

**RECONSTRUCTING RAINBOWS IN A REMARRIED FAMILY: NARRATIVES OF
A DIVERSE GROUP OF FEMALE ADOLESCENTS 'DOING FAMILY' AFTER
DIVORCE**

by

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DECLARATION

Student number: 3381-082-6

I declare that **RECONSTRUCTING RAINBOWS IN A RE-MARRIED FAMILY: NARRATIVES OF A DIVERSE GROUP OF FEMALE ADOLESCENTS 'DOING FAMILY' AFTER DIVORCE** is my own work and that all the sources that I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.

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Signature

(Miss C S Botha)

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Date

ABSTRACT

This research journey investigated the ways in which (1) the lives of adolescents have been influenced by parental divorce and subsequent remarriage, (2) exploring the relationships participants have with biological, nonresidential fathers and (3) to collaboratively present ways of doing family in alternative

Four adolescent girls took part in group conversations where they could be empowered to have their voices heard in a society where they are usually marginalized and silenced. As a result of these conversations a family game, FunFam, was developed that aimed to assist families in expanding communication within the family.

Normalizing prescriptive discourses about divorce and remarriage were deconstructed to offer participants the opportunity to re-author their stories about their families. The second part of the research journey explored the problem-saturated stories that these four participants had with their biological, nonresidential fathers. They deconstructed the discourses that influenced this relationship and redefined the relationship to suit their expectations and wishes.

KEY WORDS :

Adolescents, Divorce, Remarriage, Noncustodial parent, Stepparent, Stepfamily, Alternative family, Board games, Family Rituals, Marriage, Nuclear family, Single-parent families, Qualitative Research, Participatory narrative feminist research; Participatory Practical theology; Contextual Practical Theology; Feminist theology, Postmodern theology, Power/Knowledge, Normalizing truths, Social construction discourse; Deconstruction, Power imbalance, Re-authoring narratives, Feminist Poststructuralist paradigm, Discourse of Patriarchy, Pastoral care.

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INTRODUCTION

She looked from one to the other and she saw them established to her safety and she was free. She played between the pillar of fire and the pillar of cloud in confidence, having the assurance on her right hand and the assurance on her left. She was no longer called upon to uphold with her childish might the broken end of the arch. Her father and mother now met to the span of the heavens and she, the child, was free to play in the space beneath, between.

D. H. Lawrence

(1968)

CHAPTER 1

EXPLORING THE RAINBOW¹

PLANNING THE JOURNEY

1.1 Introduction

When one pillar upholding an adolescent's 'rainbow of life' (Kroll 1994:4) suddenly collapses and disappears, the consequences are usually very intense and complex.

Children of divorce have to deal with a range of emotions, as well as radical changes in their lifestyle. The security and hope provided by the rainbow are no longer present, and considerable anxiety could be experienced when a child or adolescent sees one end flapping in the wind when a parent disappears or withdraws from his/her life. Kroll (1994:3) goes on to describe this 'rainbow of life' as a safe space to which each child is entitled, but also as a fragile structure, a possible prey to many outside forces, such as divorce. After such an event, a child could be called upon to 'uphold with her childish might the broken end of the arch' (Lawrence 1968).

Chapter 1 introduces the reader to the inspiration for the study, the research curiosity and the tentative aims. It outlines our research journey, explains my motivation for undertaking qualitative research, specifically feminist participatory co-search. Participatory action research (see 1.5) calls for the research to belong to both the researcher and the participants. To indicate the involvement of participants and to give them a voice in a world where they are so often voiceless (Isherwood & McEwan 1993:87), their words and thoughts will be indicated with a different font.

In this study, four adolescent girls whose biological parents are divorced, and one (or both) parent(s) has/have remarried, joined me in the search for their voice in a world that speaks of divorce as sinful and wrong, and remarriage as the gaining of an evil stepparent, rather than the prospect of having more people join the intimate circle of their life. All the participants knew each other before becoming part of the group because they attend the same school and stay in the same school hostel. In addition

¹ Kroll 1994

to teaching most of the girls, I also have had therapeutic relationships with some of them prior to our work in this group.

Although they knew each other, they were not familiar with the stories of their parents' divorce and the way that their families were structured at the moment. Because our co-search was guided by the narrative approach to therapy (see 2.8) and informed by social construction discourse (as discussed in 2.3), I believed that we could have no knowledge of life or of each other that did not come out of our 'lived experience' (White & Epston 1990:9). Narrative therapy is therefore as much a journey of creation as a journey of discovery. Gerkin (1986:29) explains it as the telling and retelling of our stories.

For we dream in narrative, daydream in narrative, remember, anticipate, hope, despair, believe, doubt, plan, revise, criticize, construct, gossip, learn, hate and love by narrative. In order to live, we make up stories about others, and ourselves, about the personal as well as the social past and future.

Although White and Epston (1990:10) warn that we can never encompass the full richness of lived experience into our story, and that those experiences often go untold, we must realize that those events have real effects on the person (Freeman, Epston & Lobovits 1997:470). Narrative therapy becomes a possible tool to assist people in becoming aware of the unstoried parts of their lives, the effects that it has on them and how they could go about to re-author their lives.

This approach makes therapy a 'language-generating and meaning-generating system' (Anderson & Goolishian 1992:27) where new meanings are created around a person's problem in a tentative way and where dialogue becomes the tool for the mutual search for alternative, preferred meanings.

1.2 Who I am now...

I asked each of the participants to introduce themselves through a metaphor or a way in which they felt comfortable and that they thought would be a good way to describe themselves.

Didi ²-I am like a diamond, not only do I have sharp edges where I haven't been cut and polished, but I am very precious. My

² Most of the participants chose pseudonyms to be used in this text.

parents divorced when I was a toddler and my mother remarried a year after while I was still at nursery school. I have not yet accepted my mother's new husband as a father figure in my life, and therefore I call him by his name. I live with my mother; my sister has left school last year, but still stays with us.

Janien -I think of myself as the sun. With warm rays that are bright and can keep people warm. Our family became a victim of divorce when I was 15. My mother remarried last year to a man that I like very much. My sister and I live with them, while his children stay with his ex-wife. I cannot call him dad yet although he does all the things I would like a dad to do.

Charlette -I like to see myself as a teabag. I only realize my strength when I am in hot water. I was very young when my parents divorced. They both have been remarried since. My sister and I stay with my mother and stepfather. They married when I was in grade 2, so I grew up getting to know him in the role as my father, and I have been calling him dad ever since.

Meagan- My life is like grass. It keeps on growing despite being cut by everything that has happened to me. Both my mother and father have remarried and I have stepsiblings in both families. I stay with my mother, stepfather and little stepbrother, while my brother stays with my father, stepmother and their two children.

Carolina - I am a song. Versatile in lyric, melody and rhythm. I am a teacher-therapist-woman whose family story does not include parental divorce.

During the writing of this dissertation I traveled with a group of amazing girls on an adventurous journey that explored the 'space beneath and between' the arches of the rainbows of their lives. I entered into that journey with the following wishes:

- To assist these adolescents that are children of divorce and remarriage³ in creating and upholding a community of concern where they can be empowered and have their voices heard.
- Co-creating a forum for discussing and deconstructing discourses silencing and marginalizing them and their way of thinking around this issue, and
- Co-creating an opportunity for participants to witness and re-tell their preferred narratives about 'doing family' in alternative ways.

We collaboratively created a context where these adolescents⁴ could find an audience to witness the stories of their rainbows and their lives. Rather than a group effort that continued to enshrine the individual, we participated in groupwork that could act as a forum in which each participant's stories could be linked around shared beliefs and shared commitments. Reconstituting and linking stories

³ Technically remarriage refers to two people getting married to each other again. In this dissertation remarriage will refer to any further marriage that either parent might enter into after death or divorce.

⁴ The participants chose to be referred to as adolescents rather than teenagers or young people.

became a key aspect of our work together. In planning this journey I have been influenced by Welch's understandings of this, when she states that 'the function of telling particular stories of oppression and resistance is not to find the 'one true story' of subjugation and revolt, but to elicit other stories of suffering and courage, of defeat, of tragedy and resilient creativity (1990:39)'.

1.3 Inspiration for the study

Staying in a school hostel I often share in areas of the girl's lives that being just a teacher doesn't usually allow. I am privileged to journey with a number of girls, to have a trusting relationship with them in which they can discuss personal matters with me. In our hostel, I lead a weekly gathering where we, as a hostel, have conversations about religion and relationships. We discuss romantic interests, as well as relationships with parents and families.

During these conversations the need for additional conversation about, and support for, children of divorce and children living in remarried families, became more and more evident. I decided to initiate a divorce support group for the residents of our hostel. The response from the girls was overwhelming and I was amazed at the need for such a group.

After each of the stories I heard, every tear that I shared, I realized more and more that I wanted to collaborate with them in offering them the opportunity for revealing the conflict between the public and personal voices they experienced in their homes, our school and in the greater community.

My conversations with these participants included the fear, confusion, pain, guilt, worry and anger they experienced after their parents divorce and after one or both parents had remarried. I realized that we as adults as well as educational institutions did not meet the needs that these young people experienced around these issues. This left me to wonder: How do young people view themselves after going through a divorce? How has society, the school and their family influenced their feelings about and reaction to being part of a remarried family? Are they treated any differently at school when they get new surnames or when they get a stepfamily? Why do situations arise where children have to explain why their brother has a different last name and their mother yet another? How do they address their new step-grandparents? How does a child relate to a stepparent's family who suddenly become grandparents, step-aunts, -uncles and -cousins? How can children maintain a relationship with the noncustodial parent's family to whom he/she may have been very attached? And how do

they learn to be middle children, when they have for years been the eldest or even an only child? What would it mean for the word 'family' not to invoke assumptions of who should form that group of people, but for it simply to be a reference to the people that any given individual holds dear? What strength does it take to cope with discourses leading to and feeding these and other questions? How does an adolescent learn to live with the marginalization that she is forced to deal with every day (Sears 1992:150)?

While pondering all these questions, I started to wonder about ways in which I could stay in touch with my own experience and anxiety about being expected to speak as a 'professional' and an 'expert'. How could I stay in touch with the experience of being young in ways that do not deny my current position of privilege (Denborough 1996:41)? How could I overcome the marginalization of being a young, single woman working with adolescents not that much older than me?

Furthermore, how could I honour where I come from while at the same time raise questions about the practices I had experienced and participated in? My parents are still married and I wondered how I could attempt to best understand these children's situation although I have never experienced it myself? How could I write and speak in ways that would lead to the possibility of constructive conversations and change that could give birth to equality and freedom of oppression?

From the first day that I stood in front of a class or entered a girl's hostel room, I realized that all my years of studying did not prepare me for anything that I was about to face. I experienced this also to be my feeling about undertaking this research journey. Heshusius (1994b:124) experienced this same anxiety about 'not knowing' anything about the children she was trained to work with:

Nothing in our courses had reflected the voices of youngsters in school ...I had been on a sterile intellectual trip for five years in graduate school, having left life and all that belonged in it behind. I had missed the real significance of the lives of those I thought I had learned so much about. I had learned nothing about them, and therefore nothing about myself. I had only learned rational constructions of them that were severed from real life, hereby distorting it, often in harmful ways.

Now a group of young people and I were planning to embark on a journey. We were getting ready to peer into the eyes of the other, to go on a journey of the self, to explore our fears, celebrate each other's voices, challenge assumptions and reconstruct pasts (Sears 1992:149).

1.4 Research curiosity

In the past, research done by, among others, Kaslow (1995), Hagemeyer (1986); Jeynes (1999) and Kazan (1990) focused on and examined the connection between divorce and delinquency, underachievement, promiscuity and confused sexual identity. A new trend shows studies (McGoldrick & Gerson (1989); James & James (1999); Kroll (1994) and Smith & Smith (2000)) that examine the impact of divorce on children by comparing two-parent households to single-parent households. Although some studies have showed significant statistic differences between children in so-called 'intact families' and children in divorced families, others have shown no differences at all.

Further, they have found that there were favorable findings in different areas for children in both 'intact' and divorced families. Some children were seemingly able to adapt successfully to the stresses associated with divorce and remarriage, whereas others had more difficulty. It seemed that it was not divorce per se that created long lasting problems, but the specific circumstances in which the conflict and separation occurred.

The need for research about the functioning of remarried families and finding ways of improving relationships with noncustodial parents and stepparents, became apparent as I studied the available literature.

Reading through some of the available material, some tentative questions came to mind. One could not even attempt to address all of them in a dissertation of limited scope. Therefore, these possible questions were discussed with the group at our first meeting, and they decided, in a participatory way (see 1.5) which of the questions we would address during our conversations:

- Would it be possible to create a forum where adolescents can feel comfortable enough to identify, discuss and address issues around their experience regarding divorce and remarriage?
- Could this be a place for these young people to discuss individual stories and collective myths, rituals, modes of thinking and educational perspectives about divorce and remarriage in their homes, their school and their community?
- Would they like to take part in sharing and deconstructing their experiences of divorce and remarriage?

- What is their knowledge about dominant discourses (Lowe 1991:45) constituting them (for example, discourses concerning patriarchy, the nuclear family template, guilt and anger)?
- Would they want to challenge societal norms and assist themselves and other teenagers in finding their own voice?
- How could we assist these teenagers to empower themselves to make their voices heard by speaking about their preferred realities?
- Is it possible to design a collaborative process by looking for the not-yet-said (Anderson & Goolishian 1992) of their experience of divorce and remarriage and so begin to re-author their own narratives (White 1995a)?
- How can we challenge and influence parents' and other young people's discourses about divorce as well as being a member of a remarried family?
- How can we give them the opportunity to use what was useful to them in the group to be doing family in an alternative way?

1.5 Research approach

'Any study of society that is not supported by a firm grasp of personal ideas is empty and dead, mere doctrine and no real knowledge at all (Sears 1992:156)'.

A researcher should always be cautious about the danger of falling into a modernistic theoretical trap. Callahan (2001:3) refers to this as walking into a theory wall, where theories and accepted societal wisdoms act like a forcefield so that the researcher's questions and assumptions are arranged in a linear way and according to a pattern. The researcher then only hears what he/she expects to hear. This could very easily lead to the death of surprise and curiosity in a conversation.

The temptation of theory is also tied up with the wanting control of a conversation, wanting to know in advance where the conversation and research are going. This produces 'a discourse that is thin, generalized, statistical and, in the end, that really applies to no one in particular' (Callahan 2001:3). The postmodern paradigm (see 2.4) frees us of this temptation in that it replaces control with collaboration and co-construction.

This assists postmodern researchers in focusing on sidestepping the theory wall and encouraging conversations that are a woven cloth, at times 'bewildering in its colours and patterns' (Callahan 2001:3). One could then even replace the word 'research' with the word 'co-search' to illustrate the

collaborative and participatory approach to this study. It must be noted that during collaborative research the aim is not to establish a series of steps that can be reproduced. During qualitative co-search plots are outlined and continually revised as the process progresses (Clandinin & Connelly 1994:422).

1.6 Qualitative co-search

Qualitative research (Denzin & Lincoln 1994) is an inquiry into the personal worlds of other that, if one is fortunate, becomes a journey into oneself. This allows social constructionists (see 2.3) to step into the worlds of others, to portray these worlds through the authenticity of their voices, and to attempt to understand these worlds through integrity.

This opens the door for qualitative research to encourage participants to challenge the silencing of voices, to reveal conflicts between public and private worlds, to constitute a series of narratives that tells histories of innocence lost and of journeys to selfhood (Sears 1994:150).

The very people the research is about, those for whom it may have any implications or significance, need to have the opportunity, right and responsibility to participate in all aspects of such a co-search. Kotzé (2002:27) explains that they need to participate in decisions about:

- What to research
- Why we want to do the specific research
- By what means
- According to what paradigm, theory or research approach
- What the design and process of the research journey are to be
- How reports are written as well as how the co-search is evaluated when presented for publication or as fulfillment for the requirement of a degree.

Denzin and Lincoln (1994:4) refer to such an approach as a 'bricolage' of interconnected methods. These authors define a bricolage as a close-knit set of practices that provide solutions to a problem or a concrete situation. Such a 'close knit set of practices' can include research as care, research through stories, the narrative approach (see 2.8) to research and research in a feminist and participatory way.

1.6.1 Feminist participatory action research

Postmodern, feminist action research provides opportunities to constitute new realities and facilitate change and social transformation. Participatory action research and feminism are orientated to social and individual change and aspire to egalitarian relationships (Niehaus 2001:15). McTaggart (1997a:7) agrees when he states that participatory research is political because it is about people changing themselves and their circumstances.

During participatory action research the researcher and the participants work together towards justice, coherence and satisfaction in people's lives (McTaggart 1997a:6). The combination of feminism and participatory action research offers the opportunity for creating space for previously marginalized voices to be heard in such research.

Participatory action research is a form of qualitative research that challenges the traditional notion of the researcher as the expert and blurs the boundaries between 'researcher' and 'researched'. According to McTaggart (1997b:28) authentic participation in research means sharing the way research is conceptualized, practiced, and applied to the lived world. It implies ownership of knowledge rather than just participation.

When working with adolescent girls who have been silenced and marginalized by society for being young, female and for being children of divorce, ownership becomes especially important. Mere involvement, instead of ownership, creates the risk of the exploitation of people. These adolescents need to be more than involved in the research; they need to be participating equally in constituting the aims, pace and the structure of the research.

An opportunity for such collaborative decision-making presented itself early in our first conversation. The group felt that we had to find an alternative location to the hostel to have our meetings. They expressed the opinion that it would also assist in deconstructing the teacher-label that they were used to me having. This assisted them in viewing me as being an equal co-author rather than their teacher, therapist or academic researcher. We continued to have weekly conversations about topics that we would decide upon in advance, that could be a result of a previous conversation, or something that they felt the need to talk about. At the beginning of each conversation, we reviewed the three main research aims we had set for ourselves, assessed their relevance, and contextualized that conversation's topic to include one or more of these aims.

It often occurred that a participant would feel the need for a meeting at a different time to that that we had agreed upon. We would then have an emergency meeting to address her need. These meetings mostly centered around happenings between participants and their biological fathers, and will be addressed in chapter 4. During our conversations, and still now, the participants still refer to me as 'Juffrou'. This was a decision that I initially wanted to challenge, but I ended up deciding that if they felt comfortable with the social construction they had of that word in this specific context, I would respect that and focus on other ways than words to deconstruct the power differentials that existed within our group (see 1.6.2).

Given the status of my relationship with the participants before our research journey began, as well as the aims they chose, this research comprised of a participatory action part as well as a narrative part. The participatory part of the research comprised of deconstructing the societal discourses (White 1991:27) around divorce, remarriage and doing family in alternative ways. Societal discourses were identified and deconstructed through the sharing of individual narratives. These dominant stories told the painful problem-saturated stories (Freedman & Combs 1996:40) of being children of divorce and struggling to find a place and a voice within remarried families. This narrative part of the research gave us the space to acknowledge these stories, to listen for the not-yet-said (Anderson & Goolishian 1992:29), identify unique outcomes and explore alternative stories (White & Epston 1990:15). The participants could have their voices heard and their preferred stories thickened through this 'way of being together' (Kotzé 2002:18) and doing research.

McTaggart (1997b:29) mentions that this type of research is also concerned with changing the researcher. This view resonates with feminism that also suggests that the researcher is changed during the research (Clandenin & Connelly 1991:418). Reinharz (quoted by Kotzé 2002:26) emphasizes this self-reflexive nature of participatory research. Such reflection is necessary to guard against imposing meaning on phenomena rather than constructing meaning through negotiation with participants. That implies that the researcher abandons control and adopts openness, mutual disclosure and shared risk. Research then becomes an enactment of power relations; the focus falls on the development of a mutual production of a multi-voice, multi-centered discourse that says more about the relationship between the researcher and the researched than about some object that can be captured in language.

Throughout our journey, I had to acknowledge, re-author and challenge discourses that played into my life about childhood, about being an adult and a teacher, not having personal experience of divorce or remarriage, as well as being a professional 'leading' a research group.

During this process I realized that my generation grew up in a culture where childhood was far separated from adulthood. Adults knew certain things that children should not know. They do things that children should not do. Our society advocates to children that adults and their parents know what is best for them. Children should listen, not ask too many questions and definitely not challenge any decisions or rules that parents make. Adults are there to protect and educate children until they are old enough to 'understand' and 'stand on their own feet'.

According to the social construction discourse (see 2.3), knowledge is constructed in the space between people through using language. Should we not rather ask: How can we consult with children and young people regarding their own ideas on issues in their lives? Is it always better to believe that everything that an adult says is true? Could children have subjugated knowledges (White & Epston 1990:19) and could adults collaborate with adolescents in making these knowledges part of the child's preferred story?

In this way the researcher and all the participants take responsibility for the knowledge that are co-constructed and the possible realities it could constitute, rather than believing that the outcome of the research would be a unified theory. The outcome is seen as a discourse that constructs and influences human beings within societal settings. These discourses are connected to social conditions that define what would be 'true' at any moment in time. Whether the goal of the research is to predict, understand or empower and liberate, all forms of knowledge are discourses that human beings have created in order to discover 'truths' about themselves (Goodman 1992:123). The goal of feminist research should therefore be working through a reflexive process in which the realities that create discourses are deconstructed. Reflexivity erodes the authority of academic discourse in order to challenge concepts of power (1992:124).

1.6.2 Power imbalances in research

Foucault agrees with this notion of power imbalances and claims that those who maintain power positions control knowledge and those who hold knowledge are placed in powerful positions (Freedman & Combs 1996:38). McLean (1997:19) explains that in traditional qualitative research, the

operation of power lay outside the locus of control of the participant. Within that process, the participant was the 'researched' who often became marginalized and subjugated.

Added to that are differences in status, authority, language skills and life experience (Morgan 2000:149) that exists between adults and adolescents. When adults view this as an entitled rather than a privileged position, they are unlikely to act in a manner that is accountable to the children and adolescents in our society. Feminist ideas have uncovered new stories that give children the opportunity to speak. In this way we assist them in working through powerlessness to a place where they can step out of the traditional roles assigned to them by discourses (Bons-Storm 1998a:12).

In the same way that normalizing discourses are prescriptive about the role of the adolescent in research, it is also very prescriptive about the position of the researcher. Those discourses placed me, as researcher, in a privileged, professional, expert position responsible for all decisions regarding the process and the end-result.

I found it imperative to remind myself that I am a member of a society that usually elevates adult needs and experiences above those of children (Morgan 2000:169). This encouraged me to be alert, transparent and accountable to the needs of the participants through maintaining a genuine curiosity and respect in my questions and conversations with the group.

My postmodern worldview (see 2.4) promotes that there are no grand narrative made up of fixed, essential truths and 'correct' results for research. It was a liberating thought that I did not need to carry the 'burden of creativity' (Freeman, Epston & Lobovits 1997:13) during our conversations. Participatory action research and feminism advocates shared responsibility in decision making and evaluating of results, through a not-knowing approach (see 2.10).

1.7 Our journey

1.7.1 Inviting participants

The research group included four participants who indicated a desire to talk about their experiences of their parents' divorce and difficulties they experienced as part of a remarried family. All of the girls are pupils of the high school where I teach and are residents in our school hostel. Their ages varied between 15 and 17, and the group was mixed with respect to time since divorce, current living arrangements and relationship with nonresidential parents and stepfamilies. Each participant received

an information sheet and consent form for themselves, as well as their parents, outlining the research. Although action research groups can be as large as eight participants, this group was made up only of four members to ensure that each participant got sufficient 'air-time' (Kalter & Schreier 1993:46) to share their stories and have their voices heard.

I discussed the possible tentative aims and procedures with the participants in near language (Gergen 1990:150) that was comfortable and accessible to them. The ethical aspect and confidentiality was also discussed and negotiated.

1.7.2 Negotiating the journey

As a result of using a participatory research premises that advocates power sharing (McTaggart 1997b:29), the goals of the study was negotiated throughout the process with the participants.

A discussion was held with the participants where I presented the possible research questions (see 1.4) that I had in mind. These discussions were also used to establish a tentative map of our journey together, the title of the project and the language we would use. For example, would they choose to use the word adolescent or would they prefer to be referred to as teenagers or young people?

1.7.3 Telling our stories

Clandinin and Connelly (1994:228) remind that it is important that the telling of personal narratives allow space for growth and change. The construction of a narrative of experience is therefore a reflexive relationship between living a life story, telling a life story, retelling a life story and reliving a story (1994:419).

Group members whose parents recently have divorced or remarried could see from conversations with 'veterans' that there could very well be life after divorce. Including adolescents from various points along the extended divorce and remarriage continuum (Kalter & Schreier 1993:45) allowed a fuller discussion of issues and discourses such as nonresidential moves and relationships with nonresidential parents and stepparents that unfolds over time.

Diversity in the group with respect to current living arrangements had similar advantages to including adolescents whose parents divorced between ten years and two years ago. They could share the different perspectives of living in a single-parent family, as part of a family where one (or both) parents

has remarried, or as having a different place in the hierarchy of age (for example going from being a eldest child to now being a middle child).

1.7.3.1 A family picture

Our group started this journey of telling and retelling of our stories by drawing genograms (McGoldrick & Gerson 1989:164) to explain the family history and show the basic structure, family demographics and relationships. These graphics depictions, characteristic of the family systems theory, can be called 'shorthand to illustrate family patterns' (McGoldrick & Gerson 1989:163). Fig.1 shows the genogram that Meagan has drawn of her family where both her mother and father have been remarried; and she has stepsiblings with both stepfamilies. Where she once was the younger of two children, within her stepfamilies she became the second of five.

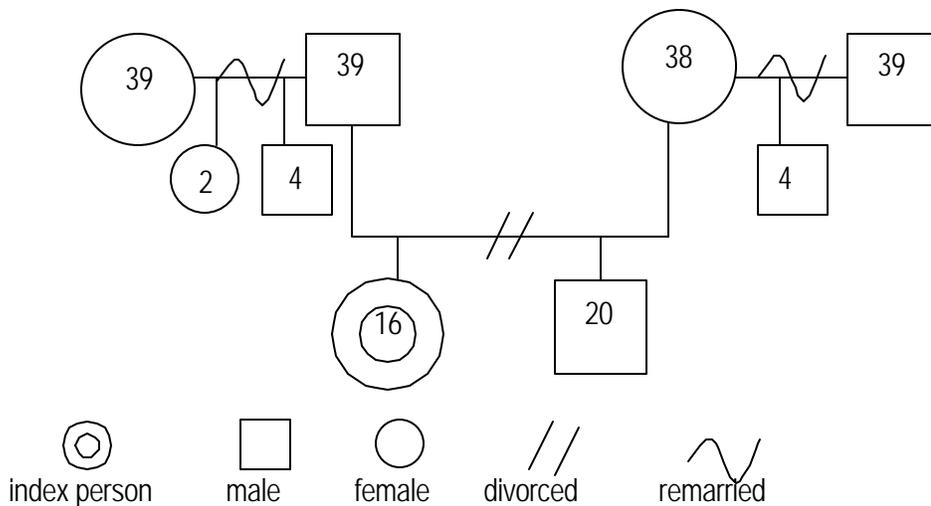
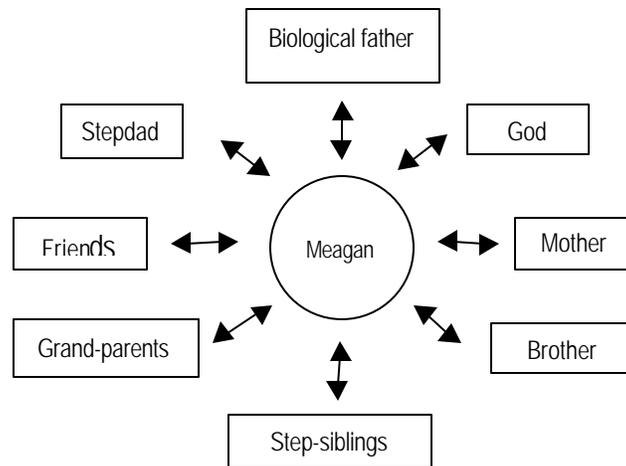


Fig 1. Genogram of Meagan's family

As I very quickly learned, I have followed a very modernistic approach for getting to know each participant's story. By asking the participants to draw such a family tree (that places a lot of emphasis on biological or lawful connections), I marginalized them by forcing them to explain their alternative family through a way developed to give a visual impression of a nuclear family. (While planning the

activity, I had to develop my own symbol for remarried, because such a symbol did not appear in the literature I had about genograms). During the next session, I apologized to the participants and asked them to again explain their families, but this time using a shape with their own names in the centre and then including all the important people and things in their lives on the perimeter. I believe that in this way we came closer to capturing the full relational matrix of these participants that had such multiple webs of relationships in their lives.



This activity gave the group the opportunity to not only get to know the composition of each other's family, but also served to immediately set the tone as them being the experts on their own lives, as well as promoting a sense of transparency and accountability within the group.

We approached all our consequent conversations with an attitude of openness and receptivity to create a participatory consciousness, 'a deeper level of kinship' (Heshusius 1994a:15) between the group and myself. Kotzé (2002:4) describes this as a freeing ourselves from the categories imposed by the notions of objectivity and subjectivity. Such knowledge *of* another person then becomes a way of knowing *with* that person. Kotzé (2002:3) illustrates this very clearly when he says that 'it is about two people daring to dance in the silence of dark – no movement to be seen or music to be heard- a search for a participatory consciousness that will create their own music and become a healing movement.'

I believe that creating such an opportunity and treating these teenagers with respect, encouraged them to share their own narratives. And through sharing they deconstructed societal discourses, found healing and also witnessed their ways of healing themselves and their families.

1.7.4 Deconstructing societal discourses

Patriarchal discourses and modernistic hierarchal structures need to be deconstructed through a postmodern social construction discourse (see 2.3) and a participatory, feminist theological view (see 2.6).

The search for a voice requires deconstruction of the very categories that give us self- and relational identity and the deconstruction of the communities that give groups, like adolescents, their collective identities. Through advocating deconstruction we are taking a stand against certain practices of power in our society that lead to the participants being subjugated and marginalized.

The participants exposed subjugating discourses through inquiring about contextual influences. The following questions suggested by Freedman and Combs (1996:68) assisted us in this task:

- What 'feeds' the problem?
- Who benefits from the discourse?
- What type of people would advocate this discourse?
- What groups of people would be opposed to this discourse?

Questions like these invited the group to consider how the entire contexts and societal influences in their lives affected the problem and how they could stand against these oppressive and exploitative practices (Cochrane, DeGruchy & Peterson 1991).

Action research recognizes that we are social beings and that we are members of groups...to change the culture of our group and society we must change ourselves, with others, through the changing of the substance, forms and patterns of language, activities and social relationships which characterize groups and interactions among their members.

(Kemmis & McTaggart 1988:13)

Contextual practical theology aims for change and transformation within groups and societies. The participants in this group have extended the changes in themselves and in the group to changes in the community. This was done by having these conversations, doing research to determine the amount of children of divorce and children living as part of single-parent or stepfamilies in our school. They also facilitated the changing of certain administrative forms at our school that could be

marginalizing and violating to children of divorce (see 6.4). In addition they have also created a family enrichment game, FunFam, (see chapter 5) to involve more people in their witnessing of their work.

1.7.5 Reflecting on sessions

After each of our conversations I transcribed the audiocassettes. The participants could then reflect on the session through either discussions, or through journal-entries. These practices encouraged transparency and accountability throughout the journey. Making use of such practices also gave the participants a chance to think about the influence the sessions had on their lives and to create meaning that had not been recognized previously, or during the conversations. This first step of reflecting on sessions enabled the group to develop a collective voice around issues of divorce and doing family, as opposed to individual experiences (Want & Williams 2000:16). The strength of this collective voice provided opportunities not only to expose restraints and tactics of discourses, but also to explore paths that could assist them to getting to a preferred way of living.

1.7.6 Having all our voices heard

This research belongs as much to the group as it does to me. Throughout the writing of this text I was cautious to not privilege my adult voice and professional language above the near-language that was used in our group. Each group member therefore had the opportunity to read the dissertation. They were encouraged to suggest changes, add or replace ideas. This added to me being accountable and transparent about the report. Another aspect of doing research in an ethical and accountable way was to offer the participants the chance to choose the pseudonyms they would like to be used in the report.

1.8 Chapter outline

The research was storied and re-storied by all the participants as the journey developed. The steps of the research journey were not pre-planned or fixed, but they developed in this fashion as they were co-constructed by the research participants. This is in line with the spirit of participatory action research, as discussed at the beginning of this chapter.

The following chapters will address certain key aspects of the research journey:

In chapter 2, I position myself within an epistemological framework that is build upon postmodern discourse, social constructionist ideas and a narrative way of doing therapy and research.

Chapter 3 gives an overview of the literature available on the influence of divorce and remarriages on children and specifically adolescents. We deconstruct some of the dominant discourses regarding these issues and hear the voice of the participants about living as part of an alternative family.

Our journey centered around two major themes. In chapter 4 we explore the relationship between the participants and their biological fathers, and we investigate the influence that this problem-saturated story has on their lives. This chapter also introduces the reader to the alternative stories that have developed around these relationships. Chapter 5 investigates the use of rituals in families, and used rituals as a foundation for the creation of a family enrichment game that can promote the doing of family in anti-nuclear, alternative ways.

At the end of our journey we use chapter 6 to reflect on the path that we have taken, the alternative stories that we have written and we speculate about where we will be going from here.

CHAPTER 2

WORKING AT THE RAINBOW'S END

EPISTEMOLOGICAL POSITIONING AS RESEARCHER

2.1 Introduction

This chapter investigates the social construction discourse; explain why this journey was built on postmodern discourse, contextual practical theology, feminist theology and the narrative approach to doing pastoral research. It also motivates the importance of allowing the participating adolescent to be the expert and authority in the construction of the journey, as well as the writing of this text. The discussion of these above mentioned issues also motivates my current epistemological position.

2.2 The lenses of my passion

I position myself within a postmodern, feminist, narrative, social constructionist worldview. It includes being ethical, accountable and transparent in my attempts to acknowledge pain and suffering together with people's resilient longing for wholeness (Ackermann & Bons-Storm 1998:35). This is achieved by creating space for individual stories and self-narratives that lie outside the grand meta-narratives of the modernistic paradigm (Freedman & Combs 1996:20). Postmodern discourse also suggests that realities people live in are socially constructed through language that is maintained through narratives (Freedman & Combs 1996:22).

2.3 Social construction discourse

Freedman and Combs (1996:16) write

As we work with people who come to see us [and takes part in our research], we think about the interaction between the stories that they are living out in their personal lives and the stories that are circulating in their culture. We think about how cultural stories are influencing the way they interpret their daily experience and how their daily actions are influencing the stories that circulate in society.

Societies construct the lenses through which they interpret the world. The beliefs, values, institutions, customs, labels, laws, divisions of labor that make up our social realities are constructed by the

members of a culture as they interact with one another from generation to generation as well as from day to day. These realities have surrounded us from birth and provide the beliefs, practices, words and experiences from which we make up our lives and constitute our multiple selves. Therefore, social construction is, according to Hoffman, 'a lens about lenses' (1990:2).

According to Freedman and Combs (1996:17) we look at the interaction between stories that people are living and the stories that are circulating in their cultures. We use pastoral therapy and research to investigate how cultural stories are influencing our actions and how these actions can influence cultural stories. In this way we become responsible for continually constituting ourselves to be the people we want to be. We examine taken-for-granted stories in our culture, the contexts we move in and the relationships we cultivate to re-author and update our own stories (1996:18). This implies that a person and his/her beliefs, values and commitments do not somehow arise 'from the depths' (Callahan 2001:4). All aspects of a person are constituted historically, politically, socially and culturally.

Kotzé (1994:112) goes on to explain that anything we therefore say about a culture or a preferred way of living is a social construction about a social construction. Postmodern discourse (see 2.4) leads us to see that as observers of the discourses surrounding our lives and issues such as divorce and remarriage, we are also the creators thereof.

Furthermore, Hoffmann (1990:3) states that social construction discourse lead to a shift on how an individual person would construct a view of reality from personal experience to how people interact with each other to construct and maintain what their society holds to be true, real and meaningful.

Social constructionists believe that how individuals know what they know does not come about through exact pictorial duplications of the world (the map is not mistaken for the territory). Instead, reality is seen in the way individuals subjectively interpret the constructions they receive (Smith & Smith 2000:21). They go on to explain that an individual's story of the world and how it works is not the world; their experience of the world is limited to their internal description thereof.

This lens to viewing reality had its origin in a general doubt of and distrust of what is generally accepted as the taken-for-granted truth. In this way social construction discourse acts as a form of social critique. It challenges the concept of knowledge as a mental representation because it views

knowledge itself as a social construction (Freedman & Combs 1996:1) because knowledge is something that people 'do' together (Gergen 1985:270).

2.3.1 Knowledge and understanding

'Social construction discourse is an attempt to approach knowledge from the perspective of the social processes through which it is created' (Kotzé & Kotzé 1997:33).

Knowledge can thus be seen as a patchwork of context, culture, language, experience and understanding (Anderson 1997:36; Niehaus 2001:25). Meaning and knowledge are co-created by individuals in conversation with each other. Anderson and Goolishian (1992:38) and Hoffman (1990:8) explain that meaning and understanding are intersubjective and mediated through language. Knowledge must then, according to Kotzé (2002:9), no longer be seen as a representation of the world, but as referring to our interpretations that has specific purposes and with political and ethical effects.

In this context, understanding does not mean that we ever understand another person. We are able to understand through dialogue only what it is the other person is saying (Kotzé 1994:4). This understanding is always in context and never lasts through time. Weingarten (1994:179) states that she believes her job to be creating conditions to develop understanding that emerges from the collaboration of therapy that offer new possibilities for feeling, thought and action. She warns that one should never commit yourself to understanding too quickly, so that the client can discover through her own speaking what she is thinking or feeling. This contributes to knowledge, meaning making and understanding being part of the social construction of a system, as well as of the participant's multiple selves.

2.3.2 Social construction of the self

In the social constructionist view, the experience of self exists in this ongoing dialogue with others; the self continually creates itself through narratives that include other people who are reciprocally woven into these different cultures (Weingarten 1994:306). The self is thus always socially constructed in the form of a narrative.

This means that the self is not something that arises spontaneously from within but something that is imposed on a person through outside influences. The primary vehicle for constituting the self is

language, and the acquisition of language comes through our interactions with others. From this perspective it is the other that inform our notions of self, as language intersects with and acts through our individual bodies. This leads to the postmodern conclusion that there is no such thing as a person's 'essential self' (or fixed, static personality). Kvale (quoted in Freedman & Combs 1996:34) writes: 'In current understanding of human beings there is a move from the inwardness of an individual psyche to being-in-the-world with other human beings. The focus of interest is moved from the inside to the outside of the human world.'

Different selves then come forth in different contexts of which no self is truer than any other. Therapists aim to work with people to bring various experiences of self and to distinguish which of those selves they prefer in which contexts.

Postmodern discourse embraces multiple realities and therefore multiple selves that can stand in a participatory relationship (Heshusius 1994a:15) with the multiple selves of the researcher to co-create new realities through language.

2.3.3 Language

Freedman and Combs (1996:24) state that language is not something that mirrors nature, but that it rather creates the nature that we know. Language is always changing; it is an interactive process, not a passive receiving of information.

Anderson and Goolishian (1992:37) use the expression 'to be in language' to illustrate that language is a dynamic, social operation and not a simple linguistic activity (Kotzé & Kotzé 1997:30). People exist in language, because meaning and understanding come about through language.

But still meaning is not carried in a word it self, but by the word in relation to its context (Derrida quoted by Freedman & Combs 1996:26), and no two contexts will ever be the same. Thus the precise meaning of a word can never be established and the meaning of words like divorce or remarriage is always to be negotiated.

We do not only use language, language uses us. It provides the categories in which we think. Discourse theory suggests that we don't develop meaning out of a void, but out of a preexisting, shared language, and through discursive practices that reflect and reenact the traditions, power relations and institutions of our society (Madigan 1996:50).

Language highlights certain features of the objects it represents, certain meanings of the situations it describes. Once designations in language become accepted, one is constrained by them. Language inevitably structures one's own experience of reality as well as the experience of those with whom one communicates. Language then becomes a sign system used by the powerful to label, define and rank. When people forget that words are all merely social constructions, their use becomes problematic and marginalizing because they obtain truth status (Kotzé 1994:3).

In the social constructions of divorce and remarriage, the above-mentioned truth status could be awarded to issues like the use of the word 'step' that are believed to always have negative connections. It could also refer to the assumption that divorce is always bad for a family, not recognizing that it might be better for the children to be in a family that are divorced. These beliefs get accepted in our society as truths, rather than just opinions of some people, mostly adults. Children, like the participants in this study are very often not awarded a voice or an opinion regarding issues such as divorce and remarriage because of accepted 'truths' proclaiming that they are 'too young to know what really is going on'.

Deconstructing the power issues in these normalizing truths (White & Epston 1990:17) enable us to enrich our pastoral therapeutic and research work with the diversity of ideas and ways of using language and constructing realities that enable people to live in ethical ways. This constant search and attempt to construct the realities and lives we live in an ethical manner, is our guide to doing research in a conversational way (Kotzé 1994:12). During this study we focused on the participant's version of the events surrounding parental divorce. This opened the way for working towards the second aim that the participants set for his study, namely, to create a safe space to deconstruct these truths and beliefs in a postmodern way.

2.4 Postmodern discourse

'When I got here I had a fixed set of opinions, the longer I stayed, the more confused I got' (Anonymous).

Andersen (1991:67) quotes Goolishian when he reminds us that 'you cannot not have a theory. But, remember that you must not fall so much in love with it that you have to carve it on a stone'. Such reminders help me to constantly revisit my thinking and approaches to therapy and life. My attraction

to a postmodern way of working is explained very well by Hoffman (1998:148) when she quotes Robert Prisig's book *Zen and the art of motorcycle maintenance*:

The [good] craftsman isn't ever following a single line of instruction. He's making decisions as he goes along. For that reason he'll be absorbed and attentive to what he's doing even though he doesn't deliberately contrive this. He isn't following any set of written instructions because the nature of the material at hand determines his thoughts and motions, which simultaneously change the nature of the material at hand.

A postmodern view of reality holds that realities are socially constructed, are constituted through language, are organized and maintained through narrative and that there are no essential truths (Freedman & Combs 1996:22). In a postmodern premise the emphasis is no longer placed on dogmas and fixed theories, but rather on the ethical implication of these rules and regulations on human lives.

A postmodern approach to research and therapy focus on the client's narrative, noticing the representation of the account rather than the 'objectivity' thereof. Specific, localized meanings attributed by individuals are accepted (local narratives), rather than the client being a passive recipient of the therapist's knowledge and expertise (Freedman & Combs 1996:44).

Before being exposed to postmodern discourse I lived and worked in a very rigid, modernistic education structure where teachers were the experts having to educate and train 'lesser beings called children'. The power differences were not only acknowledged, but also promoted through addressing forms such as Miss and Sir. Being familiar with children was definitely not allowed and in traditional classrooms there were no room for a child's personal life. The buck of the responsibility for a child's emotional well-being was very easily passed to social workers and psychologists. Listening was not part of what teachers were paid to do; they were paid to add to a child's knowledge about the world. In this way, strengthening the dominant discourses, absolute truths and normalizing narratives that modernism advocates.

I have always felt uncomfortable with such a fixed job description and definition of teaching. Coming into contact with postmodern discourse opened a new world for me. A world that I believe I always knew existed and that I spent years searching for. I could very much resonate with Weingarten

(1994:307) that I no longer believed that is was '...[my] task to observe persons; to compare their thoughts, feelings and behaviours against pre-existing normative criteria and then to explain, advise or intervene as a means to bring their responses in line with these criteria.'

These three related actions are consistent with a modernist paradigm. Instead, I believe that normative criteria participate in the creation of the very dilemmas and problems from which persons suffer and seek to escape. I agree with Weingarten (1994:309) in seeing my task as

[the] creation of a conversational context in which persons can notice aspects of their experience that contradict the restrictive views of themselves, others and the problems that beset them. When this occurs, choices for the development of new stories about their lives become possible and preferable.

Since the stories we tell about ourselves are constitutive of our experience rather than representative, persons who are telling new stories about themselves are creating paths for new thinking, feeling and action. Thus, noticing, searching for, generating possibilities from, questioning about and developing alternative story lines replace explaining, advising and intervening as the modes of therapeutic action within the postmodern paradigm (1994:308).

In this way postmodern practices, with their emphasis on the development of the client's voice rather than the assertion of the therapist's voice, seem particularly useful for work with adolescents. Their stories are particularly vulnerable to marginalization; their voices are particularly vulnerable to silencing. A postmodern practice can guard against the imposition of meaning for adolescents who are less powerful than adults and whose stories may be less precisely formed.

In her analysis of adolescents' discourses on divorce, Lamanna (1999:7) suggests that adolescent women of all classes live in a social world lacking the structural support for the modern grand narrative. One is left with the question of whether adolescents might now be searching for postmodern solutions to the challenge of coping with a divorce and remarriage in settings with limited options?

Through postmodern thinking we question dominant discourses (Freedman and Combs 1996:46). This does not mean telling people to live their lives in an alternative fashion, but rather suggest resisting dominant messages, exploring alternatives that can lead to self-determination. Postmodern discourses are all deconstructive in that they seek to distance us from, and make us skeptical about

beliefs concerning truth, knowledge, power, the self and language that are often taken for granted within, and serve as legitimating factors for, contemporary Western culture.

Adolescents are still living in a very modernistic society that prescribes to them what their view on marriage and divorce should be. Through questioning the Western, patriarchal images that they are confronted with, this study journeyed with adolescents to develop their own voice and own view, and by doing so, freed them from the 'objective truth' about being a child of divorced or remarried parents that society is attempting to portray. They experienced the space and freedom to deconstructed discourses like patriarchy, and had the opportunities to re-author their own stories, to dissect their own social constructions of these issues.

Didi - I always thought that I was the only child I knew who felt this way about being part of a divorced family. Now I know that there are a lot of other people who feel the same and who experienced the same emotions that I did.

Janien - I learned that it was okay to question the way my parents did things. There is nothing wrong with disagreeing with the way that my parents handled certain issues about their divorce, and about raising us.

During the research the group co-created a safe space where adolescents could voice and develop their multiple selves and multiple realities. Being ethical, respectful, accountable and transparent assisted us in co-creating this safe space. All these elements are reflected in the practical theological stance that underlined this research.

2.5 Contextual Practical theology

From a contextual perspective I am challenged not only to work with children of divorce, but also to be committed to transform the culture and the (school) community (Graham 1996:114) so that they can relate differently to children of divorce and remarriage. Otherwise the marginalization that these children experience might just carry on.

'Pastoral therapists cannot but take a position when engaging with people in pain and suffering. Ethically this position means a commitment to transformation, positioning oneself on the side of those suffering and against all oppressive or exploitative practices' (Kotzé 2002:3).

Bosch (1991:439) refers to a theology from below where 'doing' care grows from self-other participation and not from the privileged position of knowing reflected in western theology. According to Ackermann (1996:43) a feminist theological perspective is also based on seeing things from the outer circles or from below, rather than from a theory that has legitimized 'from above' practices of oppression.

This approach resonated very well with the adolescents in our group because it strengthened the notion that they were the experts in their own life and that we wanted to honour their knowledge and expertise on our journey together. They had very definite ideas of what needed attention and what they would have liked to change.

Contextual theology weaves together theology, social critique, religious practices and life experience as it aims toward social transformation. The aim of contextual practical theology is the social and political improvement of people in communities, especially those who experience some sort of oppression (Wolfaardt 1993:8). In this theology the emphasis falls on 'doing' theology and there is a shift from 'being' right to 'doing' right (Rossouw 1993:903), (see 2.6) Through 'doing' theology, the researcher and participants become co-constructors on the research journey.

I am committed to co-author and celebrate the stories of the participants that support their preferred theological views and practices. Given that the participants in this study came to the research from a teacher/student, adult/adolescent context, contextual theology was very relevant to this research. Through accountable, ethical 'doing' of theology I attempted to address this power hierarchy and convey to the other participants that we journeyed with equal voices. I attempted to portray this message through emphasizing that their words carried the same weight as mine, acknowledging that I had so much to learn from their experiences and expertise in this matter. Through not having the conversations at school, we strengthened the idea of equal distribution of power, as advocated by the feminist theology.

2.6 Feminist theology of praxis

I live and work within reformist feminist principles and I position myself within feminist practical theological ideas. My particular social history, my work within the Christian paradigm as a feminist, and my gender, race and social class colour my views and shape my choices (Ackermann 1998a:40).

Feminist theology is also contextual because it examines the reflection of social, political and cultural influences on people's lives (Ackermann 1998b:22). It approaches this reflection through language that is inclusive, non-hierarchical and dynamic. This makes feminist and contextual theology a dynamic system that not only strives towards social change and empowerment, but also in challenging the discourses that uphold patriarchy in society and in communities of faith. This theology originated from the experiences of women and men and their interaction with each other and society (Isherwood & McEwan 1993:35).

Isherwood and McEwan (1993:103) also mention how Christianity and patriarchal theology determine gender roles. These include women being submissive and not having authority in a relationship. This submissiveness and silence often carries on after a divorce and is very obvious to the children of divorce. Such children are being silenced and marginalized. If, as Foucault claims, power is everywhere, then these children must also have the power to resist, then those affected by the submissiveness also have a contribution to make (Rossouw 1993:902).

'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)

These dichotomies not only relate to male/ female but also to adult/adolescent and parent/child relationships. This could be seen in the way that a child or adolescent is not often afforded a voice in the reality of a parent's decision to remarry. Although Didi's mother might have been aware of the fact that her children did not have a good relationship with her new partner, she married him without ever asking their opinion. Charlette's father also married a woman that does not approve of his children, but the children are forced to go shopping with her, and their father often talks to them about improving their attitude toward her, without acknowledging that the stories might have two sides. A feminist praxis aims to address these power hierarchies and aims towards a full participatory process, giving a place to the story of the adolescent in such a situation. Janien's mother engaged in such a

participatory attitude when she got remarried. She had a conversation with Janien and her sister about the possibility of getting married, and included them in organizing the wedding ceremony as well as in the arrangements for moving to their new home. Being so closely involved in the process made me feel part of her wedding and not only like a spectator. I think it also helped me to accept him as part of the family much quicker.

When a family functions in such a participatory way, it can uncover new stories that give women; children and marginalized people (in this case adolescents) the opportunity to speak. It could also assist them in working through powerlessness to a place where they can step out of the traditional roles and dichotomies assigned to them by dominant discourses (Bons-Storm 1998b:17).

Welch (1990:20) describes this undertaking as an ethic of risk. Such an attitude begins with the recognition that we cannot guarantee decisive changes in the near future, or even in our lifetimes. But the ethic of risk is also propelled by the recognition that to stop resisting oppression and marginalization would be like dying. It is by the death of the imagination, through the ceasing of caring, that we lose the ability to imagine strategies of resistance. Our journey was a path of resistance, a quest to a collaborative search for voices and empowerment. The stories of resistance and empowerment of the participants in this study will be discussed in chapter 4.

2.7 Participatory approach to pastoral care

Participatory imagining and strategizing happen as part of a collaborative process of not to care 'for', but rather do care 'with' people (Kotzé 2002:27). A participatory approach to caring and research calls on the researcher to be decentred, neutral and non-directive. This is also evident of the participatory approach to research, as mentioned by McTaggart (1997b:28), where he explains that authentic participation in research means sharing the way that research is thought about, decided upon and practiced.

Social transformation through participatory action cannot be reached by individuals. McTaggart (1997b:34) says that 'individual researchers change themselves, support others in their effort to change and together work to change institutions and society'. But as a participatory group work

together to change their language and their social relationships, they can start to envision a change for the whole of society.

Such an approach to pastoral care (Graham 1996:49) and research collaboratively negotiates alternative ways of being and challenges oppressive discourses for participants to live in an ethical, accountable way. Group members are then taking part in a participatory collaborative process of meaning making and re-authoring their stories through social construction. Such re-authoring forms the foundations of the narrative approach to doing pastoral therapeutic work and research.

2.8 Narrative approach

'In striving to make sense of life, persons face the task of arranging their experiences across time in such a way to arrive at a coherent account of themselves' (White & Epston 1990:10).

This personal account is then used for ordering daily life, for interpreting new experiences and circulating knowledges of ourselves and of our world (Freedman and Combs 1996:47). In this way the story becomes the basis of a person's social construction of multiples of selves. The development of such a narrative involves a process where experiences are selected out to fit with that individual's evolving story while the experiences that do not seem to fit are discarded. White and Epston (1990:10) suggest that because of deficiencies in vocabulary or personal resources, many aspects of our life's experience goes unstoried and remains untold. In our research that implied taking apart the story of divorce and assisting the participants to look for the alternative stories about their parent's divorce and remarriage that might have been unavailable to them till now.

Through deconstructive listening and deconstructive questioning a context can be created in which re-authoring of these problem-saturated stories about divorce and remarriage can occur. The deconstruction of dominant stories and discourses implies that stories have many different meanings, and that researchers have to use their skill to search for the 'not-yet-said', the unique outcomes and alternative story that people might not be aware of as yet. Kotzé and Kotzé (1997:34) urge us to validate that what has been said, as well as what has not been said.

One of the micro-maps used in narrative therapy to assist in this re-authoring and validation is externalization. Externalizing is an approach to therapy that encourages people to objectify and personify the problems that they experience as oppressive. During this process, the problem becomes a separate entity and thus external to the person or relationship affected by the problem

(White & Epston 1990:38). They also promote the idea that the person is not the problem, the problem is the problem (1990:37).

Through such an externalizing conversation, the effects of the problem can be mapped. This process puts the client in the position of realizing that the problem is something that a person stands in a relationship with, has some influence and control over, rather than believing that the problem has full control over the person (White & Epston 1990:38). This realization often undermines the sense of failure that has developed for many people in response to the continuing existence of the problem despite all their efforts to overcome it.

Apart from opening up space for dialogue, rather than a monologue, about a problem, it also creates space for identifying the person's preferred way of being. It opens the door for people to take action to retrieve their lives and their relationships from the influence of the problem. In this study we have investigated their experiences of 'living in the space beneath and between' their rainbows, and journeyed toward alternative stories that better fit their ideas and wishes on how the 'space between' should look.

2.9 A playful approach

'Serious discussion and methodical problem solving may impose on children's communication, shutting out their voices, inhibiting their special abilities, knowledges and creative resources' (Freeman, Epston & Lobovits 1997: 3).

The above authors further explain that the aims of adults working with children should be to access and collaborate using the imagination and knowledge of these children. Instead of just reflecting their language, or fitting it into a theoretical framework, we should seek to become an active participant in the child's world of meaning (Freeman, Epston & Lobovits 1997:4).

As has been mentioned before, non-hierarchical language is used in such collaborative conversations and the participants have equal roles. Careful attention is paid to near-language and words that show respect and mutuality. The therapist is seen as a co-author with knowledge that is not more than that of the client (Anderson & Goolishian 1992:30).

Despite the belief that a therapist must take a stance of not-knowing one can never go into therapy session with no ideas in mind I feel that it is better to be aware of these discourses and to stay

genuinely curious, transparent and accountable and keep in mind that the idea is to collaboratively co-create conversation where the client stays the expert. During this research I was transparent about never being part of a divorced family, not knowing what it feels like to have the type of relationship with a biological father that some of the participants have. I paid attention to using language that was familiar and accessible to the participants. I was reminded of this early in our conversations I asked a question about a 'nuclear family'. If I did not employ a not-knowing approach, they might not have felt comfortable saying that they were not familiar with this term, and a valuable part of our research together would not have happened. But because they felt safe to speak, we could create our own social construction of the idea, which we called a '7th heaven family' (see 4.2).

2.10 The child is the expert

This approach by Anderson and Goolishian (1992:28) relies upon the social construction discourse that suggests that meaning is created through language and discourse. Adopting such an approach requires the researcher to have a genuine, ongoing curiosity for the participant's story. The researcher listens for the not-yet-said (1992:34) and creates space for the creation of a new, preferred narrative. The not-yet-said refers to the client's internal, private thoughts and conversations of stories that haven't been told. These could be because words have yet failed to express the story and experience, or a story that has already been told, but not in the present context.

That would imply the participant's experiences to be placed central in the conversation so that the voice of the person in pain is truly listened to. This stands in contrast to the idea of the 'expert' therapist whose knowledge and advice would be centralized in traditional therapeutic settings. Looking through the lenses of the postmodern discourse and social construction discourse, I see my role as interviewer and reflector. My job is therefore to create a forum where the expert knowledge of the group members is privileged. My skills are used to build a scaffold for this knowledge to be confirmed.

2.11 Letting the adolescent be the authority

Anderson and Goolishian (1992:34) emphasize that this approach does not mean that 'anything goes', it just means that the adolescent's experience is to be considered equally as valuable as those of the researcher. It also does not mean that the researcher will not be influenced by his/her own prejudices; it implies that he/she will be accountable and transparent so that the prejudices are open

to the participant's story. In this way meaning becomes a dialogue between participant and the researcher.

Young people, especially adolescents, are not used to experiencing themselves as authorities on themselves. They are rarely, at school or at home, given the opportunity to review, interpret and evaluate what is taking place in their lives. They are seldom asked to examine their motives or consider the consequences of their actions. But even more, adults often tell them what the events in their lives mean. During our first conversations, the participants often referred to their parent's version of the divorce, or of the state of their present relationships. But as they gained confidence and believed that I saw them as being the experts in this field, they felt free and safe to relay their own ideas about the subjects that we were discussing.

Adolescents are so used to adults deciding they know what is best and being ready to tell them what they are not to do, they become very sensitive to this and become experts at 'turning off', or simply at producing answers because an adult expects them to do so. Due to the power differential and discourses proclaiming that adolescents are 'at a stage', their life experience is often ignored and unacknowledged. McLean (1997:2) argues that adolescents' experiences are therefore marginalized and adults attempt to make choices on their behalf.

But when a researcher approaches research with a not-knowing approach and thereby puts the participants in the expert position, their local knowledge and skills are validated and deemed worthy of respect. That comes about when the researcher doesn't search for regularities and common meaning that might validate his/her theories or expectations, since that might invalidate the uniqueness of the client's story. An example of this in our research was my initial idea that these participants would have troubled relationships with their stepfathers. But due to my not-knowing position, I quickly learned that the relationship with their biological fathers was more troubled than that of their stepfather.

Another important aspect of allowing the client to be the expert is by adopting a stance of tentativeness, rather than knowing. It guards against the client's statements being turned into 'truths'. Rather, this approach seeks to convey to the client a deep respect for the person's own knowledge, which is likely to be subjugated and undervalued. This way of doing therapy and research seeks to position the generalized professional knowledge beneath the particularized, local knowledge of the child.

2.12 Conclusion

Against the framework provided in this chapter, I want to again emphasize my passion and commitment to facilitating ways of letting adolescents speak out for themselves. During the research for this study, I searched with four adolescents, for opportunities to tell peers, adults and teachers about their journey with their parents' divorce, remarriage, custody arrangements and living as a member of an alternative family. Through using the postmodern and social constructionist premise we have created a space to share what they have learned, pain they had suffered and strategies they have developed while facing these challenges every day.

The next chapter offers an overview of some of the literature available on divorce and remarriage. It investigates the social construction of the word 'divorce' and deconstructs the discourses influencing children living in as part of divorced or remarried families.

CHAPTER 3

WHEN THE RAINBOW FADES

THE MAZE OF DIVORCE AND REMARRIAGE

3.1 Introduction

The first aim set out by the participants for this study was the creation a safe space to have their voices heard on issues surrounding divorce. The tools used to create such a context have been discussed in chapter 2. The second aim of this study was to deconstruct the dominant discourses about divorce that were identified by the participants. Chapter 3 portrays an overview of the deconstruction of discourses such as patriarchy, the nuclear family, gendered sexual scripts and the stigma that is believed to be attached to children from a divorced family.

3.2 The thing called 'divorce'

An intriguing ritual has become popular among students at some primary schools in South Africa. When a boy and girl like each other, they formalize their relationship by signing a 'marriage contract' in a ceremony witnessed by friends. When a problem erupts, they end their relationship by signing 'divorce papers' in a rite duly witnessed by friends.

Statistics South Africa (1998) reports a total of 35,792 divorces recorded in South Africa during 1998. 45 331 under-aged children were affected by divorce in 1999. That number declined to 38 833 in 2000 (*Beeld* March 25 2003, p2). Yet, despite the loudness with which these statistics speak about families in our country, and our growing knowledge about the influence of a divorce on children, practices like the story at the beginning of this chapter reflect the newly constituted realities of contemporary family life, as children attempt to cope with changes around them and as they begin to construct models for their own future couple relationships.

3.3 The social construction of divorce

'Divorce is unique in that it unleashes our most primitive and most profound human passions – love, hate and jealousy' (Wallerstein quoted by Kroll 1994:27).

Wallerstein further states that divorce might be an escape route for some parents, but for children it has more far reaching consequences, like robbing them of their childhood and affecting their ability to have a successful marriage. Not all authors agree with her on this issue. Hagemeyer (1986:240) mentions ways in which children find escape from very conflicted home environments after a divorce. I tend to agree with the opinion held by James and James (1999:202) who argue both sides when they mention that children respond differently to divorce, and that it is not the occurrence of a divorce, but rather the circumstances that lead up to the divorce, that influence their lives. The opinion of the above mentioned authors are embraced by the social construction discourse that creates room for different meanings to be made out of the same legal event, and not expect the same reaction from all people to such and event.

Kalter and Schreier (1993:41) conclude that divorce should rather be viewed as a process extended in time rather than as a circumscribed trauma or crisis. Their research suggests that this process concept of divorce sets in motion a host of reactions and life changes within a family and that each such change can constitute reactions and changes in other significant areas of the child's life.

3.4 A possible sequence of divorce

There is limited space in a dissertation of this kind to explore all the views on divorce, divorce recovery, post-divorce parental involvement and remarriage. I have therefore chosen to look at literature focusing on children and specifically adolescent's response to parental divorce and remarriage. James and James (1999), Kaslow (1995), Everett and Volgy (1991) and Walsh (1991:525) have through their research listed possible sequences of the divorce process. Most of the research that I have read is modernistic and rigid in the way that it describes the order and emotions of the divorce and remarriage process. It does not leave room for individual experiences that might not fall exactly into such an order.

Everett and Volgy (1991:508) have done qualitative research on the sequence of divorce for children. These authors clearly state that the divorce process never happens in an exact, linear way. Foote and Frank (1999:161) also explain that the divorce recovery process, like grief, is expected to be an ordered, limited process that moves in identifiable steps toward 'recovery'. Recovery is then characterized by restored happiness, adaptation to the absence of the nonresidential parent and reestablished engagement with the everyday world. Among the various 'stage theories' that are

available to explain this step-by-step progression, the most well-known could likely be Kübler-Ross's five stage theory of dying and grief that is applied to most divorce recovery programmes. These five stages include denial, anger, bargaining, depression and acceptance. This theory, that widely claims that the stages do not necessarily have to occur in a fixed sequence, still stipulate 'acceptance' as being the ultimate final stage that one should aim to reach.

Most of the divorce recovery programmes that I have studied portray the same cultural messages as those around the grief process: a person's dealing with grief and loss should be private and controlled. Society insists that this loss should not be allowed to overwhelm lives, instead of acknowledging all the complications that they entail for lives and relationships filled with 'unfinished business, haunting images of suffering, regrets and missed opportunities' (Foote & Frank 1999:170).

This discourse around loss is built on the expectation that 'time heals'. When people are not 'healed' after a 'reasonable time', they are expected to take part in some sort of programme to help them 'get over' the divorce. It is also expected of children to be quick in dealing with this process, because it is assumed that they do not know so much of what is happening and because 'children can adapt so easily'. Foote and Frank (1999:173) explain the marginalization and silencing that the discourses around grief, loss and the recovery from divorce with the following statement: 'My mourning [recovery] is certainly 'complicated', but let my voice speak these complications; do not assimilate them and trivialize them by your labels that say nothing of my experience. I live these complications in my body, while you only watch them. Let me be the expression of my own complications.'

www.childrenofdivorce/divorcewizards published the following list of ten statements that their research has shown to be the ten things most children and adolescents wished they could tell their parents about the 'complications' they experienced while they were going through a divorce:

- I love and need both of you.
- I am not your messenger. If you have something to say to my other parent, tell it to him/her yourself.
- I perceive that you are hurting, are scared and upset. So am I!
- I believe that you are probably doing the best you can. So am I!
- Please don't say bad things about my other parent. It makes me feel bad.
- Don't ask me to choose sides. It's not fair.

- Don't make me feel like I am being disloyal because I like spending time with my other parent.
- This may not have been your choice, but remember, it was not my choice either.
- Please don't tell me details about the divorce that I do not understand or do not need to know.
- Please don't make me 'the man' or 'the lady' of the house. I am just a child. Let me be a child.

Not all children are offered a voice in their families to utter these statements. Some children might even be further marginalized and silenced than before the divorce due to the influence of societal discourses on their lives, their parents and their families. As mentioned previously 'the victim' of divorce is never just the children, it is rather the loss of the viability and organization of the family's process. Everett and Volgy (1991:522) suggest that it might be the discourses and inadequate rituals of our culture for the termination of ineffective family systems that not only create, but also often encourage victimization of the family.

3.5 Discourses

'Therapists are interested in discovering, acknowledging and 'taking apart' [deconstructing] the beliefs, ideas and practices of the broader culture in which a person lives that are serving to assist the problem and the problem story' (Morgan 2000:45).

Weingarten (1994:309) reports the importance of acknowledging the way in which negotiated meanings operate to 'subjugate, marginalize, and trivialize people's experience'. The idea of discourse can help us to understand the mechanisms through which the experience of certain people become dominant and other people's experience are being pushed to the outer circles and margins of society. In the area of divorce the idea of discourses can assist participants in identifying and examining the discourses prescribed by society to families about how they should feel and react to this life-changing event, as well as the course and shape their life should take after a divorce.

Foucault (quoted by Foote & Frank 1999:172) describes discourses as the clusters of taken-for-granted assumptions that lie just beneath the surface of many conversations in a particular social context. These assumptions might be given voice in a set of statements about what is 'normal' and 'conventional'. Such ideas are then awarded truth status, and have tangible effects in people's lives. It

shapes their choices, values, feelings and actions. It is not a false assumption, because its 'reality' is proven by many interactions in many families every day. He further explains that society is 'a network of interlocking dominant discourses, all having to do with the production of selves' (1999:172). This implies that the dominant discourses of divorce overlap with discourses of marriage, remarriage, childhood, family and membership. In our study some of these 'truths' included:

3.5.1 The institution of marriage

Prior to this century, marriage was a financial contract in which the woman was seen as a possession who was forced into marriage in exchange for money, power, labour or alliance with other families (Kazan 1990:43). Marriages were sometimes arranged at birth and the individual's wishes were almost never consulted. 'Luxuries' such as sexual attractiveness, falling in love, compatibility and having areas of common interest were not considered in the order of things. The discourse explained that women who did not marry became a financial burden on her father and had no status in the family.

Until the present era, the main sanctioned purpose of the marriage was the production of children. In the unlikely event that a marriage should end, the children automatically became the property of the father (see 3.5.5) and the wife went back to her family. Divorce was seen as a 'social disgrace' and women were expected to put up with all kinds of abuse from their husbands rather than contemplate breaking up the family.

In this century there has been a political and social revolution in the Western culture that has brought huge pressure to bear on marriage and has affected our expectations thereof. Janien explained that she would rather not get married at all than running the risk of having her marriage end in a divorce like that of her parents. Didi agreed and said that she would do a lot of things differently to avoid having her marriage go the same path as that of her parents. She went on to explain that she did not see marriage in the same way as her peers and friends whose parents were not divorced. Just as our views on marriage and divorce were affected, societal views of what a child is was affected by these discourses.

3.5.2 Ideologies of adolescence

I grew up surrounded by discourses proclaiming power differences and 'truths' like that children were not able or permitted to make their own decisions. The dominant narratives made us believe that

these discourses spoke the truth about the identities and the roles of children. As a result of this, children and adolescents were blind to the possibilities that other narratives or perspectives could offer.

Discourses like these rob adolescents of their voices, stories and experiences while it disempowers them. They are rarely consulted on issues in their lives and are not believed to be able to find solutions for their own problems. In addition, the adult/child dualism is so fundamental to our society that we all accept adolescence to be 'simply a phase'.

This study investigates the possibility of there being any space for children to have a voice, to be actively involved in their lives and decisions regarding them. Although it is often proclaimed that children have the right to choose which parent they would want to live with after a divorce, it is never only their decision. They are influenced in so many ways by both parents, the extended family, living arrangements, money and other practical issues.

Yet, the picture might not be as dark as it was a decade or so ago. In some societies, acknowledgment is now more readily being given to the importance of recognizing the diversity of children's childhoods and of children's own part as 'social actors' (James & James 1999:189) in shaping their childhood experiences. However, while such rhetoric may be loudly proclaimed, children's needs and interests may, in practice, still often be ignored through traditional adult preference to very particular models of the child and ideologies of childhood.

This has led to the call for the 'voices of children' to be heard, through the mobilization of new epistemological approaches, like the social construction discourse, which position children as competent social actors (James & James 1999:190). These authors also explain that premises like these offer an alternative to the more traditional idea of 'the child' as simply the outcome of socialization practices (1999:190) or as radically driven by the demands of a developing body.

The ideas of what 'the child' (or adolescent) is should also vary across time and space. It should be regarded as influenced by cultural and historical variation in the sense that children who are at different times and in different places are subject to different 'expectations, freedoms and constraints' (James & James 1999:191). Traditionally, adolescence was defined by the child's age, with the beginning marked by the onset of puberty, including dramatic physical maturation and the development of secondary sexual characteristics. The end of adolescence was more formally marked

by the adolescent reaching the 'legal' age, graduating high school or entering the work force as a self-sufficient adult.

However, chronology does not seem to be the determining factor anymore. Young children are forced to grow up faster and are assuming the roles of older adolescents. Yet the time that an adolescent remains dependent on the family has increased. At many levels our culture's demand and need for further education have greatly increased the length of time required to complete an education. Thus, the definition of adolescence has become less dependent on chronological age and more dependent on the constitution and 'meaning' that the individual, family, culture and larger social system ascribe to it. This only serves to increase the ambiguity and confusion regarding the definitions and expectations and 'rights' towards issues like having a voice.

The participants in this study could resonate with this view because they all felt forced to act as grown-ups when their parents got divorced. They were forced to share the emotional (and often financial) burden of a decision made solely by two adults. This new added responsibility often included caring for the physical and emotional well-being of smaller siblings and even one or both of the parents. These new responsibilities have negative influences on the adolescent's schoolwork and social life, and they suddenly were at the receiving end of possibly being stigmatized due to the composition of their homes and families.

3.5.3 'The stigma'

Children are still being labeled and stigmatized as a result of events, like divorce, in their family. For these adolescents, a safe space for discussion, critique and construction of their account of the divorce was not something they found in their homes (Fine 1997:383). The only other place that such a safe space could have been created was at their hostel and in their school. Yet school became the place where they were teased, marginalized and excluded, through, for example, being placed in an embarrassing situation when having to complete forms that do not allow space for two different addresses to be filled in for parents, etc.

During our first conversation I was astounded to realize that all the participants believed that children of divorced families were the minority in our school. As an outcome of our first conversation, they did a survey in our school and were amazed to find out just how many of our school's population came from divorced, single-parent or remarried homes. They also learned how most of those adolescents

also never spoke about it, and were also still caught up in the discourse that proclaimed that there is a stigma attached to divorced families.

Schools should transform and reposition these children in a rich and empowering context, where they can develop a sense of self that is defined as intellectual, social and economic (Fine 1997:391), rather than defined just by the marital status of their parents. Schools must constitute a sphere in which young people are offered access to a language and experience of empowerment, instead of becoming the sphere where they are marginalized and excluded.

Cook (2000:10) suggests that the school environment could become more open to the needs of children and families of divorce by emphasizing the three D's: 'de-stigmatize, de-mystify and discuss'. She summarizes it in the following way:

- De-stigmatize: Adolescents require a sense of belonging and connection to others who have had similar experiences. All too often children feel isolated and assume they are the only ones whose family have been disrupted. Children of divorce are usually acutely aware of the number of students in the school whose parents are divorced.
- De-mystify: Talking openly and freely about divorce and issues such as separation, financial support and custody help to place divorce within a context of a life event. Presenting divorce as a common experience helps to legitimize it as a part of many young people's lives.
- Discuss: Schools ought to provide a forum where the child can express both positive and negative feelings about parents and/or the home situation.

Children need their voices to be heard and their feelings to be validated. To be taught that it is expected and acceptable to feel hurt, abandoned, scared, and angry when your life and family structure changes so drastically from what society portrays to be the norm.

3.5.4 The nuclear family

'It was only through trying to force the group with whom I share my everyday life to fit into the narrow constraints of the nuclear family that I ever viewed my version of family as somehow abnormal' (Ralfs 2001:43).

White (1995a:18) emphasizes the idea that the nuclear family doesn't fit in with what is happening in the world. He claims that it has never been a reachable goal, but just an invention of the dominant

ideology of the 1930's. With the high divorce rate, large numbers of single-parent families, extended and alternative family structures we are exposed to in the 21st century, the concept of the nuclear family has become a myth. But a large part of society still aims to convince its young people that it exists. That it is an achievable goal that they should work towards. In this way the nuclear family ideal lives on in the discourse of family in the western world, despite the majority of so-called alternative, 'blended' or 'reconstituted' families (see chapter 5), single-parent families, adoption, fostering and homosexual parenting.

Our society's persistence in upholding the intact biological nuclear family as the ideal family form leads alternative families to try in vain to reach an inappropriate standard. Our culture lacks established patterns and rituals to assist families in the reconstruction of these complex relationship networks. The 'intact' family has been used as the standard for assessing family functioning, often with inappropriate measures and norms that do not fit the structure, resources and challenges of other family arrangements (Walsh 1991:526). Despite the strong, loving relationships that exist within most of these alternative families, the nuclear family template remains a powerful constraining force, which makes the journey towards celebrating family in an alternative ways an evolving process (Styles 2001:40).

Styles (2001:40) further tells about her experiences as being a feminist and anti-nuclear campaigner in London in the 1980's. In her mind, both the nuclear bomb and the nuclear family had a lot to answer for. The destructive power of both are very often underestimated and underscored. This detrimental effect can also be seen in the active way that patriarchy is still portrayed as a powerful and superior force in our society. This discourse seemed to be very hard at work in the lives of the participants of this study and will be fully discussed in chapter 4.

3.5.5 Patriarchy

The Latin word for father is *pater*. The word 'patriarchy' literally means: rule by the father. In a patriarchal family there are structures and practices that insure male dominance and sharp gender differences. In a patriarchal society, fathers (adult males) are the dominant group, the most important group, humans who are free and have rights. Other people (women and children) are worth something only because of their particular relation to men. Patriarchy therefore perpetuates a system of male dominance at the expense of women and many patriarchal ideas are still alive in today's society.

Given the unequal and unsatisfactory situation for many women in marriage, it could be seen as one of the main reasons that lead a woman to decide to get divorced. When a woman decides to get divorced, she is challenging the 'rule of the father' that has for so many years dominated thinking around marriage and gender relations. Children are often caught in this power struggle and cross fire between parents during custody battles and wars over finances and alimonies.

Walsh (1991:533) reports that during the past 150 years child custody laws have changed from the 'parental rights' premise, regarding children as property of the father, to a 'tender years' policy, entrusting the care of children to mothers. McGoldrick and Gerson (1989:164) comment that a number of feminist groups are accusing the system of joint custody as not being in the best interest of women. They argue that women continue to have the ultimate responsibility for children, while relinquishing the little control they had when they had sole custody through their right to receive financial support.

We are motivated by feminist theology to work towards empowerment through challenging prejudice, discrimination and rejection. In a way, this struggle around divorce is nothing else than the challenges we face regarding patriarchy. For a whole millennium patriarchy was, after all, regarded as 'normal'. With the rise of women's liberation and feminism, women are claiming full equality with men and marriage seems to be one of the arenas in which this claim is being the most contested. Men are being challenged to share decision-making, child rearing, housework and finances, and fewer women are prepared to tolerate abuse in the name of preserving the family, or 'for the sake of the children'.

The participants in this study shared evidence of the discourse of patriarchy still being active in their family lives after divorce. Fathers still have the authority to decide about the amount of time spent with their children, or the intensity of the relationship they want to have with their children. Women are still being subjected to the 'rule of the father' when it comes to financial matters, or even disciplinary matters regarding the children. In this way, the gendered sexual scripts, which support patriarchy, are still being promoted.

3.5.6 Gendered sexual scripts

Dominant discourses, such as patriarchy, regarding gender accentuate differences between men and women. Hare-Mustin and Marecek (1998:455) claims that these discourses view women as essentially caring and concerned about the needs of others, whilst men are mostly achieving and

independent. These discourses seem to support the ideal of equal relations between the sexes, but disguises inequality and differences in power and choice. Teenagers are raised within these discourses but are confronted with the total opposite when they have to live with one or the other parent after a divorce. They now have to learn these gendered scripts with the parent of one gender possibly being absent from the child's everyday life.

Most adolescents can see the nonresidential parent as often as they choose and/or is feasible. However, it is a pity that society does not question how marginalizing it might be that women, by and large, bear most of the responsibility for the well being of their children (Kazan 1990:43). This discourse does not acknowledge the responsibility the father has towards the emotional well being of the children, but it rather lays the financial responsibility mostly in his hands. The result of this on the father's relationship with the children will be discussed in chapter 4.

3.5.7 Post-divorce parenting roles

Kazan (1990:44) explains that marriage has become a means of privatization of the responsibility for child rearing and childcare. Thus, when the marriage ends there is no one to share this responsibility and the women and children could suffer as a result of the withdrawal of paternal emotional and financial support.

This then leads to a lot of fathers being depressed and frustrated by the lack of contact with their children, but accepting the situation with resignation. In those single-parent families many of the woman have to try to cope financially and are overloaded by the demands of work and sole responsibility for the children.

3.5.8 Capitalism

Women are often believed to be economically and socially dependent on men, and they are patriarchally, labeled as being 'the weaker sex', also emotionally positioned within a discourse of dependency on men (Fine 1997:492). Divorced women often find it difficult to be financially independent and have to rely heavily on alimony paid by the father of her children. The fact that a father must continue to support a household in which he no longer lives, and from which he possibly no longer receives any personal benefit, may also contribute to making this economic issue an emotional one as well. The children, on the other hand, are given the message that although dad is

sometimes held responsible for the lack of emotional welfare and stability of a family, he is still very much responsible for their financial well-being.

Many divorced women are forced to have full-time jobs and are so deprived of a lot of the time they could have been with their children. These women also work in a capitalist society where they do not have the same earning power as men. In addition such women take on both the role of mother and breadwinner, and often have the full responsibility of raising children, a responsibility that used to be shared by both parents (Weingarten 1998:16).

Financial strain is claimed to be the largest contributing factor to adjustment problems in single-parent households. American studies (Walsh 1991:529) show that most women's standard of living decline by at least 19% in the first year after divorce, while most men's increase substantially. Since 90% of children live with their mothers after divorce, children and their custodial mothers suffer the greatest financial hardship⁵.

Several factors contribute to the economic distress of most custodial households; inadequate divorce settlements and poor enforcement of child support payment by fathers are widespread problems. In addition, working mothers are likely to be blamed for neglecting their children, whereas if they stayed home, they would have to face financial hardship.

3.5.9 'Single-parent' households

The term 'single-parent family' has been applied to a large number of different family arrangements, resulting in confusion. This label is used to describe both never-married and divorced one-parent households, usually headed by mothers. Since the term is generally applied to the residential parent, the nonresidential parent, usually the father, is left without a designation and thus rendered invisible.

This discourse is not a large contributing factor to the participants of this group anymore, because all the residential mothers have been remarried. But some of the non-residential fathers are still single-parents, and because one of the aims of this research was to make the knowledge and meaning we made together accessible to a larger society, the participants felt that a discussion of this discourse should be included in this text.

⁵ No such statistics for South Africa could be located during research for this study

For many families, the term 'single-parent' reflects the reality of a father's conflictual or cut-off position and his failure to provide ongoing financial and emotional support to his children and their custodial mother. We need to be cautious to not simply accept the discourse that single-parent households are inherently dysfunctional without the leadership role conventionally awarded to the father.

Walsh (1991:533) notes that such households should not merely be viewed as waiting stations or stepping stones in transition to remarriage, but as viable family structures in their own right. These systems perpetuate the belief that a new husband/father (wife/mother) is needed to rescue the single-parent and children, who cannot function or live a satisfactory life without the leadership of a man or the care taking of a woman. 'Waiting' sets the stage for a sense of failure because it strengthens the belief that 'help is coming' or that a woman cannot have a fulfilling family life without a partner.

Handling adolescents without the support of a spouse could become problematic for mothers who accept the social myth that teenagers can only be 'controlled' by men. Often much of an adolescent's anger is directed at the father for leaving them in their mother's care, even if he did not initiate the divorce. The father-daughter-relationship seems especially at risk and will be discussed in chapter 4. Another large risk for children is when the single-parent holds on to them or they assume the role of substitute spouse and are left with feelings of guilt and frustration at the situation.

3.5.10 Guilt

Children's worries over being the cause of their parent's divorce, or of persisting parental conflict after the divorce, may lead to fears of unlovability or guilt. Walsh (1991:540) mentions loyalty conflicts for children as a common source of difficulty, when a child fears that growing close to a stepparent will hurt or alienate the other parent. Divided loyalties, confusion and mixed feelings about where a child belongs may be experienced as her taking sides or playing one parent off against the other. Children often have to balance their own affection towards a parent with the messages of anger, blame and hate portrayed by the parents towards each other. A mother's financial situation could also lead to adolescents experiencing feelings of guilt when they are forced to ask their mothers to accept financial responsibility for situations that arise because of the noncustodial parent not paying alimony.

These issues are brought to the fore again when one or both of the parents start dating and might even remarry. For the second time, the child's beliefs and trust in human relationships is put to the test.

3.6 Act II

Wallerstein (quoted by Kazan 1990:47) explains a remarriage as being Act II in a play that already has an Act I. McGoldrick and Gerson (1989:165) observe that 'as a first marriage signifies the joining of two families, so a second marriage involves the interweaving of three, four or more families'. In that way, remarriage thrusts all participants and family members into instant multiple roles and child-rearing responsibilities, without the stepwise progression of the first marriage (Walsh 1991: 539). Confusion could easily arise about kinship labels, different names, interactional rules and guidelines for functioning. Family members must navigate complex boundaries of a system involving issues such as:

- Membership: Who are the 'real' family members?
- Space and time: Where do the children really belong? How much time is spent where, when and with whom?
- Authority: Who is in charge and whom should a child obey?

These issues must continually be renegotiated as a new family attempts to ascertain new routines and rituals. This includes trying to expand and contract boundaries, while including visiting children and then letting them go while attempting to establish a 'stable' new family unit.

3.7 'What is in a word? Answer: a world' ⁶

McGoldrick and Gerson (1989:165) mention that the terms used to describe different and alternative family types suggest negative connections and potential problems. For example, they refer to these as being called 'stepfamilies' or 'restructured' families. One of the participants remarked that restructured sounded as though it was all just a matter of rearranging the parts of the family. These authors also offer 'remarried' as an option that emphasizes that it is the marital bond that forms the basis of the complex arrangement of several families in a new constellation.

For divorced families with co-parenting arrangements the term 'binuclear family' is suggested by Ahrons (quoted by Walsh 1991:527) which better describes and promotes the continuity of relationships between children and parents residing in two separate households. But even this term poses a dilemma when parents remarry to a partner who also has children from previous marriages,

⁶ White (1991:40)

creating a family system that may be 'tri-nuclear' or 'quadri-nuclear' (Walsh 1991: 527). In our group we would then have had both bi-nuclear, as well as tri-nuclear and even quadri-nuclear families, so the group felt that that would not be a term that they would feel comfortable using.

Further searching through available literature offered the term 'parallel parenting' as being a useful alternative for some families. However, this term may still not effectively portray the skewed situation in the vast majority of post-divorce families. The term 'primary parent' could possibly clarify the arrangement where the mother is head of the household and the father has a back-up or secondary role, but this runs the risk of marginalizing the secondary parent or lessens his authority and silences his voice when it comes to decisions about the children. The term 'blended family' (McGoldrick & Gerson 1989:164) suggests greater integration than can initially be expected when one considers the inherent ambiguity and changing nature of family boundaries, membership and roles. Kotzé (1995:12) uses ad-parent and ad-child rather than stepparent and stepchild. But yet again, the participants felt that this might give the image of additional, and 'not being part' of the 'real' thing. We ended up deciding that we would, in our text and our conversations, refer to alternative families. In line with the postmodern, social constructionist discourse, this word offers endless possibilities to explaining alternative family structures that could include stepparents and stepsiblings.

3.8 Stepparents and stepchildren

The dominant discourse concerning one or both parents getting remarried tells the story of the wicked and evil stepparent and his/her cruelty towards stepchildren. Children are bombarded with this message in their fairy tales, and the media exploits the plot of the stepparent to extreme lengths. Most of television's soap operas, that adolescents and even children often watch, has some form of stepparent-blaming or some cruel stepparent that spends his/her days plotting to ruin the family and drive the children away. This has, in part, lead to even just the prefix 'step' implying a more distant and less 'natural' relationship.

The participants agreed that stepparents are thus cast in the role of beating the terrible odds that they are given by the culture around them. They feel the pressure from numerous sources to be 'better than' the parent that has left the house in order to prove their entitlement to the term 'parent', and to compensate for the 'damage already done' by the divorce. These positions make it difficult to step back to evaluate and negotiate the role he/she is to play in the family.

McGoldrick and Gerson (1989:165) agree and speculate that the stepmother-stepdaughter relationship tends to be most problematic, especially since most stepdaughters have maintained close bonds with their mothers. Clashes between stepmothers and stepdaughters are common as daughters feel a responsibility to protect their natural mother and get caught in conflict over roles. In this situation, stepmothers feel less emotionally attached to the children, and as society did not prepare her to participate in family relations, her initial task does not necessarily include primary emotional bonding.

No research about the relationship of daughters with stepfathers could be located; but some research (McGoldrick & Carter 1989:403) has been done about children's gender and their relationship with stepparents. In a dissertation of limited scope the participants had to decide which area of their family life they wanted to focus on. There was no interest in investigating the relationship between daughters and stepmothers because not all the participants had stepmothers. They showed more interest in discussing, among other things, their relationships with their biological- and stepfathers.

3.9 Summary

This chapter deconstructed the dominant discourses surrounding parental divorce, including patriarchy, capitalism, the nuclear family ideal, gendered sexual scripts, post-divorce parenting roles and guilt. Possible social constructions for a post-divorce family were investigated, such as 'blended family', 'parallel family', 'bi-nuclear' and even tri- and quadri-nuclear families. The rest of this text will refer to such families as alternative families. Chapter 4 investigates the dynamics of such families as well as the relationship between the participants and their non-residential fathers.

CHAPTER 4

THE PILLARS OF ASSURANCE

REDEFINING MY RELATIONSHIP WITH DAD

4.1 Introduction

During our conversations we discussed and explored problem-saturated stories about being children wanting a relationship with their nonresidential parents, as well as children being part of alternative families that have to share a home with stepparents and stepsiblings. We have deconstructed the discourses playing into these situations and went on a search to re-connect them with the 'pillars of assurance' that keep their rainbows standing.

The first part of this chapter explores the relationship between the participants and their non/involved biological fathers. The rest of the chapter outlines their journey towards an alternative story that allows them to invite other people to join the circle of their lives and to fill the empty space left by the absence of their biological fathers.

4.2 The optical illusion of my family

While divorce dramatizes the elements of loss and grief, similar to the experience of death in a close relationship, it does not occur around the explicit loss of an object. It results in the less discernible, yet fragile sense of loss around patterns of attachment, interpersonal and structural security, loyalties and family experience (Everett & Volgy 1991:511).

I want the kind of relationship with my family that those 7th heaven children have with theirs (Didi), I also want a mum and dad and siblings that never fight and live happily together (Janien).

7th heaven is a television series about a reverend, his wife and their 7 children who seem to live the perfect life in their small American town. Although each episode focuses on one of the family members having an issue or problem of some kind, the overall impression is created of this perfect

nuclear family that everyone deserves to be part of. The media's thin description (Morgan 2000:13) of what family should be, was so powerfully portrayed in this television series, that the adolescents in our group were convinced by the discourse that one needed to have a 7th heaven mother, father and children to call yourself a family.

I went about to externalize the idea of a 7th heaven family by asking questions like 'does 7th heaven want to stand in the way and block your chances of being happy as part of your family?' 'Do you like yourself more when you are wishing for a 7th heaven family or when you are enjoying what your family has to offer?' 'Do you think the idea of 7th heaven is promoting or stealing happiness from your family?' 'What message does 7th heaven give to alternative families about their right to be happy and to be doing family in a way that they choose?'

The group talked together about the things that made them a family, although they did not fit into the nuclear family framework. They soon came to realize that one of the only differences between their family and the television family was the fact that the television parents were still married to their first spouse. Mentioning the first spouse opened the door for the conversation to centre around the relationship that the participants have with their biological fathers.

4.3 Non/involvement of nonresidential fathers

All that I have of my Dad is his surname.

Charlette made this statement when we discussed the involvement of their biological fathers in their lives. Janien added the following about her efforts in attempting to go and visit her father.

He always has excuses not to have us visit. I don't know where he gets all of them. I can't tell you how many visits he has cancelled or talked himself out of because he was 'too busy'. I haven't seen him for two and a half years and it does not seem to bother him at all.

Didi could resonate with that and said that they had experienced the same. Both their fathers stayed far away and that complicated the situation even more. Most of the girls shared the feeling that

it feels as if I have become merely a duty that my father has to fulfill, and that if he could have a choice, he would simply dispose of my sister and me, just as he did of our mother.

Narrative therapy uses tools like mapping of the influence and history of the problem in a person's life. Winslade and Monk (1999:39) elaborate on this when they advise to inquire into the length, breadth and depth of the problem. We discussed the influences of *Excuses*, *Staying away* and *Not-phoning* on the lives of these adolescents:

- How long has *Excuses* been tricking your father into not spending time with you?
- How widely has this problem spread its effects in your life?
- Do these feelings stay at home or do they come to the hostel and to school with you?
- Does it influence your feelings about yourself all the time or only during times when *Excuses* talks on his behalf?
- When is it harder to handle *Excuses*? Does it get easier at times? Can you give those times a name?
- What effects does the *Not-phoning* have on your ability to study? Your ability to have fun with the rest of your family? Your friendships and other family relationships?
- What tricks does *Excuses* and *Not-phoning* play on you to get you to feel frustrated and miserable?
- What has *Excuses* talked you into believing about your father that goes against what you have always believed about him?

These questions assisted in untangling the dominant stories about the responses of their biological fathers. One aspect of these stories included incidents of volatile relationships that exist between divorced biological parents. Janien explains: my mother sued him about our alimony that he doesn't pay. They are in this huge battle. These days she gives him missed calls from my cell phone. So he thinks that it was me, if he calls

back, she just happens to be around my phone to answer it.

Most of the participants were well aware of the strategy of having to give missed calls to initiate contact with their fathers. My mother has to call him to remind him to sometime go to the effort of phoning us. If she doesn't do it, he'll never phone (Didi).

Meagan - If I want to talk to him, I have to give him a missed call and hope that he'll phone me back. Why do I have to always initiate communication? Why can't he just pick up the phone and call me for a change? Or send me an SMS to say that he will phone me at a certain time? And I keep on wondering: is he still somewhat involved in my life because he wants to be, or is he involved because I force him to be by keeping on calling him? What would happen if I stop calling?

Didi elaborated on that: Why do I always have to call him? He'll never just call to hear how I am...he's just not interested enough. It has to be an emergency or big issue; otherwise I am just not important enough to him.

Meagan - I feel responsible, I think that if I don't call him, he will think that I do not care. But I am starting to realize that it should not be my responsibility. I wondered about how *Feeling Responsible* succeeded in convincing Meagan that phoning her father was her job.

All the participants further talked about experiencing confusion and feeling upset at frequent shuffles between three residences (homes of two parents and the school hostel). Between my mother's home and the hostel and then having to visit my father as well, it feels as if I never get the chance to settle down. They explained that it felt as if they were always just arriving and then having to leave again. These frequent separations often left them tearful and frustrated. Meagan explained that 'I'm always saying goodbye, and wherever I am, I'm missing someone'.

Didi - Although I don't always like the hostel very much, it's at least it's someplace away from home and all the fighting.

Parents could seek to compensate for a sense of failure in the first family by attempting to be a 'super parent' after the divorce. Janien shared that after every fight she has with her mother, her father prompts her and her sister to come and stay with him.

He promises to give us anything we want. But I know that he will also get upset about most of the things that my mother does. It won't be any different. I've heard people talking about 'Disneyland fathers. Those dads take their children on expensive holidays and buy them extravagant gifts, just to have them like him again.

Meagan agreed:

Such fathers promise their children anything and everything and never lay down any rules while they are visiting him. In

that way it feels as if he is a nicer parent than their mother who has the hard job of raising them. He has no idea what is going on in my everyday life, but when decisions need to be made he expects to have a say in what I choose to do.

Many parents believe, rightly or wrongly, that they *do* have rights over their children and that they have the right to make decisions about their children's future. Such a view makes the assertion of children's agency and *their right* to be heard much more difficult to accommodate (James & James 1999:204). It's so difficult to talk to him. We can make small talk over the phone, but I would never be able to tell him how I feel about the divorce (Didi).

The dominant stories around the nonresidential fathers were about struggle, pain, suffering, not caring and ignorance.

Charlette - It's such a struggle to keep our relationship with him alive, sometimes it feels as if he doesn't want me in his life. He doesn't show any interest in my life at school, at home. I'm sure he won't be able to tell you of any of my hobbies or interests.

Janien - If I don't phone him, we will never ever talk to each other. He just doesn't care. He knew that I was going to the school's formal Ball and didn't even bother to ask who my date was, what I was wearing or how it felt wearing an evening gown for the first time.

Didi shared the painful memory of her being sick with Malaria earlier in the year. She phoned her father to tell him that she had been admitted to hospital, yet he did not phone her back once during her time in hospital, or even afterwards to enquire about her health.

His medical scheme paid the bill, but I don't want his money. I didn't expect of him to drive all the way here, I just wanted him to phone and ask how I was. To phone afterwards and ask if there was anything that he could do for me. But he never called. I think I knew beforehand that he wouldn't call. I just had to let him know so that he did not just get a large hospital bill and then have a reason to throw a tantrum because of the money.

Money and alimony stays a large issue with the participants and their fathers. Meagan explained that she finds it very hard to ask her mother for things that her father is supposed to be paying for. Janien could understand that feeling because her father suddenly wanted to increase his visitation rights the minute her mother sued him for more custody. She felt obliged to go and visit simply because he was now relieving her mother of the burden of having to pay her school fees. Being a divorced family acts as a lightning rod, attracting political, social, economical and gender issues, ultimately always revolving around the oldest of questions: *who pays* for schooling, extra curricular activities, and *who's in charge* of the child's education. Reaching answers for these questions does not necessarily mean that a father will play an active role in his child's life.

4.4 Will my real father please stand up?

Meagan - For a long time I haven't been interested in the material side of a father's duty. For me it is about caring, interest in my life, being involved.

Charlette - I want him to be a dad NOW. Not in twenty years when he suddenly wants to walk me down the aisle or be a grandfather to my children. I need his involvement in my life now.

Janien - I just need him to call and ask how my day was.

The wordplay that we had with the construction of 'real' dad instead of biological dad implies that real not only shows a genetic link, but also real as 'the real thing' We also discussed the situation of a child being orphaned or adopted at a very young age. The man who raised that child became his/her father, not the person who conceived such a child.

The conversation centered on gender and the discourses talking about men not being supposed to show emotion as much and as well as women do. Charlette shared a very emotional story of remembering her stepfather⁷crying one night when she came back from visiting her biological father. We discussed the roles that their stepfathers played in their lives and the relationships they shared with these ad-parents.

How did it happen that someone I met in the middle of my life could love me more than the man who has been there since my birth, the man whose blood I have in my veins? This statement by Charlette made me wonder whether one could 'exchange' the expectations they had about their biological father and their stepfather? Would that make it possible for a stepfather to walk them down the aisle instead of having to wish that their relationship with their biological fathers would improve in such a way that they would be there to perform that very symbolic duty? I wondered what kept these adolescents, regardless of their good relationship with their stepfathers, from being able to fully place them in the role of father in their lives?

4.5 But 'blood is thicker than water'

Charlette - I always keep wondering: Would my real dad have done the same in this situation? How would he have reacted to this event? What would he have said about what is happening in my life? How would it feel to have

⁷ Although we discussed constructing another word for stepfather, the group felt that they did not associate the word in this context as carrying negative connections, so they were content with referring to their mother's second husbands as their stepfathers.

the relationship with him that my stepsiblings are now going to have?

He just stays my dad! Although my stepdad is more of a father to me, my real dad stays my dad. (Meagan)

I didn't grow up with my real dad. I have no idea how he likes his eggs. I don't even know if he likes eggs at all (Charlette).

Toni Morrison (quoted by Weingarten 1998:164) compares the absent father to a missing limb and discusses the child's need to know more about that father

I am not angry, I don't need the arm. But I do need to know what it would have been like to have had it... it's a phantom I have to behold...will it even know who or what I am? It doesn't matter...I will locate it so the severed part can remember the snatch, the slice of its disfigurement. Perhaps then the arm will no longer be a phantom, but will take its own shape, grow its own muscle and bone.

The need to know, inseparable from the pain of loss, may be the major factor in the mastery of that pain. *Need-to-know* often convinces children of the necessity of being aware of the story of the father's presence as well as that of his present absence. The child holds multiple versions of his/her parents relationship, made up of bits of stories told by the mother, the extended family, and explanations from the father himself, or fantasies elaborated from television images or personal longings.

We speculated about what would happen if all the energy and time spent by the participants wondering about what their lives would be like if they had had a better relationship with their biological fathers could be spent on their relationships with their stepfathers and the family that they live in. This issue was a double-sided coin. On the one hand, the adolescents have a desire to have a better relationship with their biological fathers, too not feel that they have to stop trying. On the other hand, they realize what they have in their stepfathers.

Charlette - I often experience that my stepfather loves me more than my real dad does.

We explored the question of whether a stepfather could love a child as much as a biological father could? Could a child love a stepfather in the same way that she would love her biological father? Can the quality of the relationship even be better between a stepfather than that of a biological father? What does a stepfather have to do to 'deserve' the same love that biological fathers often take for granted?

Most of the participants also experienced the transition to having a relationship with their stepfather easier because they never got the impression that he was there to take the place of my father (Charlette). That made it easier to accept the role he played in the family and in being involved with their mother in the decisions being made about them.

■ Meagan - He doesn't force me to have respect for him and adhere to his discipline. I do it because I want to.

This discovery seemed to be a 'sparkling moment' in our journey together. Although I have always been aware that my relationship with my stepfather were more alive and fulfilling of my needs than the relationship I had with my biological father, it now became a reality that I could hang on to (Charlette).

The specialness of our relationship suddenly became a reality, something that I could be proud of (Meagan).

What an amazing feeling to realize that I also have stories and special memories of a dad, although he is not my biological father, he is a dad in every sense of the way (Janien)

Because our lives are multistoried, one story can never 'encapsulate or handle all the contingencies of life' (Morgan 2000:8). And although the dominant story was that of biological fathers not having active relationships with their daughters, the emerging alternative story spoke of adolescents having

good relationships with stepfathers in a world that prescribes that type of relationship to be stormy and full of conflict. These adolescents had managed to write their own stories of hope amidst the painful story of their biological fathers.

Narrative therapists are interested in working with people to bring forth and thicken stories that do not support or sustain problems. As people begin to inhabit and live out the alternative stories, the results are beyond solving problems. Within the new stories, people live out new self images, new possibilities for relationships and new futures.

(Freedman & Combs 1996:16)

4.6 The circle of my life

Bons-Storm (1998b:19) reminds that 'truth' is always contextual, and that taking a truth from another context means living in conflict and pain between a person's own truth and the truth that was imposed on you by the dominant discourses. People need allies and dialogue partners to find and support their own truths, truth then becoming the place 'where you are for the time being' (1988b:19), the values that you choose to live by, as well as the way in which that context could lead to possibilities of despair and hope.

As part of our initial conversation, each participant drew a large circle on the flipchart on which they indicated the people that made up their community of concern, or in their near-language, *the circle of their lives* (see 1.2). The participants included their biological fathers as part of their circles. Charlette explained that although his name was there, he was not actively involved, so his place was *just an open space*.

The conversation then centered on living a full life even though there was an empty space in your life. The participants allocated a segment of the circle to each member of their team of support. After examining the size of the circle she gave her dad, Janien was surprised to find out that *it's not nearly as big a part as I thought it would be!*

I asked the participants whether it was possible to ever have a circle of life without an empty space of some sort. Were all people aware of the things that made up their empty space? Could death, alcohol, stress, etc. also create empty spaces just like and absent father can? How did such an empty space influence the rest of the circle? *It's like people always saying*

that they miss someone or something, they were just not sure what this was, Charlette explained. I then wondered whether the members of television's 7th heaven-family were without empty spaces? After discussing the possible spaces that they might have, Meagan made a remark that, for me, stands out as yet another sparkling moment on our journey together:

Realizing that even 7th heaven families have empty spaces in their lives, my family starts to look like a 6th heaven family. And I can live with that!

Because one can never be alone in a place, an awareness of where one is includes an awareness of relationships with others that are with you in that place. While drawing the circles of their lives, the participants had a choice about who to include. Initially, dominant discourses prescribed which relationships were to be included in that circle, but once the participants decided to lead their lives according to their preferred stories, they experienced the confidence and freedom to make their own decisions about inclusion into their individual circles.

Once the participants tapped into their subjugated, local knowledge and power to make these above mentioned decisions, we could investigate ways they used to negotiate and re-write their stories to become preferred, thickened stories of hope and peace. This investigation strengthened the idea that they had the power to make decisions about the place their lives were at and about the people they chose to include into their lives. After feeling powerless and voiceless for so long, it was liberating for these four participants to have their voices heard about their families and the way that they preferred their circle of life, and subsequently their view of their family, to look.

This liberation implied that they also had the power to make decision about how large the piece of the circle occupied by each member would be. Initially, the dominant discourses of patriarchy prescribed that biological fathers were entitled to a large piece of their child's circle of life, but the re-authored stories of these participants' lives left them with the freedom and power to decide the size of the piece of circle that they would award each member.

We discussed the different sizes of the empty space that was occupied by biological fathers and the participants realized that although their fathers still occupied space, it did not always feel like emptiness. Somehow they have invented ways of coping with this space, or even ways of shrinking it.

4.7 Coping with the space

None of the participants wanted to fully exclude their biological fathers from their lives. That implied that he was still awarded some space in their circle of life. The size of this space differed between each of the participants and was influenced by the current state of their relationship with their fathers. Participants who had some contact with their fathers awarded him a larger piece of their circle than those participants that had no contact, or very little contact. The question remained though, what happened to that empty space left by the absence of their fathers into their everyday lives? What influence did that empty space have on their lives?

The participants agreed that because they now had the choice as to who to include in their circle, they also had the choice about what to do with empty spaces. 4.6 discusses some of the strategies and skills they have discovered to address this empty space in the circle of their lives.

4.7.1 Remembering my dad

We wondered whether it would be possible to use some of the good memories that the participants had of their fathers to fill up some of the empty space? This question was based on the re-remembering and 'saying hullo again' principle developed by Michael White (1998:7). Meagan remarked that memories and good times are like a bank account. The times we do spend together can accumulate to help me through the times that I do not have contact with him.

4.7.2 Realizing that dads have stories too

I explained that in the narrative approach to therapy and life we believe that we live our lives according to the stories we tell ourselves and the stories that others, like family members, tell about us. From the social constructionist perspective that means that identities, histories and stories are not the sole property of the person to whom they are attached. We should therefore attempt to link all the stories about ourselves and about other people to a social and cultural context. When applying this social construction discourse to their stories about their dads, the participants realized that that their

fathers had 'their own' stories too. Anderson (1997: 61) explains that rather than attempting to learn a family's language and stories as a unit, we should explore the story of each individual member of a family.

Didi was amazed to discover that *Lack of contact* was also present in her father's relationship with his father. She wondered whether he was even aware of the similarities in both their relationships with their fathers. We had an externalizing conversation about the ways in which *Lack of Contact* convinced her that her father did not actually love her. We also explored the ways in which it influenced different areas of her life. We also wondered what other messages *Lack of Contact* wanted her to receive about her father. The rest of the participants agreed that *Lack of Contact* has convinced them that their fathers were aware of the disappointment and frustration that it caused in their lives. After this discussion, they were not at all sure whether their fathers were aware of the empty space left in their lives by his absence. They agreed that awareness of the empty space was possibly not part of their father's story.

I asked them questions about the type of relationship that they envision to have with their fathers? Would they be content with an 'I am in touch'-phone call every week, or do they want something more, have him involved in the every day issues and rituals in her life?

Meagan - Sometimes when we are riding in his car, I want to tell him what large role he plays in my life, but I am just too emotional. And I am too afraid because I have no idea of what his reaction might be.

Janien - I just want to tell him that although I have a stepfather that I love, he can never take his place. I can write a book about everything that I would like to tell him face to face...if I ever see him again.

Didi- I have no idea how he would react to this dissertation. He might very well erase my number from his phone forever.

Charlette - although it feels like I could have nothing to lose, it could still happen that our relationship could change somewhere in the future. I do not want to lose that hope.

4.7.3 Seeing the other people in my circle

Charlette thought that taking the paper with her circle of life with her might be a good way of remembering who the people that made up her circle were. Every time she was to look at it, she could remember how many important people chose to play an active part in her life. She was sure that it was easy to forget about all those people when 'thinking about my father clouded my vision'. I wondered if there were any other ways that she knew of to clear her vision? The participants discussed this and felt that possible ways could be remembering that not everybody had nuclear families and that an active relationship with their fathers was not a prerequisite to being happy.

They discussed examples like orphans and adopted children who never got the opportunity to know their biological parents. These children were not immediately condemned to being unhappy forever just because they did not have an active relationship with their biological parents. They reached the conclusion that happiness was made up of a lot of different components and could be reached through many possible ways. Only one of those ways was a happy family life. And for them, like orphans or adopted children, there were times in their lives that the participants were happy with their family lives, although their father wasn't part of the equation then either. They realized that happiness lay in their hands. They could decide to open their lives to happiness or unhappiness, with or without the involvement of a biological father in their lives.

4.7.4 Taking over the control

Didi -It stays my choice and nobody has the right to judge me if I decide to be happy, or not to keep on trying to have contact with my father. Why does society not make such a big fuss about fathers who just leave and forget their children, but it is such a big issue for children,

because you MUST respect and love your parents. Aren't they supposed to love and respect you too?

I enquired whether respect was something that one had to deserve or was it something that one just had a right to? A discussion developed about the requirements the participants had before they could respect someone or someone could respect them. We also explored the ways in which we were being forced by society to respect certain people. I wondered if feeling that you were forced to respect someone could rob a person of respect for themselves? We were curious about the relationship between respect, self-respect, the right to choose and being in control of your decisions. I also asked about the influence that age had in a person's right to make decisions about respecting people.

This discourse of age is very prescriptive about children not being allowed a voice to say that people did things that made them feel that they did not deserve their respect. That discourse also proclaims that there are few things more unheard of than a child not respecting an adult, not even talking about a child deciding that a parent might not be worth her respect.

In the same sense that we can choose whether we respect someone, we should also feel comfortable and free to decide how much of our time and energy we are prepared to spend on a situation. Being able to make that decision puts control on the side of the child because that would enable the child to determine which relationships she would honour and award a closeness and which she could distance herself from without having to comply to societal pressures about what a family should look like, whom one should be close to and who one should have more distance from. If people feel in control of how much time they are prepared to give to, for example, their biological fathers, they are deconstructing the discourse that children cannot make their own decisions (Brumberg 2000:20) and that adults are better at decision-making than their children .

It became very clear that during the divorce process these children were not allowed a voice. In their relationship with their parents they are also often left voiceless. They now had the choice to allow themselves a voice in their relationship with their father.

4.7.5 Allowing new people in my circle

We then went back to wondering if a stepfather could perform all the duties that an adolescent might expect a father to do. Janien wondered whether she could then allow that person to take up a larger space in her circle of life, which would imply that the empty space left by her biological father would become smaller. Charlette explained that she often experienced this when her relationship with her stepfather was the way she wished her relationship with a father figure to be.

4.8 Conclusion

This chapter documented the journey that the participants traveled from a dominant problem saturated story about the absence of their biological fathers in their everyday life. This journey led to the realization that dad's have stories too, and that, both children and fathers have the power to decide who they would like to include in the circle of their lives. They also had control about who they would want to respect and allow having an influence on their lives. We deconstructed the discourse that proclaimed that children could not make any serious decisions. These conversations also made us realize that having an active relationship with a biological father wasn't a prerequisite to leading a happy life. The next chapter explores the possibilities to between the participants and their families build this happiness on the relationship.

CHAPTER 5

TREASURING MY RAINBOW

FAMILY RITUALS⁸

5.1 Introduction

One of the goals of this study was the initiation and promotion of alternative ways of doing family, and the strengthening of visions for anti-nuclear families. The participants wished to constitute a forum to share the knowledge they have gained, to capture their voices within the eternity of the written text. This chapter shares our search for such ways of doing family in anti-nuclear, alternative ways. It also introduces the reader to our social construction of the FunFam game and provides an example of a family mission statement that can be used as a possible framework for other families that want to learn more about anti-nuclear practices.

This chapter also investigates the use of rituals to strengthen family bonds and create a foundation that step- and alternative families can build on. All the members of alternative and remarried families bring with them positive and negative legacies and rituals from their previous families. Both Kotzé (1995:1) and Walsh (1991: 533) define rituals as shared experiences that are powerful in the doing of family.

Weaving together such practices from previous family traditions and creating new patterns, from dinner rituals to celebrating holidays, like Christmas, could help to establish a bigger sense of family. Yet it needs to be mentioned that clinging to the biological family's rituals might prevent an alternative, reconstituted family from creating their own new traditions. One way of creating such traditions is through family rituals. The success of such a family event does not so much depend on the event itself, but on the process that leads up to such a ritual. The timing, scope and content of the ritual are determined through a collaborative process within the family. Considerations are made in relation to whom the appropriate audience would be and the setting for the ritual and how it could be structured in a way to most powerfully acknowledge that what has been experienced (Imber-Black, Roberts & Whiting 1988:29).

5.2 Why a ritual?

Imber-Black, Roberts and Whiting (1988:19) has done research on the use of rituals as part of the therapeutic journey. He states that besides helping to resolve contradictions and friction, rituals assist clients in facing anxiety and strong emotions, as well as facilitating and supporting social transitions and transformations.

He refers to the work done by McManus (Imber-Black, Roberts & Whiting 1988:20) that hypothesized that rituals, such as those including music, dancing and symbols, produce positive limbic discharges that lead to increased contact between people and social cohesion. Both hemispheres of the brain are being stimulated because it usually involves both digital and analogic information that needs to be processed. Another explanation could be that symbols hold 'a density of meaning' (Imber-Black, Roberts & Whiting 1988:20) that words alone could never capture. Our nostalgic and sentimental approach to life strengthens the use of symbols to explain that for which words simply become too small and too few. The use of symbols and rituals then allow for strong emotions to be safely experienced and expressed.

Families often lack ways of marking and sharing special events in their lives. In addition, the larger culture does not offer rituals to commemorate most of these occasions. Culture is quick to offer rituals like weddings and funerals, but fail to provide rituals for situations that are still being marginalized and stigmatized, like divorce and remarriages.

Janien - My sister and I were their flower girls at my mother's second wedding ceremony. She married for the second time last year and we were very involved in the planning as well as the event itself. Even during their relationship we were much more involved than some of my friends were in their parent's relationship. It had a big influence on the way I felt about their decision to get married and on how

⁸ Initially we referred to 'family traditions, until we agreed upon our social construction of the word 'ritual'

easy it was to accept him as part of our family.

Remarriages are usually dealt with in the same manner as first marriages, thus not making children of previous marriages part of the process (Kotzé 1995:2). Such a ceremony would validate the adults as a new couple, but not the new stepfamily. McGoldrick and Carter (1989:399) attribute this to the fact that most people fail to recognize the need for a new paradigm of family to accommodate the complex new relationships that are being formed. Such a new paradigm would have to be sensitive towards the voices and needs of adults and children involved. Addendum 2 offers our re-constructed framework of a family mission statement as developed by the stepfamily association of America (www.successfulstepfamilies.com). This mission statement can be used to validate membership within families. Using written documents, instead of verbal agreements, adds a sense of permanency to the occasion. The participants in this study have yet to share this creed with their families, but we have decided to include it as part of this text as our way of witnessing our commitment to doing family in the ways described in that document. Families can use this creed as a guideline to construct their own creed mirroring their values, needs and expectations of each other. Another way of facilitating such a paradigm would be through the use of rituals to celebrate, acknowledge and validate family members.

All human systems must deal with the issue of membership, including the question of who is in and who is out, who belongs to the system, who defines membership and how one gains or loses membership. Such membership issues are often difficult for families, as they require complex reworking of family patterns, rules, available relationship options, and previously agreed upon roles.

(Imber-Black, Roberts & Whiting 1988:51)

Through discussing and deconstructing the ways in which participants are 'doing family'; the concept of 'family' becomes a social construction of the sharing of lived experience and local knowledges. Schiel (2001:53) lists some questions that could be used to elicit such local knowledge. These include 'what are the things that steals our family's time together?' 'What are the things that we do that promotes the relationships in our family?' 'How do we talk to each other in our family and how would we like to be talking to each other?' 'How would we like the atmosphere in our house to be?'

Questions like these mentioned above challenged the participants and their families to discover the ways in which they were being a family together and introduced them to the ideas supported by anti-nuclear practices. This was very relevant to these families because they were disqualified from the nuclear family discourse through divorce, and were confronted with issues a lot of alternative families face.

5.3 Doing family through anti-nuclear practices

Why should these participants have to explain that their brother has a different last name and their mother yet another? How do they address their new step-grandparents? How does a child relate to a stepparent's family who suddenly became grandparents, step-aunts and -uncles and step-cousins? How can they maintain a relationship with the noncustodial parent's family to whom she may have been very attached? What would it mean for the word, 'family', not to invoke assumptions of who should form that group of people, but for it simply to be a reference to the people that certain individuals hold dear?

The realization for the adolescents in this group that the word 'family' could be seen as a verb rather than a noun, lead us to the awareness that is not who our family consists of, but the practices of the family that change the concept. Ralfs (2001:38) names such an approach anti-nuclear family practices. Anti-nuclear family are not defined by the type of individuals in the family, but is about actively 'bringing people together with each other, across culture, across generation, and in contact with the environment' (2001:38). Styles (2001:41) further explains this as being about connection rather than atomizing, collectivity rather than individualism. She calls it an eco-system of energy, loving and resources that circulate between people.

As previously explained in 3.5.4. the nuclear family does not represent this group's lived experience of family. Yet that is the template from which our culture, economic arrangements and education system operate. The biological father, mother and kids are what are meant when family is said (Janien). This profoundly impacts children and every adolescent in the group had to work through endlessly trying to force-fit their family into the nuclear family template. When family members share unrealistic expectations that the family should function 'normally', there might very well be disappointment and a sense of deficiency when they realize that those fantasies cannot be realized (Walsh 1991:532). Through talking about

belonging to 'families of difference' and celebrate alternative ways of doing family, we named families according to biology, marriage or relationship.

Along with the labels that go with the nuclear family there are prescribed ways of relating to the people who fill particular roles in one's life. Linked to this idea of 'real' and 'less-real' versions of family there are notions of proper and improper ways of connecting with and relating to different people. There are so many discourses and assumptions as to how we should interact with someone we call 'father', 'sister', or 'uncle'. The lack of relationship that the participants in this group had with their biological fathers did not fit into these discourses and assumptions connected to the word 'father'. But in the same sense that discourse did not easily provide them with the power to construct an alternative social construction of what the word 'father' would mean to that specific group of people.

It is as if there are some outlines that all relationships are supposed to follow, regardless of who the people involved are (Ralfs 2001:44). After the participants introduced 'doing family' through anti-nuclear practices at home, their family members obtained the freedom to form relationships that are satisfying to both adults and young people. Relationships that no longer fit in with the cultural discourses proclaiming, for example, that a child should have continued contact with a noncustodial parent, or that a stepparent is entitled to a parental role. In these newborn anti-nuclear families, the family members negotiated a stepparent's role to be that of companion, friend, caretaker, parent's spouse, or whichever description they, as a family, preferred.

Weingarten (1994:19) explains that alternative families that do family in such a way are also very vulnerable to having their way of parenting marginalized when they appear to violate the mainstream ideas regarding the importance of seeing adolescence as a time to be separating from your parents. This message is consistent with the dominant story portrayed by institutions such as schools and the health care industry. Such a message obscures our ability to still see our family as a unit, even though it contains adolescents and we might not all be blood-related.

Through constituting our families in anti-nuclear ways we do not wish to ignore the powerful ties of biology. But it is highly likely that biology has been the privileged framework for recognizing connections between people. Much conversation is to be had about the role of biology and its impact and restrictions on relationships.

5.4 The road ahead

It is a big enough challenge for the adolescents in our group to see themselves as doing family in alternative ways. It is even a bigger challenge to make sure that their efforts are visible to others.

Doing family from a postmodern paradigm would also involve allowing children to play a co-constructive role in decision-making processes in alternative families. The participants followed Kotzé (1995:7) in considering the following questions about the place and value their voices have in their families:

- Do they have the opportunity to freely and comfortably express their views on family issues?
- Are they consulted when decisions need to be made?
- If they are, what weight does their opinion carry?
- Is their permission asked when decisions affecting them are to be made?
- How do their parents react when they do not give their consent?
- Do they have space to object to decisions that their parents make?
- Do their parents listen to the reasoning behind their objection?
- Is there space for them to air issues they might have that their parents are not aware of?
- Do they have the same views on communication in the family as their parents do?
- Are there clear definitions on the relationships and ways of relating and behaving within the family?

Anti-nuclear family practices open the door to challenging the nuclear family discourse that dictates the lives of western families. Naming family connections is part of how we create belonging and honour loving (Ralfs 2001:39). Through advocating anti-nuclear family practices we take a stand against the dividing practices of the nuclear family. This encourages us to focus on meaningful connections with loved ones outside the boundaries of biology.

The participants used the observations made by McCormick and Carter (1989:40) about families attempting to replicate the first-marriage structure in second marriages, to illustrate the differences between such a nuclear system and doing family in an alternative way.

Replicating the nuclear family template	Doing family in an alternative way
A tight loyalty boundary drawn around household members excluding nonresidential biological	Permeable boundaries around members of different households, which would permit children to come

parents.	and go easily
The fact that the parent-child bond predates the marital bond produces a tendency for stepparents to compete with their stepchildren for primacy with the spouse, as if the relationships were on the same level.	Acceptance of the parental responsibilities and feelings of a spouse without competing with the parent-child attachment.
Traditional gender roles, requiring women to take responsibility for the emotional well-being of the family, sets the stepmother and stepdaughter up against each other and place the ex-wife and the new wife in adversarial positions regarding the children.	Revision of traditional gender roles. If the old rules that called for women to rear children and men to earn and manage the finances are not working in a family, they can negotiate roles that suites everybody in the family.

The content of this table was very relevant to this study, because it reinforced the influence of the same discourses about divorce and remarriage that the participants have deconstructed in chapter 3. It also strengthened the distinction between nuclear family templates and alternative ways of doing family in second marriage families. Such a summary provided by 'professionals' carries a lot of weight in a world that adheres to the academic discourse. This indicated to the participants that there were other people experiencing the same situation after remarriage and that they reached similar conclusions about doing family in alternative ways.

It is easy to understand the wish parents and children have for a clear and quick resolution when one has been through the trauma of divorce and the end of family life, as they knew it. Unfortunately, a lot of the participants had to learn that the 'instant intimacy' that remarried families expect of themselves is near to impossible and new relationships are harder to negotiate because they do not develop slowly, as 'intact' families do, but must begin midstream.

Although people can be doing family in alternative ways, reconstituted families will very often still carry the memories and scars of first families. Most children doesn't easily give up their attachment to their first parent, no matter how negative the relationship with that parent was or is. Having the patience to tolerate each other through the 'battle fatigue' (McCormick & Carter 1989:402) and allowing each other space and time for feelings about past relationships is crucial to the process of doing family in an alternative and reconstituted way.

5.5 How can we be ‘doing’ family?

The family can be the place where an adolescent finds love, understanding and support. Yet, so many alternative families still never openly share their feelings because it just wasn't done in the families that they grew up in. Such families were very often familiar with strict family rules, verbally explicit language, such as 'don't talk back', 'don't discuss family issues and finances', 'don't talk about sex', and 'don't discuss your feelings'. Such families close off all entrances to each other's lives and the influence of this can be seen in all the areas of their lives (www.geocities.com/childrenanddivorce).

The above-mentioned discourses could easily fool a family into settling for restricted conversations, feelings of loneliness and isolation. Adolescents in such families become passive and powerless, or they simply wear the mask that all is well in their worlds. When members of such families get the chance to 'start over' as being members of alternative families, they often struggle with the transition, because they got so used to believing that that was just the way that things were meant to be (www.geocities.com/childrenanddivorce).

Anti-nuclear family practices and doing family in alternative ways lead families to being responsive to each other, sensitive to the voices and needs of members, and supportive of each other's lives. Family members become attached and connected to each other and to the family as a whole. Communication channels are open and the atmosphere is light, fun, accepting and encouraging (Ayalon & Flasher 1993:2).

The participants made a shortlist of suggestions for doing family in alternative ways that could lead to families experiencing the communication and connectedness as discussed in the previous paragraph:

- Allowing all family members a voice, irrelevant of gender or age.
- To listen before you speak.
- To talk 'with', rather than 'to' each other.
- Compliment, validate and acknowledge each other.
- Use open-ended questions rather than just making assumptions and statements.
- Eat at a table, not in front of the television.
- Agree on weekly scheduled family times where family members can participate in a sport or do some hobby or fun activity together.

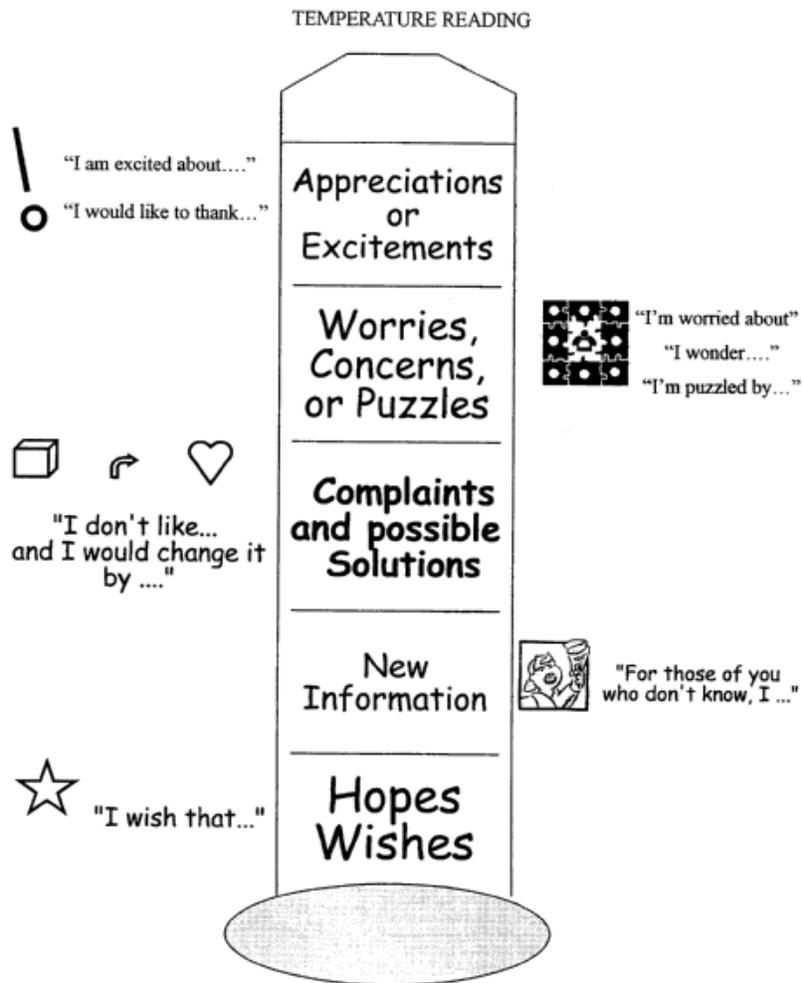
- Hold Bible study sessions together and go to church with each other, not with friends.
- Hold family meetings to discuss positive and negative issues.
- Have temperature reading sessions.

5.6 Temperature readings⁹

During our Internet search for family rituals to use as inspiration for our own ritual, we came across the following scale that is a tool for building relationships and thickening alternative stories in alternative families (www.geocities.com/childrenanddivorce). It offers a way for family members to 'change the temperature' within themselves, between them and among them. The temperature reading offers a voice to each family member to tell of satisfaction and dissatisfaction in a safe context. It's very valuable for validating each other's input and evaluating how the doing of family have been going during a certain period of time. Figure 2 illustrates the basic structure of such a temperature reading card.

fig 2 The temperature reading

⁹ www.geocities.com/childrenanddivorce



During family meetings or scheduled family time, this temperature card is taken out and each family member offered the opportunity to express their opinions or feelings on some of the issues. When a family attempts to do family in alternative ways, it implies that power differentials are deconstructed and age and hierarchy are not welcomed in their home. Silence also has a space in such families and no pressure is therefore put on any family member to verbally take part in a temperature reading.

Family members are offered the chance to invite Celebration, Trust, Love, Sharing, Freedom and other positive aspects to join the family meeting. Blame, Anger, Frustration and all problems preventing the family from doing family in their preferred way, are discussed and then discarded.

As mentioned earlier, one of the aims of this study was creating ways in which participants could witness and share their knowledge about being part of an alternative family and about doing family in alternative ways. They therefore wanted to create something that could be of use to other

adolescents and families that they could use as part of their attempt to be doing family in alternative ways. Discovering the temperature reading initiated a search for available games designed specifically for families with children and adolescents.

5.7 Games as part of 'doing family'

Games could be structured to focus on family members telling what they like about each other. Sometimes family members find it harder to say these 'corny' things than to be critical because closeness is often more difficult to tolerate than anger. Sharing the positive comments in a game can help family members feel safer. Because it's 'only a game,' people can maintain some distance from their comments. A tough adolescent might never thank his/her stepfather for helping them with homework in 'real life', but in a game they're required to come up with something.

As discussed in 4.3 members of an alternative family do not always feel like they are part of a 'real family'. So by acting, in a game, as if they can talk to each other, they actually become more solid as a family unit. Hearing what others have to say reinforces each person's self-worth. Hearing what they are appreciated for increases people's capacity to endure the difficult times later.

Except for commercial games like Monopoly, Scrabble etc, that are available for families to use, a few games have been developed specifically for the development of family unity and communication. In the dice game (www.geocities.com/childrenanddivorce) each member rolls the dice and then says something that she likes and appreciates about the person whose number she has thrown. People are encouraged to say something about the way the person behaves (i.e. he is kind; she helps me with my homework; he makes me laugh). In some families, the first time, all they have to say is 'I like your hair', or 'I like your shirt', and those responses are accepted. If a person rolls his own number he is required to say something good about himself. Some people find this the hardest task.

During the second round of the game, members ask each other questions instead of making statements. This is particularly useful where stepparents and stepchildren don't have a shared history with each other. The beauty of rolling the dice is that it adds an element of suspense – 'Who will I get?' or 'Who will get me?' People give very thoughtful answers and are often surprised at the things that others say about them.

Schiel (2001) has also developed a board game as part of his dissertation that investigated narrative ways of family enrichment. In his game scenarios are sketched where the family gets to respond in

relation to their behaviour. For example, when guests come over, and a child's room is neat, that person can advance a square. Or, the family planned a family excursion, but a child refused to go, the entire family has to move a square back.

5.7.1 Why another game?

We studied some available games on the Internet (for example the dice game and temperature readings) and read literature like the above-mentioned dissertation done by Schiel (2001). It was easy to wonder whether it would be a good idea to develop yet another game in a market that is already overflowing with possibilities. We therefore decided that we needed a fresh approach where we could apply the guidelines of the postmodern and social construction discourse to develop a game that is different from most of the games available to families.

The game that our participants developed was different to a lot of this family enrichment material that we studied, because it was developed in a full participatory way. McTaggart (1997b:27) explains that participatory research is the way in which groups of people can 'organize the conditions under which they can learn from their own experience and make this experience accessible to others'.

Clandenin and Connelly (1991:417) support this by focusing on four possible directions in studying personal experience: *inward*, namely the internal feelings, hopes and dreams of the participants. *Outward*, their construction of the multiple realities that they live in, *backward* and *forward*, that refers to past, present and future experiences. During the development of this game the participants used all four directions mentioned above to identify and deconstruct discourses informing their experiences. Not only was this helpful in thickening their alternative stories about being and doing family, it became a way to witness and make their experiences accessible to other people. The game was therefore, because of the participatory nature, developed in Afrikaans. For the sake of this dissertation, I have translated the instructions and some examples of the questions and tasks. The original Afrikaans wording for the category names were put in brackets to have the voice of the participants also heard in this part of the text.

All the questions that are asked are questions that are important to our group, and questions that they would like the answers to. The discourses that are addressed in the game were also specifically chosen to address issues that these adolescents have identified in their homes. These discourses can then be deconstructed during the game as conversations develop around some of the questions.

Where Schiel's game focuses on enriching the relationships within a family, our game emphasizes family members getting to know each other's histories, dreams and hopes. The questions were also designed to specifically address the expectations that family members have of themselves and of each other. Often, in alternative families, the members were expected to act as a family without first discussing role expectations and planning ways in which they were going to be doing family together. In that sense, this game creates space for families not only to evaluate and deconstruct the way they have been doing family, but also to write alternative stories and co-construct their ways of doing family in a scene where all the family members has equal voices.

The fun element was also much more important to our participants than what came through in the dice game. They felt it important that with all the discourses proclaiming that the relationship between parents and adolescents should be complicated and often full of conflict, they needed the opportunity to laugh and play with their parents in ways such as those mentioned in the game. They decided against another board game, not only because similar games already existed, but because a lot of them felt that they would not be able to convince their parents to play yet another board game. Didi was adamant about this when she said `my stepfather wouldn't join the family in a board game, even if I begged!` Janien agreed and said that her mother definitely did not like board games. They felt quite certain that if there were a strategic element to the game, it would be easier to convince their families to play.

`Through a game like this, families can get to know each other better. And they can start to listen to each other, because so many families have forgotten how to listen to each other and even how to talk to each other (Meagan).`

5.8 offers an abridged version of the game with examples of questions from each category.

5.8 FunFam

5.8.1 Instructions

- ❖ Age difference is not welcome in this game. That means that your age may not be used to your advantage or to someone else's disadvantage.
- ❖ Players must answer in full sentences, rather than just single words or phrases. You are never allowed to only answer 'yes' or 'no', your reasoning or motivation must be explained.
- ❖ You are allowed and encouraged to ask questions about other player's answers, for example 'can you explain your answer a bit more?' 'Can you explain your answer in a different way?' 'I feel the same/different about your answer because....', etc.
- ❖ Nobody is allowed to give advice about how family members rather should have handled a situation or how they should, in your opinion, have answered a question.
- ❖ Nobody is allowed to criticize another player.
- ❖ Nobody is allowed to say that a person cannot, or should not think in a specific way¹⁰.
- ❖ If one of the abovementioned should happen, or a person is not listening to other player's answers, the family can have a conversation to negotiate about the possibility of either having him/her return one of his playing pieces, or have him/her answer a question, miss a turn or even have him/her wash that evening's dishes.
- ❖ While a family is playing this game, the knowledge that they make at this table, builds a solid wall around them. That implies that all that they learn of their family and each other stays right there in their house. It will always be available for them to refer back to, remember and learn from, but no family member is allowed to tell sensitive information that they have learned to friends or people living outside their family.
- ❖ Family members are encouraged to share that what they have learned about doing family with friends, and even encourage them to play the game as well, but confidentiality in a family should be discussed and upheld during any time the game is played.

The game consists of individual player sheets, coloured cards representing the four categories, a dice and different shaped pieces that players need to arrange in a formation on their individual boards (See Addendum 3). On four sides of the dice, an icon appears that indicates a category that the

¹⁰ This always reminds me of Riet Bons-Storm (1990) being told by senior members of her church: 'Maar zo mag je niet denken!'

player has to answer a question from, or perform a task. The fifth side is a blank that instructs the player to skip this round while the sixth side is a bonus block that lets a player pick a piece for his board without having to answer a question or complete a task. The icons for each category are the following:



Sê jou sê (have your say)



Raai raai riepa (Take a guess)



Die wiel van Tyd (The wheel of time)



Doen jou ding (Do your thing)

For every question or task that a player completes, he gets to pick a piece out of a bag to place on his board (See Addendum 2). The player then gets to place the piece on the hexagonal shape on his board. The first player to fill his whole hexagon with individual pieces is the winner.

Should it happen that a player is not able to use the piece that he has picked, he has the option of throwing it back into the bag, provided he agrees to throw one of his own pieces back as well, without having the option of choosing a differently shaped piece. If a player would like to move a piece around after he has already placed it on the board, he needs to negotiate this with the rest of the players. They can then decide if a piece can be moved if the player is prepared to miss a turn, or complete his next task or question without obtaining an extra piece from the bag. If a player needs only one more piece to win, he is allowed to miss a turn and 'buy' that specific piece from another player through negotiating an agreement for the piece. All these guidelines are tentative, and the family can at any time negotiate and decide upon their own rules and guidelines for playing the game.

5.8.2 The categories

5.8.2.1 Have your say (Sê jou sê)

In this category the player draws a card containing a question. He/she has to answer the question in a full sentence, and not just in one word or by using a 'yes' or a 'no'. Other players are encouraged to ask questions or start a conversation about the question that a player has answered. This category includes questions like:

- What do you remember of your first school day?
- What are the things that steal our family's time for each other?

- What role does the television and cell phones play in our family?
- How does being part of this family influence your way of thinking about yourself?
- How does Fighting at home, influence your day at school/work?
- Which things in a family could be hard to forgive?
- When can a home not be a safe space for children?
- What do you appreciate about your parents?
- Is it possible to be angry with someone, but to still love that person?
- What place does tantrums have in your family?
- 'It is normal for adolescents to go through a period of rebellion and to seek to separate themselves from their parents.' What do you think?
- 'Blood is thicker than water'. What do you think?
- What do you think about premarital sex?

5.8.2.2 Take a guess (Raai raai riepa)

When a player's dice falls on this category he has to pull a card from the 'have a say' category and answer it in the way he thinks the person sitting to his left, right or opposite him, would answer it. To determine on whose behalf he has to answer, he spins the placement wheel (See Addendum 4). The person whom he answers for, needs to validate his answer, or explain his own answer if it happens to be different.

Questions in this category could include:

- What is your nickname?
- If you had the opportunity to meet anybody (dead or alive, famous or not), who would it be, and why?
- What is your favourite time of day?
- If you had to become an animal, which type of animal would you be?
- What do you consider to be your family's most prized possession?
- How would you like the members of you family to be talking to each other?

5.8.2.3 The wheel of time (Die wiel van Tyd)

The spinning wheel for this category can land on Future, Past or Present. The player then draws a card from the time box. This card contains one word, and the player needs to relate a story about that

word that has happened (past), how he currently feels or experiences it (present), or what his wished and expectations about the word are (future). Should a person then draw a word like holiday and the spinning wheel lands on past, he needs to explain a holiday that he has had that was special. Should he land on future, he needs to relate the dream vacation that he still hopes to have.

Examples of words in this category are:

- Photo
- First love
- Hospital
- Fashion
- Peer pressure
- Christmas

5.8.2.4 Do your thing (Doen jou ding)

This is the task category in which a player could receive one of three possible tasks. The first is a singing task that is loosely based on the television programme 'Liriekeraai'. A card with the name of a song is drawn. The player then spins the music wheel to determine in which style he is to sing that particular song. He could be instructed to sing it

- Very low
- Very fast
- Like a opera diva
- Like a rapper
- Like a boy band
- Like a heavy metal rock artist

This category also offers the opportunity for teamwork. The player spins the placement wheel to determine which family member is going to make up his backing orchestra. They then have 30 seconds to discuss possibilities that could be used as musical instruments (for example, a hand on a table can be used as a drum, or hitting a pencil against some glasses could be used as a xylophone, etc). He/she would use the chosen props to instrumentally accompany the singer. If the rest of the family feels that he/she did a good job at providing the background music, that player gets to pick a piece to add to his board. The game then carries on with the person sitting next to the singer.

The second task that a player could receive is the Movie Charades category. Each card contains the name of a movie that the player has to explain to the rest of the players without using any words. The family can decide before the start of the game to use specific gestures to indicate amount of words, syllables, and small words like 'and', 'the' and 'of'. A player has 30 seconds to explain his movie. If they can identify the movie correctly, the player gets to pick a piece for his board. If they are not able to identify the movie, he does not get to pick a piece and the next player has a chance to throw the dice.

The last part of this category is made up of physical tasks. Again, the family decides whether a player has performed the task as well as he could, and then he gets to draw a piece for his board, or not.

Tasks in this section could include:

- Try to lick your elbow.
- Touch your nose with your tongue.
- Get all the players something to drink.
- Rub your tummy in circles while you are patting the top of your head.
- Pronounce everybody's name backwards.
- Name 3 reasons why watermelons should be square.
- Mime someone seeing a spider walking over his hand, and getting a big fright.
- If your left shoe had to have a name, what would you call it?

5.9 The social construction of FunFam

Modernism portrays 'truths' about what families should look like. Postmodern families have the option to write and construct their own narratives. Games like these can help families to find a voice to portray their experiences. It creates a context of having respect for each other's stories in this family as well as in their family of origin. White (1995a:25) mentions 'naming and re-naming', where the family constantly re-writes their story, names their experiences together and gets access to not-yet-said lived experience that could be useful in the writing of such a family narrative.

None of the ideas in the game might be all new, but the social constructions that we have made, makes this game, the understanding thereof, and the knowledge gained from it, in a poststructuralist

view, unique to this situation. Every family that plays this game will be constructing and re-constructing the themes and ideas around the content and process of this game.

Because each game is a social construction of a family, and a work in progress, some empty cards are included so that families can add their own questions or activities. This also creates space for children that might not be that confident about their voice yet, but have a question. They could now simply add a card and then the question or discourse can be discussed the next time that the game is played. As they encounter songs or movies they think would work well, those could be added as well.

Another aspect of playing the game in a postmodern, social constructionist framework is that nothing that we construct or say now, is going to stay this way. The answers that players give now are not necessarily going to be the same way when the game is played again. The answers in this game are not set in stone, but rather in soft clay, that can be remodeled and re-shaped as players change their discourses and learn more about each other. That creates space for families to identify unique outcomes that can be further investigated and woven together into alternative stories for families.

As previously mentioned, the whole game was socially constructed by the participants. Through the eyes of adolescents, we have tried to make the game accessible to families that might include younger children. Some of the questions are therefore linked very directly to discourses influencing adolescents. Discretion on the part of adults is advised, because some questions might address issues that parents might not want younger children to have to answer. We would suggest that parents rather rephrase the questions in language that is more accessible to small children, rather than just leaving out some questions and in that way silence and marginalize their children.

We have attempted to develop the game through using a postmodern discourse. Yet, we had to acknowledge that we live in a society where modernistic ideas and principles still have a large voice in the discourses of people's lives. One of these modernistic principles is winning. It is unthinkable for some people to play a game where there is no winner. So we have developed our game in such a way that there can be a winner, that can keep the family motivated to keep on playing the game to also get the chance to be the winner. But in the same sense, winning can encompass so much more than being the first to complete the tasks. Winning in this game also says something about overcoming oppression and prejudice, about celebrating voices being heard and the family as a unit being a winner of skills to be doing family in a preferred alternative way.

This winning metaphor was carried further into the certificates that family members are awarded after each game (See addendum 5). The winner of the physical game gets a winner's certificate, but certificates can also be awarded to the player who has managed to crack the most jokes and make everybody laugh, or the player who impressed by having his voice heard much more than during previous games. Certificates can also be awarded to family members who have managed to deconstruct and re-write a lot of ideas about the influence that society and his family has on the way he thinks about himself and other members of his family. The certificates are designed in such a way that the family can decide whom it should be awarded to and then they can construct a sentence to explain why this player has been awarded a specific certificate.

5.10 Conclusion

It is our hope that with this game families can get the opportunity to not only extend the communication channels, or get to know each other better, but rather that they learn and develop ways of being a family in a way that suits them. Discourses proclaim the ways in which families should relate to each other and their situation. This chapter and the FunFam game attempts to offer other families the freedom to structure their lives according to their needs and wishes, rather than just adhering to societal discourses. Chapter 6 offers a reflection on this research journey from the view of the participants and the researcher. It also addresses the impact this study can have for practical theology and the world of pastoral care and research.

CHAPTER 6

WHERE THE JOURNEY ENDS

REFLECTIONS

6.1 Going back to where we started

She was no longer called upon to uphold with her childish might the broken end of the arch. Her father and mother now met to the span of the heavens and she, the child, was free to play in the space beneath, between.

(Lawrence 1968)

In this chapter we reflect on our journey, and we describe the way our rainbows of life have been influenced by what we have learned. In order to do this, we refer again to the initial aims of the study:

- To assist adolescents who are children of divorce and remarriage in creating and upholding a community of concern where they can be empowered and have their voices heard;
- Co-creating a forum for discussing and deconstructing discourses silencing and marginalizing them and their way of thinking around this issue;
- Co-creating an opportunity for participants to witness and re-tell their preferred narratives about the doing family in an alternative way.

This chapter will discuss the value of choosing participatory action research as a research vehicle for this study. It also offers reflections from the researcher and the participants, summarizes the accountability practices employed by the researcher and explores the deconstruction of power differentials within the group. The relevance of this study for practical theology and pastoral care is also addressed.

The influence of feminist, participatory pastoral care and practical theological approaches on this study are well summarized by Weingarten (1994:186):

To speak not just what is acceptable to one self and others, but to speak that which is not, or may not be, acceptable. If we don't challenge ourselves to go beyond the

limits of what we assume [one] should reveal, if we 'choose' silence, we will cut ourselves off from the richest intimacies we can have with our [families].

The participants in this study did not choose silence; they chose to speak about relationships in which they felt comfortable, as well as about relationships that did not meet their needs and their expectations. They were prepared to use their newfound voices to teach their families about 'doing family' and to fight for equality and what they believed to be right. This challenge was immense. Not only did they have to overcome their own fears and prejudices, but they also had to challenge the prevailing societal norms and discourses. Participatory action research turned about to be a superb vehicle for this purpose.

6.2 About participatory action research

6.2.1 Redefining the research aims

Early in this journey I learned that participatory action research could never be approached with fixed ideas and opinions about where the research would be going. I entered our first conversation with a set of aims beautifully formulated in my head. After only a short time in the conversation I realized that that was definitely not going to be the things that the group wanted to focus on. That led to us redefining the aims according to the needs of the participants, rather than that what I had thought would make a good conversation. Throughout the text evidence of these changes can be seen, like my initial idea that the participants might wish to talk about their relationships with their stepparents. It turned out that they felt a greater need to address their relationships with their biological fathers. Another example can be seen in the way we witness our work together. I entered the research contemplating something like a play or a leaflet, but the value of participatory action research and equal voices led to the development of FunFam.

I also envisioned constituting the group in such a way that some of the participants would have a good relationship with their stepparents and others not. Or that some might have a stepfather, and others a stepmother. This, with my hope that the age at which parents divorced would vary, turned out not to be the case. These factors also had an influence on the aims that the group chose.

6.2.2 What have we gained?

Participatory action research implies 'learning through actions' (Berge & Ve 2000:131). The participants and I have learned so much about each other and ourselves throughout this journey. We have learned about the normalizing truths and societal expectations about being a family and the pressure that is placed on people that choose to be 'doing family' in alternative ways. And we have also learned about the liberation and freedom of finding a voice after being silenced for so long.

Berge and Ve (2000:119) also call action research a search for equality. On our journey, we deconstructed a variety of power/knowledge differentials. Not only my being a teacher trading the overcrowded classroom concerned with academic achievement for intimate personal conversations, but also the power differential between parents and children, stepparents and children, and even between stepsiblings. We have investigated ways in which the participants have been marginalized by discourses such as *children should be seen and not heard*. As already discussed, not only participants benefit from research journeys. Feminist participatory action research opens doors for researchers to be changed and enriched by the process. At hindsight, I do not know where and how to start motivating the influence that pastoral work, participatory research and this study has had on my life. 6.2.3 offers a birds' eye view of these influences.

6.2.3 What have I gained?

Possibly the biggest lesson I have learned through the use of participatory action research is the value of being self-reflexive. I very quickly realized that I had fixed preconceived notions of divorce and remarriage. I have bought into so many of the societal discourses about children of divorce and how they are 'supposed' to act and feel about the divorce and the fact that they now had a stepfamily.

I was also once again confronted with the social construction of *'the child'* and *'the adolescent'* and how that influenced the way I made meaning around their way of thinking and doing. Through being self-reflexive I could question my reasons and my social constructions of words. I reminded myself that there were multiple realities and multiple versions of 'truths' involved in every issue and situation we addressed.

The freedom that the postmodern paradigm offers by not believing in any fixed truths, guided me to believe in there being no 'right' or 'wrong' way of doing family, no set rules of how one should care for someone, or even how one should validate and to show that care.

During this journey our focus was on developing a mutual, multi-voiced, multi-centered discourse that said more about the relationship between the researcher and the researched than about the 'object' (namely divorce and doing family) captured in language.

Clandenin and Connelly (1994: 418) state that when 'we begin experiencing the experience, we need to be sensitive to the stories already being lived, told, relived, and retold'. I had to keep on reminding myself of this as we attempted to learn and gain an understanding of experiences through constructing narratives of experience.

I always stayed aware of my own vulnerability in wanting to attempt to understand and write about what these adolescents were saying. Kotzé (2002:18) claims that one who has a voice and power has an ethical obligation to use their knowledge of power/knowledge to give a voice to the marginalized and silenced, 'to listen *to* them, but not to decide *for* them'.

The education and school system in South Africa is still very rigid and modernistic in its approach. Although we were very aware of the power discourse and very accountable and transparent about its working within our group, the question still remains whether one can ever, coming from a teacher-learner background, get to a point of total power sharing? I believe that it is an ongoing process and that the participatory action research approach that we have followed during this research has showed the participants that such a discourse can be deconstructed. We also became acutely aware of the need for ways to extend this deconstruction further than our group to classrooms, hostels and family homes.

I am a white Afrikaans speaking woman who has always been in some sort of power position. Firstly, I have been privileged to have had a university education. Secondly, I am a teacher, which also places me in a power position over all the children that I work with. Yet white Afrikaans speaking women were not afforded the chance to see themselves as capable to exert a voice and an opinion in the very patriarchal society that I grew up in. I remember my high school days where male teachers were respected and feared, simply because they were male. And how everybody assumed that they had better class discipline and authority just because of their gender. Having to live as a woman and a teacher in such a society, I have had some experiences of screaming from the margins.

When working with adolescents, I keep on reminding myself to be accountable and to address these power differences that exist between us. I remain aware of the 'truths' and beliefs that formed my

opinion of 'being powerful' while I was growing up. Being self-reflexive about these normalizing truths helps me to be able to deconstruct them and assists me in attempting to go about with these adolescents in a transparent, accountable, ethical way.

6.2.4 Deconstructing power through accountability practices

Accountability is about addressing power differences. White (1995b:166) admits that there is a power difference between a therapist and a client that cannot be erased; regardless of how committed we are to equal practices. He carries on to say: 'I have an ethical commitment to bring forth the extent to which the process of therapy is a two-way process, and to try to find ways of identifying, acknowledging and articulating the extent to which the therapeutic interactions are actually shaping of the work itself, and also shaping of my life more generally in positive ways' (1995b:167).

Therapists should work towards making these power differences transparent. Postmodern feminist therapy advocates a more egalitarian relationship where both the therapist and the client reflect on the process of therapy. Accountability then implies deconstructing the therapist's voice and by doing that privileging the voices of the clients that therapists work with.

Through being transparent the therapy is deconstructed, in such a way that the participants can reflect on the process of communication. It leads to a context in which people are more able to decide for themselves how they might take the therapist's responses (White 1995b:167). In that way transparency involves a deconstruction of the power of the therapist, entering the therapy equal to the participants.

Foucault (1980:98) argues that 'power is employed and excised through a net-like organization. And not only do individuals circulate between its threads; they are always in the position of simultaneously undergoing and exercising this power.'

It became my passion to validate and acknowledge the knowledges that these participants had, to assist them in realizing that they had more power than some discourses in society permitted them to realize. They had the power to choose to make decisions about how they would like to live their lives. They could also exercise power on our journey together in that they could make changes and add ideas to the text. They had the power to discover all the local knowledge and expertise that they had.

I see myself as a women/pastoral therapist/teacher whose job it is to validate these adolescents' subjugated knowledges, rather than deferring expert knowledges, or claiming to know advice or objective truths that would solve and simplify the issues that they deal with. This is quite different from the relationship that the participants and I have with knowledge in our school. In both research and education, knowledge has a fundamental place. Educators teach knowledge; in research we constitute bodies of knowledge. The distribution of power stands central in the difference between these two types of knowledges. Where the academic discourse promotes achievement and the quickest way of gaining as much knowledge as possible for large groups of people, the qualitative research process aims to ethically create space for dialogue and to come to mutual knowledge through practices of caring and hope.

Accountability was further ensured by negotiating the conversation times with the participants, rather than just imposing a time on them (a common occurrence in the school and hostel environment). We clearly outlined confidentiality boundaries from the first session and re-confirmed them during subsequent sessions, continuously asking for feedback about the tempo and content of the conversations. I asked their permission to audio tape all our conversations, to guide me when using direct translations as much as possible. In this way I ensured that this text is a participatory social construction, and not only my construction as a researcher. Denzin and Lincoln (1994:108) mention that all results of research are social constructions and that there are multiple voices in the text of which mine, as researcher, is equal to the voices of the participants. It was very important to me to indicate the direct words of the participants in another font, thereby validating and strengthening their voices even more. Through having the participants read and comment on the text, it further thickened our alternative story.

Having conversations with my supervisor assisted me in deconstructing power differentials, as well as being self-reflexive about checking my own social constructions around the process and my view on the discourses around research and adolescents and their voice.

Because I work in a postmodern discourse, it was important that I was transparent to myself, the participants and the readers of this text, about never being objectively involved in the process. All the knowledge and understanding was socially constructed as we went along, and was influenced by discourses and the context in which it happened. That made it impossible for me, as a researcher, to be objectively involved in the process. Throughout the text I attempted to have the voices of the

participants heard. Reflecting is an important part of participatory research and offers another opportunity to thicken the alternative stories that have been constituted.

6.3 A word from the participants

Meagan -Family doesn't imply a biological connection anymore. Family is deeper; it is the people and things that form my safe space.

Charlette -I've learned that a well-functioning family isn't necessarily a nuclear, 7th heaven family. It's people standing together, respecting each other, and loving each other even though they all have mistakes. When people are 'doing family' in these ways, they become 6th heaven families that create a world where they feel comfortable and safe.

Janien -I know now that my family does a lot of things the right way. Although we still have issues, we have learned to accept each other for what we are. I know that being a family doesn't just happen; it's something that we should be working at every day.

Meagan -A family can work on 'doing family' through talking, spending time together, doing things like having family meetings, or playing the game that we have developed. It doesn't matter what you do together, just as long as you do it as a family.

Didi -And it does not mean that if somebody doesn't live with you he isn't family anymore. My dad still is my family; we just need to find ways to be 'doing family' together. But realizing that he also has a

story, takes some of the burden of responsibility off my shoulders.

Meagan -A lot of things can still change in my relationship with my father, but I know that he cares, and that I love him enough to keep on trying. Our group's conversations gave me the courage to keep on trying.

After this discussion about the content of our journey, I asked the participants about the experience of developing a game. As previously discussed, we established at the start of the journey that we wanted to create a tool that could assist alternative families in tapping into their local and subjugated knowledge about doing family and being a family.

The fast and busy world that we live in is stealing families' time together (Meagan). A game like this gives families the opportunity to talk to each other without the pressure that is often very central to such conversations. The fact that they got to construct all the questions and tasks made them aware of the many discourses and issues that they had in common, a lot of which they were inclined to think were confined to them and their families. This strengthened the sense of unity and cohesion within the group, in that way building on our community of concern.

On narrative pastoral therapy and the way we conducted our conversations, most of the participants said that they initially saw me, apart from being a teacher, as a professional therapist whose aim it was to solve their problems. They were adamant that it wasn't expert knowledge or professional techniques that were of most value to them, but instead it was the simple display of caring and the building of a solid, trusting relationship. Didi explained that she felt very comfortable during our conversations, and could discuss issues there that she never thought she would be willing to discuss with other people.

I could feel that you listened to what I was saying as if I were a human being, not a child who was not supposed to know anything. I felt like we were on the same level, you were not there to tell me what to do,

but made me feel as if you were really listening and were really interested in my side of the story.

In some ways, our working together personifies the largest amount of power that these adolescents ever were ever permitted to have in a relationship with a teacher. In the beginning it was strange to not think of you as my teacher. But your attitude and the type of questions that you asked made me feel like I was the one in control of the conversation (Janien).

6.4 Personal reflection

The postmodern, narrative way of doing therapy and co-search created space for judgmental, gender-stereotypical behavior to be undermined. It is my hope that, after being exposed to these premises, the participants in this study now see themselves as being part of an important movement away from homogenizing trends. A movement towards a preferred sense of self that is of their own choosing and reinforced by a strong network of others who share similar views (communities of concern). That they have come to then see themselves as contributing to the community by refusing definitions of self and family that are forced upon them by the culture.

The key to writing this text lay in the ability to, throughout our journey, maintain the integrity of the participants' voices. To 'be' with them in an accountable, transparent, ethical and participatory way. To attempt to portray the richness and complexity of being an adolescent and to treat them with understanding and respect.

It's not only words like these that seem powerfully magic or the magical power of words that heed my attention. I want to echo the words of Madigan when he says that it is the 'world of the mundane, the discourse unnoticed, the words of everyday therapeutic description, that demands our vigilance' (1996:58).

Our cultural forms, rituals, discourses and assumptions still relate mainly to the 'intact' first-marriage family, and the most ordinary event, such as filling out a form or celebrating a holiday can become a source of acute embarrassment or pain for the members of remarried families. I experience this first hand at our school where children are required to complete registration forms each year that only

have space for one address for their parents. I have many a time heard a child saying 'I never know whose address to fill in – my mother whom I live with, or my father who pays my school fees?' Or children are simply instructed to 'take this form home and have your father sign it!' oblivious to the fact that there might not be a father, or that the child's relationship with the father may not be at a place where that is a feasible option. As part of this study I have started the process of having these, and other forms, changed to be more ethical and respectful to children that live as part of alternative families and that may, for example, need more space to fill in contact details for parents.

Some of the forms that the participants asked to be changed were the detention forms and general notices to parents. At the top of these letters it had a space for a teacher to address it to the parent by name. This led to a lot of embarrassment and humiliation when a child had to return to a teacher, after receiving something like detention, to say that he/she had put the wrong surname on the form. That her mother does not have the same surname that she has. Being forced to explain and clarify your family structure often makes children and adolescents very uncertain about what they think and feel about their families.

Our school's detention form has now been changed and is simply addressed to 'best parent/guardian'. This way it shows a lot more respect towards both the parent /guardian and the child who does not have the same surname, or may not be a blood relation to his parent.

We have a long way to go in terms of re-authoring the stories of marginalization and oppression our children are subjected to during times that are already very traumatic for them. We can only hope for more through studies like this, and more committed stepparents that love their alternative families and who strive toward doing family in ethical and responsible ways.

6.5 The influence of this study on practical theology and pastoral care

I believe that the process of deconstructing the underlying, dominant ideologies that construct stepfamilies liberated new energies. It motivated new visions of parenting, being a child, doing family in anti-nuclear ways, and human connectedness. I hope that it would, in our participants' families, as well as the families of those who read this text, and those we come in contact with, liberate the voices, strengths and resources of alternative families.

During this journey, once the participants came to recognize the power of their voices, their imagination and creativity could escape the boundaries set by the traditional ideas that they and I might have had about doing pastoral research and family together. It has also influenced my way of teaching, doing therapy and going about with adolescents every day. I now ask myself whether I am deconstructing, or promoting power differences in certain situations. Am I deconstructing or promoting normalizing discourses? Am I being accountable and transparent in my actions? Am I using externalizing language and inviting acceptance, non-blaming and respect into conversations I have with adolescents? Am I offering their voice the same place as my 'adult professional' voice in our conversations? Is this premise leading to equal two-way conversations that create space for individual narratives and stories of group adventures?

As a teacher and pastoral therapist I meet many adolescents that are children of divorced or remarried families. This research journey gives me, and other people coming in contact with these children, a point of reference from which we can work. The principles and guidelines of doing family in anti-nuclear alternative ways promote the re-authoring of these adolescents' stories and ways of thinking about their families. This study, and the game that evolved from it, has the potential to promote communication and initiate dialogues in families. The game can be used in individual families, but can also be implemented as part of support groups, school or church projects and community initiatives. It can be used as a foundation to build seminars and collaborative efforts to promote healthy and happy families.

I believe that I chose this topic for pastoral research that grew and developed because I desperately wanted to be involved in giving a voice to a group of people that have so long been voiceless. Children of divorce may lack language that places the suffering they endure in a social context. Instead they come to view it as a personal fault that means that their misery must be hidden or accepted. I longed to help them discover that when suffering is voiced and shared, it can create solidarity between people who suffer similarly. Moving from silence to speech is a gesture 'of defiance that heals, that makes new life and growth possible' (Eiesland 1998:104).

This study can contribute to practical theology through exploring this voicelessness and abuse that they are exposed to as a result of patriarchy and other marginalizing discourses. This participatory, practical theological study therefore also challenges the educational system to initiate dialogue with adolescents to strengthen their voices and make their opinions known. It further invites us as adults

taking part in these abusive practices to apologize to the children of our society for the time that we stole their voices and left them out of the decision-making process in their own lives. This study also offers the opportunity to parents, teachers, schools and churches to address the issue of divorce and remarriage, and to create a context where children and families can be supported in their efforts in doing family in anti-nuclear, alternative ways.

6.6 Conclusion

Our role as teachers, pastoral therapists and simply human beings should be becoming partners in this resistance and move towards finding a voice. Not only should we aim to work with these children towards change in their relationships with people like their nonresidential parents and their stepfamilies, we should support them in re-writing the dominant discourses and in that way influence societal and cultural settings. Through being ethical in the way we witness our own and their stories, we show respect for these children and we validate and acknowledge the journey that they are on. As we get closer and closer to being anti-nuclear families that create space for our children to reconstruct their rainbows, we get closer to co-creating rainbows that are safe spaces for our children to live and play under.

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ADDENDUM 1

Information sheet for the participants/parents/caregivers

PASTORAL CARE FOR ADOLESCENTS JOURNEYING WITH DIVORCE AND REMARRIAGE

Thank you for showing an interest in this project. The research project will be used to fulfill the course requirements for a dissertation as part of a Masters degree in Pastoral Therapy. This letter is designed to provide you with information on the nature and purpose of the study.

What is the tentative aim of the project?

I undertake this journey with a group of adolescents hoping to accomplish the following:

- To assist adolescent girls in investigating the challenges and problems associated with being an adolescent journeying with parental divorce and subsequent living as part of an alternative family.
- To talk about the things that are stealing their voices in their families.
- To create an opportunity for group members to witness and re-tell their stories of pain as well as hope.

What types of participants are being sought?

One group of grade 10 and 11 girls will be included in the project. The group will consist of 4- 6 pupils.

What will the participants be asked to do?

A narrative approach to therapy holds at its core that we all live in stories, dream in stories, play in stories, hope in stories and share our pain through stories. During our conversations, the participants and I will embark on a journey to investigate the way in which society influences their stories about themselves, about divorce and about their families.

We will also discover the expectations and pressures that society places on adolescents and alternative families that make it difficult for them to live the story that they would like their lives to tell. We will be investigating ways in which they can reclaim their voices in society and re-write their stories about being part of an alternative family as well as looking into ways to be 'doing family' in a way in which they would feel comfortable and happy.

During this journey we will be writing a diary of our time together. Our conversations will be audio taped and translated. This diary of our journey will become part of a dissertation that will be handed in as part of a Masters degree. Anything that is written about our journey will be given to the participants to comment on, make recommendations to and provide feedback to ensure that I have captured their voices in the correct way during the translations. Where they are directly quoted in the text, it will be indicated in a different font, to strengthen my belief that they should be awarded an equal voice in this project.

Can participants change their mind and withdraw from the project?

The participants will be informed that they are free to withdraw at any time. During, or after our journey together, more group conversations, or any individual conversations can be arranged.

What information will be collected and what use will be made of it?

The information obtained during group sessions will be discussed with my supervisor, Dr J. P. Roux, and used in the project to describe the process and development of the research. Should I receive any relevant feedback from my supervisor, I will share it with the participants.

Results of this project may be published, but data included will in no way be linked to any specific participant. Because it is important to me to keep our conversations confidential and to protect the identity of the participants, they will be given the option to choose a pseudonym to be used in the report.

After our journey has come to an end, the information collected will be securely stored and only my supervisor and myself will have access to it. At the end of the project any personal information and audiotapes will be destroyed.

Thank you for considering participation in this journey.

ADDENDUM 2

Family mission statement

Biological Father To Wife/ Biological mother to Husband

As the father of my children and the husband to my new wife/husband I respect the differences regarding the management of our new family. I acknowledge the difficulties of being the stepmother/stepfather to my children and continuous hard work to create a home in which we create predictable expectations regarding behavior, manners, contributions and responsibilities. You and I will form and agree to positive and predictable family rules, so that my children will know what to expect and be allowed to feel comfortable in our home.

As your partner I would like to share the responsibility as leader of and guide to our children. I know my children fear loss and power in my life to you, my partner. I will listen and express to them my views and explanations about how I perceive their fears. I will provide my children with separate and alone time with me. If we both have children out of previous marriages, I wish them to not be 'your children' and 'my children', but to become our children, with enough space for them to still have an active relationship with their nonresidential parent.

Biological father to children

As your biological father I promise to keep in contact with you, to support you and to show an interest in your life. Although we might not live together, I undertake to join you in building our long-distance relationship. I will do my best to be the father that you wish and expect me to be. I will attempt to keep the communication channels between us open and will make sure that you can always feel comfortable to have your voice heard in our relationship.

Further I honour to pay the alimony that will enable you and your mother, with whom

you stay, to live the life that you deserve to lead. I accept my share of the responsibility for your financial health and well being.

I undertake to try to accept the fact that you might have a stepfather who has the privilege of fulfilling the everyday duties of a father. I will accept it if you wish to also call him 'dad'. I will be open and available if you would like to discuss your relationship with him, with me.

Biological Father to Biological mother/Ex Spouse

I honor the fact that my children were conceived in love with the children's mother. We honor that mother and father are forever and agree to be civil to each other. We know this is in the best interests of our mutual children. No matter what actions we take, we will never treat each other nor talk about each other with disrespect or disdain in a child's presence. We will be father and mother forever and have the best interests of the children at heart---no matter what our disagreements.

I will respect your new husband/ wife and acknowledge and appreciate the financial and emotional contribution that he/she makes towards our children's lives. If life in their home is different from what I believe, I will explain to the children how we are different and encourage them to respect BOTH ways of seeing the world.

Stepparents

I realize that I have taken on a hard, but exciting job in the family constellation. I will educate myself and work with my partner to educate ourselves. Working cooperatively we will form a structured household. I realize this is hard work and will endeavor to take on my stepfamily with courage and a happy heart. I love my wife/husband and want our stepfamily to be a nurturing place for my spouse, his/her children and myself.

No matter what incidence have occurred I will not badmouth his ex. He/She is the parent of the children and I realize the negative affects any and all bad mouthing

has on the children.

I promise never to try to take the place of the children's biological parents. I will be there in every way that a father/mother should be. And even if we are not connected by blood, we are connected in spirit.

The Children

I want my parent and stepparent to realize that " I was here first!" And, that for most children divorce is much harder that most adults realise. Having a new stepmother or stepfather is difficult.

I need to voice my concerns and feelings to my parent alone. I want him/her to listen to me and not to try to take away my feelings. I will also listen with respect. It is OK for me to ask questions as long as we all do it with respect. In my questions I am polite and courteous. I know that to move forward with my life I need to listen and learn.

I also recognize that my mom or dad needs to have a relationship with another adult. I do not want that adult to tell me what to do. But if BOTH decide on rules for this home, after all this is a new family, a stepfamily, I will be a good member of this new family team and play by the new rules. I want to be a good citizen to both of my homes.

Even if the rules are very different in each home I will respect the point of view of my mother and father. I know that they might have entirely different ideas about things that have happened, rules, manners and about what one or the other did or did not do. I will not decide who is right. That is God's job. I will respect the point of view of each of my parents.

I choose to respect myself and respect the different realities and ways of seeing and doing things of each parent.

I promise to love and respect you, irrelevant of your being related to me by blood or by spirit. I will try not to compare you with each other, or my different households

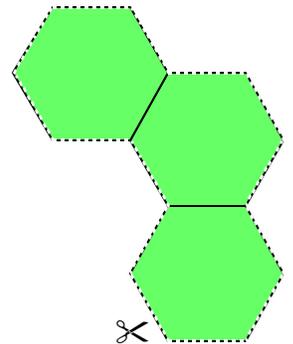
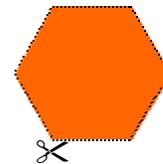
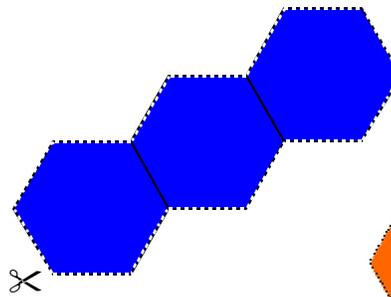
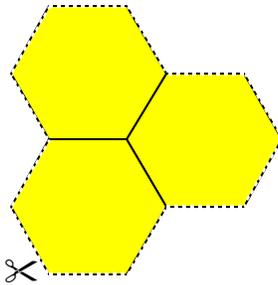
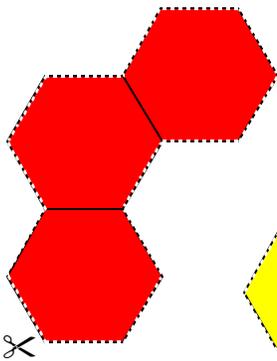
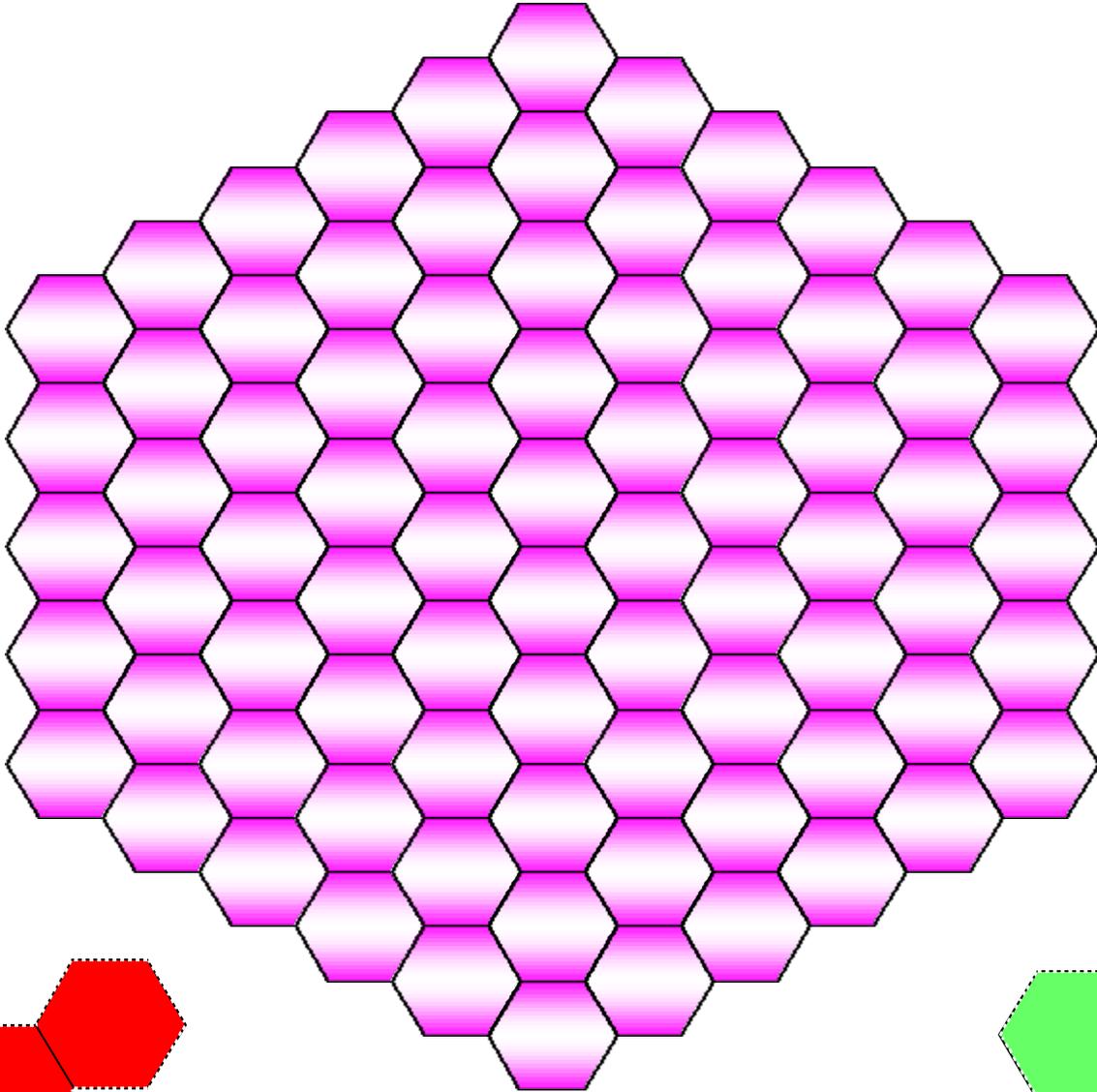
with each other.

We embark on this new journey as a family that, apart from anything else, shares a bond of love. We realize that it might not be easy all the time, but we undertake to not let Anger, Frustration etc. get the better of our family. I am proud to say that I have a family that loves me, and that I live as part of two households where I get the opportunity to have my voice heard, and the knowledge that my feelings and decisions count.

In any family, specifically and alternative family it is important to create specific agreements. These agreements that could just flow and develop naturally in a biologically connected family can often get stuck in the complexities of the stepfamily. As a family, we make the above-mentioned commitments to each other and thereby undertake to be doing family in an alternative, but preferred, way.

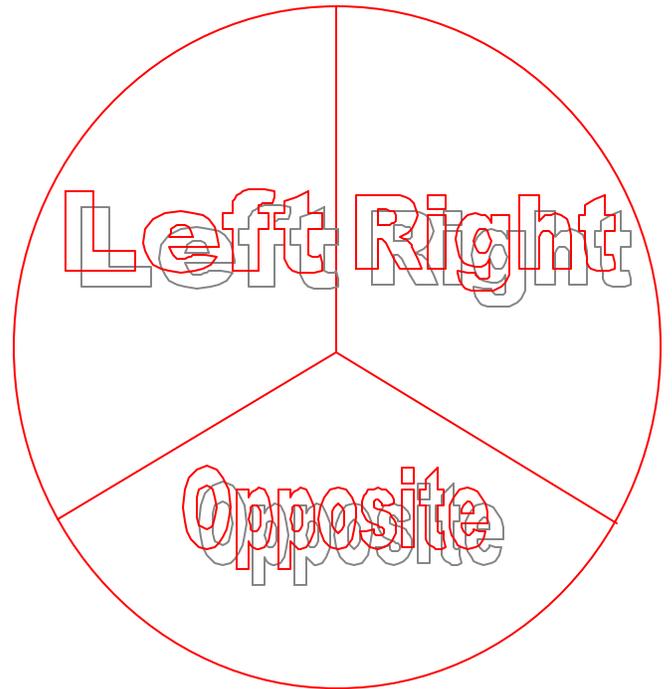
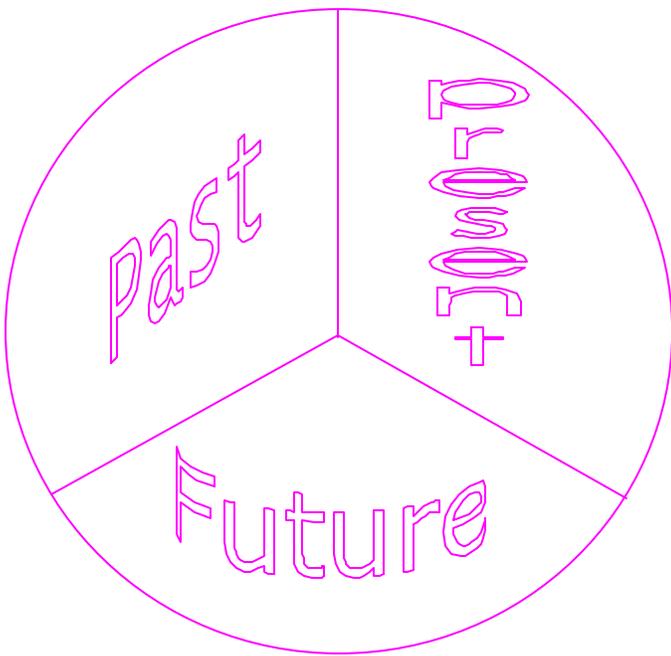
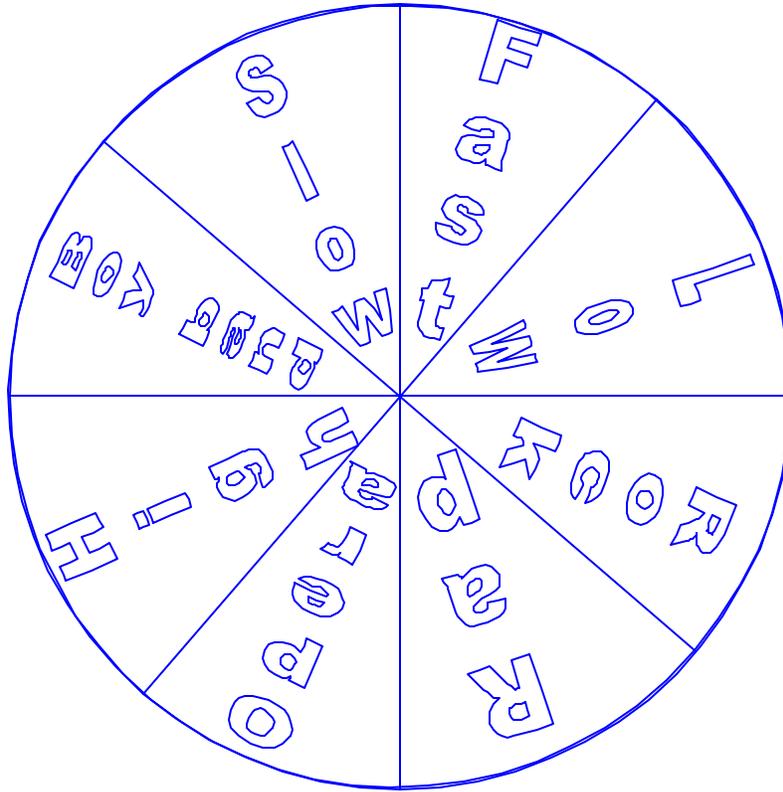
ADDENDUM 3

FunFam Individual game board and pieces



ADDENDUM 4

Spinning wheels



ADDENDUM 5

Certificates

This is to certify that

has succeeded in winning the
FunFam game!

The other players had the
following to say about the
way he/she played the game
and what it was like having
him/her as part of this
family



Congratulations!!

Date: _____

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