations between the individuals in the couple, but also in the group context*'. *Most of the groups working with Ecclesia, felt that the lack of sexual intimacy could lead to divorce. Similarly, many female congregants who spoke to her about sexual intimacy during private pastoral conversations were concerned about the absence of sexual intercourse in their marriages. Sexual intimacy was very important to them.* It would seem as if the fact that Ecclesia was a female minister safeguarded her from suspicion of perversion and enabled her to speak more freely about sex. Most Christian women, however, experience that their sexuality is policed by society and is 'enmeshed with dominant constructions of gendered identities and practices, as well as with gender power relations, coercion and violence' (Shefer & Foster 2009:267). Some forms of gender power relations and coercion are subtle, for instance in prescriptions regarding 'suitable' behaviour for women.

3.5.8   Prescriptions regarding a Christian woman's role, behaviour and dress

Derick remarked on the prescriptive discourses for women at the time when he went into ministry and for years afterwards. A suitable minister's wife was portrayed in a very specific way and her role was clearly defined: she was the mother in the manse ['*n pastorie-moeder was gewoonlik 'n vaal vroutjie*]. A suitable wife for a minister needed to be conservative in norms and dress and was supposed to be inconspicuous and reserved in manner, especially in the company of her husband and other male congregants. This discourse is not new, but has been evident over many centuries. The message was clear: Christians believed that a pious woman needed to be inconspicuous and not sexy in any way (Craig & Stander 2009:72). I Peter 3:3-4 was often used to reprimand women should they move out of the boundaries of 'accepted' dress, make-up and hairdo. A calm spirit and inner beauty were placed in opposition to outer beauty – a dichotomy strongly reminiscent of Plato's dualistic teachings:

> Dit is jammer dat daar deur die eeue heen die persepsie onder Christene ontaan het
> dat 'n gelowige vrou altyd soos 'n vaal vinkie moet lyk. Sy mag nooit eers 'n

bietjie sexy lyk nie, want dan is dit dadelik as 'sonde' getipeer. Gewoonlik is verse soos 1 Petrus 3:3-4 dan ook vinnig nadergehark: 'Julle skoonheid moet nie bestaan in uiterlike dinge soos haarkapsels, juwele en sierlike klere nie. Nee, julle skoonheid moet dié van die innerlike mens wees: Blywende beskeidenheid en kalmte van gees. Dit het by God groot waarde.'

(Craig & Stander 2009:72-73)

Landman (1999:68) gives many examples within our South African history which prescribed Christian women's position and role. Afrikaner writers - like Willem Postma (1918) who was actively involved in initiating the Women's Monument - wrote of how a Afrikaner woman was admired for 'her submissiveness....as she bowed submissively in front of her own men' - the men of her nation, her family and her husband. Such a woman knew her place: in 'conversations and in politics she kept in the background, because she knew the Bible told her so' (cited in Landman 1999:68).

In her research on the Afrikaans Reformed traditions and it's prescriptions for women, Plaatjies (2003:147) encountered similar discourses as Derick had done. These discourses found expression in prescriptions of definite norms and dress codes for Christian women. They were directly linked to sexual chastity, faith and gender roles as interpreted and policed by patriarchy. Chaste girls dress modestly and neatly. I argue that the dress code for women was one of the many ways in which patriarchy within the church attempted to prescribe and control women's sexuality.

The discourse regarding the way Christian women should dress was officially formulated and prescribed within the Reformed traditions. According to Plaatjies (2003:147), the prescribed dress codes for women were discussed and determined in the Afrikaans Reformed churches at synod level, which was male dominated speaking with a voice of patriarchy. I found it surprising and disturbing to learn that this issue was still on the agenda of the Afrikaans Reformed churches as recently as 1978.

Discourses are transferred from one generation to the next. Nowadays women's morality is still judged on how they dress. The discourse which links morality to dress codes is clearly illustrated in Heyns' (1982:481) views regarding dress codes. He argues that the sexual aspect of our clothing should honour God and should reflect the fact that men and women are created differently. Our way of dress should be in such a way that it will emphasise the difference between the two sexes in order that we do not mislead others (Heyns 1982:482).

Following Steyn and Van Zyl (2009:4), I argue that our understanding of any social process is shaped within our social constructions. Dress code - and how we understand it - is one such social construction which guides our relations to others and determines how we fit into our cultural and religious institutions (Steyn & Van Zyl 2009:4). Thus dress code prescriptions have become a social process which informs expression: for many women how they dress defines who they are in terms of their sexuality.

Prescribed dress codes were used to control and police Christian women's sexuality and regulate the way in which they expressed their selfhood. These prescriptions - which disapprove of revealing clothes or which label ways of dress as 'inappropriate' for Christian women - resonate with the dominant discourse which viewed women's bodies as a potential danger that possessed the power to morally corrupt men's piety (Heyward 1990:262). Such prescriptions policed women's experience by regulating not just the way they dressed but how they expressed themselves as sexual beings. Being scantily or sexily dressed is frequently seen as tempting or seductive towards men: this resonates with the discourse about men's sexual actions as being instinctive (as discussed in Section 3.5.6).

The roots of the discourse of 'woman as temptress' - fountains of sexual temptation who can seduce even the most pious man (Heschel 2003:155; Farley 2010:42) are embedded deep in Christian tradition. I reason that this belief is closely linked to the creation story, in which Eve is portrayed as the temptress of Adam. Russell ([1929] 2009:37) argues that Christian sexual ethics' emphasis on sexual virtue has invariably degraded the position of women: '[s]ince the moralists were men, woman appeared as the temptress….[and therefore] it was necessary to curtail her opportunities for leading men into temptation' (Russell [1929] 2009:37). Consequently, 'respectable' women were subjected to stringent social restrictions and control regarding how to dress, use make-up and talk and sit. These restrictions resonate with the discourse that objectifies women, regarding them as sex objects that arouse and precipitate men's sexual urges and inflame men's natural sexual urges (Hare-Mustin 1994:24) as discussed above (Section 3.5.6.)

Christianity prescribed marriage as a remedy to protect men from the constant peril of being seduced and thus the victims of their sexual urges.

3.5.9 Marriage as the only legitimate place for sex

Derick had mixed feelings when I asked whether he still supports the understanding that *only* marital sexual intercourse is legitimate for a Christian. Although he felt that marriage is the most desirable relationship for sexual intercourse, '*I will not judge or disapprove divorcees having a sexual relationship, as long as it is in a mutually loving and respectful relationship*'. He does, however, have concerns if teenagers and young adults engage in sexual activity out of wedlock as he believes it has the potential to emotionally trap young people, especially women. During my MTh research journey I found the same discourse amongst Christian women regarding pre-marital sex:

> Many Christian girls will engage in a sexual relationship if they believe that they are going to marry the partner. It would seem as if the intention of a marriage renders a sexual relationship more acceptable to them. If such a relationship starts to fail, the girl might feel betrayed and the guilt of having had sexual intercourse with someone that would not be her husband might compel her to stay in the relationship. Many beliefs feed this 'staying in the relationship'. It is almost as if girls feel that, if they end the relationship, it might become known that they have slept with their boyfriend. It might also be assumed that the girl will be sexually active in her next relationship. There is a very powerful discourse with regard to sexual morality. This discourse entails the notion that if a girl has more than one sexual partner, she is promiscuous. She might even judge herself to be promiscuous. It is thus safer for her to stay in the relationship she is in, in order to protect herself from her own judgement and the judgement of others.

(Spies 2006:123-124)

3.5.10 Women's role within Christian Marriage – a voiceless position

Derick believed that his relationship with his wife in particular had sensitised him towards the plight of women, making him more aware of the voiceless position of many women within Christian marriages. He had always been uncomfortable with the way in which the roles for men and women within the marriage were interpreted by men in general and by the wider church. Ephesians 5:21-33, which discusses the relationship of wives and husbands, is often used to place the wife in a serving, subservient and submissive role to the husband. For Derick, although '*this passage speaks of mutual respect and support and not of submissiveness, sadly, many clergy still hold on to the subservient role of wives*'.

Plaatjies' (2003:219) research on the literature available in the Dutch Reformed Church confirms this discourse. Poling (2006:51) explains that a woman's role within a Christian marriage was often portrayed as subservient to her husband's: he was head of the home. Landman (1999:68) confirms that women were not seen as individuals but as created within hierarchies which prescribed their position. According to the 1920 Synod of the South African Reformed Church, 'God did not create women as individuals but as part of a family in which the man was to be obeyed as head' (Landman 1999:72). This speaks of a patriarchal system, in which the male head of a family represents both himself and his family as its collective head whereas the wife always fills a secondary position to that of her husband (Radford Ruether 1990:222). The roots of this belief can be traced to St Augustine's position: only men possess the image of God, thus women could be included in the image of God only under the headship of their husbands (Radford Ruether 1990:220). This understanding of a Christian wife's position is an example of a dominant discourse which has been circulating in faith communities for many years. In this research journey it soon became apparent that while many similar discourses might not be official prescriptions, yet they are present in common understandings and practices   among Christians.

3.6   DOMINANT DISCOURSES PRESENT IN COMMON PRACTICES WITHIN PROTESTANT CHURCHES

I became aware of commonly held and shared dominant discourses regarding marriage and sexuality during social conversations with Christian women as well as during pastoral conversations with clients. Although these discourses were present during my conversations with co-searchers, they were mostly implicit. This supports the evidence that, despite the fact that many of these discourses are not documented as the official church position, many Christians still hold on to them and use them to shape their behaviour and understanding of sexuality. Even though the discourse might appear 'invisible', it nonetheless had profoundly constitutive effects on the way women understand themselves. I therefore explored literature and Christian practices that could confirm such present but invisible discourses: if these discourses were commonly held amongst women in general, they must also impact the co-searchers' understanding of sexuality and their role as Christian wives and mothers.

3.6.1 Women's position within Christian society

Landman (1999:71) reflects on the influence of Andrew Murray and Abraham Kuyper on the Reformed traditions in South Africa. This influence, in turn, shaped the recommendations put forward by a commission led by JD du Toit (Totius) to investigate women's suffrage in the church, and, by implication, women's positions within Christian society. The report of the 1920 Synod of the Reformed Church in South Africa recommended that:

> God has created women with a distinctly different nature. God has made women different and inferior....[W]omen received by nature a 'gentle and quiet spirit' from God (1 Peter 3:4) to prepare her for private life within the family (as the woman in Proverbs 31:10-31).

> (Landman 1999:71)

This recommendation was later accepted.

Abraham Kuyper argued that the natural woman 'was shy and passive; her bones were weaker than those of a man; although she could shout louder than a man, her physical abilities were limited....and few possessed a natural or developed sharpness of brain' (Landman 1999:71). The report also advised and accepted that, according to Genesis 2:18, a woman was placed in an inferior position to man as his helper: her role should thus be reserved to the private life of the family and not exercised within public life.

Historically men have decided and talked on behalf of women, especially in the church (Bons-Storm 1998:10). Men prescribed and controlled women's roles in the church, but also in the home. Patriarchy decided what were deemed suitable roles and behaviour for women. Patriarchy spoke *of* women and *about* women but very seldom *with* women, as women were mostly excluded from such conversations. Many of the discourses patriarchy established and maintained were not spoken, but implied.

Many of these discourses have been internalised by Christian women and have constituted their understandings, expectations and responses not only to themselves as sexual beings, but also in terms of their sexual relationship with their husbands. These understandings are often held as 'truths'. White and Epston (1990:20) argue that '[t]hese "truths" are "normalizing" in the sense that they construct norms around which persons are incited to shape or constitute their lives'. According to

Foucault (1972b:92-94), such 'truths' hold the specifications for individuals' behaviour and these, in turn, become a vehicle of power. I argue that power subjugates people into censoring themselves and accepting the prescribed norms of their environment. These 'truths' also constitute understandings regarding sexuality and Christian women' lived experiences, thus becoming constitutive discourses (Foucault 1972a:117).

Landman (1999:81) gives a clear example of the presence of such an implicit but constitutive discourse in the South African context: 'at the beginning of the twentieth century, social and submissive roles expected from Dutch-Afrikaans women were for the first time overtly connected with religion and divinely sanctioned'. Women are not only defined as second-rate citizens within the church, but also within their marriages. This understanding is clearly seen in the wording of the traditional marriage formulary used in South African Protestant churches.

3.6.2   Women's role as portrayed within marriage formulary

The way in which women's roles are portrayed - and thus how they will relate to themselves as lovers and wives - can be seen particularly clearly in an example of the wording of the more traditional marriage formulary. The husband is regarded as head of the home and the wife as obedient and subservient:

> Male
> I, _____, take you, _____, to be my wedded wife. With deepest joy I receive you into my life that together we may be one. As is Christ to His body, the church, so I will be to you a loving and faithful husband. Always will I perform *my headship* [emphasis mine] over you even as Christ does over me, knowing that His Lordship is one of the holiest desires for my life. I promise you my deepest love, my fullest devotion, my tenderest care. I promise I will live first unto God rather than others or even you. I promise that I will lead our lives into a life of faith and hope in Christ Jesus. Ever honouring God's guidance by His spirit through the Word, And so throughout life, no matter what may lie ahead of us, I pledge to you my life as a loving and faithful husband.

> Female
> I, _____, take you, _____, to be my wedded husband. With deepest joy I come into my new life with you. As you have pledged to me your life and love, so I too happily give you my life, and in confidence *submit myself to your headship* [emphasis mine] as to the Lord. As is the church in her relationship to Christ, so I will be to you. _____, I will live first unto our God and then unto you, loving you**, *obeying* [emphasis mine] you, caring for you and *ever seeking to please you* [emphasis mine]. God has prepared me for you and so I will ever strengthen, help,

comfort, and encourage you. Therefore, throughout life, no matter what may be ahead of us, I pledge to you my life as an ***obedient*** [emphasis mine] and faithful wife.

(Bible.org: 2010)

Müller (2008:1), a well-known South African theologian, is critical of the church in those instances where it still encourages and maintains the male dominated patriarchal views, actions and documents. He recently addressed the issue of the traditional marriage formulary and how it impacts on wives. Müller argues that the traditional formulary, which was written by men, did not respect or reflect the changed roles and positions of women. As such, it represented the patriarchal position that prescribed male-fabricated roles for husbands and wives within their homes:

> Die teologie oor die huwelik soos wat dit neerslag gevind het in die huweliksformulier is uitsluitlik deur mans geskryf. Ons sit dus met 'n tradisie van huweliksteologie wat geskryf is deur mans en grootliks beïnvloed is deur patriargale man vrou-rolverdelings. Die huweliks-formulier is 'n goeie voorbeeld van 'n manlik-gefabriseerde verstaan van die huwelik wat deur gebruik en tradisie kanoniese gesag gekry het.

(Müller 2008:1)

Müller (2008:1) compiled an adjusted marriage formulary to improve the position of the wife so that it better reflected the changed status of women. Although I have appreciation for Müller's sensitivity and initiative, I am still left with the question: Were women consulted and included in the process of compiling/adjusting the marriage formulary?

In a conversation with Kotzé (2010) he reflected on the common practices to which most Christian couples adhere to when their marriage is solemnised in a church. Many White English and Afrikaans families still have the practice of the bride's father 'giving her away'. The bride's father traditionally walks her down the aisle to where her husband-to-be awaits them. The father then 'hands' over his daughter to her fiancé, usually with the word '*Sterkte*', a word which implies: 'Now she is your trouble. Best of luck'. This practice has its origins in Judaism where a daughter was her father's possession until her marriage, when this ownership was transferred to her husband (Yee 2003:38). Kotzé (2010) remarked that this is one of the most telling acts without words (absent but implicit) of how women are seen as the property of their fathers and husbands. The absence of the mother in the bridal procession also dismisses her contribution to her daughter's upbringing. This traditional

practice of giving the daughter away resonates with similar practices found in the Hellenistic civilization:

> In Greece, it was a practice 'designed to ensure the continued existence of the *oikos'*. Of its two basic and vital acts, the first marked the transfer to the husband of the tutelage exercised up to that moment by the father, and the second marked the actual handing over of the bride to her marriage partner.

(Foucault 1984c:72)

These vows and seemingly innocent practices pre-determine the roles for many Christian wives. In a Christian marriage, women are often portrayed as less important than their husbands. Many of these discourses place women almost at the same level as a child in relation to her husband whom she has to obey and to submit to his authority. This discourse can have a profound impact on a wife's sexuality: if she accepts the position of being less important than her husband, she might also do so in terms of her sexual needs, thus accepting that her needs are not a priority. Derick and Gerhard, who also experienced these prescriptive roles for husbands and wives, believe that these should be challenged and changed as a matter of urgency.

As recently as the 1990s, bookstores in South Africa were suddenly flooded by devotional books containing spiritual messages that women need to be dependent on God and on men for their identity. These 'Pink Lady books' reflected a piety which 'display[s] an amazing affinity with the values of [the] seventeenth century Dutch Piety... which encouraged Dutch Afrikaans women to reach new heights in self-affliction, guilt and self-hate' (Landman 1999:82). These messages often included the plea that women need to be saved from 'carnality, humanness and apostasy (*vleeslikheid, menslikheid, afvalligheid)'*. This approach again speaks of the spiritual dualities as discussed in (Sections 2.8.3 & 2.10.1). Landman (1999:83) concludes that the 'Pink lady's' most laboured duality is that of soul and body: the soul is eternal while the body is made of clay. Christian women accept and maintain these understandings because, although they are deeply spiritual, they have been 'excluded from theological training for centuries and neglected in religious discourses by their church...[women] had been kept naive by male ministers about the empowering possibilities of piety which would have posed a threat to the authority, not only of male ministers, but of men in general' (Landman 1999:84). Many of these discourses are still present in the understanding and experiences of South African Protestant Christian women. I argue that promoting spirituality which is seen in opposition to the body contributes to a discourse which I have called 'Sex is dangerous'.

3.6.3 Sex is dangerous

In the past, children were discouraged from talking about sex, thinking about sex or being sexual in the presence of others: '[s]exual behaviour in public was usually met with disapproval from parents without a proper explanation as to why it is inappropriate in public' (Buys 2010:x). Young adults were not informed about how to pleasure themselves or their partners, or how to talk about sex or to negotiate sexual behaviour. Instead, the overriding messages young people received about sex were negative: 'ladies don't behave that way, you've got a filthy mind, that's dirty, and you shouldn't do this or that' (Buys (2010:x). This discourse constitutes sexuality in shame, guilt and repression - what Buys (2010:x) calls a 'sexually traumatized' generation with a 'guilt laden, anxiety-ridden foundation'. She continues that it has caused great confusion and frustration regarding sexuality amongst today's adult generation.

Derick confirmed Buys' experience - an experience shared by many church members - that when churches do address sex, the message is usually aimed at Christian teenagers. Frequently they are warned against the dangers of sex and how wrong it is; or, as a wag once said: *Sex is dirty, save it for the one you love.* Many Christian women interpret that the prescriptions regarding 'good Christian girls' require chaste and sexually inhibited behaviour. One explanation given for this sex-negative message is that 'God says more about the negative side of sex than about the positive side because…He doesn't want you to be burned, bruised, broken, disillusioned, and scarred for life' (Arthur 2003:41-42). Sadly, this is often the only message teenage girls (and boys) hear, accompanied with the threats of sexual transmitted infections such as the Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) and Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS). Given these sex-negative messages, I do not find it surprising that some women find it challenging to make the transition from a chaste and sex-ignoring (and fearing) teenager to that of passionate lover. Often they do not get the opportunity to challenge these negative discourses with a more positive discourse regarding sexuality. Most young and older women (and men) do not receive any guidance in the art of love-making within their faith community or in any other context. I am curious as to how women make the transition from sex as being sinful and dangerous, to sex as a gift from God. It would seem as if the dichotomy regarding marital sex is as strong as ever. On the one hand we still see the influence of St. Augustine and some of the Early Christian leaders who viewed sex as sinful and only for procreation; on the other, the view that sex is a gift from God.

3.6.4 Instructed, implied and prescribed discourses regarding Christian marriages

I always find it fascinating to see how much preparation goes into the wedding day and how little focus is placed on the realities that await the couple afterwards. Most couples enter into their marriage with a sense of anticipation and expectation. These expectations, however, are often not verbalised and rest on an assumed consensus of meaning. This assumed consensus of meaning is often at the core of many marital problems. The aspect of marital life which is often most clouded in such unspoken expectations is the sexual relationship.

The expectation that a marriage will produce children is another dominant discourse: '[a]t the centre, reproductive marriage confers the prize and signifies the victory of the heteronormative' (Steyn & van Zyl 2009:5). The discourse of procreation is still very prominent in most Western societies: it is expected and assumed that a married couple will have children. I link this discourse back to a women's historical function: her primary contribution to the household was her sexual fertility - she had to bear legitimate heirs (Section 2.7.2). Although sex was often only seen in light of procreation and not recreation (Craig & Stander 2009:38), this discourse has been challenged by some.

3.6.5 Sex is a gift of God

Coupled with the discourse of a fertile marriage is the assumption that Christian marriages should be sexually fulfilling (Craig & Stander 2009:37). The Reformers moved marriage from the exclusive realm of procreation to that of pleasure or recreation (Coleman 2004:176; Farley 2010:45). Marital sex was no longer viewed as merely for procreation, but as a union between husband and wife, as well as between the couple and God. Within our religious institutions sexual intercourse within the marriage is acceptable and expected. The roots of this expectation can be found in Judaism, where sexual intercourse was seen as the consummation of a marriage. Coleman (2004:166) explains that the traditional custom of 'private consent [to marriage] between the couple followed by sexual intercourse and cohabitation', as involving consent not just to take a person as husband or wife, but also implying consent to future sexual intercourse within the marriage.

All participating clergy were aware of the expectation of pleasurable sex within the marriage, an awareness that was also shared by the majority of respondents in the Sexual Happiness online survey (Annexure 6). More than 60% of respondents indicated that they were aware of the expectation

regarding sexual happiness or fulfilment as a requirement of a Christian marriage. From some of their responses, sex also seemed to be used as the measuring stick for a successful marriage:

> It [sex] is solely to be shared between a husband and wife. It is the 'cherry on top' in marriage. It is to be treasured. It is to be enjoyed. It is a gift from God to all married couples. It is yet another bond between the couple, and between the couple and God.

> It is often frowned upon to discuss matters of a private nature although some churches have acknowledged the importance of the union [sex] between husband and wife and the fulfilment of both partners for a successful marriage.

> My understanding is that sexuality is a natural and healthy part of life that is to be celebrated and enjoyed within the safe, committed and loving boundaries of marriage. Not much is spoken about sexual fulfilment, but as a youth worker we are speaking more and more about sexuality and sexual fulfilment. My faith community is very supportive of this.

> Sex within marriage is God's plan for us. That sexual fulfilment within marriage is right and good and from God and nothing to be ashamed of. However, pornography is not the means to get sexually aroused, it is sinful.

> Enjoy full out says the Bible and my church.

> That God blesses us and wants us to enjoy it.

> Sex is an emotional and physical bonding between two partners who have a relationship characterised by reciprocity and has great physical, psychological and emotional significance.

> That it be between married couples and that one should seek the fulfilment of your partner.

> Sex is an expression of your love for your spouse and is to be enjoyed within the sacrament of marriage.

> It is positive about sexuality and sexual fulfilment inside marriage.

> Within the bounds of marriage, and you should be sexually fulfilled within that, not constrained.

From the above comments, representative of women from all age groups and churches throughout South Africa, it became clear that the dominant discourse of sexual happiness in Christian marriages

is widely expected and encouraged. This expectation of sexual fulfilment is an example of a dominant discourse which is implicit rather than explicit. It is frequently based on biblical texts such as Proverbs 5:15-19:

> Be faithful to your own wife and give your love to her alone. Children that you have by other women will do you no good. Your children should grow up to help you, not strangers. So be happy with your wife and find your joy with the woman you married - pretty and graceful as a deer. Let her charms keep you happy; let her surround you with her love.

Many widely read and recommended Christian books regarding marriage - for example Tim and Beverly LaHaye: *The act of marriage* (1998); Elmarie Craig and Hennie Stander: *A tot Z van seks* (2009); Ted and Gaye Wheat: *Intended for pleasure* (1997) - often promote sexual happiness within marriage and regard it as a goal. Bredenkamp (2002:344-347) discusses 1 Corinthians 7:3-4 in which Paul encourages sexual satisfaction for both husband and wife and emphasises the importance of a healthy sexual relationship. He suggests that Paul appeared to have understood that a healthy sexual relationship could contribute to men and women's experiencing regard and respect within the marriage. Yancey (2009:9) rightfully reminds us that:

> Confining sex to marriage does not guarantee that we will realise anything beyond physical gratification in our sex lives. It may, however, create an environment of safety, intimacy, and trust where the true meaning of sex, the sacramental meaning, may at times break through. Fidelity sets a boundary in which sex can run free.

Although I support Yancey's claim that 'fidelity sets a boundary in which sex can run free', I am also very aware of marriages which do not create an environment of emotional and sexual safety where women can enjoy sexual intercourse on an emotional, physical and spiritual level. In my private practice and during this research journey I heard alternative stories to that of sexually happy marriages. I learnt of Christian women who lived in sexually unhappy marriages and the implications which these held for them. The co-searchers often experienced a sexually unhappy marriage as a personal failure. White (2002:33) suggests that '[n]ever before has the sense of being a failure to be an adequate person been so freely available to people, and never before has it been so willingly and routinely dispensed'. I argue that this is especially true in terms of how people experience themselves when they face sexual problems. Following White (2002:35), I reason 'that the phenomenon of personal failure [especially sexual failure] has grown exponentially over recent decades' due to the fact that increasing numbers of people measure success by their ability to project themselves as

competent, desirable and attractive persons. One only has to pick up a women's magazine to see this propaganda. Moreover, because of the silence that surrounds this topic, most couples who experience sexual challenges cannot discuss this at their social gatherings or in any other social situation. In the co-searchers' experience, this isolation further intensifies a sense of self-failure.

Adopting Foucault's work, White (2002:43) reasons that 'the dramatic growth of the phenomenon of personal failure is associated with the rise of a distinctly modern version of power that establishes an effective system of social control through what can be referred to as "normalising judgement"'. Modern systems of power use structures of coercion which:

> …encourage people to actively participate in the judgement of their own and each other's lives according to socially [which will include religious] constructed norms (as an outcome of which it is determined that people's actions reflect degrees of inadequacy, abnormality, insufficiency, incompetency, hopelessness, ineffectualness, deficit, imperfection and worthlessness).

> (White 2002:43)

Living in a sexually unhappy marriage frequently holds implications for how women experience and judge themselves. The co-searchers shared '*experiences of feeling insufficient, incompetent, hopeless, deficient and worthless*'. The silence and isolation in which most sexually unhappy marriages function seem to amplify these judgements (labels).

A marriage is not just about the sexual relationship. But, when the sexual relationship becomes frustrated and dissatisfied, it can cast a shadow over all the other areas of the marriage (Craig & Stander 2009:32). Sexual issues are often kept under wraps. Many dominant discourses play a major part in this, especially the expectation that marital sex will be fulfilling. A respondent of the Sexual Happiness survey described one such discourse:

> [Ministers] are pretty confused - they condone almost anything, although they warn people that extra-marital sex is not ideal, but the most dangerous assumption is that if you ARE having any sex, it's got to be pleasurable or you would not be normal - nobody discusses difficult sex or painful sex due to physiological reasons, or unrealistic expectations about how 'great' sex is supposed to be.

When sexual aspirations remain unrealised, become seemingly unattainable, and are coupled with silence, this frequently leads to deep disappointment. Yancey warns that, for many couples, sex does not turn out to be what they hoped it would be. Their idealistic dreams do not come to fruition:

> Most married people…will tell you, sex within marriage is neither as easy nor as important as they had imagined before marriage. It expresses intimacy, yes, and provides pleasure. But much of marriage consists in making day-to-day decisions, managing the complexities of careers and schedules, rearing children, negotiating differences, juggling finances, and all the other effort involved in keeping a home running.

<div align="right">(Yancey 2003a:9)</div>

3.6.6 Sex, gender roles and personal identity

Within most societies, but especially within the Protestant Churches, sex is regarded as a rite of passage in terms of readiness for marriage. It is often seen as the coming of age, accompanied with a new phase in one's life and a new identity – namely that of husband and wife:

> Sex also creates personal identities. A female virgin becomes a 'woman' through sex, but more than this, a 'wife'. When a female person's identity changes from 'girl' to 'woman' she acquires not only an identity but also a role. She enters into a web of diffuse and multiplex relations with the man with whom she has had sex.

<div align="right">(Thornton 2003:8)</div>

Although Thornton excludes the 'thoroughly modernised or "westernised" women' from the discourse quoted above (he is referring here to traditional Black women in South Africa) sex as a rite of passage is also understood in this way within many White Protestant Christian communities, especially by women born in the 1960s and before. This discourse is reflected in the way Protestant churches have established, supported and maintained traditional roles for men and women: men are the head of the home and women are home-makers and caretakers.

It is Müller's (2008:1-2) experience that most men and women experience their roles within the modern marriage very differently from the roles previously prescribed and underwritten by the church. Nowadays both husband and wife frequently work outside the home: they both share the responsibility of providing for the family's financial needs. It is significant, however, that although most modern marriages ostensibly are not organised according to patriarchal norms – in that both

partners are regarded as 'breadwinners' - most women still experience their homes as a place of additional demand and work (Müller 2008:2). In Chapter Two (Section 2.14) world trends regarding domestic work are discussed. The UN report confirms that 'women spend at least twice as much time as men on domestic work, and when all work – paid and unpaid – is considered, women work longer hours than men do' (The World's Women: Work 2010:75). Thus, while most men experience their homes as a place of support and comfort - a haven which enables them to be focused on their careers - it seems as if the patriarchally determined 'moral categories that fit a wife's role' are still being imposed on women (Müller 2008:2).

Household chores - such as preparing meals, childcare and the cleaning of the home - are still linked to a wife's love for her family and children (Müller 2008:2). Gerhard shared that often, when couples who experience marital conflict seek his help in pastoral conversations, he will ask them what is working well in their marriage. The husband will usually speak about things such as '*She makes nice food*' and '*She creates a homely atmosphere*'. Couples usually refer to the traditional gender roles, but seldom speak of equal partnerships and emotional sharing.

I argue that promoting 'traditional family' roles as the ideal in present day contexts is based on an illusion constituted by previous historical discourses of what is best for children and mothers. A South African survey on childcare, *Parenting survey: The great daycare debate* (Women24:2007) found that only 7% of those families who had participated in the survey had the 'luxury' of one parent being at home with the child all day. Moreover, more than half of toddlers and preschoolers were in day care. The happiest children (81% happy) were actually those who were looked after by a nanny at home, closely followed by those who attended day care or a crèche (72% happy). This survey found that children who were looked after by one parent all day were the least happy (60% happy). It was proposed that this last figure is so because the child's happiness in such circumstances was often dependent on the happiness of the caregiver.

Buys (2010:59) states that guilt about not being a stay-at-home mother, as well as having to work outside the home and still do the majority of household chores, can contribute to a couple to experiencing changed patterns in their libido and sexual practices. Many women feel disillusioned and overwhelmed with parenthood in the presence of limited energy due to their demanding careers and still having to take care of the home. Sexual intimacy is often the first aspect of the marriage that suffers in such circumstances (Craig & Stander 2009:188). Those women who have internalised the religious discourse which prescribes the role of childminder and homemaker primarily to the wife,

will often expect themselves to be a 'super woman' and might continue to experience guilt if they do not 'make the grade' (Buys 2010:59). Müller (2008:2) cautions that in some instances churches are still promoting patriarchal categories for husbands and wives. I agree and argue that these traditional roles feed inequality in the marriage and in the division of household related chores. As long as the church (knowingly or unknowingly) continues to prescribe traditional family roles based on gender, it will continue to feed and create discourses that can become obstacles for sexually happy marriages.

This dominant discourse is strongly reminiscent of Plaatjies' (2003:219) and Steyn and Van Zyl's (2009:4) observations regarding the of prescribed gender roles (woman as helpmeet for her husband) for Christian women (Sections 2.10; 2.10.1 & 2.10.2). Despite Müller's (2008:2) warning that the church needs to be sensitive to the changes in women's roles within society and in their homes, it seems as if the church is still promoting patriarchal categories for husbands and wives. Kotzé (2010) brings a new dimension to the discussion. He argues that the church needs to reconsider its attitudes towards the role of women in society and in marriage, not just because times have changed, but arising from an ethical position. Change needs to be motivated from an ethical stance: an ethics of awareness (Kotzé 2002:5) in response to the injustice towards women that has been committed in the name of religion. Women have been portrayed and positioned as second class citizens, inferior and submissive to men, and reflecting less of the image of God. Taking an ethical stance thus requires critiquing our practices and challenging life-denying beliefs and actions (Kotzé 2002:8). I support Kotzé (2010), who argues that the church needs to walk in front and lead the way towards an ethical and life-giving sexuality especially for women.

Theologian, Mary Rose D'Angelo (1998: 25-48) as other feminists, challenges the concept of gender differentiation as understood and interpreted from Scripture. D'Angelo explains that the term of male and female was often used as a figure of speech in antiquity. Thus, when the whole was referred to, it was done by naming its opposite poles that makes up the whole i.e. male and female. It is then understood that when God says in Genesis He/She created male and female, it actually means the whole, thus *all* human beings. If one accepts this interpretation of language, it challenges faith communities' preoccupation with gender and the acceptance of male domination based on Adam being created first and thus the head of the family. It could also be used as a figure of speech in its negative form as used in Galatians 3:28. Thus male and female could be read as *no* male or female, in other words regardless of gender. However, within the South African context feminist theology praxis is mostly not the experience of congregants. This calls for an awareness power and gender within our churches. An ethics of awareness will involve questioning how power is used within our

churches (Purvis 1993:68). God's power, and the power God supposedly assigns to men, is frequently seen as power to control - in a patriarchal mindset. This interpretation needs to be challenged:

> If God's power is not that of control, it is understood as the power of life, then the Christian story gets read differently, told differently, heard differently, and it provides different warrants for structuring our lives together on interpersonal, institutional, and cultural levels. We are to be about the business of loving each other into being in the context of trust and accessibility within a culture of hospitality that affirms life in partnership with God.

> (Purvis 1993:67-68)

I am of the conviction that female sexuality as traditionally employed – as a means to control or police women - has the potential to trap women. Sexual intercourse - which supposedly liberates a woman from being seen just as a girl - can also become the rite passage which entraps her in discourse of carer and supporter. These roles in turn, inevitably impact on her construction of her identity and how she relates to her own sexuality, sexual desire and sexual satisfaction.

3.6.7   Gender roles and frustrated sexual desire

Mayer and Mayer (cited by Mager 1996:19) believe that it is important to acknowledge that women, like men, have sexual desires that require fulfilment. Nevertheless, there is a distinct difference in how men and women's sexuality is defined. McFadden (2003:1-3) argues in *Sexual pleasure as a feminist choice* that, for many years, African women's sexual and erotic inclinations have been suppressed by the patriarchal system which merged female sexuality with reproduction within a hetero-normative culture and society. In my experience, this is also true for westernised White Protestant women. McFadden links the suppression of female sexuality by tradition and religion with being a mother and a nurturer. Isherwood and McEwan (1994:18) concur, arguing that patriarchy established the role of the woman as nurturer with the aid of religion: '[r]eligions have reinforced…. [and] prescribed roles of wife and mother [to women]'. For many centuries the Bible was used to justify and maintain the construction of the wife within the nurturing role (Landman 2002:25).

The discourse of woman as the nurturer is reinforced by the way in which girls are socialised to be complaisant and accommodating (Fredman & Potgieter 1996:52). In their interaction with others and in gender discourses, girls soon learn that their worlds are much more limited than boys. The effects

of the socialisation process are often seen in how women view their sexuality: they focus on their partners' sexual needs instead of focusing on their own. Fredman and Potgieter (1996:52) conclude that girls tend to experience their sexuality as something that others do *to* them and define *for* them rather than something they can initiate and define. Buys (2010:2), a well known and 'modern' South African sexologist, confirm the belief that men and women are created differently:

> Men were created as the 'hunters', the providers, and the protectors. They need physical strength. Women were created as the nurturers and the carers. They need emotional strength….Another big difference between men and women is the ways in [which] we perceive love and affection. Women often see kind deeds – like her husband washing the dishes without being asked – as acts of love. Men feel loved when they are intimate with their partners.

I argue that the conditioning of women to be sexually accommodating and/or complaisant can set them up for sexual disappointment and disillusionment, especially in the presence of the expectation of marital sexual fulfilment. Although women might expect a sexually happy marriage, they are often reluctant to pursue this actively in their marriages, especially in the early stages of the marriage. Within Christian marriages sexuality is often shrouded in silence due to many of the discourses as explored earlier in this chapter. All these factors contribute towards women becoming sexually frustrated in their marriages and the establishment of patterns that undermines sexual happiness for both partners. Due to a variety of reasons (which will be explored in the following chapters) many women in sexually unhappy marriages are not able to leave such marriages. This causes great predicaments, dilemmas, relational complexities and challenges, especially for Christian women.

In order to appreciate or understand the dilemmas facing women in unhappy marriages, we need to be aware of the constructions Christian women hold regarding non-marital sexual practices.

3.7   CONSTRUCTIONS REGARDING EXTRA-MARITAL SEXUAL RELATIONSHIPS

Extra-marital sexual relationships can refer to many different actions. Within the biblical sense, it can refer to sexual intimacy or intercourse before marriage; being sexually involved with a person other than your spouse; or to post-marital sexual activity. Post-marital sexual activity is when a person becomes sexually involved after divorce whilst still unmarried or after the death of a spouse. In most instances, Christians refer to an extra-marital relationship as a relationship which will include sexual intercourse. It could refer to unmarried, married, divorced or widowed people. This

section will attend to the dominant discourses which emerged from the Sexual Happiness survey (Annexure 6), as well as discourses which presented in pastoral conversations with women in my private practice.

In the Sexual Happiness online survey (Annexure 6), 91% of respondents stated that their faith communities believe that extra-marital sex is a sin and therefore wrong. Interestingly, only 52,13% indicated that they only had sexual intercourse with their spouse *after* marriage and 40,77% indicated that they had sexual intercourse with their spouse as well as other partners *before* marriage. The Health24 – The Great South African Sex Survey[6] (2010) asked respondents if they believed in sex before marriage. A 'Yes' answer was given by 71,52% of female and 74,08% of male respondents. The high percentage in this survey might be due to the fact that respondents were not necessarily representing Christians.

The Sexual Happiness online survey (Annexure 6) asked the following question: *What is your understanding of your faith community's view on extra-marital sex and extra-marital sexual relationships?* Some of the respondents answered as follows:

> It is to be avoided. It is becoming more common, but still not acceptable. It goes against God's commandments. Churchgoers will still judge and condemn those who participate in this practice.

> It is a grave sin and very negatively judged!

> This is completely wrong.

> This is a sin in God's eyes.

> Wrong. Self-destructive, sinful.

> Completely against God's prescriptions and out of the question. Not allowed at all.

> Sex should be reserved for marriage. Extra-marital sex is a sin. It does however happen and counselling etc. should be received if required and should be dealt with like any sin i.e. repentance forgiveness etc.

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[6] The survey was found to be representative of the approximately 1,3 million South African metropolitan adults (aged 20+) who earn more than R2500 per month and who have a minimum educational qualification of a Matriculation certificate.

> Not really acceptable, but it is happening, and seems to be becoming more 'acceptable' when divorced.

From the comments made by respondents regarding their understanding of their faith communities' attitudes towards extra-marital sex, it seems that even though is judged sinful, there is no general consensus in terms of how churches should deal with this issue. It would also seem as if many Christian women's sexual practices are in conflict with what their faith communities teach and what they believe the Bible says about extra-marital sex: only 52,14% women indicated that they only had sex once married in the Sexual Happiness survey (Annexure 6).

I do not engage with these statistics as absolutes. The Sexual Happiness online survey (Annexure 6) was not developed as a statistical tool but merely to test the waters: as an indication of practices of some Christian women. I explored in greater depth in personal interviews with the co-searchers their own sexual practices and beliefs, as will be discussed in the following chapters.

The focus of this research journey was on married Christian women who lived in sexually unhappy marriages. Some of these women were involved in extra-marital sexual activities and relationships, also referred to as adultery. Since the term adultery embraces a variety of actions, it is important to define the terms relevant to these actions.

3.8   DEFINING ADULTERY

What exactly are we referring to when we speak of adultery or what many people call 'having an affair'? After journeying with the co-searchers stories of their extra-marital sexual relations, it soon became clear that it is actually very difficult to define.

Moultrup (1990:9-11) faced the same dilemma, and concluded that defining our understanding of an affair in terms of the behaviour involved is quite impossible. Based on the work of researchers such as Brown (1993), Hunt (1969), Kaslow (1993), Lawson (1990) and Pitman (1990), Botha (1998:31) offers the following definition:

> An affair, in terms of various articles, may therefore lie on a continuum between two extreme poles, the one extreme being sexual intercourse and the other a platonic friendship which intimidates the excluded marriage partner.

Moultrup (1990:9) attributes the difficulty of defining the term 'adultery' or 'affair' to its characteristic multiplicity. Moultrup (1990:11) resolved this dilemma by using the term 'infidelity':

> ...since it is possible to be unfaithful in any number of ways.... [Infidelity occurs when a] relationship between a person and someone other than his [or her] spouse...has an impact on the level of intimacy, emotional distance, and overall dynamic balance in the marriage.

Although I find Moultrup's definition more inclusive and the use of the word infidelity more appropriate in certain situations, it still poses challenges for me, largely because of the multiplicity of meanings and behaviours that cluster around the word 'affair/adultery'. In this research journey, some co-searchers did engage in sexual activities outside their marriages, but often also outside any relationship - a 'one night stand'. Some of the co-searchers' sexual encounters did not include a deep emotional bond or relationship of any kind. In other instances, they were the 'typical' affair in the same sense as Moultrup and Botha refer to: a deep emotional bond and relationship accompanying a sexual relationship. In yet other instances, these were more on the basis of an agreement to a regular physical '*service*', or, as the co-searcher called it, '*a sex buddy*'. Finally, in some cases the infidelity did not impact on the level of intimacy or the emotional distance between the married couple.

In order to deal with these differences, I will be using the term 'affair' when there was a continuous relationship or emotional bond present, especially if this bond caused emotional distance between the co-searcher and her spouse. For casual sexual encounters outside any relationship, I will use the term 'sexual fling'. The term sexual fling will also include those sexual relationships that took place on a contract basis - outside an emotional bond, but by prior agreement.

Even though it is difficult to define infidelity, it would seem as if it occurs amongst Christians more often that what most people might expect. In the Sexual Happiness online survey (Annexure 6), 14,96% of respondents indicated that they have had a sex with someone other than their spouse whilst married, and 11,11% had extra-marital sex with a married person whilst they were single. The percentage of respondents involved in an extra-marital sexual relationship at the time they participated was 5,8%.

However we might define an affair or infidelity, it became clear that Christian women viewed the extra-marital sexual relations of married women in a variety of ways, but the common denominator seems to be that it is judged as sin. Respondents in the Sexual Happiness online survey (Annexure 6)

made the following comments about extra-marital sex and extra-marital sexual relationships in terms of how their faith communities view it:

> [The church] suggests that people can get hurt, but actually just assumes that people are doing it anyway, and don't really speak out against it for the fear of losing members of the congregation, and if there is an infidelity, they just say 'get divorced', and do not really help people get through it and stay together.

> Do not go that route, it involves a lot of pain and hurt for many people. And if it happens, KEEP QUIET, especially if it is the man. And if it comes out, FORGIVE and TRY AGAIN TO TRUST, [it is] mostly women required to do this.

> My understanding is that it is not acceptable as it dishonours the marriage vows and destroys love and trust in relationships. It is seen as sin.

> Often – the transgressor/s are ousted by the community at a time when they need the most guidance and less judging.

> Forgiving towards men, but judgemental towards women. [Vergewingsgesind met betrekking tot mans, veroordelend wat vroue betref].

3.9   SUMMARY

In this chapter I identified and explored some the dominant discourses regarding sex, marriage and extra-marital relations which are present in South African Protestant faith communities. This is in line with my social construction discourse which argues that in order to understand what faith predicaments and relational complexities, challenges and dilemmas Protestant Christian women experience when living in sexually unhappy marriages, one has to explore the dominant discourses in which Christian sexuality operates. Christian women's understandings of marital practices and sexual relations will be constituted by these dominant discourses. Moreover, how and what Christian women understand of marital and sexual practices will have a bearing on the challenges and dilemmas they experience when living in sexually unhappy marriages.

Similarly, since I position myself within in a social construction epistemology, the contexts - more specifically the South African contexts - in which White Protestant Christian sexuality operate were an important focal point for this study. Clergy were invited to share their experiences in terms of those dominant discourses regarding sexuality which are present in South African Protestant churches. I argue that these dominant discourses will be indicative of the discursive and co-

constructing discourses in which the co-searchers' stories unfold. Thus, to enhance understanding of the co-searchers' stories, I explored present day dominant discourses in churches, as all co-searchers were Christian women who actively participated in their faith communities. These discourses created the backdrop against which we will listen to the co-searchers' stories in the next chapter.

The silence surrounding sexuality within all facets of Christian life proved to be a constant factor. This silence was present during the ministers' theological training, in their personal lives, in their sermons, in their pastoral care training and in their marriage preparation conversations. Sexuality is unspeak-able within the church. It is gagged and silenced by the normalizing gaze.

Many of the discourses surrounding sexuality were implicit – often unspoken and invisible. Nonetheless, these implicit discourses had constituting effects on how sexuality was understood and practised within Christian marriages. The voices of prominent theologians and feminists as found in literature helped me to explore these unspoken and invisible discourses. Clearly, gender constructions as well as faith prescriptions regarding the role of Christian wives greatly influence the expectations which Christian women hold for their sexual experiences in marriage, how they express themselves sexually and otherwise, how men's sexuality is viewed, and how extra-marital sex is seen.

Christian women constantly receive conflicting messages regarding sexuality. As *unmarried* women they need to fear and avoid sexual relations, but once married, they are expected to joyfully participate in sexual intercourse. As Christian women, they should not express sexual desire, but are supposed to strive for a sexually fulfilling marriage. Christian women are seen as mothers and nurturers - as taking care of others - but are not allowed to take care of their own sexual needs.

Compounding the problems posed by the multiplicity of expectations placed upon Christian marriage - including fulfilling sex and the bearing of children - is the fact that sex is not spoken about within most faith communities. This silence regarding sexuality traps many Christian couples who are living in sexually unhappy marriages leaving them few opportunities to speak about their experiences. Finally, adultery is judged and condemned, but Christians do not get guidance how to achieve sexually happy marriages: effective pastoral care which deals with sexual challenges seems mostly absent.

In Chapter Four, I share and explore the stories of Protestant women living in sexually unhappy marriages. Kohler Riessman (2008:8) suggests that sharing stories enables people to 'excavate and reassess memories that might have been fragmented, chaotic, unbearable, and/or scarcely visible before narrating them'. I too acknowledge the power of stories, and that '[i]n a dynamic way then, narrative constitutes past experience at the same time as it provides ways for individuals to make sense of the past [the present and the future]' (Kohler Riessman 2008:8).

It is my sincere desire that telling their stories against the backdrop of dominant religious discourses will invite and create greater understanding of the complexities surrounding Christian women's non-marital sexual practices. Kohler Riessman (2008:10) recognises that the '[t]elling of stories about difficult times in our lives as creat[ing] order and contain[ing] emotions, allowing a search for meaning and enabling connection with others'. Making-meaning, creating understanding, and enabling this connection with others necessitates exploring the social structures and dominant discourses, and how these relate to the individuals and their narratives.

CHAPTER FOUR
MEETING SEXUAL UNHAPPINESS

4.1   CENTRALISING THE STORIES OF THE CO-SEARCHERS

Chapters Four and Five are dedicated to telling the stories of the co-searchers who journeyed with me in this research project and documenting some of the meanings they gave to their narratives. In both chapters I centralised the co-searchers' meanings and understandings. The choice to grant primary importance to their stories and that which was important for them to share with me, reflects my commitment to respectful research practices and to honouring my co-searchers (Anderson & Goolishian 1992:30). All the co-searchers felt that telling their stories was very important to them: before our conversations they were mostly trapped in silence. Chapter Four will use the space primarily to tell the co-searchers' stories. My aim is not only to break the silence surrounding sexually unhappy marriages, but also to support the co-searchers in this important and meaningful process.

These stories must be read and understood against two backdrops: the Reformed Christian traditions in South Africa and dominant discourses, as discussed in the previous chapters of this thesis. I support Ussher's (1993:10) stance that '[i]n order to understand the current psychological discourse associated with women's sexual problems, it is essential to have some understanding of the historical context which has led to our present practices and prejudices'.

Sexuality is largely an abstract concept. Often one can only see how it operates by listening to people's stories. Stories tend to make visible what previously was invisible and private. Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach and Zilber (1998:7) suggest that 'one of the clearest channels for learning about the inner world is through verbal account and stories presented by individual narrators about their lives and their experienced reality'. Context-related life stories can enable us to see what was not visible before. It is my hope that travelling through the stories (and contexts) of women who know sexual unhappiness intimately will enable a greater exploration and understanding of sexuality in relation to the Protestant faith contexts. These stories will make visible that which was invisible before, and will voice the previously unspoken and unspeakable.

Sharing these stories is a way of honouring women and their previously unvoiced experiences. It is not my intention to deliver judgement regarding these stories, but to create a space in which to

unpack these experiences. In taking this stance I am following Slowinski (1992:149), who believes that caretakers should not be assessing sexual acts as either right or wrong, but rather what effects these are having on the person. Like Nelson (1992:37), Slowinski (1992:149) suggests that rather than judge, the appropriate ethical question that we should contemplate is: What sexual behaviour will serve to enhance - rather than to inhibit or damage - the fuller realisation of our divinely intended humanity? This calls for the unpacking of the co-searchers' stories, without delivering 'moral' judgement.

My ethical stance also requires that I reject any kind of 'labelling'. Even though some of the sources that I quote use terms – such as 'dysfunctional' – to pathologize, I do not support this kind of labelling. My aim not to judge, label or categorise behaviour, but rather to explore the *effects* which these behaviours, discourses and social constructions have on women.

The co-searchers' words and experiences will hold central focus throughout. I will use excerpts from the research conversation transcript notes as well as from the summarising letters which I sent to each co-searcher after a conversation. The transcript notes and summarising letters that are included in this chapter were all shared with the co-searchers for feedback and correction, thereby ensuring that I had recorded an accurate account of their words and meanings. The decision to dedicate this chapter to the telling of their stories supports my commitment to ethical and collaborative research practices and is a way to privilege and value the co-searchers' contributions.

Aware of the silence in which sexually unhappy marriages are cocooned, I asked myself: What is needed to break this silence? What is keeping the stories of sexually unhappy marriages from being told? What is needed to give voice to these stories? What will enable women to tell their stories in the presence of a dominant discourse of silence?

I believe that the answer is found in the way we listen to people's stories. Listening – really listening - requires a willingness to become an intentional, compassionate witness and to be touched by the stories one hears. Kaethe Weingarten (2003b:197) describes this process:

> [t]his kind of listening is nonjudgmental and accepting. It gives space and time for the other person to drop down into herself to see what is there that wants to be brought forth. It creates an opportunity for the speaker to plunge into confusion and uncertainty, knowing that she will be accompanied by a steady companion who will listen to her story without taking it over.

Weingarten (2003b:197) suggests that the hardest thing about this kind of listening is to temporarily free ourselves from our own preconceptions, ideas and assumptions so that our minds will be truly quiet. It is only in this quietness that the unspoken can be spoken and the unheard, heard. I have tried to put this into practice. When I write the stories of the co-searchers in this chapter, I practised an attitude of quietness of self so as to be able to privilege the co-searchers' voices.

This quiet listening or witnessing does not imply a disconnected kind of listening: it requires being aware and engaged. As I have already discussed in the first three chapters of this work, through reading the many different literature resources for this research journey I had become acutely aware of the dominant discourses which prescribe Christian sexuality and how women experience and engage with their sexuality. I will thus be listening with awareness and engagement not only to the women's stories, but to those dominant discourses and how their constitutive presence is evident.

4.2   BECOMING AWARE OF SEXUAL UNHAPPINESS

My best friend lost her struggle with cancer in 2000 at the age of forty six. She was diagnosed with breast cancer in her late twenties. I journeyed with her for ten years through chemotherapy, shared in the joy of remission and the anguish of the cancer flaring up again. During this time we watched her tender young girls becoming beautiful teenagers. As we journeyed, my friend shared with me some of the losses cancer brought, such as the loss of her breast with no possibility of reconstruction. For her this felt like a part of her womanhood was missing; it felt as if a part of her identity was lost too. There were many other losses: the loss of her health; the loss of life as she knew it before cancer; the loss of sexual happiness in her marriage; and eventually, the loss of hope for recovery. I am deeply grateful that I was able to witness and experience her journey with her. In this hard school of suffering I learnt of courage and compassion.

As a result of her journey, I became aware of the deep sadness, the great loss and the extreme loneliness which sexual unhappiness can bring; but I also became aware of her courage and positive attitude in the face of adversity. The process of becoming aware of my friend's isolation in terms of her sexual functioning inspired me to take the first steps towards this research journey.

4.3   GETTING TO KNOW SEXUAL UNHAPPINESS

During the past six years I journeyed with heterosexual as well as gay couples in their struggles with sexual happiness. Although each journey was unique, the journeys also shared some common elements. In these journeys, feelings of inadequacy, of isolation and of being voiceless were frequent fellow-travellers. In this chapter I wish to give a voice to some of the women who so bravely and honestly shared their stories with me. I will indicate - by using *italics* and quotation marks - when I use the co-searchers' words or quote from the conversation transcriptions or summarising letters that I wrote to the co-searchers after each interview. In some instances it was necessary to adjust some of the excerpts from the summarising letters so as to enhance readability of this text. I summarised their words by using paraphrases, also indicated by *italics*. The adjusted summaries and paraphrases, as I have used them in this chapter, were approved as accurate reflections of the original text by the co-searchers and as representative of their experiences, interpretations and words.

4.4   A BRIEF INTRODUCTION TO THE CO-SEARCHERS

In this chapter I will explore five co-searchers' stories. Some of the co-searchers journeyed with me for more than three years; others for only a few months. Due to the sensitivity of this subject, I have used pseudonyms for all the co-searchers.

I will share five very different stories in this thesis so as to illustrate the great variety and complexity involved in sexually unhappy marriages. The first three stories captured only a brief overview of their journeys and of the constituting discourses present in their stories. As a result of various circumstances, these three co-searchers were unable to journey with me in great detail. I will thus not be able to unpack their stories at length as I would have wished to. In the individual stories I will share the circumstances which led to the premature ending of these research journeys.

I will share the last two stories in greater detail. In Chapter Five I will explore the meanings which these two co-searchers held in relation to their experiences. Deconstructing – or 'unpacking' – the discursive discourses that have helped shape meaning is central to this chapter. I have been guided by Foucault's (1972a:117) definition of a discursive discourse: '…a body of anonymous, historical rules, always determined in the time and space that have defined a given period, and for a given social, economic, geographical, or linguistic area, the conditions of operation of the enunciative function' (Section 2.4).

The co-searchers were women in their thirties, forties and late fifties. I am aware that the different eras in which these women grew up might represent very different discursive contexts. For instance, a woman who grew up in the South Africa of the 1960s and 1970s would have been exposed to a very different discursive context than one who grew up in the 1990s. But they had one thing in common: they were all born before 1994, a watershed year in South African history. From 1948 to the first democratic election held in April 1994, the National Party was in power. Through its policy of Apartheid – a feat of social engineering committed to retaining White (preferably Afrikaner) supremacy – the Nationalist government imposed draconian control over the South African population. Almost all socialising structures served as mouthpieces of the Apartheid regime. The doctrine of Reformed Theology was the most powerful constituting factor for the 'White population' and was used within the school system, the radio and the printed media (Ackermann 1998:78-79). The theological underpinning of apartheid was so comprehensive and powerful (for example, Christian National Education) that we can suppose that sexual understanding would have been interpreted in terms of Christianity, even if a person was not a Christian or did not attend church. The norms of society were based on the constituting voice of Reformed Theology as interpreted by the patriarchal system (Landman 2002:25). These dominant discourses were constitutive not only in the co-searcher's different contexts, but also constitutive of other Christian women living under this regime.

During this research journey the same dominant discourses presented in all the co-searchers' stories. I will focus on these commonly shared discourses in the deconstruction of the co-searchers' stories. Moreover, since I position myself in a social constructionist epistemology, I suggest that even younger generations of women will share some of these experiences due to the constitutive effects of dominant discourses in the lives of their mothers and fathers. Furthermore, I argue that many of these dominant discourses are still present in Protestant faith communities: they have thus been internalised by Christian women and men of all ages.

In my private practice I have found that even women in their twenties struggle with the same issues in terms of their intimate relations as the older co-searchers of this research journey. It would seem, however, as if these younger women were able to challenge and resist these dominant discourses more readily while still single or not married, but as soon as they entered marriage or started to co-habit with their partners, many of them experienced the constitutive effects of these dominant discourses.

The stories of the co-searchers are centralised in the next sections.

4.5   NAOMI AND JOHN

Naomi and John were referred to me by a male clergy member - also a registered counsellor and narrative practitioner - from a neighbouring church. Naomi and John were both members in a sister congregation of his church. Three months before our first therapeutic session, Naomi found out from her domestic worker that, for the past four years, John had been engaged in sexually inappropriate actions with her. John would grope the domestic worker's breasts and private parts; watch pornographic movies whilst she cleaned the house; masturbate in full view of her; and have telephone conversations of a sexual nature with her. John also boasted to the domestic worker about visiting prostitutes. Naomi confronted John with this information: at first, he denied it, but eventually admitted that it was true. Before the revelation of these sexual activities, on several occasions Naomi had noticed lipstick on John's clothes when he returned from work. *Although John passed this off as a joke or accident of some kind, Naomi stayed suspicious. Naomi's sense of security and trust had been undermined on these occasions, but it came as a great shock to her when she learned of John's sexual actions with their domestic worker. Naomi insisted that John moved out of their home. He went to stay with Naomi's parents for three weeks.*

Naomi spoke of the effects which the domestic worker's revelations had had on her self-esteem both as a woman and as a lover. Naomi shared how she had gone through a terrible time. She wondered: '*What the unkempt nanny could possibly offer my husband that I did not – this thought kills me. I experienced going into overdrive and became very calm, civil and distant. John robbed all my dignity from me and left me feeling helpless, alone and scared*'.

After the domestic worker's disclosure Naomi and John went to see a psychologist, who advised that John should move back into the home. At the time of our first meeting, John had moved back into their home, even though Naomi did not want this.

Naomi is a qualified primary school teacher, but at the time of our interviews she was a stay-at-home mother with small children. During our first session, Naomi and John shared with me that they engaged in 'swinging': having sex with other couples - also known as 'partner swopping'. They did not want to see a professional about this however, as neither of them felt that the swinging was the problem.

4.5.1   Infidelity in the marriage

For Naomi, the problem was that John engaged in sexual activity without her knowledge or consent. *The fact that it was with their domestic worker of seven years, who was like a very close friend to Naomi, was an even greater act of betrayal for her.* Moultrup (1990:9) discusses the contractual understanding between husbands and wives regarding what they define as infidelity. This might be different for every couple. For example, if a husband and wife have an agreement that they will not go out for lunch with a member of the opposite sex, breaking that contract could be defined as an infidelity whereas another couple might not regard this as an infidelity. *For Naomi, seeing her husband having sex with another woman was not betrayal, as they had agreed to this practice, but John being involved in sexual actions without her knowledge and hiding this from her, was seen as an act of betrayal.*

Nicki: *What is your understanding of infidelity?*

Naomi: *Infidelity is not only the physical act of sex. It is creating or looking for a bond with another person - this bond being emotional, physical or sexual. It is expressing your desire to be with someone outside your marriage – just the expressing of such a desire is already infidelity.*

Nicki: *Did you see your and John's participation in swinging as infidelity?*

Naomi: *No, I did not feel that it was infidelity as we did it together. It was okay as long as we knew about it and did it together.*

Many people might think of a sexually open marriage - a marriage where the partners mutually agree to sex with others - as an unqualified licence to engage in free sex as and when they pleased. However, as the O'Neils ([1972] 1984) explain in their groundbreaking research, this is not the case. Nena O' Neil   ([1972] 1984:xii) defines a sexually open marriage as a marriage which is governed by 'the explicit agreement, entirely optional, that each partner can have a separate relationship outside the marriage, which might, under certain conditions, include sex'. The O'Neils ([1972] 1984) argue that a sexually open marriage can only be successful if there is equality, trust and respect within the relationship and that neither of the partners are coerced into not being sexually exclusive. Naomi and John had agreed to sexual activities with other people, but only when both of them were present and both would participate:

> *This fantasy progressed to sex-talking with other couples on MXit. Again, both of you felt this would not be a threat to the marriage and your relationship, as long as both of you were fully informed and aware of any such activities. You agreed to this practice but on the condition that both of you participate and only when you are together.*

4.5.2   Spicing up their sex life

Listening to this story, I was struck by the progression of their sexual activities. Both Naomi and John described themselves as *conservative Christians*. In Naomi's words, *I am very straight-laced [Ek is baie koekerig]*. Naomi and John's attempt to '*spice up their sex life*' started with talking about sexual fantasies, which included having a 'threesome': inviting another person to join in their sexual activity. This progressed to having 'internet sex' and 'phone sex' and eventually to actual sexual intercourse with other couples.

Naomi and John said that before they shared the fantasy of a threesome, both of them experienced their sex life as *bland and predictable. But by talking about this fantasy during their sex play, they both felt that it excited them greatly and spiced up their sex life as they experienced greater passion and fewer inhibitions.*

Naomi and John started to experiment with sexual interaction with other couples on the internet and on the cell phone service, MXit. These sexual conversations with other couples progressed to meeting with other couples for sex. They also visited swingers clubs which included voyeurism[7], sex shows and engaging in sexual acts in public spaces within the club. One time John insisted that Naomi have oral sex with other men at the swingers club, while he watched. *Naomi shared that she was very shy and the only way she was able to do this was because she had had a lot to drink*. On other occasions they also engaged in same-room-sex with other couples, which may or may not include swapping of partners between the couples.

Naomi shared that they had different constructions regarding the different ways of having sex.

> *The sex that you would have when using the fantasy was different to other sex. Naomi, you described this sex as 'wild sex while the other sex would be mommy and daddy making love'. Usually there would be a time-span of about three weeks in between having this 'wild sex'. The times when you would have 'mommy and*

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[7] 'The practice of obtaining sexual pleasure by looking, especially at the naked body or genitals of another or at erotic acts between others' (Lippincott et al 2006).

daddy making love' sex, John felt frustrated and would masturbate every second day. This would cause feelings of guilt [for John] as John felt Christians should not masturbate and the thoughts that lead to masturbation are sinful. You placed masturbation in the same field as pornographic movies and magazines and sex toys.

4.5.3 Conflict between faith convictions and sexual exploration

Even though both John and Naomi seemed at ease with their sexual activities, they shared that they experienced some guilt in terms of their faith convictions. Naomi especially experienced ambivalence: when they were with another couple it felt right, but when she was at church it felt wrong. This caused inner conflict with regard to her personal faith.

Nicki: *What is your understanding as a Christian of marital sex?*

Naomi*: Marriage is a sacred union. Sex is only allowed between a husband and a wife. That is how it should be. Commitment between a man and a woman which means: I will only be with you and no other person. Therefore it is not right to venture outside that relationship.*

During our initial conversation it became apparent that John had very complex sexual challenges. *He masturbated almost daily, demanded sexual intercourse from Naomi sometimes every morning and evening and still insisted that they engage sexually with other couples, via the internet as well as in person.* Due to the complexity of John's sexuality, I felt that it would be more life-giving for him if I referred him to a sexologist or a professional that specialised in sexual problems. I also felt that it would be more appropriate for a male person to deal with John. I suggested that I continue to journey with Naomi, but referred John back to the male clergy person who had initially referred the couple to me. We agreed that my colleague and I would briefly share the stories told in the separate sessions if relevant to the rebuilding of the trust relationship and then, if necessary, have joint sessions to address the challenges Naomi and John faced regarding the re-building of their marriage and relationship. We suggested that John seek the help of a professional (outside our therapeutic contract) with regards to his sexual functioning. My male colleague referred John to a male support group for sexual addictions. However, after the first meeting John informed my colleague that he did not believe that he had a problem with sexual addiction but that he would continue to come to him for their marital problems.

During the individual conversations with Naomi, *she shared that she would prefer a sexually exclusive marriage, but she felt that the only way she could keep her husband was by agreeing to have sex with other people.* Naomi often felt as if John was '*pimping*' her on the internet to attract sexual partners for internet sex. This is strongly reminiscent of the discourse that a husband owns his wife's body and thus her sexuality. This discourse will be discussed in greater detail in the next story. *Naomi also felt that if she agreed to a sexually open marriage, then at least she would know what John was getting involved in. Naomi shared that she felt very insecure of herself and that she was struggling with a negative body-image. Naomi felt manipulated into having sex with other couples, as John would make her feel very guilty when she refused. He used to pester her, and wear her down until she finally agreed.*

Once Naomi learned of John's sexual activities with their domestic worker, she did not want to engage in further sexual contact with him. In our joint session they negotiated boundaries to support the relationship whilst Naomi was working through the trauma she felt arising from the betrayal. Naomi requested that John sleep in the guest room; did not ask for sex; and did not touch her because, when he did, he always tried to move the touching into a sexual mode. John agreed to these boundaries. However, in the subsequent individual conversations, Naomi shared *that John did not respect these boundaries. He continued to grope her breasts whenever he had the opportunity; he continuously begged for sexual intercourse; and would even resort to crying whilst telling Naomi that she was sadistic and cruel not to give him sex. The following section is an excerpt from a letter to Naomi, in which I summarised her previous conversation:*

> *For the past three months there has been no intimacy between you. This is a big problem for John as you feel for him sex means a happy marriage. You feel if you give in to his 'nagging for sex', it will be giving John the control back: 'The intimacy thing is a huge thing. I feel he wants to control me 24/7'.*
>
> *You shared that John wants you to have sex with him, but he is not willing to build the relationship or show kindness or consideration towards you. You said that often when you would ask John a favour, such as, 'Please bring me a cup of coffee', his first reaction will be: 'What do I get out of it?' You feel that whenever John does anything for you, there is always a condition attached. It must always hold a return benefit for him [usually sexual].*

After the disclosure and her subsequent refusal of sexual intercourse, John *accused Naomi of breaking up their marriage and destroying their children's happy home. John saw himself as the*

victim in this situation and Naomi as the wrongdoer. Naomi also shared other stories of verbal, emotional and economic abuse, against which she felt she had no recourse.

For Naomi, dealing with John's sexual betrayal was greatly complicated by the presence of abuse. *John accused Naomi of being the wrongdoer and this made her feel very guilty.* This guilt trapped her and prevented her from challenging the abuse. Jenkins (1990:13) discusses the abusive actions of men and how responsibility for the abuse is often shifted onto the victim. Jenkins argues that progress can be made only once a perpetrator accepts full responsibility for his abusive actions: 'The perpetrator must understand the potential impact of his abusive actions upon the victim and others. He must accept his culpability for his actions and bear the full onus of ceasing his abuse and changing his behaviour'. This shifting of blame was very evident in John and Naomi's relationship. John often portrayed himself as the victim: he had been wronged by Naomi - by her insisting that he move out, refusing to have sex with him and making their personal issues public. He often accused her of denying him from being with his children (even though he did not participate in their care as this was seen as a mother's duty). He told Naomi that she is nothing more than a financial burden to him. He blamed Naomi for his sexual frustrations and was very angry about her '*cutting him off sexually*'. *Naomi often experienced guilt, frustration and irritation when John accused her, but even so she felt that she could not challenge these allegations:*

> *John did not respect the boundaries and used guilt to erode away your boundaries. He accuses you of cutting him off, that he is not coping, and that you are to blame. This makes you feel guilty, which in return leaves you irritated with yourself and him. You feel he needs to face up to what he has done and you want to say: 'You did a disgusting thing so own up and deal with it'. You shared that you often felt on edge and nervous about John's 'criticism and controlling behaviour' towards you. You shared that John is very prescribing and you often feel not strong enough to stand up to him. 'I see myself as a weak person, and John is often negative about me being treated for post-natal depression and being on the anti-depressant'.*

4.5.4   Isolated, silenced and trapped by dominant discourses

After two individual conversations, Naomi felt that she was not able to continue with the journey: it had become very challenging emotionally for her. In our journey she was able to voice her anger and disappointment, which before she ignored:

> *You shared that reading the letter was in a sense difficult and sad. It was difficult to read about your own life as 'it made it more real, it knocks you between the eyes. It brings your life closer to yourself. It was a sad experience'. I asked why this was such a difficult and sad experience and you explained, 'I always protected him [John], reading what I said made me realise that this is my life. We are so good at pretending, pretending the happy family. Everybody thinks we have the perfect family, but they do not know what is going on when we are alone.'*

Naomi shared that reflecting on her experiences became a threat to her decision to stay in the marriage. Leaving the marriage was not a viable option for her, although she wanted to. Naomi had no support systems, no financial resources and her parents - especially her mother - pressurised her to stay in the marriage:

> *I asked who imposed such expectations on you and you shared that your parents are church-going people. Your mom made it clear that you must work at the relationship. You shared that you do not think she understands your marriage. Your mother said to you: 'Don't make my grandchildren another statistic'. You felt that with this she meant that you should not consider divorce, but rather just forgive and forget. Your mom also told you that if God can forgive us, why can't you forgive John? You feel that people do not want the truth. As she [her mother] puts it: 'there is no reason why you cannot work this out, both of you are educated people – make this work'. You believe that your mom is more concerned about the embarrassment a divorce might cause her, than about your emotional well-being.*

It would seem that as an older person, Naomi's mother felt that divorce should not be considered, no matter the circumstances. This speaks of a powerful discourse within the church regarding divorce. Even though most churches have accepted divorce as a fact of life, many Christians still struggle with the idea, especially those Christians from an older generation.

Naomi felt trapped in her marriage: economically she was completely dependent on her husband. *John cancelled her credit card after Naomi refused to have sex with him: and she has to ask for money every day to buy even the basics, such as milk and bread. John controls every cent of their income: Naomi has to justify continuously why she needed money.*

Naomi's story is an example of how economic dependence can trap a woman in an abusive marriage. The financial dependence of wives on their husbands is promoted by the dominant discourse of husband as the breadwinner and wife as the caretaker of the home and children. For many years this has been a dominant discourse not only in Protestant traditions, but also in the secular world. John and Naomi's marriage is organised according to patriarchal principles: she

stayed at home to take care of the children, whilst John continued to build a career for himself. *Naomi was left with no financial resources, nor could she depend on help from her parents. She felt she had to stay in the marriage for her own financial survival.*

In our final meeting Naomi shared that, although John had promised to continue to see my male colleague in therapy, he had failed to do so. *She had little hope that her situation would change. Considering all these factors, Naomi felt that the most life-giving decision was not to continue with our journey, to stay in the marriage and to find ways to live with the sexual unhappiness. Naomi was determined not to continue with non-marital sexual practices of any kind as she had come to believe that she had a right to refuse these practices.*

Our limited time together meant that I was unable to explore support structures or acts of resistance with Naomi, nor was I able to explore with her the meanings she held regarding her sexual practices in relation to her faith convictions. Although I wanted to support Naomi, I had to honour and respect her wish to not to continue with the journey. We agreed that she would contact me should she ever feel the need. Naomi informed me recently that she filed for divorce some months after our conversations; she and John is still living in the same house however, as she cannot afford accommodation by herself:

> *I reached a point where I had to stop making excuses for what was happening and had to start thinking whether I wanted to spend the rest of my life in an unhealthy relationship. There is still the inner conflict of doing what I need for myself and what is good for my children. John frequently blames me for 'doing this' to our family, because he says that he wants to make the marriage work and that I don't. He has also since become 'very religious' and about two months ago, in his quest for forgiveness, confessed that he did actually have sexual relations with the maid. This has made me even more determined to continue with the divorce.*

Naomi's story shows the power of religious ideas regarding divorce and the effects of these on women. It shows how patriarchal practices can keep women financially dependent - trapped in very unhappy and even abusive relationships. It speaks of the discourse of women's bodies and sexuality becoming the property of their husbands. This discourse will be explored in greater detail in the next story.

Although there were many dominant discourses present in Naomi's story, as part of my respectful practices towards the co-searchers in this research journey, I only include a detailed reflection of

those dominant discourses which I had unpacked *with* the co-searcher. As this did not happen with Naomi – she terminated the journey before we could get to this stage – I do not included a detailed reflection of this story.

4.6   RENATE: FROM MARITAL RAPE TO CELIBACY

Renate is a woman of sixty, who has been married to Frank for more than thirty five years. Renate came to see me for the first time in 2005. She needed to talk about her relationship with her husband, whom she described as verbally and emotionally abusive. *Both Renate and her husband are very involved in their church community and are seen as pillars of their society.* Renate felt that her husband is a good man, loyal and hardworking, but he has a tongue like '*razor wire'*.

4.6.1   Marital rape

In our journey Renata disclosed to me that she had been subjected to marital rape in the early years of her marriage. When we explored this, she stated this was her husband's way of punishing her because, as a student, she had had a sexual relationship with another man. Borrowdale (cited in Isherwood & McEwan 1994:125) states that research has shown that 'many men think of sex as a weapon with which to hurt and punish women and they regard rape as a way of putting women in their place'. It would seem as if this discourse was at work in the early stages of Renate and Frank's marriage.

When I asked her why she had endured this abuse, Renate stated that she had never even considered the possibility that a wife had the right to refuse sexual intercourse with her husband. Marital rape speaks powerfully of the discourse of a wife's body becoming her husband's property. We find the roots of this discourse in Judaism as well as in the beliefs of some of the early church fathers. Isherwood and McEwan (1994:49) quote Luther as saying that a woman is 'never truly her own master. God formed her body to belong to a man, to have and to rear children'. This belief has been perpetuated into the twenty first century. Due to the fact that a wife's body was seen - and still is seen - by many as her husband's property, many women have had to endure marital rape with no recourse. Throughout the centuries, men have claimed the right to sexual intercourse with their wives, with or without their wives' consent:

Until very recent times, marital rape was not recognised by the law and was therefore interpreted as an accepted practice. In the United Kingdom, British law only declared marital rape a criminal offence in 1991. Weitz (2000:1) states that in America between 10% to 14% of married women are subjected to marital rape. In South Africa marital rape was only proscribed in the *Prevention of Family Violence Act of 1993*. Cases of marital rape are seldom reported or prosecuted. Vetten and Bhana (2005:8) state that in their study of marital rape with twenty-two wives (which included women in long-term relationships), at least a third of the women had not disclosed their experiences of rape. The women believed that disclosure would not only tarnish their public image and their relationship to the rapist, but it also would affect their self-esteem. Kottler's study (cited in Vetten & Bhana 2005:8) on rape confirmed the discourse that 'men are entitled to conjugal rights and this left some women feeling obliged to have sex[ual intercourse] with their husbands because sex[ual intercourse] was their duty'.

Kottler states (quoted in Vetten & Bhana 2005:8) that most participants believed a refusal indicated 'frigidity', which then 'justified the partner's use of force to obtain sex[ual intercourse]'. Most of these women did not define their experiences of sexual violence as marital rape, but rather as 'forced or survival sex', as they believed that 'real' rape occurs between strangers in traditionally unsafe areas and involved the use of weapons. Some of the participants saw marital rape as obligatory sexual intercourse required to pay their husbands for the food and shelter provided for them and their children (Kottler, cited in Vetten & Bhana 2005:8).

(Spies 2006:55)

4.6.2   The possibility of an affair

Renate shared with me, that, in her forties, her marriage had been particularly difficult. *At that time she met another man who became a wonderful companion for her. This made Renate realise that she was very lonely in her own marriage. Her sexual needs of having caring and fulfilling sexual intercourse with her husband were not met, because her husband did not believe that she had sexual needs, nor did she feel emotionally safe enough to enjoy her sexual relationship with her husband. The other man knew that Renate would not divorce Frank. He therefore asked Renate whether she would consider having an affair with him. Renate gave this some thought and then told her husband about this. He was very shocked and told Renate that he did not realise that she was so unhappy in the marriage. The marital relationship did improve, but at times Frank still lashed out with his tongue. He also developed diabetes; consequently, due to damage to the fine capillaries in the penis, penetrative sexual intercourse became a challenge.*

4.6.3 Seeking help

Renate and I journeyed in pastoral therapeutic conversations. During these conversations we explored the power relations within her marriage, boundaries and how patriarchy operated. *Renate shared that even though she had not heard about the concept of patriarchy before, she certainly had felt its effects over the years. Renate discovered a new sense of self-worth during our journey. She started to challenge Frank's abusive behaviour. After some time, Frank's attitude changed as he was confronted with his behaviour and as Renate set new boundaries. Their marriage changed and it became a safe and happy space for both of them.*

4.6.4 A lesser being

Before Renate started to challenge Frank's views of her, Frank did not regard or treat Renate as his equal. He often spoke to her in a very condescending and patronising manner. He believed that simply because he was a man, he was more intelligent and more capable than Renate. Frank's patriarchal attitude reflects the discourse which the ancient Greeks held regarding women. Aristotle's biological theory - that the male alone contributed formative potency in reproduction, thus only the male seed contributed to the embryo (Radford Ruether 1990:222) - had shaped Christian attitudes towards women from Augustine to Aquinas (Porcile-Santiso 1990:196). According to Aristotle's biological theory, the female was viewed as only the passive incubator of the male seed. Moreover, that every male seed would normally produce a male and that females are born only through a defect in gestation. This theory claimed that only if the male seed had failed to form fully, then would a female - a defective human – be formed as a result. According to Aristotle, this would explain why females are physically weaker and less capable of moral willpower or intellectual insight than males (Farley 2010:42). Augustine had picked up Aristotle's biological theory and had incorporated it in his teachings, which denied women equal human status with men. These thoughts were then extended in the teachings of Thomas Aquinas.

Once I had shared this discourse with Renate, this enabled her not to internalise this view of herself. Thereafter she was able to challenge such patriarchal ideas continuously and to construct instead a life-giving and preferred view of herself and of her value as a woman.

4.6.5 A marriage without penetrative sexual intercourse

Renate shared that over the past four years, she and Frank have experienced their *'marriage as being very different from before. For the most part, both now feel mostly content, loved and supported'*. Renate and I discussed sexuality during our therapy sessions, and how sexuality can operate differently in every marriage. *These discussions gave her the courage to speak to Frank about her sexual needs. Once Frank developed diabetes, penetrative sex was no longer possible for him. This led to his avoidance of intimacy or sexual play. Renate missed having sexual intimacy; she also experienced sexual frustration. Renate shared this with Frank, who appreciated her openness greatly. Whereas before he would have experienced this as criticism of his manhood and his ability as a lover, he now took a caring and understanding position. He encouraged Renate to engage in solo sex (masturbation) and also bought her a vibrator. Renate saw this gift as a very special act of care and for her it was the outward proof of the changes that had taken place within Frank's attitude towards her and how he treated her.*

4.6.6 Discourse regarding penis size

During our discussions regarding sexual functioning or the lack thereof, Renate and I explored the dominant discourse – which is embedded more particularly in men's understanding of their sexuality - of penis size and the meaning of an erection. This was relevant to Renate's situation, as Frank was less and less able to achieve and maintain erection and thus to have penetrative sex.

According to Holtzhausen and Stander (1996:57-59), the discourse of penile penetration for satisfactory sexual intercourse is often associated with another discourse: namely, that penis size - and by implication the size of the erection - is directly coupled to the pleasure afforded. Erections have always been important to men: the discourse regarding the size of the male penis was circulating even in biblical times. In 1 Kings 12:10, King Rehoboam boasts that his little finger is thicker than his father's waist to indicate that he - Rehoboam - was a more capable and powerful king than his father. The Hebrew word that was translated as 'little finger' could have referred to his penis, as in antiquity a man's penis size was seen as an indication of his power and abilities (Holtzhausen & Stander 1996:57-60).

Dr Abraham Morgentaler (2009), Professor of Urology at Harvard Medical School and a medical doctor who specializes in male reproductive and sexual health, also comments on the discourse of penis size. He states that man's obsession with penis size is nothing new. Ancient drawings in the ruins of Pompeii provide clear evidence of this obsession:

> Painted on the wall, with only minor decay since the eruption of Mt Vesuvius in the year 79 AD, was the picture of a nobleman with an enormous erect penis, the length and girth larger than a man's leg, placed on an ancient scale, with sacks of gold balanced on the other side. Some time ago I rediscovered that image on the Internet and have occasionally used it in lectures, with the quip that men have always viewed a large penis as worth its weight in gold.

<div align="right">(Morgentaler 2009)</div>

Morgentaler (2009) continues that it is 'common for men to incorrectly assume that difficulties in a relationship stem directly from their performance in bed'. In contrast, Morgentaler suggests that sexual problems often originate in non-sexual issues, such as alcoholism, abusiveness or a lack of affection that lead a partner to stray sexually. Renate shared that the previous lack of affection and intimacy in their marriage was due to constant conflict: she felt under attack most of the time. Once the relationship improved their intimate life also improved.

Renate shared that becoming aware of the discourse regarding male impotence made her more sensitive to Frank's possible sense of loss with regards to his manhood. It enabled her to consider and engage in alternative sexual practices in order to relieve Frank from the pressure of having to perform sexually or facing the frustration of not maintaining an erection. It also made her realise that it is acceptable for Christians to engage in alternative sexual practices such as masturbation and the use of sexual aids.

4.6.7　New beginnings

Renate shared that the unpacking of dominant discourse in this story was very helpful to her. Before our journey, Renate had no-one to talk to about the challenges she faced in her marriage. She felt voiceless and without any options. However, as we explored the discourses, Renate came to the realization that her frustrations were not all in her head. She was able to voice to it, explore and unpack it in terms of dominant discourse.

Renate shared that, by becoming aware of patriarchy and how power operates within this system, she was able to resist it. Through Renate's resistance, Frank also became aware of his abusive use of power. He was able to change his behaviour and attitudes. These changed attitudes had a ripple effect in the relationships of all three of their children. Two of the three had similar struggles in their marriages as their parents had had. Renate and Frank encouraged them to challenge the discourse

of patriarchy, to seek respectful ways of interaction and to build towards greater levels of equality and accountability. Renate shared that the changes in her children's relationships are marked. She is very grateful that they were able to address and challenge these destructive dominant discourses at a younger age than she had. Renate contributed the changes in her children's relationships to our journey as it had a ripple effect on all the relationships within their family. Renate had thus experienced what Weingarten (2003a:18) describes:

> Hurt creates an opportunity to repair and make stronger what has been torn by harm. Failure to do so creates a second injury. The vitality of family life and the well being of family members depends on the ability of all members to re-establish connection after disconnections have occurred. The work of repairing relationships extends forward in time, affecting generations of the future. Private misery affects public life. (And the converse is so as well.) Family life and civic life are intimately connected. Healing work in families creates a more robust citizenry to participate in communal life.

Renate and her family have experienced the restorative power of healing relationships and have come to a space of contentment. Renate shared that she and Frank now live mostly celibately in their marriage: neither of them feels the need for sexual intercourse any longer. Their marriage has become a space of companionship. They are now able to create intimacy without sexual actions. Renate felt that she did not want to engage in conversations that would unpack the meanings she held regarding sexuality, as this was no longer relevant in her life. She would much rather focus on the here and now than dwell in the past.

4.7   MAYA – MOTHER GODDESS

The choice of the pseudonym – Maya – was very symbolic for this co-searcher. Maya is the mother goddess – a term used to refer to any goddess associated with motherhood, fertility, creation or the bountiful embodiment of the Earth (Wikipedia Free Encyclopaedia: 2010). As this goddess is associated with so many nature goddesses, she is also sometimes referred to as Mother Earth or as the Earth Mother.

Maya chose this name to reflect what she would have wanted to be if she had not experienced her sexual unhappiness which was vaginismus as a result of a physical condition. Cauthery, Stanway and Cooper (1985:117) explain that 'vaginismus by definition is an unconscious tensing of the vaginal muscles, which renders any form of penetration in the vagina very difficult and even

impossible in some women'. *Not only had penetrative sex been very painful to Maya for many years, but she and her husband had also been unable to have any children. This pseudonym - Maya - speaks about her yearning to be a mother and to be at ease with her body.*

Maya had heard about my research and offered to share her story with me. She believed that not only would it be very important for other women to hear it, but that the telling of her story was also very important to her.

Due to the complexity of sexual problems arising from Maya's physical condition, it is impossible to do justice to Maya's story and the dominant discourses involved in similar stories within a thesis in which it just one of the many themes. The sexual challenges which result in childless marriage and the wide array of concomitant factors embedded in these stories need to be researched as an independent study. I will therefore give only a brief overview of Maya's story.

4.7.1 Maya's background

Maya is a forty-six year old woman who works in education. She sketched her background as follows: Her mother is Afrikaans from a Reformed Church tradition and her father is a German from the Evangelical Lutheran Church. She had been married for eighteen years, after being in a relationship with her husband for five years. No children were born from this union. They were divorced shortly before our conversation, which took place towards the end of 2009.

Maya's ex-husband, Justin, is an English-speaking teacher from a family which held no formal religious ties. Justin's mother rejected the church after she had been raped by a church Elder when she was eight years old. When she told her parents of the rape, she was punished and told that she was a shameful and sinful person and that she must have seduced the Elder. *Due to this traumatic experience, she never trusted the institution of the church again and did not encourage her children to participate in a faith community.*

4.7.2 Virginity and broken dreams

Maya's struggle with sexuality and sex *per se* started on her wedding night. She was a virgin, and at the time believed the same to be true for her husband. Maya did not receive much sex education, apart from a conversation with her mother in which her mother stated that sexual intercourse is not

always enjoyable, although it could be, but that the focus of a Christian marriage should be on a loving relationship. Maya knew '*the mechanics*' from reading about the subject and from the basic sex education which she had received at school.

On their wedding night, Maya and Justin tried having sexual intercourse, but this was very painful for Maya. *Having read many romantic novels, Maya believed that the breaking of the hymen is painful for most virgins, but once that is over, sex would be easy and enjoyable.* This was not her experience. Maya bled for three days and was in considerable pain. Maya went to see a female gynaecologist within the first week after the wedding. The doctor did not have much advice for her, other than that they must keep on trying and that eventually penetrative sex would stop being painful. After six months of trying, sex was still excruciatingly painful to Maya. *This process became very traumatic for Justin, as the only way in which they could achieve penetration, was to accept that the penetration would be painful to Maya.* He told Maya that he felt like a rapist and stopped initiating sexual contact. *In the hope of matters improving, Maya initiated sexual contact frequently, almost every day, except when she had a period.*

After six months, she went to a different - male - gynaecologist. *There was some improvement after Maya had corrective surgery to enlarge her vaginal opening, but by this time, both Maya and Justin were very tense and nervous about penetrative sex and even sexual contact in general. Justin felt inadequate as lover and blamed their inexperience for the state of affairs, whilst Maya felt that her body had betrayed her: 'Every fifteen year-old can do it, but I can't'. The stress and continuous disappointment destroyed Maya and Justin's sense of intimacy: both felt very isolated. Maya shared that as she was very embarrassed about not being able to enjoy penetrative sex, she felt she could not speak to anyone about her experiences. Justin also started to avoid the subject. He saw it as Maya's problem, which she had to sort out, increasingly accusing her of frigidity, implying that it was all in her mind.*

4.7.3   The unrealistic expectations

Maya believes that the way in which the media portrays sex played an important part in both her own and in Justin's expectation of sexual intercourse. '*Movies and pop songs portray sex as great fun and never mention that it might be difficult or that there might be a problem'.* Justin enjoyed listening to vocal music. *The overwhelming message in these songs was usually that sexuality is the beginning and end of all relationships. Maya felt bombarded with messages of insistence on 'good'*

sex from all directions and felt that Justin was 'brainwashed' with these messages, especially in the songs he knew virtually by heart. Maya felt that feminism was one such source which had contributed to this discourse of 'good' sex. She believes that feminism 'exerts a lot of pressure on women to claim their sexual rights'. She also understood the feminist message as one which says that women should experience and express desire, sexual pleasure and orgasms. Maya understood this discourse to have a sub-text which implied that, if you do not enjoy sex, then you are abnormal. Maya believes that this sub-text is found in the deafening silence about the difficulties of sex.

The religious construction that Maya held regarding sex was that a happy sexual marital relation was the gift and proof of a healthy and intimate marriage. After listening to all these messages, Maya felt that 'she was never able to measure up'. Not only did she feel like a failure in terms of her sexuality, but so did Justin. This resulted in their avoiding the topic and sometimes each other. After two years, they had decided to try for a baby, and therefore had sex 'like clockwork – at the very least every second day, except when I had my period'. Justin did not initiate this intercourse, and there was very little - if any - foreplay. Maya would have loved to 'just kiss' sometimes as foreplay, but this was too intimate and no longer happened very often. As their isolation grew, so did the silence regarding sexual issues.

4.7.4   Only penetrative sex is real sex

Looking back, Maya realised that one of the most damaging dominant discourses was that both she and Justin saw penetrative sex as 'the real thing. Everything else was play-play'. It took Justin and Maya eleven years before they started to experiment with alternative ways of having sex. Maya still felt immense frustration, however, as she wanted to fall pregnant, but this was not possible without penetrative sex, which continued to be uncomfortable. As Maya did not experience orgasm during penetration, she felt that Justin thought he was disappointing her, but that this was somehow her fault. Discourses surrounding vaginismus as pathology and labels such as 'frigid' made her feel even guiltier. Their frustrations grew steadily; more and more damage was done to the other aspects of their relationship. Justin avoided discussing the issue with Maya: he felt that it was her problem. Maya, in turn, needed closeness and intimacy to feel sexually responsive. They got caught up in a cycle of avoidance, blame and guilt. The emotional distance between them had a negative effect on Maya's desire and responsiveness. Maya wanted to spend time with Justin, 'touching without a goal', but at the same time she felt that she was cheating him because she did not want sex as much as she wanted intimacy. 'I was not performing so I did not have much value – it is like window

shopping forever. I am somehow just too stupid to do it'. Feelings of inadequacy became constant travelling companions for both Justin and Maya. Both struggled with guilt: Maya because she was not able to 'perform' sexually and Justin because he felt like a rapist. Sexual issues became a dangerous minefield which both of them avoided as much as possible.

4.7.5   Sexual self-care

Maya went to see a psychologist who challenged her ideas regarding masturbation, sex toys and sexual aids. Maya did not want to use sexual aids, because '*if you need a toy, then what does it say about your body?' Maya viewed the suggestion to use a sex toy as confirmation of her body's failure to have enjoyable penetrative sex with her husband. 'It was almost like giving up hope for it to be different'.*

Maya shared that although she was able to masturbate, she 'did not feel comfortable with it'. In addition to her failure to enjoy sex, she felt as if she 'was cheating Justin'. Maya did not regard masturbation as part of her 'biblical' construction of sexuality. Nor was it part of the romantic picture she had about sex. Maya saw masturbation instead as an exclusively physical act to relieve sexual tension, with no connection to self or her husband or partner.

Maya's views on masturbation are commonly shared. Many Christians have negative ideas regarding masturbation (Craig & Stander 2008:97; Farley 2010:235-236; Nelson 2010:99). For many years, churches condemned masturbation as sinful and a form of self-love at best and sexual perversion at worst. This dominant discourse arose from an incorrect interpretation of the story about Onan and Tamar in Genesis 38:9. It was an Old Testament practice that if a married man should die before any children were born from the union, his brother had to sire a child with the widow. Having a son was important to a woman: after the death of her husband a woman had access to resources via her son. In the story of Genesis, Onan did not want to comply with this custom: he thus ensured that he ejaculated outside Tamar's vagina onto the ground. God killed Onan as God was displeased with Onan's refusal to impregnate Tamar. Many Christians interpret this 'spilling of seed on the ground' as masturbation, deducing that God killed Onan because he masturbated. We see this in the term 'onanism', which is used to refer to masturbation (Holtzhausen & Stander 1996:97).

For centuries masturbation has been regarded as a sin in many Christian and non-Christian traditions (Farley 2010:5, 236). Many myths also surround the practice of masturbation, in addition to the Old

Testament sanction against 'onanism' as sin. Even as recently as the 1970s it was general practice to warn teenage boys not to masturbate: this would cause madness, blindness or hair growth on the palms (Craig & Stander 2008:100). The discourse of masturbation as sinful has caused Christians many years of guilt, fear and ambivalent feelings. Although most churches have revised their view of masturbation, this new view is seldom articulated. This silence has allowed the continued marginalisation of many people: unsure about the practice of masturbation, they remain trapped in guilt.

After our conversation, I shared with Maya these discourses surrounding masturbation. She did not reflect on this discourse other than confirming her discomfort regarding masturbation. She shared, however, that it was helpful to be aware that other people also struggle with some of the issues she has struggled with: this made her feel less alienated and isolated. In time her own discomfort with this practice improved. *As time passed, Maya became more comfortable with masturbation as they engaged in mutual masturbation. For Maya, however, enjoyable penetrative sex remained the goal that she could not achieve – the goal that undermined her identity as a woman.*

4.7.6 Constructions of identity

'My identity was constructed in being a good wife and having children. Making a home, cooking [which Maya enjoys as an act of community]*, being there for the other person. Sexuality is part of it. I was a good wife, but it still was not enough. He did stay though'*. Maya felt that she must have done some things right, as Justin did not pack up and leave. He remained in the marriage for thirteen years, despite the sexual problems. Even so, Maya still had an ever-present sense of failure: '*Your worth as a woman resides in your ability to have sex. It felt to me that all other things that I tried were irrelevant - it was just not good enough. All the other things that I tried never made up for my inability to have sex'*. Maya's ideas remind us of how women were seen in Judaism: a woman's most prized possession was her sexuality and having children was seen as her main function. We find similar discourses - which frame women's role as nurturer and wife – embedded later in Protestant thought.

Maya did fall pregnant once, but she lost the baby at the end of her first trimester. She described this as '*a double betrayal'* of her body: it could not enjoy sex, nor could it keep a child. '*My body dropped me again'. The implication for Maya of this was that she had failed both as a wife and as a woman. Her own body was her worst enemy.*

4.7.7 Depression as companion

Depression became Justin's annual companion. Every winter Justin would struggle with depression, which intensified as the years went by. Maya still tried to create some non-sexual closeness, as penetrative sex remained a fraught area. Although they had sex about five times per week, penetration was still not enjoyable for Maya and was accompanied with much stress and physical discomfort. She enjoyed touch, and other forms of sexual contact, but Justin said that he did not believe that she could enjoy their sexual contact, as she could not climax during penetration, and he therefore felt inadequate.

In 2005 Justin went to see a psychologist about the depression. He then decided that he could not continue with the marriage. Encouraged by the psychologist, he moved out of their home with immediate effect. During this time he became involved with another woman and had an affair. In this time Maya saw the same psychologist, who was also a medical doctor, and who was able to help her. She gave Maya exercises to relax her pelvic muscles and showed her techniques that would enable painless penetration. Maya practised daily with a dildo. The day Justin came to tell Maya of the affair and that he thought that a divorce would be more honest, the two of them – for the first time ever – were able to have enjoyable sex. They decided against the divorce, and Justin moved back home three months later.

4.7.8 Sexual happiness versus emotional connection

Maya and Justin were able to have enjoyable sex, but the emotional connection that they had had in the earlier years of their marriage was absent. Although both of them tried to re-build the connection, they were unable to do so. That winter, depression revisited Justin and a cycle of moving out and moving back began, until the marriage deteriorated to such an extent that Justin felt that divorce had become inevitable.

4.7.9 Confessions

In November 2006, a year after Maya and Justin started to have enjoyable sex, Justin confessed to having had affairs. He also admitted that he was not a virgin at the time of their wedding, as he had initially stated that he was. Justin confessed that between 1999 and 2000 he had started 'cruising': he had picked up prostitutes for sex. Justin had had some unprotected sex and had subsequently infected

Maya. In 2007 Maya was diagnosed with the human papilloma virus, as well as other sexually transmitted infections.

Despite their having some very good holidays together, and being comfortable with each other, Justin moved out in 2009 because he felt that their connection was not strong enough anymore. He resumed his relationship with a lover and got divorced from Maya. They nevertheless remain friends and continue to keep contact.

4.7.10 Reflection

Maya's story captures the extreme silence in which sexual unhappiness operates. It reveals the isolation, the feelings of inadequacy and failure, as well as the sense of lost identity. *Maya shared that she was not able to talk to any of her friends or family about her struggle. She lived behind a mask. She had shared her hurt and desperation with no-one, not only because of her loyalty to Justin, but also because she felt ashamed and a failure: 'If I needed physical contact I pay for it – I went to a beauty therapist or for a massage.* [It's] *not that different from paying for sex, is it?* [It's] *just more socially acceptable '.*

Maya shared that initially she was very nervous to tell her story, as she did not know how she would deal with it on an emotional level. Nevertheless, she felt that the re-telling of her story was very helpful, as it broke the silence and therefore the isolation. Maya believes that only by telling and sharing stories regarding the sexual challenges that some marriages encounter would the silencing dominant discourses - which operate in sexual unhappiness - be challenged and changed. Maya sent Justin this story, and he agreed that the story should be told, saying that 'to filter and edit would not be true, so yes', adding 'I wish you could have been the Maya you wanted to be'.

At the time of our conversation Maya became very ill. Due to these complications we were not able to continue our journey.

4.8   JULIA: FACING THE PAST

Julia is an Afrikaans-speaking woman in her late forties; she worships at a Dutch Reformed church. *Julia comes from a close-knit family and grew up in a small town in the Lowveld. Julia's parents were very religious: going to church was important to them. They attended both services every*

Sunday and they had to be seated in church one hour before the service commenced. Their family was organised according to patriarchal principles. Her father was head of the home. No one dared to challenge his authority and her mother supported his position fully and unquestioningly. At half past five every evening, the family would read the Bible and pray together. As a child, Julia enjoyed going church and her faith was very important to her. But she did not know why she did not like Sundays.

Julia, one of six children, described her childhood as happy and carefree. She had a close relationship with her eldest brother, Jan, who was six years older than her. Julia's mother is still living and they see each other often. Julia has been married to Willem for almost twenty five years. They have a son and a daughter, both of whom have finished school and are studying at a tertiary level. Julia is a keen sportsperson and competes at provincial level in her sport.

When Julia heard about my research, she contacted me and asked to come to see me about a private matter, but one which she was quite nervous about. During this initial conversation Julia shared with me that she was living in a sexually unhappy marriage and that infidelity was a well-known companion of hers. I invited her to become a co-searcher in this research journey. Julia explained that in order to understand her current sexual practices, we would need to explore how her sexuality had developed.

All quotes from Julia's words, as well as excerpts from my transcription notes and summarising letters, have been translated from Afrikaans to English. Julia has checked all of these and has confirmed that they are truthful to the original Afrikaans text.

4.8.1   A sexually active teenager

Julia started to date at the age of thirteen. Her relationships were very physical and involved all forms of sexual play except penile penetrative sex. *Julia was very aware of the fact that it was not the norm for a thirteen year old girl to be so physical. She was also very aware of the fact that if the extent of her sexual play were known, she would be seen as an 'easy girl or a girl with a reputation'.*

Julia's first serious boyfriend – the person with whom she lost her virginity - was Pieter, After their first act of penetrative sex, Pieter accused her of not being a virgin and that she had lied to him. *This accusation surprised and offended her greatly; firstly, because he accused her of lying and secondly,*

because of the double standard involved: Pieter was not a virgin. Pieter's accusation is strongly reminiscent of the discourse which expects women to stay virgins until they are married, whereas men are allowed to 'sow their wild oats', as discussed previously (Section 2.7.6).

Sex soon became a tool of power for Julia. '*Sex was my way to toy with men. I enjoyed enticing them sexually. I would excite them and then leave them. I was a genuine "cock teaser"'*. Julia shared that although she enjoyed the feeling of control that this gave her, she could not really understand why this should be so. *She enjoyed being in a position of power – 'I was in charge; I could decide how far we will go'*.

It would seem as if Julia had internalised the discourse which labels women as the seductress of men. This discourse has its origins in patriarchy. Heschel (2003:155) states that in many ancient societies women were regarded as fountains of sexual temptation who could seduce even the most pious man. This belief is closely linked to the creation story, in which Eve is portrayed as Adam's temptress (see Sections 2.10.2 & 3.5.8). *Nowadays one only has to watch music videos to see this discourse at work. Women are frequently portrayed as lustful predators on the prowl for male victims.* Women are seen as objects that arouse, precipitate and inflame men's natural sexual urges (Hare-Mustin 1994:24).

Even though Julia's actions were deliberate, she nevertheless frequently experienced guilt after these sexual actions and felt tormented by this. She also knew that what she was doing was wrong in terms of her Christian beliefs: at times she felt as if she would explode from these guilt feelings. Throughout our conversations Julia often used the metaphor of exploding to refer to the emotional discomfort which she experienced.

After she and Pieter broke up, Julia had several other sexual partners, but these were mostly within a relationship. During her Grade 10 year her sexuality shifted. She now engaged in casual sex (although still with specific partners), *but this usually had to take place in a 'dangerous' place in order to heighten her sense of adventure.* One such place was the girls' bathroom at her school during the school day. She had one specific 'sex buddy': a good friend who was also willing to engage in this risky sexual behaviour. Julia started to collect '*trophies*' – *the more popular the boy was, the greater the achievement.* She called this '*trophy sex*'. In Julia's Grade 11 year, a visiting rugby team came to play against their school. Julia remembered fixing her sites on the visiting first

team rugby captain. She did indeed have sex with him; but this experience was an extremely upsetting one for Julia:

> *He was the first man that treated me like a slut. He took control and then told me that I am supposed to know what to do. He said that he knew that I am experienced. I realised that my sex buddy must have discussed me with the rugby boys and this made me feel cheap and humiliated.*

4.8.2 Settling down in married life

In Julia's Matric year she met Willem. He was working and their relationship was soon serious. They got married after Julia finished Matric. Julia felt that sex with Willem was never exciting or enjoyable: '*sex became an effort*'. *She missed the adrenaline rush she used to get when she engaged in risky sex.* Julia had their children soon after their marriage and she became a stay-at-home mother. *Although Julia accepted the role of mother, caretaker and housewife, at times she still felt a restlessness that she could not explain.*

4.8.3 Disappointed by marital sex

Julia described Willem as a very conservative, inexperienced and dull lover. *Sex was not very important to Willem. He preferred to have 'conventional sex': sex in the bedroom with the lights off and in the missionary position. Willem did not pay much attention to Julia's sexual needs: he did not engage with Julia on an emotional or physical level before he approached her for sexual intercourse; there was usually little or no foreplay before penetration; and he tended to ejaculate very soon after penetration. Because Willem did not tend to Julia's sexual satisfaction, she became increasingly frustrated sexually. On the few occasions when Julia plucked up the courage to ask him to give her oral sex, Willem refused. 'He did not like kinky sex'. As time went by Julia became more and more disappointed in their sex life.* She often tried to speak to Willem about her frustration and sexual needs, but their sexual practices and routines did not change. *Eventually Julia started to avoid having sex. She also gave up talking about sex, as she felt it did not have any result. 'I felt very lonely and I missed feeling desired. I missed feeling that I have the ability to excite a man and that he wanted me. I wanted a man to work for my affection and show that he wants to be with me'.*

4.8.4   An extra-marital affair

Willem was building a career for himself, whilst Julia was a stay-at-home mom. *Willem worked long hours and was often pre-occupied with his work. 'Willem neglected me, but I loved him. I did not want to divorce him. Everything else in the marriage worked, except for our sex life'*. At the age of twenty eight, Julia had her first extra-marital affair. This affair lasted for more than two years. *Having this secret created immense stress and tension in Julia; her relationship with Willem also deteriorated and became increasingly strained.*

Julia's son was now six years old. Often, when she took care of his personal hygiene, she experienced an unease that she could not understand. There was a smell to his body that made her uneasy, but she did not know why. Julia started to develop flash-backs and memories that she could not understand. She believed that she was going crazy with guilt. The dreams and memories increased and intensified. Julia eventually went to a psychiatrist.

4.8.5   Memories and flash backs

Julia started to have flashbacks about her childhood days. With the help of a psychiatrist she realised that these were memories about her being sexually abused, which were only now coming to the surface of her consciousness. *This came as a great shock to her, as she had no previous recollection of this.* It became apparent that Jan, Julia's older brother with whom she was quite close, was the one who had sexually molested her.

Julia remembered that as a child, her family usually had a special Sunday lunch after which the family would have an afternoon nap. The molestation usually happened in the lounge on Sundays when the rest of the family were resting. With the help of her psychiatrist Julia eventually could remember all the details about the molestation. Julia immediately felt great concern for her younger sister, who, as a grown woman, still suffered from enuresis (bed-wetting) and had had several nervous breakdowns. *Julia was not only filled with rage but also with a sense of loss.*

She was deeply disappointed and felt betrayed by her brother. A lot of things started to make sense to Julia, such as why she did not like Sundays. Julia shared that since her children had been born she had refused to lie down with her husband on a Sunday after lunch: she always went to lie with her children instead. Although she felt an incredible need to do this, she could never understand why. It

also then made sense why her first lover thought she was not a virgin, and why her hymen was already torn.

Julia recalled that when she was in high school Jan was already working. *His conversations often included sexual innuendos. He used to brag to Julia about his abilities as a lover and of his 'scores'. Julia believes that the sexual molestation had changed her construction of sexuality and that this had subsequently played itself out in many different ways in her life.*

4.8.6   A time of adjustment

Remembering the molestation was followed by a time of adjustment, not only for Julia, but also for her husband. He was also very angry with Jan. Willem and Jan used to be very good friends, but knowing now what Jan had done changed how Willem saw him. Julia and her family relocated to Cape Town soon after this disclosure. This brought relief as they no longer saw Jan.

For some years Julia continued to carry the secret of what happened to her as a young girl. *This was very difficult for her. She was still very angry, especially that the remembering of the molestation had had such an effect on her. Julia decided to break the silence.* She told some of her friends what had happened to her; she also told some of her family members. Julia shared that breaking the silence was very liberating for her. Julia was not able to disclose fully however, as she felt the need to protect her mother. Julia felt that her mother was now an old woman, and that telling her would just upset her. She also reasoned that telling her mother would not change the facts. She therefore continued to carry this secret in some family circles. Julia called this *'the Black Box' that needs to be kept shut.* In our exploration of the 'Black Box', Julia shared that she was afraid to tell her mother about the molestation. She was afraid that her mother would not believe her or that she might even blame Julia for the molestation. Julia also shared that she was not only angry with Jan, but also with her parents. She felt that they should have protected her.

Julia's comment resonates with the 'mother blaming' discourse. Jenkins (1990:40) explains that 'some victims of incestuous abuse appear to be less forgiving of and attribute more blame to their mothers for not protecting them, than to their fathers [and brothers] for abusing them'. Although Julia did not shift the blame from Jan to her mother, nevertheless she felt that both of her parents did not protect her.

Julia's fear that her mother might blame her reflects the discourse which places female sexuality under suspicion by defining women as the seductresses of men (Section 3.5.8). I link this discourse to the discourse which sees male sexuality as instinctive and, by implication, portrays the man as the victim of his sexual urges. It is not uncommon to find that women - and even children - are blamed for men's inappropriate sexual behaviour towards them, which men supposedly cannot control.

Sexual molestation and abuse flourish when speaking about sexual issues becomes taboo. Julia experienced this taboo in her childhood home. Sex was never spoken about and never referred to. This silence holds a message of blame and guilt, which victims often internalise (Jenkins 1990:13-15). Some victims interpret such feelings of blame and shame as confirmation that they somehow are responsible for their own victimisation:

> Statistics South Africa (1998 section 11:13) found in their study of *Crimes: Prosecutions and convictions with regard to certain offences* that 10% of the victims of sexual crimes did not report these crimes because they felt that the crime was partly their fault. Another 2, 2% of victims did not report the crime because they feared being blamed for the crime and 9, 5% feared being exposed or embarrassed.
>
> (Spies 2006:118)

These statistics are used to emphasize the shared discourse of blame. Organisations working with gender based violence often estimate the unreported cases of sexual abuse at a much higher level: based on my experiences in my private practice, I would agree.

Julia decided that she would not confront Jan as long as her mother is alive: she is scared that if this came out, it might split the family in two. Julia shared that she would like to confront her brother, but is afraid of his possible response. Julia said that although she is scared that he might deny it, it would be even worse if he acknowledged it, but did not show any remorse.

Julia still feels anger towards Jan, but has started a process of letting this anger go. Through reflecting during our journey on the relationship between sexual molestation and her relationship to her sexuality, Julia felt that this had had a major impact. She believes that her promiscuous behaviour at high school was due to the sexual molestation, even though she did not remember it at the time. She also believes that it was a major contributing factor to her extra-marital sexual activities and her need to be in control. This speaks of power relations which I will unpack in greater detail in Chapter Five.

Moultrup (1990:16) states that when dealing with extra-marital relations, it is helpful to understand that 'emotional trauma in people's lives does occasionally lead to dysfunctional patterns. Affairs are one of those patterns'. While this in no way condones or encourages involvements in extramarital affairs, acknowledging this link can prompt useful restructuring of relationships and, if so, 'it could be a painful but ultimately helpful crisis'. It would seem that remembering the molestation had helped Julia to understand her constructions of sexuality better. She was able to look at the effects not only of the abuse, but also of how it had lived in her sexual behaviour. Changing these constructions was a slow and difficult process for Julia.

4.8.7   Breaking destructive patterns

After their relocation to Cape Town, Julia started to rebuild her life. She was now able to speak about the sexual molestation. However, the challenges that the marriage had previously faced in terms of sex, were still present. Willem's business went through a crisis and he nearly went insolvent. *This caused Willem - the sole provider for the family - great stress. The worse the situation became at the business, the more he withdrew from Julia. Willem developed stress-induced erectile dysfunction.* Erectile dysfunction (ED), or male impotence as it is also called, is the inability to develop or maintain an erection of the penis sufficient for satisfactory sexual performance (Cauthery & Stanway 1985:92). Because Willem could not rely on his ability to get or maintain an erection, he started to avoid Julia. Their physical contact became less and less to the point where Willem would not even hold Julia's hand. He used to stay up late at night, and often slept in front of the television just to avoid physical contact. In later conversations Willem confirmed that he had taken these actions deliberately so as to avoid any possibility of intimacy. *Willem and Julia started to drift apart. Julia realised that the ED was due to stress, but even so, she felt very rejected. Julia often spoke to Willem and pleaded with him to consult a doctor for some help. Willem consistently refused; eventually there was no intimacy in the marriage. This continued for a period of four years. Julia shared that what was worst for her was not so much that she did not get any sex, but that she missed being caressed and desired. Not only did all physical contact cease, but they also did not communicate anymore about it.* According to Moultrup (1990:23) communication is 'important to effective and healthy family functioning'. He sees communication as 'a reflection of the more abstract dynamics of an emotional system, rather than as a "cause" of those dynamics'. Moultrup argues that couples who do not talk to each other or miss-communicate do so because 'there is some

type of emotional underpinning that is critical'. In Julia's situation it was the absence of sex, but also the absence of talking about the absence of sex, that made talking impossible.

As self doubt crept in, Julia started to believe that she was no longer attractive. Old patterns returned and Julia became involved in sexual flings. These flings made her feel attractive and desirable again. Julia made it clear that she was not interested in having an affair, but just a 'sexual service'. She explained:

> *I still loved Willem very much even if I was very unhappy in the marriage. Often people say you must get out of an unhappy marriage. It is easy to say walk out. Willem and I have history, we built a life together – you don't just walk out. Willem is my best friend, I cannot lose my husband and my best friend. Life without Willem will not be worth living. Anyway, I have been a housewife my whole life, how would I support myself? I never wanted an affair. I never wanted to do this, but it is the only way that I can have some physical contact. If it means that I have to get a sexual service – so be it. I would rather get sex in my marriage. But I have tried everything and Willem refused to get help. I so wished it could be different.*

Julia continued to have sexual flings. She and a divorced man contracted that they could contact each other for a '*sexual service'*: but this '*sexual service*' is all that their relationship is or ever would be. Julia was always very sad whenever she spoke about this. *She also felt bitterness and anger towards Willem. She felt that he left her with no other option but to be unfaithful. She had tremendous guilt about her unfaithfulness; this in turn caused her much stress. Once more she was keeping a secret, a secret that trapped her in guilt. She desired to have a sexually happy marriage, but after so many years of disappointment and struggles, she has given up hope.*

4.8.8   Being discovered

Willem became suspicious of Julia. He started to check-up on her after he saw an sms message - which was actually quite innocent - from a male friend. As Willem paid closer attention to her, Julia's anger increased. She said: '*Why did it first have to come to this - before he would take notice of me?'* Willem confronted Julia about the sms message and she was able to explain that it was from a friend. Fairly soon hereafter, Willem became complacent once more and hardly took any notice of Julia.

Soon after this incident, Julia was invited to visit a male friend whose own marriage was going through a tough time. Julia decided to go. After arriving there, Julia decided not to engage in any sexual talk or actions. She convinced the man, who was younger than her, to rather work at his marriage and to sort their problems out. *Julia believed that being part of this research journey had helped her to take that decision. She realised that having sexual flings are dangerous on all levels: emotionally, spiritually as well as physically. Julia also started to do sexual self-care (masturbate) and therefore felt that she had an alternative.*

However, someone saw Julia leaving this man's apartment and informed Willem. *He was shattered.* Julia told him what happened and that even though she had intended to have a sexual fling with this man, she did not. After a few days Willem accepted her explanation. He also told her that although he is convinced that there has been infidelity, he did not want to know about it. The two of them sat down and - for the first time in years - talked about their relationship and their future together.

4.8.9   Miracles do happen

Willem realised that his denial of their sexual problems and his refusal to address this had made Julia very vulnerable to sexual indiscretions. He agreed to get help for his erectile dysfunction. Willem saw a doctor shortly after this and, with some changes in his blood pressure medication as well as with sexual aids, Willem was able to get and maintain an erection. Willem came to see me to discuss the constructions he held regarding 'Christian sex'; *thereafter, both Julia and he started to enjoy a fulfilling and exciting intimate life.*

4.8.10   Depression came to visit

The years of tension now took their toll on Julia: she developed a depression. Willem and Julia continued to work at their relationship. *They were able to talk to each other, be intimate and to enjoy being together. But guilt stayed with Julia.* One evening, when Willem and Julia were having an argument, in the heat of the moment Willem referred to the 'incident' – thus when she was seen at the other man's flat. *Julia felt so overwhelmed with guilt that she tried to commit suicide by taking an overdose of pain pills. Julia shared afterwards that she did not really want to commit suicide; she was just so tired of fighting against the guilt that she did something irrational.* Julia was placed on anti-depressants and I saw her for individual therapy. *Since then, Julia has regained her previous sense of wellbeing and is happy in her marriage.* As part of my contract with Julia, we continue to

meet bi-monthly as my commitment to this research journey and to her. She asked me to keep her accountable to her decision to be faithful.

4.8.11   Keeping safe

Julia has decided that she no longer wanted to engage in sexual flings and is determined to stay faithful. She is keeping safe in various ways. She has deleted all her sexual contacts' numbers from her phone. She does not take any unknown or unidentified calls. She no longer stays for the social after a round of golf, unless Willem can join her. *She continues to meet regularly with me as a way of being accountable. When Julia feels herself sliding towards becoming bored with her marriage, she shares this with Willem who then makes an effort to be with her and to create opportunities for fun.* Julia has now been faithful for two years. In Chapter Five I will unpack the meanings, dilemmas and challenges which Julia's journey held for her.

4.9   MAGDA – BEING THE PERFECT WIFE

Magda is a forty-seven year old Afrikaans-speaking woman. She has been married to Marius for twenty five years and they have a son at university. Magda and her family worship at a Dutch Reformed Church where she is lead singer in the worship team. She is very involved in her community and has served for many years on the executive of a prominent Afrikaans women's organisation.

Magda has been in an extra-marital affair for the past seven years.

All quotes of Magda's words - as well as excerpts from my transcription notes and summarising letters – have been translated from Afrikaans into English. All these translations have been checked by Magda and confirmed as truthful to the original Afrikaans text. In some instances I include the Afrikaans words to capture the cultural nuances within the specific words. I indicate excerpts and paraphrases from my transcripts or summarising letters with *italics*.

4.9.1   Prescribed roles

Magda described Marius, her husband, as a *'typical traditional Afrikaner male' – ['n stoere, boere Afrikaner man]*. Marius is set in his ways: *Food is very important for Afrikaner men and he wants*

meat, rice and potatoes. He believes the most suitable colour for a house is white, and rugby is very important [*hy glo aan vleis, rys en aartappels, 'n huis moet wit geverf wees en rugby is baie belangrik]*. For Magda, these words capture Marius's identity. They reveal the things that are important to him: typical traditional Afrikaner meals, a sensible home, and sport, in particular rugby. Magda described Marius in the following way:

> *Marius sees his most important role as that of provider. He is an honest and hard working person with integrity. He is a sociable person and very popular with friends. He is known for being willing to assist, and is a loyal and generous friend who is very hospitable. He is courteous and well-mannered. However, he has quite an ego and believes that he knows best and that the world works according to his theories.*

Magda felt that, to a great extent, Marius's set ways have determined the dynamics of their marriage.

4.9.2   Dynamics of the marriage

Magda's marriage and household is organised according to the traditional roles for men and women, as prescribed by patriarchy. Marius is the primary breadwinner for the family. After the birth of their son, Magda was a stay-at-home mom and only returned to the formal labour force when their son was in the latter part of primary school. Magda explained that Marius regards the household chores - such as preparing meals and the organising of the home - as her responsibility. These patriarchal ideas about the role of men and women within marriage formed part of the dominant discourse in the 1980s in South Africa: most Afrikaans-speaking homes were organised according to these prescribed roles (see Sections 2.10 & 2.14).

Early in the marriage Marius made it clear that all Magda's activities which were outside the home needed to be secondary to her role as homemaker, wife and mother. Marius also insisted that, because he is the primary breadwinner, all activities in which Magda participated had to be secondary to his work. He often reminded her that '*it is his income that puts food on the table*'. *These kinds of remarks made Magda feel that everything that she contributes is of little or no value. Magda stated: 'I am allowed to go to work and gym - other than that am I supposed to take care of the home and garden'.*

For the past few years, Magda has held a senior position which is also quite demanding. Since working fulltime outside the home, Magda has employed the services of a domestic worker and

gardener as part of her support system. Magda makes a substantial financial contribution to the household. Magda feels that, although Marius seems to appreciate this, she does not think that Marius puts any value to her work. '*He seldom shows any interest in my career and minimises the challenges that I face within my working day*'. *Magda shared that Marius's attitude impacts on the constructions which she holds in terms of her identity, which is quite different in the two situations. In her work environment, Magda feels competent, valued, recognised, strong and in control. In contrast, in her home environment she feels insignificant and unimportant: her main function is to serve and fulfil her duties as prescribed by the traditional gender roles, thus to serve her husband.*

Magda shared that she believes that these prescribed roles have impacted on the interaction between Marius and her, and on how they see each other.

4.9.3   Through his eyes

Magda and Marius started to date when she was eighteen years old. She described herself as very '*innocent at the time*'. Magda feels that Marius still sees her as that '*innocent eighteen year old girl as he at times treats me as a fragile porcelain doll*'. Magda believes that Marius does not see her as a '*grown-up woman with mature needs....It is as if he has placed me on a pedestal. His interaction with me is courteous and correct. He cannot be "basic" [primitive in terms of allowing himself to be sexual] with me. I have never become a woman to him, but am still a young girl in his eyes. This annoys me as I want a relationship which includes sexuality*'.

Often when Marius shows his affection towards Magda, he will use baby talk and childish language. *This irritates Magda very much. She believes that this epitomises their relationship – 'he still sees me as a child. I am not a child. I am a grown-up sexual woman who wants to be desired and to have sex'.* This attitude is reminiscent of the position of women in patriarchy. I shared this discourse with Magda. *She confirmed that it is her experience that women are not seen as equals: they often have the same status as a child in relation to the man or at least in some instances.*

Magda shared that her relationship with Marius is more that of friends than of lovers. Sex, however, has become a tool of power within their marriage.

4.9.4 Using sex to control and punish

Marius has specific expectations in terms of what he believes would be acceptable behaviour for women. Magda explained that he has set ideas regarding how a wife should speak to her husband and how she should behave in public. Magda described herself as an intense person who is animated: *When she speaks she uses her voice, facial expressions as well as hands. Magda feels that her words and tone of voice is often misinterpreted by Marius. He will often accuse her of being nasty when she had no intention of being nasty. Over the years this became an issue in their relationship. Magda has become very aware of how she speaks and continuously keeps herself in check. Magda feels that Marius is 'passive-aggressive' and will therefore often 'punish' her for behaviour which he feels is inappropriate or which he sees as her being nasty. At such times Marius will still be very cordial towards Magda, but emotionally cold and withdrawn. He will not touch her and will refuse to engage with her on a physical level. Magda experienced this 'withdrawal as punishment for her wrong-doing'. Over the years it established itself in the following pattern:*

> *I will do something wrong (most of the time I will not even know what) then Marius will become distant and withdrawn. I will try to rescue the situation by being nice and accommodating. I will approach him or initiate physical contact, which he will reject or ignore. My response to this is that I too withdraw and he in turn then becomes even more withdrawn. During the punishment period there is no physical contact, especially not sexual and he rejects any sexual advances that I make. After a while, once he feels that he has punished me long enough, he will warm to me again.*

At first Magda tried to win Marius over by being nice and even trying to seduce him to break the separation, but he would only ignore her advances. Eventually she too stopped trying. Marius now believes that she does not enjoy or want sex. Magda experience these separations as Marius's love as being 'conditional'. She had to earn his love and affection with the correct behaviour. If she does not comply, he would take his love away, which she then had to earn back by good behaviour. 'I have to be good all the time [ek moet die hele tyd net soet wees]. When I am not good, then I am not loved. I am only loved when I am good. No-one is always good.' The operation of power within Magda's marriage will be explored in Chapter Five.

Magda shared that often she did not even know what she had done wrong. It felt to her as if she was being judged, sentenced and punished without a trial. Magda explained that this withdrawal was very difficult to address. Marius would always stay polite, but he was cold and withdrawn towards her.

She therefore could never say to him that he did this or that wrong, because that was exactly the point, he did nothing. If she became frustrated she showed it and he could point out that she spoke in a nasty way, but as he did nothing, he was always the injured party and she the guilty party. These withdrawals used to hurt Magda deeply. Magda shared that she felt rejected, lonely and frustrated. After many years of this pattern repeating itself over and over again, Magda felt increasingly disengaged from the marriage. This disengagement also manifested itself within the communication between Magda and Marius.

4.9.5 Absence of communication

Magda believes that the lack of communication has been the biggest contributing factor to her disengagement from the marriage, as well as to the ever increasing emotional distance between Marius and herself.

Because Magda felt that she was always seen as the guilty party, she no longer tried to speak with Marius about this pattern of withdrawing from her: he always blamed her for it. Magda felt that the only way she could protect herself emotionally against this negativity was just to live with it and not confront it. Living with this continual disapproval and subsequent punishment by means of being cut off has had a major impact on how Magda sees herself:

> *It is like an abused wife. I started to believe that it is my fault and that I deserved the punishment. I felt very insecure and inferior because I was rejected on the most basic level of my personhood. The most basic level of our being is our sexual level – I was rejected on this level. The deepest and most primal level. One builds oneself from this level, the construction of yourself, the way you see yourself. It is your foundation. For me it felt as if there were bricks missing. It told me that I was not fully woman and not worthy of being desired or loved.*

It would seem as if Magda had internalised the discourse that links a woman's sexuality to her worth as previously discussed (Sections 2.7.2 & 3.6.6). Such dominant discourses contribute and constitute women's constructions of their identities.

4.9.6 Constructions of identity

In our discussion of the construction of identity, Magda shared that over the years her identity has changed. *Identity is constructed and re-constructed in relationships – relationships with self, others, and God.* Magda said that her self-esteem was directly linked to her sense of identity.

At high school Magda was head girl, an accomplished pianist and a top academic student. Magda believed in herself and her ability to achieve and to build a prosperous future for herself. However, in her matric year, when she and Marius started to date, this started to change. Magda started to feel that her achievements were less important. *'My self-worth stopped. I forsake myself [Ek het myself prysgegee]. Magda put herself second to Marius. His priorities were put first.*

4.9.6.1   Identity as wife and mother

Once married, Magda slotted into the subservient role traditionally prescribed to Christian women. She accepted this position. There was no sense of egalitarianism in the relationship: her needs and wants simply became less important or were put aside. She sacrificed herself as was expected from a pious Christian wife.

I shared with Magda that this 'sacrifice of self' in women can be seen when a family sits down to a meal in a patriarchal home. The wife usually dishes up the food: first for the husband then the children and last for herself. If chicken is on the menu the husband will get his favourite piece, usually the thighs and the neck and the children will get the drumsticks. Magda concluded: *The mother usually ends up with what is left - the white meat and the tail-end.*

Magda described herself as a nurturer. She internalised the dominant discourse of wife and mother as nurturer to the extent that she sacrificed her own identity. *She accepted unquestioningly Marius's position as the head of the home and as the most important person in the home.*

Magda shared that she had internalised the prescriptions of patriarchy at every level in her life. According to her, this was especially apparent in the way she used to dress. Although she is a very attractive woman with a *'good body'*, she never used to wear clothes that showed off her body. Her hairstyle was practical and conservative -*'as a good wife's should'* - and even *'her make-up spoke of being subdued and sensible'.* Within Protestant churches, women's dress codes were often linked to their piety (Section 3.5.8) and had a major influence on how women expressed themselves both in dress and overall appearance. Magda shared that her mother used to buy her clothes for her until she was in her late thirties. *Magda's mother was a strongly constituting voice in her life: her mother often spoke with the voice of patriarchy.*

In Magda's thirties, guilt became a well-known companion. Magda shared that she often felt guilty for failing her husband, as he did not have sex with her. She understood this sexual rejection as failing to be 'a good wife' and therefore that they did not have a sexually happy marriage. Moreover, her mother blamed her for not having more children. Because of the infrequency of sexual intercourse, Magda did not fall pregnant after the birth of her son, even though she had wanted more children. Magda's mother then accused her of not being a good wife and a good Christian woman for not having more children.

In our conversations it became apparent that Magda's mother was the most dominant voice in terms of maintaining patriarchal interpretation of roles within Magda's marriage, especially in the earlier years of their marriage. *Magda's mother believed that the husband should be the head and the wife should be in a subservient role to her husband as this was the Godly order of things. Magda continued to accept these prescriptions for many years, but came to a point where she started to question, resist and challenge the voice of patriarchy.*

4.9.6.2   Turning forty

When Magda turned forty, she experienced a distinct change in how she related to herself and to her world. She moved from being a conservative looking woman to being a very sexy woman. 'I became sexy, I thought about sex and started to dress accordingly, thus like a woman who is comfortable with her own body, comfortable in her own skin'.

During this time of transition Magda and a friend went overseas. While they travelled the two of them spoke about their lives. Magda shared her frustrations regarding the absence of sex in her marriage with her friend and said to her: '*I want trouble, I need trouble'*. Magda felt that it was at this point that she took the decision to no longer accept her sexually unhappy marriage.

4.9.7   Taking the decision

Magda shared that she became increasing frustrated sexually and decided to seek sexual fulfilment outside her marriage. Magda believes that her becoming involved in an extra-marital affair was no co-incidence, it was a conscious decision. *There were many factors which contributed to this decision, but the main one was being a sexually neglected wife with no hope for change within her*

marriage. However, Magda was not able to leave the marriage. Pittman (1993:34) explains this dilemma as:

> There are awful marriages people can't get all the way into and can't get all the way out of….Often people in such marriages make a marital arrangement by calling in marital aids…Such practical affairs help them keep the marriage steady but distant.

Pittman (1993:36) states that '[a]ffairs can wreck a good marriage, but can help stabilize a bad one'. This paradox would seem to hold true in Magda's case. Soon after Magda's return from her overseas trip she met John. At their second meeting John asked Magda if she would be interested in having an affair. *John was very frank and told her that he wanted more sex than he gets at home. Magda agreed to the affair and they negotiated the terms of the affair.*

4.9.8   The terms of the affair

Both John and Magda made it clear to each other that they had no intention of leaving their own marriages. John stated that although he was happily married, he needed more sex and wanted a companion other than his wife. They agreed to a *'no strings attached'* relationship. Magda insisted that John would never contact her, but that she would contact him when she wanted to see him. *Magda did not want the stress and worry of being contacted when it was inconvenient for her to take his call or to risk being exposed. In fact, having the responsibility to set up dates suited Magda: she controlled when they saw each other; there were no surprises and thus less risk of being discovered.* They usually meet once a week and Magda calls John when it is convenient for her. *They agreed to very specific boundaries and only share certain aspects of their lives with each other. Information about their families is out of bounds. Outside the agreed boundaries, neither of them had any claims nor any right to blame. They share some parts of their lives and others not at all. For example, she and John have not shared a meal in seven years. Both of them regard a meal as a 'family thing' and thus not part of the affair.*

Magda explained that life with John became a sexual adventure and she started to experience herself very differently. She now saw herself a warm blooded desirable woman, who could be treated as an adult and as an equal: '*Before, sex was the instrument with which I was punished. I was deprived of sexual contact, of sexual touch, now I felt alive. Sex became enjoyable, exciting and easy. Sex with*

John was very different to sex with Marius'. Magda used the analogy of two shoemakers to explain how she experienced sex with Marius and John:

> *'The one shoemaker only makes one pair of shoes a month while the other shoemaker makes at least a pair a week. The second shoemaker soon became much more skilled and knew his trade much better than the first shoemaker. The more shoes he made, the easier it got and the more comfortable became the shoes he made. Sex with John was like the shoemaking of the second cobbler.*

Magda shared that she is no longer sexually frustrated and uptight all the time. She felt more relaxed, happy and content. But this relationship is not just about sex.

4.9.9   A different kind of love

Magda shared that although she still loved Marius, she also loved John:

> *Loving John is a different kind of love. It is an easy love. John can be very difficult, but I do not get that side. I only get the pleasant side. We don't have to share the mundane things of life. The daily stresses and strains. However, I will never trade Marius for John. Marius and I built a life together. We raised a son; there is family involved, friends and dogs. One does not just trade in your life. I believe that my affair enables me to stay with Marius. It makes the isolation, emotional neglect and loneliness bearable. John is just a fling* (laughs) *quite a long fling hey?*

Magda shared that the different ways the two men speak to her when affectionate reveal the difference in the relationships. Marius will speak to Magda as if she is a baby when he is being affectionate, whereas John speaks to her as a mature woman whom he desires.

4.9.10 Evolution of the affair

For the past eight months Magda and John did not have sex. They only met for coffee and talked. *The affair moved from being a very intense physical connection to a non-physical emotional connection.* John often says to Magda: '*It is only time and we have a life time ahead of us'*. Magda explained that with these words John is saying that he is not bothered by the fact that they cannot spend more time together as he does not see their affair as a passing fancy, he sees it as a long term commitment to each other.

Even though sex with John was great, exciting and fulfilling, Magda shared that she was relieved that there was no sex in the affair at the time of our conversations. She acknowledged that having sex with John did indeed cause her feelings of guilt. She felt that if anyone sees John and her together now, she will not have to lie: she will be able to say that she is meeting a friend for coffee.

Magda experienced anxiety, especially about the possibility (though remote) that Marius would want to have sex with her on the same day that she had had sex with John: 'I am not a whore; I do not sleep with two different men on the same day'.

Magda believes that the affair has given her the self-confidence to resist some of the negative ideas about herself that her sexually unhappy marriage held for her. She also started to resist some of the ways in which patriarchy operates in the marriage. These acts of resistance will be shared in Chapter Five.

4.9.11   The tables turned

Towards the end of Magda's participation in this research journey, she accidentally made a discovery. She came across a text message on Marius's cell phone. This message, of a sexual nature, was from a 'Flirt service'. *Magda felt very shocked and disappointed. The disappointment she felt was not about him betraying her, but that he resorted to something like a chat service. She felt that such actions were not appropriate for a man of his standing. She viewed it as cheap.*

Knowing that she herself was in an affair left Magda confused about her anger. She explained that, although it might seem hypocritical, she believed that Marius had no right to have extra-marital sex: she was never the one who refused to have sex. She felt 'angry that he would rather have sexual conversations with strangers than with his wife, but for years he rejected her'. Seeing this text message brought back a lot of the pain she experienced and she felt very humiliated. She felt angry about all the lonely nights she spent, for all the times she cried and for all the times when she desperately wanted Marius to make love to her, and he refused.

She told Marius that she had seen the text message, but that she was not interested in knowing what was going on or why it was on his phone. She asked him to be more careful as she did not want their son to ever discover such a message on his father's phone. *After this Marius was much more*

attentive to Magda and apologetic in his attitude towards her. Magda stuck to her decision not to pursue this matter any further.

4.9.12 Looking at the future

Magda shared that her marriage with Marius, although sexually unhappy, is in essence a good marriage. She had no intention of leaving Marius. Her decision to stay in the marriage was affected by many different things:

> *It is complicated and one cannot just walk out of a marriage of twenty five years. There are still a lot of things that are working well in the marriage. It is then easier to turn a blind eye and accept what you have rather than focus on what you do not have. It is still my hope that my marriage will be different. I would like it to be more than just a partnership, a friendship. I would like it to be a marriage in the full sense of the word. I do not know if I will continue with the affair. I now realise that I cannot be emotionally engaged in both relationships. I realise that I became increasingly emotionally absent in my own marriage. Perhaps it was a way to protect myself* (she pauses for a while) *perhaps I am myself busy with punishment therapy in the same way as Marius was. I realise that I am doing nothing to sustain my marriage. I want to believe that it will be possible for Marius and me to have a sexually happy marriage.*

Shortly after this conversation Magda was diagnosed with breast cancer. In our last telephone conversation she told me that she believed that the cancer was the manifestation of the rejection she had experienced over all these years. Magda underwent surgery and is now in chemotherapy. She requested that we finish our journey once her chemotherapy is completed.

Magda's sexually unhappy marriage and the affair that followed had a major affect on her faith constructions and how she experienced herself as Christian. In Chapter Five I share the explorations as well as the meanings she has made of her journey.

4.10 SUMMARY

Sexually unhappy marriages take many different forms, as seen in the co-searchers' stories in this chapter. Circumstances differ, ages differ, belief systems differ and ways to live with it differ. The one commonality is the silence surrounding sexually unhappy marriages. This silence is present not only in our communities, but – even more significant - the silence shapes how these women live.

There is seldom space created for these stories to be told: more often, they are marginalized and silenced both by society and by the women themselves. When the stories of sexually unhappy marriages are spoken about, they are usually told by those living outside such marriages. Women living in sexually unhappy marriages are mostly silent. Giving a voice to these women in this chapter was a way of breaking the silence. Moreover, giving a voice to their stories was a way to be respectful of their stories and lives.

I have deliberately chosen not to discuss or unpack these stories here: I want to give their voices priority. It was important that the stories speak on their own behalf. In this chapter I have also limited the application of theory to the stories, unless it confirmed what the co-searchers shared with me. Theory could have easily drowned out the co-searchers' voices which would, in turn, have undermined the goal of this chapter.

These stories revealed how diverse and how complicated sexually unhappy marriages can be. But although these stories were unique and different from each other, nevertheless the same constituting dominant discourses often circulated within them. The same dominant discourse re-appeared in most of these stories, showing its pervasive power even in varied circumstances.

Kohler Riessman (2008:8) explains that narrative is more than just telling stories: it has the ability to become a point of entry for narrative analyses. As Yuval-Davis, Kohler Riessman (2008:8) believes that narrative constructs identities as it speaks of who we are and who we are not. Chapter Four was about creating a point of entry for the unpacking of sexually unhappy marriages and related issues - such as power relations and faith constructions.

In Chapter Five I will explore how Julia and Magda negotiated meaning in relation to their sexually unhappy marriages, as well as the effects and consequences which living in sexually unfulfilled marriages and infidelity held for them. I have chosen to focus on them because – embedded in these two stories – were most of discourses shared by all the co-searchers.

UNPACKING THE DOMINANT DISCOURSES AND HOW THESE OPERATED IN THE CO-SEARCHERS' STORIES

5.   INTRODUCTION

Discourses have been central to this research journey. Positioned in a social constructionist epistemology, I reason that our 'realties' are constructed by dominant discourses (Freedman & Combs 1996:23; Burr 1995:3). The categories and concepts we use to create understanding are historically and culturally specific (Foucault 1972b:131-132; Drewery & Winslade 1997:34). In Chapter Two I identified and unpacked some of the historical dominant discourses regarding marital practices, sexuality and adultery. Chapter Three identified and explored how present day discourses operate in Protestant Christians' sexuality. The co-searcher's stories were voiced in Chapter Four, as well as the discourses that were constitutive in their stories, most of which had already been identified and explored in the previous chapters. In Chapter Five I unpack the dominant discourses and how these operate in the co-searchers' lives. This process of 'unpacking' or deconstruction involves: exploring the relational complexities, challenges and dilemmas which sexually unhappy marriages held for the co-searchers; how they responded to these challenges; and the effects which these challenges had on their lives. It also involves exploring the discourses which have contributed to sexual unhappiness and how co-searchers incorporated their constructions and constituting discourses regarding sexuality into their lives.

Qualitative research aims for an in-depth focus on social issues: it is about making sense of and interpreting social phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them (Denzin & Lincoln 1994:2). The goal of this chapter is thus an in-depth focus on such meanings and the constituting dominant discourses that were present in the co-searchers' stories. Chase (2000:656) refers to this process as 'retrospective meaning making - the shaping or ordering of past experiences'. This chapter centralises Magda and Julia's stories. Their stories represent the most commonly occurring discourses which were present in the conversations with clergy members, the co-searchers, the online survey as well as in the stories that I have heard in my private practice over the past six years.

Julia and Magda's stories also represent most of the dilemmas, challenges and complexities that the other co-searchers experienced of this research journey. It was only with these two co-searchers that I was able to journey through a detailed deconstruction process: unpacking their stories, identifying

the dominant discourse(s) and mapping the effects of these discourses on their lives and relationships. The three other co-searchers were not able to participate in the deconstruction process to the *same extent*, due to their individual circumstances, as previously discussed. In line with my desire to be ethical and accountable in my research practices, I will therefore only discuss the two co-searchers' stories with whom I was able to explore, deconstruct and confirm the dominant discourses which operated in their lives.

Narrative inquiry, as the research method used in this qualitative research, includes exploring the social context and culture in which stories take place in order to create greater understanding of the complexities, relationships and settings (Webster & Mertova 2007:4). In other words, narrative inquiry explores problems as forms of storytelling which involve characters with both personal and societal stories (Webster & Mertova 2007:4). Narrative inquiry includes both the deconstruction and reconstruction of personal as well as societal stories. Although the main focus of this chapter will be on two co-searchers' stories only, these stories will also represent societal stories and its dominant discourses regarding sexual unhappiness in South African Protestant Christian women's lives.

5.1 INVITING GREATER UNDERSTANDING

Part of the conversational journey we undertook involved exploring and challenging those life-denying or life-restricting experiences that had contributed to the marginalisation of sexuality by prescriptive religious dominant discourses. These dominant discourses – more particularly patriarchy and power relations – are linked in turn to discourses regarding female sexual desire and expression.

The aim of this research journey was not to produce change in terms of sexual practices but to create greater awareness and understanding: to create a space in which to unpack the co-searchers' constructions and experiences; to story the relational complexities; to explore the challenges and dilemmas which stem from sexually unhappy marriages; and to identify factors that contributed to this unhappiness. I am in agreement with Anderson and Goolishian (1992:29) who reason that in order to create greater awareness and understanding, the researcher does not enter into a conversation with 'preconceived opinions and expectations'. One way of challenging these preconceived ideas is to unpack - through a process of deconstruction - the dominant discourses that have shaped these constructions and understandings.

5.2   DECONSTRUCTION OF STORIES

Unpacking the co-searchers' stories involves the deconstruction of discourses. By 'deconstruction' I understand as:

> ...procedures that subvert taken-for-granted realities and practices; those so-called 'truths' that are split off from the conditions and the disembodied ways of speaking that side their biases and prejudices, and those familiar practices of self and of relationship that are subjugating persons' lives.
>
> (White 1991:26)

Using White's ideas regarding deconstruction, Morgan (2000:46) describes deconstruction as '[t]he pulling apart and examining of "taken-for-granted" truths'. Put differently, '[d]econstructive questioning invites people to see their stories from different perspectives, to notice how they are constructed (or *that* they are constructed), to note their limits and to discover that there are other possible narratives' (Freedman & Combs 1996:57).

White (1991:27-28) and his followers see 'reality' as socially constructed. Sexuality is mostly genetically determined, ***but the meanings*** that are given to it are socially constructed. Although sexual feelings or sexual desire are genetically programmed and hormonally based (Lemmer 2005:2) – it is thus part of being human - it is the socialisation and control regarding sexual desire and actions by cultural and religious norms that renders the experience acceptable or not and determines the meanings attached to it (Slowinski 1992:149-150). This study was particularly interested in such meanings. The meanings allocated to sexuality are usually constructed within the dominant cultural and religious discourses that are often invisible.

White (2007:269) speaks of making visible that which is not through the process of 'social collaboration', a concept he adopted from Vygotsky's work with children. Following Vygotsky, White suggests that learning - and thus greater understanding - is not an independent effort, but is done in collaboration with others. As part of my commitment to respectful research practices and to honour my co-searchers' stories, I regarded collaboration with the co-searchers in their search for meaning as very important. I therefore gave primacy to the co-searchers' experiences in relation to the understandings and connections I formed. This was done by moving from 'what is known and familiar' to 'what might be possible for them to know about their lives and identities' (White

2007:271). Vygotsky (in White 2007:271) termed this space between the known and what is possible to know as the 'zone of proximal development'. White (2007:271) believes that using narrative practices - such as 'scaffolding' - allows collaboration with the client to move across this 'zone of proximal development'. I found this scaffolding process invaluable, and used it in my research interviews, not only to collaborate with the co-searchers as they traversed their 'zone of proximal development' (White 2007:275), but also to enable me to traverse *mine*.

Sampson (1998:3) regards deconstruction as a process in which we do not destroy knowledge, but where we undo knowledge. This 'undoing' is done by establishing what taken-for-granted knowledges are knowledges which have become unquestionable 'truths'. White (1991:27) talks about the need to 'exoticize the domestic': to take a new or different approach to that which is seen as ordinary or most familiar. If we are going to see the domestic differently, we will need different lenses through which to view dominant discourses. Different lenses will make us more aware of the extent to which certain modes of life and thought shape and dictate our understanding.

Part of this process was to explore some of the dominant discourses that were held as 'truths' in order to scaffold towards the possibility of new ways of understanding.

5.3   DOMINANT DISCOURSES

Social constructions – one of which is sexuality - are found within dominant discourses (White 1991:27-28). According to Ussher (1994:150), sexuality is 'constructed at the level of culture and history through the complex interrelationship of many different social and historical factors'. Women are taught what is expected from them regarding their sexuality. These knowledges - disguised in discourses - are knowingly and unknowingly imparted to women by parents, the media, the school system, the church and other influences (Fredman & Potgieter 1996:50; Steyn & Van Zyl 2009:4). For Christian women, these expectations are specifically in line with the beliefs of their faith tradition (see Sections 3.6.1; 3.6.2; 3.6.6 & 3.6.7).

Each of the co-searchers' stories were different: each had its own unique context and circumstances. Despite these differences however, specific dominant discourses circulated within all these stories. Based on the work of Foucault (1972a:55) and my social construction positioning, I understand discourse in terms of bodies of knowledge and how there are historically specific relations between disciplines (defined as bodies of knowledge) and disciplinary practices (forms of social control and

social possibility). Discourse, as used by Foucault (1972a:48-49; 117), does not refer to language or social interaction, but to relatively well-bounded areas of social knowledge. As Foucault, I argue that discourses construct reality. Different people may view the same discourse differently: some might interpret and accept that particular discourse as 'the truth' and others might not. White and Epston (1990:20) argue that truth should not be seen as an absolute - an objective belief system based on intrinsic facts - but as a constructed 'reality'. A 'truth' thus consists of constructed ideas that are allotted the status of truth (White & Epston 1990:19). Within these 'truths' lie 'normalizing' powers 'that construct norms around which persons are incited to shape or constitute their lives' (White & Epston 1990:19-20). Reflecting on Foucault's work, McHoul and Grace (1993:39) explain that all belief systems are governed by certain constraints, rules, conditions or possibilities and that 'these mean that discourses always function in relation to power relations'.

In this research journey patriarchy has shown itself as a constitutive force with the power to create awareness or disable awareness, to empower or to disempower. Creating positions of awareness and empowerment are crucial in my ethical commitment to this research. I therefore argue that dominant discourses - such as patriarchy - need to be explored and deconstructed in terms of the power relations which we find embedded within these discourses.

The system of patriarchy undervalued one half of humanity - women - by defining the other half - men - as superior and therefore elevated to the position of sovereign power (Isherwood & McEwan 1994:19; Bons-Storm 1998:10). Chapters Two and Three of this thesis explored the roots of patriarchy in the terms of religious prescriptions for sexual behaviour of women (and men). In Chapter Four, patriarchy showed itself in the co-searchers' stories. In this chapter I will unpack the dominant discourses which stem from patriarchal philosophy in terms of the co-searchers' stories.

5.4   PATRIARCHY

Keane (1998:122) views patriarchy in its most basic form as 'rule by the father', which perpetuated a 'system of male domination at the expense of women'. I argue that male domination is deeply entrenched within Christian marriages in South Africa. Joubert (2010:1) commenting on the 2001 population census, suggests that the overwhelming majority (79,8%) of South Africa's 'population can be described as *reached* with a Christian philosophy and ideology dominant in the public life'. Of the 79,8% of Christians, most White South African Christians (42,8%) indicated that they belong to the Reformed churches. In the light of these census figures, I argue that the dominant discourse of

patriarchy is still circulating in many churches and that patriarchal ways of understanding gender, sexuality and sexual practices will be constitutive in Christians' ways of understanding and living.

Within a patriarchal understanding of the Christian tradition, the husband was appointed as head of the home and the wife as helpmeet in a subservient power relationship to him (Isherwood & McEwan 1994:42-44; Landman 2002:25; Müller 2008:2; Bons-Storm 1998:10; Plaatjies 2003:219; Poling 2006:51). Since these role and status divisions were frequently believed to be based on biblical teaching, these ideas gained even more power (Isherwood & McEwan 1994:31-32; Poling 2006:51) and became unquestionable 'truths'. Nelson (2010:97) attributes these appointed gender roles to patriarchal dualism, which he names the second deadly sin. Patriarchal dualism (Section 2.10.1) is a counterpart of spiritual dualism (Section 2.8.3) in which 'men typically have defined themselves as essentially spirit or mind, and men have defined women as essentially body and emotion. The logic, of course, is that the higher reality must dominate and control the lower' (Nelson 2010:97).

As Craig and Stander (2009:14), and Nelson (2010:97) it is also my experience that many of these discourses are still circulating within Christian belief systems and are held as biblical 'truths'. Nelson (2010:97) concludes that '[i]n Christianity, however, [patriarchal dualism] has taken particular twists that powerfully join the male control of women to body denial' and….women's suffering has particularly been encouraged, for in patriarchy it is they and not males who essentially represent the evil the fleshly body) that needs redemption'. This body denial is seen in the dismissal of female sexual desire or women's right and need to sexual fulfilment. I am in agreement with Nelson that such discourses are sinful and dangerous not only the health and well-being of women, but also to men and their marriages. Nelson (2010:97) draws attention to the less spoken of and countervailing discourse within religious traditions that promotes affirmation of human equality as presented in Galatians 3:28. However, the feminist discourse of resistance to patriarchal dualism is still often met with dismissal and insistence of male control of women's bodies in the name of biblical prescribed gender roles, is only but one example of this.

Bons-Storm (1998:10) argues that the '…meanings given to sex and gender by the dominant discourses in society are important components in the making of personhood', which to a great extent will determine people's views and standpoints as well as who are listened to. The church – speaking with the voice of patriarchy – has also excluded or marginalized much of women's experiences:

> The voices of many women together with their valuable contributions to the formation of thought and practice are ignored or silenced. I have come to understand this phenomenon not so much as the vice of brutal men, but as a structural problem of our societies and churches, because they are constituted by patriarchal ideologies.

> (Bons-Storm 1998:10-11)

Following Bons-Storm, I also argue that patriarchy, as a voice of power, is a dominant discourse which exerts power in the operations of sexuality and how it is understood.

Ackermann and Bons-storm (1998:1) suggest that '[p]ractical theology is probably the theological discipline least influenced by feminist voices'. In an attempt to redress this imbalance, I will endeavour to represent a feminist voice and feminist based understanding. My focus is thus on the effects of patriarchy as a dominant discourse in terms of women's sexuality, most of which were life-denying.

5.4.1   Sexual abuse as an abusive form of patriarchal power

Patriarchy often manifested itself in the co-searchers' stories as an abusive form of power and control. Poling (1991; 2006), a practical theologian addresses the issue of sexual abuse as a form of patriarchal power. The work of Christie Cozad Neuger (1996; 2001; 2008) too is invaluable to the pastoral care of those who suffered sexual abuse. However, as my focus it not on sexual abuse, but sexually unhappy marriages, I refrain to explore this issue in greater depth.

Julia was the victim of patriarchal power in one of its most abusive forms - the sexual molestation of a child. The patriarchal discourse – which regarded women as objects or 'property' – thus devalued Julia's personhood. She was only a body: an object of sexual exploitation for male curiosity and pleasure. This devaluation of Julia's personhood had a major impact on how she constructed her sexuality: she internalised the discourse which objectified sexuality, but at the same time the need to 'gain control' became a very important aspect of her sexual functioning.

Julia explained that when she engaged in sexual flings she separated her emotions from her sexual experiences. Sex became merely a means to the goal, that of physical contact and sexual release. Sex also became a way of exerting control over men – what she called '*trophy sex*'. This clearly indicates

that Julia did not link this objectification of her sexuality to a devaluation of her personhood. In contrast, it gave her control back which in turn created a sense of personhood for her. Moreover, Julia connected her sense of worth as a woman to her ability to have enjoyable sexual intercourse:

> *Julia: When a man desires me and shows that he would like to have sex with me, it makes me feel needed. It makes me feel that I have some worth.*

The practice of connecting sex to the worth of a woman resonates with the patriarchal discourse which linked a woman's worth to her ability to bear children. This discourse – linking a woman's worth to her sexuality and, more specifically to her reproductive ability - is evident in Maya's experiences (Section 4.7.6). Julia, however, resisted the limiting discourse regarding female sexuality only in terms of procreation: she used her sexuality as a way of accomplishing sexual fulfilment. She did not allow sexuality to objectify her to being only a child bearer; instead, she used her sexuality to create a sense of worth and as a confirmation of her womanhood.

5.4.2   Sex as instrument of punishment

In the co-searchers' stories, sexuality was often used as a form of power and control. For all the co-searchers, their biological sex was connected to prescribed gender roles; this, in turn, was connected to what was seen as acceptable sexual behaviour. Magda shared that if her conduct did not meet patriarchal expectations for a wife, sexual contact was withheld from her. She interpreted and experienced her husband's physical and sexual absence as punishment. For instance if Magda was not at home when her husband came from work, did not prepare meals in the way he prefers and if she was outspoken, her husband would withdraw from her and became distant and cold. The interpretation of the issue of withholding physical and sexual contact as punishment creates an ethical dilemma. Farley (2010:219) describes abusive sexual practices as 'instances of disrespect for persons' capacity for, and right to, freedom of choice', thus to say no to physical touch or sexual interaction and to live with bodily integrity. A gender-sensitive interpretation needs to acknowledge the conjugal rights of ***husbands and wives***, as well as the right not to be forced into having sex, even within marriage. Without such boundaries, marital rape will not be acknowledged. I embrace the sexual rights and free consent of both husbands and wives. However, I need to draw a distinction – Magda interpreted and experienced her husband's avoidance and refusal of physical contact as punishment and not because he did not feel like having sex. She argued that avoidance of intimacy

and sexual contact became the tool of punishment to deprive her from physical contact and closeness until such time when she complies with her husband's expectations.

Magda explained that having sexual intercourse with her husband was a physical expression of their love and commitment to each other. Thus when sex was withheld from her, she experienced it as her husband's love being withheld from her. Sex - and indirectly her own sexuality - became the instrument with which she was controlled and punished – *'[b]efore sex was the instrument with which I was punished. I was deprived of sexual contact…'*

The withholding of sexual contact reflects the dominant discourse that a wife's body becomes the property of her husband (Section 2.7.2). I argue that this discourse is based on the premise that a husband has the power and right to decide when and how his wife could engage in sexual activity. Linked to this premise is the dismissal of female sexual desire and female sexual fulfilment (Section 2.10.2). Women's sexuality is mostly linked to reproduction, and therefore men and women often hold different expectations for sexual fulfilment (McFadden 2003:4). Women (and men) are socialised to be indifferent to female sexual desire and fulfilment (Fredman & Potgieter 1996:51; Zak & McDonald 1997:905). This indifference is reinforced by the dominant discourse which encourages women to be passive in sexual activity and to wait for men to initiate sexual contact (Reilly & Lynch 1990:23; Blyth & Straker 1996:253; Farley 2010:4,36). This discourse was present as far back as the time of Plutarch (46-120 CE), when it was believed that a wife who seeks sexual fulfilment for herself was regarded as bad, meretricious and impetuous (Peterman1999:168). This discourse placed the fulfilment of a wife's sexual desire under the control of her husband. It follows that if a husband disregards his wife's right to sexual fulfilment - or even worse, if he believes that she has no need for sexual fulfilment - he might never attend to her sexual needs and desires. The dismissal of *Eros* involved in this instance reflects the belief that, in Christian women's lives, sex should be only a way to express love and not sexual desire, which is often equated to lust (Craig & Stander 2009:89). Magda internalised this discourse: she believed that sex within her marriage served as a way of showing her love and acceptance of her husband, and vice versa (Buys 2010:130). However, her constructions about sex changed when sexuality became an instrument of punishment and deprivation in her marriage.

As the sexual deprivation increased in her marriage, so Magda increased her resistance to the dominant discourse which defines her sexuality in service of her marriage and her husband only. Lorde (2010:74) defines the erotic as ' a measure between the beginnings of our sense of self, and

the chaos of our strongest feelings' thus …an internal sense of satisfaction to which once we have experienced it, we know we can aspire'. Understanding the erotic in these terms implies that it does not necessarily include nor exclude sexuality. Lorde (2010:75) argues that if women reclaim the erotic in their lives, thus creative power and harmony, it becomes 'an assertion of the life-force of women', by which they will be empowered and able to connect with themselves as humans that are able to experience joy in many aspects of their lives. Lorde (2010:75) refers to this as a 'self-connection shared in a measure of joy….a reminder of my capacity for feeling'. Therefore if women allow themselves to experience the erotic (in the greatest sense of the word) in their lives, they will begin to feel deeply all the aspects of their lives, and demand from themselves and from their lives pursuits that they feel are accordance with the joy which they know they are capable of. Erotic knowledge empowers and can become 'a lens through which [women] scrutinize all aspects of [their] existence, forcing [themselves] to evaluate those aspects honestly in terms of their relative meaning within [their] lives' (Lorde 2010:75-76) Though Lorde does not speak here of the erotic as the sexual, it has relevance to Magda's experiences.

Magda became more connected to herself by experiencing the erotic in a sexual sense. Once she engaged in an extra-marital affair, her construction of sex changed. Magda started to view sex as a way of doing self-care: she thus accepted and attended to her sexual needs. Magda explained that sex then became an act of self-acceptance, whereas before sex was only seen as a way to show and experience her husband's love and acceptance. Magda thus challenged this dominant discourse and, in the process, also challenged the constitutive power it exerted over her constructions of herself as a woman. Magda now felt in control of her own sexuality – she was no longer just a victim of sexual rejection.

5.4.3   Sex as expression of love

Botha (1998:222) as Buys (2010:2) discusses the gender differences in the experiences of *Eros* as an expression of love. Botha argues that men express their love both in practical ways - such as assisting with household chores - and in sexual actions. Botha's view supports Lawson (1990:65), who reasons that both men and women find intimacy in verbal and sexual intimacy as this is in line with the cultural script of love. Botha (1998:222) argues, however, that 'a few years into the marriage, gender differences appear': men will continue to find intimacy in sexual fulfilment but minimise their verbal intimacy, whereas women will tend to increase their need for verbal intimacy. Consequently, men express and experience love when having sex, whilst women experience being

loved in other ways: for instance, in kind deeds and help with household chores (Buys 2010:2,13; Craig & Stander 2009:155).

The co-searchers in this research journey challenged this discourse. They all regarded sex as a way in which they experienced being loved and giving love. Sex for them was not reserved to the male experience of love. These women mostly did not feel loved by their husbands' practical help and, in the absence of sex, the co-searchers felt unloved and neglected. Their constructions regarding the function of sex, however, diversified.

In this research journey most of the co-searchers moved from understanding sex as exclusively an expression of love and dedication. In both Julia and Magda's stories extra-marital sex became a form of self-care in terms of coping with sexual frustrations and finding self-acceptance: sex was now in the service of their personal sexual and emotional fulfilment. Both Magda and Julia rejected the patriarchal interpretation of a woman's sexuality being only in service of her marriage and husband. Within their marriages, sex kept its identity as the expression of their love for their husbands, but outside matrimony sex became an act of sexual self-care and self acceptance:

> Some affairs are seen by their participants as having very much more to do with sex than with love; some are seen as having more to do with being loved, valued and cared for than with sexual release. Above all, however, the extra-marital affair is an attempt by someone who is married to meet through individual, extra-marital behaviour some personal objective, some private aim, which the marriage itself either has not met or has not radically altered.

> (Lake & Hills 1979:33-34)

Throughout the ages, patriarchy had - and still has - a powerful constituting effect on female sexuality. This is seen in the prescriptions and controls regarding female sexuality in terms of virginity; adultery; expression of sexual desire; the pursuit of sexual pleasure by females; and the expression of female sexuality (Lorde 2010:74). Patriarchy's relationship with female sexuality was - and still is - one of control and restraint. Russell ([1929] 2009:4) states that '[t]he primary motive of sexual ethics as they have existed in Western civilisation since pre-Christian times has been to secure that degree of female virtue without which the patriarchal family becomes impossible, since paternity is uncertain'. However, journeying with sexual unhappiness in this research journey revealed a very different story. Instead of controlling female sexuality, patriarchy became a contributing factor in the abandonment of sexual virtue and fidelity in the co-searchers' lives.

One of the ways in which patriarchy exerted power over sexuality in the co-searchers story was to take their voices away. The voicelessness of female sexuality is present in society, church structures as well in individual marriages. It was often in the presence of this voicelessness that infidelity became an option to the co-searchers.

5.4.4 Voicelessness and sexual fulfilment

Due to Magda and Julia's voiceless position - in terms of their sexual unhappiness in their marriages – both ventured outside the boundaries of their marriages in search of sexual happiness and fulfilment.

Male domination established itself especially powerfully within Christian marriages by means of prescribed gender roles which appointed the husband as head of the home and the wife as helpmeet in a subservient power relationship to him (Isherwood & McEwan1994:42-44; Landman 2002:25 ; Müller 2008:2; Bons-Storm 1998:10; Plaatjies 2003:219; Poling 2006:51). Based on these gender roles, women are often socialised in ways that are restricting to the development of their sexuality. One way in which patriarchy entraps female sexuality is to place women in the position of being passive recipients, thus often leaving women's sexual fulfilment neglected or unattended (McFadden 2003:4; Reilly & Lynch 1990:23; Blyth & Straker 1996:253; Farley 2010:4). Dominant discourses regarding Christian women's roles within their marriages - as caretakers and nurturers - frame their sexuality as something that they give to others, rather than experiencing and enjoying it themselves (Fredman & Potgieter 1996:51; Zak & McDonald 1997:905). Even if women do not internalise this dominant discourse, their husbands often do: this still often leaves wives out in the cold in terms of sexual fulfilment.

I therefore reason that patriarchy frequency causes sexual unhappiness – as is clearly evident in the co-searchers' stories - and sexual unhappiness can lead to extra-marital sexual relations. The stronger patriarchy's voice is in a marriage, the more voiceless the wife becomes. The more voiceless the wife becomes, the less likely the possibility of addressing and resolving her sexual frustrations within the marriage. The longer this silence regarding sexual unhappiness continues, the greater the risk that hopelessness will establish itself.

Listening to the co-searchers' stories it became clear that it was often in the presence of such hopelessness that they ventured outside their marriages. Their hopelessness was often directly linked to being voiceless about sexual unhappiness. I am therefore of the conviction that the silencing of female sexual unhappiness has largely to do with the operation of power within relationships, as was seen in the co-searchers' stories.

Deconstructing infidelity in this way leaves one with questions regarding the responsibility and ethics of infidelity. It creates the awareness of counter-accountability in terms of patriarchy and the unfaithful wife. It exposes the hypocrisy of working only with the wife's responsibility as an individual and not at the same time questioning the husband's collective responsibility in the wife's infidelity. My thesis worked with the issues of individual and collective responsibility and more especially the dilemmas arising from individual *versus* collective responsibility.

5.4.5   Operations of power and resistance

Besley's (2001:82-83) discussion of Foucault's ideas on power and knowledge concludes that power/knowledge relations operate discursively, thus determining whether a person can speak, what can be verbalised and by whom and whether it is listened to. Within patriarchal organised marriages, wives' sexual needs are often silenced or marginalised. Women's sexual needs are often seen as less important or even denied, especially once they become mothers. Both Magda and Julia initially tried to address the issue of their lack of sexual fulfilment, but subsequently became silenced as their plights were ignored. Magda's husband interpreted this silence as her not wanting sex. I link this idea to the discourse that views men as sexual beings but women only as the passive recipients of male sexuality (Sections 3.5.6 & 3.6.7).

From Foucault's (1984b:239) discussion on the operations of power (also cited in Flaskas & Humphreys 1993:40-41), it is understood that within every power relation, there is the possibility of resistance (Foucault 1994:167-168). I came to believe that, for many of the co-searchers, infidelity became an act of resistance. Their resistance (infidelity) was against the perception that women are passive - almost non-sexual beings - but also resistance to their husband's control of their sexuality and sexual fulfilment. Foucault (1994:167) explains that within all power relations there is the possibility of resistance, thus the possibility of change. This resistance was not only against the dominant patriarchal discourses within their marriages, but also against the dominant discourses which prescribe women's sexuality as being passive and less important. For Julia and Magda the

resistance of the 'normalizing gaze' was an act towards taking power back for themselves by seeking sexual fulfilment and physical contact outside their marriages. This reversal of power challenges Foucault's (1984b:239) statement that 'where there is power, there is resistance' I argue that the converse is also true: where there is resistance, there is power.

Yee (2003:57) discusses the operations of power and the reversal of power as seen in Judaism. This is reminiscent of the co-searchers' response to patriarchal discourses and how its power operated in their marriages:

> However, men's honour was particularly vulnerable to the actions of women. The social system ran harmoniously based on the voluntary deference of its weaker members, but women could adopt various strategies to exploit the vulnerabilities of male honour and patrilineality. Sexual transgressions or the threat thereof left men exposed. Yee (2003:57) named such actions or intentions 'weapons of the weak' and these need to be taken into account in any diagnosis of power. With these 'weapons of the weak', women not only resisted male authority, but also exerted control over their own lives in a male-dominated world. Shame was cast on a male if his subordinates did not respect him, especially if his wife rejected him sexually. A man's personal honour was vulnerable to the defiance of his authority – leaving women dominant in the power-relation.

> (Spies 2006:48)

Yee (2003:49) concludes that resistance can become an exercise of power, rather than merely a reaction to it. I agree with Yee's conclusion. These acts of resistance were not only seen in the co-searchers' non-marital sexual activities, but also within other actions.

5.4.6   Acts of resistance

Although a body of knowledge regarding feminist discourses of resistance is available, it was not experienced by either the participating clergy or the co-searchers. Patriarchy was and still is the dominant voice and most constitutive in how women express, experience and construct their sexuality. This body of resistance was not available to the co-searchers on two levels – feminist discourses of resistance were not apparent in their churches and secondly most of the co-searchers did not emotionally connect with the resistance discourse as most of them have internalised the dominant discourse of patriarchy. However, due to their participation in this research journey acts of resistance became more available as their awareness grew.

Magda shared that becoming aware of the dominant discourses of patriarchy during our discussions had brought some shifts in how she viewed her world, how she acted and how she felt:

> *You shared that you experienced some shifts in how you think about things. These shifts are affecting how you act and how you feel. You decided that you will join a friend of yours on a spiritual retreat in December. Before, you would ask Marius's permission, now you just informed him. You said that you now have the courage to question things and do not just accept them. 'It is time that I stand up for myself. I must decide what I want to do with the rest of my life. I must start living and stop waiting. Before I used to do what Marius wanted me to do. I am fed-up with looking nice for other people. I am tired of looking good for other men. I am finished trying [to be what Marius expects]. I have reached saturation point.'*

Magda shared that, despite this shift, in many ways she continued to internalise the expectations of a wife - expectations which she still finds difficult to challenge. She mentioned she was so sensitive towards being labelled 'nasty', that she continued to attend to her household chores, even when very upset: *'I will cook, it is what I am supposed to do, it is my job – otherwise I am the "nasty" wife. Even when he does not come home for supper without letting me know'*.

The more aware Magda became of the operations of power in her marriage, the more she started to question these dominant discourses. This awareness arose from our deconstruction conversations, even though 'creating a greater awareness' was not the purpose of the deconstruction. This outcome is nevertheless in line with outcomes of feminist research: opening up space for the possibility of change; creating political awareness; and addressing injustice (McTaggart 1997:7; Walker 1998:240). Magda started to insist that Marius inform her if he was not going to be home for a meal. She also no longer prepared meals for him if he did not confirm that he would be home. These acts of resistance – however small - indicate Magda's active engagement in the power relations that existed in her marriage:

> …[I]f there was no resistance, there would be no power relations. Because it would simply be a matter of obedience. You have to use power relations to refer to the situation where you're not doing what you want.
>
> (Foucault 1994:167)

Magda realised that she did not have to be at her husband's beck and call (even in his absence), and that her time should also be taken into consideration and respected. On those evenings when Marius is not at home for supper, as is often the case, Magda will now take the time to do things she never

did before, such as going to a movie. These changes in Magda's behaviour had a ripple effect. Magda shared that her husband too started to change. He became more attentive to her as a person and did not take her time so much for granted. He also started to show some interest in her work and in the challenges she deals with in her working environment.

Magda shared that before our conversations she was not even aware of the operations of patriarchy, even though she experienced its effects daily. She never even considered the possibility that she could or should be treated with the same respect and dignity as men. Foucault (cited in White & Epston 1990:19) argues that power and knowledge are inseparable and support one another inter-relationally. Thus, those with knowledge have power and those with power can create knowledge or 'truths'. Magda's story clearly revealed how patriarchy had held the knowledge and had created the rules.

If living in sexually unhappy marriages held many challenges and dilemmas for the co-searchers, then being engaged in non-marital sexual relationships complicated their lives to an even greater extent.

5.5   DILEMMAS

All the co-searchers experienced how living in sexually unhappy marriages had caused dilemmas and how these dilemmas became worse because they were Christians. The combination of sexual unhappiness and being Christian confronted these women with complex situations and choices. They experienced deep conflict in terms of what they believed: the need to be faithful and honest as a Christian wife clashed with their sexual practices which were 'deceiving and adulterous[8]' Both Magda and Julia felt terrible guilt about the deceit, yet at the same time they felt that they did not have another option.

> Affairs are usually surrounded by a protective web of lies and deceit. Whether an affair is a secret or not and whether it has ended or is still going on, the lies are usually designed to 'protect' the marriage, or to safeguard certain aspects of the marital relationship. Many of these lies are half-truths, because the whole truth would be too painful to face up to, or might too radically alter the relationship between husband and wife.

(Lake & Hills 1979:86)

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[8] I make use of quotation marks here to place the dominant discourse under erasure and thus to emphasize that it is a discourse which is held as a 'truth', but which can be challenged and questioned.

There was a commonality in the themes in which these dilemmas presented themselves.

5.5.1   Faith as accuser and redeemer

In this research journey the personal faith of co-searchers and the prescriptions of Protestant faith traditions regarding marriage and sexual practices were constant travelling companions. Co-searchers experienced great internal conflict because they were transgressing the commandment: 'Do not commit adultery' (Exodus 20:14). All the women who engaged in non-marital sexual practices experienced guilt. While their faith was very important to most of these women, it was especially significant for Julia.

Julia experienced her faith as representing - simultaneously - the position of accuser and redeemer. This contributed to great inner conflict and tension within her. Julia shared that ever since she was a young child her faith had been very important to her. She also believed that if she had not had her faith to hold on to, she would have not survived the turmoil she experienced in her life as a result of sexuality. She '*probably would have committed suicide*'. While she held onto the belief that in Christ her sins could be forgiven, at the same time she felt that she could not ask for forgiveness if she had no intention of changing her actions by remaining faithful to her husband. Her faith gave her hope that God would intervene in some way in her life. Although Julia continued to attend church services, she felt separated from God. She was also not able to pray to God, as she felt tremendous guilt.

For many years Magda had also experienced guilt. She felt that her affair excluded her from God's grace. During this time she attended a church service that dealt with grace. Magda realised that her salvation is not about what she does or does not do, but arises from God's grace. But, even though this message was very liberating and one which she held onto firmly, Magda also felt that her faith was the courier of blame.

Magda and Julia both felt separated not only from God, but also from their church communities. Their experiences of alienation expose the constitutive force of power within the church (as described by Flaskas and Humphreys 1993:41). Doehring (cited in Graham 1999:198) speaks of this as the power of religion to hold captive or to release. Magda and Julia both experienced great relief that I did not judge them because I was a local preacher. They found it very important to be able to

speak about their experiences. It broke the silence and allowed them to step outside the secrets. Neuger (1996:99) speaks of helping those in need of pastoral care in finding their 'mother tongue', thus finding their own voice. Neuger (1996:99) makes a distinction between traditional and feminist listening:

> Although pastoral care has always been about naming and storytelling, it has not understood that naming to involve the deconstruction of patriarchal, internalized, and constantly reinforced language for the sake of transformation. In this transforming process, not only is an individual empowered toward self-, other-, and God-knowledge, but a new language is created and passed on for ongoing transformation of the creation.

It would seem as if having the space to voice their experiences allowed them to look at their actions differently. Julia in particular became convinced of the harmful effects and risks that her sexual flings held. They both shared that being able to tell their stories – and thus breaking the silence - helped to move them closer to God and gave them an opportunity to re-evaluate the effects that their non-marital sexual relations had had on themselves, their marriages and their faith. But even though they felt more connected to their faith after they had voiced their stories, they still felt disconnected from their faith communities.

5.5.2 Judgement and silence within the faith community

Both Julia and Magda felt that they would be judged very harshly if their non-marital sexual practices became known. Since most Christians viewed adultery and Christianity as mutually exclusive, they felt that knowledge of their adultery would place the sincerity of their faith under suspicion. The dominant discourse of judgement thus perpetuated their silence. Even though they continued to attend church services they both felt spiritually separated from their faith communities. They also withdrew from most of the church activities in which they previously participated.

The silence was twofold. Not only did the dominant discourse of judgement silence the co-searchers from speaking about their experiences of sexually unhappy marriages and about their subsequent decision to become engaged in non-marital sexual activities, but there was also a silence within church communities about sexually unhappy marriages.

The co-searchers' faith communities seldom (if ever) addressed the issue of sexually unhappy marriages. Although extra-marital sex is condemned and sexually happy marriages held as the ideal,

few ministers or church leaders speak about the issues that undermine sexually happy marriages: for example, the destructive effects of patriarchy. The silence regarding sexual happiness within marriages holds an absent but implicit message. But silence is not univocal: the silence regarding sexually happy and unhappy marriages can be interpreted in different ways.

The silence with regards to extra-marital relations suggests that most faith communities view extra-marital affairs as the exception rather than the rule. If faith communities regarded extra-marital relations as a common problem, surely they would address this issue in various ways and not ignore it in silence? Such silence seems to suggest that faith communities are in denial with regards to non-marital sexual practices. Moultrup (1990:11) argues that '[t]his paucity of literature stands in sharp contrast to the statistics that suggest that most marriages will, at some point, need to resolve the emotional trauma created by an affair'. De Bruin (cited in Botha:1998:19) states that approximately 50% of all White males and 30% of White females in the Republic of South Africa have had an extra-marital affair at some time:

> Despite the statistical evidence that more than half of all married men and women will, sometime in their married life, have to face the reality of an extra-marital affair, society as a whole still proclaims monogamy to be the norm.

> (Botha 1998:369)

As Kell (1992:158), Botha (1998:169) is convinced that the dismissive attitude towards 'extra-marital affairs will continue to ensure that extra-marital affairs are a secretive phenomenon'. By ignoring extra-marital sexual relations, the church is saying indirectly that this is not a common problem, or not a serious enough problem to talk about it. Nevertheless, the church still expects married couples to work towards the goal of a sexually happy marriage (Buys 2010:11; Craig & Stander 2009:17-19). Commenting on sex and marriage, Lake and Hills (1979:8) maintain that:

> Marriage is the acceptable face of adult sexuality, the part we like to see, to which we are accustomed. Extra-marital affairs are the dark side of sexuality, the bit we would rather not look upon which we know exists but whose implications we would prefer not to discuss.

Extra-marital sex stirs up strong emotions and reactive attitudes – usually more so than most other problems. This reactive response is even noticeable in the attitudes displayed by mental health professionals towards extra-marital affairs: '[I]t would seem as if there is a higher level of anxiety around extramarital affairs to other problems' (Moultrup1990:11). Most of the clergy members who

participated in this research journey felt that their initial theological training did not equip them to deal with their congregants' sexual problems. The co-searchers shared this view: they felt that their ministers would not be able to help them with sexual problems or the issues that underpin sexual problems. I support Craig and Stander's (2009:89) view that the silence in which sexual problems exist is due to a lack of knowledge; this in turn feeds the silence. It is a vicious circle: the silence feeds itself and results in the absence of helpful interventions.

The churches' avoidance of the need to address extra-marital sexual relations within its members' marriages begs the question: What about sexuality is so fearful that it makes it unspeakable? I relate this unspeak-ability back to the deeply ingrained sense of guilt which surrounds sexuality. This ingrained sense of guilt reflects a dualistic view of human beings in which reality is seen as consisting of two basic opposing elements: mind and matter (or mind and body), good and evil, reason and passion (Porcile-Santiso 1990:196; Craig & Stander 2009:15). This dichotomous view of body and soul resulted in all functions pertaining to the body being viewed as being in conflict with the soul. This dichotomy led to the relegation of the erotic (Porcile-Santiso 1990:196; Craig & Stander 2009:15). Ever since the early Christian centuries this view of sexuality had been part of the collective Christian consciousness (Casaleggio & Janse van Rensburg 2002:370; Green 1992:37-38) and frequently resulted in Christians - especially women - experiencing guilt and discomfort about sexual feelings, sexual desire and sexual pleasure (Craig & Stander 2009:14). As Nelson (1992:37-38), I argue that spiritual dualism contributed greatly to a sex-negative attitude in the church. Placing sexuality in the opposite realm to spirituality invited guilt and judgement to become dominant discourses regarding sexuality. Sex was often seen in terms of carnality, humanness and apostasy.

5.5.3 Judgement from the community

In her exploration of guilt, Julia shared her belief that women who engage in non-marital sexual relationships are judged more harshly than men by the community, and more especially by faith communities. Adulterous women are labelled as '*sluts who are on the prowl instead of controlling their sexual appetite*' [*Jy is 'n slegte vrou wat rondloop, in plaas daarvan om jou lus af te knyp*]. Julia felt that those who judge adultery do so because they associate it with lust. She believes that, when judging, few people consider the fact that there is a context in which infidelity takes place and that it usually arises out of a very complex situation. Julia felt that people tended to ignore the emotional aspects – including the relational issues in marriage – that were involved in infidelity which have also contributed to sexual unhappiness:

> *People judge extra-marital sex as they reduce it to lust. They see it as just an action to satisfy sexual lust; they do not consider the loneliness and isolation that might have been contributing factors in these actions. It is often the need for physical closeness and emotional intimacy and not lust - why women engage in extra-marital sex. But such women are judged as sex addicts, they are seen as rubbish and low life.*

Gaddy (1996:85) confirms Julia's belief that bodily sins are often judged as being worse than others: '[m]ost people (in both church and secular society) reserve their harshest judgements for physical acts of wrongdoing – especially physical actions involving sex'.

Julia felt that it was very important not to disclose to anyone that she was involved in sexual flings. She believed disclosure would change the way others viewed her identity. She felt that it would brand her as an adulterer, thereby totalising her in the act infidelity and reducing her complete personhood into that one aspect of her life:

> *It will take my identity away and define me as just an adulterer. My personhood will be defined in terms of my sexuality. Resulting in this being the only identify that I have. All the other areas of my personhood, such as committed mother, supportive friend and community worker will be nullified and replaced with adulterer. Adulterers are more than just that, they have many other stories in their lives and many other values.*

The expectation of judgement was a major collaborator in keeping the silence; in turn, this silence isolated the co-searchers. The isolation which the co-searchers experienced was often acute and overwhelming. The silence, however, was not only about their extra-marital sexual activities, but also about their sexual unhappiness within their marriages. They often experienced a sense of personal failure as a result of the sexual unhappiness in their marriages. They felt that they had failed as Christian women and as wives. The feelings of failure strengthened the silence: they felt that talking to friends about their feelings would expose them on many different levels. By sharing such intimate information – as they would need to share if they spoke honestly about their problems - they could be seen by others as being disloyal to their husband. They also felt that it might expose their extra-marital actions to judgment. For some, the acknowledgement of sexual difficulty meant admitting to being a failure as a lover and not worthy of being loved. They were also concerned that, because they wanted to experience sexual fulfilment and to have sex on a regular basis, they would be labelled as over-sexed or perverse. They believed that this sexual need would be interpreted as just physical gratification and not as part of emotional intimacy. The co-searchers' ideas and fears

reminded me strongly of the discourse that women are not supposed to be sexual beings and that their sexuality always needs to be in the service of others.

Landman (1999:86) comments on discourses that isolate women in silence. Often a model of piety is prescribed in which women have to bear their own burdens. Landman also believes that the internalisation 'of guilt, sin and hell led women to easily fall prey to their piety being used to victimise and oppress them'. I support Landman's challenge of a piety which isolates:

> In this regard we have to say: not all kinds of piety are good for women. A piety which promotes individualism and keeps women from 'carrying each other's burdens', that is, from communally care for each other and constituting a forum from which women can voice their experiences and needs, is a piety which is bad for women. Furthermore, a piety which forces women to see their bodies as their enemies and their souls as naturally in possession of Satan, is bad for women because it alienates them from their own power and from entering into an empowering relationship with their Christ. Any piety which robs women of the possibility of forming mutual relationships with other people and with God, is bad and leads to women's social and political isolation. And any piety which prescribes morality to women without giving them the chance to develop themselves as moral agents, is to be evaded. In short, what is bad for women is any piety which socially stylises women and psychologically alienates them from their feelings and experiences (and bodies).

> (Landman 1999:86)

Because women's sexuality was placed under suspicion throughout the ages (Ussher 1993:10), women developed a deep sense of guilt with regards to their sexual needs and tended to deny their body-liness. This was especially so for Christian women. Sexual desire and pleasure seemed to evoke judgement. This is even more so for women who engaged in non-marital sexual relations. They were not only concerned about the judgement of society in general, but also about how they will be seen by their children.

5.5.4   Identity as mother

For many Christian women, to fail in the role of mother and as nurturer, is to fail as a Christian. Within the Protestant Church, Christian women's role was linked to that of nurturer. For many centuries the Bible was used to justify and maintain the construction of the wife within the nurturing role (Isherwood & McEwan 1994:18; Landman 2002:25). This belief infiltrated all spheres of life, especially theology and psychology (Shefer & Foster 2009:267; Nicolson 1994:12; Buys 2010:2).

Nicolson (1994:12) discusses Freud's theory of female sexuality and states that Freud also cast women's sexuality in the role of nurturer. As recently as the 1970s in South Africa, the religious discourse which prescribed women in the role of motherhood was still prevalent (Plaatjies 2003:219). The women whose identities were constructed within this dominant discourse are the mothers and grandmothers of young women and girls today. These discourses are thus still in circulation, though perhaps not as prominent as before. Müller (2008:1-2) argues that remnants of this discourse are still found in many churches' belief systems and therefore also in Christians' constructions of the role of wives and mothers. Household chores - such as preparing meals, childcare and the cleaning of the home - are still linked to a wife's love and commitment to her family and children, even though many women work also outside their homes (Müller 2008:2).

There seems to be a close link between seeing the woman as nurturer and the exclusion of female desire and an expression of female sexuality (McFadden 2003:1-3). The discourse which prescribed the role of nurturer for mothers excluded them from being sexually assertive. It therefore follows that if mothers were not seen as sexual beings, were they not encouraged to seek fulfilment in sexual expression and enjoyment. Many Christian women have internalised this dominant discourse: they do not see themselves as sexual beings or able to pursue their sexual fulfilment. The effects of the normalizing gaze become apparent in women who accept this position. Magda and Julia, who did not internalise the dominant discourse of mothers as sexless beings, were very aware of being the object of this gaze, especially from their children.

Julia shared that if her children were to know of her infidelity she would feel as if she had failed as a mother. The infidelity would reveal the contradictions between her beliefs and actions and would label her as being immoral. She stated that *she would rather be dead than have her children find out about her infidelity*. Julia explained that it would be much worse if her children knew than if her husband knew. Her husband could understand why she was sexually so unhappy, whereas her children would find it hard to see her as a sexual being with sexual needs. Similarly, Magda also felt that her son would not be able to understand her affair and that this knowledge would tarnish her image, especially her role as a mother.

Extra-marital sexual practices not only held emotional dilemmas: they also posed physical risks that were perhaps even more dangerous to the women.

5.5.5   Physical risks

Physical risks were a very real effect of extra-marital sexual relations. Most of the co-searchers, who engaged in sexual activity other than with their husbands, often did so without protection. Although they all were aware of the risks involved in unprotected sex and the possibility of contracting a sexually transmitted infection (STI) they often did not take precautions. Most of the women felt that their sexual partners were 'decent' people and therefore 'safe' sexual partners.

My exploration of the idea that 'decent' people do not contract STIs exposed a dominant discourse embedded in this concept. This discourse reasons as follows: 'Because I am a Christian I am exempt from sexual diseases as only "bad" girls - like sluts and prostitutes - get STIs'. Moreover, even if one's sexual partner is not a Christian but a 'decent' person - and thus not having sex co-currently with different sex partners – then one is also safeguarded from STIs. I found this reasoning alarming because it is based on an assumption that a person is a safe sexual partner because s/he is 'decent', and not on an exploration of his/her sexual history. The misconception which regards STIs as primarily the disease of prostitutes and sexually promiscuous people gives rise to false security. In the same vein, a person's standing in life is often linked to his/her safeness as a sexual partner: the higher the status, the 'safer' the partner. For instance, a local preacher, a successful business person or a chairperson of the school committee frequently would not be associated with STIs. Their position in their community seems to exempt them from being seen as a risky sexual partner, *even when they are unfaithful*. Similarly, the assumption that 'good Christians' do not contract STIs or even that 'good Christians' do not have sex other than with their spouses.

Many misconceptions circulate regarding STIs. For instance, whereas HIV and AIDS was initially seen as a disease contracted by promiscuous gay people only or even just because they are gay (Ward 2010:1), in South Africa at present there are more heterosexuals individuals infected with the virus than homosexual individuals. Despite these figures, many South Africans still regard HIV and AIDS as a gay or Black disease (Nelson Mandela Foundation: 2010; Wasserman 2008:207).

I explored with the co-searchers a concern regarding their culpability in putting their husbands' lives at risk should they contract HIV and subsequently infect their husbands. I challenged the co-searchers on the safety of their sexual practices as well as on the responsibility and accountability they had not only to themselves, but especially to their husbands who unknowingly were at risk. In most instances the co-searchers agreed to practise safer sex in future.

During the exploration of the physical risks involved in extra-marital sexual relations, conversations frequently led to discussing the contributing factors to extra-marital sex.

5.6 CONTRIBUTING FACTORS TO EXTRA-MARITAL SEXUAL RELATIONS

Some common factors were present in the exploration of extra-marital sexual relations. These contributing factors were not held as excuses or rationalisations by the co-searchers, but were rather seen as risks factors to be aware of.

5.6.1 Alcohol abuse

Alcohol abuse proved to be a risk factor as well as a contributing factor in casual sex and sexual flings, as seen in both Naomi and Julia's stories. Alcohol's role in reducing sexual inhibition is notorious: '[a]lcohol is primarily a depressant. It affects the cerebral cortex before the deep forebrain structures, and the function of the cerebral cortex is mostly inhibitory...'. The functions of these areas of the brain are depressed by alcohol. It '"dis-inhibits" animal-like behaviors [sic] controlled by the limbic system, notably sex and aggression' (Dewey 2007). Alcohol also leads to a distinct mental state: alcohol myopia (Steele & Josephs 2009:923). Alcohol myopia makes future events fade into insignificance while present stimuli dominate attention. It thus contributes to irresponsible sexual behaviour as the long term consequences are ignored. Because alcohol makes people neglect long-term consequences in favour of short-term pleasures (Steele & Josephs 2009:923-925), alcohol has become notorious for producing irresponsible sexual behaviour (Fritz: 2010). Finally, alcohol is often described as the single most important risk factor in AIDS: people who normally would protect themselves when sober sometimes engage in unprotected sex when drunk.

Risky sexual behaviour as a result of alcohol myopia is evident not only in Julia and Naomi's stories, but also in the sexual behaviour of many of the women that I see in my private practice. By inhibiting religious convictions regarding sexual practices, alcohol also neutralises the 'normalizing gaze': this frequently leads to extra-marital sexual encounters and unprotected sex.

Naomi shared that she could only participate in swinging when she was drunk: alcohol helped her to get over her shyness. During a conversation in which Julia and I reflected on extra-marital sexual behaviour, I asked the following question:

> *Nicki:* *What do you think plays a contributing factor when women move from thinking about extra-marital sex to actually having extra-marital sex?*
> *Julia:* *Alcohol – definitely alcohol. It gives you the courage to take the next step. It takes one's inhibitions away. I could only do it when I used some alcohol.*

The factors that contributed towards making women vulnerable to extra-marital sex were not always as tangible as a substance like alcohol; sometimes these factors arose from more abstract social constructions.

5.6.2   Feelings of hopelessness

Isolation emerged as a very dominant theme in all the co-searchers' stories. Both Julia and Magda's decisions to engage in non-marital sexual activity were motivated by their sense of hopelessness arising from sexual happiness: they felt that their husbands either obstructed sexual happiness within marriage or made it unobtainable altogether.

The absence of hope in the co-searchers' sexual lives invited an exploration of how hope operates and what enables hope. I discovered that when hope is absent or when people are feeling hopeless 'this work is exponentially more difficult since hopeless people generally withdraw from social contact' (Weingarten 2010a:17). Withdrawal from social contact is often based on the assumption 'that others share their grim view and share their negative view of them[selves] ... [thus] the task for people who lack hope is to resist isolation' (Weingarten 2010a:17).

I interpret the task of 'resisting isolation' in this context to mean resisting the silence regarding sexually unhappy marriages. Weingarten argues that in the midst of isolation and hopelessness, the 'intentional witness' can become the connection back to a 'reasonable hope'. In this research journey I chose to become an intentional witness to the pain of sexually unhappy marriages out of my conviction that being an intentional witness to pain can enable reasonable hope.

Reasonable hope is relational: it is something you do with others. Weingarten's (2010a:1) understanding of hope thus 'stands in contradistinction to the dominant discourse of hope as a feeling achieved by an individual'. Julia experienced hope as a relational activity:

> *Because I was angry with Willem and myself [about having extra-marital sex], I could not pray. However, I found comfort in the fact that I knew that other people were praying for me and my marriage (although they did not know what the problems were). It felt as if they hold hope on my behalf, which helped me to hold on to life.*

Weingarten (2006:3) argues that reasonable hope is a realistic hope: its possibility lies in the belief that hope is something that people do together. She continues that the doing of hope with others is 'a more accurate reflection of the nature of human relatedness: we are not isolated, but rather intrinsically interdependent'. This research journey created a space for me to stand with 'othered' women and to *do* hope with them by breaking the silence and, by implication, the isolation. By breaking the silence, these women were able to challenge the dominant discourses and practices which were life-denying. Once the women re-constructed their understandings of hope – reasonable hope as something they do with others - they no longer relied on the abstract concept of hope as a feeling. Instead, they connected hope to possible actions. They took agency of their own lives. They were able to move towards reasonable hope: hope connected to actions.

Julia began to 'do hope' through small actions: she started to practice sexual self-care. This made her realise that she does not need to depend on someone else for the release of sexual tension. With the help of de-construction, Julia was able to challenge her (mis)conceptions regarding masturbation. Whereas before she regarded masturbation only as a means to a climax, now she is able to see it as an action of self-care: it kept her safe and re-connected her with her womanhood. Although Julia did not regard masturbation as a substitute for the intimacy of sexual intercourse, she felt that she had a choice. This realisation enabled her to shift position: she moved away from being a victim of loneliness and sexual frustration to being a woman with choices. Eventually she also moved away from sexual flings.

Weingarten's (2006:5) ideas regarding hope were very helpful in the process of reconstructing hope, particularly because 'reasonable hope' can accommodate doubt and despair. Initially both Julia and Magda felt that they could hold no hope of a sexually happy marriage: they felt too much doubt and despair about their marriages. Both had had long struggles with sexual unhappiness and had tried many different avenues to change this without any success. But understanding hope differently allowed them to hold onto the belief that in some way they would find some meaning in their experiences, regardless of how things turned out. They came to understand that even if they experienced feelings of despair and doubt, it did not necessarily imply that they had to be hopeless.

Weingarten (2006:6) confirms their experience: '[r]ealistic hope is comfortable with a mess. It accepts that chaos can assort itself into order. It embraces contradiction'.

'Reasonable hope's' capacity to allow for contradictions was helpful, particularly as marriage and sexual infidelity are frequently filled with contradictions: for instance, loving two people at the same time or separating one's love for the spouse from non-marital sexual actions. Both Magda and Julia felt that their extra-marital sexual relations allowed them to stay in their marriages – another seeming contradiction. By allowing space for these contradictions both Magda and Julia (and most of the other co-searchers) were able to explore new ways of understanding: understanding beyond binaries. It would seem as if the affairs and sexual flings 'protected' the marriages by allowing the women to re-connect with sexual fulfilment. In turn, this enabled them to begin believing that sexual fulfilment could be possible for them again, even within their marriages. They no longer saw themselves as undesirable women who were not worthy of physical contact. They experienced themselves instead as sexual beings, capable of enjoying their bodies and of being acceptable as lovers.

Lake and Hills (1979:96) discuss the detachment and separation which people who are having extra-marital affairs experience in terms of contradiction - love for spouse and extra-marital sex. They argue that people develop the ability to separate 'their lives into different compartments', and do not allow 'one set of feelings and activities to interfere with the other. One part of them is used in the marriage; another part is used in the affair' (Lake & Hills 1979:96). This was 'compartmentalisation' was evident in all the co-searchers' stories.

Realistic or 'reasonable' hope is always pragmatic; seeks goals and pathways towards actions of hope (Weingarten 2006:7). The decision to shift hope from a feeling to an action proved to be invaluable for the co-searchers. Regaining hope for sexual happiness within her marriage encouraged Julia – after many years of silence and isolation - to speak to Willem about their future and about the sexual challenges within their marriage. It also enabled her to resist extra-marital sexual flings in order to work at her own marriage.

Pragmatic hope was evident in Magda's story. When she came to a position where she no longer accepted the patriarchal principles of her marriage – more especially that she needed to be subservient in all her actions - Magda was able to challenge these ideas and to create new ways of relating to her role as mother and wife.

5.6.3 Extra-marital sex as the facilitator of hope

The nature of narrative research is that one is frequently left with more questions than answers. Narrative research 'does not strive to produce any conclusions of certainty, but aims for its finds to be "well grounded" and "supportable", retaining an emphasis on the linguistic reality of human experience' (Webster & Mertova 2007:4). I support this view. After contemplating how extra-marital sexual relationships recovered hope in the co-searcher's stories and thus supported the marriages involved, I am left with the following questions: Do we need to challenge the dominant discourse that prescribed that sex should only happen between married people in order to protect the marriage? Should only married people have sex - thus no sex before or outside of marriage? If this discourse – no sex outside of marriage - is adhered to strictly, what implications are there in terms of sexual incompatibility? Would sexual incompatibility be revealed if couples had sexual experiences with each other before getting married, thereby enabling the couple to make an informed decision about entering into marriage and to negotiate their subsequent sexual commitment to each other? My experience of dealing with couples who had married as virgins - as prescribed by Christianity - only to find that one was a-sexual, has challenged the desirability of the dominant discourse which prescribes virgin brides and grooms. It also leaves me with even more questions: If couples engaged in sexual intimacy before marriage, would sexual challenges not be discovered prior to marriage, which could then allow for negotiation on the way forward? Can Christian couples consider a sexually open marriage if one of the partners is a-sexual, and thus have the freedom of extra-marital sex in order to support the marriage? Is it possible that sex is not necessarily the core of intimacy for all people? Has Christianity - through its position on sexual intercourse - sexualised marriage and thus, paradoxically, reduced it to the act of sex?

I continue to grapple with the notion of whether Christianity needs to radically change its discourse regarding sex and marriage: as it exists at present, it creates many problems that are hidden in silence. By raising these questions I do not want to create the impression that the church (or Christians) should condone promiscuous behaviour. Nor do I want to promote the rationalisation of 'free sex' - sex void of any commitment and meaning. I am convinced, however, that the focus of marriage would shift if the church removed the taboo regarding extra-marital practices. No longer would marriage be defined by sexual intercourse but rather by other aspects of a committed relationship. If the church 'de-criminalised' extra-marital sex, people would be able to be much more open about their sexual struggles. This openness might lead, in turn, to earlier intervention and better informed choices regarding marriage and of how sexuality will operate in a marital relationship. A

more open attitude to sexual intercourse could encourage couples to engage with their sexuality on many levels, and therefore support more realistic expectations regarding sex within marriage. It might even promote amongst couples a greater caution, awareness and respect regarding sexual relations and how these impact relationships. This approach would shift the pastoral care of sexuality from a prescriptive ethical approach to a participatory ethical approach, thereby allowing Christians to formulate their own ethics regarding sexuality.

Participatory ethics embraces the notion of doing hope and giving a voice to the voiceless.

5.6.4   Silence and voicelessness

Hope and hopelessness proved to be important factors to be aware of when dealing with sexually unhappy marriages; they also often played a determining factor whether a co-searcher engaged in extra-marital sexual activities or not. Frequently, it was only once the co-searcher had given up all hope that the marriage could change that she took the decision to engage in extra-marital sex. Being voiceless was closely linked to hope and hopelessness. Voicelessness presented itself in different ways in the co-searchers' stories. In some instances, the wife was not able to speak about sex because sex, *per se,* was a taboo subject within the marriage. This was Renate's experience. For Maya and Magda, the sexual unhappiness was unspeakable and thus not spoken about. Although at first Julia was able to speak about sexual unhappiness, her husband's lack of response - when she shared her frustrations and hurts - made her feel unheard and thus voiceless. After many years of trying to address sexual unhappiness in her marriage without success, Julia came to the conclusion that her marriage would never change: she felt trapped in a sexless marriage.

In the presence of patriarchy, women's voices are often ignored or silenced (Bons-Storm 1998:10). This is especially apparent when dealing with sexuality. Silence has been one of the most dominant discourses in terms of Christian sexuality. Sex is not spoken about either within churches or within many marriages. The powerful discourse of women as 'nurturer and caretaker' has also impacted women's sexuality (Isherwood & McEwan 1994:42-44; Landman 2002:25; Müller 2008:2; Plaatjies 2003:219; Buys 2010:2). The role of nurturer enabled them to take care of others, but silenced both Julia and Magda in terms of their own sexual needs. They became voiceless in terms of their personal sexual nurturing within their marriages.

Historically women's sexual desire was seen as dangerous and unholy by the church (Isherwood & McEwan 1994:39, 54; Ussher 1993:10). This discourse invariably contributed to a reluctance to speak about female sexual desire and unfulfilled sexual expectations. Once again, this left women voiceless in terms of addressing their sexual needs and desires.

Yet another patriarchal discourse within Christian marriages is that of the husband as head of the home and thus the head also of the marriage (Landman 1999:72). This discourse interprets the husband's voice as more important than his wife's (Landman 1999:82). This attitude frequently expressed itself in sexual practices, which could leave the wife voiceless. This discourse positions the wife in a submissive role. This contributes to voicelessness, as an obedient and submissive Christian wife is not supposed to challenge her husband or insist on placing her needs first. Closely linked to the notion of being a submissive Christian wife, is being a pious wife (Landman 1999:86). A pious wife was seen as someone who sacrifices herself for others; by implication, this also means sacrificing her sexual needs. Being a pious wife also meant suffering in silence (Landman 1999:86; Poling 2006:54) and accepting sexual unhappiness in silence, with no other recourse.

Sexual unhappiness often resides in silence and voicelessness which, in turn, can result in sexual problems being left unattended and unresolved. Some co-searchers lost hope in the presence of continuous unresolved conflict and sexual unhappiness. As a result of the absence of hope, Julia and Magda sought sexual fulfilment outside their marriages. Moreover, the absence of hope and extra-marital sexual relations seemed to provide the fertile soil in which depression could thrive. The absence of hope was often linked to depression – either in the co-searcher or in her husband.

5.6.5   Depression

Depression was frequently a companion in this journey. Nowadays depression seems to be a common disease due to various factors, not the least of which is living in an environment of continual stress. The South African Depression and Anxiety group (SADAG) states that some external factors that may contribute to depression, such as the loneliness from relationship difficulties. SADAG (2010:5) also list financial worries, legal problems, retirement, and other stressors as contributing factors to the development of depression. It is important to note however, that although depression can be caused by external factors, genetics and physiological or biochemical factors are often also contributing factors:

Researchers now realise that inherited factors are important. In other words, having close relatives who have had depression means that you are more likely to become depressed. People with a genetic susceptibility may be more vulnerable to depression when something upsetting happens. One particularly interesting area of research today involves the 'biochemistry of depression'. Depression is believed to be caused by an imbalance of brain chemicals called neurotransmitters. In other words, when the functioning of certain neurotransmitters is disturbed, depression can occur. Another contributing physiological factor can be medical illnesses, including strokes, Cushing's disease, and thyroid problems. Various medications, such as treatment for high blood pressure, birth control pills, and steroids (like cortisone), have also been implicated. Last but not least, alcohol and other commonly abused substances take their toll.

(SADAG 2010:5)

Although I work from a social constructionist position, I acknowledge that it is important to be aware that sexuality also has a physiological aspect in terms of biochemistry which should not be ignored. It is crucial to be aware of such bodily factors - such as depression – which could also be contributing factors towards sexual unhappiness. I am in agreement with Botha (1998:376) who cautions that the discourse of relational social construction of knowledge, as developed by Gergen (1994), must not 'reduce people's narratives to discourses alone'. While the meaning we attach to sexuality is socially constructed, the functioning of sexuality is situated within bodies. The meanings which individuals assign to sexuality and sexual functioning often stem from their physical ability or inability to have sex. Mind and body cannot be split into two independent parts: they are inter-connected and interdependent, and thus determine sexual functioning reciprocally. In sexual unhappiness, interconnectivity often exists between sexual unhappiness and medical conditions (Buys 2010:xii). Several co-searchers in this research journey experienced the negative effects - in either their husbands' bodies or their own - of physiological or biochemical factors, such as depression, diabetes and other stress related illnesses. Depression was a common denominator in Magda, Julia and Maya's stories, as well as in and my own. The presence of depression as a common denominator necessitates a brief exploration of neuroscience in relation to depression and sex and sexual unhappiness.

5.6.5.1 The neuroscience of depression and its effects of sexual functioning

Fisher and Thomson (2007:246) explain that 'among the primary neural systems are three discrete, interrelated motivation/emotional systems for mating, reproduction, and parenting: the sex drive,

romantic love, and male-female attachment'. When depression is present, all three of these systems are negatively affected.

Fisher and Thomson's research (2007:263-265) into how healthy sexual functioning affects relationships reveals that there is a greater reason for the existence of orgasm than merely for pleasure. Orgasm encourages feelings of attachment by raising the oxytocin and vasopressin levels in individuals: these are the crucial hormones for bonding and long-term partnership. They conclude that if we fail to reach orgasm, we also fail to stimulate the brain system linked to long-term love, thereby endangering the stability of a long-term partnership (Fisher & Thomson 2007:261). Even ejaculation seems to feature in Mother Nature's plans to keep couples together (Fisher & Thomson 2007:266). These findings highlight the importance of sexual intercourse between husband and wife and how it affects their ability to bond on a chemical level in the brain. Depression often has a negative effect on libido resulting in less frequent sexual contact (Craig & Stander 2009:173). Untreated depression can even result in no sexual contact. The absence of sexual contact can contribute to both partners feeling increasingly less bonded in terms of their long-term commitment. But treating depression with antidepressants, however, can also have possible negative implications for people's sexual functioning.

5.6.5.2 Antidepressants

Fisher and Thomson (2007:245) state that today millions of people take antidepressants - also known as serotonin reuptake-inhibitors (SSRIs) - on a daily basis. This can have a major effect on people's functioning within their sexual relationships. Side effects include:

> [I]n both men and women, these antidepressants can cause emotional blunting, weight gain, and several types of sexual dysfunction, interfering with sexual desire, sexual arousal, genital sensation, lubrication, erection, ejaculation, and orgasm.
>
> (Fisher & Thomson 2007:245)

Researchers have recently found, with the aid of brain scans, that romantic attraction is linked to areas of the brain that produce dopamine and that these mini dopamine factories are suppressed by high amounts of serotonin. Thus when SSRIs and serotonin and norepinephrine reuptake inhibitors (SNRIs) are taken, dopamine levels drop and users are less able to fall in love or maintain romance

with a partner. Moreover, serotonin-enhancing antidepressants can cause emotional blunting and sexual dysfunction in 73% of people who take this medication (Fisher &Thomson 2007:255). They conclude that antidepressants can interfere with the three neural systems needed for mating, reproduction and long term bonding.

Graham (2010b:22), remarking on Fisher and Thompson's work, notes 'that while low levels of serotonin contribute to feelings of intense romantic love' it might leave those who struggle with depression vulnerable to falling in love, and thus perhaps also vulnerable to extra-marital affairs. Although antidepressants are often prescribed to patients with low serotonin levels, research has also shown that high serotonin levels can suppress both dopamine and testosterone levels. This is why SSRIs and SNRIs tend to damage feelings of romantic love and the sex drive. Although the use of antidepressants is crucial for some people, it is important to be aware of their possible side effects and how these could influence couples' sexual functioning. I am of the opinion that when depression and sexual problems are present, therapists and clients alike should be informed by or work in collaboration with a medical practitioner. A multi-disciplinary approach is necessary due to the bodily-ness of sexual relations. This bodily-ness of sexual challenges can be seen, for instance, in the effects of depression and antidepressants on vasopressin and oxytocin levels in men.

It is not only medical conditions and medication which affects sexual functioning, however. It is also the natural process of aging. The male hormone, testosterone, is influenced by the aging process.

5.6.5.3 Andropause

Some of the co-searchers shared that their husbands' sexual functioning was affected by the aging process. Morgentaler (2008:1) explains that with aging and other factors, men's testosterone levels can decrease: '[t]he symptoms of low testosterone include: low sex drive (what we call libido), weak erections, feeling chronically tired and without energy, and depression or a milder version…' Graham (2010a:49) reports that in the year 2000 'scientists, came up with an explanation for why men become grumpy and irritable - "irritable male syndrome"', also known as testosterone deficiency. Research has shown that men's mood swings are due to a decline in testosterone which affects their brain and behaviour. Studies have shown that testosterone can raise vasopressin and oxytocin levels, thus low testosterone levels and low sex drive can result in a diminished bond between partners. The sudden decrease in a man's testosterone level could indicate the start of

andropause (Graham 2010a:49). The absence of sex drive and impaired male sexual functioning was present in the Julia's marriage as well as in one of the participating clergy.

Graham (2010a:49) reports that even though men do not experience the same sudden drop in hormone levels as women, the amount of usable testosterone in the body drops steadily from the early twenties. Once a man's level has dropped by 50%, this causes the onset of andropause or the so-called 'mid-life crisis'. Graham (2010a:49) continues that '[s]ymptoms of depression, anger, irritability, fatigue, low libido, erectile dysfunction, weight gain and poor concentration arrive shortly thereafter'. According to Graham, aging and stress are the main contributing factors to testosterone deficiency.

Julia's husband was able to regain his potency after making adjustments to his blood pressure medication and a testosterone supplement programme was started: testosterone undecanoate (TU). Goosen (2006:295) states that testosterone treatment in younger and middle-aged men has been found to be effective. It often improves sexual functioning such as sexual desire, nocturnal erections and frequency of intercourse. Goosen (2006:296) states that 75% of men treated with testosterone reported beneficial effects to their sexual function and '[i]n the 25% who experienced no improvement aging, diabetes and cardiovascular disease were factors that emerged as significant'.

While sexual unhappiness was often due to challenges in the husband's sexual functioning, a further challenge was posed by the silence in which sexuality is trapped. This silence frequently hindered frank discussion about sexual problems between the husband and wife, as well as with a medical practitioner. Several discourses regarding men's potency have a major influence on this silence. Moreover, such discourses can be linked to how men are portrayed in patriarchal ideology.

5.6.6   Discourses regarding male potency and patriarchy

Within a patriarchal ideology men are often portrayed as the hunter (Landman 2002:25; Buys 2010:2) with power and physical ability as the mark of a man. Since biblical times a man's worth was often linked to his penis size and ability to perform sexually (Holtzhausen & Stander 1996:57-59; Morgentaler 2009:1; Craig & Stander 2009:50). Closely linked to these ideas of strength and virility are the dominant discourses which see a man's sexuality as instinctive and natural (Hare-Mustin 1994:24), as well as the idea that men are always ready for sex. Wasserman (2008:117) discusses the dominant discourse which sees and expects of all men to always desire sex and be able

to perform sexually: '[m]en are not always ready for sex', especially older men (usually from forty years onwards), men who have very stressful lives or men who are using certain prescribed medication might find that their libido and sexual functioning are detrimentally effected. Craig and Stander (2009:165) state that research shows that erectile dysfunction (ED) is a common problem: up to 52% of men older than forty are affected by it. Moreover, 50% of men will at one stage or another struggle with impotency due to varied factors. Finally, when men have challenges regarding their sexual function it influences their self confidence as well as their self esteem (Craig & Stander 2009:165). I suggest that if discourses which link maleness to sexual functioning are internalised, sexual challenges will have an exponentially greater effect. The implications of these discourses are that if a man does not conform and perform to these standards, he is 'unnatural' or not a man.

Radford Ruether (1990:220) discusses the patriarchal view regarding the role of men as head of the family within a Christian marriage. She traces the roots of this belief to St Augustine, who argued that only men possess the image of God in themselves. It therefore follows that men should resemble God, thus be invincible and powerful. Within patriarchal discourses, men symbolise strength and power. Linked to strength and power are discourses which portray men as unfailing. Therefore, if a man should 'fail' sexually, he has 'failed' as a man. Since this implication is often too overwhelming for men to acknowledge, many men find it almost impossible to speak about their sexual challenges.

It is not only men that are exposed to discourse regarding male sexual functioning: many women have also internalised these discourses regarding male potency. For instance, Julia felt sexually rejected because her husband at times was unable to get or to maintain an erection. This in turn led to performance anxiety within her husband and, eventually, to a total avoidance of intimacy.

Journeying with sexual unhappiness made me aware of the complexity of sexuality. It cannot be addressed on one level only: it needs to be addressed on emotional, physical, relational and religious levels. Religious discourses, more often than not, play a powerful role in the meaning that Christians allocate to sexuality.

5.6.7   Sexual incompatibility

Within our religious institutions sexual intercourse within marriage is acceptable and expected. The roots of this expectation can be found in Judaism, where sexual intercourse was seen as the consummation of a marriage (Sections 3.6.4 & 3.6.5). Even though sex is often covered under a

blanket of repression and guilt (Haught 1997:1; Craig & Stander 2009:14), another discourse co-exists with it: the expectation and presupposition of sexual happiness within the Christian marriage (Bredenkamp 2002:344-347; Yancey 2009:9; Craig & Stander 2009:21). Despite this presupposition, very few young people get guidance about how to explore their sexuality (Fredman & Potgieter 1996:52). Often the only messages they ever hear is that 'sex is dangerous' and that sexual exploration as well as sexual intercourse should be avoided before marriage (Arthur 2003:42; Craig & Stander 2009:14). Christian women are expected to marry as virgins (Russell [1929] 2009:29; Peterman 1999:170-171). In conversations with women it became apparent that Christian girls are not encouraged to explore their sexuality and to be physically intimate with their boyfriends or even fiancés. This discourse presents a dilemma: how do a couple know how important or unimportant sexual and physical contact is to them if they never explore this side of their relationship or do so very tentatively? Lake and Hills (1979:25) summarise this dilemma concisely:

> The general rules of the ideal marriage suggest that sex should always be perfect, and that it should express and maintain an ideal love. But who knows before marriage whether his or her partner is capable of this love? Without considerable experience of sexual intercourse together, which couple can be sure their marriage will be sexually fulfilling? The marriage is supposed to last a lifetime. According to the ideal, each must adjust his or her feelings to take account of the reality which emerges. Blessed are those who expect the least, for they shall not be disappointed.

Today, people have a much longer life expectancy than a few centuries ago:

> In general, the risk of death at any give age is less for females than for males, except during the childbearing years (in economically developed societies females have a lower mortality even during those years)….In ancient Greece and Rome the average life expectancy was about 28 years; in the early 21st century life expectancy averaged about 78 years in most industrialized countries. In countries with a high rate of HIV infection, however, the average life expectancy was as low as 33 years.

> (Encyclopaedia Britannica: 2010)

According to the United Nations Children's Fund report, *The State of world's children 2009* (UNICEF 2008:2), in industrial countries more women survive childbirth and both men and women live longer. These two factors result in the possibility of a couple being married for a much longer period than before. If such a marriage is sexually unhappy, the couple may be doomed to a lifetime of frustration and unhappiness.

In Maya's story we saw how the expectation of 'good' sex can devastate a marriage as well as a person's positive construction of self. Maya connected her worth as a woman to her ability to have enjoyable sex with her husband and to bear children (Section 4.7.6). Maya's construction of her identity resonates with how women were seen in Judaism: a woman's most prized possession was her sexuality and having children was seen as her main function. In Protestant thought we find similar discourses which frame a woman's role as nurturer and wife. These discourses are examples of how patriarchal philosophies and interpretations of women became life-denying and undermined Maya's sexual happiness. Many Christian women internalise patriarchal ideas regarding their role in terms of sex and bearing children; this then becomes constitutive in their experiences of self and others. Many of these discourses are invisible, but are accepted as the 'truth' and have a profound impact on a woman's understanding of her sexuality. Coupled with the discourse that sexual happiness within marriages is guaranteed, is the assumption that all people are equally sexual or that couples will be sexually compatible.

5.6.8   Continuum of sexual desire

Butler (in McClintock Fulkerson 1994:82) argues that not only should we move away from the binary of man and woman, but also from woman and woman. Her alternative to these binary identities calls for heterosexuality to be contested, along with its fixed sexed identities, with the notion that gender is a performance. I would like to expand this argument to include sexuality. For many centuries sexuality was seen in the binary of heterosexual or homosexuality, with homosexuality as the deviant (Steyn & van Zyl 2009:3-6). It is only in recent years that people have become more accepting of the fact that there are also transgendered, bi-sexual and inter-sexed people (Triangle project: 2010). A further level of distinction needs to be considered. The need for sexual contact also lies on a continuum (Buys 2010:24; Craig & Stander 2009:158). For some people, sex is all important; but at the other end of the continuum lays asexuality (non-sexuality), which means, in its broadest sense, the lack of sexual attraction or the lack of interest in sex and/or desire for sex:

> An asexual [person] is someone who does not experience sexual attraction. Unlike celibacy, which people choose, asexuality is an intrinsic part of who [the person is]. For some [asexual people] sexual arousal is a fairly regular occurrence, though it is not associated with a desire to find a sexual partner or partners. Some will occasionally masturbate, but feel no desire for partnered sexuality. Other asexual people experience little or no arousal. Because [they] don't care about sex, asexual people generally do not see a lack of sexual arousal as a problem to

be corrected, and focus their energy on enjoying other types of arousal and pleasure. Asexual people have the same emotional needs as anyone else, and like in the sexual community [it varies] widely in how we fulfil those needs. Some asexual people are happier on their own, others are happiest with a group of close friends. Other asexual people have a desire to form more intimate romantic relationships, and will date and seek long-term partnerships. Asexual people are just as likely to date sexual people as [they] are to date each other.

(Aven: 2008)

Julia's story illustrated how problematic great differences in libido can prove to be in a marriage. Extra-marital sexual relations are often galvanised by differences in sexual desire and sexual incompatibility (Craig & Stander 158-160). The meanings that are attached to the absence of a sexual relationship are important. For Julia, as for many other women, the absence of sexual intercourse meant the absence of desire for her as a woman. She felt sexually rejected. Many women experience a negative self esteem when they feel sexually rejected: 'they think there is something very wrong with them and the relationship' (Buys 2010:13-14). In Julia's case, she interpreted this rejection as her not being desirable or that she was less of a woman. The absence of regular sexual intercourse - and eventually the total absence - led to a break-down in communication, sexual frustration, intense feelings of loneliness and, eventually, to sexual flings.

Sexual desire and functioning are complex issues, influenced by many different factors including - to name but a few - genetics, medication, disease and the aging process (Buys 2010:23). When one considers all these factors, it becomes very apparent that sexual happiness is complicated and frequently misunderstood.

Sexual happiness thus cannot be assumed or guaranteed. Even when the aforementioned physiological factors are absent, social constructions can frequently erode sexual happiness. One such social construction is economic dependency.

5.6.9 Economic dependency

Financial considerations frequently came to the fore during most of the participating co-searchers' individual journeys. Many South African women born in the 1950s and 1960s often gave up their careers once their children were born or continued working on a part-time basis in order to take care of their children. Stay-at-home mother seldom received any compensation for the work they did as childminders and taking care of their homes. Most did not have any pension fund: this left them

totally dependent financially on their husbands. The patriarchal system promoted idea that the husband was the provider for the family (Landman 2002:25). Within South African society, males were seen as the breadwinners and – until 1994 at least most senior positions were reserved for White males. This meant that the majority of women who did return to the official labour force after the birth of their children, often still needed their husband's income to subsidise their own. For many women this financial dependence meant that, after being married for twenty years or more, divorce was not really an option. By that time, women were often in their forties, they had no work experience in the formal labour market, nor did they have their own pension or medical fund. For such women, divorce was often not an option. The partnership between husband and wife on an economic level may persist long after the marriage's loving origins have ceased, and therefore the couple stay married (Lake & Hills 1979:20). The effort required to unbundle the marriage and its assets is not seen as sufficient to justify a divorce - as Magda experienced – and thus: '[h]oly wedlock is often sustained by financial deadlock' (Lake & Hills 1979:21). When women lived in sexually unhappy marriages - with little or no option of leaving the marriage because of their financial dependence on their husbands – many women (such as Magda and Julia) regarded an affair as a way to escape their situation. Even if they could not ask for a divorce, they still could thus find some level of happiness outside their marriages.

Isherwood and McEwan (1994:123) state that 'a man's success is often measured by his ability to "keep"' his wife. Thus, a 'kept' wife becomes a trophy, an object to reflect the husband's ability as financial provider. This discourse not only denies women self-fulfilment outside the home, but the work they do within their homes is often dismissed and not compensated. I relate this practice to the discourse that a wife becomes the property of her husband. When they marry, the husband 'acquires' the full-time services of his wife: she and her services become his property and he does not have to compensate her in exchange.

Financial dependence not only greatly influenced the co-searchers; it also impacted their husbands. Those husbands who were the primary or sole breadwinners experienced immense pressure to provide sufficiently for their families' needs. In the light of the recent economic recession, many primary breadwinners have experienced great stress regarding work security, and, where they have had their own businesses, great pressure to ensure that their businesses survive. This additional stress has frequently had a very negative effect on the marriage relationship in general and on sexual functioning in particular. I argue that most older South African men have internalised the dominant discourse that men must provide for their families. Moreover, men often construct their identity on

the foundation their careers and on their ability to provide. Thus if their ability to provide for the family is threatened, men's identity comes under attack.

In Julia's story, financial challenges contributed in both she and her husband experiencing feelings of guilt. Julia's guilt stems from the fact that she does not contribute to the household's income in actual rands and cents; her husband's guilt for being unable to provide sufficiently. These guilt feelings frequently led to blame, conflict and a break-down in the communication between the spouses. Both Magda and Julia were very aware of their husband's status as the primary and only breadwinner; both felt that this had an impact on their relationship and on the role they fulfilled within their homes. Being financially dependent on their husbands left them voiceless: they constantly felt beholden and in their husbands' debt.

Although economic dependence was a major influence in many of the co-searchers' stories, whether they got divorced or whether they stayed in a sexually unhappy marriage was frequently determined by additional considerations.

5.7 COMPLEXITIES

An examination of the contributing factors to extra-marital sexual relations reveals clearly that, more often than not, this is a complex matter indeed. Living in sexually unhappy marriages often meant living with many contradictions. Most of the women, especially those who had been married for twenty years or more, shared that their marriages represented much more than just having a husband. Often they were very good friends: the relationship worked well, with the exception of the physical side. There was so much more than finances at stake. The women spoke of having a history together. Often they had been together longer as a couple than they had been single. They spoke of shared interests, children, family, friends, animals, cell groups, business connections and a shared home. Although these were things that they felt they could not easily give up, at the same time they also felt that they could not live as sexless beings, without the hope of experiencing physical intimacy and care. For most, extra-marital sex became the trade off – the price they had to pay to stay in the marriage. As Magda put it: '*better the devil you know than the devil you don't know*'. Despite this, the decision to stay in the marriage and to engage in extra-marital sex nevertheless still held many challenges for the co-searchers.

5.8   THE CHALLENGE OF KEEPING UP APPEARANCES

Living in a sexually unhappy marriage held many challenges for the co-searchers. Keeping up the appearance of having a happy marriage was a great challenge. Often the couple had to pretend - to their children, family and friends - that all was well within their marriage. Since sexual issues were viewed as a private issue, they were not discussed with others. Consequently, pretending became a constant companion in the co-searchers' lives. Julia explained this pretending:

> *Willem is always so concerned about what other people may think of us. It is important to him that we portray the right image when we are with friends. I must do the things expected from a Christian wife. He becomes upset if I dance with other men or when I act playful. I used to get very upset about him being so concerned about what other people think – he should rather worry about what his own wife thinks. If we should get a divorce, it would shock all our friends. Everyone is under the impression that we are happily married – they only see us at social events and then we seem so happy and at ease with each other. No one realises that we are leading a double life. Once we are back home, we are distant – in separate worlds. We do not talk, we do not touch. We are each on our own and so very alone.*

Lake and Hills (1979:26) confirm Julia's experience as a common discourse: '[t]he couple do not let one another down in public. Each controls the other's sexuality. They must pretend to be perfectly adjusted. Each must persist, must work hard at putting up with the price of being married'.

5.9   SUMMARY

Journeying with the co-searchers through their stories made me aware of the complexity of sexually unhappy marriages. Its effects permeate all aspects of the lives of those involved. It has the ability to isolate, to silence and to alienate women from themselves, their faith constructions and the significant people in their lives. It challenges their constructions of who they believe themselves to be as Christian wives and mothers. It causes self-judgement and judgment by others, which results in feelings of guilt. It often causes conflict between personal faith convictions and sexual practices. It causes conflict in the women's sense of identity. At times this conflict leads to women internalising dominant discourses in a way that impacted negatively on their self-understanding - such as being a 'slut'. At other times, the conflict enabled them to view themselves as brave women who were prepared to step out of their comfort zones to seek sexual fulfilment, even if it meant going outside of their marriages and beyond their understanding of their faith practices. Living in a sexually

unhappy marriage also meant living double lives: pretending that all is well when it is not; and pretending to still be faithful and committed in the marriage.

Not all effects were necessarily harmful. Extra-marital sexual practices enabled women to challenge life-restricting dominant discourses regarding female sexual desire and pleasure. Extra-marital sexual practices became the catalyst enabling women to challenge patriarchy and to resist life-denying power relations. They became the medium of self-discovery and a new sense of self belief. They acted as protector of the marriage, yet at the same time undermining it. Thus on every level, extra-marital sexual practices are multifaceted indeed. They are filled with contradiction and complexity, enveloped in a distinctive cloak of silence, and has isolation as its most well known travelling companion.

In Chapter Six I will reflect on the research journey in terms of the process, my personal experiences as researcher and the outcomes from this journey.

CHAPTER SIX
REFLECTIONS ON THE JOURNEY WITH SEXUAL UNHAPPINESS

6.1   LOOKING BACK

In Chapter One I mapped the road for this research journey by stating my epistemology; the research aims I formulated to guide me in relation to my research question; and the research procedure which I intended to follow. This research journey was about the faith predicaments and relational complexities, challenges and dilemmas South African Protestant Christian women experience when living in sexually unhappy marriages. It also explored the effects of these marriages on the co-searchers' lives. This research was done from a social constructionist position. As Burr (1995:3), I view social construction as the ways in which we commonly understand the world (Sections 1.6.1 & 2.2). Such understandings are rooted and developed from categories and concepts that are historically and culturally specific (Foucault 1972b:131-132; Freedman & Combs 1996:23; Drewery & Winslade 1997:34). Because I regard our understanding of sexuality as a social construction, I support Ussher's (1994:150) idea that sexuality is constructed in the 'complex interrelationship of many different social and historical factors'. I therefore invited the voices which stand in relation to sexuality into this research journey. The voice of Christian history proved to be a very constitutive voice in the social and religious constructions of sexual practices and sexuality.

The societal and religious context in which Christian sexuality operates was a very important departure point for this study. I argued that as contexts are shaped by dominant discourses, the process of deconstruction of such dominant (but also implicit) discourses was thus integral to this research journey (Webster & Mertova 2007:4). I 'read' the dominant discourses at work in the South African Protestant faith social contexts through the lenses of power relations and feminist and gender sensitive awareness.

In Chapter Two I identified and unpacked some of the historical dominant discourses regarding marital practices, sexuality and infidelity by means of a brief literature overview of the traditions from which Reformed theology developed. This exploration was extended to present day Protestant faith traditions and practices.

Chapter Three identified and explored how present day discourses operate in Protestant Christians' sexuality. I worked from the premise that an understanding of the discourses of sexuality within faith

communities and of how sexuality is addressed in such structures would illuminate the relational complexities, challenges and dilemmas South African Christian women experience when living in sexually unhappy marriages. I included literature to unpack the dominant discourses present in the conversations with the clergy and the co-searchers. I also included some of the results and comments of my Sexual Happiness online survey, thereby extending the exploration and enhancing our understanding of how the discourses interact with social constructions and contexts.

Chapters Two and Three provided the cultural and religious backdrop against which we needed to listen to the co-searchers' stories: they created awareness and identified some of the dominant and implicit discourses which were constitutive in Christian sexuality. Since sexuality is largely an abstract concept, one can often only see how it operates by listening to people's stories. Stories tend to make visible what was previously invisible and private (Kohler Riessman 2008:8; Lieblich et al 1998:7). The co-searchers' stories were voiced in Chapter Four in order to make visible the invisible and unspoken and to voice those discourses which were constitutive in their stories. Whereas before our research journey began most of these discourses were invisible to the co-searchers, once we had named and deconstructed these dominant and implicit discourses, we were able to explore their effects.

In Chapter Five I unpacked the dominant discourses and how these operated in the co-searchers' lives. During this unpacking process I explored the relational complexities, challenges and dilemmas which sexually unhappy marriages held for the co-searchers; how they responded to them; and the effects that these had had on their lives. I also explored discourses which contributed to sexual unhappiness and how co-searchers incorporated into their lives their faith constructions and the constituting discourses regarding sexuality.

This last chapter is a reflection on this research journey on several levels. Reinharz (1992:194) suggests that in feminist research learning occurs at three levels: namely, at 'the levels of person, problem, and method'. This suggests 'that the researcher would learn about herself, about the subject matter under study, and about how to conduct research' (Reinharz 1992:194). I have used Reinharz's distinctions in the structuring of this chapter which will thus include reflections on my personal experiences; the dominant discourses defining and operating within sexual unhappiness; and the research process during this journey.

6.2 DOMINANT DISCOURSES DEFINING AND OPERATING WITHIN SEXUAL UNHAPPINESS

The core of this research journey was to identify and explore the effects of dominant discourses on Christian sexuality. The exploration of discourses included both historical and current day discourses. In the next section I will reflect on the dominant discourses which I encountered in the literature review of historical sexual practices (as discussed in Chapter Two), on present day discourses (Chapter Three), and on how these have a constitutive effect on Christian women today. The exploration of present day discourses and how these were interpreted by the co-searchers was formulated in the aims for this research journey (Sections 1.3.1; 1.3.2; 1.3.3 & 1.3.4). Kotzé (2002:9) explains that poststructuralism does not view knowledge as an 'entity'; but rather that how knowledge is interpreted is significant. It was precisely these interpretations of faith prescriptions regarding sexuality that piqued my curiosity.

The discourse of patriarchy was one of the most determining influences on how women (and men) view sexuality and on how this and other related issues operated in the lives of the co-searchers.

6.2.1 Patriarchy as a dominant voice

Patriarchal philosophy and practices were present in all of the co-searchers' stories and their marriages were organised along patriarchal lines – with the exception of Maya. They accepted their family structures as based on biblical prescriptions: in a Christian marriage the husband is the head of the family with the wife in a subservient position. As wives, they were not seen as their husband's equals in their marriages, and they believed that this hierarchy held true for most South African Christian marriages. The discourse of inequality in marriage was explicit at times, and implicit at others. The co-searchers felt that their husbands' ways of doing were prioritized, often to the detriment of the co-searchers' needs. This was especially so in terms of sexual fulfilment. For instance, Magda's husband did not consider her sexual fulfilment as important and ignored her needs (Section 4.9.3), whereas Renate's husband believed that he had the right to sexual intercourse with her, even without her consent (Section 4.6.1).

The co-searchers' experiences were underpinned by two communal religious discourses: a wife becomes her husband's property and a wife's unequal status within marriage (Sections 2.7.1 & 2.7.2). Because women were seen as property, only their husbands had the right to have sexual

intercourse with them (Russell [1929] 2009:17; Yee 2003:38; Coleman 2004:51; Greenberg 1990:33-36). As sexual intercourse served as the 'official' seal of a marriage (Arthur 2002:28), sex thus became the 'official' mark of a husband's ownership of his wife and her sexuality. Limiting a wife's sexuality to marriage and defining sexuality's main function as procreation in pre-Christian societies meant a wife only engaged in sexual intercourse when pregnancy was the goal or when her husband required sexual pleasure (Greenberg 1990:33; Foucault 1984c:73; Russell [1929] 2009:29; Coleman 2004:13).

In modern times sexual intercourse is seen as also recreational, however, the husband's needs are usually prioritized. The fact that these discourses were evident in most of the co-searchers' stories has led me to conclude that patriarchy still entraps female sexuality in the position of being the passive recipient, thus frequently leaving women's sexual fulfilment neglected or unattended. In many instances churches still promote and prescribe patriarchal organized marriages, which continue to contribute to inequality within marriage. The mindset of wives' as less important than and under the 'control' of their husbands, has the potential to create and contribute to sexually unhappy marriages which manifest in many different ways as will be discussed in the next sections.

6.2.2 Spiritual dualism as a dominant voice

The co-searchers shared that growing-up in Christian homes they had received the unspoken message that it was unbecoming for Christian women to speak about their sexual desire, their need for sexual satisfaction, or even to have sexual desire unless initiated by the man. Sexual desire was seen as 'lust'. Their understanding of lust was based on how Scripture was interpreted and presented to them, in particular Matthew 5:27-28:

> You have heard that it was said, 'Do not commit adultery.' But now I tell you: anyone who looks at a woman and wants to possess her is guilty of committing adultery with her in his heart.

> (Good News Bible)

I connect the subjugation of sexual desire, *Eros,* to the philosophy of spiritual dualism (Section 2.8.3). Spiritual dualism, as defined by Plato, was widely accepted by the Early Church and is still present today (Porcile-Santiso 1990:196; Casaleggio & Janse van Rensburg 2002:370; Heyns 1982:201; Green 1992:37; Nelson 2010:95). The presence of this discourse made it very difficult for

the co-searchers to speak about their own sexual desire because of the connotation that sexual desire was lustful and therefore sinful. Furthermore, the continuous disregard and dismissal of their sexual fulfilment by their husbands and the absence of open discussions regarding sexual practices meant that they eventually lost hope for sexual fulfilment within their marriages. The dominant discourse of spiritual dualism framed sexual desire as sinful and silenced sexuality within Christianity (Nelson 1992:37-38).

I am in agreement with Nelson (2010:95), who challenges an ethic that makes the human body and sexuality suspicious and argues for body theologies that will illuminate our experiences. Nelson (2010:96) opposes the deadly sins as defined in Early Christianity (and still constitutive at present), as he is of the conviction that **spiritualistic dualism** is the first deadly sin. Nelson (2010:96) states that 'any dualism is the radical breaking apart of two elements that essentially belong together, a rupture which sees the two coexisting in uneasy truce or in open warfare'. Spiritual dualism claimed sexuality as the locus of fleshly sin, which Nelson counters, is not representative of the Hebrew Scriptures which speak of unity in flesh as good and within God's plan. Nelson (2010:96) continues that Christianity also expresses an anti-dualistic view, 'by affirming creation as good, and it adds to this its particular emphasis on divine incarnation', thus God incarnated in Jesus Christ. For Nelson (2010:96) the fleshly experience of each other becomes vitally important in our understanding of God: 'the fully physical, sweating, lubricating, menstruating, ejaculating, urinating, defecating bodies that we are – in sickness and in health – are the central vehicles of God's embodiment in our experience'.

Spiritual dualism and the vilification of the flesh, greatly contributed to sexual desire as unspeakable and frequently co-author sexually unhappy marriages.

6.2.3   Silence as a discursive voice

Silence was the most dominant discourse that emerged from the present day contextual exploration of how churches deal with sexuality. The participating clergy all shared that - both during their theological training and thereafter - the church was mostly silent with regard to sexuality (Sections 3.5.1 & 3.5.5). On those occasions when sexuality was addressed, it was usually in the negative: for instance, the dangers of pre-marital sex. The most explicit discourse was that sexual intercourse was reserved for the marital relationship (Section 3.5.9). Here, its focus was on *Agape* love (Section 3.4.5). *Eros* was not addressed, nor were issues surrounding sexually unhappy marriages. Within the

co-searchers' marriages, *Eros* was mostly silenced or dismissed, especially in terms of female sexual desire.

According to Foucault (1985:16), 'Christian tradition consigned pleasure to the realm of death and evil'. This discourse could explain the silence experienced by both the co-searchers and the clergy. The connection of sex to sin and shame contributed to discursive limiting responses such as deep-seated anxiety in the church regarding sexual desire and practices, an anxiety that was passed down through the ages (Craig & Stander 2009:14). I argue that this anxiety turned into silence, making sex the feared and unspoken.

This silence was still evident in the participating clergy's theological training (Section 3.5.1) and in their congregations. Even though the participating clergy were licensed to solemnise a marriage, and thus also able to licence legitimate sexual intercourse in terms of religious teaching, they nevertheless felt that their training had not equipped them to deal adequately with sexual issues. Moreover, the lack of training regarding the pastoral care of sexual problems (Section 3.5.2) posed many challenges for the participating clergy members as well as for the co-searchers. Although sexual relations are expected in Christian marriages (Section 3.6.5), this aspect seldom gets in-depth attention in marriage preparation conversations (Section 3.5.4), sermons or in Bible studies (Sections 3.5.5 & 3.5.6). Both clergy members ascribed this silence to the effect of the normalizing gaze. The notion of silence holds the message that something is unspeakable. Unspeakable, in turn, is often pregnant with threat, fear and shame.

6.2.4   *Eros* **and the normalizing gaze**

The co-searchers believed that marriage is supposed to sanctify sexual intercourse and remove lust from it. For instance, Julia believed that only marriage can remove lust from sexual intercourse, thus all sex outside marriage is lustful and sinful. Linking *Eros* to lust reflects Julia's belief that in Christian marriages sex should ***only*** be a way to express love and not sexual desire, since sexual desire is often equated with lust (Craig & Stander 2009:89; Slowinski 1992:144; Nelson 2010:96). The co-searchers were not alone in being silenced in terms of *Eros*, the participating male clergy were too (Sections 3.5.1; 3.5.2; 3.5.4 & 3.5.5).

Gerhard and Derick both experienced that sexuality - specifically *Eros* - was unspeakable within the church. As male clergy, they felt that they could not address the erotic side of sex because they

feared being judged as perverts (Section 3.5.6). This speaks of the normalising gaze (Section 3.5.5) as defined by Foucault (1977:177-178) and followers of his work. The historical norm was that sexual issues are not discussed within the church. The clergy members thus found it difficult to discuss eroticism with their congregants. Moreover, they felt that they might become marginalised if they challenged the norm of silence and the unspeak-ability surrounding *Eros*. In terms of the clergy's experience, the normalising gaze was thus internalised to such an extent that it silenced them.

The subjugation of sexuality within the church contributed in silence which in turn subjugated sexuality even more. This silence carries the message that sexuality is still regarded as shameful, guilt-ridden and unseemly. These negative and trauma-inducing responses towards sexuality - so characteristic of the past - continue to be transferred by means of discourses even today, despite the fact that we live in such a sexually saturated secular society.

Weingarten (2004:14) explains that silence can communicate a wealth of meanings and instructions, such as: 'Don't go there; don't say that; don't touch; too much; too little; this hurts; this doesn't. But **why** the territory is as it is cannot be read from the map of silence' [emphasis mine]. Although Magda and Julia both experienced the unspeak-ability of sexual problems, neither could explain why it was so unspeakable within their marriages. This absence of explanation - Weingarten's **why** (2004:14) - reinforces the dominant discourses regarding sexuality, thereby promoting and maintaining these meanings as unquestionable 'truths'. Julia and Magda both experienced that being unable to speak about sexuality and sexual problems exacerbated these problems. Silence upholds the secrecy regarding sexuality. Not speaking about sex transforms it into a taboo subject, implying shame and guilt, even within Christian marriages (Section 3.6.3). The dominant discourse of silence within churches regarding sexual challenges and sexuality in general, reinforces such beliefs (Craig & Stander 2009:47, 79, 149).

The silence in the church surrounding sexuality also prevents people from speaking about traumatic sexual experiences such as the sexual abuse of children, molestation, rape and abusive sexual practices within Christian marriages. The real effects of silence are clearly illustrated in the recent exposure of those Catholic priests who have sexually abused young boys. The silence surrounding sexuality has prevented these stories from being exposed for many decades. Plante (2010:1) states that '[t]he Catholic Church has certainly had a history of acting in a highly defensive manner and circling the wagons on this topic [of sexual abuse]'.

Even if Christians have not experienced sexual trauma, a message of trauma is communicated through the silence. I am in agreement with Weingarten (2004:14), who argues that silence is a mechanism by which trauma in one generation is communicated to the next.

6.2.5   The sexualisation of marriage

The silence regarding *Eros* implies that erotic sex is sinful. Sex became only a means to procreate and later a means to avoid sexual sins (Section 2.8.1). Sex was prescribed to be only an outward expression of love and not of erotic desire. Christian marriage has become focussed on sexual intercourse as it became the ***only legitimate place*** for sex. It would seem as if many Christians are conflicted between expressing their sexuality and avoiding being 'lustful', as was seen in the co-searchers' stories. The assignment of sex to marriage only was frequently interpreted in a way that sex almost determined and defined marriage. Moreover, this sex could not include erotic sex, as this was equated to lust. By defining marriage in terms of sex, marriage has become sexualised. Marriage is thus a cure for 'lust', whilst intimacy, partnership and love – core Christian values – have been relegated.

I argue that due to this silence regarding erotic sexuality, the church has become confused and obsessed with sex and marriage. The church's prescription of *Agape* as 'pure' love - with the implicit discourse of excluding *Eros* - is totally disconnected from the 'realities' confronting its congregants as humans are (erotic) sexual beings. Sexuality became something to be feared and avoided, yet when married, sex suddenly becomes the norm to achieve, that is an expression of *Agape* love. I reason that as long as seminaries, clergy members, congregants and families maintain silence regarding sexuality - especially erotic sexuality - within Christian marriage the discourse that sexuality is lustful, sinful and unspeakable will be perpetuated.

The current debate within the Dutch Reformed Church regarding pre-marital sex and co-habitation (Kletskerk: 2011) is but only one example of how sex-focussed prescriptive discourses regarding Christian marriages have become. Nelson (2010:100) argues that Christian 'faiths have fallen into more legalism about sexual morality than about any other arena of human behavior'. We need to engage differently with sexuality. The most important question we can ask is: What are the *effects* of how we approach, prescribe and live our sexuality within our congregations and faith societies? I am in agreement with Farley (2010:12) who argues that too much importance is given to the morality of

sex. Farley (2010:13) continues that '[t]he sexual has threatened to take over the moral focus ….and [e]verything about the "sexual" is considered "moral" or "immoral", and "morality" is almost reduced to "sexual morality"' without taking other aspects of relationships in account such as respect, trust, honesty, fairness and faithfulness.

It would seem as if the current prescriptions regarding sex for Christians also do not consider practical issues such as sexual incompatibility (Section 5.6.7), difference in sexual libido (Section 5.6.8) or any other sexual challenges that couples might face. The sexual unhappiness of Christian marriages compels the church and theological institutions to deconstruct the prescriptions and restrictions regarding sexual intercourse. If we engage in sexuality with greater openness - if sexuality becomes speak-able and 'decriminalised' - then Christians will be better able to confront their fears and confusions regarding sexuality and to address sexual unhappiness where necessary. If sex is moved out of the exclusive realm of marriage it has the potential to become more than just a way to avoid sin. Teenagers and young adults will be able to speak about their concerns, the choices they need to make regarding sexuality, and to negotiate future marriage practices. Sex will become a 'normal' part of being human, rather than a core issue of marriage enshrouded with guilt, shame, fear, prescription and taboo in the intimate lives of couples. Intimacy would no longer be limited just to sexual actions or penetrative sexual intercourse, but framed as ***all practices*** in a committed, respectful and egalitarian relationship that have at heart the desire to take care of each other on an emotional, physical and spiritual level. If the construction of marriage is desexualised then sexuality will no longer be the subject of mistrust, fear and control. It could become an expression of being human: our intrinsic desire and ability to connect to a significant other in a very intimate and spiritual way. Christians will be able to negotiate and express their sexuality in ways that are relevant and life-giving to them instead of having to abide by prescriptions which often induce fear and shame. Reflecting on the effects of these discourses left me with the distinct impression that in many instances Christian prescriptions regarding sex are not life-giving to the marriage or to the spouses. Questioning these discourses does not mean condoning sexual promiscuity, but rather looking at the effects of these discourses and how they operate in Christians' lives.

6.2.6   The mistrust of female sexuality due to spiritual dualism

Both Julia and Magda experienced their sexuality as being controlled and policed by their families and by the dominant discourse of virgin brides and female purity within their churches. By exploring the motivation behind the control of female sexuality (Section 3.6.8), we uncovered the deep-seated

discourse that women were fountains of sexual temptation who could seduce even the most pious of men (Heschel 2003:155). This mistrust of female sexuality manifested itself in many ways, the most severe of which was the utmost contempt evident in early church Fathers' writings (Westermarck cited in Russell [1929] 2009:38):

> Woman was represented as the door of hell, as the mother of all human ills. She should be ashamed at the very thought that she is a woman. She should live in continual penance, on account of the curses she has brought upon the world. She should be ashamed of her dress, for it is the memorial of her fall. She should be especially ashamed of her beauty, for it is the most potent instrument of daemon. …. [Women's] essentially subordinate position [should] continually [be] maintained.

Female sexuality became a danger to God-fearing Christians. This dominant discourse within religion, and more specifically the Christian religion, has contributed to a sex-fearing church. Sex, especially erotic sex, became the antithesis of being God-fearing and pious: if you fear God, you need to fear sex. Christian women had to ignore or deny their sexual desire as it personified evil. Historically, the Christian church has vilified erotic sex, yet at the same time has regarded sex as only legitimate within marriage and therefore, central to and defining of, marriage. The vilification of sex has made it unspeakable both in the church and also within Christian marriages even up to the present day (Craig & Stander 2009:14, 89,139; Haught 1997:1; Heschel 2003:155; Holtzhausen & Stander 1996:18-24, 160-164). This silence created a fertile breeding ground for misconceptions and confusion regarding sexual desire, lust and erotic sex. It also became the main collaborator in life-restricting sexual practices within Christian's lives such as the mistrust and dismissal of female sexual desire. The discourses of silence within Christian churches were not the only factors which contributed to sexually unhappy marriages, however. Equally damaging have been those prescriptions that were held - and in some instances still are held - regarding the economic roles of the husband and wife in a Christian marriage.

6.2.7 Financial dependence and power relations in Christian marriages

All the co-searchers except Maya stated that they were financially dependent on their husbands at one time or another. Renate, Naomi, Magda and Julia attributed this to the fact that for periods in their married life they were primarily stay-at-home mothers and homemakers. They felt they had to tolerate living in a sexually unhappy marriage because they were dependent economically on their husbands. If they left the marriage, they would be unable to support themselves sufficiently as most

of their working experience was at home, and thus outside of the formal labour market. The co-searchers reasoned that their husbands knew that they were financially dependent and therefore felt secure to continue with the status quo rather than address the sexual unhappiness within their marriages.

The fulltime position of homemaker and childminder can contribute to sexually unhappy marriages, especially when financial dependence creates an unequal base of power. Such inequity frequently leaves the wife with little or no negotiating power. In those relationships where one partner holds most of the power, this partner will have the ability to control and dictate the nature of the relationship. Economically dependent wives are often controlled and forced to accept marital practices, even if such practices are life-denying or disrespectful towards them. A husband can use his wife's financial dependence as leverage. He can refuse to take her emotional, physical and spiritual needs in account since she has no option but to stay in the marriage. Moreover, a wife's financial dependence might create the notion that she 'owes' her husband 'payment'. As she does not contribute financially to the household, he is entitled to sexual fulfilment but she not. Moreover, he is entitled to her sexuality as he 'owns' her, a mindset reminiscent of the patriarchal discourse which implied that wives become the property of their husbands.

Financial dependence is often directly linked to prescribed gender roles.

6.2.8   Prescribed gender roles and financial dependence

The co-searchers shared that their roles as homemaker and primary childminder were rooted within their faith constructions (Section 5.6.9). In South Africa wives are mostly not compensated for their fulltime work within their homes, leaving them without financial resources. Frequently, stay-at-home mothers do not have their own pension fund and are often a dependent in terms of their husband's medical fund. This was the case for the majority of the co-searchers. The longer they stayed in the marriage the greater their financial dependence. Financial dependence could keep women trapped in unhappy and even abusive marriages, as was the case with Naomi (Section 4.5.4).

I do not oppose the notion of wives being stay-at-home mothers and homemakers if this is ***their*** choice, but I do oppose the notion that this work is mostly not compensated. I am also concerned that stay-at-home mothers are mostly deprived of further personal development or training opportunities. They are frequently isolated from intellectual or career stimulation and become almost invisible in

society. Stay-at-home mothers are seen as the backbone of a community, yet they do not get recognition, financial security or any other benefits for their work. They are taken-for-granted, and then left to fend for themselves should they divorce.

I relate the notion of uncompensated work within the home back to discourses where marriage was seen as an economic transaction (Section 2.7.2). Remnants of this discourse are still evident in how many South African Protestant churches portray the wife's role in marriage (Müller 2008:2). When wives are typecast in the role of primary homemaker and childminder - even when she also works outside her home - it reveals the discourse that insists that these roles are the woman's duty within marriage. This was Magda's experience (Section 4.9.2). Thus, when a woman got married the patriarchal mindset would assume that she should fulfil these duties, with or without her husband's help. Married women with children, who do not have the support of their husband in terms of child-caring and household duties, often find it difficult to make themselves available for demanding corporate positions, which are usually also the better paying positions. I have been asked frequently in job interviews questions about when I planned to start a family, how many children I had, and what their ages were. These questions seemed to imply that if I had young children I would not be suited for a demanding position as my focus would necessarily be on my family.

These limiting discourses need to be challenged, not only in the secular world, but even more so within the churches. Churches should be in the forefront of addressing life-restricting gender discourses. The church should create awareness and should challenge those discourses which contribute towards women experiencing guilt regarding their new economic role and changed childminding patterns. It should challenge traditional views on household chores – not so much because the husband should help, but because women should have the freedom to experience equality in fulfilling their careers and in being economically independent. Sexual intimacy within marriages could be supported if women are freed from guilt regarding the care of their children, if they experience having equal opportunities to focus on their careers, and if they are equally supported within their homes.

6.2.9   Gender roles and sexual expression

The gender discourse which frames female sexuality and gender in a nurturing role was a dominant discourse during this research journey (Section 3.6.7). This dominant discourse became apparent in all the co-searchers' stories, especially in the earlier years of their marriages: their focus was mostly

on their husband's sexual satisfaction and not on their own. This discourse - of having to take care of others and personal needs not having precedence - contributes to women not claiming or expecting sexual satisfaction (Fredman & Potgieter 1996:52; Peterman 1999:168; Farley 2010:36). The effects of the socialisation process were often seen how the co-searchers experienced their sexuality: it was something that others did *to* them and defined *for* them. Even within their roles as lovers they continued the dominant discourse of taking care of others before taking care of their own personal needs. Moreover, a pious wife sacrifices herself for others in submissiveness and in silence (Landman 1999:86). I assert that this also meant that the pious wife must accept sexual unhappiness in silence. In the presence of these patriarchal gender discourses, the co-searchers frequently felt voiceless.

Sexual unhappiness often resides in silence and voicelessness. This in turn leaves sexual problems unattended and unresolved. In the presence of continuous sexual unhappiness and unresolved conflict, some co-searchers lost hope for sexual happiness within their marriages (Section 5.4.4) and eventually resorted to extra-marital sex. The discourse of the complacent, submissive and silent Christian wife therefore enabled prolonged and unresolved sexual unhappiness, which in turn facilitated infidelity.

Gender discourses not only silenced women from speaking about sexuality or negotiating sexual fulfilment for themselves, they are also silenced because patriarchy speaks on their behalf: the husband is cast in the role of head of the home with the final say (Bons-Storm 1998:10-11). Sex was frequently in the service of male sexual fulfilment, and female sexuality framed in that of procreation.

6.2.10 The expectation of bearing children

The discourse of procreation is still very prominent in most Western societies. It is frequently expected and assumed that a married couple will have children (Section 3.6.4). I link the expectation of bearing children to the patriarchal dominant discourse which required wives to produce legitimate heirs (Section 2.7.2). In Magda's story this expectation was verbalised by Magda as well as by her mother (Section 4.9.6.1). Maya's story illustrated how women today still often link their worth to their ability to bear children (Section 4.7.6). Such prescriptive discourses are often life-denying. Buys (2010:76) states that when women cannot conceive, they 'begin to question their identity as a woman'. Buys' (2010:75) discussion of this discourse plainly illustrates how constitutive it can be:

> Procreation is one of the natural progressions of relationships. It completes the 'circle of life' and comforts us in knowing that we will be looked after in our old age and that our 'seed' will be passed on to the next generation. Couples who cannot conceive have to redefine their relationship because their purpose changes. Some couples actually end up feeling 'purposeless' and struggle to understand the reason for their existence and what they should aim for in future.

Such life-denying effects call for a change from prescriptive ethics to participatory ethics. Participatory ethics does not ask if the expectation of bearing children is right or wrong, but rather asks what are the effects of this expectation, especially if women choose not to have children or if they are unable to fall pregnant? When we engage in talking about the effects of dominant discourses a new type of conversation can develop, one which falls outside the binary of right or wrong or who is to blame or not. It allows for a new way of understanding and re-defining what we want, thus a re-authoring of the story. Such new ways of understanding can '… provide a starting point for re-authoring conversations. They provide a point of entry to the alternative storylines of people's lives that, at the outset of these conversations, are barely visible' (White 2007:61). Such alternative storylines can be life-giving because they allow for a re-negotiation of dominant discourses such as sex in terms of recreation instead of procreation.

6.2.11 Sex as recreation

Although sex is often wrapped in repression and guilt, another discourse nevertheless co-exists with it: the expectation and presupposition of sexual fulfilment within the marriage (Section 2.9). Within Christian marriages, sexual intercourse is often depicted as a gift or blessing from God to married couples to be cherished and enjoyed (Section 3.6.5). But very few couples receive 'sexual training' in the art of love-making to facilitate sexual happiness within their marriages (Russell [1929] 2009:174; Foucault 1978:119). There is often the assumption that sexual fulfilment is easily attainable and that couples usually have the same sexual needs and levels of libido (Buys 2010:23-24).

More often than not, this is not the case – as revealed by the co-searchers' stories in Chapter Four. Many Christian couples find it difficult to establish sexual practices which are fulfilling for both husband and wife (Craig & Stander 2009:149-154). Although lack of information was often at the root of such challenges, the constitutive power of discourses regarding sexuality was also significant. Such constitutive discourses include: masturbation is a sin (Section 4.7.5); only penetrative sex is

'real' sex (Section 4.7.4); men are instinctive sexual beings and women are not (Section 3.5.6); prescribed gender roles (Section 3.6.6); and the unspeak-ability of sex as discussed in this chapter. An even greater unspeakable story, however, is that of sexually unhappy marriages due to male impotence.

6.4.12 Shifts in male virility, penetrative sex and masturbation

There seemed to be an interconnection between the discourses surrounding male virility, penis size, penetrative sex as the 'ultimate sex' and masturbation as a sin. Males are often portrayed as instinctively sexual beings and penis size (Sections 4.6.6 & 5.6.6) is regarded as confirmation of their virility and ability as lovers (Craig & Stander 2009:50,165-167). Within Christian belief, penetrative sex is often seen not only as the most important but sometimes even as the only legitimate form as sexual intercourse (Craig & Stander 2009:100,129). As Maya's story reveals (Section 4.7.3), this can lead to great disillusionment and frustration. Maya, Renate and Julia were all able to challenge these discourses and to accept that alternative ways of having sexual intimacy could be life-giving.

It would seem as if the changed and changing gender roles of men and women are contributing to a shift in how men and women express their sexuality. Once women moved outside the realm of only a homemaker and nurturer to that of secondary or primary breadwinner, they were able to shift their constructions about expressing their sexuality. Women now find it easier to be sexually assertive and to engage in sexual practices which are intent on their own sexual happiness. Men might also feel that they now can more easily assume a nurturer's role, thus also nurturing their wives' sexuality. A changed view of female masturbation might be indicative of this shift.

Masturbation posed a challenge for most of the co-searchers. Renate and Julia discussed masturbation with me. We deconstructed their religious and gender-informed ideas regarding sexual self-care. I invited them to consider different religious interpretations regarding masturbation. This process of deconstruction enabled them to challenge the dominant discourse of masturbation as sin (Craig & Stander 2009:97; Farley 2010:235-236; Nelson 2010:99) as well as the discourse that women do not or should not need sexual self-care. These deconstructions resulted in masturbation subsequently becoming a life-giving practice for both Renate and Julia. For instance, in Julia's case it was more than just a way to release sexual tension: it was also a way to keep her safe from high risk behaviour and enabled her to resist sexual flings.

Our deconstruction of 'sinful' sexual practices and masturbation engaged us in conversations about what is viewed as 'acceptable' behaviour for Christian women. This in turn invited an exploration of how we construct our identity as women and the effects which these constructions have on our lives.

6.2.13 Constructions of identity

The connection between sexuality and the construction of identity (Section 3.6.6) was evident in all the co-searchers' stories. I believe that identity is spoken into existence, especially identity as defined by internalized dominant discourses (Bons-Storm 1998:10; Thornton 2003:8). Farley (2010:110) speaks of human beings as 'bodied, sexed, gendered' embodied spirits and inspirited bodies. I understand this to mean that the way we make meaning of our identity is found within both how we express ourselves within our bodies as well as our spirits. Farley (2010:117) proposes a view 'whereby our bodies and our spirits are one – distinguishable as aspects of our personhood, but unified in a way that they are neither mere parts of one whole nor reducible one to the other'. Farley continues that 'the self-transcendence that Christians associate with what it means to be a human person pertains to ourselves not just as spirits but as bodies'. The connection between body, spirit, sexuality and identity became apparent in the co-searchers' stories.

Maya, Magda and Julia linked their worth as women to their ability to have enjoyable sex with their husbands. In the absence of sexual happiness, their identity constructions became fraught with guilt, feelings of failure and rejection. The expectation of sexual happiness as prescribed within Christian marriage - without effective education, exploration or deconstruction regarding prescribed sexual practices - holds thus the potential to undermine women's (and men's) sense of well-being. Restricting sex to marriage intensifies this discourse, which in turns could amplify sexual unhappiness and thus the loss of identity and self-worth.

In those instances where there was infidelity, it imposed a further threat to the co-searchers' identity. It led to them questioning and doubting themselves as mothers. They were far more threatened by being exposed in front of their children than to their husbands. Christian women who live in sexually unhappy marriages clearly have to negotiate complex challenges, dilemmas and predicaments.

6.2.14 Summary

Many discourses were constitutive in both the co-searchers' stories and in the participating clergy's stories. Patriarchy, silence, prescribed gender roles and the vilification of erotic sex were some of the most dominant discourses we encountered. This frequently contributed to the 'normalising gaze' which subjugated sexuality - especially female sexuality - and undermined sexually happy marriages. The discourse that is perhaps the most challenging for Christians, however, is the construction regarding legitimate sex - sex only within the marriage – without effective education, exploration or deconstruction regarding prescribed sexual practices and the effects which these have on marriages. Sex by means of marriage became a trap for Christian women: women could only have sex within marriage and as soon as they married, their identity and role changed. They then were forced into patriarchal ways which dictated and shaped their sexual expression, but also frequently also their future in terms of career opportunities and financial security. Christian marriage became totalised by sex as it was reduced to the only legal or acceptable relationship for sex to take place. Marriage should be so much more than just the legal place for sex. Moreover, if sex is dethroned from being all-important to marriage, it could then reside in a more balanced and life-giving space as just another aspect of being human, although still private and special.

The private and subjugated nature of sex often dictated the research process and necessitated an awareness of the effects that this research journey might hold.

6.3   REFLECTING ON THE RESEARCH PROCESS

This research process was directed by the question: **What faith predicaments and relational complexities, challenges and dilemmas do Protestant Christian women in South Africa experience when living in sexually unhappy marriages and what are the effects of these on their lives?** In order to address my research question, one of my primary commitments to this research was to invite women into speech, especially those who were usually marginalised and silenced due to their sexual practices.

6.3.1   Inclusion of co-searchers

Over the past six years, I have journeyed with many women who were living in sexually unhappy marriages, most of whom were willing to participate in this research journey. The first challenge

facing me was the decision regarding which stories to include. I based the inclusion of a story on the degree to which it reflected aspects that were common in the other stories shared with me over the past six years.

The second challenge that I faced was to include a number of stories to illustrate the variety and diversity of sexually unhappy marriages. The core awareness I wanted to communicate was the reality that sexually unhappy Christian marriages are not uncommon: in fact, they are more common than most people expect. If I had only explored one or two stories it might have created the impression that sexually unhappy Christian marriages are rare, especially as this topic is not readily spoken about. However, the fact that I chose to include several stories made it impossible to journey with every story in the depth that I would have liked to have done. Each story had so much richness and complexity - I could have devoted the entire thesis to only one co-searcher's story - but had I done so, it would have undermined my aim to show the diversity and widespread occurrence of sexually unhappy marriages amongst Christian women.

In order to address these challenges, I decided to not discuss each story in the detail or to the extent that the co-searcher shared it with me. I opted instead to give a brief overview of each story, focusing on the dominant discourses and themes that presented themselves, and particularly on those which were constitutive in most of the co-searchers' stories.

Finding a balance between including several stories and the richness of each story proved to be helpful. It afforded me the opportunity to engage with several stories which showed diversity and complexity, but also to include richness and depth in the description of some. However, it also required excluding much of the stories' detail. This made it quite difficult to tell the stories with continuity; it also meant that at times some of my assertions might seem as sweeping statements and generalisations. This was a trade off that I had to accept. I tried to work with this constraint by including literature that confirmed the co-searchers' experiences as ones commonly shared by Christian women. But the inclusion of literature also limited greater exploration of the co-searchers' experiences. I dealt with this by restricting the deconstruction of discourses to one or two co-searchers' experiences. Finding a balance between the co-searchers' voices and the literature proved very challenging indeed. Although at times the co-searchers' voices became quite faint, their experiences have been witnessed and recorded which, in itself, is an important act of resistance against the dominant discourse of silence.

The subject of sexuality nevertheless remains so abstract and unspoken that it called for considerable detail in deconstructing the discourses. This further restricted a greater inclusion of the co-searchers voices - a dilemma to which I have still not found a solution.

In order to invite the unspeakable into speech, I had to be aware of power relations and how these operated not only within the dominant discourses in the co-searchers' lives but also within my understanding of their constructions. This awareness raised questions such as: How does power operate within these discourses? Whose knowledges are centralised? What knowledges are marginalised by these dominant discourses? It also heightened my awareness towards my position as a witness: What effects did my witness position have on the co-searchers and on how they told their stories? How would this witness position affect the way I conducted this research?

6.3.2 Witness positions in the research journey

My feminist participatory action research approach required both an awareness of the influence of gender, culture and socio-economic context on the co-searchers' stories as well as a willingness to engage with the politics in which the dominant discourses are embedded. Weingarten's (2003b:26-30) work on witness positions proved invaluable here. As I am committed to respectful and accountable research practices, it was important for me to be aware of the co-searchers' witness positions as well as of my witness position as the researcher. My ethical commitment compelled me to include a process of being aware myself and of making the co-searchers aware of dominant discourses so that they could challenge life-denying or life-restricting discourses should they choose to do so. Weingarten (2003b:26) argues that '[a]wareness is a key element in developing the capacity for self-witnessing'. However it is important to understand that being able to witness is not a solution in itself. Power co-exists with the variations on witness positions (Weingarten 2000:397). These witness positions can be defined in terms of awareness or unawareness and empowered or disempowered in relation to what is witnessed (Weingarten 2003b:27-32). In the next section I reflect on some of the shifts that occurred in the co-searchers' witness positions.

6.3.3 Being a witness of witness positions

During this research journey I became a witness to the co-searchers' stories, but they themselves were also witnesses of their own stories in the telling and re-telling of their stories. We can change

our witness position in a transformation process only once we become aware of issues that we need to address or re-dress in the presence of empowerment (Weingarten 2000:397).

Awareness of the co-searchers' witness positions brought with it the responsibility to be aware of - and sensitive towards - the changes which engaging in this research journey might bring about. For instance, as Naomi became aware of the possibility that she could challenge life-restricting and life-denying sexual practices – such as having oral sex with other men to please her husband (Section 4.5.3) - she started to challenge these practices as she preferred a sexually exclusive marriage. Naomi moved from a witness position of being unaware and disempowered, to being aware and empowered. This had consequences for her relationship with her husband and their future sexual practices. The existing contract regarding having sex with other partners (swinging) was challenged and changed. As the researcher and witness of this story, however, I had to take cognisance of Naomi's financial dependence on her husband. More specifically, of the possibility of aggravated emotional and economic abuse due to the changes that Naomi insisted on in terms of their sexual practices. When Naomi decided to stay in the marriage and thus felt that she could not continue with our research journey, it was of great importance that I respected and accepted her decision.

In Naomi's situation, I was very aware of the very real dangers to her health in terms of aggravated abuse and the risks of contracting a sexually transmitted infection. Thus talking about safer sexual practices was part of my commitment to life-giving research. We also explored the possibility of her returning to the formal labour market: this could lessen her financial dependence and the impact of the economic abuse to which she was subjected. When Naomi informed me - some months after we discontinued our research journey - that she had accepted a teaching post and had decided to leave the marriage, it reminded me that many research and therapeutic outcomes are a process: their impact is often discernable only years afterwards. Initially Naomi shifted from an unaware/ disempowered to an aware/disempowered position. Her economic reality, the stigma of divorce and the pressure from her mother to stay in the marriage ('*Don't make my grandchildren another statistic*') made any further shift impossible for her at that time. The impact of our work together continued even after she terminated the research process. This was clearly evident when Naomi subsequently moved from the aware/disempowered to the aware/empowered position. Naomi's story in particular reminded me of how important it is to be aware of the co-searcher's witness position, as well as to be aware of the power relations which are at play in the research process and the relationships involved. It also confirmed for me the importance of being aware of the researcher's witness position and that witnessing practices always need to be responsible and accountable.

6.3.4 Creating awareness and accountability by means of witness positions

It was my experience that although it is desirable to be an aware and empowered witness, this is often a difficult position to achieve. Weingarten (2003b:30) states that 'every witness position creates consequences for the individual, family, community and society….Each carries possibilities, challenges, and risks'. My position of awareness challenged me as a researcher - to explore the constitutive discourses at work in the co-searchers' lives and how power operated within their lives and relationships.

Many people are not aware of patriarchy as a system of power: they believe that this is just the way things are, or even more damaging, that this is the way God intended society to be organised. Women are often not empowered to question or challenge the social constructions they hold regarding sexuality simply because they are unaware of the dominant discourses at work. In this research journey it became clear that the voice of patriarchy was frequently so dominant and that many women have internalised patriarchal discourses to such an extent that they were unaware and disempowered. This was especially true regarding how the co-searchers experienced and expressed their sexuality. Moreover, husbands also frequently internalised the values of patriarchy. This internalised position place a husband in the empowered but unaware position. He was unaware of the possibility of his wife's sexual needs, but empowered to dictate her sexual fulfilment (or lack of fulfilment) to a great extent. He had the power to change how they engaged in sexuality, but did not do so because he did not see his wife's sexual happiness as a priority.

Being positioned in the unaware but empowered position holds the greatest risk for others. The empowered can exert power without being aware of its effects: this was evident in both Renate and Naomi's stories. Their husbands exerted power over them, without being aware of the effects of their actions. Renate endured marital rape (Section 4.6.1) and was being treated as a lesser being (Section 4.6.4). Naomi had to accept a sexually open marriage (Section 4.5.3) and being 'pimped' on the internet.

Becoming aware of patriarchy and power relations moved some of the co-searchers from a witness position of being unaware and disempowered to being aware but still disempowered. For instance, Julia had to accept that her husband would not address his impotence and thus left her sexually neglected. However, due to our deconstruction of sexual self-care, Julia moved closer to an aware and empowered position: masturbation gave her an alternative to sexual flings. Viewing

masturbation as 'self-care' empowered her to address her sexual frustrations in a life-giving way. Walker (1998:240) states that participatory action research 'incorporates social action and change as part of the research process itself'. Such social action and change was clearly evident in Julia's story. As co-searcher, Julia's shift in witness positions – from disempowered to empowered - testifies to Maguire's (2001:62) suggestion that '[f]eminist-grounded action research affords participants the power and space to decide for or against action'.

Magda felt that having an affair moved her from the aware/disempowered to the empowered/aware position. This position was a complex one, however, and held many contradictions and challenges for her. Although Magda moved to a position where she could determine her sexual happiness (in the affair), she still felt disempowered in terms of her position in her marriage and in her ability to create sexually happiness within her marriage. This placed Magda in the witness position of being aware but disempowered.

I adapted Weingarten's (2003b:30) grid on witness positions to illustrate the complexity of sexual unhappiness and infidelity in relation to power, awareness and sexual happiness. Imbalances of power were present in all the co-searchers' stories. Patriarchal principles were found in all the stories and these frequently contributed to the co-searchers' sexual unhappiness. Moreover, many of the patriarchal discourses were internalised to such an extent that they had become invisible to both the co-searchers and their spouses. This adapted grid illustrates some of the positions which women take up when living in sexually unhappy marriages. It also illustrates the complexity of sexual practices and how the different positions can be life-giving, life-restricting and even life-denying to women.

Sexual Practices

	Sexually happy AWARE	Sexually unhappy UNAWARE
Marital Sex EMPOWERED	Happy Marital sex Aware / empowered Life-giving to both partners	Unhappy marital sex Unaware / empowered Internalised life-denying patriarchal views of female sexuality
Non-marital Sex DISEMPOWERED	Sexually happy in non-marital sex Aware / disempowered Unable to change sex within marriage	Sexually unhappy in non-marital sex Unaware / disempowered This would be the position of a victim of sexual violence

Position one (green block) could be seen as the ideal. The Empowered/Aware quadrant reflects the position of being in a sexually happy marriage - a marriage in which the sexual practices are respectful and accommodating of both the husband and wife's sexual, emotional and spiritual needs and expectations. I argue that patriarchy undermines egalitarian practices in a marriage, thus making this position very difficult to achieve in many marriages. Moreover, churches will contribute to sexually unhappy marriages as long as they continue to prescribe the marriage practices embedded in the dominant patriarchal discourses. I challenged these dominant discourses with their taken-for-granted understandings for marriages. During our conversations we explored and deconstructed discourses which entrenched the husband's sexual fulfilment as being important but implied that the wife's sexual fulfilment was less so. We challenged the notion that a woman's needs are subservient and that she should always place her family before herself. We discussed egalitarian practices and how these could be life-giving to both partners within a marriage. These conversations employed the narrative practice of social collaboration in which we moved from the known and familiar '…to what might be possible for them to know about their lives and identities' (White 2007:269). This movement required scaffolding conversations over the zone proximal development (Section 5.2). These explorations and deconstructions enabled change and invited new ways of relating and understanding in the co-searchers' lives.

Position two (red block) is often evident in those marriages where the wife (and/or husband) has internalised restricting ideas regarding female sexuality, desire and pleasure. Although the wife might be empowered in her marriage, she is not aware of the possibility of sexual happiness, or she might see sexual pleasure as being unbecoming for a Christian wife and mother. In this position women often internalise the dominant discourse which views sex for procreation only. All other recreational sexual acts are viewed as sinful. Guilt, as a normalizing gaze, often ensures that such wives and husbands police their own sexuality and restrain it within the norms they perceive as 'Christian sex'.

Position three (yellow block) represents those women who are in sexually unhappy marriages but engage in extra-marital sex, where they find sexual fulfilment. Magda was in this witness position.

Naomi occupied witness position four (grey block) - the most dangerous of the four quadrants. She engaged in swinging with other couples because she believed that she had to accept this sexual practice in order to keep her husband happy. She did not find these sexual encounters conducive to her sexual happiness. They left her feeling guilty and insecure, and still sexually unhappy in and

outside her marriage. It also posed a health threat to her in terms of contracting sexually transmitted infections. As a result of this research process she became aware and empowered. This enabled her to move to a more life-giving position in which she refused to engage in swinging and eventually decided to leave her abusive marriage.

Being aware of the complexity of sexuality posed the question of how we contribute to research regarding on this subject in ethical ways that will be life-giving on an emotional, physical, intellectual and spiritual level. I argue that one way of enhancing ethical practices is to follow a multi-discipline approach when dealing with sexual challenges.

6.3.5   A multi-disciplined approach

When I embarked on this research journey, I soon realised that I needed more than a basic understanding of human sexuality and functioning if I wanted to do this research ethically. While I agree with Craig and Stander's (2009:31) recommendation that sexual problems must be dealt with on a relational level as well as a physical level, I maintain that one must also add a cultural and spiritual level. It soon became apparent in this research journey that sexuality, spirituality and religion are deeply intertwined: it is almost impossible to address these separately. Any pastoral therapist or minister who journeys with clients in problems relating to sexual issues needs to have a comprehensive understanding of both human sexual functioning and of how dominant discourses operate in the ways we make meaning of our sexuality. Since mind and body cannot be compartmentalised, a well-grounded understanding of human sexual functioning is of great importance when dealing with sexual issues. It also requires a multi-disciplinary approach due to the bodily-ness of sexual relations. This bodily-ness of sexual challenges can be seen, for instance, in the effects of depression and antidepressants on vasopressin and oxytocin levels in men (Sections 5.6.5.1 & 5.6.5.2). It was my experience that research in the field of sexuality needs to be done in conjunction with a relevant medical practitioner and/or a sexologist when physical problems or other medical factors are present – which was often the case in this research journey. I was in the fortunate position that I enjoyed the support of a medical doctor with whom I work in conjunction, when this was required. I referred co-searchers to her if I had a concern regarding any medical of physical issues relating to their sexual functioning – as was the case with Magda, Julia as well as Julia's husband.

I argue that this also holds true for pastoral work within the field of sexuality. However, many ministers hold the opinion that independent pastoral therapists or other practitioners are superfluous, because they – as the 'professional' employed to minister, should do *all* the pastoral care that is needed within their congregations.

This research journey revealed, however, that both in the participating clergy's opinion and in the co-searchers' experience, most ministers were not adequately equipped or trained to deal with sexuality. Reflecting on the notion of professional snobbery/exclusivity and competitiveness left me with the following conclusions. Firstly, as long as care practitioners of all disciplines fail to embrace a multi-disciplined approach to sexuality, sexual challenges will not be dealt with effectively. The very real possibility exists that sexuality will be compartmentalised by the various disciplines only further entrenching the confusion and disempowerment that surrounds this issue. Secondly, seminaries traditionally do not equip ministers to deal with sexual and gender challenges in pastoral care. If this gap is not addressed adequately, congregants will receive less effective pastoral care at best and at worst no care at all – thus keeping sexual issues trapped in silence and isolation. Thirdly, sexual problems have the potential to marginalise congregants, undermine their marriages and injure their faith constructions. If the church is serious about the importance of marriage, which is prescribed as the only legitimate place for sex, then the church needs to get serious about the pastoral care of sexuality and gender issues and to engage with it on all levels: from the training process in seminaries, through to including independent pastoral therapists in their church structures to engaging participatory ethics instead of prescriptive ethics.

6.3.6   Prescriptive verses participatory ethics as research companion

A moralistic prescriptive discourse regarding sexuality and infidelity exists in most South African Protestant churches. When one positions oneself in a moralistic prescriptive discourse - the discourse which sees infidelity as sin - one cannot but condemn such actions. This was a very basic but very critical issue in this research journey. I consciously chose not to engage in prescriptive ethics, but rather to challenge this taken-for-granted and dominant way of doing ethics. I chose to position myself as a compassionate and understanding witness, journeying *with* people and not looking *at* them or showing them the 'right' path. Pastoral carers and ministers often have the urge to tell people that what they are doing is wrong, especially if they work from a biblicist/legalist or confessional approach to theology. Nelson (2010:100) defines legalism 'as the attempt to apply precise rules and objective standards to whole classes of actions without regards to their unique

contexts or the meanings those acts have to particular persons. Masturbation, homosexual expression, and nonmarital heterosexual intercourse are frequent targets for religio-moral absolutes'. Such an approach - telling people what they should do - does not represent anything new because this is the dominant discourse. When it comes to sexuality pastors and ministers frequently keep talking and doing the dominant discourse. This research journey revealed the challenge to pastoral care in general and, more specifically, to pastoral care surrounding infidelity: to step into the 'not yet said' and the unspeakable. I discovered that when I related to the person herself and not to the 'truths' of prescribed fidelity, new possibilities opened for all.

Magda and Julia's experiences showed the constitutive force of the power within the church (Section 5.5.2). Both Magda and Julia experienced great relief that I, as a Christian researcher and local preacher, did not judge them. A participatory ethical stance enabled me not to judge, which in turn enabled them to speak the unspeakable. It broke the silence and allowed them to step outside the secrets. Having the space to voice their experiences allowed them to look differently at their actions. Julia in particular became convinced of the harmful effects and risks that her sexual flings held for her. Both Julia and Magda shared that being able to share their stories – and thus breaking the silence - helped them to move closer to God and to re-evaluate the effects that their non-marital sexual relations had had on themselves, their marriages and their faith. I do not believe that this would have been possible if I had engaged with them from a moralistic and prescriptive ethical stance. Such a stance would have left them guilty and voiceless, or defensive and evasive.

Prescriptive ethics results 'from a process of deductive reasoning grounded in systems of "truth" that are mostly embedded in scientific and/or religious discourse ….remains entrenched in the dominant confessional theologies of modern religion and the care professions of our time' (Kotzé 2002:13-14). After listening to Julia and Magda's stories in particular, I came to the conclusion that this is especially true for how the church prescribes and interprets ethics regarding sexuality. The constant threat of their infidelity being judged and their experiences being rejected held Julia and Magda captive, isolated, in silence and marginalised. This position did not hold any possibility of change for them. It paralysed them. It condemned them. It separated them from their faith, their faith communities and from God.

As Kotzé (2002:16) it was also my experience that '[p]rescriptive ethics leave people who are on the receiving end marginalised and alienated, unable to have a say in the "truths" that are supposed to shape their lives'. During this research journey this voicelessness, marginalisation and alienation

became apparent in the co-searchers' stories. Patriarchy as a prescriptive system regarding 'moral' sexual practices was a constant in the co-searchers' lives. Furthermore, when the co-searchers did not conform to these prescriptions, their experiences became marginalised and silenced.

A feminist approach to this research supported my participatory ethical stance. This gave me a counter balance from which I could challenge the dominant patriarchal discourses which prescribed 'moral' sexual practices in this research journey. Feminist ideas regarding ethics provide for plurality in lifestyles and moral interpretations and therefore challenge prescriptive ethics (Sevenhuijsen 1998:9). Walker (1998:50) remarks that '[d]ifferently situated people may face different moral problems or experience similar ones differently'. Sevenhuijsen and Walker's views enabled and supported me to create space to listen to the marginalised stories of the co-searchers - stories that others might condemn as sinful. This space allowed for a different kind of ethics with different questions. No longer was the focus on what was 'right' or 'wrong', but rather on exploring the effects of the dominant discourses and how these operated in the women's lives and relationships. This space enabled us to move away from prescriptive ethics to participatory ethics (Kotzé 2002:7) which centralised the co-searchers' experiences.

6.3.7 Centralizing the co-searchers' experiences

I centralized the co-searcher's knowledges and convictions during this research journey. This research practice was helpful: it not only supported me in creating space for the co-searchers' stories but it also created space for myself to listen. I engaged with the stories by responding with embodied re-tellings which centralised the co-searchers experiences. White (1999:72) defines embodied re-tellings as the acknowledgement of the ways in which the expressions of a person's story have touched my life and how their story has contributed to another way of understanding, thus creating new knowledge. Embodied re-telling requires embodied listening. Embodied listening refers to the de-centralising of one's own ideas and listening regardless of one's own constructions or beliefs. This means reflecting only on how the story resonates with the listener in terms of the story, thus keeping the co-searcher's story centralised and yet also connected to my research question.

However, I found that participating in this way was not without challenges and called for practices of resilience which enabled me to stay grounded during the research process.

6.3.8 Practices of resilience

I often witnessed deep hurt and isolation during this research journey. I continually asked myself how my research methodology could facilitate resilience as a practice of ethical research. Weingarten (2010b) believes that resilience shows itself in the presence of adversity. Resilience is not the same as hardiness, nor is it a coping skill. Resilience is directional – thus moving a person to a place where greater wellness and efficiency can be achieved. Weingarten (2010b) suggests that workers in the field of wellness should engage in practices that will activate their own resilience as well as the resilience of those with whom they journey. Practising resilience proved invaluable in this research journey.

I shared Weingarten's (2010b) assertion that finding meaning within trauma and suffering could support resilience and that turning private pain into public purpose was one such way of doing this. The research aims I formulated had at heart to break the silence regarding sexually unhappy marriages and to speak the unspeakable, thus moving private pain into a public arena. It endeavoured to explore the effects of sexual happiness and on how women negotiated meaning in such relationships. Weingarten (2010a:17) refers to this as creating reasonable hope (Section 5.6.2) and moving to a witness position of being aware and empowered (Section 6.3.4). Hope, agency, purpose, community, gratitude and joy are states of resilience (Weingarten 2010b). All these states were experienced in this research journey.

I invited hope and agency into this journey by believing that the small is not trivial. Even though this research journey did not always produce happily-ever-after stories, it still made a difference in the lives of those who participated, and - I dare say - to those who will read this text. Instead of trying to 'fix' everything, this research journey addressed what it could and what the co-searchers prioritised – even if this was only creating the space to tell the story of sexual unhappiness, as in Maya's case. According to White (1999:57-58), there is the expectation within a structuralist tradition that a therapist needs to 'fix' the situation. I experienced this expectation as also holding true for research situations. By positioning myself in a post-modern and poststructuralist epistemology, I was able to resist the expectation of 'fixing' and found joy in even small specks of hope, resistance and change.

I was greatly encouraged by the co-searchers' willingness and eagerness to share their experiences with others by means of this thesis. I find joy in Julia's decision no longer to engage in extra-marital flings as these held tremendous physical risks for her (Section 4.8.11). I find encouragement in

Renate's resistance of the label of a 'lesser' being (Section 4.6.4). This research journey participated in creating and promoting human dignity for women: together we challenged life-denying patriarchal practices and replaced these with respectful, caring and life-giving ways-of-doing. I continue to stand in community with the co-searchers by remaining in contact with them and being available to listen to their stories of hope and despair. I hold on to agency and purpose by challenging the silence regarding sexually unhappy marriages and by centralising the co-searchers' voices in this thesis. Reflecting on this journey has filled me with a deep sense of gratitude for the courage displayed by these women. It has also moved me to engage continuously in doing reasonable hope.

Although the aim of this research journey was not to do therapy, my research methodology proved to have important therapeutic effects. I attribute these life-giving effects to the ethical practices I engaged in through my research methodology. This methodology created collaboration by sharing agency and power, thereby empowering the co-searchers. Furthermore, participatory ethics facilitated new witness positions - being aware and empowered. I did not judge the co-searchers, nor did I intend to 'fix' their lives. I co-searched *with* them, inviting *their* knowledges into speech. This was done by identifying the dominant discourses which operated in the co-searchers' sexuality and how these affected *their* lives, but also mine as the researcher. This research was not about *which* sexual practices were Christian or moral, but about *how* these sexual practices affected their lives.

This research methodology supported women in voicing their marginalised experiences. Moreover it facilitated change in their sexual practices and, in some instances, even moved them towards fidelity, safer sexual practices, a greater sense of well-being and a deepened sense of spirituality and relation with God. I suggest that this research methodology could provide a helpful therapeutic model for therapy with women living in sexually unhappy marriages. Narrative enquiry and narrative therapeutic practices supported and enabled me to make the shift away from a prescriptive towards a more participatory theology. These practices allowed me to journey with people and to join them in their realities rather than impose my own on them. These practices speak of new ways of relating and challenging the taken-for-granted ways of doing therapy and research. It is about creating reasonable hope.

6.3.9   Ethical ways as research companion

The process of reflecting on the reasonable hope that I held with regards to this research journey raised the question: *What was it that I hoped for?* I hoped for this research to be a way in which I

could honour my commitment to do participatory theology and pastoral care (Sections 1.6.3 & 1.6.4) as well as to give voice to the marginalised and unheard. This approach is based on participatory ethics as developed by Kotzé (2002:7). Participatory ethics with regards to pastoral care invites previously unheard voices to the world of theology (Kotzé & Kotzé 2001:8). As the voices of sexuality and unhappy marriages were mostly silent within the church, I argued that inviting these voices into the realm of practical theological research was a way not only to do research ethically but also to do theology ethically. This approach was about doing research and/or theology *with* and not doing research and/or theology *to*. It implied and prescribed an egalitarian relationship and a sharing of power and knowledges both in research and in pastoral care. It invited accountability from the researcher as this journey was negotiated. It also promoted equality, which in turn supported my desire to be respectful in my research and theological practices (Sections 1.7.1 & 1.7.2).

Heitink (1993:175) supports this 'doing' approach to practical theology. He believes that those who become aware, thus equipped with knowledge, need to address oppressive or unjust systems. My understanding of this is that I need to continuously address the context of women's experiences of sexuality and the relation between their sexuality and their faith experiences. Poling's (1995:117) views on giving the voiceless a voice, especially in terms of sexuality within the church, supported my desire to speak the unspoken:

> [I]f persons in and out of the church are suffering because of conflicts between their sexual behaviours and the church's ethical positions, this phenomenon merits careful attention and pastoral understanding, not condemnation,…God is speaking through these new voices of suffering even if the church does not want to hear.

> (Poling 1995:117)

Many theologians speak about what should be done, but very few about *how* it could be done. This gap between theory and praxis raised the following questions: How do we do it? How do we make it happen so that we move beyond talking to doing? It seemed to me that inviting the previously unspoken in this research journey was one such way of addressing these questions. This was done by moving from moralising prescriptions to participatory ethics and theology – a move that will be discussed in the latter part of this chapter. Speaking the previously unspoken was not an easy task. It held specific challenges for me as a researcher, especially in view of the sensitivity and private nature of the research subject.

6.3.10 Resisting censoring in the presence of the normalizing gaze

Whilst writing the thesis, I was very aware of the fact that some parts of the text were of a sexually explicit nature or rather different to what are usually viewed as 'normal' and 'acceptable' sexual practices. This research journey was about the lived sexual experiences of Christian women – not about what they are supposed to live and experience according Christian prescriptions. Some readers might find this offensive or even detrimental to the constructions of sexuality they hold dear. I was concerned for readers who are not de-sensitised to such stories and about the effects which reading this text might have on them. I had to make a conscious effort to resist the censoring effects this awareness had on me. The unspoken-ness of sexually unhappy marriages and sexual practices made it difficult to resist the pressure of the normalizing gaze of silence. I experienced the normalising gaze as prescriptive of what can or should be said or told and what should not.

This normalizing gaze confronted me with an ethical dilemma: do I honour the co-searchers by writing their stories in as revealing and frank a manner as they had shared these, or do I censor the text? After much reflection and consideration, I decided to write the stories as these were shared with me. I adopted a non-moralising position. This position does not mean being a-moral, but participating authentically: neither moralising nor condoning. If I had censored the text it would have implied that I had also felt that some sexual practices should be unspeakable – thus judging and silencing the co-searchers in the process. In line with my ethical research practices however, I felt obliged to include a sensitivity warning in the introduction of this thesis. I also felt an ethical obligation to forewarn the editor of this thesis as to the sexual nature of the text, which was often outside prescribed Christian sexual practices.

To illustrate the process of warning I include some electronic texts messages between myself and the editor:

Dear Celene,
As I am writing Chapter Four, which include some details regarding couple's sexual practices, I just realised: You might find some of this disturbing and even offensive. I am concerned that you might feel violated? Will you be okay with the editing of such explicit text?
Nicki

The editor's response:

Thank you for your sensitivity.

These are real stories – the specific details matter. Only this morning I was working with a twenty-something who is so knotted up in the discourse of 'sex is sin' and finds coping with the reality of what she thinks/feels so frightening, when confronted with this discourse. I am finding your thesis fascinating – as if I had to work on this at this point in my life – so do not be concerned on account of me. Be concerned – be VERY concerned – if my editing is inaccurate or insensitive to the meaning which you are trying to make!

I will find ways of dealing with the content, if necessary.
With love
Celene

The editor's response supported my desire to honour the co-searchers by writing their stories as these were shared with me. These stories illustrated how messy lived experiences can be, especially for Christians. Reflecting on the effects of this text invited a reflection on the questions and answers raised by this research journey.

6.3.11 No conclusive answers

When reflecting on the research journey and the methodology I have to conclude that, in many instances, I was left with unanswered questions. Perhaps these issues are so complex that the core issue is not so much about finding answers but about finding ways of working with the questions: 'Some questions are larger than any answers to them' (Kotzé 2010). If there were answers, easy ones, there would never have been a question. Far from finding all the answers, by the end of this process I even had many new questions about how faith and infidelity interact. Looking at the effects of sexually unhappy marriages and the religious prescriptions which Christians use to guide them has thus left me without a comprehensive conclusion. Even the punctuation of this process worked differently: the answers we found together were not followed by a full stop – as if the matter was conclusive. Far more often there was a comma, a question mark or an exclamation mark!

Once again, Reinharz (1992:4) enlightened my experience when she suggested that 'feminist researchers deal with dilemmas [of real people] that have no absolute solutions'. Positioning myself within social construction discourse (Section 1.6.1) and adopting a feminist approach to theology (Section 1.6.2) facilitated my appreciation for a multiplicity of understandings. This enabled me to accept that there might be many answers to the issues visited in this thesis. Dale Spender (quoted in Reinharz 1992:7) expresses a similar view: 'at the core of feminist ideas is the crucial insight that there is no one truth, no one authority, no one objective method which leads to the production of pure knowledge'. The acceptance of no one authority was supported by my post-modern approach to theology.

Sexually unhappy marriages presented many contradictions. This is a complex matter with no easy answers. It is my hope that this research project may be only the beginning of a process in which the wider theological and faith societies will become more aware and engaged in the sexual challenges confronting Christian marriages.

6.4   REFLECTION ON MY EXPERIENCE AS RESEARCHER

While reflecting on this research journey I found that the term *coming of age* most aptly captures what it has meant to me. *Coming of age* is about transition. While each co-searcher had her own personal process of transition, the various forms of transition were not limited only to the co-searchers' stories. Transition was also evident in the research process and in me as the researcher. This process of *coming of age* enriched my postmodern, social constructionist and feminist position which compelled me to question and critically reflect on taken-for-granted knowledges (White 1991:26-27; Freedman & Combs 1996:57; Weedon 1987:20; Burr 1995:3; Nelson 1992:42; Gergen 1985:267-268; Thomas 2002:88). One such important taken-for-granted knowledge is that practical theology as a male dominated discipline.

6.4.1   My experiences of practical theology as a male dominated discipline

For many centuries, both worldwide and in South Africa, White, well-educated men dominated the theological world, often speaking with the voice of patriarchy (Bons-Storm 1994:10). The supervisor and co-supervisor for this thesis are men. Although I have greatly appreciated and valued their wealth of academic knowledge and experience, there were times when I experienced a void in terms of a shared point of orientation in gender contexts. Bons-Storm (1998:18) names this an 'ultimate

point of orientation' - a concept of truth based on an ultimate value which becomes the point of orientation. It was my experience that 'truth' is contextual and often gender-determined, as was evident throughout this thesis. Even more significant for this thesis, what we understand and the meanings that we hold in terms of theology are greatly influenced and even determined by our gender due to the dominance of patriarchy. One needs allies and dialogue partners to explore such 'truths', which are often imposed by patriarchal dominant discourses (Bons-Storm 1998:18). Sadly, when I spoke to female congregants the dominant discourse found was mostly a patriarchal interpretation of church, social structures and gender. The overwhelming majority of clergy in my community are male and I had therefore but one female clergy to consult with. The fact that I did not have a female mentor or supervisor frequently left me second-guessing the 'truths' that I had experienced during this research journey: these 'truths' were often marginalised in the presence of the dominant patriarchal discourses at work within the church and theological disciplines. In some instances I questioned the relevance of dominant discourses and was only convinced of their importance after discussions with women. Most of these discussions were with women outside theology and academia. I often became aware of the absence of *female* theologians and clergy members in my immediate vicinity and experienced a yearning for female theologians as conversational partners.

Experiencing this sense of isolation due to my gender was often intensified by the difficulties which I had in formulating sexuality and in coherently articulating the experiences and understandings I had encountered in this research journey.

6.4.2   Language as conveyer/medium of understanding

Writing this thesis in my second language has proved to be a great challenge. This was not only because my limited vocabulary meant that I often struggled to find the right words, but also because sexuality is shrouded in such silence that I could not rely on common understandings even if I had found the 'right' English word. The distinct absence in language regarding sexuality meant that the co-searchers and I frequently had an understanding of what we wanted to share, but found it very difficult to articulate. The majority of the co-searchers were Afrikaans-speaking and the interviews therefore conducted in Afrikaans. The discourse could often be conceptualised, but it was very difficult to verbalize – thus to put into speech - due to the lack of language. The co-searchers often commented on how difficult it was for them to find words to give expression to their meaning and understanding. Language is a social construction (Section 2.3), and when the constructs at hand are

held in silence, language-ing becomes very difficult (knotty) and language a less effective tool to convey meaning.

The absence of verbalised construction was not the only challenge. The fact that relevant resources - resources that dealt specifically with sexuality in the South African Protestant contexts - were very limited also proved to be a great challenge as discussed (Section 3.3). Moreover, the information that was available was frequently written from a very biblicist perspective or was not based on biological facts in terms of sexual functioning.

6.4.3   Social constructions verses biological facts regarding sexuality

Socially constructed discourses were often present during conversations with the co-searchers. At times, however, the co-searchers regarded these socially constructed discourses as biological or medical facts. In our explorations of such 'facts' the co-searchers would often refer to 'they say' or 'it is a known fact' that sexuality operates in this or that way. Many social constructions regarding sexuality are often perceived as medical or biological facts based on research. This is even evident in literature where, for instance, it is stated as 'fact' that women feel loved when their husband do acts of service for them or in verbal intimacy, but men feel loved when having sex (Botha 1998:222; Buys 2010:2,13; Craig & Stander 2009:155). Many such 'truths' perpetuated dominant discourses which were life-restricting or life-denying to the co-searchers.

It was especially of great concern to me to see the many internet websites which are presented as 'scientific', and thus widely consulted, but which contained incorrect and flawed information regarding sexuality. Such websites are often presented as Christian-Scripture based and are compiled by organisations and individuals with extreme biblicist and legalistic views. They present the information as Scripture based and 'scientific', yet, on closer inspection, it is often based on opinions or social constructions and not on 'research'. I do not wish to engage here in a debate regarding what kind of research/knowledge is relevant or credible. Of more importance is to ask *why* these discourses continue to circulate and *what* are the effects of such social constructions? Informed by Foucault's (1972b) work on power and knowledge, Kotzé (2002:8) argues 'that when we reflect on the knowledges we participate in and that shape our lives' we need to ask the following questions: '*Whose knowledges are these? For whose purposes? To whose benefit are these knowledges? Who is silenced or marginalised by these knowledges? Who suffers as a result of these knowledges?'* In line

with this thinking I have thus chosen to ask how knowledges operate and how can we engage ethically with this, rather than asking how scientific or credible knowledge is.

6.4.4   Precautions whilst listening to stories about sexuality

A participatory approach to research held consequences both for me as the researcher, as well as for the research process. I entered into this research as a person with specific knowledges regarding sexuality shaped by my academic and theological background as well as by my personal experiences, fears, emotions and faith convictions. These constructions are part of me and were present in every conversation (Anderson 1997:94). I was aware of the possible effects which listening to stories about sex could have on me. This encouraged me to take precautions to safeguard my own sense of wellness, as well as to protect the life-giving constructions that I hold regarding sexuality. As part of this commitment to my own wellbeing and to broaden my perspective I decided to attend an introductory course to human sexuality (Addinal: 2006) which was presented in association with the South African Sexual Health Association (SASHA).

This course was very helpful as I learnt about sexual practices hitherto unknown to me. Becoming aware of and learning more about a greater range of sexual practices equipped me with a deeper understanding of human sexuality. It enabled me to become knowledgeable about many varied sexual practices which I might encounter in this research project – as was the case. Part of this process entailed establishing which kind of sexual interactions was I uncomfortable with as a therapist and researcher. It was important to identify these challenges to my sexual understanding because it enabled me to engage in a process of de-sensitization. I was then empowered to work with such sexual practices without feeling traumatised or violated. I become familiar with the terms used in sexual situations outside my personal experience: for example, same-room-sex during swinging sexual encounters. It enabled me to work with issues that I would usually find very difficult such as abusive sexual practices. The de-sensitization process was very helpful as it created a protective barrier around my personal convictions. It desensitised me to talk about sexual practices, even those which were disturbing to me, such as marital rape and coercive sexual practices without feeling violated.

6.4.5 Vulnerability and subjectivity as a researcher

As I listened to the co-searchers' stories of loneliness, and feelings of rejection and unworthiness, I was reminded of a time when I too experienced these feelings. Because I shared some of experiences and emotions which living with sexual unhappiness had brought me, I was able not only to be aware of and sensitive to the co-searchers' emotional vulnerability and safety but also of my own needs in this respect. I was able to research *with* and not *on* the co-searchers. Moreover, I was able to share from my own story how dominant discourses had affected my well-being. Doing research from a feminist stance allowed me to embrace myself as a person in the research process. Reinharz (1992:258) explains that feminist research 'generally considers personal experiences to be a valuable asset' and '…utilizing the researcher's personal experiences is a distinguishing feature' of feminist research.

In line with this, I joined with the co-searchers in a transcending participatory consciousness. Heshusius (1994:15) conceptualises a participatory consciousness as a process of freeing ourselves from the categories imposed by the notions of objectivity and subjectivity to move to an understanding between the self and the other. This stance allows for a deep kinship of 'selfother' between the knower and the known. In other words, a participatory consciousness requires '… an attitude of profound openness and receptivity' (Heshusius 1994:15), which includes self-disclosure and self-reflection. Reinharz (1992:196) discusses the reflexive nature of feminist research and how it invites researchers to assess honestly what they have learnt about themselves. For me this implied knowing from where I started - being aware of the knowledges that I held and discourses that constituted me - whilst journeying with the co-searchers of this research. This was a way in which I could invite ethical practices into this journey and do research in a participatory way.

I shared with Julia how my husband and I negotiated new ways of intimacy in order to accommodate the effects of the depression and the antidepressant medication. I also decided to break the silence by talking to a friend of mine about the emotions I experienced in the absence of sexual intimacy. Sharing my story and how I journeyed with my experiences helped Julia to realise that her experiences, although unique, were shared in some ways. It broke the isolation she experienced. It spoke of the possibility that storylines can change, that hope is possible and that new ways of relating can be negotiated. By sharing parts of my story, though always in relation to the co-searcher's experience, I invited shared meaning-making into the journey, thus inviting collaboration

and shared agency. My vulnerability enabled me to share the co-searchers' experience of being exposed and having to trust the other. This enabled shared relational responsibility.

I support Kotzé's (2002:23, 25) challenge of the conventional ways of research which are situated in positivist scientific theorising guided by values of objectivity and neutrality. I view co-searching a more ethical way of research: '[c]o-*search* refers to a participatory search in which the "researcher" and the "subjects" of research become participants in co-searching for new knowledges about which all participants have a say' (Kotzé 2002:25). Sharing my personal experiences with the co-searchers and being transparent about my discursive position promoted collaborative learning and the sharing of agency which included the co-construction of knowledge (Anderson 1998:66). I reasoned that inviting shared agency into this research journey also invited shared power. A participatory search implies and requires power-sharing. I am in agreement with Kotzé (2002:26) who argues that '[t]o reflect on ourselves implies to reflect on the way power operates in our research and in the production of knowledges. Continuous awareness of the potentially dangerous possibilities of our research can assist us in doing ethicising research'. By me having experienced how sexual unhappiness can undermine a person's sense of personhood and by sharing this with the co-searchers, a space was created in which emotional safety for both the co-searchers and me was established. In those stories where I felt moved because of my own experiences, I would share this experience with the co-searcher. I argued that exposing myself to the same vulnerabilities and risks as the co-searchers experienced promoted power-sharing (Section 1.7.2). My notion was in line with the Reinharz's thinking (1992:32–34) that a researcher's self-disclosure during interviews is good feminist practice as it promotes honesty and accountability. Those co-searchers with whom I shared parts of my story greatly appreciated my honesty and often commented on how this had helped them to voice their own vulnerabilities, fears and insecurities.

6.5   SUMMARY

This journey made me aware of the complexity of sexually unhappy marriages. Its effects permeate all aspects of the lives of those involved (Craig & Stander 2009:32). It has the ability to isolate, to silence and to alienate women from themselves, their faith constructions and the significant people in their lives. It challenges their constructions of who they believe themselves to be as Christian wives and mothers. It causes self-judgement and judgment by others, which results in feelings of guilt. It often causes conflict between personal faith convictions and sexual practices. It causes the reconstruction of identity: at times this life-giving, at others life-restricting.

This research journey was about voicing the co-searchers' experiences and exploring their knowledges and how they made meaning from their journeys with sexual unhappiness. This was a process of co-search, thus searching together for greater understanding and co-authoring the story of Christian sexually unhappy marriages. The co-searchers remained my ethical responsibility and focus throughout. Their experiences were the most important departure point – as was their emotional, spiritual and physical well-being. This process had at heart to co-create, voice and support new spaces for the co-searchers in order to invite life-giving practices into their journeys, which facilitated mutually beneficial outcomes. The co-searchers were able to story their experiences, to deconstruct the constitutive discourses and to negotiate new meanings for their experiences in ways which were life-giving to them on all levels of their being. During this process I too was able to create new knowledges and a greater understanding regarding the pastoral care of sexuality.

Much of this research journey involved doing 'reasonable hope'. Weingarten (2010a:7) insists that critical to our understanding of 'reasonable hope' is the dimension of time:

> Hope's objective is most often placed in an eagerly awaited future, with the arc of time between the present and the future filled with anticipation. *Reasonable hope's objective is the process of making sense of what exists now in the belief that this prepares us to meet what lies ahead*. With reasonable hope, the present is filled with working not waiting; we scaffold ourselves to prepare for the future [emphasis mine].

Part of doing reasonable hope, was also looking forward in preparation of what lies beyond this research journey.

6.6   FUTURE OPPORTUNITIES AND WAYS FORWARD

Looking at ways to move forward with this research journey immediately challenged me, leaving me with questions such as: Can one 'resolve' the paradox between praxis and beliefs? And: How can churches equip their members to cope better with the contradictions involved in our sexuality?

This research journey has also challenged many of the dominant discourses which most Protestant churches hold dear and questioned how these churches have defined their understanding of marriage, sexuality and adultery. Some might even interpret this research as anti-God or anti-church. But

inviting a multiplicity of understanding and doing does not necessarily imply that 'anything and everything goes' thereby encouraging a kind of spiritual relativism (Rossouw 1993:904). My understanding of this process is that it does not reflect a *laissez faire* approach to pastoral care in which 'anything/everything goes', but requires a heightened awareness that not 'anything/ everything' that goes under the guise of 'appropriate sexual behaviour' is necessarily life-giving. Embedded in some of the church's teachings are discourses that are life-restricting or even abusive.

If churches are going to adequately address the challenges facing their members they will need to move from teaching prescriptive ethics to embodying participatory ethics. This is a far more risky position because it allows for a 'bottom up' exploration of sexuality and sexual practices rather than a 'top down' imposition of 'rules' from the church's theological hierarchy. This position could allow Christians to explore and define what will be life-giving in their contexts for themselves, but also to those with whom they engage. Engaging in Christianity, church, theology, pastoral care, theological training and one's personal faith in a participatory way, will bring many challenges and dilemmas. It will challenge the ideas of one 'truth', biblicist ways of understanding Scripture, church traditions and maybe even one's personal faith convictions. I do not believe there is an easy or uncomplicated answer to this, however it is my hope that doing faith and theology by means of participatory ethics will bring me closer to life-giving practices. Thus, ways that will include marginalised voices: ways that will allow for people to explore and define their own understandings of God, themselves and their sexual practices that are life-giving. Ways of doing participatory ethics will be reflected upon in the next section.

6.6.1   Doing hope

Derick, as well as other Christians who have learned of this research project, have invited me to present and facilitate workshops with congregations regarding sexual happiness and unhappiness once this research journey is completed. This will be one way in which I will **do** reasonable hope (Weingarten 2010a:17) not as a feeling, but as an action that is done with and in relation to others. I argue that hope need be the responsibility of a community: hope is 'something we do with others. Hope is too important – its effects on body and soul too significant – to be left to individuals alone' (Weingarten 2000:204). I intend to honour my commitment to practising ethical theology by *doing* hope with regards to sexuality theology instead of *only* theorizing about sexuality. I will invite others to engage in dialogue about sexuality in workshops and presentation opportunities. Pattison (1994:51) argues that Christians should continuously be actively involved in a process of critical dialogue with theological traditions, which will 'both encourage and modify Christian praxis, since

the tradition contains its own liberative content and so presents its own challenges'. Such a dialectical process 'may be seen as a circle whereby ideas, understandings and traditions, on the one hand, and actual practical action, on the other, continually enter into dialogue, stimulating and modifying each other' (Pattison 1994:51). In the context of this research, the first step in practising this 'critical dialogue' will involve breaking the silence regarding sexuality traditionally found within churches. I will offer congregations in my area conversations to engage in dialogue regarding sexuality and will share this research journey with them. Looking at the effects of how sexuality operated in the past could afford people the opportunity to look differently at sexuality without becoming prescriptive. This could invite – rather than tell – new ways of looking at sexuality.

6.6.2   Breaking the silence

Although there is a large body of literature, as developed by editors such as Jeanne Stevenson-Moessner (1996; 2000; 2008), Nancy Ramsay (2004), Christie Cozad Neuger (1996; 2001) and James Poling (1991; 2010) on women and pastoral care, including sexual issues, it became apparent in this research journey, that most of the participating clergy as well as the co-searchers still experienced sexual issues as being unspoken in their lives and in their congregations. Therefore, by speaking about sexuality and related gender issues I hope to penetrate the silence in which sexuality is veiled and to create ways of speaking about sexuality within South African Protestant congregations. Such dialogue will not aim to pronounce on what is right or wrong, moral or immoral, but rather to discern what the effects are of the silence and the implicit discourses that constitute Christians' understandings regarding sexuality and sexual practices. This requires moving away from a moralising platform which judges and condemns right and wrong to a position which looks at the effects of our faith practices. Faith cannot stand separated from actions, nor can actions stand indifferent or inconsequential from faith's effects. Christians are called to be accountable with regards to their faith practices and the effects these have on their lives and relationships. This accountability is not only on a personal level, but needs also to be on a collective level. Due to my post-modern theological stance I argue that people are interconnected and that the concepts of individualism and Christianity are mutually excluding (Jenkins cited in Pattison 1993:85). Throughout this research journey I have worked with the issues of individual and collective responsibility and, more especially, the dilemmas that arise from individual *versus* collective responsibility. Pastoral carers cannot look at infidelity *only* in terms of the offending party, but should include an exploration of the discourses which have shaped these ideas or behaviours, thus by implication also the contribution of such discourses and the effects thereof.

By moving away from binary viewpoints and legalistic prescriptions - such as what is wrong or right, pious or sinful, acceptable or not – I have tried to encourage and facilitate discussions regarding the effects of discourses. By looking at the effects of the dominant discourses I hoped to create space and the possibility for new ways of speaking and relating to sexuality within our faith communities.

I am in agreement with Farley (2010:11) who argues that '[e]ven where new theological perspectives on human sexuality are greeted with disagreement and controversy, the maps for theological discourse on matters of sex [need to be] irrevocably altered'. Sexuality and its related constructions - such as prescribed gender discourses and prescriptive sexual practices – need to be continuously challenged and re-authored into stories reflective of people's lived experiences. Although this process of re-authoring has been done by many feminist practical theologians, many non-feminist practical theologians still hold on to traditionally prescribed gender discourses. Church communities need to ask what are people's 'lived experiences' and how can the church engage in these in life-giving ways? The challenge within this is that long held constructions will be challenged: for instance, in what ways do the church's ideas regarding sexuality conflict with the constitutional rights as laid down in the constitution of the Republic of South Africa (No. 108 of 1996), which ensures no discrimination against people due to gender, race or sexual orientation. Church communities need to ask themselves if their gender-based prescriptions ensure that 'human dignity' which is so entrenched within many faith communities. I am of the conviction that for too long church communities have hidden behind 'Christian' prescriptions/values in order to avoid addressing difficult issues such as sexuality and gender, which in turn leads to the abandonment of collective responsibility. I argue that we need to follow Christ's lead: doing faith in contextual, relevant and life-giving ways, which calls for new ways of doing and challenges taken-for-granted prescriptions that marginalise.

Practical theologians need to take their contexts seriously and to address life-denying gender discourses, even in the face of adversity and opposition. It became apparent in this research journey that the ways in which the discourses regarding sexuality and gender operate in many congregations are not supportive of women, or of sexual happiness within marriages. Women (and men) who are living in sexually unhappy marriages often experience isolation due to the silence regarding sexuality. Already marginalized by the wider community, they frequently encounter an even greater marginalization in their faith communities.

6.6.3 Seeking new forums to promote awareness

The participating clergy members suggested that this thesis should be on a recommended reading list for ministers in training, as well as for ministers and pastoral workers in congregations. I will investigate avenues in which such a request/suggestion could be forwarded to seminaries as well as to ministers of congregations. Academic articles will be another avenue whereby to share this research journey. This thesis could also become the basis for a book in which I weave my research into a more accessible form in order to create wider reader base than just the academic circle.

I recommend that all marriages officers within churches are educated and trained in sexuality and gender in order that they can guide young couples in open discussions regarding sexuality. The participating clergy shared that because sexuality was never discussed in their training, they felt ill-equipped to speak about or adequately deal with sexuality. They had engaged in further self study on the subject to address this need. However, I argue that the issue is much more complex than simply accumulating more knowledge about sexuality. The issue at stake is not so much the (lack of) knowledge, but training clergy to deal with the dilemmas raised by the prescriptive way in which much pastoral work and practical theology operates. What is needed is a participatory mode and a critical reflection on those taken-for-granted knowledges that the church holds. It is my hope and dream that practical theologians, clergy and pastoral workers will receive training regarding sexuality and gender issues which will equip them to speak about the discourses regarding sexuality (in all its facets). These conversations should not be limited only to prospective brides and grooms, but should be offered to people of all ages within their congregations. Only once sex becomes speakable within our churches and seminaries, will congregants challenge the discourse of silence and those other discourses which often result in sexually unhappy marriages and teenagers and young adults engaging in life-denying sexual behaviour and relationships.

6.6.4 Training methods in theology

A critical evaluation of the traditional and current methods of training pastoral counsellors and theologians in South Africa's tertiary institutions is urgently required. The participating clergy felt that theological students and pastoral therapists are given theoretical knowledge, but seldom practical experience whilst in training. I did not share this experience as the pastoral therapy training I received through the Institute for Therapeutic Development (ITD) was invaluable, especially

because the theory was supported by and based within praxis. During our training we were part of a supervision group and frequently engaged in practical experience i.e. seeing clients under supervision, evaluating these recorded sessions with the lecturers and the fellow students and practicing participatory and deconstructing conversations within groups. Grasping therapeutic practices and executing these were two very different experiences. I discovered that positioning myself in a participatory approach to pastoral care and using narrative practices required much more than theoretical knowledge. I had to use and engage language very differently, and had to hold a tentative position throughout. I had to learn to centralise the knowledges of a co-searcher/client instead of knowledges taught or prescribed by the Bible. These practices went beyond the mere understanding of techniques: it was about making a shift in my stance towards pastoral care and traditional knowledges. It was only with practical experience - *doing* this, that it became embodied knowledge.

A training approach which separates theory from praxis is based on the discourse that if students are taught what they should do, they will know ***how*** to apply it without any practical training and application. Within this approach of pastoral training lies a critical gap and crisis: training needs to be about ***doing*** and not only talk about how to do.

A critical evaluation of traditional training content is needed especially in terms of power relations. Questions need to be asked such as: Which knowledges are called into speech and centralised? Which paradigms in pastoral work are privileged and what are the effects of this privileged status? Questions also need to be asked about the power relations at work within training facilities. This will require sensitivity towards power relations and the ability to create awareness in others of power relations and their effects on those who are taught and on those who will receive care from the trained caretakers. Therefore, a critical issue to consider should be: Do training methods and resulting pastoral care practices marginalise people or do they invite participation and the creating of new and relevant knowledge? A critical evaluation of power relations at work within theological training might open up space for questions to be asked about the inclusion of women in theology.

6.6.5 The absence of women's voices in theology

As Graham (1998:140), I argue that the inclusion of feminist voices will create more authentic and inclusive communities, allowing for ministries that are informed by a vision of transcendence, justice and hope. For the last two decades, thus since 2000, an extensive bibliography on the pastoral

care of women has been developed by editors such as Jeanne Stevenson-Moessner, which is available in the UNISA library. However, it should be noted that the older generation of pastoral workers might not be aware of this literature and often their praxis are still informed by the historically dominant patriarchal discourses. In conversations with women who participate within their church structures, they too shared that the female experience is often silenced in the presence of the patriarchal discourse. I therefore argue that although the feminist resistance discourse exists it is often not dominant or even recognised within congregations, church structures and pastoral therapy in South Africa.

Poling (2006:51) calls on practical theologians and pastoral carers to challenge ambiguous interpretations regarding the cross of Jesus Christ and how that interpretation finds its ways in faith practices via patriarchy.

> The cross of Jesus Christ was a violent event and its interpretation over the centuries has been ambiguous. For men who live in patriarchal societies, the cross gives mixed messages. On the one hand, the cross is a symbol that legitimizes male dominance in human community. For many centuries, the cross has been symbolic of the church's authority as a patriarchal institution.

> (Poling 2006:51)

Poling (2006:51), as many other theologians, urges that we interpret the cross in a way that will challenge patriarchy, as he argues that '… the cross is a symbol of accountability for men, a sign that God rejects domination and brings judgement to those who engage in violence'. This violence will include structural violence as seen within churches, seminaries, marriages and social structures in the name of the 'God-given order' of male domination at the expense of women, thus patriarchy. I am in agreement with Poling and other theologians who support feminist resistance theology and suggest that in addition to the feminist resistance discourse, men, as the dominant voice in the field of practical theology, need to develop a gender consciousness: it calls for self-reflexivity in terms of patriarchy, gender and power relations. Male clergy need to challenge their own prescriptive positions and challenge the ways in which they engage with and effect power relations.

One outcome of this research journey is an invitation to participate in a video recorded conversation regarding gender practices. This video will be shared at the next synod meeting of the Dutch Reformed Church of the Western and South Cape region in 2011, in order to open discussion

regarding gender practices. In this video I will address issues of power relating to gender and sexuality.

I will continue to investigate avenues in which I can promote gender-sensitive practices. I also intend to develop a module regarding gender practices and mainstreaming which I will offer to clergy and congregations.

6.6.6   Gender awareness and mainstreaming

One of the most dominant discourses present in this research journey was that of silence regarding sexuality and gender-related issues within the lives and faith experiences of the co-searchers, clergy and other participants in their faith communities. Sexuality and gender is intertwined and inseparable. We need to find ways to break this silence and to encourage conversation regarding sexuality and gender issues. Moreover, women's voices need to be included and centralised when we speak about female sexuality and gender-related issues. Practical theology informed by feminist consciousness and action will result in enabling the voice of women's experiences of pastoral care to be heard and the diversity of their needs and contexts to become more visible (Graham 1998:140-141). As the church continues to be a male dominated institution which is often constituted by patriarchal philosophy, I am of the opinion that the church needs to engage in a process of gender mainstreaming. James Cochrane (2001:67-86) points out that the challenge for contextual theology lies in the need to provide social analysis at a local level, and according to the categories provided by the people in those contexts. In the context of this research I believe that Protestant churches should engage in a process of assessing its gender policies and how gender discourses operate within faith communities, and also specifically in Christian marriages. Maybe even more important, faith societies need to assess what are the effects of these dominant gender discourses.

I am in agreement with Farley (2010:156) who argues that '[g]ender ought not to divide us….Gender wars would cease if we saw that we are not "opposite" sexes but persons with somewhat different (but in fact, very similar) bodies'. As Farley, I too argue that gender 'gives us no reason to judge other embodied humans as "abject bodies"…, it provides no justification for dominance over one another, or for exclusion, shaming, or doing violence to other human bodies. Whatever the forces and powers of culture and society, they must be disarmed insofar as they make us lose sight of what we share.'

During the time of Apartheid, contextual theology had to do with political freedom and challenging oppressive regimes. In South Africa today, we continue to find oppressive regimes with regards to gender and sexuality within our churches. The recent court case regarding the dismissal of a gay organist, Johan Strydom, of the NG Moreleta Park congregation (Kletskerk:2011) is but one sad reminder of this oppression.

Poling (2006:52) states that '[t]he vocation of practical theologians is to understand how the stories, teachings, and practices of our religious institutions affects people. He continues that practical theologians need to be aware of how religion functions on a conscious as well as an unconscious level. I understand this to mean that practical theologians and pastoral workers need to be aware of ideas, formations and practices and how this affects people. Such ideas, formations and practices are social constructions as expressed in dominant discourses of which patriarchy is one. If such dominant discourses are damaging to people, it needs to be re-examined and challenged in order that our theology can be just.

A starting point to open discussion could emerge if men became curious and open to women's experiences, so that they can hear what women say; they need to listen to women's stories so that women become real people and not objectified others. The silence regarding gender and sexual issues within churches need to be challenged not only at the congregational level, but also within the training of clergy members and pastoral workers. This can be done by including a curriculum dealing with gender, power relations and sexuality. Clergy and congregation members alike need to address injustice and challenge life-denying discourses within our faith congregations:

> …our solidarity can only be with those who are hurt, subjugated or otherwise marginalized by the institutions and procedures by which we organize our life together in society. It is from that point of view, with such people as our first interlocutors and their experiences as our first point of reference for analysis, that critical engagement with government and other agencies [such as the church] in our society becomes valuable, and vital.

(Cochrane 2001:85)

A shift from conventional gender oppression is needed. This shift could be accomplished if there is a move from prescriptive and traditional religious knowledges/'truths' to participatory knowledges as negotiated and authored by those whom it affects. However, it is of great importance that, as in the past, activists not only speak about change but *do* change. This calls theologians, clergy and

congregations members alike to be accountable in terms of the collective consciousness and responsibility – thus uBuntu. This could only be done if '[t]hose who have a voice and power have an ethical obligation to use the privilege of their knowledge/power to ensure participation with the marginalised and silenced to listen to them, but not to decide for them, and to engage in participatory solidarity *with* them' (Kotzé 2002:18). One way of achieving participatory solidarity is by means of a formal process of creating gender awareness and gender mainstreaming within the church where gender sensitive practices are absent.

A process of gender mainstreaming will create an awareness of gender inequality. Part of creating this awareness needs to be an exploration of life-denying gender discourses which operate and circulate in faith communities and to map their effects. Take for instance the discourse that 'men need to be the primary breadwinners of a family'. Since gender mainstreaming has at heart the promotion of gender equality, this means that the rights, responsibilities and opportunities of individuals will not depend on whether they are born male or female (World Health Organisation:2010). I share Roux's (2010:2) understanding of gender quality as 'all human beings being free to develop their personal abilities and make choices without the limitations set by strict gender roles and gender relations between women and men in a given socio-cultural context'. Gender equality through gender mainstreaming is not about expecting women to be like men but 'about allowing women to participate as women in the workplace and in life, about making their unique contribution as women' (Roux 2010:2). Gender mainstreaming means including - rather than polarising - men and women. This is done by engaging men and women in a process that makes life better for all. Only then will the church be accountable in terms of the collective consciousness and responsibility – thus *doing* uBuntu:

> A person with ubuntu [sic] is open and available to others, affirming of others, does not feel threatened that others are able and good, for he or she has a proper self-assurance that comes from knowing that he or she belongs in a greater whole and is diminished when others are humiliated or diminished, when others are tortured or oppressed.

> (Desmond Tutu cited in uBuntu: 2011)

Inclusion of all calls for *practicing* diversity and not ignoring or discarding diversity. The inclusion of women and gender equality does not mean filling 'quotas' but truly centralising and validating women's experiences. It means addressing inequality and creating actions to empower women:

Empowerment of women involves awareness-raising, building self-confidence, expansion of choices, increased access to and control over resources and actions to transform the structures and institutions which reinforce and perpetuate gender discrimination and inequality.

(Roux 2010:2)

As Roux (2010:4), I am of the conviction that gender equality often holds little institutional support: policy commitments to gender equality are not always backed by serious efforts in practice. Efforts to promote gender equality will only succeed if the senior leadership of an institution - in this instance a church/faith society - establishes, drives and maintains gender mainstreaming practices. Furthermore, a process of gender mainstreaming needs to include people on all levels of the given context.

The challenge we face is: How can we develop theological discourse that undermines the existing dominant oppressive gender discourses? Awareness of gender calls for an awareness of power relations and for doing theology differently as discussed throughout this thesis. It calls for a movement from a prescriptive and confessional approach to theology to a participatory theology as discussed in this thesis. Hudson and Kotzé (2002:277) speak of this as developing an ethical spirituality by participating in the stories of others. I support their proposal for a theological approach that 'provides space for an ongoing and open-ended meaning-making negotiation between dogma and personal experience, pursued by people of faith in community' (Hudson & Kotzé 2002:277). This could create an ethical, inclusive, accountable and life-giving practical theology which includes the previously unheard voices, especially by means of pastoral care.

6.6.7 Feminist practices and pastoral care

Feminist practices allow for more than just personal counselling: they involve giving and receiving care whilst building relationships of mutuality and empowerment. Building relationships that empower should be at the centre of the praxis of practical theologians and pastoral caretakers. Graham (1998:141) calls these 'practices of reconstructive practical theology' that place 'an individual story in a social or collective context, locates the personal story in relation to the stories of faith (both historical and contemporary) and finally encourages new models of practice to blossom which embody and enact renewed visions of faith'. This calls for a different way of doing pastoral care and research in the field of practical theologies especially when dealing with sexuality and

gender issues. Following Graham, this research journey was done from a stance of reconstructive feminist practical theology; it enabled previously marginalised stories to be heard. The co-searchers and I build relationships of mutuality in the sharing of stories and witness positions. By exploring the different witness positions, as well as exploring historical and contemporary dominant discourses, we empowered each other to challenge life-restricting power relations and faith constructions regarding sexuality and gender. I contend that by sharing the stories of this research journey, I will be able to sensitise and encourage colleagues and others to a greater inclusion of women's voices in practical theology and new ways of speaking about sexuality in our faith contexts. I also intend to investigate the possibility of a short publication to share the co-searchers' stories and the effects of the dominant discourses that constituted their understanding and practices to include a wider audience (witness base) to their experiences.

Not only do I wish to reach more people with these women's voices but I also hope to include a collective meaning, thus bring the political into focus. Only by means of using political agency and power mechanisms – such as those evident in the feminist and anti-Apartheid movements - can the existing ways of doing theology be challenged and changed. This demands an active campaign of creating awareness towards the plight of women in the church but also of those in need of pastoral care, by challenging existing structures in theology and the ways churches speak and do theology. This can be done if the effects of conventional praxis are exposed, calculated and addressed.

This thesis was about providing such a space for an ongoing and open-ended meaning-making. Therefore, space is also given to the co-searchers' and clergy's reflections as the last word.

6.7 THE CO-SEARCHERS' REFLECTIONS ON THEIR PARTICIPATION

An important thread that was interwoven in all the aims formulated for this research project was the commitment to breaking the silence regarding sexuality, and, more especially, the silence enshrouding sexually unhappy marriages in relation to faith. This research journey created the space for co-searchers and clergy members to voice their understanding and experiences, especially about that which was previously unspeakable.

By documenting these stories in this thesis I extended the way in which I gave a voice to these stories. I invited co-searchers and participating clergy members to reflect on their stories as I had used them in this research project. Chapters Three and Four were sent to them for revision and

sanction. I also invited feedback on the effects which the process of voicing their stories had had on them. All the participants shared that they found that *reading* their stories was a profoundly moving experience. When they read these in print, it was as if they – perhaps for the first time - really ***heard*** their own stories. Most co-searchers found this a difficult process. Some even felt so vulnerable that they requested that I omit some details of their stories. It would seem as if actually seeing their stories in black on white was different from speaking about them.

The voicing and documentation of these stories facilitated and created new understandings and new awareness. In order to centralise the co-searchers and clergy members' voices, I conclude with their reflections on their participation:

Naomi *shared with me that reading her story had encouraged her to persevere with the decisions she had taken regarding boundaries. Reading her story had made her life seem more real to her. It confirmed her belief that she could no longer continue to accept the abusive marriage as she had done before.*

After reviewing her story in Chapter Four, **Renate** was amazed at her own journey. *For so many years she had believed that verbal and emotional abuse should be endured and accepted. Nevertheless, after our journey she too set boundaries that would protect her dignity and personhood. Her marriage changed, as did their sexual practices. Their marriage moved from being very unhappy and operating in disrespectful ways to being life-giving and supporting of both Renate and Frank. They challenged patriarchal ways and invited equality and mutual respect into their marriage. Reviewing the documentation, Renate shared that it was a precious experience to see her life documented: it reminded her of how important it is to voice experiences.*

Maya: '*I found it very difficult and emotional to go back to some of the really painful memories. I'd reached a stage of accepting some of the hard parts and thought we had put it behind us, and we'd managed to make such an improvement in our sex life, but in the end, it was just not enough. Still, I felt that it was a story that needed to be told, to tell other women out there that if they are finding sex hard and painful at a physical level, they are not alone; they are not abnormal; what they are going through is not their fault. That they should not think it was all in the head, that they should not give up. I was driven by the hope that perhaps my story might make a difference, to someone.*

Perhaps a few words from a piece I wrote a few years after our miscarriage about the fluidity (good and bad) of life may help to explain some of what I still feel: "As I am a woman, how can things not flow? There is a flowing in the coursing in my veins, in my breath, in the cycles of my body, again and again in the blood, in the melting hungriness when you roll up your sleeves or you smile at me with your eyes. It is there (...) in the shifting seasons…. And mostly, despite the pain, I have rejoiced in the little changes, the little flows, that tell me the earth is alive, and I in it. Sometimes, I have grieved for the loss of that which has flowed away – the person whose voice is lost to me first, before the face fades, to become unfamiliar, even in photographs. Only once have I truly tried to hold back the flow, knowing in every moment of what seemed like hours that I could not – as I tried to catch in my hands, to hold on, to keep, to make solid, the slipping, sliding mass of dark blood that was my daughter, our daughter, leaving my body, already dissolving, dissolved".

When I reread the part of our story as reflected in the interview material in the final version of the research report later, in its bare outlines, without all the other bits that made up 23 years of togetherness, I was dizzy and disoriented for two days, the emotions were so strong, and yet, I stand, a survivor, still in love.'

Magda shared that reading her story was an uncomfortable experience. '*When reading my story, I got a fright because I realised that I am still in the same position, despite the breast cancer. The cancer was a wake-up call, yet nothing has changed in terms of how we engage sexually. To see yourself so exposed and honest on paper is difficult. In my reflection I wrote many things down, but then erased it again. It is as if my brain does not want to think about this. It is too difficult. Even so, my participation in this research was helpful to me – I now have a clearer vision of my future and my choices. I do not have to accept patriarchal or disrespectful ways. I can choose life.'*

Julia: '*Reading my story was helpful as I found all the emotions I experienced - there in black on white: Fear, anxiety, anger, disappointment (in myself and my husband), depression, emotional exhaustion, stress, frustration, anguish, self-judgement, resentment, rebellion, bitterness, loneliness and even thoughts of suicide. I want to say to women in sexually unhappy marriages: Don't go there [affairs]. It creates too much stress and it does not solve any problems. Rather talk to your husband and work at your relationship. Get professional help - talk about it – communication is very important! Recovering from the effects of sexual flings I now know how to handle inappropriate attention from men differently. I now have the wisdom to keep myself out of dangerous and exposing situations. I now know how to protect myself and how to avoid temptation.'*

Gerhard: '*Reading through Chapter Three of this thesis already helped me in terms of my pastoral care as it reminded me of and created an awareness of power relations and the importance of challenging life-denying patriarchal systems. But it also stirred up some unpleasant memories. A close relative of mine had to negotiate some challenges as she was sexually abused by a family member. This created a deep-seated mistrust of men, especially with regards to emotional safety. It is still at times difficult for R to get past the shame and fear. Often such issues are buried underneath patriarchal discourses. We too experience the silencing effects of patriarchy and abuse, even though both of us would like to challenge these life-denying consequences.*'

Derick shared his deep appreciation for this work. Participating in this research journey motivated him to continue to challenge life-denying and life-restricting patriarchal discourses within his home congregation. Derick believes that congregants need to be sensitised to the operations of patriarchy and to the effects it has on people. Derick also believes that talking about sexuality is very important, especially as he often has to deal with marriages that face sexual challenges. Derick was very grateful that he had had the opportunity to journey in this research:

'*Participating in this research project has challenged me to look very differently at how we talk about sex – something which God has given especially to us humans to enjoy. It made me particularly aware of the way we try to persuade our children not to be sexually active before marriage, and yet, once they are married, we expect couples suddenly to be able to enjoy sex and to be innovative in their ways of pleasuring each other. We are so busy arguing about premarital sex that we place enormous tension – even unconsciously – on the thing God calls "sex". I have discovered that many people, even "good" Christians, battle with sex in their marriages because of feelings of guilt. I have also discovered that many of them even find it difficult at times to praise God for the fact that husband and wife may enjoy each other sexually.*

This journey made me aware again of how the media exploits women - who are created so beautifully - for their own ends, whether this be to sell their products, to sell pleasure or whatever. I now realize how many people struggle to talk comfortably about sex, especially in the light of these distorted images. Very few people are able to speak comfortably about sex, even when speaking about sex in the context in which God intended sex to be: as something good which God has given to His children to enjoy. I now realise how difficult it must be for people to make sense of sexuality in the presence of such distorted images. We have an enormously important task: to challenge the

negative images surrounding sexuality and to educate people about this wondrous aspect of marriage. We must make people aware that we must honour God for the wonderful gift of sex.'

Ecclesia: '*I believe that this research is of the utmost importance. Participating in this research journey was insightful to me. It created an awareness of the challenges that sexually unhappy marriages hold for Christians. I now will deal with such issues with much greater sensitivity and will create opportunities for safer spaces for congregants to share their experiences. I believe that ministers as well as theological students need to read this thesis. There is such a silence regarding patriarchy within our churches and ignorance about how it operates and what the effects are. I wish that this research could become a prescribed text for ministers in training.'*

IN CONCLUSION

This research journey was a journey filled with contradictions. The most obvious of these was the fact of infidelity in the presence of deep Christian faith and a revered regard for marriage as a Godly institution. Infidelity included a wide range of activities - from internet based virtual love affairs to longstanding sexual and emotional bonds outside marriage.

This research journey revealed other contradictions, such as patriarchal practices in the presence of deep love and commitment. It revealed expectations and prescriptions for Christian marital sex without any practical guidelines.

For me, this journey was about a 'loss of innocence' as an integral part of *coming of age*. It required a new way of understanding and relating, but it also meant letting go of simplistic or one dimensional views of sexuality. After journeying with sexually unhappy marriages I came away with the realisation of the complexity of this matter, especially in the presence of faith. This journey challenged long-held personal beliefs. At the same time, it also re-enforced the conviction that churches, and in particular pastoral therapists, need to acknowledge and address a changing society with new challenges and new ways of relating. I am now more than ever convinced that one cannot address issues regarding sexuality without also addressing power relations and gender issues. Narrative Therapy incorporates the modes of power - thus politics - in its approach to therapy. Furthermore, dealing with something as controversial as sexually unhappy marriages and non-marital sexual practices requires a participatory approach towards theology and pastoral care. One

needs to travel *with* people and do care *with* people. Only if one is willing to move away from judgement and fear can one move towards dignity, respect and life-giving pastoral practices.

I believe that the church – due to its history - is deeply traumatised by sexuality. Trauma is most effectively transferred from one generation to the next by silence. As long as the church remains silent regarding sexuality, it will continue to be a deeply traumatised – and traumatising - institution regarding sexuality.

I am committed to seek opportunities continuously to address the issue of sexually unhappy marriages in a faith context. For me, being faithful to this calling can be summarised in the words of Bons-Storm (1998:15):

> …[B]eing faithful means to live and eventually die in critical orientation to a christian [sic] tradition in such a way that the ambiguities and the brokenness of life can be endured, and life can be experienced as meaningful in a trusting relationship with the Divine. Living in this world with one's eyes open spells dread and despair. The brokenness of life in all its aspects cannot be ignored. To be faithful one needs stories that go against the grain because they do not gloss over the dread and despair but give vision of hope.

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EXPLORING AND STORYING CHRISTIAN WOMEN'S EXPERIENCES LIVING IN SEXUALLY UNHAPPY MARRIAGES

Information Sheet for Participants

Dear _____

Thank you for your interest in this doctorate research project which addresses the experiences of Protestant Christian women in terms of sexuality.

Why I am doing this research?

This project is being undertaken as part of the requirements for a Doctorate in Practical Theology, with specialisation in Pastoral Therapy.

Background Information: Why did I choose this subject?

During my MTh research journey, I explored with Christian women their constructions of sexuality and their stories confirmed the silence which envelops sexuality in most religious/faith communities, which I became aware of over many years. I also became aware of the desire among women, especially religious women, to explore and voice their understanding of their sexuality in relation to their faith constructions. It furthermore became apparent to me how difficult it is for some Christians to live according to biblical prescriptions regarding sexuality and the confusion there is about this due to the silence about sexuality within most faith contexts in South Africa.
 and different ways of doing theology and pastoral care.

Being a pastoral therapist, who is willing to speak frankly about sexuality, pathed the way for people to discuss sexual issues. Many of the Christians who came to see me for therapeutic conversations, and even people that I know socially, started to share with me their need to discuss Christians'

[1]understanding of sexuality. Many felt that Christians are in need of pastoral care or guidance in their intimate relationships and the way they experience and express their sexuality within their religious context[2]. However, sexuality is often perceived to be a forbidden subject within the church. This silence is compounded by the fact that the majority of faith communities in South Africa are still positioned within a Biblicist (confessional) approach to faith and it is often believed that the Bible is the sole source of knowledge and norm for the subject.

Many Protestant Christian women shared with me that they voice (and sometimes live and practice) their sexuality in particular ways to be in-line with what they believe are acceptable in the eyes of the church. Though I came across this approach in many conversations with women, I also learnt about experiences seldom spoken of. Such alternative stories were voiced to me and I became the 'witness' of the previously unspoken. The unspeakable was told in different situations, as women shared their stories with me in social context, during workshops and in my private practice. Many of them are Protestant Christian women who are living in sexually unfulfilling marriages and some even engaging in extra-marital sex as a result. It became apparent that their perceived and convicted beliefs might be compatible with the accepted norms, in terms of the dominant traditional religious teachings regarding sexual practices, but how they actually experienced themselves as sexual beings, were often in conflict and therefore unspeakable. This discrepancy often causes feelings of alienation, isolation and condemnation.

What is the aim of the project?

I formulated the following research question to direct my research:

What faith predicaments and relational complexities, challenges and dilemmas do Protestant Christian women in South Africa experience, when living in sexually unhappy marriages?

I see this research journey as a process of inviting conversation which could promote understanding of the faith processes involved; and the complexities and challenges that sexually unfulfilled

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[1] The use of the singular 'understanding' is not meant to imply a monolithic view of Christians' understanding of sexuality (or rather sexualities). Thus understanding in the context of the study is meant to imply diverse views and experiences throughout.

[2] I am aware that we find within the church same-sexed as well as heterosexual couples, but for the purpose of this study I focus on heterosexual couples.

marriages might hold for both the client (Christian women) and the therapy process, especially in the presence of conflicting biblical prescriptions and Biblicist faith understandings. Furthermore, that such conversation will acknowledge differences in understanding of biblical and religious prescriptions regarding sexual discourses. To facilitate this, I identified the following preliminary research aims:

1.   Storying the experiences of Protestant Christian women regarding their understanding of faith prescriptions for marital sexual relations and sexual fulfilment.

2.   Identifying the experiences of Christian Protestant women regarding their understanding of faith prescriptions in terms of non-marital sexual practices.

3.   Exploring how Christian women who live in sexually unhappy marriages negotiate meaning of such a relationship?

4.   Exploring the effects and consequences of sexually unfulfilled marriages.

Who will participate?

This participatory action research project invites Christian women whom worship at Protestant churches within South Africa.

What will be required of participants?

Should you agree to take part in this project, you will be asked to give consent for the information obtained during the individual conversations to be used in the research project.

If you decide to participate in the project, we will need to have two (2) conversations, of approximately one and a half hours each. After each conversation, you will receive a typed summary of the session. You will be asked to make comments, corrections and/or provide feedback regarding the summary. Although the sessions will be in either Afrikaans or English, the report will be written in English. Therefore, all the summaries as well as other correspondence will be in English. At your request, it can be translated into Afrikaans.

As my thesis is in English, all documentation regarding my research will also be in English.

Free participation

You are free to withdraw from the research project at any time without any negative consequences for you.

Confidentiality

The information obtained during our conversations will be discussed with my promoter, who lives in Pretoria. With your prior consent, the information will be used in my thesis.

The information collected during the project will be securely stored and will be destroyed after conclusion of the project.

Results of the study

Results of this project may be published. At your request, details (names and places) will be altered to ensure your anonymity. You will have the choice of using your own name or a pseudonym of your own choice.

You are most welcome to request a copy of the results of the project, should you wish.

Questions of participants

Should you have any questions or concerns regarding the project, either now or in future, please feel free to contact me:

Nicki Spies
Student Number: 3513 6006
Tel: 021 – 979 2055
Cell: 082 3410 308
E-mail: pnspies@telkomsa.net

or my promoter, Prof Dirk Kotzé at:

The Institute for Therapeutic Development.

Tel & Fax: +27 (0)12 460 6704

E-mail: djk@itd.ac.za

This project has been reviewed and approved by the Department of Practical Theology, UNISA and the Institute of Therapeutic Development.

EXPLORING AND STORYING CHRISTIAN WOMEN'S EXPERIENCES LIVING IN SEXUALLY UNHAPPY MARRIAGES

Information Sheet for Participants

Dear Clergy Member

Thank you for your interest in this doctorate research project which addresses the experiences of Protestant Christian women in terms of sexuality.

Why I am doing this research?

This project is being undertaken as part of the requirements for a doctorate in Practical Theology, with specialisation in Pastoral Therapy.

Background Information: Why did I choose this subject?

During my MTh research journey, I explored with Christian women their constructions of sexuality and their stories confirmed the silence which envelops sexuality in most religious/faith communities, which I became aware of over many years. I also became aware of the desire among women, especially religious women, to explore and voice their understanding of their sexuality in relation to their faith constructions. It furthermore became apparent to me how difficult it is for some Christians to live according to biblical prescriptions regarding sexuality and the confusion there is about this due to the silence about sexuality within most faith contexts in South Africa.
 and different ways of doing theology and pastoral care.

Being a pastoral therapist, who is willing to speak frankly about sexuality, pathed the way for people to discuss sexual issues. Many of the Christians who came to see me for therapeutic conversations, and even people that I know socially, started to share with me their need to discuss Christians'

[3]understanding of sexuality. Many felt that Christians are in need of pastoral care or guidance in their intimate relationships and the way they experience and express their sexuality within their religious context[4]. However, sexuality is often perceived to be a forbidden subject within the church. This silence is compounded by the fact that the majority of faith communities in South Africa are still positioned within a Biblicist (confessional) approach to faith and it is often believed that the Bible is the sole source of knowledge and norm for the subject.

Many Protestant Christian women shared with me that they voice (and sometimes live and practice) their sexuality in particular ways to be in-line with what they believe are acceptable in the eyes of the church. Though I came across this approach in many conversations with women, I also learnt about experiences seldom spoken of. Such alternative stories were voiced to me and I became the 'witness' of the previously unspoken. The unspeakable was told in different situations, as women shared their stories with me in social context, during workshops and in my private practice. Many of them are Protestant Christian women who are living in sexually unfulfilling marriages and some even engaging in extra-marital sex as a result. It became apparent that their perceived and convicted beliefs might be compatible with the accepted norms, in terms of the dominant traditional religious teachings regarding sexual practices, but how they actually experienced themselves as sexual beings, were often in conflict and therefore unspeakable. This discrepancy often causes feelings of alienation, isolation and condemnation.

What is the aim of the project?

I formulated the following research question to direct my research:

What faith predicaments and relational complexities, challenges and dilemmas do Protestant Christian women in South Africa experience, when living in sexually unhappy marriages?

To facilitate this, I identified the following preliminary research aims:

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[3] The use of the singular 'understanding' is not meant to imply a monolithic view of Christians' understanding of sexuality (or rather sexualities). Thus understanding in the context of the study is meant to imply diverse views and experiences throughout.

[4] I am aware that we find within the church same-sexed as well as heterosexual couples, but for the purpose of this study I focus on heterosexual couples.

1. Storying the experiences of Protestant Christian women regarding their understanding of faith prescriptions for marital sexual relations and sexual fulfilment.

2. Identifying the experiences of Christian Protestant women regarding their understanding of faith prescriptions in terms of non-marital sexual practices.

3. Exploring how Christian women who live in sexually unhappy marriages negotiate meaning of such a relationship?

4. Exploring the effects and consequences of sexually unfulfilled marriages.

Who will participate?

This participatory action research project invites Christian women whom worship at Protestant churches within South Africa as well as clergy members from the Protestant tradition.

Clergy members are invited to participate specifically to assist in identifying and clarifying the current understandings and interpretation of biblical prescriptions for Christian marriages, regarding sexuality, as held by Protestant Christians. I do not presuppose that such understandings and interpretations are representative of the official dogma and doctrine of participant's church denominations. Thus, the understandings and interpretations will not necessarily reflect the official policies, based on doctrine or theology of the church, but rather how it is understood and implemented by its members.

Part of this project is to explore how pastoral care is done with regards to sexuality, it is important to me to include the voices of clergy members as pastoral caretakers. I believe that the inclusion of the voices of clergy members will enable me to more richly provide the contexts in which Christian women face their sexuality in terms of their faith constructions.

What will be required of participants?

Should you agree to take part in this project, you will be asked to give consent for the information obtained during the individual conversations to be used in the research project.

If you decide to participate in the project, we will need to have two (2) conversations, of approximately one and a half hours each. After each conversation, you will receive a typed summary of the session. You will be asked to make comments, corrections and/or provide feedback regarding the summary. Although the sessions will be in either Afrikaans or English, the report will be written in English. Therefore, all the summaries as well as other correspondence will be in English. At your request, it can be translated into Afrikaans.

As my thesis is in English, all documentation regarding my research will also be in English.

Free participation

You are free to withdraw from the research project at any time without any negative consequences for you.

Confidentiality

The information obtained during our conversations will be discussed with my promoter, who lives in Pretoria. With your prior consent, the information will be used in my thesis.

The information collected during the project will be securely stored and will be destroyed after conclusion of the project.

Results of the study

Results of this project may be published. At your request, details (names and places) will be altered to ensure your anonymity. You will have the choice of using your own name or a pseudonym of your own choice.

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Questions of participants

Should you have any questions or concerns regarding the project, either now or in future, please feel free to contact me:

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or my promoter, Prof Dirk Kotzé at:

The Institute for Therapeutic Development.

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This project has been reviewed and approved by the Department of Practical Theology, UNISA and the Institute of Therapeutic Development.

ANNEXURE 3

EXPLORING AND STORYING CHRISTIAN WOMEN'S EXPERIENCES LIVING IN SEXUALLY UNHAPPY MARRIAGES

Consent Form for Participation

I have read the Information Sheet concerning the project and I understand what the project is all about. All my questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I understand that I am free to request further information at any stage.

<u>I understand and accept that:</u>

1.   My participation in the project is entirely voluntary.

2.   I am free to withdraw from the project at any time without any disadvantage.

3.   I am aware of what will happen to my personal information at the conclusion of the project.

4.   I will receive no payment or compensation for participation in the study.

5.   All personal information supplied by me will remain confidential throughout the project.

6.   I am aware that Dr. Dirk Kotzé, promoter to Nicki Spies will read the material.

I am willing to participate in this research project.

_____   _____

Signature of participant   Date

_____   _____

Name of participantin   Signature of witness

capital letters

ANNEXURE 4

EXPLORING AND STORYING CHRISTIAN WOMEN'S EXPERIENCES LIVING IN SEXUALLY UNHAPPY MARRIAGES

Consent Form for the Release of Information by Participants

<u>I declare that:</u>

1. I have read the summary of the project.
2. I have had the opportunity to make changes to that information, including suggestions, corrections or comments to summaries pertaining to my participation.
3. I agree that my suggestions, corrections or comments can be included in the research project.
4. I have read the final summary of the discussions and agree that this is an accurate and satisfactory account of the research process, and I therefore give permission for this summary to be used in the research report as well as in the group discussions.

I understand that the information obtained during the discussions may be included in article format for publication. I understand that my confidentiality will be safeguarded throughout the study, in the written report of the project and in the publication. I also understand that should I decide that any information that may lead to my identification should not be used, it will not be used or included in the project report or publication.

I prefer the following name (either own name or pseudonym) be used in the research report or any other publication resulting from the project.

Name to be used   _____

_____   _____
Signature of participant   Date

_____   _____
Name of participant   Signature of witness

ANNEXURE 5

EXPLORING AND STORYING CHRISTIAN WOMEN'S EXPERIENCES LIVING IN SEXUALLY UNHAPPY MARRIAGES

In order to explore and clarify the current understanding/interpretation of heterosexual Christian sexuality held by congregants, pastoral therapists as well as clergy in the Protestant tradition, I will participate in exploratory conversations with the afore-mentioned as well as members of seminaries of the Protestant traditions to identify these understandings.

Questions for Clergy Participants:

1. Who or what informs your understanding or interpretation of heterosexual Christian sexuality?
2. When and how was this understanding formed?
3. Do you know specific Scripture that deals with sexuality?
4. How does your church address the subject of sexuality in your home congregation?
5. What to your understanding is a sexually happy marriage?
6. What to your understanding are the faith prescriptions for marital sexual relations and sexual fulfilment?
7. What are your faith convictions and that of your faith community regarding extra-marital sexual relations?
8. Would you be comfortable to discuss sexual issues with your congregants? Please motivate.

SEXUAL HAPPINESS

CHRISTIAN WOMEN STORYING LIVING IN SEXUALLY UNHAPPY MARRIAGES

This survey is conducted as part of my research for a Doctorate in Practical Theology, with specialization in Pastoral Therapy. This research journey evolved from my experiences during my MTh research, in which I explored Christian women's constructions of sexuality. I became aware of the silence in which sexuality is enveloped within our faith communities. During conversations with Christians (in my private practice, on a social level and in research) I realized that many Christians believe they should base their sexual expressions on the ideas of what is perceived as religious morality, and interpreted in of 'pious behaviour' in their understanding of Scripture and that of their faith communities. Many Protestant Christian women shared with me that they voice (and sometimes live and practice) their sexuality in particular ways to be in-line with what they believe are acceptable in the eyes of the church. Though I came across this understanding in many conversations with women, I also learnt about experiences seldom spoken of, namely sexually unhappy marriages and the effects thereof. Such alternative stories were voiced to me and therefore I became a 'witness' of the previously unspoken. It is in these untold stories in which I am interested and therefore I formulated the following research question to guide my research:

What faith predicaments and relational complexities, challenges and dilemmas do Protestant Christian women experience, when living in sexually unhappy marriages?

With this survey I wish to collect data for statistical purposes which will enable me to compare the experiences of my research participants with those of a greater community of women. Though my research is focused on Protestant Christian women, I invite women of <u>all denominations</u> to participate in this survey, NOT only Protestant Christian women.

PLEASE NOTE THAT BY PARTICIPATION IT IS UNDERSTOOD THAT YOU DECLARE THAT:

You understand that the information obtained from this questionnaire may be included in Nicki Spies' research project and or in article format for publication. You understand that your confidentiality will be preserved throughout the study, in the written report of the project and in any

publication thereof. You also understand that should you decide that any information that may lead to your identification will not be used or included in the project report or publication.

Kindly complete the following questions.

☐ 18 - 25   ☐ 26 - 35   ☐ 36 - 45   ☐ 46 - 55   ☐ 56 - 65
☐ 66+

Please indicate your religious orientation:

☐ African Initiated Churches   ☐ Atheist   ☐ Buddhist
☐ Catholic / Anglican Christian   ☐ Christian (Protestant)   ☐ Hindu
☐ Islam   ☐ Judaism   ☐ Non-religious
☐ Other (Please Specify):
_____

3)   If your faith orientation is Christian and you are regularly involved in a faith community, please which faith community e.g. Dutch Reformed Church.

_____

4) Sexual orientation: Please mark the appropriate block

☐ Heterosexual

☐ Gay

☐ Bi-sexual

☐ Other (Please Specify):
_____

*5)   Present Relationship Status:

☐ Single

☐ Married

☐ Cohabit

☐ Committed non-cohabiting relationship

☐ Casual relationship/s

☐ Separated / Divorced

☐ Widowed

☐ Other (Please Specify):

6) How long have you been in your current relationship or marriage, or if not at present in a relationship, the most recent one?

☐ 0 - 5 yrs   ☐ 6 - 10 yrs   ☐ 11 - 15 yrs   ☐ 16 - 20 yrs

☐ 21 - 25 yrs   ☐ 26+ yrs   ☐ not applicable

7)   Present Sexual Status:

☐ Virgin

☐ Not sexually active

☐ Sexually active - solo sex only (masturbation)

☐ Sexually active with only the partner in relationship / marriage

☐ Sexually active with spouse / partner and solo sex

☐ Sexually active with partner/s outside the marriage / relationship

☐ Sexually active with multiple partners in multiple relationships

☐ Sexually active with multiple partners outside any relationships

Other (Please Specify):

8)   If sexually active, please indicate the average frequency for the past year of sexual intercourse or activity with a partner. If sexually active with more than one partner, please also indicate the other partner/s and frequency in the OTHER box.

☐ Less than once a month

☐ Once a month

☐ Twice a month

☐ Once a week

☐ 2 - 4 times a week

☐ Daily

☐ More than once a day

9) Which of the following statements would best describe your present average sexual experience? If sexually active with more than one partner, please also indicate the second and subsequent partner/s and experience in the OTHER box.

- ☐ It is usually enjoyable and satisfying

- ☐ It is at times enjoyable and satisfying

- ☐ It is bearable, but mostly not enjoyable

- ☐ It is a duty

- ☐ It is unbearable

- ☐ Not applicable

- ☐ Other (Please Specify):

☐

10) Please consider the following factors and evaluate its **effect** on your enjoyment or lack of enjoyment of sexual activity. The value of neutral indicating no effect.

	1 very positive	2 positive	3 neutral	4 negative	5 very negative
My personal faith convictions	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
My partner's faith convictions	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
My parent's faith convictions	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Time constraints	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Energy constraints	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Parental responsibilities/ constraints	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Gender roles and accompanied (	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Predictable sexual routines	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Libido / sex drive	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Great difference in libido (sex drive) to partner	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Sexual dysfunction of my partner i.e. erectile dysfunction	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Sexual dysfunction of myself i.e. vaginismus	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Being an inexperienced lover myself	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
The sexual inexperience of my s partner	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Being an experienced lover myself	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Having an experienced lover	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

11) Who or what was the **main** source/s of your initial and later sexual education?

☐ No education   ☐ Books   ☐ Church

☐ Experience   ☐ Friends   ☐ Internet

☐ Mother   ☐ Father   ☐ School

Other (Please Specify): _____

12)   Have you ever **considered** sexual activity or a sexual relationship in the following situations?

	Yes	No	Not sure
Pre-marital casual sex thus outside any relations	☐	☐	☐
Sex with a partner in a committed relationship	☐	☐	☐
Sex with a cohabiting partner	☐	☐	☐
Extra-marital sex (sex with someone other than husband or wife whilst married)	☐	☐	☐
Extra-marital sex (sex with a married person whilst you are single)	☐	☐	☐
Post marital sex (after divorce)	☐	☐	☐
Open marriage / relationship - both partners allc to have outside sexual relationships	☐	☐	☐

13)   What would keep you from engaging in sexual activity with anyone other than your legally married husband or wife?

☐ My faith

☐ My values

☐ Judgement from others

☐ Sexually transmitted diseases e.g. HIV & AIDS

☐ Risk of pregnancy

☐ Love for my spouse / partner

☐ Regard for my spouse's / partner's feelings

☐ Possible negative consequences e.g. divorce

☐ Regard for my children

[   ]

14) Please mark the appropriate blocks which would indicate the scenarios which are applicable to you, since you became sexually active.

	Yes	No
Pre-marital casual sex thus outside any relationship	☐	☐
Sex with a partner in a committed relationship	☐	☐
Sex with a cohabiting partner	☐	☐
Sex with husband / wife only after been married	☐	☐
Sex with husband / wife and other partners before marriage	☐	☐
Extra-marital sex (sex with someone other than you husband or wife whilst married)	☐	☐
Extra-marital sex (sex with a married person whilst are single)	☐	☐
Married / committed relationship but celibate	☐	☐
Post marital sex (after divorce)	☐	☐
Open marriage / relationship - both partners allowed to sexually engage with others	☐	☐

15) How many sexual partners have you had as per the listed scenarios?

	0	1	2	3	>3
Pre-marital casual sex thus outside any relationship	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Sex with a partner in a committed relationship	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Sex with a cohabiting partner	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Sex with husband / wife	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Extra-marital sex (sex with someone other than your husband or wife)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Post marital sex (after divorce)   ☐   ☐   ☐ ☐ ☐

16) Are you having an extra-marital sexual relationship or extra-marital sexual activities at present?

☐ Yes

☐ No

17) Have you disclosed the extra-marital sex or sexual relationship, and if so, to whom'

☐ Not applicable

☐ I have not disclosed the extra-marital sex/relationship

☐ I have disclosed to my partner / husband / wife

☐ I have disclosed to a friend

☐ I have disclosed to a professional e.g. counsellor

☐ I have disclosed to a Cleric e.g. Minister / Priest / Rabbi / Imam / Brahmin

Other (Please Specify): _____

18) What is your understanding of your faith community's view on sexuality and sexual fulfilment?

_____

_____

19) What is your understanding of your faith community's view on extra-marital sex and extra-marital sexual relationships?

_____

_____

20) How often have you heard a sermon on the goodness of sexuality and intimate relations in the past three years?

☐ none   ☐ 1   ☐ 2

☐ 3 - 5   ☐ 6 - 10   ☐ more than 10

Female Sexuality:
   Towards Greater Understanding

Nicki Spies
2006

Questionnaire and Comments

Please mark the appropriate block with x.

Age:	
18 - 25	
25 - 35	
35 - 45	
45 - 55	
55 - 65	
65 +	

Marital Status:	
Single	
Married	
Committed relationship	
Separated/Divorced	
Widow	
Other	

Number of years married: _____

Sexual Identity:	
Heterosexual	
Gay	
Bi-sexual	

Sexual Status:	
Virgin	
Active	
Inactive	

If sexually active, please record frequency of sexual intercourse per week.

Once a week	
2 - 4 times a week	
More than 4 times a week	

Faith Orientation	
Atheist	
Christian	
Hindu	
Moslem	
Other	

Church Denomination	
Anglican	
Catholic	
Dutch Reformed	
Judaism	
Methodist	
Reformed	
Other	

Which of the following statements would best describe your attitude towards and experiences of sexual activity.

It is always wonderful and enjoyable. ☐
It is at times wonderful and enjoyable. ☐
It is bearable, and mostly boring. ☐
It is a duty. ☐
It is unbearable. ☐

What contribute to your enjoyment of sexual intercourse?

Being an experience lover. ☐
Having an experience lover. ☐
My personal faith convictions. ☐
My partner's faith convictions. ☐
My parent's faith convictions. ☐

What contribute to your lack of enjoyment of sexual intercourse?

Being an inexperience lover. ☐
Having an inexperience lover. ☐
Boredom ☐
My personal faith convictions. ☐
My partner's faith convictions. ☐
My parent's faith convictions. ☐

Who or what was the main source of your sexual education?

No information. ☐
Parent/s (please indicate mother / father) ☐ Mother / Father
School ☐
Church ☐
Friends ☐
Books ☐
Experience ☐
Other media i.e. internet. ☐

Were your parents comfortable to talk about sexual matters?

Very comfortable ☐

Very uncomfortable ☐

Reasonable comfortable. ☐

Avoided the subject at all costs. ☐

Are you comfortable to talk about sexual matters with your children ?

Very comfortable ☐

Very uncomfortable ☐

Reasonable comfortable. ☐

Avoided the subject at all costs. ☐

What is your understanding of the church's approach to sexuality?

Would you be comfortable to discuss sexual issues / problems with your minister, please motivate.

Have you heard a sermon on the goodness of sexuality and intimate relations?

Many ☐

A few ☐

Never ☐

If you could change the church's approach to sexuality, what would you suggest?

General Comments:

Thank you for your time.