

NARRATIVES OF RELATIONSHIPS/MARRIAGES

by

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ABSTRACT

Religious and cultural discourses shape relationships/marriages. The constructed nature of relationships/marriages opens the possibility for alternative relational realities. Positioning relationships/marriages in alternative discourses assisted the couples to construct a preferred relationship narrative. Three couples embarked on this feminist participatory action research journey – a couple from the Jehovah's Witnesses tradition, a couple from the Dutch Reformed Church and a couple from a Gay Reformed Church. Conversations with the participating couples deconstructed their relationships. It also enabled the couples to co-author alternative, preferred realities of their relationships/marriages and to provide rich descriptions of these.

Key terms: narrative approach, social constructionism, discourse, post-modern theological discourse, feminist theology, heterosexuality, homosexuality, gender, ethical, relationships/marriages.

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CHAPTER ONE

PLANNING THE RESEARCH JOURNEY AHEAD

1.1 CAUGHT BETWEEN CONFLICTING DISCURSIVE PRACTICES

During the past few years as a marriage counsellor, I have become aware that people are positioned within different discourses constituting their relationships/marriages (see Chapter Two). Due to their position within and between discourses, certain expectations come to prevail in their lives. On the one hand, there are people who consult me and who desperately seek the right companion. On the other hand, there are people who consult me and who struggle with a problem-saturated relationship narrative. This made me aware that competing dominant discourses circulate within a given society – the discourse of coupledness and the discourse of divorce.

The popular discourse of coupledness successfully recruits people to search for a meaningful relationship. Botha (1998:16) reflects on the popularity of the institution of marriage, which is seen as a social and religious norm within Western society. In the USA, marriage rates for males and females have remained relatively stable since 1966 (Botha 1998:16). In accordance with this Landis and Landis (quoted by Botha 1998:17) claimed: 'Our society has been called a "love orientated" and a "marriage orientated" society, in that people are under pressure (whether consciously or not) to fall in love or to be in love with someone. In some ways being in love is viewed as evidence of normality, a way of conforming to the expectations of society.' Over 90% of people in Western society marry before they are fifty years old. Furthermore, most of the individuals who choose not to marry cohabit in committed relationships that resemble marriage. Almost all people become part of a couple at some point in their lives (Botha 1998:17). The prevalence of relationships and marriages suggests that more and more people accept the discourse of coupledness.

Another (competing) dominant discourse is that of divorce. Whitehead (quoted in Post 2000:18) comments on the divorce culture which supports the Western discourse of expressive individualism: 'Because expressive individualism is too weak to support stable relationships, this ethos means the death of marriage.' Divorce is a prevalent

phenomenon within Western society. Post (2000:13) claims that one-third to one-half of all first marriages in Western societies dissolve. Reasons for divorce include financial, sexual and communication problems. Do these areas reflect the 'Middle Class Myth of Love and Marriage' that Greer ([1970] 1999) claimed society was caught up in?

Finding that many of the people consulting me wanted to be part of couples, but that almost as many experienced problems when they were in relationships, made me very curious about relationships/marriages and the power/knowledge effects of cultural and religious discourses on relationships/marriages.

1.2 RESEARCH CURIOSITY

Becoming aware of two dominant discourses circulating in South African society today – the discourse of coupledness and the discourse of divorce – triggered my curiosity. I became curious about what couples' religious and cultural assumptions regarding relationships/marriages are and whether these assumptions have a sustaining or detrimental effect on experiences within relationships/marriages. This curiosity guided me to formulate the research aims set out below.

1.3 AIM OF STUDY

When I embarked on this research journey, I was guided by a specific aim for this journey.

The aim was to reflect with couples on cultural and religious discourses which co-constitute the institution of relationships/marriages, as well as to reflect on cultural and religious discourses which co-constitute specific gender roles in a relationship. During the conversations regarding these cultural and religious discourses, the couples were encouraged to voice their own experiences within these discourses.

If they experienced their relationship narrative as being oppressive or abusive within these dominant cultural and religious discourses, part of the conversational journey

was to deconstruct these discourses, attempting to uncover alternative, preferred constructions of their relationship/marriage.

However, if dominant cultural and religious discourses sustained the couple's experience of their relationship/marriage, the conversational journey was directed towards empowering the couple to provide a rich description of their relationship narrative in a language that co-constituted their preferred realities (especially by inviting conversations regarding how they have resisted or would resist any oppressive or abusive ideas from entering their relational space).

What do I mean by 'preferred constructions of the relationship/marriage'? I was guided by the following questions: 'Preferred by whom? To whose benefit?' A preferred construction of the relationship/marriage would be invited from individuals who experienced oppression or abuse due to the dominant construction of their relationship. Furthermore, a preferred narrative was determined by the couple and not by me as researcher, and it was guided by the lived experiences of the individuals within the relationship.

In researching the above-mentioned aims, a specific research approach was followed. Therefore, I will now attend to the conceptual framework that guided the process of my researching the above aims.

1.4 CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The following section illuminates the discursive foundation of the research approach.

1.4.1 Discursive position

In an attempt to be transparent and accountable (see also Section 2.7.2) towards the readers of this research report, I reflected on my own discursive position as a researcher during this study. During this whole research journey, I positioned myself

within a post-modern discourse, whilst living and travelling towards a participatory mode of consciousness (Heshusius 1994).

Postmodernism is an approach which requires that we look at things in new ways. It also suggests that we look at new things, given the changing nature of the world in which we live...[postmodernism] refers to a diversity of processes brought about by the breakdown of boundaries and an implosion of difference in cultural contexts.

(Jennings & Graham 1996:167)

Thus, in post-modern thought, there are no universal criteria of truth – truth is relative, because claims to knowledge are always contextual. A post-modern discourse accepts that there are multiple representations of events. There are no final narratives, but each narrative is a reflection of the way people organise and understand their social world (Jennings & Graham 1996:168-169). The individual is no longer viewed as a unitary rational ego. ‘Rather it is seen as occupying different subject-positions within discursive practices, positions which are produced by the power/knowledge relations of particular discourses’ (Jennings & Graham 1996:169-170). In post-modern thought, the prevalence of discourses is acknowledged. Each discourse values some concepts and viewpoints more highly than others, resulting in a marginalization of other discourses. Discourses are also related to power relations and hierarchical structures in society. Discourses are embedded in social relationships and social institutions such as heterosexual and homosexual relationships/marriages (Jennings & Graham 1996:172).

During this research journey, the participants and I became fellow travellers. Being fellow travellers meant breaking through the boundaries that the positivistic sciences have created between the knower (researcher) and the known (participants). Breaking through these illusory boundaries made this journey one of participation and enchantment. Letting go of all perceived boundaries between the self and other allows for a participatory mode of consciousness (Heshusius 1994:16). A participatory mode of consciousness involves letting go of the idea of ‘being-separate-and-in-control’ (Heshusius 1994:16) altogether. Instead of taking a distanced observer stance, insider

perspectives are privileged (Allen & Walker 2000:24). For me, this meant that during this research journey I turned towards the couples, listening to their stories with an attitude of profound openness and receptivity. This challenged me to let go of my own preconceived ideas regarding their relationships and to hear their experiences of their relationships within specific cultural and religious discourses. Through a participatory mode of consciousness, I attempted to affirm the couples and their relationships in their own right.

Concerns about truth and degrees of interpretation are replaced by positing a transformative process of merging, and then differentiation, which results in rethinking the boundaries of self and other in the knowledge of their permeability. Reality is no longer understood as truth to be interpreted but as mutually evolving.

(Heshusius 1994:18)

This journey towards becoming aware of the discourses which co-constitute relationships/marriages, involved a process of entering into conversations with participating couples negotiating an ever-evolving understanding of their relationships. My curiosity regarding the discourses which co-constitute relationships/marriages also directed me to first explore the history and development of the institution of marriage as discourse.

1.4.2 The history and development of the institution of marriage

I adopted Foucault's (1985; 1986) notion of a genealogy of knowledge to reflect on the history and development of marriage from a power relations perspective. The purpose of this research journey was not to engage in a thorough historical analysis of the institution of marriage, but only to become aware of historical discourses, enabling me to participate with the participants in the inquiry. Therefore, I will touch on the history and development of the institution of marriage only briefly. Furthermore, due to the fact that this is a dissertation of limited scope, I focused only on discourses related to Western ideas about marriage. This history provides a glimpse into centuries of men's domination over women, the restricted role of sexuality and the dilemma of love against a Greco-Roman and Judaeo-Christian background.

1.4.2.1 *Marriage in the centuries before Christ*

Foucault's history of sexuality describes the history and functions of marriage. During the fourth century BC, a man in classical Greece could say: 'Mistresses we keep for the sake of pleasure, concubines for the daily care of our persons, but wives to bear us legitimate children and to be faithful guardians of our households' (Foucault 1985:143). The main motivation for marriage was procreation (producing heirs that would eventually take care of the land and therefore contribute to the successful growth of the city), and taking care of the household (in order to create products for the marketplace) and managing provisions. Love was not generally regarded as a foundation of marriage. Within the marital relationship, each partner had a specific status and role as husband or wife. The wife was bound by her legal and social status as wife, which implied that her husband had to be her exclusive sexual partner. If a wife committed adultery, she would receive private and public punishment – in Greece, this meant that she became an outcast from her husband's home and had no right to appear in public and religious ceremonies. She was in her husband's power and it was to him that she gave children. The husband was bound by a certain number of obligations towards his wife, but having sexual relations only with his wife was not part of these obligations. Nevertheless, a man was expected to limit his sexual activities outside marriage because 'he is the head of the family, having authority, exercising a power whose locus of application was in the home and fulfilling household obligations that affected his reputation as a citizen' (Foucault 1985:151). Thus the man's ability to limit outside sexual relations was an exhibition of self-mastery in the use of his own authority. For the husband, having sexual relations only with his wife was the most elegant way of exercising his control. People got married in order to maintain the *oikos* (household) and the wife was a key figure in the management of the *oikos*. The management of the *oikos* was a crucial factor for a landowner's (a man/husband's) existence, because it

... is an endurance exercise, physical training that is good for the body, for its health and vigor, it also encourages piety by making it possible to offer rich sacrifices to the gods, it favours friendship relations by providing the occasion to show generosity, to satisfy fully one's hospitality obligations and to manifest one's beneficence towards other citizens. Further, this activity is useful for the entire city in that it adds to its wealth and especially because it supplies it with good defenders: the landowner being

used to strenuous work, is a strong soldier and the wealth he possesses motivates him to courageously defend the homeland.

(Foucault 1985:153)

A husband would be wise to educate his wife to become a good mistress of his house. Furthermore, although a husband was allowed to have sexual relations outside his marriage, he was obliged to ensure that his lawful wife had precedence over his concubines or courtesans. A lover could not replace the wife at her husband's side and the wife kept her status and dignity as the head mistress of the household. Thus a faithful husband was one who maintained the privileges to which his wife was entitled by marriage. Only his wife was privileged to produce his legitimate heirs (Foucault 1985).

During the Hellenistic period, marriage shifted from an institution which was useful to families and the city, or taking care of domestic activities to ensure a successful household (where closeness and affectionate feelings between partners were excluded), to an institution which was experienced as a 'shared existence, a personal bond, and a respective position of the partners in this relationship' (Foucault 1986:78). Here the art of a marriage was not just running a successful *oikos* (household) but it was a way of living together – leading one's own separate life with the other and together they form a common existence. Within this marriage both husband and wife had duties and obligations which were definitely not equal, but were shared.

A shift towards equal sexual rights for both husband and wife characterised the shift from the fourth century BC to the Hellenistic period. The ethics of a strict marriage common to this period could be called the conjugalisation of sexual relations. These ethics prohibited both husband and wife from having sexual intercourse outside the marriage. Although the husband, as head of the family, had more rights than his wife, equal rights were demanded for both the husband and the wife in the domain of sexual interactions. However, sexual intercourse between husband and wife, in the Hellenistic world, was still solely aimed at procreation. The natural and rational principle of marriage was to produce descendants. The enjoyment of pleasurable sensations was not allowed to be the rationale behind the marriage. Sexual relations could only rightfully take place if procreation was the goal. Although the principles of

conjugalisation of sexual relations seem similar to the principles regarding this issue in the Christian tradition, it is important to realise that the morals in which they were grounded differed completely (Foucault 1986). In Christianity sexual fidelity was justified because sex was seen as 'the mark of sin, the Fall and evil' and marriage could 'give it a legitimacy that still may not exculpate it entirely' (Foucault 1986:183). However sexual fidelity in marriage was 'an unconditional duty for anyone concerned about his salvation' (Foucault 1986:184).

1.4.2.2 *Marriage in Jesus' time*

The situation of women, and particularly of the wives of the Shamminaites and Hillelites in Jesus' time, was degraded (Mackin 1999:28; Dowell 1996:125). Wives had to obey their husbands, as they would a master (Jacobs-Malina 1990:4) – obedience was a religious duty. All the facets of the wife's personality and identity revolved around the domestic world (Jacobs-Malina 1990:2). Her first duties were household duties. Other duties included washing her husband's face, hands and feet. The notion of the wife's dependence on her husband was reinforced by the fact that polygamy was permissible – the wife had to tolerate concubines living with her. However, for economic reasons, polygamy was not very frequent. Furthermore, the right to divorce belonged exclusively to the husband. It was extremely important for a woman to have children, particularly sons. If a wife gave birth to a son, she was respected, as she had given her husband the most precious gift of all. The absence of children was viewed as a great misfortune – it could even be seen as divine punishment. Relationships between children and parents were also determined by the woman's duty to obey (Mackin 1999:28; Richardson Jensen 1996:162) – the children had to respect their father more than their mother, as she was obliged to give a similar respect to the father of her children. If the husband died before the wife produced a son, she had to wait until a brother of her deceased husband decided whether he wanted to marry her. Only if her brother-in-law refused to marry her could she choose to marry someone else (Mackin 1993:28-29). Mackin (1993:29) claims that 'it is impossible to know with certainty how much this subservient condition of wives in Jesus' time among his people, was due simply to the customs of a patriarchal culture, and how much was the consequence of husbands' asserting their lordship they have found granted them in Genesis 3:16b'.

1.4.2.3 *Marriage in medieval culture*

Moving forward into history, feudal literature shows that romantic love was experienced as anti-social and adulterous (Greer [1970] 1999:223). In her book *The Female Eunuch* Greer ([1970] 1999) focuses on the phenomena of marriage and sexual relations in the Europe during the Middle Ages. Within medieval culture, women with influence were either religious or women living in celibacy within or after the marriage (see also Boss 1996:231; Sweetman 1996). Stories of ill-fated passion were cautionary tales. Love was a curse, a wound, and the plague. 'Sex itself was outlawed, except in desire of issue' (Greer [1970] 1999:225) and adultery was punishable by death. There was a distinct body-soul dichotomy and the chastity belt could be seen as a metaphor reflecting these times (Greer [1970] 1999:225). Medieval Catholicism promoted celibacy – sexual abstemiousness was theoretically expected not only from the clergy but also within married life: 'Marriage was a station in life inferior to vowed celibacy and infantile virginity and the abstention of widows' (Greer [1970] 1999:227).

With the breakdown of the feudal system came the corrosion of hierarchic, dogmatic religion (Greer [1970] 1999:227). The second class status of marriage became one of the principal issues in the Reformation. 'Martin Luther, the Augustinian friar, had barely posted his ninety-five theses on the door of the church in Wittenberg when he took himself a wife' (:227). In England, the values of the lower class had an influence on upper-class culture. The story of Patient Griselda, told by Boccaccio, reflects the general effect of the impact of lower-class mores on the attenuated and neurotic sexuality of the ruling class (:228). A village boy chose a girl from his own village according to books on husbandry, where specific qualities were listed - 'health, strength, fertility, good-will and good humour as well as proper complement of household skills' (:228-229). The husband respected his wife as a comrade, and the obsession of romantic love was irrelevant. Yet, as mobility increased, especially that of young men, marriages outside one's own community increased. The church upheld unrealistic laws about affinity and kinship, resulting in parishes without competent clergy, and common law marriage was on the increase. The religious reformers were forced to create a new ideology of marriage. Marriage came to be seen as 'the highest state of life and the condition of attainment of the status of citizenship and manhood'

(:229). A girl was likely to be heartily wooed, but love was always subject to firm consideration of suitability and advantageousness. A girl could not be married until the groom presented himself to the father. In agreeing to marry a man, the woman agrees to respect him, fulfil his will joyfully in bed and take care of him. However, there was no indication that she expected her life to be transfigured by love. The wife experienced herself as others saw her, as 'a sexual creature ready for mating' (:230). Marriage took place in the village church, where they were blessed. Greer ([1970] 1999:230) writes that blessings were experienced as a necessity because 'the blessing would promise children and freedom from nameless fear and jealousy'.

A new ideology of marriage also introduced a debate between Protestant and Roman Catholic Christians regarding whether marriage can be viewed as a sacrament (Roman Catholics) or be viewed in the Protestant language of a covenant (Martos 1993:31-56; see also Section 3.3.3)

1.4.2.4 *Marriage from the sixteenth century to the present*

By the end of the sixteenth century, love and marriage was already established as an important theme in literature (Greer [1970] 1999:232). The ideal of exclusive love and cohabitation was prominent in the works of Shakespeare, but Shakespeare did not romanticise marriage. He described it 'as a difficult state of life, requiring discipline, sexual energy, mutual respect and great forbearance; he knew there were no easy answers to marital problems, and that infatuation was no basis for continued cohabitation' (:235). The new ideology of marriage needed its mythology and Shakespeare supplied it. Protestant moralists sought to redeem marriage from the status of a remedy against fornication by underplaying the sexual component and addressing the husband as the wife's friend (:235). Similar themes of love-and-marriage continued throughout the years up to today's understanding or expectations regarding love-and-marriage (Greer [1970] 1999).

Examining current discourses surrounding marriages, I have realised that dominant discourses today still include specific elements of discourses that evolved over several centuries. Even today some relationships still reflect the ethical systems and categories according to which classical Greek culture understood marriage and sexuality. 'Foucault states that the ethical systems developed by Plato and Aristotle

were not meant to be universally applicable but were, quite consciously, an ethics for free men' (Welch 1990:125). In classical Greek culture, there was a clear connection between what was normative and the maintenance of the oppression of women. I find myself wondering how much the ethical discourses of classical Greece still influence ideas regarding relationships/marriages today. Bons-Storm (1996:105) is of the opinion that the driving force behind the arguments defending marriage is the anxiety men have of losing control over women.

There are, however, other discourses that can provide an alternative to the ethical discourses of classical Greece. Within the feminist discourse, it is argued that friendship (Sowle Cahill 1987; Stuart 1995; Van Leeuwen, Knoppers, Schuurman & Sterk 1993) is the best definition of marriage (see Section 2.6.1). The idea of friendship, which includes mutuality and partnership, can challenge the oppressive effects of a patriarchal discourse of relationships/marriages.

1.4.3 Relationships/marriages and gender

Social construction discourse provides an alternative to the positivist framework in which most research regarding sexual relationships has been conducted (Allen & Walker 2000:24). It should be recognised that research and theory about sexual relationships, as human relationships, must incorporate an understanding of the relations of power, social inequality and gender inequality. If I operate within social construction discourse (Gergen 1985; Burr 1995; Anderson 1997), I am reminded that various meanings are found within relationships/marriages. The various dimensions and transformations of relationships do not occur in a vacuum – they are enlivened through social interactions between people (Allen & Walker 2000:24). Traditional definitions of concepts such as homosexuality, heterosexuality, masculinity, femininity and cohabitation can no longer be defined in universalising terms, since a social construction view suggests that all knowledge is local and partial (Brueggemann 1993:9). So, for example, femininity and masculinity can be defined differently by homosexual couples as opposed to heterosexual couples.

Questions about relationships/marriages inevitably lead to questions about gender issues: '[G]ender relations enter into and are constituent elements in every aspect of human experience' (Flax 1990:40). Foucault argues that human experience is

influenced by sanctioned ideas and social practices in a given historical period. Given that Foucault's assumption is correct, Elliot (1998:38) reasons that 'gender needs to be placed in its socio-political context'. Flax (1990:40) makes a similar point: '[T]he experience of gender relations for any person and the structure of gender as a social category are shaped by the interactions of gender relations and other social relations such as class and race. Gender relations thus have no fixed essence, they vary both within and over time.' These views reflect a social constructionist perspective, suggesting that both masculinity and femininity are constructed and negotiated in the practices of everyday life (Gilbert & Gilbert 1998:49; Laird 2000:458; Steyn 2001:88).

Cultural feminists claim that identities are shaped and constituted in discourse rather than anatomy: 'Prevalent discourses influencing women's conception of self in Western culture include patriarchy, capitalism, Western religion and the like' (Elliot 1998:43). Gender relations and accompanying sex-role theory constitute individuals' masculine and feminine identities. According to sex-role theory, the word 'masculine' is assigned to males who are the 'doers', breadwinners, protectors, strong, independent and active. The term 'feminine' is assigned to women who are physically attractive, gentle, soft-spoken, passive and somewhat dependent (Van Leeuwen et al 1993:226). The understanding of masculinity also needs to be broadened beyond the biological: 'Masculinity is not a biological entity that exists prior to society, rather, masculinities are ways that societies interpret and employ male bodies' (Gilbert & Gilbert 1998:46).

Bird (2000:252) argues that once gender relations have been liberated from universalising and essentialising ideas, the practices of gender relations are available for inquiry. Ideas and practices that constitute gender relations can then be explored and scrutinised (Bird 2000:252). It is crucial that gender relations are situated within a historical and cultural context, since this will move people away from personal blame to re-consider instead the effects of gendered ideas on the lives of people (Bird 2000:253). Within Western society, people live according to specific constructions of femininity and masculinity. These constructions are enforced through the phenomenon of patriarchy. Patriarchy is 'the institutionalization of male dominance over women and children in the family and the extension of male dominance over

women in general' (Pease 1997:79). This study focuses only on segments of these constructions, but an exploration of traditional Western male and female roles within relationships is still necessary.

The discourse of 'hegemonic masculinity' (Gilbert & Gilbert 1998:51) tends to restrict men from emotional expressiveness and possibilities of relating in loving ways – thus men are taught to discount their feelings and never show emotion. If a man does show any emotion, it is shown in such a manner that it leads to the alienation of others, for example, aggressive outbursts. However, in denying emotions, rich emotional experiences and connectedness are also denied. Masculinity limits a man's view of what love is and results in men feeling that loving behaviour and emotional intimacy is feminine and therefore all feelings should be avoided. Intimacy is associated with vulnerability and fear, and a man who needs intimacy is perceived as needy and weak. This attitude also denies close connections. Dominant discourses on masculinity encourage men to expect women to care for them, but do not elaborate on how men can care for women. Consequently, a struggle develops in searching for ways of providing a mutually satisfying relationship (Pease 1997). Jenkins (1990:30) elaborates on how such traditional Western male and female role stereotypes lead to further disconnection within the marital relational space. The male is responsible for being the economic provider and therefore must be tough and competitive.

Relating to the idea of the man as economic provider, Pease (1997:50) claims that in order to understand men within patriarchy, it is necessary to look at the effects of differing class locations on men's masculinity. So, for example, working class masculinity is seen as physically expressive and overly aggressive. Working class men who do dirty, unhealthy, demeaning work experience their manual work as an affirmation of their masculinity. Yet there is a threat to their male dominance – the social organisation of their work, which implies that they are 'bossed around' by superiors and pushed to meet production targets. Compensation for having to put up with these indignities and oppressions in the workplace is found within the family. At home, the male can rejoice in his male dominance. He dominates his wife and children. Middle-class masculinity is characterised as uptight and emotionally inhibited. Within the working context, these men also feel powerless and humiliated

and therefore sometimes desire to demonstrate their power at home. Jenkins (1990:39) claims that within this traditional male role, a man is expected to solve problems in a rational manner and therefore there is no place for feelings.

'The relationship and intimacy skills promoted by the traditional female role stereotype, relate to parenting, nurturing, empathy, sensitivity and emotional expressiveness' (Jenkins 1990:39). The dominant discourse of the woman's role is one of emotional nurturance of others in the family and also resolving emotional problems. Within this femininity/patriarchal discourse it is the woman's job to keep the family calm and to prevent stress and conflict. Her responsibilities lie within the sphere of the family's emotional climate and taking care of domestic duties: 'Her happiness comes from fulfilling others' needs and she alone is responsible for the success or failure of marriage or family relationships' (Jenkins 1990:39).

The word 'gender' immediately sets a train of thought in motion in me. First, I distinguish between male and female and then attribute socially constructed masculine and feminine qualities. Relationships/marriages embody specific gender relations. In this study, I was curious about these gender relations and whether they assisted in either creating abusive or oppressive experiences within the relationship or resisting abusive or oppressive experiences.

1.5 RESEARCH APPROACH

The strategy of inquiry applied in this study resonated with the post-modern idea that there is no essential truth and that there are multiple realities. Feminist participatory action research was chosen because '[a]t 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' (Dale Spencer quoted in Reinharz 1992:7).

Through the lens of post-modernism, feminist action research provides opportunities to create new realities and facilitate change. Reinharz (1992:175) builds on Lather's idea that feminist action research must be oriented to social and individual change because feminism represents a repudiation of the *status quo*. Furthermore, participatory action research aspires to communitarian and egalitarian politics. During participatory action research, people work together towards justice, coherence and

satisfaction in people's lives (McTaggart 1997a:6). With regard to this aspiration towards egalitarian politics, Berge and Ve (2000:131) claim that a good reason for using action research is that 'in action research the participants aim to achieve equality in relationships'. During this research journey, the participants and I entered into conversations attempting to negotiate relationship/marriage narratives where both the partners' and the relationship's alternative discourse experienced equality, justice and satisfaction with and within other discourses. McTaggart (1997a:7) claims that participatory action research is political because it is about people changing themselves and their circumstances. During this research journey change was directed at multi-dimensional levels. If a couple experienced their relationship narrative as being oppressed or abused by dominant cultural and religious discourses, change was directed at co-constructing alternative, preferred relationship narratives. Yet if a couple experienced specific cultural and religious discourses as sustaining their relationship narrative, change was directed at co-constructing rich, thick descriptions of their relationship. At another level, participatory action research is also concerned with changing the researcher (McTaggart 1997b:40) and this connects with the acknowledgement by feminist action research that during the research process, the researcher is also changed (Reinharz 1992:194; Berge & Ve 2000:130).

It must be acknowledged that the beginning of this research journey did not reflect authentic participation in research. McTaggart (1997b:29) builds on Tandon's idea that one determinant of authentic participation in research is the participants' role in setting the agenda of the inquiry. This research journey was initiated through my own curiosity and not due to the identification by a group of people (the participants) of a need amongst them to bring about change through research. Yet as soon as fellow participants/travellers showed their willingness to join me on this journey, participation was emphasised, whilst I attempted to challenge my power/knowledge position through reflective self-awareness. Berge and Ve (2000:132) remark that 'one important method in action research is self-reflection'. Self-reflection, accountability and transparency (see Section 2.7.2) were ways of challenging my power/knowledge position as researcher. One way of inviting participation into this journey was to never force my ideas or preferred discourses on the couples. Instead I offered them alternative discursive views, allowing couples to decide for themselves what they would like to do with these alternatives.

Due to the specific aim of this study – reflecting on cultural and religious discourses which co-constitute the institution of relationships/marriages and specific gender roles within a relationship – the action research resulted in an exposure of discourses. This exposure of discourses can be aligned with McTaggart's (1997b:31) claim that one of the principles of participatory action research is studying discourses and an accompanying distribution of power. Thus, as a participatory action researcher, through the conversations with the couples, the couples and I needed to reflect together on the discourses shaping their relationship narrative. Through these conversations we tried to expose dominant forms of discourse that silenced non-dominant voices through power relations: 'action research should be concerned with deconstructing authoritative voices – those who speak for and on behalf of others' (Jennings & Graham 1996:178). During conversations with Mary Gergen (July 2001 personal communication) she claimed that the whole idea of deconstruction resulted in a feeling of loss – leaving nothing behind. Therefore she advocates rather speaking of reconstructing, since research should invite something new. Because I felt comfortable with Gergen's idea of reconstruction, my feminist action research was a collaborative attempt along with the participants to reconstruct their relationship narratives, freeing them from abusive or oppressive discursive practices, in a language that co-constituted their preferred realities.

Jennings and Graham (1996:178) claim that an action researcher examines 'narrative' as a useful form of discourse, as people can only 'know the world' through a particular discourse. Narratives can help to communicate meanings, project a voice, provide multiple perspectives and offer future possibilities. Thus, during this research journey, story telling (narratives) was implemented to allow for thick, reflexive descriptions of cultural and religious discourses regarding relationships/marriages and the reconstruction of preferred relationship narratives. The participants were invited to voice their experiences by story telling to expose dominant religious and cultural discourses regarding relationships/marriages since, although personal narratives are also influenced by cultural and contextual stories, they do provide a rich source of local knowledge. Hoffman (quoted in Freedman & Combs 1996:30) stresses the value of telling stories in the process of understanding: 'Because postmodern and poststructural ideas were originated by people in semiotics and literary criticism, it is

becoming increasingly common in talking of social fields of study, to use the analogy of narrative or text.'

In traditional scientific enterprises, the investigator almost wholly controls the theoretical meaning of events and the participants are not explicitly encouraged to reflect on their situations within the study or offer interpretations of events (Gergen & Gergen 1991:86). However, doing research using a post-modern, social construction approach enabled me as researcher to take a 'reflexively dialogic approach to research...the foremost feature of this type of work is the sharing of power between researchers and subjects in order to construct meaning' (Gergen & Gergen 1991:86). Thus I as researcher was able to move outwards into the fuller realm of shared languages. The reflexive attempt was relational, inviting the expression of alternative perspectives into my own activities. A reflexively dialogical approach to research invites 'multiplicity of voices to speak to the research issues of concern' (Gergen & Gergen 1991:79). By positioning myself in a reflexively dialogical approach, I attempted to enrich ideas regarding relationships/marriages.

Feminist action research is like setting out on a journey. Being a researcher-traveller means having a self and a body. This requires abandoning the voices of disembodied objectivity and locating oneself in time and space (Reinharz 1992:211). Typically, during the course of a feminist research journey, the researcher is also changed (Reinharz 1992:194). Thus, if I was committed to abandoning 'disembodied objectivity', I also needed to reflect on the personal changes that took place in me during this journey, enriching my ideas regarding relationships/marriages and becoming aware of ethical ways of doing research.

In the following section I elaborate on how this research journey was co-constructed between the participants and myself.

1.6 RESEARCH PROCEDURES

This research journey followed the following path set out below.

Deciding on the criteria for participation was crucial for me, as it was my intention to be exposed to a diverse set of religious and cultural discourses regarding relationships/marriages. Therefore I searched for couples who were positioned within

different religious and cultural discursive practices. In searching for diversity, I thought that a homosexual couple, an African couple or couples outside the Christian belief system, for example, a Muslim couple, would add diversity to this research journey.

In my own practice, every week, I have therapeutic conversations with couples who are attempting to create an alternative, preferred relationship narrative. The participants for this study were recruited from these therapeutic conversations, after they had completed therapy. I invited them to become fellow travellers on this research journey. They were given an information sheet (Appendix 1) explaining the aim and procedures of the study, and a separate letter of consent regarding their participation in the project (Appendix 2).

Three couples accepted the invitation. The first was a couple from the Jehovah's Witness tradition – Claire and John had been married for eighteen years. They decided not to commit themselves to becoming parents, but preferred to focus their commitment, as a couple, on community work. The second couple came from the Dutch Reformed Church – Susan and Jack had been in a committed relationship for three years. The third couple had a homosexual orientation – ten years ago, Jessica and Allison declared their commitment towards each other publicly in a wedding ceremony. They are the parents of a little girl, Jackie. Allison is Jackie's biological mother.

I embarked on three conversational journeys with each couple. During each conversation I embraced a 'not-knowing position'. In a not-knowing position the emphasis is not on producing change but on opening up space for conversation (Anderson & Goolishian 1992:29). During these conversations I listened to the relationship/marriage narratives of each couple and inquired about the social and religious discourses in which their relationships are embedded. My listening was guided by what Freedman and Combs (1996:460) call deconstructive listening. Deconstructive listening is guided by a belief that the narrative the couple is telling has many possible meanings. Deconstructive listening is complemented by 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' (Freedman & Combs 1996:57). Deconstructive questioning helps people to start to realise that narratives are constructions that can be constituted differently since they do not represent an essential truth. Furthermore, a not-knowing position 'express[es] a need to know more about what has been said, rather than convey[s] preconceived opinions and expectations about the client, the problem, or what must be changed' (Anderson & Goolishian 1992:29).

Due to the nature of this research, a large quantity of information was constructed during the research process. It was therefore necessary to identify specific ways to reconstruct the stories that were told. For the purposes of this study, I used letter writing. Clandinin and Connelly (1994:421) regard letters as a research method which can be used between participants, between research collaborators or between researchers and participants. Epston (1994:33) made me attend to the powerful effects of letters: 'Words in a letter don't fade and disappear the way a conversation does; they endure through time and space, bearing witness to the work of therapy and immortalizing it.' Acknowledging the powerful effect of therapeutic letters, I felt that letters would be valuable in re-telling the relationship narratives but would also assist in creating a participatory consciousness. During this research journey I wrote letters to the participants after each conversation and invited them to respond to these letters. During each session I made notes of everything that was said, frequently reading these notes back to the couple concerned. I also asked the couple, after each session, whether they wanted to include or exclude specific details/ideas regarding the session, attempting to reinforce the idea of partnership. Referring to these notes, I wrote a letter. Each letter was a summary of the content of a conversation, but it also included further questions, reflections and new insights on my behalf. These letters also included reflections from the literature regarding relationships, in an attempt to invite alternative or richer understandings regarding the couple's own relationship. The letters attempted to invite opportunities for change like those discussed by Epston (1994:32), who said: 'In my letters I am always tuning in to what opens up new possibilities, any glimpse of an alternative to the client's problem-saturated story.' The couple received the letter and during the next meeting they had an opportunity to reflect on the letter. Clandinin and Connelly (1994:421) remark that one of the merits of using letters is that equality is established. The participants were provided with the opportunity to add or change the content of the letters and the reading of the letters

invited further conversations between the couple and myself, but also between the two partners. The participants used the letters to participate in a very active way.

The final part of the journey was to reconstruct these stories in a research report, where I wove the relationship narratives of the couples together with the relationship narratives found in the relevant literature.

Feminist, participatory action research required me to do research ethically, according to the ethical considerations discussed in the following section.

1.7 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Ethical research requires transparency and accountability towards both the participants and the readers of the report. However, for me, ethical research also means avoiding abusive or oppressive practices towards the fellow travellers (participants) in the research journey. In order to conduct research that is ethical (in terms of these criteria) involved several dimensions, as set out below.

A post-modern view of reality (my personal discursive position) calls for an acknowledgement of the notion that there is no essential truth and that realities are socially constructed. Moreover, Foucault's ideas on power and knowledge must be taken into account. Given the status and knowledge of counsellor and researcher, I entered the research study from a position of power or 'privileged position' (Hall 1996:37). There was a danger that I could impose my view of reality on the participants, and/or re-construct their stories according to my own values and beliefs.

If I did abuse my position and ignore ideologies, that would be unethical: 'All social groups have an ideology, because sharing an ideology is one of the ways by which a group exists. It must follow, therefore, that social researchers cannot be free of ideology, since they also necessarily belong to a social group' (Winter 1996:18). Therefore as an action researcher, it was necessary for me to address the presence and influence of the discursive positions (see Chapter Two) of the participants and myself.

As researcher I have an ethical obligation to be reflexive regarding my research methods in order to ensure the credibility of the research study. Hall (1996:30) provides an explanatory description of what reflexivity attempts to do. It is meant to:

1. monitor and reflect on one's doing of the research – the methods and the researcher's influence on the setting - and act responsively on these methods as the study proceeds; and
2. account for researcher constitutiveness. This process begins with being self-conscious (to the extent that this is possible) about how one's doing research as well as what one brings to it (previous experience, knowledge, values, beliefs and *a priori* concepts) shapes the way the data are interpreted and treated. An account of researcher constitutiveness is completed when this awareness is incorporated in the research report.

(Hall 1996:30)

Thus, in order to be reflexive, I tried to expose my own thought processes so that my personal involvement in the knowledge construction process was clear. The reader of the report is made aware that my ideology has an effect on the reconstruction of the participants' stories. Because of my self-disclosure, the reader has an opportunity to criticise and question the report. The reader is exposed to the idea that 'knowledge is constructed by people in a dynamic context rather than implying that it is a static entity which is "out there waiting to be captured"' (Hall 1996:37).

Another consideration I subscribe to is the ethical need to debate whether to regard partners in dialogue as 'generalized other' versus 'concrete other' (Welch 1990:127; Graham 1996:154). Regarding a partner in a moral dialogue as a 'generalized other' results in each individual being seen as 'a rational being entitled to the same rights and duties we would want to ascribe to ourselves' (Welch 1990:127). When one chooses this position, the relation to the other is governed by the norms of 'formal equality and reciprocity' (Welch 1990:127), where the other is entitled to expect and assume from us what we can expect and assume from him/her. On the other hand, our relation to the other as a 'concrete other' is governed by the norms of 'equality and complementary reciprocity: each is entitled to expect and to assume from the other forms of behavior through which the other feels recognized and confirmed as a concrete, individual being with specific needs' (Gilligan quoted in Welch 1990:127-128).

The above-mentioned debate had specific relevance for me during my research journey. Positioning myself within a feminist, social construction discourse meant that I have specific views regarding relationships and gender roles within relationships.

However, I cannot assume that what I would want and expect within a relationship is what all other humans would want and expect from their relationships. Therefore, I always needed to open up conversations to reveal the couple's lived experiences within the relationship and whether these experiences were their own preferred way of constructing their relationship. This is the reason why I mentioned previously in this chapter that when (as part of my aim of the study) I attempted to construct an alternative, preferred relationship narrative, the construction could not be my idea of what that preferred narrative should look like, but I had to ask the couple what their preferred narrative was. Their preferred narrative should benefit them, irrespective of my views.

Furthermore, through a participatory mode of consciousness, the act of knowing becomes an ethical act (Heshusius 1994:19). During the conversational journeys that became part of this research, I left the privileged status of being the expert behind and instead embedded myself in each couple's relationship narrative. 'Mutuality and ethicality are at once embedded in a participatory mode of consciousness' (Heshusius 1994:19). Together the couple and I tried to understand their relationship and to search for alternative understandings of their relationship.

Another ethical consideration that deserves attention is the reminder that feminist, participatory action research is concerned with creating new realities and facilitating change to the benefit of the participants (see Reinharz 1992:175; McTaggart 1997a:7). As I entered a conversational journey with participants, I was guided by the notion that the participants needed to benefit from being involved in the research journey. Although my research aim centred around discourses and relationships/marriages (see Section 1.3), I accepted the ethical responsibility that the participants also needed to benefit from participation. Using the practices of the narrative approach (see Section 2.7.2), such as therapeutic letters, deconstruction and rich descriptions provided the means to create space for new realities and facilitate change – to the benefit of the participants. This meant that the conversations with the couples regarding the constitutive effects of religious and social discourses reflected characteristics of therapeutic conversations within the narrative approach. Therefore (although I was concerned with uncovering the discourses constituting relationships/marriages), doing research ethically required me either to weave alternative, preferred constructions of

their relationship/marriage narratives or to weave a rich description of their preferred realities.

On a more practical level, I attempted to conduct the research ethically by viewing the participants as fellow travellers. This meant that the letters I wrote to them were always open to revision by them – they were encouraged to add or replace ideas in the letter. They were also invited to read the research report, which allowed me to be transparent towards the participants. Another aspect of doing research ethically was the use of pseudonyms in the research report to protect the participants' identity. The participants preferred that I should choose these pseudonyms.

1.8 SUMMARY

Being positioned within conflicting discursive practices – the discourse of coupledness and the discourse of divorce – has made me curious regarding the whole phenomenon of relationships/marriages. This curiosity helped me to formulate the aims of this study, which was firstly to reflect with three couples on the cultural and religious discourses which co-constitute the institutions of relationships/marriages, as well as to reflect on cultural and religious discourses which co-constitute specific gender roles in relationships/marriages. Ideas and principles of feminist participatory action research were used as guidelines in the process of my researching the above-mentioned aim.

1.9 CHAPTER OVERVIEW

Following on from this introductory chapter, which reflected on the specific paths followed during this research journey, the research report includes the following:

In Chapter Two I introduce my own discursive positions during the research journey.

Chapters Three and Four re-tell the conversational journey with a couple from the Jehovah's Witness tradition, a couple from the Dutch Reformed Church and a couple from the Gay Reformed Church – during these re-tellings I attempted to reflect on the cultural and religious discourses which constitute the relationships/marriages of these couples.

In Chapter Five, I reflect on what I have learned during and from this research journey. I discuss some emerging ideas regarding relationships/marriages, as well as what I have learnt about doing research. I also discuss the participating couples' experiences on this research journey.

CHAPTER TWO

DISCURSIVE POSITION AS RESEARCHER

2.1 DISCURSIVE POSITION

In this chapter I attempt to show what my own discursive position during this research journey was. I was guided by social construction discourse, post-structuralism and post-modern theological discourse, contextual practical theology, the feminist theology of praxis and narrative pastoral therapy.

2.2 SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION AS A POST-MODERN DISCOURSE

According to Anderson (1997:36) post-modern thought, moves toward 'knowledge as a discursive practice, toward a plurality of narratives that are more local, contextual and fluid; it moves toward a multiplicity of approaches to the analysis of subjects such as knowledge, truth, language, history, self, and power'. A post-modern view of reality holds that (a) realities are socially constructed; (b) realities are constituted through language; (c) realities are organised and maintained through narrative and (d) there are no essential truths (Freedman & Combs 1996:22).

Objective knowledge as an individual possession has reached an impasse, resulting in the social construction discourse view that knowledge is lodged within the sphere of social relatedness (Gergen 1994:30). According to Gergen (1994:45), 'it is neither underlying ideology nor textual history that shapes our conceptions of the true and the good. Rather, it is social process'. Thus knowledge is socially constructed and the knower and knowledge are interdependent (Anderson 1997:36). Therefore it can also be claimed that knowledgeable accounts of the world (including people) are discursive, and that all that is meaningful grows from relationships (Gergen 1994:viii-ix). All knowledge, according to social constructionism, is derived from looking at the world from some perspective or other – knowledge results from a dance between context, culture, language, experience and understanding (Burr 1995:6; Anderson 1997:36). Language in particular plays an important role in constructions of knowledge: 'From this perspective, knowledge is not something people process

somewhere in their heads, but rather, something people do together' (Gergen 1985:270). Thus speaking/language is not neutral or passive, since people create and recreate a reality every time they speak. Language constitutes meaning, yet meaning is not found within the word itself. Meaning is found via the word in relation to its context (Freedman & Combs 1996:29), and words 'take on their meaning only within the context of ongoing relationships' (Gergen 1994:49). However, since no context is the same, 'meanings are not permanently fixed but are continuously influenced, constructed and reconstructed over time' (Anderson 1997:42).

Identities, values, opinions and life-styles are all formed within and during human interactions. Due to advances in technology, the physical world has shrunk, while the individual's experience of the cultural and social world has expanded, embedding every individual within a multiplicity of relationships. Within this new complex and expanding world of relationships, every individual incorporates a variety of values and attitudes into his/her own definition of self – even sometimes resulting in contradictions. Gergen (1991:28) calls this experience of the world and the self 'social saturation'. In a post-modern world, people find themselves within a variety of relationships – at work with colleagues, on the phone with a friend, over the Internet with strangers, at home with a partner – with the result that the relationship between partners/couples ceases to be a primary relationship. 'Relating to others slowly transforms our identities; the more others there are, the more we are transformed, and the farther from home – geographically, emotionally, intellectually – we find our relationships, the greater the potential for quarrels in our family of birth or marriage' (Gergen 1991:32). Social saturation may result in a blurring of ideals and an inability to determine what a good and proper relationship/marriage should look like (Gergen 1991:31). Consequently social saturation and its effects need to be considered when relationship narratives within a post-modern world are heard. Each person's ideas and expectations of other people and relationships are constantly transformed due to the multiplicity of other relationships.

2.3 POST-STRUCTURALIST DISCOURSE

According to Grenz (1995:92), structuralists theorised that cultures develop literary documents – texts – in an attempt to provide structures of meaning by means of which people can make sense out of the meaninglessness of their experience. Post-

structuralists such as Saussure argue that meaning is not inherent in a text itself. The content of a word is determined not by what it contains but by what exists outside it. Concepts are not defined positively in terms of their content, but negatively by contrast with other items in the same system (Saussure 1983:114-115). Yet taking into consideration the sign as a whole, a positive characteristic appears. The combination of signification and signal has a positive nature, since it gives rise to a system of values. Two signs are not different from each other, but in opposition to each other, for example, father versus mother.

Post-structuralism takes from Saussure the principle 'that meaning is produced within language rather than reflected by language and that individual signs do not have intrinsic meaning but acquire meaning through the language chain and their difference within it from other signs' (Weedon 1987:23). However, Saussure's theory does not account for the plurality of meaning or changes in meaning (Weedon 1987:24). The meaning of the term 'woman', for example, is not fixed in a natural world, but is socially produced within language and this meaning is therefore subject to change. Weedon (1987:24) makes a plea for viewing language as a system that exists within historically specific discourses – inevitably this results in giving competing meanings to the world. Because language is situated within competing discourses, language becomes a social act and a site of political struggle.

The post-structuralist Jacques Derrida attempted to examine the concept of multiple or changing meaning by introducing the concept of 'differance'.

2.3.1 Jacques Derrida

The concept of 'differance' includes both difference and deferral (Sampson 1989:11). The idea of difference corresponds here with Saussure's claim that meanings emerge in linguistic practice on the basis of differences and not on the basis of essences or internal connections (Sampson 1989:11). 'Deferral describes the inherent time lag (distance) between presence and what constitutes that presence, namely absence, writing, the trace' (Sampson 1989:11). Weedon (1987:25) explains that 'signifiers are always located in a discursive context and the temporary fixing of meaning in a specific reading of a signifier depends on this discursive context', for example, the meanings of the signifier 'woman' vary from ideal to victim to object of sexual desire,

according to the context (Weedon 1987:25). If this assumption is true, objective meaning is impossible. Instead, we participate in the dance of the signifiers in our lives and context all the time.

Expanding his post-structuralist notion that there is no single fixed, inherent meaning within a text, Derrida proposed the deconstructive act of placing a term under erasure (*sous rature*) (Derrida 1974:65). To place a word *sous rature* is 'to write a word, cross it out, and then print both word and deletion. (Since the word is inaccurate, it is crossed out. Since it is necessary, it remains legible)' (Spivak 1974:xiv). The process of placing a term under erasure deconstructs what appears to be familiar or known and this act leads to 'unfamiliar conclusions' (Spivak 1974:xiv) or to the 'not-yet-said'. Consequently, Sampson (1989:7) argues that deconstruction is to undo, not to destroy. The deconstruction of texts is also applicable to realities – in that case, deconstruction is a radical skepticism about the claims of grand or totalising theories/dominant discourses in life as 'regimes of truth'. Deconstruction is achieved by analysing the gaps, silences, ambiguities and implicit power relations within dominant discourses (Lowe 1991:43).

2.3.2 Michel Foucault

Foucault claimed that those who have power put forward every interpretation. Those who have knowledge (for example, individuals and groups affiliated within medical, psychological, religious and education institutions) hold an authoritative/power position and reinforce that position when they interpret human phenomena. Foucault argued that every assertion of knowledge is an act of power. Foucault's argument adds a moral twist to post-structuralist discourse (Grenz 1995:93).

Foucault (1980:131) discusses the regime of truth or the 'general politics' of truth which is 'the types of discourse which it accepts and makes function as true; the mechanisms and instances which enable one to distinguish true and false statements, the means by which each is sanctioned; the techniques and procedures accorded value in the acquisition of truth; the status of those who are charged with saying what counts as true'. Truth is thus dependent on specific discourses within a given society during a specific period. Discourses regarding homosexuality are a good example. In the first editions of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorder (DSM),

homosexuality was a diagnosable condition, implying that homosexuality was viewed as a category of pathology (Pirelli-Benestad 2001:76). In the DSM-III, homosexuality was shifted to 'Ego-dystonic Homosexuality' (DSM-III 1980:380), where the homosexual person was regarded as being distressed about his/her sexual orientation. In the current DSM-IV (1994), homosexuality is no longer a category of pathology.

Truth is linked in a circular relation with systems of power which produce and sustain it (Foucault 1980:133) and therefore Foucault constitutes a new politics of truth: 'We are subjected to the production of truth through power and we cannot exercise power except through the production of truth' (Foucault 1980:93). These power/knowledge relations within specific discourses imply that if there are dominant knowledges or truths, then there are also subjugated knowledges (Flaskas & Humphreys 1993:43).

Foucault (1980:82) describes 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'. Foucault (1980:82-83) also uses the term 'genealogy' – when those who have been identified as having unqualified, low-ranking knowledges voice local memories and knowledge of struggles. The project of genealogies, according to Foucault (1980:85), is based on the reactivation of local knowledges (subjugated knowledges) in opposition to the scientific hierarchisation of knowledges and the effects intrinsic to their power. In terms of Foucault's description, the genealogy within this research project was to give a voice to knowledges which have been subjugated due to dominant discourses regarding relationships/marriages. So, for example, within patriarchal discourse, women's experiences within their relationships become subjugated knowledges, which should now be heard. Creating possibilities for these subjugated knowledges to be heard and therefore resisting the power relations implicit within the regimes of truth that govern them is a response to Foucault's proposition that when there is power, there is always the possibility of resistance (Flaskas & Humphreys 1993:42).

2.4 DISCOURSE

The term 'discourse' has become a central concept in post-modern thought (Lowe 1991:44) and is used to refer to two broad concepts. The term 'discourse' relates to the process of conversation (Lowe 1991:44-45) and acts as a medium that provides words and ideas for speech (Hare-Mustin 1994:19). Through this process of conversation, meanings are constituted, since 'particular conversational practices fashion realities and set in train certain consequences' (Lowe 1991:45). In the use of the term 'discourse' as dominant texts or bodies of knowledge, the term refers to 'systematic and institutionalised ways of speaking or writing' (Lowe 1991:45) or doing. Dominant texts or bodies of knowledge may result in a marginalization of some voices. Simultaneously, there is a privileging of other knowledgeable voices: 'Discourses thus constitute knowledge and confer power' (Lowe 1991:45).

Within any specific culture, there are different and competing discourses, which are not equally important. Some discourses have a dominant and privileged position. These discourses become so familiar within a culture that they convey taken-for-granted knowledges, which in turn become part of the identity of most members of the culture: consequently, discourses influence attitudes and behaviour. On the other hand, subordinate, marginalized discourses, associated with groups on the margins of society, are excluded from influence since they do not carry any authority. Usually a dominant discourse supports specific institutions and ways of being (Hare-Mustin 1994:21), for example, patriarchy or hegemonic racial and religious structures.

Dominant discourses regarding gender accentuate differences between men and women. According to Hare-Mustin (1994:22), these discourses view women as essentially caring, close to nature and oriented to meeting the needs of others, whilst men are essentially independent and achieving. What these discourses have in common is that they seem to support the ideal of equal relations between the sexes, but disguises inequality and differences in power and choice. This study, explores cultural and religious discourses regarding gender and relationships/marriages and to deconstruct the effects that these discourses have on individuals as well as on relationships. This deconstructive listening/questioning opened up space for marginalized discourses – thus inviting the not-yet-said to voice itself. 'Feminist postmodernists have focused on the way dominant discourses produce and sustain the

status of those who have power against the competing discourses of those on the margins of society' (Hare-Mustin 1994:21).

Another dominant discourse in Western society privileges heterosexual relations, and therefore marginalizes any discourse of homosexual relations. So, for example, same-gender unions do not receive the same status of marriage and therefore same-gender unions are excluded from certain privileges attributed to marital status (see Chapter Four).

Hare-Mustin (1994:24) identifies three dominant discourses of gender, which are applicable within the domain of relationships – the male sexual drive discourse, the permissive discourse and the marriage-between-equals discourse. The male sexual drive discourse sees women as objects that arouse men's sexual urges. Men's sexual drive is viewed as natural and as making men 'real men'. This discourse is a discourse of patriarchal heterosexuality reinforcing male domination. Within this discourse the problem of inequality in relationships is not addressed (Hare-Mustin 1994:24-27). The permissive discourse gives both sexes the right to express their sexuality. However, due to the different positions of men and women in society, the effects of this discourse are different for men and women. Permissiveness results in open sexual access for men, whilst for women, permissiveness can mean pressure to accede to men's urging women to participate in sexual activity. Women are also convinced that they have no right to feel hurt or betrayed by male infidelity, because theoretically women are allowed the same liberties. However, a woman's infidelity implies that she is devious and irresponsible in the fulfilment of her duties as a nurturing caretaker (Hare-Mustin 1994:27-29). Within the discourse of equality, men and women are regarded as naturally different from each other, so that the sexes cannot be compared. This discourse conceals women's subordination and men's domination by reframing differences as equality. This discourse views love as equal to 'taking care of'. Men take care through economic provision, whilst women do this through personal services and putting the other above the self. Within the equality discourse, a woman's love is reflected by her selflessness (making her partner happy at the expense of her 'self'), leaving a woman uneasy if she focuses on herself, her interests and her needs (Hare-Mustin 1994:29-31).

Both discourse as a social process of communication between people and the dominant discourses within a given culture have a constitutive effect on a person's self-narrative. In acknowledging multiple realities, multiple voices and relationships as the loci of knowledges, I therefore also position myself within a post-modern theological discourse.

2.5 POST-MODERN THEOLOGICAL DISCOURSE

Post-modern discourse claims that there is no essential or final truth. Truth is relative to the questions asked within a specific context. The same can be said about theological truth. Theological thinking cannot occur outside a specific religious, socio-economic climate (Herholdt 1998:219-221). In this regard, Van Huyssteen (1997:29) suggests that people's religious interpretations of their beliefs regarding God comes to them in and through their manifold experiences of nature, persons, ideas, emotions, places, things and events. During my conversations with the three participating couples, I realised that each couple had constructed a different theology. My positioning in a post-modern theological discourse required me to be both culturally sensitive and sensitive to different ways of seeing and giving meaning to experiences in a theological discourse. Brueggemann (1993:9) makes a plea for viewing the practice of Christian interpretation as contextual, local and pluralistic: 'We voice a claim that rings true in our context, that applies authoritatively to our lived life. But it is a claim that is made in a pluralism where it has no formal privilege.' Post-modern thought in theology thus centres on a rejection of all dominating global narratives of legitimisation, resulting in an embracing of pluralism and diversity (Van Huyssteen 1997:75). What is required is an acknowledgement that all claims of reality, including those made by theologians, are to be fully negotiated (Brueggemann 1993:17).

If one genuinely adopts the post-structuralist notion that meaning is not fixed within a given text, but results from the reader's interpretation of the text, readings of Scripture within post-modern theology also need to be challenged: the biblical text becomes a contextual conversational partner, rather than a decontextualised collection of norms and truths (Deist 1994:258). As Henry (1995:36) points out: 'There is no original or final textual meaning, no one way to interpret the Bible or any other text.' Post-modern theology therefore allows for multiple interpretations of the Bible, yet

consistently asks the interpreter(s) to reflect on the moral/practical consequences of these interpretations.

In a patriarchal discourse, biblical views regarding marriage are interpreted in such a manner that it leads to the domination of husbands over their wives, in turn leading to a marginalization of women. There are, however, different theological discourses in which a person can position him/herself. Positioning myself within a feminist discourse results in my searching for more egalitarian biblical interpretations regarding the role of women and men in relationships (see Section 3.2). Each of the participants of this research journey also positioned him/herself in a specific theological discourse. So, for example, a Jehovah's Witness theological discourse resulted in the couple's interpreting the biblical notion of male headship as partnership in marriage, asking the husband to consider the wife's emotional, physical and material needs when making decisions.

Post-modern theology, like feminist post-modernist theology, also expresses a concern for those in society who are marginalized. This concern is grounded in a Christian understanding of the value of human life – God bestows unconditional dignity and value on all human beings, irrespective of personal achievements, race, class or sex (Rossouw 1993:902). During the conversations with the participants, I invited them to tell me about their experiences within the specific theological discourse in which they position themselves. In attempting to co-create a contextual theology that serves all couples, I was guided by Rossouw's (1993:901) recommendation that theology should move towards participatory theology. If a couple felt marginalized within a theological discourse, I was challenged not to provide 'expert knowledge' by dishing out 'pre-cooked solutions' (Rossouw 1993:901). In the co-creation of a contextual theology which serves everyone pastoral therapists and clients 'should become fellow players in the search for meaningful Christian life in our contemporary culture' (Rossouw 1993:901). In a post-modern theological discourse, theology too is viewed as a social construction. This implied that during the conversations the participants and I attempted to construct an alternative Christian interpretation of their relationship.

The post-modern emphasis of this approach becomes especially clear in the study's concern for those who have been marginalized – those who are socially rejected (such

as homosexual couples) or those who are regarded as unfit to compete in society (such as women). A concern for the marginalized opens up space for feminist theology and other emancipatory movements such as the gay rights movement. In entering into conversation with the three participating couples, I was guided by the voices of contextual theologies such as feminist theology.

2.6 CONTEXTUAL PRACTICAL THEOLOGY

The common goal of ministry would be transformation/liberation. This implies a process of transforming the church to enable it in turn, to be, a transforming community, but also a prophetic ministry directed at society as a contribution to the flourishing of justice. We seek a transformation of unjust social structures and of the attitudes and policies which perpetuate and reinforce them.

(Cochrane, De Gruchy & Peterson 1991:10)

The contextual approach is concerned with social transformation – transforming a society in order to become increasingly consonant with the vision and values of the commonwealth of God (Cohrane et al 1991:3). Here the emphasis is on doing theology (Bosch 1991:424) and there is a shift from being right to doing right (Rossouw 1993:903). Bosch (1991:425) builds on Bonino's idea regarding the importance of doing theology, as there is no knowledge except in action itself, in the process of changing the world through participation. This correlates with the model of pastoral care which Graham (1996:49) proposes, one of shared companionship on life's journey rather than the imbalance of client/expert, sheep/shepherd or participants/researcher. Furthermore, in attempting to do right, one should be sensitive to the practical consequences of theological perspectives and belief practices for certain groups of people (Rossouw 1993:903). During this research journey, the couples and I became co-explorers concerning effects of cultural and religious discourses on their relationships/marriages. The aim of contextual practical theology is the social and political improvement of people in specific communities – especially those who experience oppression due to their sex or race (Wolfaardt 1993:7-9).

Cochrane et al (1991:15) claim that one cannot do theology from a position of theological neutrality. Bonino (quoted in Bosch 1991:425) stated that 'there is no socially and political neutral theology; in the struggle for life and against death, theology must take sides'. The implication is that prior to entering a specific context,

a faith commitment is necessary (Cochrane et al 1991:15). I thus entered this research journey with a faith commitment grounded in the values of the commonwealth of God (justice, love, freedom and shalom) and was motivated to establish an egalitarian society. My commitment implied listening to the cultural and contextual stories of marriages and relationships, attempting to hear voices that have been silenced due to dominant racial, gender and relationship discourses. My concern means that I had to invite alternative meanings, which facilitated the attempts by individuals to free their relationships from the chains of marginalization – celebrating a preferred narrative of the self and the relationship.

A faith commitment within the contextual approach could involve an acknowledgement and confession of Jesus of Nazareth as the Christ: redeemer and liberator. 'In this way, confessing Christ is continuous with the Mosaic prophetic tradition in the Hebrew Scriptures, it implies a prophetic mode of doing theology. It points towards the coming of God's justice and peace within the human community, or more specifically, within the particular contexts in which this task is undertaken' (Cochrane et al 1991:16). In the Mosaic prophetic tradition, the focus is on God's justice and righteousness, with a concern for those who are marginalized and the aim of establishing an egalitarian society (Cochrane et al 1991:57).

Contextual theology is, according to Bosch (1991:439) a theology from below (thus not from the privileged expert position), resulting in the construction of 'local theologies' (Bosch 1991:427). Bosch's assumption therefore discards the notion of a universal validity or dominant theology (Bosch 1991:427). During this research journey, I was guided by the idea of a theology from below. Instead of providing 'expert knowledge', the couples were invited to co-construct with me a 'local theology' that sustains their preferred practices within their relationship/marriage narratives.

Adopting this stance of a theology from below, invited feminist theology along on this research journey. Feminist theology takes as its starting point the experience of women and men and their interaction with each other and society (Isherwood & McEwan 1993:35).

2.6.1 Feminist theology of praxis

Ackermann (1990:30) describes feminist liberation theology as a form of liberation theology that affirms the priority of praxis as the starting point for theology. Feminist theology is therefore contextual, since it examines whether current political, social, economic and familial institutions reflect the values of the commonwealth of God (justice, love, freedom and shalom) in the present context (Ackermann 1990:23). According to Ackermann (1990:28), 'the commonwealth of God makes ethical demands which lead to liberating praxis. The commonwealth of God demands justice, love, freedom and shalom, and in so doing, calls for the priority of praxis, praxis which is just, loving, freeing and which leads to peace and wholeness'. Van Schalkwyk (1999:202) refers to 'shalom' as relationality. The shalomatic theme of relationality is concerned with relations of equality and mutuality between men and women and between oppressors and oppressed. Similarly Cozad Neuger (1999:117) claims that relationality serves feminist theory through the lens of ethics: relationality is oriented towards identifying and deconstructing unjust power arrangements between people. Justice and love starts with liberating praxis for social justice, where each individual's humanity is affirmed as equal in the image of God (*imago Dei*) (Ackermann 1990:15). 'In a context of relationality, people can become fully human and can reflect on the image of a relational God' (Van Schalkwyk 1999:202).

Within Christianity, and specifically patriarchal theology, specific gender roles are ascribed to individuals – women must be submissive to their husbands and must never have any authority over a man and therefore a woman must be kept silent (Isherwood & McEwan 1993:103). With regard to Christian teachings on marriage, many feminist theologians would affirm that historically these teachings have had negative consequences for women (Dowell 1996:125). The prophet Hosea described his marriage to an unfaithful woman (Hosea 1.2). However, his wife is continuously running after other lovers. Hosea's wife was seen as the whore, but Hosea bought her back. The implication of this story is that a woman is the husband's possession; if a woman tries to express her autonomy, she is labelled as a whore; by buying her back, the husband reclaims her, not through love but through a transaction, where the woman has no say in it. This implies ownership by the male (Isherwood & McEwan 1993:101).

Feminist theologians criticise the notion of love (agape) in the New Testament as being a form of self-sacrifice (Sowle Cahill 1987:157). Appeals to agapic love have been frequently used to excuse men's violent and abusive behaviour toward women. As Christians, women are asked to forgive and forget unjust behaviour towards them (Van Leeuwen et al 1993:412). The theological solution, according to feminists, is to redefine love as mutuality rather than self-sacrifice. Agape should be mediated in the more 'egalitarian, caring, and mutual spirit of the so-called "love commandment": "love your neighbor as yourself"' (Wall, Needham, Browning & James 1999:148). A paradigm for a relationship/marriage is 'a successful friendship, in which self and other both give and receive without the need to designate one or the other party as "head"' (Van Leeuwen et al 1993:413).

Feminist theologians such as Sowle Cahill (1987:156) argue that friendship is the best definition of marriage or the partnership that marriage requires. The key thing to the friendship which is the marriage 'is that it is mutually satisfying; it is a reciprocal sharing of thoughts, goals, and efforts' (Sowle Cahill 1987:156). In friendship, equal power relations are reclaimed. It could be argued that 'in friendship we are recovering creation as God created it to be, we are rediscovering our equality' (Stuart 1995:44).

How many relationships/marriages are currently situated within a patriarchal theological discourse? In this project both, women and men were invited to voice their experiences within or with this discourse, because truth 'can only be discovered through the experience of its meaning within the lives of the people, not through the authoritative pronouncements of officials in power' (Isherwood & McEwan 1993:60-61). Feminist theology is characterised by its acknowledgement of the importance of the whole experience – especially women's experience becomes the basis of theological reflection for the feminist theologians who attempt to redress the historical inequality of men's experiences being fore-grounded. Isherwood and McEwan (1993:82) claim that only when theology takes women's experiences seriously, can it become a liberating action, a commitment to praxis.

The feminist theology of praxis is a response to God's invitation for justice, for a fullness of life for everyone, and for a true partnership in the work of liberation (Cozad Neuger & Poling 1997:42). Therefore a theology of praxis is inclusive, calling for justice for everyone regardless of race, class or sex: 'Feminist theology recognizes

as one of its tasks 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). Feminist theology was practiced in this study by questioning and overcoming false divisions between male/female, heterosexual/homosexual and about inviting participants to liberate themselves from gender-specific restrictions found in dominant cultural and relational discourses. This approach was in line with the shalomatic theme of relationality that expresses a concern for making connections across the borders of injustice, inequality and separation (Van Schalkwyk 1999:203).

Positioning myself within a contextual theology such as feminist theology challenged me to enter into conversation with the three participating couples, inviting them to voice their experiences within a theological discourse. Concerned with the transformation of discursive practices into social justice and equality, the research journey was guided by attempts to co-construct alternative, local and just theological discourses regarding the participants' relationships/marriages. One of the couples was not experiencing oppression within their theological discourse and I thus invited rich descriptions (White 1997:15) of their marriage within this specific theological discourse. Ironically, while this couple was not marginalized within this theological discourse in which they were situated, the theology itself was marginalized. This couple positioned themselves within a Jehovah's Witnesses' theological discourse – a faith tradition that has been marginalized in the South African context. Thus part of this research journey was to invite them (and others who would be reading this research report) to celebrate and acknowledge the validity of yet another local, contextual theology.

Therapeutic conversations can be a vehicle for addressing injustices that occur in a society. 'Just therapy' takes into account the gender, cultural, social and economic context of people (Waldegrave 1990:5). Narrative pastoral therapy aspires to become a 'just therapy' since it takes into account the gender, cultural, social and economic discourses circulating in society.

2.7 PASTORAL THEOLOGY

The shift from a modern to a post-modern paradigm has several implications for pastoral therapy. Pattison (quoted in Graham 1996:51) describes it as follows: 'The subject of care is shifting from that of a self-actualized individual for whom care functions primarily at times of crisis towards one of a person in need of nurture and support as he or she negotiates a complexity of moral and theological challenges in a rapidly-changing economic and social context.' Positioning myself within a post-modern discourse requires me to question the individualism still promoted in contemporary Western pastoral care and invites me to explore a greater emphasis on the social justice dimension of Christian ministry (Graham 1996:43).

As the subject of care shifts, there is greater awareness of the social and cultural contexts of care (Dunlap 1999:134). Pastoral caregivers need to recognise that even the most private emotion is enmeshed in larger power structures, locating those who receive care in a political, cultural, religious and social matrix. Consequently, Dunlap (1999:135) recommends pastoral praxis to become an 'activity of bearing discourses'.

2.7.1 Pastoral praxis as a constitutive discursive activity

Concern with the social and cultural contexts of care allows pastoral counsellors to take the effects of discourses into account. Davies and Harrè (1991:45) remind therapists that discourses can compete with each other to create distinct and incompatible versions of reality. Furthermore, to know anything is to know in terms of one or more discourses. Discourses develop around a specific topic (for the purposes of this study, the discourses regarding relationships/marriages, positioned within the larger cultural and religious discourses). This research journey sensitised me to the effects of several discourses such as heterosexuality and patriarchy, which enjoy privileged power positions, resulting in the disqualification of subjugated knowledges (Foucault 1980:85) regarding relationships/marriages.

When thinking in terms of relationships/marriages, we need to acknowledge that there are also competing discourses regarding relationships/marriages, for example the participating couple from the Dutch Reformed Church. They are living together and are having pre-marital sex. The dominant religious discourse in which they were positioned resulted in their relationship's being constructed as sinful and wrong,

silencing their local knowledge (Foucault 1980:85) of a life-giving, nurturing relationship narrative. In relation to this study, pastoral praxis should include a consideration of the effects of religious and cultural discursive positions regarding relationships/marriages. Here the question of agency (measure of choice) arises: 'If we are wholly constituted by discourses, are we nothing but passive creatures?' and 'Is it possible to choose to identify with a discourse, or are we mute products of discursive competitions?' (Dunlap 1999:137).

Davies and Harrè (1991:43) stress the constitutive force of discourse and the way in which people are positioned through those discursive practices. Therefore it is important to refer to subjectivity instead of the self, because the individual is positioned in a social context (see Dunlap 1999:136). However, subjectivity is fluid as it is constantly constituted and reconstituted through the various discursive practices in which people participate (Davies & Harrè 1991:46; Dunlap 1999:136; Weedon 1987:33). 'This understanding of subjectivity engenders hope because it is contested. Subject positions are not fixed' (Dunlap 1999:138). Recognition that we are constructed by our social context invites us to play a role in shaping these contexts or choosing the ones with which to affiliate (Dunlap 1999:138).

Weedon (1987:106) affirms that agency is possible, as one can draw on knowledge of more than one discourse and the recognition that meaning is plural. As Davies and Harrè (1991:46) remind us, various subject positions are available within discursive practices. Therefore I accepted the ethical responsibility that feminist participatory action research is concerned with creating new realities and facilitating change to the benefit of the participants (see Section 1.7) by increasing agency through 'actively invoking alternative discourses that may lie dormant in a person's memory, by nurturing new sources of knowledge and by empowering care receivers to make choices for creative and life-giving discourses' (Dunlap 1999:137).

In the activity of bearing discourses, the narrative approach has assisted me to respectfully enter into dialogue with the fellow participants.

2.7.2 The narrative approach

The narrative approach to therapy guided me during the conversational journeys with each couple. Narrative therapists are interested in discovering, acknowledging and

deconstructing the beliefs, ideas and practices of the broader culture in which a person lives (Morgan 2000:45). Within the narrative approach, the emphasis is placed on cultural and religious stories (in this case of relationships/marriages). Narrative therapy acknowledges that the culture to which a person belongs, determines in part what life events have meaning and what life events are relatively meaningless (Freedman & Combs 1996:32). 'Culture, by its very nature, gives meaning to events and experiences' (Waldegrave 1990:15). Since people are formed by their communal and social contexts, pastoral counsellors need to question ethical and moral dilemmas. The narrative approach, within a post-modern discourse, regards truth as a web of discourses, whilst discourses are seen to be highly context-dependent (Graham 1996:29).

This is where Derrida's ideas of deconstruction can be helpful. Morgan (2000:50) explains: 'Deconstruction conversations help people to "unpack" the dominant stories and view them from a different perspective.' Thus, deconstruction conversations attempt to make people aware of how their stories were constructed and also invite them to see their stories from different perspectives/constructions (Freedman & Combs 1996:57). The ethical responsibility for me as counsellor and researcher was to assist in deconstructing/reconstructing the dominant discourses regarding relationships/marriages that marginalized or oppressed a couple and to use conversations to co-develop their preferred identities and relationship narratives. In support of this ethical responsibility to question discourses that marginalize or oppress people, Waldegrave (1990:5) argues that 'in choosing not to address these issues in therapy, therapists may inadvertently be replicating, maintaining, and even furthering, existing injustices'.

Some couples, however, do not experience their discursive position as being problematic, for example, the couple from the Jehovah's Witness background. They had negotiated equality and partnership in their relationship using their preferred view of this religious discourse. Therefore, during our conversational journey, the discussions were directed towards achieving 'thick descriptions' (White 1997:14) of their relationship knowledges. Lives are thickly described through engaging with a community of persons in the telling and re-telling of the preferred stories of a person's history and identity (White 1997:16).

Within a narrative approach, an ethical stance is taken by being transparent and accountable. Hence, I have attempted to position myself in such a way that I am transparent about my association with certain ideologies such as patriarchy, feminism and post-modernism in line with recommendations by Elliot (1998:51) and White (1997:203). Elliot (1998:52) recommends that after the therapist discloses his/her views, he/she should invite a discussion with his/her conversational partners in an attempt not to impose ideas onto clients. These discussions leave choice to the clients, whilst the counsellor assists them to explore their own position, its effects and the ideas and practices they prefer.

By taking an ethical position of accountability, a counsellor acknowledges the risk of reproducing power relations by being a member of a privileged group (Elliot 1998:52-53).

Accountability included acknowledgement of my context and the power afforded by my position. The importance of such self-reflexivity is part of feminist perspectives that emphasize both the situatedness of knowledge and the interrelatedness of the knower and what is known.

(Doehring 1999:102)

At the beginning of a conversational journey with each couple, I took on an ethical position of accountability and transparency so that the couples could understand the allegiances and loyalties that shaped my 'being' during this journey, acknowledging the assumption that 'pastoral theology is a value-laden construction that arises out of the various commitments we have as people of faith, scholars, and practitioners' (Doehring 1999:99).

My pastoral practice according to the narrative approach is about giving a voice to those who are marginalized due to their race, class or sex. It is about positioning myself where I constantly consider the effects of specific actions and therefore assume an ethical responsibility by means of questioning discourses and the accompanying societal practices that lead to the marginalization of specific people or relationships/marriages.

2.8 SUMMARY

According to social construction discourse, knowledge (including religious knowledge) is socially constructed, resulting in an acknowledgement that meaning is never fixed, but is continuously constructed or reconstructed over time. Meaning is always relative to the discourse in which it is positioned. Deconstruction is one way of challenging the notion of fixed meanings/realities. Although meanings/realities are socially constructed, they do have real effects. The power/knowledge positions of certain religious and cultural discourses could have an oppressive or abusive effect on people who find themselves in a more marginalized discursive position. Being concerned with ethical and just practices, those being marginalized must be invited to give voice to their experiences and to search for more just discursive practices. These ideas served as the compass which directed me during this research journey. I wanted to reflect with the couples on the cultural and religious discourses that co-constituted their relationships/marriages, allowing them to voice their experiences within these discourses and searching for preferred relationship narratives.

In Chapters Three and Four, I introduce a few religious and cultural discourses that have had a constitutive effect on the relationship narratives of three couples, before reflecting on the process as a whole in Chapter Five.

CHAPTER THREE

NARRATIVES OF HETEROSEXUAL COUPLES

3.1 AWARENESS OF CULTURAL AND RELIGIOUS DISCOURSES

In terms of social construction discourse, knowledge – in this case people's understanding of a relationship or marriage – is socially constructed. Relationship narratives are by implication co-constructed by various cultural discourses, including psychology, politics and theology (Botha 1998:197): 'Several cultural discourses that are related to our understanding of love and relationships have been reified into truths or have become institutionalised discourses that exert power over people.' If one agrees with Hare-Mustin (1994:21) that some discourses become dominant discourses, resulting in the marginalization of other discourses, it can be deduced that some relationships/marriages are positioned on the margins of society. Dominant relationship discourses could result in the marginalization of one individual within the relationship/marriage, or these discourses would disqualify marginal relationship discourses, resulting in the oppression of couples in those marginal relationship discourses. As a narrative therapist, I direct part of the conversation with the couples who consult me to a deconstruction of oppressive and abusive cultural and religious discourses regarding relationships/marriages. However, when a preferred relational narrative emerges within a conversation, I am challenged to invite a rich description of this preferred narrative into the conversation to constitute the relationship further.

In this chapter I introduce the relationship narratives of two heterosexual couples – a married couple who are Jehovah's Witnesses and an unmarried couple from the Dutch Reformed Church – and the constitutive effects of cultural and religious discourses on their relationship narratives. During this conversational journey, both couples expressed their own interpretations of biblical views of marriage. As a fellow traveller on this research journey, I also had to state my interpretation of biblical views of marriage, and that I am continuously searching for alternative interpretations to patriarchal discourses on marriage.

3.2 EXPLORING A BIBLICAL VIEW OF MARRIAGE

Biblical views regarding marriage in the Old and New Testament are explored briefly below. I invited the voices of feminist theologians into this exploration, attempting to weave an alternative interpretation to the dominant patriarchal discourses (interpretations) on marriage.

Genesis reveals a unique woman-man relationship in relation to God. Genesis 1:27 is a fundamental verse that claims that men and women are created in the image of God. This passage in Genesis also gives an account of God's vision of/for man and woman. Man and woman were created with the express intent that they would be a unit, and in this unit especially through sexuality, they would procreate (Dominian 1991:8-9). The second chapter of Genesis reflects the basic orientation of the couple towards each other, as the central pillar of God's plan for humankind. Dominian (1991:10) sums up: '[I]n God's plan for mankind there is a union between a man and a woman, who are of equal worth, which provides the fundamental relationship for the sexes, with which new life can start.'

Genesis 5:2 describe how God created man and woman and named them both together *adam*: 'This fact alone, that God names male and female together *adam* (that is, earthling or humankind), founds the equality of man and woman as human beings, whatever their distinctions in functions' (Lawler 1993:11). These texts indicate that man had found an equal. Her being his equal made it possible for them to marry, and, as Genesis 2:24 states, for them to become one body (Lawler 1993:11). Feminist theologians such as Isherwood and McEwan (1993:39) argue that selected verses in Scripture may be avoided in an attempt to reinforce a patriarchal view of marriage. Genesis carries two creation stories. The first account is found in Genesis 1:26-27 – this account imputes no inferiority to women and suggests equal creation under God. The second account, Genesis 2: 21-23, deals with the creation of man separately from the creation of woman. This account results in women's being viewed as inferior. Focusing on Genesis 1:26-27 'would have served no useful purpose for patriarchy' (Isherwood & McEwan 1993:39) and results in the selective use of Scripture to inform and sustain views regarding marriage.

The prophet Hosea also expressed views regarding marriage. He preached about the covenant relationship of Yahweh and Israel within the context of his own marriage to his wife, Gomer (Lawler 1993:12). Hosea speaks of the covenant love (Deuteronomy 6:5) but this love is not a love of interpersonal affection, but a love that is understood as loyalty, service and obedience. Hosea's love towards Gomer reflects the same continued faithfulness as Yahweh's faithfulness to his people. However, as discussed in Chapter Two, Hosea's image of the sacred marriage is criticised by feminist theologians, because it implies ownership of the female by the male. The different emphases that emerge in readings of Hosea demonstrate clearly the danger of exclusiveness and selectiveness of discourses, be they patriarchal or feminist.

The idea that marriage is a representative image of a mutually faithful covenant relationship is continued in the New Testament (Lawler 1993:14).

The New Testament contains Jesus' teachings regarding marriage. Jesus drew on the creation story to teach his views regarding marriage as well as women's position in marriage. In Mark 10:6-7 Jesus talks about male and female living together in partnership and it is clear that Jesus demonstrated a unique sensitivity to the problems of patriarchal repression. According to Post (2000:55-59), both Jesus and Paul reject hierarchy in marriage. Dominion (1991:17) claims that in the times of Jesus, women were considered to be subordinate to men and their role was confined to the home. Yet Jesus showed a completely different attitude towards women, placing women in a high profile. The actions of Jesus gave new hope to women (Isherwood & McEwan 1993:42), asking for equality within marriages.

Paul compares marriage to a union between the church and Christ (2 Corinthians 11:2; Ephesians 5). In Paul's teachings he emphasises that the agape (serving and loyal love) should be mutually manifested between husband and wife (Post 2000:59). Comparing marriage to the union between Christ and the church had several implications. Some readers use this as an injunction to see husbands as lords and masters of their wives. Lawler (1993:15) claims that such an attitude is un-Christian since it contradicts the Christian view of mutual obedience for both men and women; husbands and wives. I tend to agree – using the comparison of marriage to the union of Christ and the church to affirm husbands as the masters is a patriarchal interpretation of Scripture. Lawler (1993:16) elaborates on what the actual implication

for marriages may be if a marriage is compared to the union of Christ and the church. A Christian husband's headship over his wife should be in accordance with the image of Christ's leadership over the church: '*Diakonia*, service, is the Christ way of exercising authority' (Lawler 1993:16) - as Ephesians 5:25 claims, Christ gave himself up for the church. Thus the 'headship' of husbands requires husbands to serve their wives, to give themselves up for their wives. Headship therefore does not imply controlling, giving orders, making unreasonable demands and viewing another human being as inferior. Dreyer (1996:97), a feminist theologian; interprets the husband's role not as that of an authoritative figure exercising his authority, but as a sacrifice of himself to his wife as a way to express his love. This self-sacrificing love of the husband is the love that the wife 'submits' herself to.

Ephesians elaborates, asking husbands to love their wives and asking wives to fear their husbands. However, this fear is not the fear of a slave for a master; it is qualified as reverence for loving service. This love/reverence cannot be commanded by a tyrant and can only be won by a loving, serving husband (Lawler 1993:16). Other biblical texts support Ephesians' call to husbands to love their wives. The first reason is supported by a Genesis text that 'the two shall become one body'. 'Prior to marriage a man did not have this body, nor did a woman have this head' (Lawler 1993:17). This implies that marriage provides a gift for each partner and a union is formed, where to love each other is to love oneself. Flowing from this 'one-body' image is the phrase 'you shall love your neighbour as yourself' (Mark 12:31). Feminist theologians such as Ackermann (1990:89) regard this verse 'you shall love your neighbour as yourself' as the praxis of a right relationship. Such praxis is liberating and reflects the values of the commonwealth of God – justice, love, freedom and shalom (see also Section 2.6.1). The message found in Ephesians 5:21-32 is a radical message, considering that it was delivered in the patriarchal Hellenistic period. As stated in Section 1.4.2.1, in those times love did not form the basis of marriage and instructions regarding correct behaviour were often given to the subordinates (wives), not the masters (husband). Yet in these texts, the husband is ordered to love his wife. Within these texts the patriarchal structure stays unchanged – a woman must be submissive to her husband. However, the dynamics found within this structure are radically different – they are concerned with the woman's welfare also. There is no space for domination, because if the husband should try to dominate, he is failing to express and live Christ's love

(Dreyer 1996:99-100). Headship is connected to love. Headship in Christology does not imply domination but rather service, love and self-sacrifice (Dreyer 1996:100). Reinforcing this is the fact that Paul in 1 Corinthians 7 appears to assume an equal relationship between husband and wife.

Sections 3.3 and 3.4 discuss the journeys of discovery into the relationship narratives of a couple who are Jehovah's Witnesses and a couple from the Dutch Reformed Church.

3.3 JOURNEY WITH A COUPLE FROM THE JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES TRADITION

Claire and John have been married for nineteen years. Both Claire and John, had been brought up according to the Jehovah's Witnesses' religious tradition, and they had decided to invest, as a couple, their time and energy in spreading the 'good news of God'. As Jehovah's Witnesses they take pride in being scholars of the Bible and see the Bible as a guideline in all aspects of life. They follow a confessional approach to religion.

In the confessional approach the gospel is understood in accordance with different doctrines (Pieterse 1993:101). A confessional approach to practical theology finds objective truths in Scripture and these objective truths are taken to the current context and situation (Pieterse 1993:58). Within a confessional approach, Scripture is studied, and the insights about what the world should look like are brought to the world, attempting to bring practice into line with the Bible (Wolfaardt 1992:7). Scripture is thus perceived to be the only source of knowledge and norm for theology (Burger 1991:59).

I would like to distinguish between the confessional approach to practical theology and a contextual practical theology. As was explained in Chapter Two, a person never does theology from a position of theological neutrality. Contextual practical theology requires (which I adhere to) us to enter a specific context with a faith-commitment (Cochrane et al 1991:15). Some criticise contextual theology as being insufficiently substantiated biblically. However, contextual practical theology is grounded on a faith commitment that is always under 'the authority and critique of the gospel' (Cochrane

et al 1991:16). A faith commitment is the point where we are not open for further negotiation; for example, I entered this research journey with a faith commitment that is grounded in the values of the commonwealth of God. If these values are not present, I accept an ethical responsibility to question beliefs and practices that counteract these values.

Jehovah's Witnesses follow a confessional approach, experiencing the Bible as the only true source of knowledge. Instead of arguing whether a confessional approach or a contextual approach is preferable, I was concerned, during this research journey, with how this confessional approach constituted the lives and relationships of people such as Claire and John.

During our conversational journey we looked at three prominent themes. These were Jehovah's Witnesses' religious view of marriage, especially gender expectations within a marriage, the symbolic capacity of marriage and viewing marriage as a covenant.

3.3.1 Interpreting biblical views

During the conversations with Claire and John, we spoke about how people or institutions abuse the message in the Bible, for example, by selectively reading the Bible in order to justify patriarchy. However, they felt that being scholars of the Bible prevented them from making selective interpretations. Understanding and piecing the whole biblical message together, Claire and John, had created a marriage where both partners feel equally important, cared and loved for.

After each conversation, I wrote them a therapeutic letter (Epston 1994). Claire and John reported that they experienced these letters as an invitation to respond. They used these letters to participate in a very active way. The letters motivated them to find reading material in their own library regarding Jehovah's Witnesses' understanding of marriage. This reading material became a rich source of information that I was able to incorporate within the research report.

The following extract from a letter summarising the discussion we had engaged in:

For you, as Jehovah's Witnesses, 'the Bible is your source of guidance and criteria' and in order to achieve a contented, happy life, the 'application' of

the words of wisdom found in the Bible is 'an absolute necessity'. As Jehovah's Witnesses, it is expected of you 'to become students of the Bible – with a good knowledge of the Bible, misinterpretations of the message found in the Bible is impossible'. During our conversation we spoke about how certain people abuse the messages in the Bible in order to justify a certain lifestyle or attitude. You told me that an example of this would be the verse in 1 Cor 11:3 where the man is seen as the head of the family. The abuse of this verse is seen in marriages where the husband becomes a dictator expecting submissiveness from the wife. You claimed that the abuse of a verse only happens if a verse is read in isolation to the rest of the texts found in the Bible. Thus looking for a guideline regarding marriages, it is necessary to be aware of the whole biblical understanding of marriages – all the texts that talk about marriage. You have realised that with a good knowledge of the Bible a verse such as 'the husband as head of the family' is qualified in other verses in the Bible, for example in Ephesians 5:25 where husbands are asked to love their wives just as Christ loved the congregation. For you, this verse asks couples to become aware of Christ's behaviour and attitudes and incorporate these behaviours and attitudes into the marriage. Claire, you explained how you understood Christ to be 'the One who gave His life to His people (self-sacrificing love) and who never suppressed His people'. For you, this asks of the husband to show self-sacrificing love and to treat his wife as an equal deserving of respect, not suppression.

John, you used the metaphor of a puzzle to depict your relationship. I am wondering whether I understood this metaphor. There is a biblical view of what a marriage should look like – this view can be compared to a complete puzzle. Yet each piece of the puzzle represents a view/insight regarding marriages. These puzzle pieces are scattered throughout the Bible. In order to complete the puzzle, all the pieces must be found. Thus, in order to have a complete view of the marriage, the whole Bible must be studied – selective use of the Bible will result in a puzzle that is incomplete / a marriage that is incomplete, usually resulting in the marginalization of one partner in this relationship. Have I understood correctly what you have meant with the metaphor of the puzzle?

The criticism by feminist theologians of the prophet Hosea's analogy of marriage is that Hosea's view of marriage allows a woman/wife to be seen as a husband's property/possession and silences the voice of the wife. They claim that this analogy supports a patriarchal view of marriage. A statement by Post (2000:34) supports Claire and John's understanding of marriage and the dangers of selectively abusing texts in the Bible. Post (2000:34) provides the following quote made by Browning:

‘although Christianity has sometimes supported unjust family practices, its overall direction has been toward a love ethic of equal regard between husband and wife.’ Supporting a feminist view of equality within marriage, Tamar Frankl (quoted in Post 2000:53) also points out ‘that “the seeds of balance between sexes” may still be found in the Hebrew Bible as a whole’.

3.3.1.1 *Male headship?*

A prominent biblical concept that Claire, John and I discussed was the idea of male headship over the family. Claire and John quoted Ephesians 5:22-25, 28 and 29 as being relevant to the discussion of male headship. The following is a brief extract from a letter I wrote to them after our discussion on male headship, elaborating on their own unique implementation of headship in their marriage:

Both of you agreed that the husband should be ‘the head of the family’, since this is also in accordance with the biblical view of marriage. Yet both of you also want to qualify what is meant by the idea of the man being the head of the family. You warned of the dangers of misinterpreting this, in assuming ‘male dominance or dictatorship over women’. Within your Jehovah’s Witnesses’ tradition, men are discouraged from viewing women as inferior to men, resulting in the expectation that women should be submissive.

True to your belief system, and also currently very alive within your relationship, is the idea of ‘partnership’. You experience the idea that the man as head of the family is a loving arrangement. Within your relationship, this means that John needs to take care of Claire’s needs. Yet the only way that John will be able to be aware of Claire’s needs is by asking and hearing what her needs are. John, you explained how easy it is to misinterpret the idea that the man is the head of the family. You told me about how you thought that as the head, you should budget and manage the financial matters. Your intentions were good, but unfortunately you did not ask Claire’s opinion regarding the finances. This resulted in Claire’s needs being excluded from the budget. Yet Claire knew she had a right to voice her unmet needs and this resulted in your adjusting and consulting Claire in every decision that you make. [This issue between them had resulted in their request for therapy in the first instance.]

Watchtower and *Awake!* are both magazines written and distributed by Jehovah’s Witnesses. These publications elaborate on the concept of marriage and roles and expectations within marriage. Jehovah’s Witnesses have evolved an interpretation of

biblical views regarding marriage and encourage other witnesses to follow this view. Jehovah's Witnesses acknowledge that the notion of 'headship' has often allowed men to abuse their husbandly authority and dominate their wives. This attitude is opposed: 'Headship in the family is never established by violence, whether physical, psychological, or verbal' (*Awake!* 1992:16). Jehovah's Witnesses claim that Paul urged Christian husbands not to become tyrants controlling every detail of their wives' existence. According to the *Watchtower* (1994:10-15) Jesus Christ, the man, was never harsh or domineering, but treated his followers with honour and respect, saying 'Come to me all you who are toiling and loaded down, and I will refresh you. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am mild-tempered and lowly in heart' (Matthew 11:28-29). Jesus' being lowly at heart has implications for husbands: a husband needs to find a balance in headship, allowing himself to hear suggestions and criticisms from his wife without feeling threatened. Jesus' 'humility was not on the surface, only to disappear when someone differed with him' (*Watchtower* 1983:17-22). Claire and John have also negotiated and introduced this 'lowly at heart' concept into their own relationship – as discussed in a letter written to them:

This brings me to another aspect of your relationship. Each partner is viewed as an equal, resulting in 'respecting each other's views and opinions'. You said you put this into practice when Claire took up her right to express her feelings regarding John and his family, and John respected this. In your religious teachings, men are expected to listen to their wives in an attempt to prevent the men from 'becoming the dictators in their relationships'. According to your religion, this view is also supported in the Scripture – Gen 21:8, where God told the man (Abraham) to listen to his wife (Sarah).

Furthermore, a husband within a Jehovah's Witnesses' tradition is encouraged to imitate Jesus' self-sacrificing love. However, taking care of only material needs is not seen as sufficient. Jesus' took care of the spiritual and the emotional needs of his disciples in addition to their physical ones. Thus, self-sacrificing love asks of a husband to take care of his wife's material, emotional and physical needs (*Watchtower* 1983:17-22). 'While Jehovah set husbands as the head of the household, he does not subscribe to men mistreating women. Instead, he directs that the man with knowledge of the woman, should extend care and honor to her' (*Awake!* 1994:21).

Women's subjection is also qualified within the Jehovah's Witnesses' tradition. 'Subjection does not imply dictatorship' (*Awake!* 1992:15). According to the *Watchtower* (1991b:19-21), God requires a wife to respect the position that her husband holds as head of the family. But if the husband desires to enjoy her respect for him as a person, he has to earn that respect by never oppressing her and by showing self-sacrificing love. However, a husband's authority over his wife is not total. Jehovah does not require a wife to be blindly submissive to her husband. This principle is illustrated in 1 Samuel 25:2-42, in the narrative of Abigail and her wealthy husband. Her husband took a bad course of action and had bad intentions and Abigail refused to follow her husband in this course. In the end, Abigail's actions were richly blessed by Jehovah (*Watchtower* 1991a:8-13). Jehovah's Witnesses thus feel that if a husband earnestly tries to follow Jesus' example, a wife will be happy to be subject to him in everything because she will know that he takes her best interest to heart (*Watchtower* 1991b:19-21). Subjection, furthermore, does not imply slavery. God wanted women to be men's 'complement/counterpart', even asking in Malachi 2:14 that men view women as men's partners (*Watchtower* 1994:10-15). Jehovah's Witnesses traditionally believe that sin distorted women's role. Selfish men who abusively domineer their wives and therefore abuse their rightful headship are a reflection of humanity's sinful condition (*Watchtower* 1991a:8-13). God did not intend for women to be inferior (subjects) to men.

3.3.1.2 *Women – the weaker vessel?*

Another prominent concept Claire, John and I discussed is the biblical notion of the woman as the weaker vessel (1 Peter 3:7). Jehovah's Witnesses interpret this verse to mean that Peter was referring not to spiritual and emotional, but to physical traits. Women's bone and muscle structure is formed in such a manner that women have less physical strength than men. However, Jehovah's Witnesses argue that there is no indication that Peter was making any comparison of moral, spiritual or mental strength. The Bible describes the strong moral character, the endurance and the discernment of women who followed God's way – women such as Sarah, Deborah, Ruth and Esther, to name but a few. Nonetheless, some misinterpret this reference to women as 'weaker', assuming that women are lesser persons. Jehovah's Witnesses claim that Peter used the term 'weaker vessel' not to denigrate women but to foster

respect (*Watchtower* 1994:19-20). Women in this religious tradition are acknowledged for their inner moral strength. The inner moral strength of women is reflected in a diary entry made by Hannah Levy-Haas, a Jewish inmate of the Ravensbruck Nazi concentration camp: 'One thing here upsets me terribly, and that is to see that the men are far weaker and far less able to stand up to hardship than the women – physically and often morally as well. Unable to control themselves, they display such a lack of moral fibre that one cannot but be sorry for them' (*Awake!* 1992:15-17).

'You husbands, continue dwelling in like manner with them according to knowledge' – another statement found in 1 Peter 3:7, is interpreted by Jehovah's Witnesses as asking husbands to become aware of their wives' feelings, strengths, limitations, likes and dislikes in order for husbands to respect their wives' needs and experiences (*Awake!* 1994:19-21). The following extract from a letter written to Claire and John explores their ideas regarding partnership as they interpret their relationship through their readings of Scripture:

For you, partnership also excludes the possibility of the wife 'being the husband's slave'. Here you especially focused on domestic responsibilities. Within your relationship these responsibilities are shared. Both of you have a full time working position and John, you feel that it is unfair to expect Claire to take sole responsibility for the domestic duties and you claimed that a man's place is also 'in the kitchen'. Here you also find resonance with the biblical notion that the woman is the weaker vessel. Your interpretation of this means that she cannot take on the domestic responsibility because physically she is weaker than the man. Therefore it asks for shared responsibility, especially if the wife also has a full time job.

Would you say that you have interpreted Scripture in a manner that allowed this partnership (mutuality and equality) to be alive within your marriage? What was it in you, which made these religious ideas attract you? Looking at your own marriage, is there anything that the two of you have brought to these religious ideas to change, enhance or enrich them?

3.3.2 The symbolic capacity of marriage

Within traditional marriage rites, there is consistent reference to marriage as 'signifying unto us the mystical union which exists between Christ and his Church' (Howe 1992:40). This points to a deeper symbolic dimension of marriage – more is

involved in the marriage than the fulfilment of the couple. Intimacy and mutual happiness goes beyond the marital relationship, extending into inviting others to experience the reality of love's transforming power in all of life (Howe 1992:40).

Howe (1992:40) claims that traditionally, marriage has borne society's hopes for the continuity of the generations and stability of the social order. Pauline theology, correlating with this traditional view, claimed that sexual intercourse expresses and arouses lust, binding human beings to the flesh when they should actually be more concerned with preparing themselves for the next life, transcending this corrupt physical nature. Paul acknowledged that people cannot control this sexual urge and in order to prevent licentiousness he condoned sexual intercourse only in the married situation. Marriage controls these urges, allowing for more time and attention to be given to preparing for the next life. Roman Catholicism remains largely governed by this notion. Within the Protestant tradition, the symbolic dimension of marriage consists of viewing marriage as a vehicle to express God's grace (Howe 1992:32, 40).

Prior to their marriage, Claire and John had decided not to have children. Knowing that both of their commitments lie with doing community work as Jehovah's Witnesses, they realised that this commitment would be unfair towards children. Doing community work requires a specific lifestyle including a lot of travelling to foreign countries (especially in Africa) and doing voluntary work with no salary. This commitment to a childless marriage has challenged dominant cultural and religious discourses regarding marriage and family. In society today, the myth circulates that children will enhance (and not complicate) a marriage relationship. Howe (1992:29-30), attempting to understand why this myth receives so much support, asks: 'Must this not be so if the chief end of marriage is indeed "to be fruitful and multiply"?'

Howe (1992:41) suggests that another symbolic dimension of marriage is the task of cultivating the fruits of gracious love within the marriage that subsequently leads to greater loving kindness towards others. 'The "fruits" of marriage are not so much children, therefore, but a quality of character by which a couple share themselves for others' welfare' (Howe 1992:41). Could the symbolic capacity of marriage thus be the reaching out to others – sustained by the couple's love for each other? This is a question I asked Claire and John, looking at their commitment to a childless marriage and their willingness to give of self to persons other than their own children, in wider

community. Our exploration of this idea is reflected in the following extract from a letter I wrote to them after our discussion:

You told me that according to your faith tradition, the goal of a marriage is not just procreation. This implies that sex, within your marriage, enables your relationship to develop into deeper, more intimate levels deepening your love for each other. Could it be possible that this love that you have for each other reflects God's gracious love to others? Have you ever considered whether your love for each other affects other people to such an extent that they may have a glimpse of the nearness and supportiveness of God? Thinking of your lifestyle and your commitment to be of service to your community – would you say that your love sustains the two of you in such a manner that you can share yourselves for others' welfare? What does this sharing of yourself with the rest of the world mean to you? Could this sharing reflect God's ever reaching out lovingly to all beings? Does this resonate with specific religious ideas that you have chosen and what do these ideas say about the values that you, as a couple, choose and stand for?

Claire and John's commitment to do community work, but to view their marriage relationship as a higher priority, resonates with Post's (2000:29) ideas of the prophetic family. The prophetic family follows Jesus' example in responding morally to the needs of its neighbours. Jesus' example asks us to love as if we were in a universal family of siblings under God (Post 2000:62). The view of a prophetic family correlates with Luther's theology of marriage, where a couple loves, cares and prays for everyone and is not sealed off from wider spheres of agape (Post 2000:77). Exploring a commitment to community work, Post (2000:177) asks the following question: 'How does he or she, as a moral agent, balance the powerful responsibilities of family life with important commitments to the Christian ideal of universal agape?' This question reminded me of Claire and John's ideas regarding biblical views that close off all doors to equal partnership, as summarised in the following extract of a letter written to Claire and John:

In response to my question whether there are biblical views that close off all doors to equal partnership, you said that the possibility does exist that religious ideas could result in anti-partnership behaviour. According to you, the Bible also asks of individuals to invest energy and time in community work. Some individuals interpret this action to be of such importance that no time and energy is left for building and sustaining the marriage relationship. For you, this reflects anti-partnership behaviour, since 'the other partner is

left with all the responsibilities and could also feel very neglected within the marriage'. However, you feel that such anti-partnership behaviour contradicts the Jehovah's Witnesses' religious tradition. Within your religion, you are expected to see marriage as the primary God-given responsibility, and thereafter community work. This makes me wonder about your own marriage.

Browning (quoted in Post 2000:195) elaborated on the order of love, by saying that 'equal regard does not mean that we should sacrifice the needs of our own children or spouse in an effort ourselves to meet immediately and directly the needs of all other children and all other spouses'. Thus it is reasonable first to meet the genuine needs of those closest to us and for whom we are particularly responsible (Post 2000:185).

The questions asked in the following extract of a letter written to them, invited these 'rich descriptions' of their relationship:

What does it mean to both of you, realising that your marriage sustains you to give and to support your fellow humans? You said that the message found in the Bible is 'that of being righteous, just, clean, good and unselfish'. And when I asked what it was about you that made these ideas attractive to you, you said that both of you are believers in that which is righteous, just, clean, good and unselfish. Believing in this has enabled you to create a marriage where mutuality and equality are present. I wonder whether your belief in the righteous, just, clean, good and unselfish has enabled you to share yourselves for other's welfare?

Claire and John have implemented their own order of love. They prioritise loving and caring for each other. This love found in their marriage sustains them in such a manner that they can share themselves for other's welfare. They concluded that if this love for each other was not present and that if mutuality and equality, which made their relationship strong and secure, were absent, there would be no energy left to support and nurture others.

The symbolic capacity of Claire and John's marriage has enabled them to become a prophetic family, following a prophetic Mosaic way of life.

3.3.3 Marriage as covenant

Marriage as sacrament and marriage as covenant are two biblical views regarding marriage.

Before the eleventh century, there was no such thing as a Christian wedding ceremony. There were also no uniform ecclesiastical regulations regarding marriage during the early centuries of Christianity. Only in the twelfth century did marriage come to be regarded as a sacrament in the same sense as baptism and the other official sacraments (Martos 1993:31). Roman Catholic Christians today still view marriage as a sacrament: 'Just as baptism both initiates a person into the kingdom of God and symbolizes the sinless way that life in the kingdom should be lived, so marriage unites and consecrates two persons in fidelity to each other and symbolizes the love and respect that married people should always have for each other' (Martos 1993:41). The Roman Catholic theology of marriage viewed marriage as a sacrament instituted by Christ, where two legally competent persons become permanently united. The *sacramentum* was the giving of consent, where both partners agreed to the marriage. The *sacramentum et res* was the marriage contract, which symbolised the permanent union between Christ and the church. The *res* was the grace that the couple received to be faithful to each other and to fulfill their duties as parents (Martos 1993:61).

During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, a dispute developed between Catholic ecclesiastical authorities and Catholic civil authorities over the marriage contracts of Catholics. The civil authorities insisted on the separability and distinction of contract from sacrament in marriage. Since contracts are a concern of the state, marriage contracts had to fall under state jurisdiction. The ecclesiastical authorities insisted on the inseparability of the contract and sacrament, claiming that the sacrament is the contract elevated to the status of a grace-giving instrument. Since sacraments are the concern of the church, this would mean that the marriage contract falls under ecclesiastical jurisdiction (Mackin 1987:37). Therefore, viewing the marriage as sacrament assigned certain power relations to the church. (The matter is unresolved, and in most European countries, couples have to undergo a civil ceremony. The religious ceremony is optional in legal terms. In South Africa, a historically predominant Protestant country, the civil authority may be delegated to religious authorities if a couple chooses a church wedding.)

There are complex ambiguities within churches' teachings regarding the view of marriage as sacrament. Paul made it clear that marriage was a *remedium*/escape from human lustful desire. However, marriage also signifies the union between Christ and the church: 'The church has never resolved the tension between the *remedium* with its sexual pessimism and the *sacramentum* which, at least in contemporary accounts, sees marital intimacy as a *locus* for the experience of the love of God' (Thatcher 1998:74).

Marriage can also be viewed in the Protestant language of covenant. A debate between Protestant and Roman Catholic Christians developed over whether marriage is a sacrament. Martos (1993:56) elaborates: 'According to Martin Luther, since marriage existed since the beginning of the world, "there is no reason why it should be called a sacrament of the new land and the sole property of the church"' (Babylonian Captivity of the Church 5). Luther therefore could not understand why there should be reason to believe that people received any special grace from God just because they were married. Luther viewed marriage as a natural and social institution, which fell under natural and civil law and not church law. The role of the clergy then had to be to advise and counsel Christians about marriage, not to pass laws and judge marriage cases (Martos 1993:56-57). Although Luther rejected the notion of marriage as sacrament, he still deeply encouraged the concept of the permanence of the marital bond (Post 2000:78). The Protestant view of marriage as covenant, contends that 'even if marriage is rightfully controlled by the state, it is nevertheless a divinely ordered state that is obligated to uphold in law and policy the design of God' (Post 2000:102).

The Old Testament sets out the Israelite notion of their special relationship with God, the idea of covenant. The prophet Hosea preached about the covenant relationship between Yahweh and Israel and invited people to view marriage within the same covenant terms. Hosea spoke of covenant love, which was not a love of interpersonal affection but a love understood as loyalty, service and obedience. The meaning of marriage was derived from the divine covenant, which required fidelity, faithfulness and permanence (thus no dissolution of the covenant, no matter what the provocation) (see Lawler 1993:12-14).

When marriage is viewed as a covenant, the relationship within the marriage should be framed in accordance with the covenantal love of God. God's covenantal love is

reflected by a promise of grace, intimacy and empowerment. For humans living in a world where conflict and suffering is a familiar phenomenon, God created a covenant – a space for love and freedom. This implies that marriage should be a space governed by the concepts of love and freedom (Müller 1994:22). The covenant is not only between the husband and wife, but also between the couple and God. The notion of a covenant implies something binding – in both the good and bad times – and therefore this covenant is negotiated to be permanent. The blessing of God seals the marriage (Hunter 1990:677-678).

‘The contemporary problem with understanding Christian marriage as a human covenant that is a sign of the divine covenant, is that a divine-human covenant is necessarily an asymmetrical relationship’ (Thatcher 1998:85). The covenant symbolism invites a power and gender imbalance, since it could be interpreted as meaning that the husband represents the divine whilst the wife represents the human in the divine-human covenant. Hosea’s comparison of marriage to Yahweh’s union to Israel, also opens up possible interpretations resulting in power and gender imbalances. According to Thatcher (1998:85) there is a way of dealing with gender imbalance: ‘The marriage covenant becomes a sign of God’s covenant when it symbolizes God’s love for both of them, and the way they love each other is the way God loves *them both*.’ Post (2000:51) also claims that the sacred covenant should be honoured by permanence, yet feels that such an absolute of permanence is a frightening prospect if a marriage is guided by patriarchy.

Claire and John’s own view regarding their marriage was invited into our discussion, as can be seen in the following extract from a letter I wrote to them:

I am aware that certain Christian traditions have different views on marriage. The two prominent views that have caught my attention are whether marriage is considered as a covenant or whether marriage is viewed as a sacrament. This makes me curious about how your specific religious tradition views the marriage. Does it view marriage as a covenant or sacrament and what is understood by that? Is this the type of stance that you would like to subscribe to or would you like to view your own marriage differently? Is there perhaps a metaphor that could sufficiently describe your view of your marriage?

Both Claire and John chose to view their marriage as a covenant and the following extract from the subsequent letter provides a summary regarding their view:

During our conversation, you told me that you view marriage 'as a holy institution between the two partners as well as between the partners and God'. Therefore you see marriage as a covenant – 'a sacred agreement, asking for loyalty and commitment'. For you, this commitment implies that you can only be 'divorced from each other through death or infidelity'. Yet realising that there are marriage relationships where physical and emotional abuse are present and therefore endangering the well-being of the individual, separation from each other is acceptable. This separation does not imply divorce – this to you means, 'that you are not allowed to get married again'. Both of you feel comfortable in viewing your own marriage as a covenant.

3.3.4 Concluding the journey

My conversational journey with Claire and John introduced me to a confessional approach (see Pieterse 1993; Burger 1991; Wolfaardt 1992) to marriage. Within this confessional approach to marriage, both husband and wife felt and lived the positive effects of married life. We had no need to deconstruct any of their traditional ideas regarding marriage, but invited conversational ideas regarding the protection of their egalitarian relationship against any future anti-partnership ideas, attempting to invite an even richer description of their marriage narrative. In the following extract of a letter written to them, questions were asked to explore a rich description of their marriage narrative:

You told me that in your faith community one man was reprimanded for not assisting his wife with domestic duties. This made me wonder whether the possibility exists, within marriages, that certain biblical views are used in such a manner that it closes off all doors to equal partnership? What steps have the two of you taken to assure that your relationship reflects a pro-partnership attitude? Would you say that in the years that you have been married, there ever was a time that unwelcome, anti-partnership religious ideas tried to take control of your life? And what religious ideas have you created and used to resist this happening? I am left wondering about the first time we met for counselling. What steps took place before you contacted me? Did these steps reflect a commitment to the creation or the re-negotiation of an equal partnership? Do you feel that it is necessary to negotiate future steps that can be taken if any unwelcome ideas or practices try to jeopardize your relationship? What would these steps be?

Claire and John have negotiated an egalitarian relationship where Claire has the freedom and right to voice her dissatisfaction with certain anti-partnership ideas. In

concluding this journey I was left wondering how much the struggles and victories of the world-wide feminist discourse have contributed indirectly to Claire's sense of entitlement to voice her needs. How much of feminist discourse has indirectly supported Claire in her opposition to anti-partnership ideas? As Jehovah's Witnesses, Claire and John avoid taking an overt political stance and therefore they never mentioned their position regarding the feminist movement. However, I wonder how many religious couples have used the feminist/womanist calls for equality as an encouragement to renegotiate patriarchal discourses regarding marriage into egalitarian, pro-partnership relationship discourses? The feminist/womanist demand for equality has been present for many years and I wondered whether the presence of feminist discourses has entered the centre of dominant relationship/marriage discourses. Could it then be argued that women such as Claire stand on the shoulders of feminists/womanists who have paved the way to assert rights and equalities?

There is another side to the argument. Would feminists perceive Claire to be someone who needs to be made more aware of what women's voices are asking for? This question introduced an ethical challenge for me. Although Claire and John's understanding of male headship, for example, might be interpreted by some feminists as keeping the door open for the oppression of women, Claire's understanding of male headship resonates with her preferred reality. If this is Claire's preferred reality, to what extent do feminists have the right to question Claire's preferred reality? From a power/knowledge position (Foucault), if feminist theologians had to question Claire's preferred reality, would they not discredit Claire's experiences? Should feminists continue to struggle to construct one dominant discourse regarding women and marriage? Or should a gap be left for alternative stories of other realities preferred by women in their relationships/marriages?

My conversations with Claire and John were complemented by and contradicted with my conversations with a couple from the Dutch Reformed Church. Unlike Claire and John this couple struggled with dominant religious discourses, and deconstructive conversations regarding these traditional religious discourses attempted to invite alternative discursive constructions regarding their relationship.

3.4 A CONVERSATIONAL JOURNEY WITH A COUPLE FROM THE DUTCH REFORMED CHURCH

Susan and Jack have been in a relationship for three years and are currently engaged to get married in January 2002. Disagreements and fights began to control the relationship between Susan and her mother, resulting in Susan's decision to move out of home. She decided to move in with Jack, as his presence provided a safe haven for her. Although deciding to live together provided an emotional and financial sense of security, both were challenged by a set of religious discourses. Being deeply religious, they wanted to live their life the Christian way. However, they had difficulty believing that they were living a Christian life as their lifestyle appear to conflict with religious discourses that claim that living together and having sex before marriage is sinful. Susan and Jack internalised these dominant religious discourses, with the result that they started to blame themselves for living a sinful life. Internalising these dominant religious discourses silenced their local knowledge (Foucault 1980:85) of a life-giving, nurturing relationship narrative. These dominant religious discourses gave rise to guilt, shame and arguments in Susan and Jack's relationship. They suffered the effects of the knowledges circulating within the dominant discourses of their own faith tradition.

Part of our conversational journey was thus to give a voice to the subjugated knowledge (Foucault 1980:82) about Susan and Jack's relationship in an attempt to deconstruct dominant religious discourses and invite a relationship-fulfilling discourse into the conversation. Specific themes within their relationship were explored, namely living together and having sex before marriage and the social construction of their relationship.

3.4.1 The passage into marriage

Studies on sexual behaviour in Western society have confirmed that virginity before marriage is no longer an operative norm. Approximately 70 to 80 percent of the male population and well over half of the female population in the United States are not virgins when they get married (Howe 1992:34). The phenomenon of sexual intercourse before marriage does not rule out the possibility that some couples have

intercourse in the context of a permanent relationship to which they have committed themselves. For many people, sexual intercourse functions as a sign of a yearning for intimacy at an emotional and not merely a physical level (Howe 1992:34-35).

Whitehead and Whitehead (1993:136) argue that marriage should be viewed as a passage – a transition that takes time and is composed of different stages, each stage with its own tasks and challenges. The passage of marriage begins with a decision to marry or a commitment towards each other and the relationship. Historically this entry into the passage of marriage was the betrothal (Whitehead & Whitehead 1993:137).

The transition from pre-modern times (the notion of betrothal) into modernity (with insistence on legal marriage) reflects the struggle for power of the bureaucratic state. ‘The Hardwicke Act [1754] required registration of all marriages, and set up a bureaucratic apparatus for doing so. The creeping extension of the bureaucratic state to encompass the entry into marriage is characteristic of the apparatus of modernity. Uniformity was imposed and policed. Betrothal no longer had any legal force’ (Thatcher 1998:78). This power-struggle in terms of the sexual politics of the state from the mid-eighteenth century manipulated people into a legalistic dominant marriage discourse. So, for example, welfare legislation was revised in order to discriminate against couples (particularly parents) who were not legally married. Modernity introduced the ‘Era of Mandatory Marriage’ (Thatcher 1998:79). However, in the current post-modern era marginalized belief-structures regarding relationships and marriages are slowly but surely again being provided of an arena where oppressive legalistic dominant discourses can be challenged. It is increasingly becoming apparent that the stages of entry into marriage since the early 1990’s present remarkable parallels with betrothal practices in pre-modern England, for example. Thatcher (1998:80) makes a plea for churches to explore such parallels: ‘A reacquaintance with premodern modes of entry into marriage enables the churches to re-evaluate the ever more popular practice of cohabitation. There is however little sign of this happening.’

‘Since the institution of marriage and the theology of marriage share an identical social history, it will be necessary to lift the veil of present marriage practice in order to enter an earlier, premodern world where the entry into marriage was very much less

formal and regulated' (Thatcher 1998:76). In response to this plea, in conversations with Susan and Jack, I attempted to 'lift the veil of present marriage practice', by deconstructing dominant ideas regarding relationships and marriages, to provide them with alternatives in viewing their current situation and to free them from the oppressive effects of a legalistic dominant religious discourse. In the following extract of a letter to Susan and Jack, there is an attempt to deconstruct these dominant ideas:

During our conversation we played with the idea that there can be a wide range of interpretations for a given situation or concept. I wonder if you would consider the interpretation that living together and having sex before marriage is sinful and wrong, as one dominant interpretation/view of relationships within our time. I was wondering what we could do with other interpretations regarding relationships – interpretations that were made during different time periods and by different Christian theologians.

I was wondering if you would join me on a journey all the way back to the twelfth century. During the twelfth century, the Western Church developed a two-stage theory of marriage, namely initiation and completion. The exchange of consent was the first stage and sexual intercourse was the consummation. Yet consent could be given either in the present or the future tense. Consent in the present tense was marriage, whilst consent in the future tense was betrothal. It is important to realise that there was a difference between marriage and betrothal. Let me give you a description of betrothal. Betrothal was the recognised shift in a relationship – moving from a friendship into a lovers' relationship. This shift consequently allowed a couple to be sexually and socially intimate. Furthermore, within the betrothal, time and space was given for each person to explore her/his own faults and incompatibilities as well as the other person's. This is because usually in the early phases of courtship, these faults and incompatibilities are inhibited. It was thought that the effect would be disastrous if a couple committed themselves to the unbreakable ties of the marriage, without being aware of each other's faults and incompatibilities. Yet as times changed, new laws and regulations developed and this gave rise to the predominance of legal marriages – this required the registration of all marriages and since the practice of betrothal could not be registered as a marriage, it was abandoned.

Now let's come back to the present time. If I look around and listen to stories, I have realised that more and more couples choose to live together before getting married. The more I examine current relationships, the more similar it seems to twelfth century betrothal. I ask myself whether betrothal is making a reappearance. I am wondering now about your relationship. Are you getting

to know each other on a deeper, more intimate emotional and sexual level? Does getting to know each other more intimately reassure you about the commitment you made to each other by getting engaged? Does this time period, where you are living with each other, help you to enter the lifelong binding commitment of marriage, which is sealed by God's presence? Could you perhaps view this period as working for a guarantee to God and yourselves that once you are married, there will be no considerations of ending of the union between the two of you?

Relationship/marriage practices found in pre-modern times can serve to deconstruct the dominant religious discourse of our time that claims: "The beginning of marriage is identified with the wedding ceremony, sexual intercourse beforehand "constitutes a grave sin"" (Thatcher 1998:80).

Some religious institutions are starting to side with those marginalized by the dominant discourses. The Report of a Church of England Working Party of the Board for Social Responsibility, *Something to Celebrate*, is an example of different views being taken and an attempt to deconstruct these dominant religious discourses (Thatcher 1998:80). This view was introduced in a letter written to Susan and Jack:

During 1995 a contradictory view was taken in the Report of a Church of England Working Party of the Board for Social Responsibility – a view that contradicted the dominant view that marriage as sacrament can only be entered (sexual activity and living together) after solemnisation in church. This report claimed the following: 'The wisest and most practical way forward...may be for Christians both to hold fast to the centrality of marriage and at the same time to accept that cohabitation is, for many people, a step along the way towards that fuller and more complete commitment.'

I think it is important to mention that in this report not all forms of cohabitation are condoned. According to this report, cohabitation is condoned, and should therefore be morally recognised, when the couple is exclusively committed to each other and live according to the principle of proportion (that is, the more intimate the couple is, the greater the commitment should be) and the couple use contraceptives. Would you value your relationship as a commitment reflecting the principle of proportion? What does this mean to you? Does this help you to challenge guilt feelings?

Here I reverted to Whitehead and Whitehead's (1993:137) idea regarding the passage into marriage and their view that the entry-point into this passage is reciprocal consent

and commitment towards the relationship. This first phase could be called the engagement (or what used to be a betrothal). Yet a lot of ambivalence arises regarding how 'engaged' we are or should be, since we enter into a serious but partial commitment. 'Religious people, sometimes apprehensive that such a partial commitment will involve sexual and genital engagement, have often argued against the seriousness of this stage of the relationship' (Whitehead & Whitehead 1993:137). Whitehead and Whitehead (1993:137-138) view this engagement phase as the period where a couple can explore levels of emotional and physical intimacy through self-disclosure – not just a greater openness regarding each other's bodies but also an openness to each other's dreams and faith(s). Yet this again raises the question of what kind of sexual sharing is appropriate and permitted: 'The notion of marriage as a passage with stages of deepening intimacy and commitment threatens the conventional Christian understanding that all genital expression is forbidden before marriage... A more contemporary concern of Christians might be that this intimacy not be limited to genital expression. Many young adults today find sexual sharing easier than psychological and religious self-disclosure' (Whitehead & Whitehead 1993:138).

Other questions that I wondered about, were these: When is a couple married? What determines the transition into the married phase? And thus, when is sexual intercourse permitted?

In Rome in 866 Pope Nicholas I declared that a marriage was legal and binding even without a public or liturgical ceremony, when the couple gave their consent to each other. Thus the couple's consent legally established their marriage. The pope's insistence that mere consent constituted marriage was largely ignored or unknown in the rest of Europe, where the notion that marriages had to be consummated by sexual intercourse was followed (Martos 1993:48). In the twelfth century, Pope Alexander III worked out a criterion of marriage which was legislated for the whole Latin Church. He also said that consent given by the two partners themselves was all that was needed for the existence of a real marriage: 'Thus consent was viewed as an act of conferring on each other the legal right to marital relations' (Martos 1993:50). Despite the legal, economic and political implications introduced into the concept of marriage since then, Christian thinking about marriage affirms that the foundation of

any marriage relationship is the consent of the couple. Today still through mutual consent the couple marry themselves, whilst external ceremonies celebrate and legalise a commitment already entered into. A civil or religious authority may confirm the couple's commitment to the rest of the community, 'but "pronouncing" the couple husband and wife does not itself create the marriage state' (Howe 1992:31). During conversations with Susan and Jack, I invited their ideas regarding consent and marriage, as shown in the following extract from the letter they received from me after the first discussion:

Would you see the following as a definition of your Christian view of marriage? 'The marriage relationship is a permanent union, bound by mutual commitments to loyalty and fidelity, built upon consent, which is sealed initially by the act of sexual intercourse and which in its fullness is intended to symbolise God's love for all humanity'. [I got this definition from Howe (1992:30)].

Looking at your own situation would you say that this definition's focus on mutual commitment can be relevant within your relationship? What does a commitment look like in your relationship? Does it include respect and care for each other, to such an extent that each of you can entrust his/her well-being to the other? How relevant are care and respect within your relationship? The latter part of the definition focuses on consent. What does consent mean to you? Jack, you spoke of the moment when you knew 'that Susan is the woman that I love'. What happens after a moment such as that? Was there a time when both of you, privately, exchanged your intent within this relationship? I am wondering whether that correlates with the idea of consent. The marriage ceremony is viewed as the public declaration of the commitment that you made to each other privately. Whether prior to or following the public ceremony, the consenting couple expresses their union through sexual intimacy. Christian theologians today acknowledge that within the context of a committed, respecting and caring relationship sexual pleasuring strengthens the bonds of permanent commitment and also contributes to the couple's loyalty to and trust of one another. Is it possible to feel comfortable with some contemporary theologians' ideas that virginity before marriage is irrelevant? Could we agree that 'purity' (sexual purity) is more in relation to our intent to commitment rather than the lack of genital contact?

Does any of the above-mentioned correlate with the ideas that you shared with me regarding your sexual expectations? Jack, you claimed that sex, within your relationship, 'is not just about pure lust'. For you it is not 'what

you get out of it, but rather an act that the two of you can share with each other'. You also said, 'if Susan does not enjoy the sex, you do not enjoy it, and then you would rather prefer not to have sex'. I am quite curious to hear your opinions on these above-mentioned ideas. What effect could these ideas have on your relationship?

'Whether prior to or following the customary public ceremony and celebration it is typical for a consenting couple to express their union definitively by presenting their bodies to one another' (Howe 1992:32). Christian theologians who include contemporary thinking about sexuality into their theological reflections view sexual pleasuring as a way to strengthen the bonds between the couple – binding a couple's loyalty and trust. Both Susan and Jack talked about the dangers, for them, of having sex before a legal commitment is made public – a danger that both of them faced as they entered into a sexual relationship before being certain of a commitment towards each other. Their fear resonated with Howe's (1992:33) idea that outside the context of a faithful committed relationship sexual pleasuring re-enforces self-centredness, and Susan and Jack also added that it leaves a person empty, with a yearning for an emotional closeness. According to Susan and Jack, to have sex in a committed relationship invites a deeper connectedness between them.

The conversations we had about committed relationships and sexual intercourse were an attempt to challenge the influence of the discourses promoting guilt and shame and to invite the local experience of a special uniqueness back into Susan and Jack's relationship – creating a preferred alternative story regarding their preferred way of practising their relationship. During subsequent conversations, the co-construction of a preferred alternative story became evident. As the alternative relationship narrative unfolded, closeness and intimacy entered the room – it even became visible in their actions. Susan, who had sat on a separate chair, stood up and cuddled up in Jack's arms as together they wove a rich description of their preferred alternative relationship narrative. The following extract of a letter written to them after they had started to weave an alternative narrative provides a summary of this rich description:

You also claimed that it feels to you as if God already qualifies your relationship as a marriage. When you committed yourself to this relationship and gave each other consent, you invited God to be part of your relationship. Your own private ritual to affirm your engagement was doing Bible-study together and asking God to bless and be part of this committed relationship.

Previously you thought that all the challenges and traumas within the relationship were God's way of showing His dissatisfaction with your relationship. Yet currently you think that if God were not on your relationship's side, then the trauma would have succeeded in separating you from each other. In actual fact, you feel that perhaps God wanted you to face these challenges/traumas in order for both of you to grow: 'It was God's way of moulding us for each other'. What new possibilities would open up for your relationship if you were to side more with this new picture that you have of your relationship as a triangle including God?

You have come to realise that 'it is a good thing to live together'. Getting married requires 'huge adaptations' and therefore living together is a gradual process, allowing each of you to adapt to the new experiences and expectations found within the next phase of a committed relationship. I also asked what commitment looked like in your relationship. For both of you, commitment included 'loyalty, respect, fidelity, love, dedication in the upliftment of each other and being affected by each other's well being'. Both of you said that commitment is very alive within your relationship. I wonder whether this assurance that commitment is present, makes it easier for you to experience God's consent for this relationship, especially when you say that God already sees your relationship as a marriage.

Being very aware of the detrimental effects of views (discourses) stating that cohabitation and sex before marriage is sinful, the Report of a Church of England Working Party of the Board for Social Responsibility asks of the Church to re-examine its discourses in an attempt to not alienate, more than it already has, the thousands of couples in this position (Thatcher 1998:81). Post (2000:97) refers to two liberal Protestants, John Patton and Brian H. Childs, who claim that there is no ideal form towards which Christian families should strive. However, they ask that 'care' should be a normative function within familial relationships. In their definition of care they include appreciation, respect, compassion and solicitude. I want to ask how this 'care' can also be relevant in relationships/marriages. Irrespective of whether a couple is married or not, living together or not, having sex or not, if care is present, should not religious discourses regarding relationships/marriages celebrate the presence of a caring (respectful, compassionate, appreciative) relationship?

3.4.2 The social construction of the relationship

Bleske (quoted in Thatcher 1998:92) claims that relationships/marriages are 'intrinsically fragile' since 'compared with premodern times, the separation of home from work has led to a loss of the essential shared sphere of experience which previously provided stimuli for shared experiences of learning and similar developments, for mutual perception and formation of values'. I wonder who is wise enough to teach contemporary young couples about mutual partnership. The idea of mutual partnership becomes difficult to implement when a person operates within a hierarchical structure at work and is then expected to switch back into a mode of mutuality when at home. Furthermore, while wishing to give each other equal regard, 'the growth of individualization in our society makes it necessary to develop a pattern for one's own life which is often difficult or indeed impossible to combine with partnership' (Bleske quoted in Thatcher 1998:92).

This comment reminded me of what Gergen (1991:28) calls social saturation (see Section 2.2). Within a complex and expanding world of relationships, people's values, opinions and experiences are constructed through their interactions with others. This opens up the possibility for 'a sea of mixed opinions and speculations, both from outside ourselves and from the multiple voices we have already collected within ourselves' (Gergen 1991:28), rendering it impossible of making rational choices, especially choices regarding a relationship/marriage. In interactions with other people, people co-construct their ideas and values regarding a relationship/marriage: 'We find our existence not separately from our relationships, but within them' (Gergen 1991:28).

Susan and Jack described their relationship metaphorically as a butterfly with fragile wings. The wings of a butterfly are covered with a powder-like substance. If one rubs too hard, the powder rubs off. When this happens, the butterfly is no longer able to fly. What is needed is gentle hands that will protect and strengthen the butterfly. It became clear to Susan and Jack that through relationships with other people, their own relationship is affected/influenced. The ideas of some people or religious institutions regarding relationships can be compared to the harmful effects of rubbing a butterfly's wings. Both Susan and Jack feel that some people and institutions have not made time to study the intrinsic, beautiful patterns and colours of the wings (thus

not listening to the unique story and experiences within this relationship). Being disrespectful towards these delicate wings, the hands of these entities (discourses) leave their marks on the butterfly-wings. On the other hand, both Susan and Jack have found themselves in relationships where the values and ideas that others represent have enabled them to co-construct a positive, life-enhancing view of their relationship. These interactions were experienced as a pair of caring hands that showed appreciation for the unique, special patterns and colours of the butterfly wings. The following extract from a letter elaborates on their understanding of the socially constructed nature of their relationship:

In response to my question whether people and their ways/ideas influence your own ideas/ways, both of you felt that this was especially applicable to your relationship. You think that it does have an effect on your relationship as sometimes it strengthens your relationship, and yet it also brings a lot of conflict into your relationship. You reflected back on the day when the pastoral counsellor at Susan's work, told her that you need to get married immediately to avoid a sinful lifestyle. The effect of these ideas was detrimental – it introduced and tried to strengthen guilt, fighting and uncertainty in your relationship. Yet a few weeks later, you came into contact with other religious people – people who radiated the unconditional presence of the Holy Spirit. It was not so much what they said, but what they did that affected your relationship. Susan, you talked to them about your relationship and their reaction and words were completely different to those of the pastoral counsellor's reaction. This enabled you to close the door on guilt, fighting and uncertainty. It enabled you to invite intimacy, fulfilment and sacredness back into your relationship. You said that outside influences have either positive or negative effects on your relationship. I wonder: What steps will the two of you take to attempt to keep the door closed on the negative effects? Does it resonate with the new direction you have taken into caring for this 'butterfly relationship' – listening to your own experiences within the relationship, doing that which feels good and right for the two of you and ignoring outside opinions that reintroduce conflict into the relationship?

Relationships and interactions with other people have co-constructed Susan and Jack's relationship. However, for them, it was extremely important also to acknowledge God's presence in the construction of their relationship.

3.4.3 The divine triangle

Religious couples sometimes construct God as a member or partner of the marital triangle: 'The couple's words "reveal the hand of God" in both the mundane and extraordinary events of life' (Butler & Harper 1994:278). Susan and Jack, being a deeply religious couple, also metaphorically described their relationship as a triangle. They want to place their own relationship with each other as well as their relationship, as a couple, with God in this triangle. There is thus a belief shared between these partners that God is a member of the marital system (Butler & Harper 1994:278).

Couples have their own set of rituals to communicate God's interest and involvement in the marriage. Butler and Harper (1994:279) elaborate on specific ways how couples construct God's presence in their relationship. One way is to enter into informal dialogue with God or to reserve such dialogues for a more formal context. Susan and Jack use both these practices, but especially enjoy the joint bible-study time that they have set apart. During bible-study they search for God's words of wisdom regarding personal and relational interactions. Yet another way of invoking God in the relationship is through histories/narratives: 'Experiences, including the spiritual, are woven into a shared narrative of the God-couple relationship' (Butler & Harper 1994:179). For Susan and Jack, these narratives/histories have been especially helpful in enabling them to construct a view of their relationship as blessed and accepted by God. During our conversations, they told me these narratives and by telling these narratives they were able to develop a rich description of their preferred relationship narrative. The first incident was when Susan decided to move out of her parental home. At that time Jack was also staying with his parents. Listening to dominant religious voices, they were left uncertain about whether moving in together was the right option. They decided to pray together and ask God to guide them towards an affordable flat if he approved of their living together. The next day they found an affordable, comfortable flat. Another narrative they told involved Susan's engagement ring. She and Jack walked in a park one evening and when she got home she realised that her ring was missing. They went back to the park and searched for hours – eventually they found the ring lying in the grass. Both of them decided that if God did not accept their relationship they would not have found the ring. As with the flat, they interpreted this incident as God's affirmation of their relationship, as well as God's

presence in their relationship. Their understanding of God's being part of the triangle was summarised in a letter written to them:

I am reminded of another metaphor of your relationship – the metaphor of a triangle. In this triangle we talked about your relationship with each other as well as your relationship with God. You said that everything within the boundaries of this triangle feels 'good, right, intimate and sacred'. Since God is part of this triangle, He is completely aware of both your intention and commitment found in this relationship. God, being part of your relationship, is thus very 'familiar with the good experiences that both of you have within this relationship'. Thinking back now, you have realised that God has 'never judged your relationship' but you have always 'experienced Him as being patient towards the relationship and blessing this relationship'. You said that the people who are not part of this triangle are not aware of the happiness within this triangle and 'it is usually these people who judge and criticise the relationship'.

This conversation with Susan and Jack sparked my own inner dialogue regarding how people socially construct God/dess (Cashford 1996:82) through their experiences. Constructing a theology like Susan and Jack did regarding God's love and omnipotence left me wondering what the effects of this would be for the therapeutic process. Such a theology would be easy to respect in times of prosperity, but what would happen in times of suffering? How will God be constructed then, or what is the correlation between God and suffering then? (Louw 1993:412; Louw 1983:53). This question is traditionally called 'theodicy' (Louw 1983:53). The search for God's presence in times of suffering intensifies this theodicy question (Louw 1993:412). In short, four alternative explanations exist for the theodicy question: (a) either God desires to prevent harm, but cannot (then God is a God of love but is not omnipotent), (b) or God has the power to prevent harm, but does not desire to do that (then God is omnipotent but not loving), (c) or God neither has the desire nor the power to prevent harm (then God is neither omnipotent nor loving) or (d) God has the power to do harm and desires harm (then God is the author of our sin) (Louw 1983:54). I am left wondering whether I should challenge such dogmas or whether I should accept a more prophetic ethical role by inquiring what the ethical effects of such dogmas are. And if the effects of such dogmas are detrimental to someone, how do I then challenge this dogma?

3.4.4 Sin

During the conversational journey with Susan and Jack, I was confronted with ideas regarding sin. Many people, like Susan and Jack, have their own personal struggles with guilt and shame because of their 'sinful life', a definition given to them by a religious discourse. This left me wondering whether religious discourses over the years have placed too great an emphasis on defining sin only with regard to personal matters such as premarital sex, and has therefore placed lesser emphasis on systemic sins such as sexism, classism and religious intolerance.

Feminist theologians have transformed the entire concept of 'sin', as they have shifted the focus of sin onto a much broader context – including the social, political, economic and religious institutions that function to perpetuate 'sins' such as racism and sexism (Tatman 1996:218). Carter Heyward (quoted in Tatman 1996:218) describes personal and systemic sin as 'the violation of right relation' - right relations are those that are mutually empowering and sin occurs whenever a person (or group) use(s) or abuse(s) another individual, group, or natural resource for personal benefit, resulting in the disempowerment, degradations or destruction of those that are exploited. Furthermore, this implies that the violation of a 'right relation' can be determined only in the context of each specific relation (Tatman 1996:218).

Understanding sin in terms of a violation of 'right relations' provides a challenge to constructions of sin such as sex before marriage. According to the relationship narrative of Susan and Jack, neither partner felt abused or disempowered by the other. On the contrary, both experienced their relationship as mutually empowering. The disempowerment that they experienced resulted from religious intolerance towards premarital sex. On the basis of examples such as this, feminist theologians are calling on people to be accountable for both their personal actions and their actions as members of social, political, economic and religious groups (Tatman 1996:218). The question arises whether society should not rather invest its energies in combating sins that are violating right relations instead of alienating people/couples who express their love to each other outside the institution of marriage.

3.4.5 Crossroads in the conversational journey

As my journey with Susan and Jack ended, I was encouraged to view each 'butterfly' for its own uniqueness and specialness. Within a conversational space where the subjugated knowledge and experience deeply embedded within Susan and Jack's relationship was given a voice, they re-constructed a preferred alternative story. During our conversations, dominant discourses regarding relationships were deconstructed in an attempt to provide alternative options for both Susan and Jack in viewing and experiencing their relationship.

3.5 GLANCING BACK ALONG THE PATH TAKEN

The socially constructed nature of relationships/marriages has been explored in this chapter.

A couple who is Jehovah's Witnesses constructed their marriage according to a biblical, confessional approach. Their biblical interpretation of marriage served as a challenge to more dominant patriarchal views of marriage held by traditions that marginalize their faith tradition. Furthermore, their preferred marriage narrative deconstructed the dominant view of procreation as the primary purpose of marriage.

A couple from the Dutch Reformed Church introduced me to their struggles with constructing their relationship as good and virtuous in a context of religious intolerance towards premarital sex. The socially constructed nature of their relationship narrative became evident as they were introduced to different voices and views regarding relationships/marriages. Certain voices perpetuated a problem-saturated relationship narrative, whilst alternative voices spoke of a right relation that is mutually empowering.

In the following chapter I introduce a deeply religious couple, who have invited God to be a part of their married and familial life. What makes this couple different from the two couples discussed in Chapter Three is that they have challenged the dominant discourse of heterosexual marriages by forming a same-gender marriage and have developed a family life within this marriage.

CHAPTER FOUR

A NARRATIVE OF A SAME-GENDER UNION

4.1 THE SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF SAME-GENDER UNIONS

My fellow travellers on this part of the research journey are a couple married for ten years, with one daughter, Jackie (six). They are loyal members of a Gay Reformed Church and take pride in calling themselves Christians. As Christians they are very familiar with the sexual ethics of their religious tradition. These sexual ethics have brought about sexual distance between these partners, who are otherwise committed members of a close-knit family. This couple, Allison and Jessica, are two women who love each other and who are dedicated to the responsibilities of being a family. Unfortunately, society does not acknowledge their relationship as a marriage and therefore disqualifies their experiences of being a family. In this chapter I explore various legal, religious and cultural discursive positions regarding same-gender unions in general and to how lesbian unions construct their own unique family identity in particular.

The debate on theological dogma regarding homosexuality and same-gender unions is ongoing, keeping people with a homosexual orientation culturally and theologically/spiritually in a kind of solitary confinement. In this research journey, my concern is people and not dogmas. I therefore write from the position that homosexuality is a reality and that the sexual preferences of homosexual people are legitimate.

As legal discourses have very real effects on the lives and relationships of same-gender couples and these discourses both reflect and shape religious and cultural discourses, I started with an exploration into the legal discourses regarding homosexual unions.

4.2 THE SOUTH AFRICAN CONSTITUTION AND THE RIGHT TO EQUALITY

Currently the South African constitution does not recognise homosexual marriages and therefore deters homosexual couples from obtaining (civil or legal) marital status. This means that, although Jessica and Allison's marriage was sanctified by a religious ceremony, their marriage is not acknowledged by the State. South African law defines marriage as follows:

Marriage may be defined as a legal relationship, established by means of a state ceremony, between two competent persons of different sexes, obliging them, *inter alia*, to live together for life (or more realistically, for as long as the marriage lasts), to afford each other the conjugal privileges inclusively, and to support each other.

(Dale Hutchison et al quoted in Mosikatsana 1996:550)

South African Common Law regarding marriage is based on Roman-Dutch law, which was influenced by Christianity. Although Common Law regarding marriage has changed over the years, the characteristic feature of heterosexuality has remained part of the definition of marriage (Mosikatsana 1996:555). The lack of an inclusive definition of marital status perpetuates the prohibition of same-gender marriages.

The Common Law ban on homosexual marriages appears to be a violation of the equality clause in the final Constitution, which specifically prohibits discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation. It is also inconsistent with the Constitution which protects the right to privacy (Mosikatsana 1996:556; see also Labuschagne 1996:542, Grant 1996:568, De Vos 1996:375). Section 9(3) of the South African Constitution provides that:

- (1) Every person shall have the right to equality before the law and to equal protection of the law.
- (2) No person shall be unfairly discriminated against, directly or indirectly, and, without derogating from generality of this provision, on one or more of the following grounds in particular: race, gender, sex, ethnic or social group, colour, sexual orientation, age disability, religion, conscience, belief, culture or language.

(Mosikatsana 1996:562-563)

Discrimination against a person due to her/his sexual orientation means that lesbians and gay men are currently denied family benefits on the basis that they are not legally married. A whole range of benefits are relevant here: partner benefits in pensions, medical aid and medical insurance coverage, immigration, insurance, rights to intestate inheritance, the legal standing to act on behalf of a partner who has lost the capacity to make conscious choices, either automatically or through a living will or power of attorney, spousal privilege, fair assessment of fostering abilities with regard to adoption and child care, a claim to division of property on the breakdown of a relationship, support after the breakdown of a relationship, wrongful death actions and compassionate leave (Steyn 1998:107-108). The dominant legal discourse thus serves to oppress homosexual couples in terms of their marital and familial rights.

Allison and Jessica jointly decided to become parents – Allison is Jackie's biological mother. Unfortunately, the State's invalidation of same-gender marriages also discriminates against homosexuals with regard to the relationship of child and parent (De Vos 1996:362). Allison and Jessica are Jackie's parents, yet no family relationship between Jessica (the non-biological mother) and Jackie is acknowledged in the current legal discourse. If Allison and Jessica's relationship were to end, Jessica would have no obligation to contribute towards Jackie's maintenance even though Jessica has accepted an equal part in caring for Jackie and Jackie has known Jessica as her parent all of her life. Moreover, if Allison were to pass away, Jessica would have no rights, responsibilities or rights of access to Jackie, and therefore Jessica's chances of automatically becoming Jackie's guardian would be in jeopardy. Exclusion from the benefits of being legally married, requires same-gender couples to take care of themselves and their positions, as their rights are not protected by law. Obviously, some of the legal consequences of marriage can be appropriated independently through instruments such as contracts, living wills and powers of attorney (Steyn 1998:113). Unfortunately, it remains unclear whether the courts will enforce these instruments. De Vos (1996:361) expresses concern that these contractual and other legal alternatives may only be available to affluent and knowledgeable gay men and lesbians who can pay for legal advice. By implication, poor, uneducated gay men and lesbians are still excluded from such 'equal' opportunities. De Vos (1996:378) claims that the individuals directly affected by these distinctions are the poor and the elderly who end up being 'the margins of an

already marginalised group within society'. Allison and Jessica live in one of the poorest blocks of flats in town. Because they are not affluent, they too are excluded from opportunities to receive competent legal advice to protect their rights as a family.

Recently, two lesbian couples decided to fight for their rights in the Pretoria Supreme Court. In the first case, Judge De Vos and her partner Miss Du Toit argued that certain parts of both the Childcare Act and the Act on Guardianship were unconstitutional. De Vos and Du Toit had adopted two children, but in the eyes of the law, De Vos is the only legal guardian of the children. In the other case, Judge Satchwell and her partner Miss Cornelley claimed that certain parts of the Act on Judges' Conditions of Service are unconstitutional, as Miss Cornelley cannot claim the right to the same pension benefits that other judges' spouses are entitled to. The verdict in both cases supported gay and lesbian rights (*Beeld* 2001). Such cases have hopefully set a precedent which will assist gay and lesbian couples – especially those who might not be in a privileged, knowledgeable position – in their struggle towards equality.

The effects of the discriminatory dominant legal discourse go further. When the law recognises heterosexual marriages but not homosexual marriages, same-gender couples are pushed further into the margins of society. A message of endorsement is sent to heterosexuals and a message of disapproval is sent to homosexuals. Excluding same-gender marriages from the benefits of marriage denies recognition of the fact that same-gender couples can conduct their personal relationships with human dignity (Grant 1996:571).

The denial of same-gender marriages and the justification of such discrimination is primarily based on the contention that same-gender relationships are not traditional constructions of marriage. The primary purpose of marriage is procreation, and same-gender relationships have procreative limitations (Grant 1996:571). The voice of social construction discourse (Gergen 1985, Anderson 1997) suggests that a construct such as 'family' does not have a fixed meaning – meaning is continuously influenced and reconstructed. Therefore, I agree with Grant (1996:571) who argues that it is unreasonable to discriminate against same-gender marriages on the grounds that it cannot fulfil the traditional characteristic of marriage in terms of procreation: 'Given

the wide range of religious, political, economic and ethnic variations of family, one specific construction of family cannot be unleashed on society as a norm to withhold or grant benefits' (Grant 1996:571).

It is important to note here that the South African legal system has created an act such as the Recognition of Customary Marriages (Act 120 of 1998). The aim of this act is to provide for an alternative to Western-style monogamous and individualistic marriages (Oomen 2000:279). Oomen (2000:279) postulates that this Act introduces the concept of legal pluralism, where two legal regimes exist to regulate the same institution – marriage – for different people. So, for example, on the one hand, bigamy is a common law offence, but, on the other hand, the Recognition of Customary Marriages Act permits polygamous marriages. Legal pluralism can be accounted for by Section 9(3) of the South African Constitution that prohibits discrimination on the grounds of culture. Therefore the Recognition of Customary Marriages Act was called into being to enable members of several local communities to enjoy their culture, which in some cases involves polygamous marriages (Oomen 2000:280). Could it not then be argued that the same legal pluralism that is provided for by Section 9(3) of the South African Constitution that prohibits discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation should lead to the recognition of homosexual marriages? Should members of a homosexual community not also be allowed to enjoy their sexual orientation within the legal institution of same-gender marriages?

In discussing this legal discourse that places same-gender marriages on the margins of society, I am reminded of Foucault's (1980:131) notion of power/knowledge relations (see Section 2.3.2). The failure to recognise same-gender marriages perpetuates the cultural and ideological hegemony of a Western Judaeo-Christian concept of a legal marriage. Here the dominant discourse of heterosexual marriage is centralised throughout society 'with the result that the interests and control of the dominant class is maintained by norms and perceptions that have been internalised by all classes' (Mosikatsana 1996:554). Many feminists criticise marriage on the grounds 'that marriage in the history of modern patriarchies has been mandatory for and oppressive to women' (Card 1997:318), implying that marriage is defined according to the values and interests of white, middle-class, middle-aged, heterosexual men (Mosikatsana 1996:555). It could be argued then, that avoiding the acknowledgement

of same-gender marriages is an attempt to maintain power relations that are constituted when one positions oneself within a dominant heterosexual discourse.

People with a homosexual orientation express differing opinions regarding marriage. Some lesbians and gay men believe marriage to be of vital importance, whilst others are not convinced. To marry or not to marry? That is the question.

4.3 TO MARRY OR NOT TO MARRY?

The quest for legitimate same-gender marriages has sparked a debate amongst lesbians and gay men regarding whether they want to be part of the institution of marriage. This debate introduces other options to individuals with a homosexual orientation – options that need to be explored further as alternatives to the institution of marriage.

4.3.1 Arguing towards inclusion

Lesbians and gay men who argue for some public legitimisation of their relationships want to end discrimination against their relationships/marriages. They feel that recognition of same-gender marriages would help to normalise the status of their relationships (De Vos 1996:357) and they do not regard the quality of their relationship as anything less than marriage. Without access to this institution, their relationship is trivialised and they feel that their personal commitment is deemed unworthy of public acceptance (Katzen 1997:5). The potential to eliminate fears and prejudices surrounding homosexuality in society could be strengthened if same-gender marriages were recognised (De Vos 1996:358). This group of people contend that their position is not assimilationist, despite their plea to be treated in the same way as heterosexual couples (De Vos 1996:358). Instead, they argue that their inclusion would disrupt the traditional gendered definition of marriage as a power hierarchy and subvert traditional gender-roles within the marriage institution (Katzen 1997:5).

Allison and Jessica choose to view their relationship as a marriage and would also argue for the legal recognition of same-gender marriages. If their relationship were legally recognised as a marriage, they would enjoy the financial and emotional benefits that heterosexual couples receive.

The argument for an acknowledgement of same-gender marriages requires support by a theological argument that a covenanted relationship between two women or two men is just as much a Christian marriage as one between a man and a woman. Therefore we need to move towards a theology for lesbian and gay marriage (see Section 4.5).

However, there is a group of homosexual people who object to the word 'marriage', as that word is loaded with the baggage of yesteryear, steeped in religious beliefs and grounded in the subjugation of women (Katzen 1997:5). This group of people do not argue in favour of same-gender marriage.

4.3.2 Searching for alternative options

Many lesbians and gay men do not want to be incorporated into marriage, as marriage reinforces the dominant ideological discourse of a patriarchal society (Stuart 1995:106, Mosikatsana 1996:557, see also Card 1997). 'Marriage in our society is such an archaic, patriarchal institution. Why would gay men and lesbians want to buy into something that is so in need of reform?' (Williams 1990:135).

Feminists criticise marriage as a patriarchal institution involving hierarchies that have systematically subordinated women's personal, economic and social interests to those of men. Proponents of this view argue that any attempt by lesbian and gay couples who do fit the more traditional family model to obtain marriage benefits will also eventually establish a hierarchy of relationships (De Vos 1996:358-359).

This group of people argues for the recognition of something different, something which 'emphasises the quality of the relationship and not the form. Something which challenges the time-honoured privileging of sex as the determinant of worthwhile relationships' (Katzen 1997:7). The only option worth fighting for is the recognition of significant personal relationships, where intimacy could best be met by a broader concept of partner importance regardless of gender. This would meet the needs of lovers (Katzen 1997:7) and therefore avoid marginalization of those with a homosexual orientation and those men and women who choose not to marry. Such an option is not gendered: 'Imagine a world without marriage...the only recognised form of relationship was [a] "significant personal relationship' (Katzen 1997:7). This option therefore overcomes hierarchies implied and institutionalised by existing law

regarding relationships, where marriage is the only standard and where coupledness based on gender is the only valid choice (Katzen 1997:7).

A feminist theological perspective regards friendship as a normative adult relationship and as a standard by which all relationships can be evaluated (see also Section 2.5.1). This contradicts the dominant heterosexual norm where all relationships are measured by how closely they are approximated to heterosexual marriage – bearing in mind that marriage is currently only available to part of the whole community:

Friendship as norm rather than an exception, levels the ethical playing field so that all relationships can be measured by the same criteria. Rather than giving heterosexual marriage a certain privileged place and measuring everything else against it, thus implicitly assuring that no other relationship can ever measure up, friendship as a norm simplifies the ethical discussion and makes it more just.

(Hunt 1996:74)

Arguing against recognition of marriage, and for the recognition of a significant personal relationship such as friendship, as a way to de-marginalize same-gender couples, Stuart (1995:99) introduces the concept of Christian theology of sexuality on the basis of friendship.

4.4 CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY OF SEXUALITY ON THE BASIS OF FRIENDSHIP

According to Williams (1990:155), most marriages in Scripture were not based on covenants. Throughout most of biblical history, a woman was treated as a form of property and marriage was a contract between a man and his wife's father. Marriage was concerned with the exchange of property (including the woman) rather than with mutuality (Williams 1990:155). There are, two biblical examples of friendship covenants of mutuality and justice between two people – significantly, two people of the same gender (who were not necessarily homosexual), namely David and Jonathan and Ruth and Naomi (Williams 1990:155). In these narratives we see equality in friendship.

In the story of David and Jonathan (2 Samuel 1:25-26), there are two friends whose friendship defies social rank. 'On a wave of passion they achieve a remarkable equality in their own relating' (Stuart 1995:135). In the story of Ruth and Naomi (Ruth 1:16-17), there is a friendship between two members of the same gender where mutuality, passion and justice are present. Their different nationalities, religions and blood families could not stifle the affection between them. This friendship was later acknowledged by the women in Bethlehem as being worth more than seven sons to Naomi (Stuart 1995:136).

Feminist (lesbian) theologians find a biblical example of passionate friendship, in the narratives of David and Jonathan and Ruth and Naomi, an alternative to models and metaphors of marriage in Hebrew Scripture (Stuart 1995:135). These biblical notions of passionate friendship defy constructions related to gender and sex. The dominant patriarchal, heterosexist constructions of marriage lead to an oppression of women as well as the oppression of people with a homosexual orientation. Friendship as alternative to marriage, friendship as definition of marriage, or friendship as the partnership that marriage requires challenges these oppressions. Through friendship, equality is recovered, since love is defined as mutuality (see also Section 2.6.1). Friendship does not allow oppression (of women or men). Furthermore, as Hunt (1996:74) points at, if friendship is viewed as a normative adult relationship, it allows for the acknowledgement of same-gender relationships as equally valid. Friendship as norm avoids a comparison of relationships to the dominant discourse of heterosexual marriages. To me, friendship (as a standard by which all relationships can be evaluated) becomes blind to gender, only seeking equality, mutuality and justice, becoming concerned with the 'quality of the relationship and not the form' (Katzen 1997:7). Concerned with the form of a relationship could lead to considerations regarding the gender of the two persons who are involved in the relationship.

However, some people/couples, like Allison and Jessica, choose to see their union in terms of a Christian marriage. They do not want their relationship to be excluded from the Christian understanding of marriage. The following section argues towards a theology of marriage which is inclusive of same-gender unions.

4.5 A THEOLOGY FOR LESBIAN AND GAY MARRIAGE

There are arguments for maintaining the view that the two ends of conjugal love (steadfast fidelity) and procreation are the best articulation of the practices of marriage. However, McCarthy Matzko (1997:371) claims that 'the faithful presence of gay and lesbian Christians induces a good bit of dissonance about traditional practices of marriage and about how to respond to the number of persons who are entering steadfast same sex unions'. It has become necessary to re-evaluate the reasons for excluding homosexual couples from marriage. This re-evaluation has directed theologians towards a theology for lesbian and gay marriage.

McCarthy Matzko (1997:372-373) asks us to imagine two women and a child sitting together in a congregation during a Sunday morning service. The scene is common: two women and a young girl together – they may be mother, daughter and friend or sister-in-law, mother and daughter. Now imagine the three going home together – they eat, nap, and spend the afternoon in recreation and fulfilling domestic tasks. When night comes, the child goes to her room to her bed and the two women go to their room – they share the same bed, read, talk, embrace, kiss and fall asleep. The next morning they go to work and school and in the late afternoon they come back home to attend to the day to day details of home, as well as to sustaining a relationship of intimacy, trust and mutual care... The appearance of a family is a given; yet to call them a family is an uncritical use of the word (McCarthy Matzko 1997:373). On the one hand, the relationship sustains fidelity, steadfast covenant-making and equal sharing of parental roles towards their daughter. On the other hand, their relationship is not procreative and does not reflect the natural reciprocity of man and woman in the ordering of creation (McCarthy Matzko 1997:373). Allison, Jessica and Jackie could just as well have been this family. How are we to deal with this picture? Are all same-gender unions a violation of the marriage covenant?

In 1994, the Ramsey Colloquium, a group sponsored by the Institute of Religion and Public Life, published a statement regarding the cultural revolution which the gay and lesbian movement seems to be pushing forward. The Ramsey group feels that this so-called revolution amounts to a recasting of sexual norms, 'not only so that the gay "lifestyle" will be tolerated but also to free all persons from oppressive standards of heterosexual monogamy and fidelity' (McCarthy Matzko 1997:376). This group's

concern is to challenge these convictions, as they believe that the ideology of this sexual revolution proposes that no sexual desire ought to be restrained and encourages an abuse of the body in search of pleasure. They feel that this ideology is destructive, as it does not lead to individual flourishing or social well-being.

The Ramsey Colloquium insists that marriage is the normative context for sexual expression and that the traditional practices of marriage promote the public good. Asserting that heterosexual marriage is normative, the Colloquium defines homosexual acts as a form of extramarital deviance. Those persons who are not called to marriage, both homosexuals and heterosexuals, are called upon to be chaste (McCarthy Matzko 1997:377).

Initially the Ramsey Colloquium's statement is concerned with the ideology of the gay lifestyle, but they conclude that all homosexual acts and same-gender relationships challenge the norm of heterosexual marriage: 'All gay and lesbian relationships seem to fall under the same banner of the gay lifestyle' (McCarthy Matzko 1997:377). At this stage however, it is important to be reminded of the two women and their daughter (or even Allison, Jessica and their daughter Jackie). Imagine that these two women agree with the Colloquium's fear that a sexual revolution can erode family values. Jessica and Allison have also voiced their concerns regarding the lowering of sexual morals. However, they see it happening in heterosexual relationships/marriages as well. They believe that it is wrong/sinful to be sexually intimate with anyone else besides one's partner. Furthermore, the life that these two women sustain is hardly what the Ramsey Colloquium refers to as a 'gay lifestyle'. They have a committed, faithful union and they are committed to raising their daughter as best they can (McCarthy Matzko 1997:378). The relationship of these two women obviously 'lacks elements like male-female complementarity and natural procreative possibilities, but its steadfast fidelity, its nurturing of children, and its contributions to the family-sustaining practices of the community set it within the public network of marriage' (McCarthy Matzko 1997:379). The argument that McCarthy Matzko (1997:379) presents, an argument I completely agree with, is that some relationships that do not include all the elements of marriage are marriages nevertheless. He claims that the most obvious case would be when a married man and woman find themselves unable to have children. Through adoption or service to the

community, the childless (childfree) marriage nevertheless sustains the procreative character of marriage in general. Although Allison and Jessica's procreative possibilities are limited, they have accepted the responsibility of becoming a family and nurturing and raising their daughter as best they can. Although interpersonal difficulties are present, they are committed to fulfil the promise they made to each other in the presence of God, to love and care for each other for the rest of their lives. Why then should their marriage be marginalized by the dominant discourse of heterosexual marriage that creates a normative context for sexual expression?

Acknowledging arguments such as those set out above, Williams (1990:138) uses the definition of marriage in the canons of the Episcopal Church and expands its inclusivity so that it can describe both same-gender and opposite gender unions.

4.5.1 A working definition

Williams (1990:138) proposes the following working definition of Christian marriage:

Marriage is a lifelong union of two persons in heart, body, and mind, as set forth in liturgical forms authorised by this Church, for the purpose of mutual joy, for the help and comfort given one another in prosperity and adversity; sometimes also for the procreation and/or rearing of children, and their physical and spiritual nurture.

I wish to expand on some aspects from this proposal.

4.5.1.1 A lifelong union

Stereotypes in society include assumptions such as that people with a homosexual orientation are more promiscuous than heterosexuals, that they cannot form lasting long-term relationships (Williams 1990:138) and that most lesbians and gays are non-monogamous (Haas & Stafford 1998:847). Neither of these assumptions may ring true for a high percentage of these couples. On the contrary, many lesbians and gays seek out long-term relationships and hold marriage to be a lifelong union. They seek a lifelong union for the same reasons heterosexual people do – for love, commitment and companionship (Williams 1990:138, Haas & Stafford 1998:847, see also Wiese 1996:16). Furthermore, Williams (1990:139) claims that 'lesbian couples tend to be considerably more stable than either male couples or heterosexual couples, largely

because women in our society are socialised to be monogamous', thus making a lifelong union more likely (see also Zak & McDonald 1997:905).

Allison and Jessica solemnly declared their commitment to each other to become 'partners for life'. Being female and therefore being socialised to be monogamous could assist them in their attempts to stay partners for life. The first part of this working definition is therefore also applicable to the relationship between Allison and Jessica.

4.5.1.2 *The purposes of marriage*

A Christian theology of marriage, according to Williams (1990:140), must be rooted in the concepts of companionship and mutuality. However, a theology of marriage is also concerned with sexuality within the marriage. Heyns (1986:153) postulates that sexuality within marriage has three purposes, namely procreation, recreation and participation. 'Participation' in the context of sexuality is sharing life and sexuality as an expression of feelings of connectedness, mutuality and fidelity. Furthermore, according to Heyns (1986:157), sexual love does not have to result in procreation before it qualifies as authentic sexuality within marriage. Where procreation is the primary goal of sexuality, women are degraded to a 'birth-machine' and the marriage to a 'children factory' (Heyns 1986:157). The argument that the purpose of sexuality in marriage should not exclusively be procreation but should also encompass participation opens up the door for attempts such as that by Williams (1990:138) to expand the definition of marriage to include same-gender unions. According to Williams (1990:140), a theology of marriage should be rooted in companionship and mutuality. Here I would like to add that theology of marriage could also be rooted in sexuality for the purpose of participation.

According to Williams (1990:157), Martin Bucer argued over four centuries ago that marriage is primarily for companionship and not for procreation or parenting. This plea for companionship is rooted in the biblical affirmation of Genesis 2 that it "is not good" to be alone, and that our loving God has provided means for us not to be alone, one of the most important of which is a committed, lifelong, ever-deepening union in "heart, body and mind" with a spouse' (Williams 1990:149-150). St Aelred of Rievaulx, a 14th-century Cistercian abbot developed a theology of companionship.

This theology recognised that a profound, committed relationship with a spouse or special friend actually increases people's capacity to love, which enables individuals to offer Christian love to a wider circle of others (Williams 1990:152).

At Allison and Jessica's wedding, the minister used the biblical text Ecclesiastes 4:9-12 to describe the power of companionship between two people. The text uses the metaphor of a rope that is strong due to the weaving process that took place. This metaphor reflects the notion that two people who are woven together into a lifelong union receive companionship that is a strong source of mutual help, joy and comfort.

Mutuality is one of the prerequisites for marriage in the current theology of churches such as the Episcopal Church. Mutuality requires for equality between partners – equal division of domestic roles and equal decision-making opportunities. Societal gender-role conditioning has unfortunately made it difficult for heterosexual men to achieve mutuality with their wives. Gay and lesbian couples stand outside this stereotyping as 'society has not defined role expectations for our [same-gender] relationships, and we must create our own systems for decision-making and division of labour' (Williams 1990:143). This implies that same-gender couples achieve mutuality much more easily than heterosexual couples (see Section 4.6.2).

I have been arguing here for a move towards a theology of gay and lesbian marriage. In order to avoid further marginalization of same-gender unions such as that of Allison and Jessica – a union built on a monogamous, committed and loving companionship and concerned with the well-being of their family and more specifically the nurturance of their daughter – secular and ecclesiastical institutions need to acknowledge and celebrate these unions. Du Plessis (1999:45) makes a plea for society to acknowledge that a monogamous same-gender relationship (as an alternative family structure), where love, commitment and reciprocal respect are present, can provide a constructive contribution towards society.

The family structure of a specifically lesbian relationship is explored in the next section.

4.6 LESBIAN UNIONS

The conversational journey with Allison and Jessica introduced me to the relationship narrative of a same-gender couple, telling how they constructed their own unique family lifestyle. During this journey, the relationship narrative of lesbian unions was widened to include stories of parenting, sexuality, power-sharing and gendering.

4.6.1 Gender and the butch-femme narrative

We explored whether Allison and Jessica felt that the 'butch-femme' narrative was a constituent of their relationship. 'Butch' can be understood as the 'masculine or the active giver of sexual pleasure' whilst 'femme' can be understood as the 'feminine or the passive receiver of sexual pleasure' (Reilly & Lynch 1990:3). They agreed that Allison identified more with the 'femme' role and Jessica identified more with the 'butch' role. The following extract of a letter written to them after a conversation we had, examines their understanding of the 'butch-femme' roles:

You told me that in your relationship Jessica accepts the 'more masculine role of caring' and Allison feels more comfortable with the 'feminine role of caring'. Jessica, you prefer to receive biltong rather than flowers, whilst Allison would rather receive flowers. Allison, you enjoy being on the receiving end of caring, for example, falling asleep in Jessica's arms, whilst you, Jessica, are more concerned with pampering and making Allison happy. Would you say that, although your relationship includes masculine and feminine characteristics, it rejects the example of a heterosexual, patriarchal (male domination and female subordination) relationship? If your relationship rejects the characteristics of a patriarchal relationship, how does it affect your relationship? I also wonder whether these masculine and feminine ideas which are part of your relationship are placing any limitations on your ability to see and to organise your relationship differently?

In Chapter One I explored the constitutive effects of gender on relationships/marriages. This therefore opened up the question to what extent gender prescriptions play a role in lesbian relationships. I was guided by the following questions asked by Laird (2000:456, 459): 'To what extent does the dominant patriarchal discourse, with its cultural narratives about gender and sexual relations between men and women, also shape relations of gender and sexuality in lesbian

relationships? ... To what extent does gender, particularly as it is embedded in the butch-femme metaphor, play a role in lesbian relationships?’

The development of the ‘butch-femme’ narrative within lesbian relationships is quite understandable, as there was no other relationship model other than the patriarchal heterosexual model to follow. Therefore if a lesbian couple wanted to establish a partnership, it seemed logical to assume these roles (see Reilly & Lynch 1990:3). The seemingly heterocentric ‘butch-femme’ narrative is a common cultural story people draw on in the larger social discourse to understand and characterise the gendering of lesbian relationships:

Given that heterosexuality is assumed and expected in this society and for so long was the only visible or positive source of models and images for coupling and parenting, it is understandable that lesbians look to those familiar cultural narratives for ideas about how to constitute their self stories and their relationships.

(Laird 2000:459)

Although Jessica and Allison have adopted the ‘butch-femme’ narrative, the gender prescriptions associated with feminine and masculine ideas were not conservatively storied in their relationship. Equality, shared parenting and power-sharing has been negotiated between them. In trying to understand this kind of phenomenon, Laird (2000:459) explains that ‘butch-femme’ as a metaphor is far more complex than a simple imitation of heterosexual gender roles. It is a metaphor that constantly changes its meaning. These meanings shift over time and the change must be understood in its historical and cultural contexts. The ‘butch-femme’ narrative is always open for change, as lesbians search for successful coupledness (Laird 2000:459). Bird (2000:253) also accentuated the importance of situating gender relations within a historical and cultural context. In acknowledging the feminist movement, today’s cultural context makes women aware of the right to equality. It is therefore understandable that lesbian couples today would adapt to and liberate the traditional ‘butch-femme’ metaphor into a narrative where equality and partnership are prominent. Although Jessica identified more with the ‘butch’ role, Allison and Jessica together negotiated an equal partnership (see Section 4.6.2).

This journey with Allison and Jessica has helped me understand that gendered divisions located in the ‘butch-femme’ metaphor cannot easily be compared with the

gender divisions of masculinity and femininity found in heterosexual couples. Identifying more with one gendering style than another in the 'butch-femme' narrative in lesbian relationships does not guarantee privilege of power (Laird 2000:461). Same-gender couples coin the term "gender straight jacketing" to describe a set of assumptions under which heterosexist male-female couple stereotypes are wrongly superimposed on the experiences of lesbian and gay men in couples' (Laird 2000:462). Allison and Jessica's negotiation of gender prescriptions reminded me of Flax's (1990:40) statement that 'gender relations thus have no fixed essence; they vary both within and over time'.

4.6.2 Power-sharing

As the 'butch-femme' narrative in lesbian relationships does not guarantee privilege or power, it is apparent that lesbian couples may be more concerned with following an 'ethic of equality' (Kurdek 1995:87) within their relationships (see also Daune Littlefield, Lim, Canada & Jennings 2000:72; Eldridge & Gilbert 1990:58-59; Reilly & Lynch 1990:2; Haas & Stafford 1998:852-853). An ethic of equality includes a quest to incorporate equality of involvement by partners and an equal balance of power between partners (Jordan & Deluty 2000:148).

The following extract from a letter written to Allison and Jessica after our conversation illuminates their attempts to follow an ethic of equality:

According to you, your relationship is built on 'love and respect for each others' feelings'. What is also present in your relationship is equality, which includes a variety of aspects. Firstly, equality is concerned with the sharing of domestic responsibilities with each of you contributing according to your personal preferences and abilities. Jessica, you feel more comfortable fixing things in the house than preparing dinner in the evenings. You also prefer Allison to accept responsibility for the financial matters. Concerning caring for Jackie, you accept more responsibility. There are the days when Allison feels ill and then you also take care of Allison by washing Allison's hair and painting her nails. On the other hand, you, Allison, are more competent when it comes to preparing meals and making clothes. Therefore you feel more comfortable making these specific contributions.

Furthermore, another component of equality, for you, is compromising, for example, to ask for some coffee but then to be willing to make some for your

partner at a later stage. You also said that Allison tends to take the necessary decisions in the running of your household. But here too, equality plays a role. Before you, Allison, make a decision, you consult with Jessica concerning her ideas and opinions – for you it is about negotiating. According to you, negotiation brings equality into the relationship. You told me about a time when negotiation was not part of your relationship and how its absence contributed towards fighting and unhappiness being part of the relationship. Allison, you, for example, invited a few friends over prior to consulting with Jessica. If you had first consulted with Jessica, you would have heard that Jessica was extremely tired and you would then have known that Jessica was not in the mood for guests. I wonder if there are any other ideas/things that are trying to deprive your relationship of equality? What are the steps that you will then take to protect or re-introduce equality within your relationship? Would you say that ideas of 'butch' within your relationship not necessarily imply 'power over' the other? I wonder whether you have replaced power over the other with healthy negotiation? I am wondering how you have been able to manage an equal relationship and also to include negotiation as part of your lives? Did you have examples to follow or did you have to discover it for yourself or make it up as you go?

In Allison and Jessica's relationship narrative, the 'butch-femme' metaphor did not ascribe specific roles to each partner. In this relationship, equality has been achieved through shared responsibilities. Each partner accepts specific tasks and responsibilities in accordance with their own abilities and preferences. But equality in Allison and Jessica's relationship also means 'being considerate of the other and weighing the impact of my actions on my partner' (Daune Littlefield et al 2000:77).

It is interesting that Kurdek (1995:92) claims that, compared to gay partners, lesbian partners attribute greater importance to equality. According to Kurdek, lesbians are more likely to follow an ethic of equality 'perhaps in reaction to socialisation pressures that typically reduce women's power in intimate relationships' (Kurdek 1995:92). Here I would also like to refer back to Bird (2000:253), who situates gender relations within a cultural context. Both Jessica and Allison have had firsthand experience of being powerless in abusive relationships with men, both as children and as adults. It is therefore understandable that both of them would resist re-enacting these powerless experiences in their relationship and rather identify with the ethic of equality that has been brought to the public consciousness by the feminist movement.

In this relationship narrative, identifying with a more 'femme' role does not imply sole 'mothering' responsibility for Allison. Parenting is equally shared between the two partners.

4.6.3 A parental narrative

Powerful social myths about homosexuality and parenting such as the idea that homosexual people will raise children who will be homosexual (Grant 1996:573) have prevented same-gender couples from becoming parents. This may mean that a woman who has been lesbian-identified for all or most of her life, does not envision herself as a mother (Muzio 1996:360). However, lesbians have slowly begun to widen their narratives to include stories of themselves as mothers. As these stories are being lived and told, lesbian parents become the objects of the dominant narrative that reflects and re-creates deep-seated doubts about lesbians' efficiency as parents. Therefore lesbians who consider becoming mothers or who are already mothers (such as Allison and Jessica) oppose a dominant narrative (Muzio 1996:159-160).

Contrary to these powerful social myths – myths entrenched in and by homophobia – literature and research findings suggest that children who are brought up in a lesbian family showed normal development and normal social competence (Patterson 1996:420, 427; Mitchell 1996:346; Du Plessis 1999:59). What is normal? These researchers use the term 'normal' to mean heterosexual which shows the dominance of heterosexuality as a discourse. A few differences found with children of two mothers are that, compared to other children, they are less aggressive and hostile and more aware of their feelings – both positive and negative feelings (Mitchell 1996:348). In support of these findings Dr Money from the Johns Hopkins University claims that sexual orientation should not play a role in deciding whether a person would be a good parent. According to him, the sexual orientation of the parent has no effect on the child. What is of greater importance, for him, is the relationship quality between the parent and child (Du Plessis 1999:60).

Mitchell (1996:344) argues that a dual-mother lesbian family may be a model of effective functioning – a model representative of a feminist family model. Its efficiency is reflected in several ways. Firstly, there is no risk that the child will experience one parent as uninvolved, because both partners are expected to assume

equal responsibilities. If there is a difference or inequality between the parents, it is not tied to gender differences and the typical hierarchical scheme in the culture (Mitchell 1996:348). Secondly, striving towards an ethic of equality eliminates any experiences of oppression (Mitchell 1996:348).

Allison and Jessica have negotiated responsibilities when it comes to caring for Jackie. Jessica and Jackie have an especially strong relationship and Jackie perceives Jessica to be her primary caretaker. Furthermore, both parents enjoy it when Jackie excitedly talks about how her 'heart was stolen' by the boys at school. Neither of them is pushing Jackie into a specific sexual orientation. They claim that it is her choice and they will support whatever her preference might be.

4.6.4 A sexual narrative

Allison and Jessica's sexual narrative has become problem-saturated. Allison has recently started to perceive the sexual side of their relationship as sinful and each time that they are intimate, she struggles with guilt. However, believing that all people, including all Christians, are sinners has assisted her in her struggle against guilt. She reasons that God does not distinguish between different kinds of sins and that God will forgive everyone for their sins – including herself for being homosexual.

In 1974 the American Psychiatric Association dropped homosexuality from its lists of mental diseases. Since then some Christian leaders have separated orientation from practice. Several churches have taken a neutral position towards homosexuality as orientation, but the practice of homosexual behaviour is still regarded as sinful (Toulouse 2000:24). When such Christians recognise that homosexuality is permanent, they insist that the moral or right choice for a Christian homosexual is abstention from any sexual intercourse (Thom 1998:145). I am left wondering: How much such discursive positions have contributed towards Jessica and Allison's sin-saturated relationship narrative?

Women are socialised differently and acquire a different sexual script from men (Zak & McDonald 1997:905). 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). Out of all combinations of couples, both

heterosexual and homosexual, lesbians have the lowest frequency of sexual activity (Reilly & Lynch 1990:23).

Although the two people in this relationship narrative are both females, Allison and Jessica's relationship is firmly embedded in a heterosexist discourse regarding female sexuality. Allison and Jessica's struggle with sexual intimacy could be understood in terms of the constitutive effects of the above-mentioned discourses. The following extract of a letter written to them was an attempt to expose the discourses that constituted their relationship:

Allison, you told me that the sexual side of your relationship has opened the door to guilt. You said that love, respect and equality make the relationship good, but to you it feels like a sin to have sex with another woman. Your struggle with guilt has resulted in your considering avoiding sexual intimacy. If one can say that girls/women are differently socialised to boys/men regarding sexuality, I am left wondering what effect it will have on a gay relationship. Let me try to explain. Would you agree that a large percentage of women are taught from an early age that erotic, sexual contact is actually taboo/something that is not allowed to be enjoyed and that a woman should be 'more passive' and wait for the man to initiate sexual contact? If these ideas have been part of one's growing up, what sexual possibilities are left for a relationship between two women?

Both Allison and Jessica are deeply religious people, which made Allison's struggle with whether homosexuality is sinful, so much harder. When I asked her what she does to assist her in this struggle, she said: 'I start to pray and also remind myself of the message found in Romans 3 – all our sins will be forgiven. That provides hope for me.' However, Allison wanted further biblical assurance that the sexual love between herself and Jessica was permitted. This need for reassurance directed me to explore various biblical interpretations regarding sexuality.

4.7 HOMOSEXUALITY AND THE BIBLE

The Judaeo-Christian tradition of sexual ethics is a meta-narrative that has traditionally dominated discourse concerning same-gender relationships. This sexual ethic is strongly committed to the defence of procreation and family life and therefore views all other forms of sexual activity as illicit (Gill 1998:177). This meta-narrative has introduced a variety of discursive positions, ranging from fundamentalists,

conservatives and liberalists to radicals. When the fundamentalists voice their opinions, one hears comments such as: 'perversion deliberately chosen, explicitly condemned by God's word, get cured or get out of the church' (Stuart 1995:1). The conservatives argue that homosexuality is 'not deliberately chosen, probably born that way, but activity still condemned by God's word – it is OK to be it, not OK to engage in genital acts' (Stuart 1995:1). The liberalists declare that Scripture and tradition condemn homosexual acts, but people in biblical times did not know as much about homosexuality as we do today – although same-gender unions fall short of the ideal of heterosexual marriage, it is not sinful as homosexual people cannot help it. Finally the radicals explain that heterosexual marriage is the ideal but that lesbian and gay people are as capable of forming committed stable relationships. The radicals have read feminist theology and know all about the patriarchal context of the Scriptures and realise that the worst thing patriarchy can imagine is a man playing the role of a woman in sex (Stuart 1995:2). These various discursive positions regarding homosexuality remind me of Foucault's notion that individuals are constructed and known through being made an 'object of knowledge' and a target of power (Townley 1994:12). Being an object of knowledge influences the subjectivity (see Section 2.7.1) of the individual who is known in this way (Townley 1994:12). Therefore, in making same-gender couples, like Allison and Jessica, objects of knowledge has real effects on whether they perceive their lifestyle as sinful or not.

During 1995, the Synod of Western Cape released a document regarding homosexuality. In this document it was acknowledged that there is an explicit danger in reading Scripture without taking into consideration the dynamics between context, text and the situation of the writers as well as the readers of the texts (Synod of Western Cape 1995:191). One of these dangers is to separate specific texts from the context in which they are found and to claim them to contain timeless and unchangeable norms applicable to all life situations. This has been done with texts regarding homosexual behaviour. The literal interpretation of these texts ignores the context, where these texts were concerned with the condemnation of sexual practices such as temple-prostitution, for example. A second danger is to use selected texts as evidence for a person's own point of view or opinion. Society needs to acknowledge that the meanings of texts are not dependent only on the writer but that they are also influenced by the reader of the texts (see Section 2.5). The way biblical texts were

abused to defend Apartheid is an example of this. Attitudes regarding homosexuality provide yet another example. Finally, another danger is found in the inconsistent use of texts (Synod of Western Cape 1995:191). Selected texts are used as normative, whilst others are not viewed as normative. Biblical sexual mores are a good example of this, where we find sexual attitudes, practices and restrictions that are normative in Scripture but no longer accepted as normative (Wink 1999:37). The Bible condemned or discouraged the following forms of behaviour, which we generally allow: intercourse during menstruation, naming sexual organs, nudity (under certain conditions), masturbation (some Christians still condemn this) and birth control (some Christians still forbid this). 'Likewise, the Bible permitted behaviors that we today condemn or have discontinued' (Wink 1999:430), such as polygamy, sex with slaves, concubinage, treatment of women as property and very early marriage – for a girl from the age of eleven (Wink 1999:43). Therefore I agree with a very important question that Wink (1999:43) asks: 'So why do we appeal to proof texts in Scripture in the case of homosexuality alone, when we feel perfectly free to disagree with Scripture regarding most sexual practices?'

This is an argument that I used in an attempt to assist Allison in questioning/deconstructing her understanding of what constitutes a sinful life. An extract from a letter written to Allison and Jessica reflects parts of this argument:

I am left with many questions regarding how to define the difference between 'right and wrong'. There is especially one question I wonder about and that is: 'How do I know what God says is being correctly interpreted for us today?' I also wonder what the implication would be if I had to get to know God only through the Bible? Many practices were created for a specific context and many changes have taken place since. Many of the practices that were forbidden in the Bible are allowed by us today and many practices that the Bible allowed are now forbidden by us. I also wonder why some people are able to quote biblical texts that reject homosexuality, whilst they feel totally comfortable with ignoring other biblical ideas regarding sexual practices?

4.7.1 Shifting from texts of death to texts of life

For many gay and lesbian people, the Bible has brought death and not life. Many people speak of the Bible as a pistol loaded with six texts that are used as bullets to

oppress lesbian and gay people (Germond 1997:193). Germond (1997:203) argues that through a biblical theology of inclusion, the biblical texts carry a life-fulfilling message of liberation and inclusion. He believes that a theology of inclusion is central to the Christian message: 'Inclusive theology claims that the central force of the Christian message means that there should be no dividing wall between heterosexual and homosexual, for we are all one in Christ' (Germond 1997:210). A biblical theology of inclusion highlights the intimate association of Jesus with the marginalized, the outcasts and the ritually impure. What becomes a dramatic feature is the inclusion of the excluded (Germond 1997:205).

Furthermore, Kritzing (1998:244) postulates that an inclusive model acknowledges that 'it is not sufficient merely to quote a series of Bible verses in support of a particular position'. Smit (1985:137) refers to Ridderbos's recommendation that in interpreting a biblical message, one should avoid speculations and fundamentalism. Ridderbos goes further, stating that the way that speculation and fundamentalism can be avoided is through following the commandment of loving one's neighbour. This commandment could free people with a homosexual orientation from the chains of oppression (see Smit 1985:138).

Below, there is a short interpretation of selected biblical texts according to a biblical theology of inclusion.

4.7.1.1 *Genesis 19:1-29*

The story of Sodom is said to condemn homosexuality – because of attempted male rape, people say that the sin of Sodom was homosexuality (Helminiak 1997:83). By contrast, it has been argued that the sin of Sodom was not homosexuality but the people of Sodom's inhospitality and unwillingness to aid the poor and the needy (Helminiak 1997:83; Nagel & Dreyer 1997:357-358; Du Plessis 1999:41). This argument is supported by the realisation that none of the explicit biblical references to Sodom names homosexuality as its sin (Helminiak 1997:83).

For thousand of years in the Christian West homosexuals have been the victims of inhospitable treatment. Condemned by the church, they have been the victims of persecution, torture, and even death. In the name of a mistaken understanding of the crime

of Sodom and Gomorrah, the true crime of Sodom and Gomorrah has been and continues to be repeated every day.

(McNeill quoted in Du Plessis 1999:42)

Du Plessis (1999:42) and Germond (1997:220) assert that the Sodom story is one of violent rape and not a story of loving homosexual behaviour. The story of Sodom has been abused in the context of homosexuality and he asks that this story should rather be used as a warning against rape and sexual violence.

4.7.1.2 *Judges 19:16-29*

This is a story where a man and his concubine receive shelter for the night. The men of the city wanted to 'know' this man, but instead the concubine was forced out of the house and given to the men. She was raped to death. The horror of this story is the rape and sexual violence done to the woman (Germond 1997:217; Tribble 1984:65-91). The incidents in Sodom and Gibeah (Judges 19: 16-29), according to Germond (1997:217) have obvious parallels – rape and sexual violence.

4.7.1.3 *Leviticus 18:22; 20:13*

Furnish (2000:37) and Du Plessis (1999:42) reminds us that the Holiness Code of Leviticus should be understood against a specific historical cultural background. Some rules found in this code have an ethical imperative such as 'love your neighbour as yourself', while others are rules concerning ritual purity. In the latter, moral purity is not an issue, but rather uncleanness and pollution in the literal physical sense (Furnish 2000:36; Germond 1997:218). Along with homosexual acts, other practices that disqualified a person from participating in religious ceremonies were the eating of pork and shellfish, having a menstrual flow or seminal emission (Helminiak 1997:83). Furthermore, physically disabled people were not allowed in the church, men were not allowed to cut their hair and beards and the people were not allowed to wear clothes made from mixed fabrics. For years these rules have not been literally implemented by churches, but when it comes to considerations regarding homosexuality, the churches continue to interpret these texts literally (Du Plessis 1999:42; Germond 1997:220). This correlates with the danger of using biblical texts inconsistently in attempts to justify personal values and morals.

4.7.1.4 *1 Corinthians 6:9 and 1 Timothy 1:10*

Germond (1997:220) argues that these two texts can be treated together because they pose the same challenge to interpreters. The words *malakoi* and *arsenokoitai* are found in these texts and are often translated as 'homosexuals' or 'sodomites' (Germond 1997:220). When these words are translated into English, most English versions contain some allusion to homosexuality. However, many other leading foreign language translations see no homosexual reference (Germond 1997: 221). 'What we are faced with is careless and imprecise translations because the established meaning of the word has confirmed the natural bias and assumptions of heterosexist interpreters, and has resulted in a distinct lack of rigour in the pursuit of accuracy of translation' (Germond 1997: 221).

To conclude, Germond (1997:224) thinks that it cannot be justified to translate either *malakoi* or *arsenokoitai* in a manner that indicates homosexual behaviour. He assumes that Thomas of Aquinas, in the thirteenth century, was the first influential theologian to use these passages as a condemnation of homosexual behaviour. Biblical interpreters have followed unquestioningly in his footsteps ever since (Germond 1997:225).

4.7.1.5 *Romans 1:18-32*

These texts clearly reflect Paul's negativity to homosexual activity. However, according to Germond (1997:227), Paul's negativity regarding homosexuality is not 'because it violates God's natural law but because it is one of the many evils that God handed people over to when they chose to worship idols instead of the true God and displayed their rebellion against him'.

A question is raised: What kind of homosexuality is Paul concerned with? The primary form of homosexuality in Paul's time was pederasty (men using young boys as lovers). Maybe Paul was referring to this. However, Paul was also concerned with sexual activity amongst women (Germond 1997:227). Perhaps these texts can be applied to heterosexual people who chose to involve themselves in homosexual activity. This is equally problematic: How does one determine at what point a person is homosexual and at what point a person is heterosexual (Germond 1997:227)?

Furnish (2000:38) also acknowledges that Paul described same-gender intercourse as 'unnatural' and used the expression 'degrading passions'. He argues that sources from Paul's time show people's presuppositions about homosexuality and examining such sources will help readers to understand Paul's negative judgement.

Firstly, according to Furnish (2000:38), anyone who engaged in intercourse with a partner of the same gender was wilfully overriding his/her own natural desire for the opposite sex (Furnish 2000:38). It is important to realise that people in biblical times did not know much about a homosexual orientation. This meant that homosexual acts were contrary to the 'nature' of all persons (Sano 2000:46). Same-gender relations were viewed as unnatural because most people's 'natural' sexual desire appeared to be towards the opposite sex. They did not understand the complexities involved in the formation of sexual identity (Furnish 2000:38). It is only in the late nineteenth century (1892) that some understanding of the concept homosexual orientation developed (Sano 2000:46). Secondly, according to Furnish (2000:38), all homoerotic acts were regarded as inherently lustful and were seen as an expression of sexual appetites that were so out of control that intercourse with the opposite sex could no longer satisfy this insatiable lust. Thirdly, according to Furnish (2000:39), homoerotic intercourse appeared to violate the laws of nature because those laws (socially constructed laws that reflected the dominant discourse of patriarchy of that time and that culture) decree that the male was always to assume the dominant active sexual role, with the female submissive and passive. If two males thus have sex, one male's 'naturally' dominant role is compromised and when two females have sex, the role of the male is usurped (Furnish 2000:39).

Of all the biblical texts in both the Old and the New Testament, Romans 1: 18-32 presents the most clear, but by no means, unambiguous, argument against homosexual activity. Germond (1997:228) argues that Romans 1 'stands alone against the cumulative force of the inclusive work of Jesus on the Cross'.

In exploring alternative, sometimes silenced, interpretations of these biblical texts regarding homosexuality, I would like to position myself with those who claim that a historical-critical reading of the Bible fails to support the blanket condemnation of homosexuality traditionally attributed to it (Helminiak 1997:81). In support of this argument, Smit (1985:137) refers to Ridderbos's warning against the danger of

(wrongfully) condemning homosexual behaviour by using Scripture without a historical-critical reading. I am left wondering what would the effects be if same-gender couples, like Allison and Jessica, had opportunities to hear alternative biblical interpretations regarding homosexuality? Would it assist them to create an alternative, preferred relationship narrative that rejoices in sparkling characteristics such as love, commitment, sexual passion and fidelity?

4.8 BEING CHRISTIAN ABOUT HOMOSEXUALITY – A LOVE ETHIC

The power/knowledge position of the Judaeo-Christian meta-narrative of sexual ethics has played and will probably continue to play an influential role in the construction of knowledge regarding homosexuality – same-gender unions are still marginalized and oppressed by this dominant religious discourse today. Foucault argues that power is a ‘force that produces discourses, knowledges and subjectivities’ (Flaskas & Humphreys 1993:40; see also Townley 1994:8). I propose, in accordance with Williams (1990:147), that churches take a more positive, prophetic role – using this power/knowledge position to challenge the oppression and marginalization of same-gender unions by following a love ethic instead of a sex ethic (Wink 1999:44-45).

Wink (1999:44) argues that the Bible has no sexual ethic as it exhibits a variety of sexual mores, some of which have changed over the thousand-year span of biblical history. Neither heterosexuality nor homosexuality is, within itself, moral or immoral. The (im)morality of a person’s sexual life depends on the manner in which it is included within the context of a (ir)responsible and (im)moral lifestyle. A love ethic is more concerned whether both partners are experiencing love and commitment from each other (Du Plessis 1999:48). Christ never spoke about homosexuality, but talked a lot about love and He made a point of welcoming many of those cast out by society for sexual reasons: ‘The general tenor of the New Testament writings suggests that Christians should be less concerned about whether or not sex is OK (and if so, when) and more interested in the *quality of the relationship* in which sex may or may not occur’ (Shackleton 1998:152). A love ethic is not concerned with the question of whether or not the partners are of the same sex but rather whether they are trying to live their relationships in a responsible way (Van der Geest 1993:117).

In accordance to following a love ethic, the Synod of the Western Cape (1995:197) report acknowledges that the Bible has set specific criteria for meaningful sexuality worthy of humans – criteria applicable for all people, regardless of their hetero-, bi- or homosexual orientation. These criteria include sexuality as a binding and permanent commitment towards each other, as a form of solidarity with and sensitivity towards the partner, as trust in each other and as communication. By publishing findings such as these South African churches can move toward acceptance of a more prophetic role in society regarding homosexuality. They can in practice, expand on Paul's text: '...neither Jew nor Greek, slave or freeman, male or female, *heterosexual or homosexual*. All are one in Christ' (Mulrooney 1998:144).

4.9 CONCLUSION

Post-modern perspectives portray the self as a subject-in-relation, formed by communal and social contexts (Graham 1996:50-51). Jessica and Allison's journey into storying their lives is a never-ending journey as they face new economic, cultural, social and religious challenges. In adopting a view where humans are constructed as 'relational selves' (Graham 1996:50), formed by communal and social contexts, care should therefore include social and political dimensions. The feminist maxim that the 'personal is political' can therefore be applied as individual or relationship problems occur within a broader social context (Graham 1996:51). In concluding the conversational journey with Allison and Jessica, a journey that included a dimension of care, I was reminded that 'the subject of care is shifting from that of a self-actualised individual for whom care functions primarily at times of crisis towards one of a person in need of nurture and support as she or he negotiates a complexity of moral and theological challenges in a rapidly-changing economic and social context' (Pattison quoted in Graham 1996:51).

Jessica and Allison continue to participate actively in their church and its activities. They have spoken about how sustaining they find the love, care and support that they receive from their church and especially their minister. I was relieved to know that Jessica and Allison, as a homosexual couple challenged by dominant heterosexist attitudes and beliefs daily, have found a place of safety, the gay Reformed Church, where they receive support, as they negotiate challenges, instead of further alienation enforced by a religious institution.

In this chapter, I explored a variety of discursive positions regarding same-gender relationships. It is clear that same-gender unions have over the years been exposed to various degrees of marginalization and oppression, as these unions are not accepted as valid marriages and families. These couples have had no role models to follow in constructing their relationships. The feminist movement has provided a few options in constructing relationships, particularly lesbian relationships. Being very aware of the dominant patriarchal discourse regarding marriage, some same-gender couples prefer not to define their relationship in terms of marriage, as marriage represents the oppression of women. These couples advocate acknowledging their relationships in terms of passionate friendship. On the other hand, lesbian marriages do challenge dominant patriarchal discourses by working towards equality and partnership in relationships. As women, lesbians have first hand experience of being oppressed and therefore their unions are very sensitive not to reproduce the effects of a dominant patriarchal attitude. I also argued towards a love ethic that does not distinguish between male or female but is rather concerned with the quality of a relationship. Sexual ethics in the Bible are inconsistent and vary over time and culture, whilst a love ethic is consistent with the example of Jesus' love. Following a love ethic would also assist Allison and Jessica in bringing closeness and intimacy back into their relationship, refocusing on the love, commitment and fidelity that is alive in their relationship.

This chapter concludes my conversational journeys with the participants. In Chapter Five I glance back on the whole research journey – especially in terms of what I have learnt about how to do research and what the participants and I have learned or gained from this journey.

CHAPTER FIVE

GLEANINGS FROM THE RESEARCH JOURNEY

5.1 A JOURNEY INTO DISCOVERIES

This research journey was a journey into multiple discoveries. It has taught me many things about constructed nature of relationships/marriages. This chapter elaborates on the discoveries made – realisations which serve a purpose for me as a pastoral counsellor, but also realisations which the participants will be able to use on their journeys into the future. The insights and deductions that I set out in this chapter are not meant to be prescriptive for pastoral counselling in general or for all pastoral counsellors. Through this research journey I have constructed my own local knowledge – insights and commitments that I have arrived at and that will guide me as a pastoral counsellor.

5.2 BEING A STUDENT OF MY OWN RESEARCH

During this research journey I experienced myself as standing between two parallel roads. The one road represents the conversations I had with the three participating couples – their real lives and experiences. The other road represents the conversations that I entered into with academic literature. The most adventurous aspect of this journey was, for me, the attempt to build a bridge between these two roads. With a connecting bridge, I was able to learn from both conversations – those I had with the couples and those I had with the literature.

I underwent a learning experience in committing myself to this research journey, and found the postulation that feminist action research changes the researcher during the whole research process (Reinharz 1992:194) to be true. This learning experience has changed my views regarding relationships/marriages and especially some of the religious discourses that co-constitute these narratives. From the dual conversations (with participants and the literature) new understanding and knowledge evolved that will guide me as a pastoral counsellor in future. In the following sections I will weave these realisations together, trusting that this new narrative may enter into

conversations with other pastoral counsellors when they listen to problem relationship/marriage narratives.

5.2.1 The constructed nature of relationships/marriages

The aims of this research journey were to reflect with three couples on the cultural and religious discourses which co-constitute their relationships/marriages, as well as to reflect on cultural and religious discourses which co-construct specific gender roles in a relationship (see Section 1.3).

From a social construction viewpoint, marriage is regarded as a construct that is linked to other cultural and religious institutions. De Vos (1996:371) claims that two significant issues arise from embracing marriage as a social construction. Firstly, the social constructions of institutions and identities involves performing power relations. Marriage, as it is viewed in most parts of the Western world, is a heterosexual, monogamous institution necessary for human procreation and sanctioned by God. This dominant view of marriage 'becomes no more than a reflection of the present power relations in Western society' (De Vos 1996:371). Secondly, the constructs of marriage are dynamic – discourses on marriage change as other institutions and attitudes change (De Vos 1996:371).

In Chapter One I discussed the history and development of the institution of marriage and in Chapters Three and Four I introduced three couples who construct their relationships/marriages differently. Foucault (1985; 1986) indicates various ways in which marriage, as an institution in a Western culture, evolved over centuries. Law in the fourth century BC did not prohibit a married man from having sexual relations with an unmarried woman or with any man. Sexual exclusivity was thus not expected of marital partners, especially not of a man. However, the enjoyment of pleasurable sexual sensations was not the rationale for marriage, because marital sexual relations were only rightfully to take place if procreation was the goal (Foucault 1986). Furthermore, polygamy was permitted by Jewish law and was customary elsewhere too, in some cases (De Vos 1996:372-373). After various changes, today, Western culture does not accept polygamy, and fidelity is expected from both husband and wife. Childfree couples and same-gender couples challenge the notion that the main

purpose of sexuality in marriage is procreation. Other purposes of sexuality in marriage include recreation and participation (Heyns 1986:153).

Foucault writes about power relations, claiming that they can be contested, as power relations are changeable and unstable (Townley 1994:8; Flaskas & Humphreys 1993:42). Because the power/knowledge positions of dominant discourses are unstable, over time, changes challenge these dominant discourses, allowing new discourses to enjoy the centralised power/knowledge position. This research journey has made me aware of different and competing discourses regarding relationships/marriages. As the feminist movement became more prominent, it challenged the power/knowledge position of the dominant patriarchal view of marriage. Couples are starting to negotiate equality and partnership into their relationship. Claire and John, who are members of the Jehovah's Witnesses tradition, have interpreted the Bible in such a manner that male headship does not imply dictatorship, but rather a male responsibility to lovingly and respectfully care for his wife and her physical, emotional and material needs. As the homosexual movement becomes increasingly prominent, voicing its oppression, it challenges dominant heterosexist discourses. Jessica and Allison entered a woman-to-woman marriage, creating their construction of marriage. More people, like Susan and Jack (from the Dutch Reformed Church) are living together and having premarital sex in a committed relationship. Alternative religious discourses are arising, exploring ways of viewing cohabitation as a step along the way to a fuller more complete commitment, resulting in a different religious construction of a relationship.

This research journey has helped me come to realise that marriage is 'not an institution with certain fundamental and essential elements' (De Vos 1996:371) and that there are no absolute truths about marriage. However, in Section 5.2.4, I argue for the acceptance of the ethics of relationality, valuing love, care, mutuality and equality within relationships. Perhaps ironically, while on the one hand, I claim that there are no absolute truths, on the other hand, I argue for non-negotiable relational ethics. I do so because I know that contextual practical theology can never be practised from a position of theological neutrality (Cochrane et al 1991:15), but is grounded in a faith commitment. A faith commitment is the point where one is not open for further negotiation. I entered this research journey with a faith commitment

grounded in the values of the commonwealth of God (see Section 2.6.1), which include the ethics of relationality. For me, this means that, although I recognise the constructed nature of relationships, I believe that relationships/marriages need to be constructed in accordance within the ethics of relationality.

As a pastoral counsellor, I have to acknowledge that relationships/marriages are socially constructed. Doing so allows me to enter into conversations to listen to various relationship/marriage narratives and to co-construct different relationship/marriage discourses. It helps to free me from the pitfall of expecting all relationships/marriages to look like and function in accordance with the picture presented by a dominant discourse. Acceptance of a social construction view of relationships/marriages 'means there can be no more talk of a "natural" definition of marriage' (De Vos 1996:371).

5.2.2 Pastoral praxis as a constitutive discursive activity

Because I am aware of the constructed nature of relationships/marriages, as a pastoral counsellor, I have an obligation to acknowledge that the discursive practices of religious and cultural discourses have a constitutive effect on relationship/marriage narratives and on individual subjectivity (see Davies & Harrè 1991:46). However, when a counsellor such as myself raises awareness in people that their relationships/marriages are constructed by and in social contexts, that deconstructive act invites them to play a role in reshaping these contexts or choosing other contexts with which to affiliate (Dunlap 1999:138). This practice resonates with the social construction discourse notion of multiple meanings (Doehring 1999:102; Gergen 1985) and that people's 'positions are not fixed' (Dunlap 1999:138).

In order to consider the effects of religious and cultural discursive positions regarding relationships/marriages, an approach is needed that rejects 'any meaning system (patriarchal, racist, classist, heterosexist) that has universalized and made metaphysical any binary categories (i.e., masculine/feminine, white/black, straight/gay) that place people in privileged and marginalized positions' (Doehring 1999:101). Co-searching the discourses that constitute their relationship/marriage with the participants, meant that the couples were able to voice their experiences and preferences within the discursive positions that are relevant to their situation. Jessica

and Allison, a same-gender couple, and Susan and Jack, a couple living together and having pre-marital sex, have been marginalized through dominant religious discourses. Being guided by a social construction view of multiple meanings has enabled me to introduce a variety of other discursive positions in an attempt to open up possibilities for these couples to reconstitute their relationships/marriages (see Chapters Three and Four) in their preferred way.

A social constructionist view, within the context of relationships/marriages, required me as a pastoral counsellor to look at gender and its multiple meanings (Flax 1990:40; Bird 2000:252; Gilbert & Gilbert 1998:497). So, for example, the Jehovah's Witness traditional discourse regarding gender roles stresses that husband and wife are in an equal partnership. On the other hand, femininity and masculinity in a lesbian couple is differently constructed from the way these notions are constructed for a heterosexual couple (see Laird 2000:459). A social construction discourse approach thus 'defines gender as positional, relational, contextual, and political' (Doehring 1999:101).

This research journey made me aware of the constructed nature of relationships/marriages, as well as the possibilities for positioning relationships/marriages in alternative discursive positions that would assist couples in creating a preferred relationship narrative. During the conversational journeys with each couple, I attempted to introduce them to different discursive positions by making the couples aware of such alternative positions. These attempts were influenced by a commitment to challenge and question oppressive ideas and practices, in order to stress the ethics of relationality above sexual mores (such as dogmatic opinions regarding same-gender sexuality or marital status as a way to legitimise sexual intimacy). The journey was designed to open up possibilities for these couples to story their relationship/marriage differently – either by weaving alternative preferred constructions of their relationship/marriage (as with Susan and Jack, a couple from the Dutch Reformed Church, and Jessica and Allison, a same-gender couple), or by inviting richer descriptions of their relationship narrative in a language that co-constituted their preferred realities (as with Claire and John, the couple who are Jehovah's Witnesses).

5.2.3 Opening up conversations about God and religion

Awareness of the socially constructed nature of relationships focused my initial research curiosity - I explored couples' religious and cultural assumptions regarding relationships/marriages and whether these assumptions have a sustaining or detrimental effect on their experiences within their relationships/marriages (see Section 1.2). Reflecting back on this research journey, I would like to remark on religious discourses. The three couples' relationships were mainly constructed by religious discourses. Claire and John constructed the partnership in their relationship in accordance with their positive interpretation of the biblical notion of 'male headship' and women as the 'weaker vessels', an interpretation which is supportive of relationality. Susan and Jack constructed their relationship as wrong due to a religious position that views pre-marital sex as sinful. Allison constructed the sexuality in her relationship with Jessica as sinful due to dominant religious views that same-gender sexuality opposes God's intentions in creating male and female. These three narratives confirm that the religious discourses in which these people participate do have a constitutive effect on their relationship narratives (see Davies & Harrè 1991:46).

Griffith (1995:124) claims that clients are limited to speak of their experiences of God and religion by both '*proscriptive constraints* – that this God-talk is not to be spoken of here, and by *prescriptive constraints* – that God can and should be spoken of here, but only in a certain way'. According to Griffith (1995:124), the psychotherapy culture may influence a therapist/counsellor to impose proscriptive constraints, whilst the religious counselling culture may influence a therapist to impose prescriptive constraints. Being influenced by either proscriptive or prescriptive constraints could close the doors on understanding how God-talk and religious ideas contribute to a couple's problem-saturated story. During this research journey the participants and I needed to appreciate and challenge the constitutive effects of religious discourses and accompanying biblical prescriptions on their relationship/marriage narrative. Ignorance about religious discursive positions could prevent couples from opening up possibilities to reconstruct their relationship in the language of their preferred reality. Therefore, during this conversational journey with the participating couples, I avoided

imposing either prescriptive or proscriptive constraints and rather opened up conversations for their preferred God/dess (Cashford 1996:82) talk.

On our research journey together, the three couples and I challenged both proscriptive and prescriptive constraints by trying to find the couple's preferred way of God/dess talk (see Cashford 1996:82). Challenging these constraints opened up conversational space for the couples to talk about how biblical/religious prescriptions construct their relationships. The couple who are Jehovah's Witnesses interpreted and experienced biblical prescriptions as empowering and enhancing their relationship. During the research journey we developed this into a richer description of their relationship (see Chapter Three).

The other two couples experienced the religious prescriptions as very guilt provoking and in conflict with their personal preferences, which had effects on their relationships. These effects of the religious discourses on their lives reminded me of Foucault's description of Bentham's panopticon (Foucault 1977:195-228), where surveillance was internalised along with normalising judgements (Foucault 1997:177). These normalising judgements and surveillance by a religious discourse had become internalised in and organised the couples' relationships. The internalisation of these religious prescriptions meant that both couples 'policed' their own behaviour to such an extent that the avoidance of sexual intimacy became an option. Jessica and Allison were, for example, 'policed' by heterosexism to such an extent that they tried to avoid sexual intimacy. During our research journey we deconstructed and reconstructed new ways of 'doing' their preferred relationship, outside punitive prescriptions which had a detrimental effect on their relationship (see Chapters Three and Four).

I have thus realised that when couples seek counselling, I need to open up space to invite talk about religious discourses and its constitutive effects on a relationship/marriage.

5.2.4 The shalomatic theme of relationality

Feminist theology brought an ethical dimension to the journey. Feminist theology examines whether current political, social, economic and familial institutions reflect the values of the commonwealth of God (justice, love, freedom and shalom) in the

present context (Ackermann 1990:23; see also Section 2.5.1). Van Schalkwyk (1999:202) refers to shalom as relationality. According to her, the shalomatic theme of relationality is concerned with relations of equality and mutuality between all people. Similarly, Cozad Neuger (1999:117) claims that relationality has served as a focus for feminist theory through the lens of ethics. Therefore, I as pastoral counsellor have learnt to listen to relationship narratives via the ethics of relationality. Here I am concerned with the way relationships have been ordered in Western culture and have served as a vehicle for oppression as well as for empowerment (see Cozad Neuger 1999:117; Miller-McLemore 1999:89).

Within relationships/marriages a relational ethics, the important values are the following: love, care, mutuality and justice (Wall et al 1999:148). The emphasis on relationality during pastoral counselling with couples, requires conversations founded on identifying and deconstructing unjust power arrangements between people. Issues of justice and the ordering of relationships are not restricted to women's concerns only, but are expanded to all who have been and continue to be excluded or marginalized, such as gay men and lesbians (Cozad Neuger 1999:118).

Much of feminist pastoral theology has relied on this work of deconstructing the unjust ordering of relationships as central in developing strategies of pastoral care and counseling that help people live in right relationship with one another.

(Cozad Neuger 1999:118)

The shalomatic theme of relationality stresses concern about making connections across the borders of injustice, inequality and separation (see Van Schalkwyk 1999:203). A shalomatic theme of relationality was reflected in my desire to challenge the marginalized, discursive positions of the couples' relationship narratives, for example, the narrative of the same-gender union between Jessica and Allison, where we challenged prescriptive ideas and discourses regarding their sexual life as a couple (see Chapter Four). Following the ethics of relationality guided us to focus on love, care and mutuality as well as a commitment of the partners to each other and towards sustaining a family life. This assisted us in co-constructing their preferred relationship narrative.

Arguing for an ethics of relationality has also introduced me to feminist ideas regarding the construction of relationships/marriages as friendship.

5.2.5 A call to friendship

In Chapter Two I set out feminist theologians' position that friendship is the best definition of marriage or the partnership that marriage requires. Friendship includes mutuality, equality and reciprocal sharing of thoughts, goals and efforts (see Section 2.6.1). In Chapter Four, I also introduced the argument that some people (both homosexual and heterosexual couples), do not want to participate in marriage, as an aspect of the dominant ideological discourse of a patriarchal society. Such couples argue that what is important is the quality of the relationship, regardless of gender. Feminist theologians support this by arguing for an acknowledgement of friendship as a normative adult relationship. Friendship, which includes mutuality and equality, levels the ethical playing field so that all relationships can be measured by the same criteria (Hunt 1996:74; see also Section 4.3.2).

Viewing friendship as a normative adult relationship could assist people or relationships that are marginalized because they do not fit into the dominant heterosexual marriage discourse. The marriages of same-gender couples such as Allison and Jessica can then be acknowledged because such marriages are based on friendship (mutuality). Ethical discussions regarding pre-marital sex, as in the case of Susan and Jack, could then be refocused on the quality of the whole relationship, where sexual expression is only one part of the friendship and mutuality between them.

Focusing friendship enables me as a pastoral counsellor to invite 'just' relationship/marriage practices – valuing mutuality above self-sacrifice or oppression. When any relationship/marriage is built on the foundation of friendship, I am encouraged to celebrate the relationship, irrespective of whether the individuals concerned are a lesbian couple, Jehovah's Witnesses or a couple living together and having pre-marital sex. The three participating couples all experience love, care, mutuality and equality in their relationships – all these are building blocks for friendship as well as for the ethics of relationality. For me, my concern is then the

reality of their experiences and valuing the legitimacy of the constructed nature of their relationships.

5.2.6 An appeal for tolerance

During this research journey and in my everyday interaction with people, I have come to realise that religious discourses can be interpreted differently and lived differently in relationship/marriage narratives.

During this research journey I was confronted with several questions. Does being male award dominance to husbands, as in the narrative of the Jehovah's Witnesses couple who follow an interpretation of the biblical notion of male headship? Is sex before marriage enough reason to condemn a long-term committed and loving relationship, as in the narrative of the Dutch Reformed couple? Are there grounds for a moral condemnation of same-gender sexual relations, as in the narrative of the lesbian couple from the Gay Reformed Church who provide a loving home for their daughter and who continuously attempt to live a virtuous life in the presence of God?

Confronted with sexual ethics, I must ask myself how I as pastoral counsellor am able to distinguish 'right' from 'wrong'. Wink (1999:44) argues that no sex act is ethical in itself without reference to the rest of a person's life, cultural patterns and the special circumstances faced. He suggests replacing the notion of a 'sex ethic' with a 'love ethic'.

Such a love ethic is nonexploitative (hence no sexual exploitation of children, no using of another to his or her loss); it does not dominate (hence no patriarchal treatment of women as chattel), it is responsible, mutual, caring, and loving.

(Wink 1999:45)

Our ethical task is to apply Jesus' love ethic to whatever sexual mores are prevalent in a given culture and to co-constitute relationship/marriage narratives. This does not mean adopting an attitude of anything goes, but rather recognising that everything is affected by Jesus' love commandment (Wink 1999:45). A sexual ethic opens the door to greater intolerance towards certain relationships/marriages, resulting in people's being oppressed and marginalized. Sloane Coffin (1999:106) remarks that intolerance comes from placing the purity of dogma ahead of the integrity of love. Intolerance

reflects a distorted interpretation of the gospel as having 'limited sympathies and unlimited certainties, when the very reverse, to have limited certainties but unlimited sympathies, is not only more tolerant but far more Christian' (Sloane Coffin 1999:106-107).

Following a love ethic will support my prophetic role in caring for people. A love ethic has challenged me to reconceptualise the entire concept of sin. Feminist theologians introduced me to the possibility of defining systemic and personal sin as a 'violation of right relation' (Carter Heyward quoted in Tatman 1996:218). Right relations include equality and mutuality, whilst sin is an abuse or use of people or individuals for one's own benefit. Violations of right relations must be determined within each specific relation (see Section 3.4.4). For me, understanding sin in terms of the violation of 'right relations' provides a challenge to constructions of sin including pre-marital sex (Susan and Jack) or same-gender sex (Allison and Jessica). Both these couples have negotiated love as equality and mutuality within their relationship. Abuse and oppression do not control or construct their relationship. My understanding of my prophetic role is to provide continuous care as people/couples negotiate their way through financial, political, social and familial challenges, instead of alienating them through a position of 'limited sympathies and unlimited certainties'. The question arises whether we (including myself, other pastoral counsellors and churches) should not rather support people in their everyday attempts to negotiate life's challenges and move towards relational ethics instead of alienating people/couples by imposing prescriptions derived from religion, Scripture or other 'expert' opinions.

'Who has known the mind of God?' asks Sloane Coffin (1999:107). Wink (1999:48) asks: 'How do I know I am correctly interpreting God's word for us?' These are the questions that I would like to bear in mind on my journey further ahead as pastoral counsellor. I hope that these questions will consistently invite 'limited certainties and unlimited sympathies' (Sloane Coffin 1999:106-107). Part of the limited certainties for me would be to follow the ethics of Jesus' love ethic. This would require of me to take a stand against any form of marginalization, domination and exploitation and to choose care, mutuality and love. An appeal for tolerance is an appeal for a love ethic in pastoral counselling.

5.3 DOING PARTICIPATORY ACTION RESEARCH

In this section I will attempt to describe what I learnt about doing participatory action research.

5.3.1 No final map

Participatory action research has taught me that a research journey can never be planned ahead in terms of fixed aims.

I entered this journey with the expectation that the participant couples were going to introduce me to a problem-saturated relationship/marriage narrative. Based on this expectation, I formulated my research aims in terms of a deconstruction of the dominant problem-saturated story, in search of an alternative preferred relationship/marriage narrative. However, during my first conversation with Claire and John, I realised that the religious discourses that co-constituted their marriage had not led to a problem-saturated narrative. I was therefore forced to reformulate my research aims. This resulted in my including an invitation of a rich description of the relationship/marriage narrative as part of the aim.

Planning this research journey, I wanted to bring a diversity of relationship/marriage narratives into the research. That is why I wanted to include a homosexual couple as well as an African couple. My search for an African couple that was willing to participate was unsuccessful. This has made me aware that some entitlement is needed to work cross-culturally and perhaps this is something that the organisation where I am employed needs to take into consideration in counselling. However, I do recommend further conversations with African couples, as this would enrich understanding regarding different constructions of relationships/marriages.

5.3.2 Good reasons for action research

Berge and Ve (2000:129) provide good reasons why action research is an appropriate approach for increasing gender equity (see Section 1.5). On the basis of these reasons I would like to argue that action research was an appropriate approach for this research, considering my curiosity regarding religious and cultural discourses that co-constitute relationship/marriage narratives.

The first reason that they give is that 'action research is about learning from actions' (Berge & Ve 2000:130). During this research journey, I felt that I was a student of my own research. Each step of this journey was a step towards learning something new. What made this research so valuable for both the participants and myself was that through our conversations the constructed nature of relationships/marriages became more apparent, opening up possibilities for different perspectives/constructions of their relationships.

The second reason for using action research is that 'in action research the participants aim to achieve equality in relationships' (Berge & Ve 2000:131). Reflecting back on all the conversational journeys that we embarked on during this research, it becomes clear that we were searching for equality. This implied equality between myself and the participants in the search for equality between partners and respect and equality for the relationship/marriage within the dominant religious and cultural discourses. Both the couple from the Dutch Reformed Church (Susan and Jack) and the couple with a homosexual orientation (Allison and Jessica) wanted their relationship to be acknowledged within their preferred religion.

The third reason for doing action research is that 'one important method in action research is self-reflection' (Berge & Ve 2000:132). Self-reflection has enabled me to realise that I do have preconceived ideas regarding relationships. These preconceived ideas influence my behaviour and expectations. Before embarking on this research journey, I thought that Jehovah's Witnesses are people whose faith tradition is very conservative and confessional (see Section 3.3). When they started talking about male headship, I nodded inwardly as I said to myself: 'Yes, I knew it! They are using biblical notions of male headship to justify male domination over women.' However, as the conversation continued, my preconceived ideas were challenged. Their understanding of male headship has resulted in men's respecting their wife's material, emotional and spiritual needs. They made me realise that preconceived ideas lead to intolerance and the oppression of certain groups. I now know that instead of avoiding a Jehovah's Witnesses couple, we can learn from them. Claire and John's marriage narrative reminded me of the social construction notion that there is seldom one meaning to a word. I entered this research journey with the idea that biblical male headship implies domination over women. Conversations with this couple challenged

me – deconstructing my own problem narrative regarding a confessional approach. They interpreted male headship confessionally, but differently from the dominant discourses regarding headship or maleness. As a pastoral counsellor I therefore always need to be self-reflexive – acknowledging that my interpretation of a word or a relationship narrative is never guaranteed to correlate with the client/couple's interpretation of that relationship or other narrative. I need to be willing to be guided by them and to let the couple help me understand their narrative.

5.3.3 Transparency and accountability

During this research journey I was guided by the ethical stance of a narrative approach. An ethical position is taken by being transparent and accountable.

Elliot (1998:51) describes transparency as positioning oneself in such a manner that people are aware of one's association with certain ideologies, such as feminism and patriarchy (see Section 2.7.2). During the conversations I had with the participants, I disclosed personal opinions only to a limited extent. In reflecting back, I wonder to what extent this research has been a collaborative enquiry, as I was the only one to ask the questions. In future, to strengthen the shared dimension of the research process, I would like to build on Hudson's (2000:95) recommendation to provide 'opportunities at the end of each session for the research participants to interview me especially with regard to my research concerns and the questions I asked'.

By taking an ethical stance of accountability, I acknowledge the risk of reproducing power relations by being a member of a privileged group (see Elliot 1997:52), for example in my power/knowledge position as the researcher. During this research process I tried to dismantle power inequalities in an attempt to align the process in accordance with participatory action research. Ways of challenging the power imbalance were firstly to meet the couples at the place they chose. All the couples chose to have the meetings at their homes. Secondly, I attempted to take a 'reflexively dialogic approach to research' (Gergen & Gergen 1991:86; see also Section 1.5) where one invites a 'multiplicity of voices to speak to the research issues of concern' (Gergen & Gergen 1991:79). I attempted to follow this approach by inviting the participants to comment on the questions I asked and reassuring them that they could decide whether or not they wanted to answer the question. The letters I wrote

represents another attempt to invite a reflexively dialogic approach. The participants were encouraged to change and add to the content of the letter and also to expand conversations that flowed from the letter.

Hall (1996:30) comments that in writing a research report, the researcher's own ideology (discursive position) has an effect on the reconstruction of the participants' stories (see Section 1.7). Similarly, Hudson (2000:98) states that 'in analysing and interpreting data, and writing up research, the text that is produced from the interpretations of the texts generated in the conversations with the research participants is the *researcher's story* of their lives'. This research report is my story of the relationship narratives of the participants. Therefore, in attempting to be accountable towards the participants and the future readers of this report, I acknowledge that the relationship/marriage narratives contained in this report are my interpretation of the texts generated in the conversations with the couples. Furthermore, I acknowledge that my interpretation is influenced by my various discursive positions.

My first attempt in doing participatory action research has been a profound personal learning experience. However, participatory action research is also concerned with the participants – in what way have they gained by being involved with this research journey?

5.4 EFFECTS OF THE RESEARCH JOURNEY ON THE RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

Feminist participatory action research is concerned with creating new realities and facilitating change to the benefit of the participants (see McTaggart 1997a:7). I therefore entered this research journey with an awareness that I wanted the participants to benefit from participating (see Section 1.7).

During our conversations, I attempted to make all of us aware of how relationship narratives are constructed by cultural and religious discourses and then to facilitate the participants' seeing their stories from different perspectives/constructions (see Friedman & Combs 1996:57). I was hoping that if they saw their stories from different perspectives, it would open up opportunities to create an alternative

preferred relationship narrative or to richly describe their preferred relationship narrative.

All the couples commented that the conversations they had with me stimulated further private conversations between them. Susan and Jack said: 'After we had spoken to you, we were able to speak about a more sensitive issue that we always avoided. MONEY! We were able to start to re-negotiate our shared responsibilities regarding our finances.' Allison and Jessica claimed: 'We are reminded of the importance of communication and that we need to communicate with each other.' They also felt that the communication between them 'is a great source of caring and nurturing' between them. Claire and John remarked that the conversations and letters had invited a 'deeper dimension' of exploration into their own relationship narrative.

Claire and John revelled in the new realisation that the love and partnership that is alive in their marriage has sustained them in such a manner that they can share themselves for other's welfare. This realisation contributed to a rich description of their relationship narrative. They said that if love, mutuality and equality were not present 'there would be no energy left to support and nurture others' (see Section 3.3.2).

The conversational journey with Susan and Jack introduced a variety of other religious discursive positions regarding committed relationships, where pre-marital sex is only one dimension of the relationship. Introducing alternative discursive positions opened up possibilities for Susan and Jack to reconstruct their relationship narrative in a preferred language. During one of our conversations, the unfolding of their preferred alternative story even became visible in their actions. Susan, who sat on a separate chair, stood up and moved into Jack's arms. After a break, I saw them briefly again. They claimed that since closing the door on the influences of guilt and shame, they have been able to assist each other in the new challenges that they are facing.

Jessica and Allison stated that different religious positions and interpretations regarding homosexuality explored in our conversations have made them aware of the possibility of seeing their sexual love as positive. However, they thought that it would still take some time to understand their sexuality in a different light.

Using the narrative approach has provided the means to create space for new realities and the facilitation of change. The conversational journeys therefore had a therapeutic dimension (see Section 1.7). However, the research dimension and the therapeutic dimension to this whole journey introduced me to another very unexpected dimension, the dimension of friendship, as the boundaries between researcher and participants started to fade away. As I already argued, friendship allows equality and mutuality (see Section 5.2.5) in a relationship. Both Claire and John and Susan and Jack invited me to join them for lunch, whilst Jessica and Allison invited me to accompany them to a service at their church. I have interpreted these invitations as a call to friendship. I embrace these friendships with open arms, as we are all fellow travellers on life's journey.

5.5 ONE FINAL GLANCE BACK

Winter (1996:27) points out that 'writing up a report is an act of learning and, in this sense, we write for ourselves so that, when we read what we have written, we find out what, in the end, we have learned'. In writing this report I have come to realise that I have a whole suitcase full of new learnings and understandings. I am reminded of the time I went to Holland and how much fun it was to return home with a suitcase full of new memories – photos, mementos, clothes, gifts, and so on. The adventure that lies ahead is to take this suitcase, filled with new insights, and start to unpack it back into my personal and professional life.

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APPENDIX 1

NARRATIVES OF RELATIONSHIPS/MARRIAGES

Information sheet for invited participants

Thank you for your interest in this project. Please read this information carefully before finalising your decision to participate. Should you have any questions about the content of this information sheet, please do not hesitate to raise them with me.

What is the purpose of this project?

Currently I am in the process of completing a Masters in Practical Theology (with specialisation in Pastoral Therapy) at the University of South Africa. In order to meet the requirements for this course, I must write a research thesis. My research focus revolves around cultural and religious ideas regarding relationships and marriages.

Why have I approached you?

I needed three to four couples to become research partners in this project. In order to meet the aims of the project, I am searching for couples that are willing to tell me the story of their relationship or marriage.

What will participants be asked to do?

During the conversations I will explore with each participant-couple the religious and cultural ideas that might have an effect on the relationship or marriage. After each conversation I will write a letter to the couple. The letter will serve as summary of the conversation as well as further questions that I want to ask. These letters are given to you for verification and/or adjustment or any other comments.

Should you agree to take part in this project, you will be asked to give consent for the information obtained during our conversations to be used in the research project. Strict confidentiality and anonymity will be maintained with respect to each participant's personal identity in the report.

Please be aware that you may decide not to take part in the project without any disadvantage to yourself of any kind.

APPENDIX 2

NARRATIVES OF RELATIONSHIPS/MARRIAGES

Consent form for invited participants

I have read the Information Sheet concerning the research project and understand its purpose. All my questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I understand that I can request further information at any stage.

I know that –

1. My participation in the project is entirely voluntary.
2. I am free to withdraw from the project at any time.
3. A copy of the final research document will be retained by the University of South Africa and by the Institute for Therapeutic Development.
4. I will receive no payment or compensation for participating in the study.
5. All personal information supplied by me will remain confidential and anonymous throughout the project.

I hereby confirm that I am willing to participate in this research project.

.....

Signature of participant

.....

Date