# A
# CONSTRUCTION OF FAMILY ROLES BY WORKING MEN WHO EXPERIENCE DEPRESSION

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In loving memory of

Prof. L. Hofmeyr

**"If there is hell upon earth, it is to be found in a melancholy man's heart."**

**(from *The Anatomy of Melancholy*, 1621, by Robert Burton [1577-1640] in Dill and Anderson, 1999:110)**

# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

# ABSTRACT

## A

## CONSTRUCTION OF FAMILY ROLES BY WORKING MEN WHO EXPERIENCE DEPRESSION

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Despite depression having become such a common phenomenon in our modern-day life, there is still much that the social work profession needs to learn about it, in order to facilitate a process that will enable clients to deal not only with the immediate effects of depression but also with the changes it might bring about with regard to their families. The majority of the research conducted thus far appears to have focused on depression in women, with precious little attention to the experience of depression by male sufferers. By way of this study, the researcher aims to address these problems.

It is interesting to note that we still do not really know precisely what meaning men's family roles, such as that of fatherhood, actually hold for them. As anyone who has studied depression will know only too well, people's perceptions of the world and of themselves change with the onset of depression. It is therefore quite possible that perceptions regarding family roles may similarly be subject to change. This study attempts to find answers to questions such as these with a view to improved future research and therapy.

Constructivism forms part of a broad post-modernist approach to the social sciences. In particular, it emphasises the importance of personal construct creation as well as the development of such constructs through social processes. With its use of narrative and metaphorical techniques, it offers a unique glimpse into the construct system of the interviewee. In an effort to explore the meanings and experiences of men who are struggling with depression, three case study narratives obtained from selected persons are offered. By way of a co-construction of these stories, certain conclusions are arrived at, leading to specific recommendations for future practice and research.

**KEY PHRASES:** *experience of depression; self; constructivism; identity; self-esteem; self-complexity; Personal Construct Theory; Social Constructivism; depression vulnerability; meaning-making; male family roles.*

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# OPSOMMING

## 'N
## KONSTRUKSIE VAN GESINSROLLE DEUR WERKENDE MANS WAT DEPRESSIE ERVAAR

| | |
|---|---|
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Ten spyte daarvan dat depressie so 'n algemene verskynsel binne ons hedendaagse lewe geword het, is daar nog heelwat wat die maatskaplike werk professie daaroor moet leer, ten einde 'n proses te fasiliteer wat dit vir kliënte moontlik sal maak om nie alleenlik met die onmiddellike gevolge van depressie te handel nie, maar ook met die veranderinge wat moontlik binne die gesin deur die toestand teweeg gebring is. Die meerderheid navorsing tot dusver blyk op depressie onder vrouens toegespits te gewees het, met bitter min aandag aan die ervaring van depressie onder manlike lyers. Deur middel van hierdie studie beoog die navorser om sodanige probleme aan te spreek.

Dit is interessant om daarop te let dat ons nog steeds nie weet wat die eintlike betekenis is wat mans se gesinsrolle, soos dié van vaderskap, vir hulle inhou nie. Soos enigiemand wat depressie bestudeer het alte goed sal weet, verander mense se persepsies van die wêreld en van hulself wanneer hulle depressie ervaar. Dit is daarom heel moontlik dat persepsies rakende gesinsrolle ook aan verandering onderworpe kan wees. Hierdie studie poog om antwoorde op vrae soos hierdie te bekom, met die oog op verbeterde toekomstige navorsing en terapie.

Konstruktivisme maak deel uit van 'n breë post-moderne benadering tot die sosiale wetenskappe. Dit lê in besonder klem op die skep van persoonlike konstrukte sowel as die ontwikkeling van sodanige konstrukte deur middel van sosiale prosesse. Met sy gebruik van verhale en metaforiese tegnieke, bied dit 'n unieke blik op die konstruk-stelsel van die persoon met wie 'n onderhoud gevoer word. In 'n poging om die betekenisse en ervaringe van mans wat met depressie stry, te eksploreer, word drie gevallestudie-verhale wat verkry is vanaf geselekteerde persone, aangebied. Deur middel van 'n ko-konstruksie van hierdie verhale, word daar by sekere gevolgtrekkings uitgekom, wat weer tot spesifieke aanbevelings vir toekomstige praktyk en navorsing aanleiding gee.

**SLEUTELTERME:** *ervaring van depressie; self; konstruktivisme; identiteit; selfbeeld; self-kompleksiteit; Persoonlike Konstrukteorie; Sosiale Konstruktivisme; kwesbaarheid vir depressie; betekenis-skep; manlike gesinsrolle.*

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# CHAPTER 1

# DELINEATION OF PROPOSED RESEARCH

## 1.1    INTRODUCTION

The incidence of depression is increasing at an alarming rate - so much so, in fact, that the World Health Organisation has described it as one of the greatest employee problems for companies at present. It is predicted that this trend will continue. More specifically, there has been a marked increase in the number of men diagnosed with this disorder.

If one were to identify just one outstanding quality of depression as a phenomenon, it would surely be its incredible complexity - this grows obvious as one becomes familiar with the array of different approaches which have been successfully applied in its treatment: cognitive, behavioural and gestalt therapies have all made significant contributions to our knowledge base on depression, as have transactional analysis, systemic and constructivist thinking. Depression has furthermore inspired vast volumes of research.

As editors of a voluminous work on the interactional nature of depression, Joiner, Coyne & Blalock (1999:15) emphasise the importance of role disputes and role transitions as areas of interpersonal focus within interpersonal psychotherapy; indeed, as these authors indicate, role change introduces a sense of unfamiliarity and uncertainty so may therefore be resisted even in the case of changes which are for the better. We are all acquainted with the sometimes devastating effects of death, divorce or the "empty-nest syndrome", all of which imply some kind of role loss. From the above one can deduce that roles constitute an important part of who people are and how they behave. During the course of this study an attempt

will therefore be made to explore, from a constructivist point of view, and with regard to their family roles, the nature of the constructions held by working men who are suffering from depression.

## 1.2    MOTIVATION FOR CHOICE OF TOPIC

In her career as a social worker, the researcher for several years had a caseload made up of incarcerated males in a prison environment. Many of these inmates were clinically depressed. Most had family roles and commitments. It was during this time that the researcher began to wonder what one would discover if one were to really plumb the depths of the inner constructions that such men have with regard to their family roles. Would there be any similarities, given the fact that all people are different? She also wondered in what way, if at all, men's family role constructions change once they become depressed. Might not such information enhance our understanding of the condition we call depression and what happens to people whilst they are suffering from it? It was from there, to some extent, that the idea for this study developed.

The researcher was also partially prompted in her enthusiasm for the study, by the questions the public typically ask in the wake of a combined family murder and suicide (bearing in mind that these acts are usually committed by men): "How could he be so selfish? Didn't he care about his children/his wife?" Though depression has been a suspected factor in some of these cases, it has obviously not been possible to interview such men about what was going on in their minds regarding themselves and their family roles before the tragedies. It is the researcher's sincere hope that by expanding our knowledge base in this regard, a contribution may not only be made to the quality of the therapy offered by social workers to depressed men, but that there might also be a timeous prevention of loss of life.

Interestingly, in the available literature, much attention has been afforded the questions surrounding role as they apply to women; examples are the studies of Rapmund & Moore (2000) and Linville (1987). But what of the men? From a constructivist point of view it appears to have been only their family role as breadwinner that has been explored to some extent. One of the contributions made here includes that of Balswick (1992:31) who writes about men having felt good about themselves solely through achievement in an objective manner such as a good job or a high salary. Low (1990:250) speaks of the breadwinning role as having traditionally been one of the primary sources of the man's greater power.

The idea of approaching the concept of depression in ways other than simply its underlying distorted cognitions is not a new one. Hirschfeld, Klerman, Chodoff, Korchin and Barrett (1976:377), for example, quote Fenichel who emphasised as far back as 1945 the loss of self-esteem rather than a loss of object as the root of depression. To date, however, few scholarly inquiries have focused on the possibility that, despite the innate uniqueness of each client, there might be certain identifiable common *patterns* or at least *similarities* between the constructions that working men who also happen to be clinically depressed, carry with regard to their own primary family roles such as "father" or "breadwinner". Should such patterns indeed exist, knowledge thereof would predictably be of enormous value to the therapist charged with the task of assisting these and future persons to foster enhanced insight into their own personal functioning, as well as the reasons behind the development of the emotional disorder in their lives, and the way in which they construct meanings about their family roles. It is this motivation that the researcher regards as paramount in her decision to conduct this study, and indeed from which she proceeded to develop its aims.

## 1.3    PROBLEM FORMULATION

The paucity of material on the types of constructions which evolve with regard to family roles and the manner in which they do so specifically amongst those working men who are grappling with depression, leaves therapists with few guidelines for therapy with clients who fall within this category. Depression as a syndrome may be known to the social work profession. However, unless we can establish how existing constructions - like those regarding family roles - are changed when it is operant, we will find it difficult both to meet the client where he is and to take appropriate therapeutic action. For example, it is quite possible that a client might have come to place particular emphasis on his role as a father, as opposed to that of his role as a husband, or *vice versa*; it could be that the role of husband, for whatever reason in his mind, might not be as significant as one would ordinarily assume. From a constructivist point of view, Friedlander in Anderson (1997:298) is of the opinion that "Without a theoretical understanding of what is occurring at this point in treatment and why, what I should attempt to accomplish during the repair episode remains a mystery." Therapists may even make the mistake of forcing upon the client their own ideas and opinions about his condition or its associated features, thereby in effect denying his autonomy and self-determination. This in turn implies the elimination of any opportunity to explore and facilitate his strengths in developing new constructions of his life story.

The researcher sees as her challenge, in conducting this study, the accumulation of information that can actually be utilised in the devising of suitable strategies to assist future clients more effectively, through the facilitation of heightened awareness in them of personal constructions and how these have impacted upon their lives. Thus, the problem which needs to be addressed by way of this research, is the lack of existing literature on the constructions regarding family roles that are created by working men who experience depression. An attempt will

therefore be made to understand the way that working men construct their family roles as a result of depression.

## 1.4 AIM AND OBJECTIVES

The researcher has very specific objectives in mind for this study. In keeping with the requirements for good research, these objectives have been delineated such that their achievement will contribute toward the achievement of the overall aim of the study.

### 1.4.1 Aim

The overall aim of the study will be to make a meaningful contribution to the social worker's existing constructivist understanding of the nature of depression amongst working men, in terms of the meanings they assign to their family roles.

### 1.4.2 Objectives

De Vos, Schurink & Strydom (1998:7) conclude that research objectives are the steps to be taken, one by one, realistically at grass-roots level, within a certain time span, in order to achieve one's overall aim. In the case of the present study, these steps or objectives may be described as follows:

#### 1.4.2.1 Literature

- To describe the phenomenon of depression as it is viewed by theorists from various perspectives and place it in the context of constructivism;

- To describe the importance of role and examine how it relates to self-esteem;

- To describe masculinity as a socialised experience;

- To describe and explain the most important tenets of constructivist thinking as a theoretical approach and consider how these relate to mental illness;

### 1.4.2.2 Empirical investigation

The empirical investigation will be launched in order to develop a constructivist understanding of depression in terms of family roles. Three detailed case studies will be presented in order to explore the following:

- The circumstances surrounding men's entry into their family roles as well as their constructions about those roles, as developed over a period of time though interaction with the environment (including other people);

- How their constructions concerning these roles measure up to their experience of reality;

- Their emotional reactions to their past and present family role circumstances as well as their constructions with regard to these;

- How (if at all) their constructions with regard to their family roles have changed since they have become depressed.

### 1.4.2.3 Conclusions

An attempt will be made by the researcher to identify similarities or patterns that might exist between the constructions with regard to family roles that have been created by the respondents interviewed.

## 1.5    ASSUMPTIONS FOR THE STUDY

Since the intended study is of an exploratory nature, the researcher does not enter into it with specific hypotheses. There are, however, one or two assumptions that must be borne in mind:

In constructivist terms, awareness arises from an interaction between a person and the world, with events in that world having to be construed in order to be experienced. Because people do not construe events similarly, their experience of these events will also differ (Leitner, 1999:241). One can therefore assume that even an abstract concept such as "role" or "roles" would be one such aspect open to individual constructs of meaning. It follows from there that the same would apply to the more focused concept of "family roles", which lies at the heart of this particular study.

## 1.6    RESEARCH APPROACH

Quality refers to what kind or type something is, or to the essential character of something (Kvale, 1996:67). The very character of family role constructs belonging to working men who experience depression is what constitutes the focus of this study's exploration. For this reason, as well as the expectation that the data in question will be of a principally verbal nature, the research approach to be followed will most definitely be *qualitative*. Denzin & Lincoln (1994:2) as quoted by Schurink (1998:240) define qualitative research as a multiperspective approach to social interaction that has a number of aims: describing, making sense out of, interpreting or reconstructing interaction in terms of the meanings that subjects attach to it. It should also be clear by now that depression, just like any other life event, is not construed or experienced in the same manner by everyone. In other words, should similarities or patterns be identified, these will amount to nothing

more than a tentative generalisation or inductive conclusion rather than a completely certain one.

Grinnell & Williams (1990:143) explain that qualitative researchers do not remain indifferent to the lives of their research subjects; this value is perfectly in line with the overall aim of both this study and the profession of social work as a whole, namely to enhance the social functioning of clients.

## 1.7 TYPE OF RESEARCH

The research study concerns itself primarily with extending the knowledge base of therapists regarding the construction of family roles by the abovementioned client group. It will attempt to link in a new way the existing concepts of family roles, constructivism and depression.

Neuman (1997:141) explains that applied researchers attempt to help practitioners accomplish tasks. Theory plays a less central role for them when seeking a solution to a specific problem, with the main strength of this research type being its immediate practical use. Since the ultimate goal of this particular study is to improve future therapeutic service delivery, the researcher concludes that it will be of an *applied* nature.

## 1.8 RESEARCH DESIGN

Since the researcher intends to enter into a domain on which so little information exists, she expects that her efforts will be of an *exploratory* nature. Bless & Higson-Smith (1995:42) echo this view by stating that the purpose of exploratory research is to gain insight into a situation, phenomenon, community or person, with the need for such a study arising out of a lack of basic information on a new

area of interest. In the case of the researcher's intended project, insight is precisely what is to be sought after in order that therapists dealing with working men suffering from depression, may be better equipped to help such clients.

## 1.9    RESEARCH PROCEDURE

According to Kvale (1996:124) a qualitative interview obtains qualitative descriptions of the life world of the subject with respect to interpretation. Therefore, the research procedure best suited to the information required for the purposes of achieving the aims and objectives of the study is that of *semi-structured face-to-face interviewing* of subjects by the researcher, using an interview schedule which will serve as a guide to the aspects that she wishes to cover. (Compare Neimeyer, G.J. & Neimeyer, R.A., 1993:19). Such a schedule will contain critical questions that capture the essence of the study; similarly, suitable follow-up or contingency questions will be included in the schedule. Despite this, there will be an openness to changes of sequence, as is suggested by Kvale (1996:124)

Since the subjects will in effect be telling their personal stories so that clarity may be obtained about these, the use of narrative will be crucial. Indeed, as Burke (1997:65) so eloquently describes the value of narrative:

> There are moments in life when we encounter a description or idea which suddenly illuminates aspects of our experience which we had previously ignored or mostly lived without reflection.

According to Kvale (1996:38) a *phenomenological* perspective includes "a focus on the life world, an openness to the experiences of the subjects...and a search for invariant essential meanings in the descriptions". The experiences he is referring to must of necessity include some kind of interaction with the outside world; all of

this translates into the roles that people occupy as well as their personal constructs about these roles, making the above research design most suitable for the proposed research. The value placed on something is clearly linked to the meaning it has to an individual. This strengthens the case for the use of this particular type of research design in the proposed investigation.

In the opinion of Neuman (1997:347) ethnomethodology, on the other hand, concerns itself with the examination of social interaction in order to identify the rules for constructing social reality and common sense, how these rules are applied and how new rules are created. This would include the development of roles, therefore this is a second research design well suited to this study.

## 1.10 PILOT STUDY

According to Bless & Higson-Smith (1995:50) one of the uses of a pilot study is to allow the evaluator to investigate the accuracy and appropriateness of any instrument that has been developed, in order that planning may be revised. Neuman (1997:141) supports this view by stating that the aim of a pilot study is in fact to improve reliability. The researcher's personal opinion of the pilot study as an essential part of the larger research process is that, since its findings are not included in the final research report, it may be viewed as a "pretest" of sorts.

Four issues are relevant in the case of the pilot study for the research at hand:

### 1.10.1 Literature study

Having completed a broad study of the available literature on the topic of depression as a whole - including the most important relevant theoretical viewpoints, pharmacological and therapeutic treatments, as well as the factors that have been found to play a role in the development of the condition in some clients

- the student embarked upon a more focused study in which the emphasis fell upon the link between depression and the concept of role; in addition, salient terms such as "self-esteem" and "constructivism" came under the spotlight. The search for relevant information was conducted at the University of Pretoria's Academic Information Service using local as well as international databases and was structured to include magazines, books and electronic magazines. Although the researcher found there to be no shortage of information on each individual key concept, she discovered a complete lack of research that brings them together in one study. As depression is an area of concern not only for social work but also for caring professions such as psychology and psychiatry, many of the sources consulted are written by members of these disciplines.

## 1.10.2 Consultation with experts

As part of the pilot study it was essential for the researcher to approach certain specialists currently working in the field in which she is interested. The following persons were interviewed:

- Mr J.D.B. Kruger, a clinical psychologist who is linked to the Centre for Human Development in the Witbank and Alberton areas, himself works from a strongly constructivist approach. He shared with the researcher one of the observations he has made in his own practice with regard to the role of breadwinner in the Afrikaans Christian view and the ages of men who tend to question their lives: this is namely that it is often males who have married at a very young age who tend to experience disillusionment with regard to their family roles;

- Ms Tracy Harper, an occupational social worker who runs her own business offering EAP programmes, indicated that depression amongst men is still very much linked to the successful fulfilment of the traditional breadwinner role.

She showed a great deal of enthusiasm for the researcher's intended topic of study, in fact describing it as a fascinating one;

- Mr Julian von den Berg, a long-time social worker with the Eskom EAP for the distribution unit in Gauteng, described as follows the trends he has found amongst the men that he sees on a daily basis: in general men are happy to occupy their family roles in the traditional manner expected of them. It is, on the contrary, their working situations that cause them severe disillusionment, though he has not observed any overinvestment in family roles.

- Ms Caroline Brady, a counselling psychologist in private practice, indicated that the researcher's area of investigation is one that she has never explored. However, it is her experience that the origins of depression amongst males can usually be found in unhappiness related to the work situation. Where marital/family roles are not going well, men are inclined to overinvest in their work due to a determination to be very successful in at least that arena. She has not observed in any client the opposite trend, namely an overinvestment in family roles in the face of failure at work.

## 1.10.3 Overview of the feasibility of the study

The researcher does not foresee any problems in conducting the research; her written request to Vista Clinic that she be permitted to interview (as her case study subjects) a number of its patients, has been approved; the researcher has been informed by a representative of the clinic that she herself will be responsible for the selection and recruitment of such subjects with a view to inclusion in the study. This will be done via the psychiatrists and psychologists who have rooms at Vista. Having been fully informed of the purpose of the research, it will be up to the identified individuals to provide their voluntary written consent for participation in the study.

It is anticipated that costs for the entire project will be kept to an absolute minimum, involving only time for the required interviews and administration, as well as fuel for the researcher's transport to and from the clinic. Neither of these pose a problem to either the researcher or the facility itself.

### 1.10.4  Testing of interview schedule

The interview schedule is to be tested by the researcher on at least one member of the identified research population. These members will not be included in the final study. This will allow for alterations prior to the commencement of the actual study, should it become apparent that one or more of the original questions is redundant or fails to elicit the desired information - possibly by so confusing the interviewee that he misinterprets what it is that is desired from him.

## 1.11  DESCRIPTION OF RESEARCH POPULATION, DELINEATION OF SAMPLE AND SAMPLING METHOD

Since the researcher does not actually wish to determine *how many* of the working males currently under treatment at the chosen facility (in other words, the *universe*) were rendered vulnerable to depression, but instead *how* the process occurred amongst a particular group of them, she will need time to do a thorough study. Consequently she will accommodate three subjects within the confines of the research project.

The sampling method used will be *purposive*, in that only those who meet the following criteria will be selected for possible inclusion:

- Male
- Caucasian
- Working (whether an employee or self-employed)

- Identified as suffering from depression but already in the recovery phase (in the sense that some treatment has taken place and some adjustments made)

- Family man (married/cohabiting with or without children)

The judgement of the researcher regarding representivity will in other words be crucial (Bless & Higson-Smith, 1995:95). As the researcher will not be able to indicate how much chance each subject has of being selected for the sample, this will obviously be an example of *non-probability* sampling. The obvious disadvantage of this sampling method, as Bailey (1994:94) points out, is that the investigator cannot claim that his or her sample is representative of the larger population, which greatly limits the investigator's ability to generalise his or her findings beyond the specific sample studied.

## 1.12   ETHICAL ASPECTS

According to Strydom (1998:24-34) a researcher ought to pay attention to certain aspects in order to ensure that his or her study is in fact ethical. What follows is an account of the manner in which the relevant concerns will be addressed in this study:

### 1.12.1  Potential harm to subjects

There is no known medical risk or discomfort associated with this project, although subjects may experience fatigue and/or stress when being interviewed. In order to counter such a situation, the researcher will ensure that subjects are granted as many breaks as they feel they require during an interview. The initial consent form makes mention of this.

## 1.12.2  Informed consent

The student will obtain written consent from each subject for inclusion in the study and this will occur only after the purpose of the study has been fully explained by the researcher.

## 1.12.3  Deception of subjects

As has already been stated, every attempt will be made from the outset to ensure that subjects are aware of the real goal of the study as well as the experiences they might expect as a result of their inclusion in the study.

## 1.12.4  Violation of privacy

In order that a spirit of confidentiality be maintained, subjects will participate anonymously and no reference will be made, in the final report, to subjects' real names.

## 1.12.5  Release of the findings

At their own request, subjects will be informed objectively of the findings of the research.

## 1.12.6  Restoration of subjects

The researcher will offer a debriefing session after the study in order to provide the subjects with an opportunity to work through the experiences associated with their inclusion in the study.

## 1.13   DEFINITIONS OF MAIN CONCEPTS:

### 1.13.1  Depression

Reference has already been made to the complexity of depression as a clinical concept. This is equally relevant to the matter of seeking a suitable definition for it. For example, the condition may be defined in terms of symptoms laid down by the W.H.O. (World Health Organisation). However, for the purposes of this study, the researcher will use as a point of departure the classification of the American Psychiatric Association in their Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, 4th Edition (1994:317).

The Depressive Disorders constitute but one of the four major subtypes making up the larger group of disorders known as the Mood Disorders. The Depressive Disorders (i.e., Major Depressive Disorder, Dysthymic Disorder and Depressive Disorder Not Otherwise Specified) are distinguished from the Bipolar Disorders by the fact that there is no history of there ever having been a Manic, Mixed, or Hypomanic Episode. In this regard, the researcher would like to point out that depressive symptoms nevertheless remain a significant part of the clinical profile of Bipolar Disorders such as the above.

Since the researcher's interest lies in the most obvious affective characteristics of depression, she will refer to several authors in order to clarify what the actual experience of depression entails:

Vooys (1999:16-17) notes that, according to Scheaffer & Millman (1981:109) depression is a feeling of sadness and heaviness of spirit that is often accompanied by reduced activity. Gilbert (1998:36) explains the DSM-IV criterium of dysphoria as a term that simply means "to feel bad, burdened, weighted down". Persistent sad or empty moods, he says, are primary markers of depression. Dayringer (1995:4) also quotes the DSM-IV, which states that one of

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the nine symptoms that may be present in depressive people is feelings of worthlessness.

All in all, then, the researcher's view of depression is that it is a condition characterised by a more-than-fleeting sense of unhappiness, an inability to cope adequately with the demands of life and a marked loss of self-esteem.

## 1.13.2 Self-esteem

The term "self-esteem" is used by De Witt & Booysen (1994:113), as quoted by Vooys (1999:42) to indicate a reasonably stable positive feeling that a person experiences with regard to him-/herself. Vooys herself adds that it is in fact not possible to have a positive self-concept without self-esteem, self-respect and self-acceptance. Since someone who feels worthless is obviously lacking in self-esteem, the researcher is of the opinion that its potential link with depression is deserving of closer scrutiny.

## 1.13.3 Constructivism

Van Glassersfeld in Watzlawick (1984:24) describes constructivism as "...a theory of knowledge in which knowledge does not reflect an 'objective' ontological reality, but exclusively an ordering and organisation of a world constituted by our experience". Blowers & O' Connor (1996:3) add that the act of constructing never delivers "reality" to us directly; instead, we can only form progressive approximations to it, based on our assumptions tested against the outcomes." This implies that there is no one objective reality - for each of us it is different. People create their "realities" through the meanings they link to what they observe (Efran & Lukens, 1985; Efran, Lukens, R.J. & Lukens, M.D. 1988) as quoted by Moore (1997:559). This lies in sharp contrast to the rational-behavioural therapist's concept of "rational" as opposed to "irrational" when measured against an objective reality (Dryden, 1995:12).

The researcher is of the opinion that because roles develop in relation to other people and are therefore social by their very nature, it is entirely appropriate to consider also the positions taken by *social* constructivists. Burr (1995:3) explains this to the reader: "Social constructionism insists that we take a critical stance towards our taken-for-granted ways of understanding the world (including ourselves)". The author goes on to say that it cautions us to be suspicious of our assumptions about how the world appears to be.

### 1.13.4 Role

The New Dictionary of Social Work (1995:54) defines a role as "the expected or prescribed behaviour patterns of a person in interaction with other persons or within a given social context". George Kelly was one of the fathers of constructivism as we know it today; he is quoted by Blowers & O' Connor (1996:11) in his definition of a role as a "psychological process based upon the role player's construction of aspects of the construction systems of those with whom he attempts to join in social enterprise". Oatley & Bolton (1985:377) hint at the deeper impact of roles by stating that a role provides an identity, being itself "bound up with personal goals, plans, and expectations". We know from living life that the latter three concepts all hold meaning for human beings; in the South African Pocket Oxford Dictionary, Branford (2001:588) states that the term "meaning" is a synonym for "importance" or "significance". In this study, then, the emphasis will fall on the meaning of family roles to subjects.

### 1.14 DIVISION OF RESEARCH PROJECT

The research report will consist of a total of five chapters, which will be presented as follows:

Chapter 1

The necessary motivation, overall aim and more specific objectives are clearly indicated, as are the relevant research methods and important concepts in the study.

Chapter 2

In this chapter, an overview of constructivist thinking and its most significant tenets is provided.

Chapter 3

The spotlight, in this chapter, falls on the phenomenon of depression and how it relates to the concepts of role and self-esteem. Furthermore, because the persons to be used by the researcher as case studies are men, the experience of being a male is explained as a backdrop to an understanding of the experience of depression.

Chapter 4

In view of the literature presented in the previous two chapters, three case studies are presented in order to demonstrate the constructions of depressed working men with regard to their family roles.

Chapter 5

A summary is offered, together with the conclusions that have emerged from the empirical study and some recommendations for future research.

# CHAPTER 2

# THE CONSTRUCTIVIST APPROACH

## 2.1 INTRODUCTION

In order to gain meaningful insight into the nature of the constructs that depressed working men may hold with regard to their family roles, it is imperative that one develop a thorough understanding of the constructivist approach to human beings and their relationship with the world they inhabit. It quickly becomes apparent, upon reviewing the available literature on the topic, that this is a far greater challenge than meets the eye, one reason being the discovery that there is most certainly more than one category of constructivism in existence. It would therefore probably be more accurate to speak of constructivist approach*es* as opposed to a single approach only. Stam as quoted by Neimeyer (1998:140) uses fairly strong words to capture accurately the complexity of the situation, by saying that we are "awash in a whole variety of constructivisms and constructionisms, some of which bear a family resemblance to each other whereas others are downright antithetical".

Rosen (1996:27) sums up the constructivist perspective when he asserts that, according to this view, meaning is completely subjective and indeterminate, residing in the interpreter. Prochaska and Norcross (1999:439) liken people to great poems, with each of us who interacts with a person or a poem perceiving something different. As a result, reality is not out there to be found but is constructed inside each of us. Consequently we cannot attain knowledge of how the world "really" is. This is borne out by Moore (1997:559) who emphasises that that which is observed by people takes on the meaning attributed to it by this observer rather than some objective meaning. It has occurred to the researcher

that the old adage "Beauty lies in the eyes of the beholder" would probably be very appealing to social scientists of the constructivist persuasion since it emphasises our own individual reality as being the only one that each of us can know.

Upon commencing a study of constructivism, it seems reasonable to expect that its views will be mutually exclusive of those adhered to by other social science theories. As it turns out, this is by no means the case. In many instances, the views of other approaches are shared, expanded upon or utilised in differing ways by constructivist thought, resulting in significant overlap. As long as one is prepared to accommodate these complicating features of constructivism, a thorough understanding of its core is attainable. The ensuing chapter endeavours to convey to the reader not only that but also an appreciation for the manner in which it relates to a largely abstract concept such as depression.

## 2.2 MEANING, INTERPRETATION AND REALITY

Most theories are developed with a particular focus in mind. Those belonging to the social sciences, being no exception, steer clear of the area of expertise belonging to the mathematicians, for example, and concentrate instead on the socio-psychological functioning of people. What, then, is the specific domain of constructivist theory?

In the introduction to this chapter, mention was made of "meaning", "knowledge" and "reality". Berlin (1996:326) states that in our daily lives, we constantly attempt to make sense of and adapt to what is going on around us and within us, in order to do whatever seems in the best interest of our goals or enhances our feelings of security and predictability. In other words, the researcher deduces that we essentially concern ourselves with acting upon our *meanings* and *interpretations* of reality. Actually, these meanings and interpretations

(constructs) are for all intents and purposes our *reality*, our *truth* and our *knowledge*. It is the reflection on the possible origins of these meanings and interpretations that has, over a period of many decades, spawned an enormous body of literature representing vastly differing views.

Rosen (1996:5) makes it clear that while there are a variety of constructivist models, they all hold in common the epistemological belief that a totally objective reality, one that stands apart from the knowing subject, can never be fully known. They reject the correspondence theory of truth, which postulates that our mental representations mirror an objective reality, "out there," as it truly is. By contrast, Erwin (1999:353) claims that an "objectivist epistemology" is one which holds that propositions are generally true or false independently of any particular paradigm, school of thought, or language, or that they can often be warranted independently of what anyone believes. Gonçalves (1995:217) contributes to our understanding of this view by reminding us that the philosophy of an objective reality (which constructivism so firmly opposes) is in fact empiricist by its very nature. Empirical reality, we must remember, is said to be fixed in time, so that we can eventually all come to know the same reality (Prochaska & Norcross, 1999:446). As Austen (2000:128) explains, scientific positivism not only supposes that an objective truth exists but also that it can be understood through the use of reason. Furthermore, Feixas (1995:305) reminds us that in terms of traditional objectivism, reality is directly represented in the subject's mind, with the latter passively receiving stimuli from the environment. Against the background of the above, the researcher experiences a nagging concern that extreme objectivism within the therapeutic context might just display a tendency to translate into a lack of empathy for the world-view of the client.

Robert A. Neimeyer (1998:136) tells us that for most of the 20th century, psychology concerned itself with the development of logical and empirical methods (particularly featuring quantification, statistical inference and controlled experimentation) for discovering objective, verifiable facts about its specialised

subject matter; also important was the discovery of generalisable laws of human behaviour, the validity of which was established by their correspondence with observable, extratheoretical realities. At the core of this modern programme was the belief in a knowable world. This author says that by contrast, postmodernism includes an acknowledgement (even a celebration) of multiple realities, socially constituted and historically situated, which defy adequate comprehension in objectivist terms. At this juncture the researcher wishes to draw the attention of the reader to postmodernism's obvious inclusion of approaches such as constructivism. Indeed, as the abovementioned author so aptly puts it in one of his earlier publications (1995a:13) the approach "...turns nearly every aspect of this modern psychological program on its head."

Neimeyer (1995a:36) explains (quoting Steier, 1991) that together with the loss of faith in an objectively knowable universe, there occurred a loss of the hope that elimination of human bias, adherence to canons of methodology, and reliance on pure observation would yield a "true" human science that mirrored (corresponded with) psychological reality without distortion. For this reason, the researcher has to wonder whether, if one were to force a modernist to adhere to a postmodern approach, he or she might not experience a profound sense of having had to "settle" for something "less" than the (objective) truth! Neimeyer's explanation is echoed by Freedman and Combs (1996:33) who state that where a modernist worldview would invite us to close down options and work methodically to identify a universally applicable interpretation, the postmodernists welcome diversity. Since Kelly, the father of construct theory, refers to a construct as a product of human thought, which organises itself in ways that may run counter to strictly logical thinking (Blowers & O'Connor, 1996:5), there is clearly no place for constructivism in the fold of traditional thinking.

Granvold (1996:346) sums up the situation by expressing the view that ontologically, constructivism stands in contrast to realism. If, as Rosen (1996:6) states, ontology is a study of the nature of being whereas epistemology is

concerned with the nature of knowledge (compare Mouton, 1996:46) then, in the opinion of the researcher, constructivism may in certain cases concern itself with the "unreal" aspect of being or experiencing. What the researcher means by this is that the unexpected, the unconventional and the unusual may at times be the focus of attention, so long as it is part of the subject's experience.

Barker (1992:68) states that there are a number of alternatives to the traditional positivist stance claiming the existence of an objective, knowable reality: for example, the postpositivists believe that there is a reality out there, but acknowledge that we may not know very much about it. To the postpositivists, reality is essentially a "social construction" dependent upon the way people perceive the world. This view is extended further by constructivism, which asserts that there are actually multiple realities and that these are derived from the personal experiences of individuals or the consensus views of specific social groups. That different people see the world differently, from time to time and from place to place, does not mean that reality is constantly in a state of flux. Rather, people - individually or groupwise - are involved in a state of construction, deconstruction and reconstruction of what they *know* as reality. It will later be shown by the researcher that a therapy session, if correctly dealt with, may mirror these processes.

Postmodernism, which had its principal starting-point in the 1970's, incorporates a spirit of dissatisfaction in addition to disbelief and so poses a major challenge to modernist thinking. This reaction arose partly out of the failure of many of the venerated activities grouped as "science" to fulfil the optimistic promises they had made (Payne, 2000:22-23). The roots of constructivism as a systemic metatheory are to be found in the writings of philosophers such as Vico and later those of Kant: what is relevant in their work, in the opinion of Blowers and O'Connor (1996:90) is the concept that the rational mind reflects on its experiences and judges them against prior knowledge or reflection to exact a truth. The truth does not correspond to an actual or extant world, since it cannot be known. What can

be known is only what the mind with its categories can shape from sensory experience - the world of appearances. The researcher has the impression that these authors are touching here on the very process of construing.

According to Mahoney as quoted by Neimeyer (1993:222), the emergence of constructivism as a fully developed participatory epistemology had to await the decline of logical empiricism, classical rationalism, and linear determinism in 20th-century philosophies of science. D'Andrea (2000:4) quotes Hayes and Oppenheim in stating that what is new regarding constructivism is the support it receives from the larger intellectual, social, and political context embodied in postmodernism, leading the researcher to conclude that postmodernism is therefore a wider construct than is constructivism. D'Andrea (2000:4) makes the observation that some of the complementary aspects of postmodern and constructivistic thinking reflected by both of these constructs include: a growing recognition of the relative, subjective, and fluid nature of knowledge; an acceptance of the legitimacy of multiple perspectives and interpretations of reality; and a rejection of the universal organising categories that have historically been presented as truths about human development and psychological well-being by modern counselling theorists and researchers .

The reader will by this time have noted that constructs - created meanings and interpretations - form the basis of constructivism. The approach also adheres to a discipline known as "hermeneutics" which is defined by Rosen (1996:26) as "the art of interpretation and understanding". According to Gonçalves (1995:199) psychology and contemporary hermeneutics have, in this sense, become allied sciences for the meta-epistemic task of understanding human understanding.

Efran, Lukens, R.J. and Lukens, M.D. (1992:266) claim that the images of the objectivist can be thought of as "discoveries" about the outside world, whilst the images of the constructivist are more like "inventions" about it. These authors then conclude, in reviewing the opinion of Watzlawick (1984), that "objectivists

are inventors who think that they are discoverers - they do not recognize their own inventions when they come across them. Good constructivists, on the other hand, acknowledge the active role they play in creating a view of the world and interpreting observations in terms of it".

Kleinke (1994:11) quotes an earlier publication by Watzlawick (1978), in which he defined the difference between *first-order* and *second-order reality*. First-order reality refers to the objective world. Second-order reality refers to one's subjective perceptions of the world. His view is that people are influenced not by the objective world but rather by their perceptions and interpretations of this world, which is a product of their assumptive world, or second-order reality.

Watzlawick as quoted by Rosen (1996:9) elaborates upon our understanding thus far of constructivism, by postulating that the construction of meaning and the attribution of value reside in the mental activity of the knowing subject with its inner coherence and internal logic. From this mental activity arises reality of the second order. One reframing or alternative perspective in second-order reality, he stresses, is neither more right nor wrong than another. It was with great interest (and a sense of humour) that the researcher noted the employment of words such as "coherence" and "logic" with reference to constructivism. It is almost as though these labels are intended to confer dignity on the seemingly "unscientific" postmodernist approach. They also remind us once again that a person's actions are nothing if not tangible embodiments of his or her beliefs.

Leitner (1999:240) says that most people do have varying levels of awareness. Some experiences are clearly articulated and keenly felt. Others are to be found at extremely low levels, unarticulated and only just within the sphere of awareness. Many lie somewhere between these extremes and, while they are clear in certain contexts, are lost in others. It is these vague sensations, the researcher suggests, that may lead a person to declare: "I can't quite put my finger on it, but …". Leitner (1999:241) furthermore states what should by now be apparent, namely

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that awareness arises from an interaction between the person and the world and that events in the world have to be construed in order to be experienced. What often gets labelled as "unconscious" actually is a difference in meaning systems. In other words, if I do not construe events similarly to you, my experience of those events will be different from yours.

Since sensations are products of the senses acting upon an external world, that world must exist, even though in itself it is unknowable. The construing of that world proceeds in steps: first of all, the general "stream of events" is noted and interpreted. Next, a pattern or repetition is recognised. Finally, a structure is conferred and events experienced are given meaning. The constructs thus formed are then used to anticipate and predict events. If the predictions are not successful, the construing may be modified. Constructs are therefore tested for their ability to predict (Blowers and O'Connor, 1996:89-90). These authors continue by mentioning that Vaihinger (1924), takes us a little further when he extends these Kantian ideas to describe how the mind comes to know the world by constructing a version of it from its appearances. For him, in other words, the mind functions as an organ of appropriation by absorbing stimuli, and also as an organ of assimilation and construction, by modifying a stimulus and in the process transforming both its form and the way it is to be understood.

Hermans (1995:265) states that personal meaning is determined not by objective facts but by their interpretation. It is obviously for this reason that Rosen (1996:37) has described meaning as being relational: "It is a superordinate postulate of Piaget's paradigm that meaning inheres neither in the knowing subject nor in the known object but, instead, is a *relationship* between knower and known." The researcher considers it necessary to suggest that the relevant strength or weakness of that relationship might be significant here. She finds support for this view in returning to Hermans (1995:266), who informs us that mechanistic models favour efficient cause relationships, whereas it is in the nature of contextualism to conceptualise changes in terms of formal and final *relationships*

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i.e., when a person values something, he or she always feels something about it, and in these feelings, basic motives are reflected Hermans (1995:250).

When you take something out of context, it becomes meaningless; put it in a new context, and it means something else. The very heart of constructivism is the recognition that our hypotheses about the world are not directly provable (Efran, *et al.* 1992:267). It appears to the researcher that were it not for the pioneering and varying hypotheses of numerous great thinkers, enquiry in the complex field of social science (with its conspicuous absence of mathematical figures) would never have been endowed with the richness it now possesses; instead, the first hypothesis suggested would have been accepted as the ultimate truth. It strikes her, then, that we will forever be indebted to personal meanings for the creativity they indirectly foster. To the constructivist, hypotheses persist mainly for two reasons, neither one having much to do with objective truth: first, because we find them useful in our work; and second, because no one has yet been able either to disprove them or to come up with a better alternative. Hypotheses that persist are, at best, part of a temporarily acceptable working framework. Barker (1992:68) emphasises the importance of acknowledging all paradigms as human constructions, no more nor less, adding that this holds true for the study of all aspects of our world, including depression. All paradigms represent the way we *think* about the world. As a result, they inevitably reflect the values of the people who constructed them.

Crosby in Moore (1997:559) describes what is known as the *radical constructivism* introduced by the Chilean biologist, Humberto Maturana: Maturana used the visual abilities of frogs as an analogy to explain the process that underlies constructivist thinking. When we see a frog catch a fly, we assume that the fly looks much the same to the frog as it does to us. In fact, however, the frog's eyes allow it to perceive the fly only when it moves, and then just as a vague moving shape. The frog thus has access to the reality of the world only as it is filtered by its sensory apparatus. In the same way, we construct our own

"filtered" reality by means of the eyes with which we see it. From a constructivist point of view, there can be no question of one correct, objective truth or reality, and "reality" is created by the observer (who acts in accordance with his or her "reality", for which he or she then seeks corroboration). Little wonder then, the researcher feels compelled to note, that Maturana does not regard it as unusual to find (in the case of, for instance, a five-member family) not simply that there are five different views of the same family, but even that five different families are actually created, based upon the five members' completely different sets of meanings! There need not even necessarily be consensus about the realities that develop amongst the members of a system.

In closing, the contention of Rapmund and Moore (2000:21) is regarded by the researcher as significant. These authors postulate the implication of a constructivist approach to be as follows: each person has a unique way of constructing the world which is his or her reality and which is valid for him or her. This frees the researcher from having to decide whether the participant's reality is "correct" or "false". Without further ado, then, a detailed exploration of some of the more significant contributions made to the constructivist approach may now be embarked upon.

## 2.3    TYPES OF CONSTRUCTIVISM

In the opinion of the researcher, the three basic beliefs which exist regarding human knowledge, are best summed up by David Pare as quoted by Freedman and Combs (1996:20): (1) reality is knowable - its elements and workings can be accurately and replicably discovered, described, and used by human beings; (2) we are prisoners of our own perceptions - attempts to describe reality tell us a great deal about the person doing the describing, but not much about external reality; and (3) knowledge arises within communities of knowers - the realities we inhabit are those we negotiate with one another.

The objectivity of the first - or modernist - view has already been discussed. The development of the second and third streams now require explaining.

## 2.3.1 Personal Construct Theory

The well-known psychologist George Kelly introduced Personal Construct Theory (PCT) and is considered by many to have been the first person who formally brought a constructivist perspective to the fields of personality theory and mental health. The researcher almost finds comical his insistence on an avoidance of the invention/discovery confusion, linking it even to the creation of his own theory: "I must make this clear at the outset. I did not find this theory lurking among the data of an experiment, nor was it disclosed to me on a mountaintop, nor in a laboratory. I have, in my own clumsy way, been making it up." (Kelly, 1969, in Efran, *et al*. 1992:266).

Kelly urges humility in a theory that, Loos and Epstein (1989:149) emphasise, stresses the personal development of meaning over the search for "objective truths". Winter (1992:4) states that constructive alternativism (a term coined by Kelly himself and the central philosophical assumption underlying personal construct theory) in effect asserts that all of our present interpretations of the universe are subject to revision or replacement. This implies that every theory, including personal construct theory, is just another such interpretation of the universe. Therefore, no matter how determined we are to keep to it, it will in all likelihood eventually make way for a more satisfactory alternative interpretation. Here, the theme of multiple hypotheses once again makes its presence felt.

Button (1985:29) believes that the primary strength of PCT lies in its taking people seriously; we are invited to try to understand them, to attempt to enter into their world. Naturally, this approach is not unique to construct theory. The unique characteristic of construct theory, though, is that it focuses on one particular aspect of a person's psychological processes, namely his need to try to *anticipate*,

his reaching into the future. Thus, for Kelly, the way in which a person anticipates is his or her most relevant characteristic (Feixas, 1995:309). It is here that the epistemology of constructive alternativism comes into play and, to the researcher's mind, requires further highlighting:

At the heart of George Kelly's epic two-volume work "The Psychology of Personal Constructs" (1955) lie two major axioms or postulates: a look at the first, constructive alternativism (a term coined by him) brings home the point that he sees us as constructivists who take an active, interpretive view of the world. It assumes a *subjective* realism by which each of us interprets the world according to our own construals of its possibilities. It is true that such a view does lie is at the heart of current cognitive approaches to faulty inference, but Kelly was perhaps more systematic (Blowers & O'Connor, 1996:2). This emphasis on interpretation for predictive possibility led him to his second axiomatic assertion, known as that of "man-the-scientist". It was his view that we act in the manner of scientists - we formulate hypotheses, test them against reality and then revise them if they turn out to be false or of limited use. We in fact continually collect "evidence" on the basis of which this revision is conducted (Winter, 1992:4) and in so doing keep the process of construing alive. (Compare Sween, 1999:193).

The picture indirectly painted by Kelly is of an active, dynamic human race in which "man is not static but in motion and making predictions about the future on the basis of his previous experience" (Button, 1985:4). This outlook is underlined by Feixas (1995:309): he states that the Personal Construct Theory approach results in the conceptualisation of human beings as proactive, goal directed, or purposive and quotes Bruner (1956) who expresses the view that because Kelly's brand of constructivism (with its central motivational principle being the anticipation of the future) developed through his psychological theory and practice, it was not simply an "armchair reflection" later expressed in the epistemological chapter of his 1955 work.

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Anticipation neither has to involve conscious thought nor does it merely relate to the far-off future. Some experience requires very immediate, virtually instant action, whereas at other times we have almost unlimited time to ponder various eventualities. At all points on this spectrum, however, it is argued that we proceed according to our [existing and as yet untested] anticipations. Much of the time we may be successful in these anticipations. Occasionally, however, we do get it wrong (Button, 1985:4, brackets added). For example, the customary reply to a "good morning" greeting might be replaced by an off-the-cuff remark which could lead to a catastrophic reaction in terms of anticipation. In keeping with the basic point of the departure of constructivism, as "scientists" we attempt to devise hypotheses that render events understandable and, to some degree, predictable (Neimeyer, 1987a:4)

Kelly's Fundamental Postulate reads: "A person's processes are psychologically channelized by the ways in which he anticipates events" (Kelly, 1955:46) and states that a person's view of his universe is obtained "through transparent patterns or templates which he creates and then attempts to fit over the realities of which the world is composed" (Kelly, 1955:8-9); in other words, such a person is engaged in the act of construal.

Blowers and O'Connor (1996:3) state that although we make plans based upon expected outcomes our individual vantage points may differ significantly. We retain the dimensions relevant to us to form our impressions of people, objects and events. This lies at the heart of the interpretive process, or the act of construing, and leads to the formation of constructs - "transparent patterns or templates" of the realities that make up the world.

According to Leitner (1999:246) Kelly is quite clear that, were it not for the process of construing, life would be nothing but a chaotic stream of randomness; each construct created by us in our personal theories inevitably frames certain assumptions about ourselves and the world. These *framing assumptions* are not

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only useful; they are absolutely necessary in order to engage the world in a meaningful way. They are the "givens" through which we operate in the world and they amount to unquestioning "truths" on which we elaborate our ventures into the unknown. Neimeyer (1985:99) says that for Kelly, experience consisted of more than simply the events people confront. Rather, it describes the process of framing an anticipation of an event, investing oneself in the outcome, encountering the event, recognising the confirmation or disconfirmation of one's anticipation, and finally, revising one's construct system in light of the outcome. In a later work, Kelly, as quoted by Greg J. Neimeyer (1987:23) went on to describe constructs as "the axes of reference man contrives to put his psychological space in order and to plot his varying courses of action".

The remainder of Kelly's Personal Construct Theory is made up of a number of corollaries (1955:103-104) to the Fundamental Postulate:

- *Construction corollary*: a person anticipates events by construing their replications;

- *Individuality corollary*: persons differ from each other in their constructions of events;

- *Organisation corollary*: each person characteristically develops, for his or her convenience in anticipating events, a construct system embracing ordinal relationships among constructs;

- *Dichotomy corollary*: a person's construct system comprises a finite number of dichotomous constructs;

- *Choice corollary*: a person chooses for himself or herself that alternative in a dichotomized construct through which he or she anticipates the greater possibility for extension and definition of that system;

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- *Range corollary*: a construct is convenient for the anticipation of a finite range of events only;

- *Experience corollary*: a person's construct system varies as he or she successively construes the replication of events;

- *Modulation corollary*: the variation in a person's construct system is limited by the permeability of the constructs within whose ranges of convenience the variants lie;

- *Fragmentation corollary*: a person may successively employ a variety of construct systems that are inferentially incompatible with each other;

- *Commonality corollary*: to the extent that one person employs a construction of experience similar to that employed by another, his or her psychological processes are similar to those of another;

- *Sociality corollary*: to the extent that one person construes the construction processes of another, he or she may play a role in a social process involving the other person.

Winter (1992:4) sheds further light on the Construction Corollary: "By searching for repeated themes in our experience of the world, we provide ourselves with a basis for predicting future events". Also central to this process of construing, according to Personal Construct Theory, is the recognition of similarities between some events, or *elements* of the individual's world, which at the same time differentiate them from other events. In doing so, we develop a construction system. In the words of the Dichotomy Corollary, such a system is composed of a finite number of dichotomous *constructs* (italics mine). Each construct can therefore be regarded as bipolar, with one pole, the *emergent pole*, indicating a way in which at least two elements are similar while its other pole, the *implicit*

*pole*, defines their contrast with some other element or elements. In the process of developing and elaborating our meaning system, we all make choices and it is the Choice Corollary which states that we choose the direction of greater meaning, given the system as a whole. This corollary thus clearly implies that, as we choose to elaborate in one direction, we simultaneously are choosing not to elaborate in other directions. Thus, there are always unexplored implications to our meaning system (Leitner, 1999:243). To illustrate, we might say that a man could choose to elaborate his life role as a breadwinner rather than an alternative understanding of being a man. Nevertheless, in order to be able to do that, he would have to be aware that the second option holds less meaning for him. As Greg and Robert Neimeyer (1993:6) put it:

> Such distinctions enable us to navigate our way through an ocean of experience in vessels of our own making. They allow us to impose structure and impute significance to the events of our world. In all its varied forms, the processes of meaning making constitute the very heart of being human.

Anderson (1997:303) emphasises the suggestion made by Personal Construct Theory that constructs are denoted when a person uses a word or phrase to indicate a discrimination between two or more people, objects, places, or events; in other words, some things are perceived as similar but different from others. To use the explanation of Leitner (1999:244) we see that the Dichotomy Corollary, in stating that these meanings are inherently bipolar, actually implies that we create both poles of each component of our meaning system. We understand phenomena in terms of what they *are* and what they are *not*. Put differently, this approach suggests that every assertion is simultaneously an implied negation (Neimeyer, 1993:225). If, for example, we were to describe something as "cold", we are in truth also making a statement to the effect that it is "not hot". Blowers and O'Connor (1996:3) argue that by testing our hypotheses to see which best fits our expectations, we can retain them temporarily, revise them or replace them. Our

experiences are thus shaped by whether or not we are able to construe replication in the hypotheses we advance.

According to Feixas and Villegas, as well as Neimeyer, both referred to by Feixas (1995:309) one of the most interesting features of Kelly's constructivism is not only that it has been developed through clinical practice but also that the entire body of personal construct psychology (comprising a psychological theory, a clinical theory, various assessment methods and strategies for intervention as well as therapeutic techniques) was coherently derived from Kelly's constructivist assumptions. Such a consistency among these different levels of theory and practice, he says, is rare in psychology, particularly in psychotherapy.

How, then, are we to make sense of human behaviour in terms of Personal Construct Theory? Neimeyer (1987a:4) informs us that construct theorists consider people's behaviour as simply being ways of testing their beliefs about the future, given the limits imposed by their current understandings. We are once again reminded of the posture of anticipation, which links with his fundamental assumption about the nature of human beings, namely that they are essentially interpretive and continously in the process of attributing meaning to their ongoing experience. This implies that they all seek to understand, predict and control the course of their lives.

At the heart of Kelly's theory, according to Soffer (1990:357 & 360) is a developmental/progressive cosmology that posits a universe whose gentle unfolding is organised as a hierarchy of exquisitely intercorrelated events. Thus, while the hierarchy is a unitary entity, it allows for the uniqueness of the events it encompasses. The assimilating, or acceptance of new experience requires the recognition of some dimension within which the new event can be seen as compatible with, that is, similar to, the knowledge system attempting to embrace it. (Compare Kelly, 1955:83.) However, there is a limit to the amount of inconsistency the construct system can tolerate without losing its integrity. As

Guidano (1995a:94) says, the ordering of our world is inseparable from our experiencing of it.

## 2.3.2 Social Constructivism

At this stage in the discussion on constructivism, the question the researcher asks herself must surely be whether or not Personal Construct Theory in and of itself provides a complete picture of the creation of meaning or knowledge. The group of social scientists known as social constructivists argue that it does not. In their view, the interactive relationship between people is central to the construction of knowledge, while the notion that the ahistorical, decontextualised individual constructs and possesses knowledge independently in his or her own head, is rejected. According to them, knowledge and meaning are constructed and reconstructed over time within the social matrix. They consequently do not constitute universal or immutable essences or objective truths existing for all times and cultures (Rosen, 1996:17 & 20). In short, as D'Andrea (2000:4) indicates, there is an increasing understanding that the "truths" individuals construct about themselves and the world are significantly influenced by their historical-cultural-social context. Neimeyer, G.J. and Neimeyer, R.A. (1993:13) have the following to say on the subject:

> The essential point is that constructivist orientations typically place greater emphasis on the concept of *semantic holism*, the belief that any given construction can be best understood within the context of the broader system of meaning that supports it.

Hanna and Brown (1999:22) draw our attention to the fact that in contrast to constructivism, social constructionists consider a person's view to be the product of conversations, dialogues and interactions. The meaning a person gives to a situation comes through social process, not an isolated internal process. This does not, however, eradicate the fact that although our personal meanings are created

out of the dynamic interaction between us and the world, they remain, as stated by Leitner (1999:244) just that - our *personal* creations. What is significant, however, is the fact that the meaning attributed to an event determines behaviour (Hanna & Brown, 1999:64).

Fodor (1998:61) has the following to say on the topic of social constructivism:

> When we talk about awareness, there is an implicit assumption that we are locked into a private world of perceiving. However, central to our theory is the contrary assumption that we experience in a social field. We are part of our culture and learn, develop, and are socialized within that field. Hence, our schematic patterning is socially constructed, and we in turn view and encounter the social field through our awareness".

He also stresses that in postmodern thinking, the social nature of construing is further highlighted, with social constructivists holding that belief systems and apparent realities are socially constituted rather than given.

Freedman and Combs (1996:16) view the main premise of social constructionism as being that entities such as the beliefs, values, institutions, customs, labels, laws and divisions of labour which make up our social realities, are constructed by the members of a culture as they interact with one another both from generation to generation and from day to day. That is to say, societies construct the "lenses" through which their members interpret the world. The realities that each of us take for granted are the realities that our societies have surrounded us with since birth. These realities provide the beliefs, practices, words, and experiences from which we make up our lives.

Berger & Luckman in Freedman and Combs (1996:23-25) have distinguished three processes they believe to be important in the way that any social group constructs and maintains its knowledge concerning "reality": *Typification* is the

process through which people sort their perceptions into types or classes; *Institutionalisation* is the process through which institutions arise around sets of typifications: the institution, say, of motherhood; *Legitimation* refers to those processes that give legitimacy to the institutions and typifications of a particular society; *Reification*, finally, encompasses the overall process of which the other three are parts.

Hoffman (1990:2) as quoted by Freedman and Combs (1996:26) has clearly afforded the issue of "constructivism versus social constructivism" much thought, and states that constructivism is to be associated with the writings of Maturana and Varela (1980), von Foerster (1981), and von Glasersfeld (1987). In focusing on the biology of both perception and cognition, she continues, these researchers and theorists have persuasively argued the following point: since sensory data go through several transformations as they are received and processed, it is impossible to know what external reality is "really like". They say that there is no such thing as "direct perception". On the development of constructs Hoffman (1990:2) writes, for example, that constructionists such as Von Glasersfeld believe that:

> ...constructs are shaped as the organism evolves a fit with its environment, and that the construction of ideas about the world takes place in a nervous system that operates something like a blind person checking out a room. The walker in the dark who doesn't bump into a tree cannot say whether he is in a wood or a field, only that he has avoided bashing his head.

As many people still seem to do, Hoffman initially assumed that social constructionism was synonymous with constructivism. Then she read Gergen's (1985) paper and realised that the social constructionists place far more emphasis on social interpretation and the intersubjective influence of language, family, and culture, and much less on the operations of the nervous system as it "feels its way along". She says that she favours social constructionism because, instead of

seeing individuals as stuck in "biological isolation booths", it "... posits an evolving, non-"skull-bound" set of meanings that emerge unendingly from the constantly changing interactions and narratives between people. At this juncture she quotes Gergen (1985:268) as saying, "The move is from an experiential to a social epistemology". In other words, there is a shift from focusing on how an individual person constructs a model of reality from his or her individual experience to an emphasis on how people interact with one another in order to construct, modify and maintain what their society holds to be true, real and meaningful. (Compare Pare in Freedman & Combs, 1996:20.) The researcher considers this to have been an example of the process of the enrichment of the social sciences (through the introduction of alternate hypotheses) of which she spoke in an earlier part of this chapter.

In closing this section on social constructivism, it seems appropriate, in the interest of perspective, for the researcher to quote the view of Anku (1997:112) who warns that the individual and the social do not form a "mixture" that can be easily separated physically. They are not even a "compound" that people might attempt to separate chemically. They form an "element" which, if separated, will only yield pieces of the same element. The usefulness of the efforts to separate the individual and the social is that the inseparable connectivity between them becomes strengthened.

## 2.3.3 Other types of constructivism

Neimeyer (1985) as quoted by Neimeyer (1998:140) warns that although it might be tempting to discuss the Social Constructivist agenda as if it were a unified counterpoint to traditional forms of social theory, "any close listening to the postmodern chorus reveals a polyphony of voices - not all of which are singing in the same key".

The foregoing discussion has focused on the meaning of constructivism, as well as on the types of constructivism representing the two broad streams of thought within the larger movement. There are, however, a number of others, described in some depth by Lyddon (1995:72-81). These include *material constructivism*, *efficient constructivism* (which includes constructive processing of information as well as social learning theory), *formal constructivism* (this includes social constructionist theory as well as narrative psychology) and *final constructivism* (which includes developmental and dialectical theories, systems perspectives and transpersonal psychology). Rather than viewing systemic approaches as a subset of final constructivism, Feixas, Procter and Neimeyer (1993:144-147) allow for a separate category which they refer to as *systemic constructivism*. In addition to the above, there is an approach known as *developmental-constructivism* (Strand, 1997:325) which holds that the basic elements of consciousness and culture stem from the first two orders of consciousness, first-order consciousness being simply the capacity for sensation and perception. From this arises second-order consciousness, which is thought that is organised according to the principle of what is known as the "durable category", allowing for the grouping of objects into sets or classes. Strand (1997:338) expands on the matter by letting us know that according to this type of constructivism, individuals do not have equal capabilities for constructing new realities and that the process of self-development from one order of consciousness to the next proceeds along a line very similar to the historical evolution of cultural mentality. The third, fourth and fifth orders of consciousness correspond to the cultural perspectives of Traditionalism, Modernism and Postmodernism respectively, with each perspective representing a state of mind and a way of organising the world (Strand, 1997:331). There is nothing inherently better or worse about one order of consciousness than another - they are simply different. Their value derives from the context within which they are operative. The value of each order is dependent upon the degree to which it matches or fits with one's experiential context - adolescents, for example, only have to begin to understand and respect the rules of society, not handle all the demands expected of adults (Strand, 1997:332). In their article, Lyddon and

Alford (1993) make it clear that the assessment of these developmental dimensions of clients' problems has direct implications for both goal setting and mode of strategic intervention.

Neimeyer (1993:228) informs us that there is a variant known as *Piagetian constructivism*, which postulates that cognitive-developmental levels can be identified in the processes people use to construct their knowledge of self and world. Then there is also, according to Matto (1998:633) *cognitive-constructivism*, which draws from a variety of human behaviour theories such as: systems and attachment theories; George Kelly's Personal Construct theory; psychodynamic theory; and social learning theory. Finally, Berlin (1996:331) informs us about the *Cognitive-Integrative* perspective, an approach which assumes that meaning exists independently of our own constructive activities.

The reader who wishes to learn more about any of these forms of constructivism or their associated terms is referred to the above seven publications. For the purposes of the present discussion and indeed this study, however, the above will suffice.

Strand (1997:330-331) explains, in terms of developmental constructivism: third order consciousness is characterised by viewing social structures in universal and absolute terms. What remains outside of awareness for individuals' organizing experience at the third order is a recognition that the quality, value and applicability of rules and institutions is dependent upon the context within which they exist. Third-order consciousness gives way to the fourth order when the individual begins to realize, for example, that the "justness" of a principle is a quality located not within the principle per se, but rather exists as a function of the social context. The result of fourth-order consciousness' comparatively increased capacity for abstract thought is that decision-making is not directed by absolute principles, or the solving of a problem without consideration of the larger ramifications, but rather is dictated by an internal ordering of what is appropriate

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behaviour relative to a given situation context of our present society. Also, the ability to relate to and recognize the constructed, historical nature of relationships is present. That is, individuals operating from the fourth order can identify actions that, while appropriate from the standpoint of, let's say, solving a specific problem, do not make sense from the perspective of protecting or reinspecting one's relationship with another. Fifth-order consciousness maintains that all theories of systems of thought are incomplete. Furthermore, each individual perspective is recognized as unique, with a set of values and ideas that cannot be reduced to, or anticipated by, other perspectives. This is organization according to a *trans-systems* view. Individuals organized accordingly recognize that there may be many equally valid ways of navigating the sea of life. Unlike fourth-order consciousness, which attempts to recognize commonalities, fifth-order consciousness celebrates the diversity of perspectives arising from different lived experience, and recognizes that all knowledges and types of thought are legitimate.

## 2.4 LANGUAGE, NARRATIVE AND METAPHOR

Like most theoretical approaches, constructivism uses for the communication of its views certain concepts and constructs. The most important of these, together with some of their implications, are outlined below.

### 2.4.1 Language

Burck (1997:64) quotes a Czech proverb: "Learn a new language and get a new soul." The importance of this proverb will become apparent as the reader gains an understanding of the significance of language when observed from a constructivist point of view.

The researcher wishes to point out that language appears to have played a crucial role throughout the history of the social sciences, yet with differing emphases: In the modernist view, reality precedes language (compare Neimeyer, 1998:136), whereas in the opinion of the postmodernists, the opposite is true. For example, Freedman and Combs (1996:28-29) explain that in the modernist belief system, there is a clear distinction between the objective (real) world and the subjective (mental) world, with language being seen as a reliable and accurate link between the objective and subjective worlds. In other words, there is an objective, "knowable" world out there. We can use language in order to represent this external reality. Postmodernists, according to the authors, have different beliefs about the purpose of language: they focus on how the language that we use constitutes our world and beliefs for it is in language that societies construct their views of reality. To postmodernists, the only worlds that people can know are the worlds we share in language. Language, they believe, is an interactive process, not a passive receiving of pre-existing truths. According to constructivism, thus, it is through language that realities are constructed. In this regard the authors quote Richard Rorty (1989:5-6):

> The world does not speak. Only we do. The world can, once we have programmed ourselves with a language, cause us to hold beliefs. But it cannot propose a language for us to speak. Only other human beings can do that.

In agreeing on the meaning of a word or gesture, we agree on a description, and that description shapes subsequent descriptions, which direct our perceptions toward making still other descriptions and away from making others. Our language tells us how to see the world and what to see in it. Speaking isn't neutral or passive. Every time we speak, we bring forth a reality. Each time we share words, we give legitimacy to the distinctions that those words bring forth. To talk about race, for example, is to legitimate race as a concept (Freedman & Combs, 1996:28-29).

Neimeyer (1998:137) understands language to be the contingent, situated and shifting symbolic order that structures our relationship to "reality", as well as to ourselves. However, what is central in social constructivism and narrative theory, according to Fodor (1998:61) is the view that experience is language-based, and that language and dialogue are integral to the experiential cultural field. Language as well as culture, place, time, and circumstance influence the construction of what we know and experience.

Efran, *et al.* (1992:269) do more than hint at the crucial role played by language in day-to-day living when they postulate that the most elaborate, advanced co-ordinations are made possible by language and in fact occur primarily in that medium. Language, they add, is the one essential that such complex co-ordinations of action in a social community cannot do without, and that is why constructivists insist on talking about human lives as basically being "conversations".

According to Neimeyer (1998:136) language, in the modernist view, actually constitutes the structures of social reality and so requires the cultivation of new approaches (hermeneutic, narrative, deconstructionist, rhetorical and discursive) appropriate to analyzing the "text" of human experience in social context. It is also, he says, more disquieting, for it holds out the promise of only a changing, fragmentary and constructed knowledge, without the certainty of firm (logical or empirical) foundations.

What is the significance of this analysing of text (which can of course be viewed as the written or spoken word) to which Neimeyer refers and which is so very different from the mechanistic approach to personal meaning discussed in an earlier part of this chapter? To discover more, we look to Hermans (1995:266) whose view is as follows: A contextual view supposes that the meaning of an event results from a formal cause, in that as part of the text, the event is part of a patterned whole. For example, the first word in a text ought not to be viewed as

the efficient cause of the next word, because the second word does not necessarily follow the first word (and a second sentence does not necessarily follow the first one). Yet, in combination, the various words, as well as the sentences they create, form an organised pattern in which all the elements constitute meaning through their very interrelatedness. When the text bears the character of a narrative, the meaning of the specific events have their formal cause in the story as an organised whole.

Freedman and Combs (1996:22) list several ideas that relate to this postmodern view of reality. The last of these - "Realities are organized and maintained through narrative" - is significant in the eyes of the researcher for it implies that if the construct *language* is responsible for the creation of our realities, it is *narrative* that is responsible for their organisation and maintenance. The very construction of realities emerges from linguistic action on a local level. The activity or process of languaging takes place in *dialogue* (within oneself and with others). Languaging is therefore not merely the denotation of objects with linguistic symbols, but entails the actions taken with respect to those denotations. It includes not only the ability to make distinctions, but to comment on those distinctions, or to make distinctions about distinctions (Loos and Epstein, 1989:151). This view seems to the researcher to be reminiscent of our earlier discourse on the notion that people act upon their realities.

Anderson (1997:303) reminds us of Kelly's (1955) suggestion that people create sounds and shapes (words) and introduce them as elements into their personal constructs. A single word in a particular construct may then become the construct symbol. Language has thus seemingly been important in constructivism from the outset. Loos and Epstein (1989:158) nevertheless stress that language, as we are using it, is not merely representational (i.e. either a transformation of ontological reality into symbols or a private phenomenon reflecting one's internal transformation of experience). Rather, language is (1) a social creation, (2) an active negotiation or attribution of meaning, and (3) a local phenomenon that is

constantly evolving. Meaning, in this sense, does not exist apart from languaging, and is constantly in the process of being co-developed.

Neimeyer (1998:138) poses what the researcher considers to be a vital question: "Does this lead us inevitably to the view that language unproblematically gives us access to a common, agreed upon frame of reference through which to co-ordinate our relations to others?" First of all, he attempts to answer it for us, from a social constructionist point of view, by indicating that this is by no means the case, since the meanings of things remain open and contested. Sites of significant conflict occur between participants in the same linguistic community. He continues in the same vein when he adds that language does not neutrally reflect a shared reality so much as it constitutes social reality in different ways according to the positions and interests of the groups and individuals involved. Thus, language in this sense has more of a performative nature than a representational one and Neimeyer refers to Edwards & Potter who are of the opinion that it actually sensitises us to what people are doing or attempting to do in their speaking and writing. He sums this up, finally, by stating that a social constructionist view promotes a Copernican shift in our understanding of language, from seeing it as a medium for merely reflecting or labelling an independent reality, to viewing it as the very medium by which social reality is constructed.

Fourie as quoted by Moore (1997:559) writes that Maturana maintains that when there is consensus between members of a system about the reality of an observation, this occurs because a *consensual domain* in language has come into being among the observers, and not because the phenomenon about which they have agreed has an intrinsic existence independent of its observation. Maturana is again quoted (this time by Erwin, 1999: 358) as saying: "Outside of language nothing (no thing) exists because existence is bound to our distinctions in language". This is clearly a far more radical statement than simply claiming, for example, that without language there would be no meaningful conversation (this despite the fact that the latter is just as viable a statement). According to the

researcher, it implies that ourselves and worlds are far more dependent upon language than we might have thought.

## 2.4.2 Narrative

Narrative can be used to refer to an account of an event or events, so in other words amounts to "story-telling" (Payne, 2000:20). Sween (1999:193) believes that stories have always been important in people's lives:

> Since time immemorial, and the days around the campfire, we have been telling stories. Stories are our most familiar means of communicating the meaning we find in our experience.

On the topic of narrative, Gonçalves (1995:196) states on one hand that life is a narrative, a story co-constructed through an intensive dialectical interchange between individuals and their ecological niches, but on the other it is a unique kind of narrative - one without a clearcut beginning and end. The purpose and significance of a narrative's listener, as well as the purpose of the narrative itself, is explained by Hermans (1995:266) as follows:

> A person telling a narrative intends to explain some thing, to share something, or to make a point. The telling of a story implies at least two elements: (a) there is an actual or imagined listener who co-structures both the content and form of the story (e.g., one tells a story differently to a young child than to an adult) and; (b) there is a purpose for which one tells it (e.g., one wants to persuade, explain, or express one's emotions). Both factors - the listener and the purpose of telling - have their repercussions for the content and structure of a narrative.

Payne (2000:19) states that in a postmodern perspective it is assumed that, rather than anything described by the many diverse and often mutually contradictory

psychological theories behind the various schools of therapy, it is our immediate, day-to-day, concrete, personal apprehension of our lives - expressed through the "stories" we tell ourselves and others about our lives - that is primarily knowable. These stories are also influential. In a postmodern perspective, these stories or narratives form the matrix of concepts and beliefs by which we understand our lives, and the world in which our lives take place. There is a continuing interaction between the stories we tell ourselves about our lives, the ways we live our lives, and the further stories we then tell. Greenberg and Pascual-Leone (1995:184) summarise this process quite well when they assert that people both discover and create their experience through dynamic syntheses, but that once experience has been symbolised, they further operate on the chosen symbols - such as "feeling like a failure".

Freedman and Combs (1996:29-32) elaborate on the notion that realities are organized and maintained through stories: if the realities we inhabit are brought forth in the language we use, they are then kept alive and passed along in the stories that we live and tell. Thus narrative has a role in organising, maintaining, and circulating knowledge of ourselves and our worlds. Whatever culture we belong to, its narratives have influenced us to ascribe certain meanings to particular life events and to treat others as relatively meaningless. Each remembered event constitutes a story. Together with our other stories, this story constitutes a life narrative and, experientially speaking, our life narrative is our life. Therefore, within a social constructionist worldview, it is important to attend to cultural and contextual stories as well as to individual people's stories.

The researcher wishes to postulate that one person's life story can be regarded as a composition of various sub-plots, some of which continue throughout his/her life, whilst others are either temporarily suspended (to be continued at a later date) or draw to a close very early on. Whatever the content of the various themes, the researcher does not believe that simplicity can ever be an accurate description of the life story of a human being.

According to Sween (1999:193) narrative therapy provides a contrast to the perspective (emphasised by many forms of psychology) that the individual is believed to construct his or her internal world almost single-handedly. Instead, it

> ...proposes that identity is co-created in relationship with other people as well as by one's history and culture. Thus, being seen by others in a certain way can contribute as much as seeing oneself in a certain way. We come to see ourselves by looking in the mirrors that other people hold up for us. In this way, a person's identity is said to be socially constructed.

Efran, *et al.* (1992:269) alert us to the fact that if we view our lives from a narrative, constructivist perspective, we will see that we are all enacting our own unique "constructed" playlets in roughly the same performance space, using each other as "members of the cast". Using the example of a robber demanding money from someone, they explain that the victim's next reply, whatever it turns out to be, will inevitably affect the outcome of the robber's play. To both players, then, this reply becomes vitally important. In the opinion of the researcher, such an example could easily lead to a characterisation of people as good or evil. However, Mahoney (1995b:392) tells us that values, like objective truth, cannot be justified or otherwise unequivocally authorised; what is "good or bad, sacred or profane, and right or wrong" is always to be found framed within individual, social, and historical contexts. Thus there is not, never was, and never can be a truly "nondirective" or value-free form of human dialogue. All human perception, learning, knowing, and interaction is necessarily motivated by and permeated with biases, preferences, and valuations which are usually implicit.

## 2.4.3 Metaphor

Lakoff and Johnson in Martin and Margison (2000:63) define metaphor as simply "understanding and experiencing one thing in terms of another". Carlsen (1995:131) also quotes Lakoff and Johnson when emphasising that people's

conceptual systems play a "central role in defining our everyday realities" and are largely metaphorical: In short "the way we think, what we experience, and what we do every day is very much a matter of metaphor".

Freedman and Combs (1996:1) suggest that using the metaphors of narrative and social construction leads us to think about people's lives as stories and to consider the ways in which every person's social, interpersonal reality has been constructed through interaction with other human beings and human institutions, culminating in a focus on the influence of social realities on the meaning of people's lives. Papp (1990:26) adds to this view by stating that metaphors provide a complete *gestalt* in which disconnected patterns can be seen in relation to one another. Behaviour, interaction, and perception can be linked simultaneously. Explanatory language tends to isolate and fragment (describing one event as followed by another in a linear fashion) whereas figurative language tends to do the opposite: it synthesises and combines, creating by contrast a holistic picture. This is particularly significant when we bear in mind that, as Payne (2000:25) so rightly reminds us, in a postmodern perspective it is perfectly legitimate to state what one's experience or belief is, as well as the reason for that belief. Postmodernism in other words does not crush belief, conviction or moral position. It does, however, take the stance - *why?*

It is clear from the above that interpretation plays a pivotal role in the use of narrative and metaphor. At this point, therefore, the researcher considers a more complete discussion of the discipline known as Hermeneutics to be of particular value in the development of an understanding of the interrelatedness of these various concepts:

Hermeneutics, which is derived from the Greek *hermeneutikos*, meaning "interpretation" (Mahoney, 1995a:45) is explained by Gonçalves (1995:199) as the discipline concerned with the interpretation of the narrative. In Greek mythology, Hermes (son of Zeus and Maia) was a skilled herdsman and musician,

not to mention the messenger of the gods. He travelled everywhere, coding and decoding the messages of the pantheon narrative. In so doing, he played the role of interpreter. Since the inception of contemporary hermeneutics, it is no longer the text that is the object of analysis. Rather, the actual process of understanding has become the central topic of hermeneutic inquiry.

The researcher is in unison with Mahoney (1995a:46) who draws our attention to the striking parallels that exist between narrative psychology and hermeneutics. For example, both have to do with stories and meanings that are personally interpreted, both involve active generative processes as well as equally active reflective processes and, in the final instance, both are reflections of the continuing human quest to understand.

Guidano in Fodor (1998:59) highlights the links between meaning, experience and narrative in the experiencing/explaining dichotomy that serves as the foundation for our meaning-making process. He suggests that, as we experience, we are continuously making meaning of that experience and telling stories both to ourselves and to others. These stories in turn influence the next experience.

The researcher's personal view with regard to the connection between the three key concepts discussed above is that, even though "reality" and the events that constitute it are not always conceptualised in the written or spoken word, some form of language (even symbolic) is still required for the story to make any sense whatsoever either to the narrator or to the listener. To that extent, language surely predates both narrative and metaphor, since the latter is after all a kind of "as if" variation on an existing story. It makes sense, then, to say that narrative predates metaphor, for if there were no narrative, there would be no need for metaphor.

## 2.5. A CONSTRUCTIVIST APPROACH TO SEVERAL TERMS RELEVANT TO DEPRESSION

Button (1985:15) emphasises that describing someone as having a disorder is essentially a construction. Like all constructs, he adds, the term "disorder" is useful to the extent that it aids anticipation. He presumes the persistence of constructs like "neurotic" to mean that they have helped some people to predict some of the sorts of things to expect of certain people. We don't necessarily all agree with each other about who should be regarded as exhibiting a psychological disorder. We must also bear in mind the virtually infinite number of groups who refer to such disorder, as well as the countless contexts within which it can occur.

If we approach issues such as mental health or depression from a constructivist point of view we must accept that, being constructs, each of these is open to an almost unlimited range of interpretations and meanings. Be that as it may, the focus of this dissertation relates to the *constructivist* view of depression, hence an exploration of what this particular approach has to say on certain salient matters is, in the opinion of the researcher, imperative.

### 2.5.1 Self

Neimeyer (1998:146) says that social constructionist theory undermines our taken-for-granted belief in stable, singular and sustainable identities, instead conjuring an image of selves that subtly or dramatically shift with alternations in the conversational manner. Burck (1997:64) asserts that the central tenet of narrative theory, as a form of constructivism, is that the self is constructed - or storied - through interaction with others, and that in this process language produces meaning as opposed to simply reflecting experience.

The researcher believes that in attempting to ascertain the importance of self, we need look no further than the following statement by Flanagan in Blowers and

O'Connor (1996:92): a mental event is conscious if, and only if, accompanying the awareness of whatever it is one is aware of is a representation of self, and an awareness that what is happening is happening to the self.

Gonçalves (1995:209) maintains that the cognitive revolution was responsible for the introduction of a radical change in the conceptions of selfhood. The *I*, the self as subject, and the knower became the focus of attention, with the cognitivist approach playing a central role in this resurgence. Soon the literature was invaded by a multitude of concepts qualified by the *self* prefix (e.g., self-esteem, self-concept, self-efficacy, self-control, self-regulation, self-awareness, or any other of the 250 self compound words to be found in most dictionaries.

Neimeyer (1998:140) states that from a social constructivist viewpoint, this modern view of self is both overly idealised and insufficiently contextual. In particular, it errs in "essentializing" the self as a generally consistent set of traits, motives, needs, attitudes and competencies located within the person, and taken as a kind of irreducible unity worthy of study in its own right. In sharp contrast to this ethic of individualism, Social Constructivist theories taking the linguistic turn view the self as deeply penetrated by the language of one's place and time. Like a foetus floating in an amnion of culturally available signs, symbols, practices and conversations, the "self", Neimeyer writes, symbiotically depends for its existence upon a living system that precedes and supports it.

Blowers and O'Connor (1996:95) are convinced that Sartre (1943) would view all one's self-consciousness as defined through one's relationship with the world and one's position in it. If one decides to talk to someone, that very interpersonal conversation produces a need for a self-consciousness, and hence it is that interaction which produces a need for a self, not the self that produces a need for interaction. It is by acting and perceiving in the world that one's sense of self develops. Through these activities language produces meaning (in this case self-meaning) as opposed to simply reflecting experience (Burck, 1997:64).

Greenberg and Pascual-Leone (2001:165) inform us, furthermore, that consciousness is influenced by a number of factors, not the least of which are the views and attitudes of others toward self, and the past responses of the self in similar situations. These authors add (2001:178) that language and bodily experience, derived respectively from culture and biology, play a critical role in constituting people's identities. Identity results from dynamic syntheses of direct experience with learned views of self. These emotional schemes become the core structures of the person and guide further growth. How one symbolises one's internal states evolves in an intersubjective manner, and the "I" comes to see itself as a particular "me," mediated through others' views of, and responses to, the self. At this point reference is made by the authors to Guidano (1987, 1995) and Stern (1985).

Burke (1997:65): "Identities cannot be picked up and lived at will. The cultural stories available and the way we are positioned in the dominant discourses will powerfully shape the interpersonal stories we develop in interaction with those around us."

In keeping with the "man-the-scientist" approach introduced by George Kelly, Greenberg and Pascual-Leone (2001:170) state that the individual is thus continually constructing a particular view of self by constantly selecting some schemes/elements of experience (internal or external) and ignoring other aspects. The researcher does not find it surprising, given the constructivists' acknowledgement of multiple realities, that we find evidence here of more than one self. This theme is further developed when we examine the views of writers such as Payne (2000:36), who asserts that social constructionist psychologists have questioned the concept of a single definable core "self", arguing that this concept is itself merely a Western "humanist" social construct. They propose that identity is socially constructed - "negotiated" - from moment to moment, varying according to circumstance, its apparent continuity an illusion based on the generally consistent and repeated social circumstances within which most people

operate. In this regard Payne quotes Gergen and Davis (1985), as well as Gergen (1992). (Compare Anderson, 1997.)

The constructivist writer Saari (1996:144) suggests that identity is the content of the autobiographical stories told to self and others. She concludes that, from her perspective, identity may also be seen as an individual's personal theory about himself, about the world, and about his or her relationship with the world and vice versa. It is through this personal theory, she postulates in quoting Epstein, that the individual organises past experiences and plans future actions.

Greenberg and Pascual-Leone (1995:185) posit that the construction of personal meaning involves two important moments: First, there is a moment in which synthesised information is consciously symbolised in order to form a subjective reality. In this process, attention is directed to embodied felt experience and a particular current representation of reality is constructed. Second, there follows a moment in which an explanation of the symbolised experience is generated such that a coherent narrative of identity is produced. It is then the combination of these two processes of symbolisation that leads to the construction of new views of self and reality. We not only live our lives, we also are compelled to evaluate and make meaning thereof. To better understand ourselves, we continually explain ourselves to ourselves, in so doing forming a narrative of who we are and establishing a stable identity. (Compare White & Epston, 1990:10.) We are, however, strongly influenced in the task of deciding who we are by the sources that we use in generating our identities, narratives, and self-evaluations. Again, the researcher notes, there is the hint of an unstable self which stands in direct contrast to any modernist talk of stability.

White and Epston (1990:10) are of the opinion that in striving to make sense of life, persons face the task of arranging their experiences in sequences across time in such a way as to arrive at a coherent account of themselves and the world around them. This account of self may be referred to as a self-narrative or story.

The success of this storying of experience provides persons with a sense of continuity and meaning in their lives, and this is relied upon for the ordering of their daily lives as well as for the interpretation of any further experience. Payne (2000:19) says that a person's *self*-story is a first-person narrative through which he defines his identity, based on his memories and perceptions of his history, his present life, his roles in various social and personal settings, and his relationships. These self-stories, these accounts of life, are often told to others, and are frequently told to himself, in fragmented "inner" monologue, changing in precise detail at each telling but with recurring dominant themes and concepts. We should also bear in mind that, as Martin and Margison (2000:63) tell us, it is language that functions as a source of evidence for the nature of our conceptual system, or how we define the world and ourselves.

Neimeyer (1993:226) is another writer who urges us not to forget the narrative element to understanding self, when he reminds us that people constitute and are constituted by the stories that they live and the stories that they tell. (Compare Hanna & Brown, 1999:22; Freedman & Combs, 1996:268.) In a later publication, he identifies two arenas of human experience that he says are completely transformed once viewed from a constructionist point of view. The first of these, *language*, has already been discussed earlier in this chapter. The second, *self*, loses its familiar personalism, stability and integrity in a constructionist account, partly because it is itself shaped by the very linguistic operations that bring into being the social world. In this way, even the self is dethroned from a position of agency, freedom and conscious self-determination, vanishing into a proliferation of inconsistent social roles on the interpersonal and cultural stage (1998:136 & 137).

Sampson in Neimeyer (1998:139) argues that the very notion of an independent, individualistic, stable and knowable self is a product of the modern era, which in effect "produced" a view of persons as isolated and autonomous agents capable of self-determination, in keeping with the requirements of progressive, capitalist

economies. As a product of this same modern ethos, early twentieth century psychology followed in this tradition, dutifully putting forward numerous "theories of personality" which attempted to delineate the development, dynamics and disorders of such self-contained individuals

"Markus and Nurius in Kleinke (1994:260) use the term *possible selves* to make the point that people's selves are fluid and dynamic. Their research shows that people's feelings of self-esteem, positive affect, and hope are related to their self-perceptions in the present. However, these feelings are also strongly tied to people's views about what is possible in the future. In other words, although our feelings about ourselves and our lives are certainly influenced by our present situation, they are also affected to a substantial degree by our expectations of what we can achieve.

In some of the preceding paragraphs we saw that writers in recent times (such as Payne, (2000) talk of roles as being crucial to the view of self. This is neither a new nor a novel idea. After all, Neimeyer (1998:143) reminds us that Kelly viewed identity as organised around "core role constructs" - which he viewed as pivotal, often preverbal means of discriminating a sense of self and world which were rooted in one's earliest dependency relationships. Moreover, the ongoing effort to discover commonality with the meaning-making efforts of other persons and to construe the perspectives of others in order to establish meaningful role relationships with them were essential corollaries of his basic theory. As Cox and Lyddon quoted by Neimeyer (1998:143) note, "the postmodern paradigm offers psychology a new vision for understanding identity - one that underscores the importance of context, interconnectedness, and evolutionary process."

For her own part, the researcher thinks that although we may have different selves which emerge at different times, each person still has a core which allows him to identify, for example, that he is not feeling quite himself. Moreover, the researcher believes that people are motivated to seek some kind of order - it

bothers them when someone appears to be "acting out of character". Regardless of this thought, we cannot afford to limit ourselves by defining ourselves too narrowly. To do so would certainly amount to a denial of our multiple potentialities.

## 2.5.2 Mental/Emotional Health versus Illness

In the previous chapter we became acquainted with Kelly's view on role. Loos and Epstein (1989:150) explain that the notion of role is so central to Kelly's thinking that he considered entitling his work "role theory".

The nature of role relationships can be seen in Kelly's (1955:95) sociality corollary: "To the extent that one person construes the construction processes of another, he may play a role in a social process involving the other person". Loos and Epstein (1989:150) remind us that in the sociality corollary, Kelly stressed that a dyad's capacity to develop an intimate, ongoing role relationship depends on the ability of each member to subsume the frame of reference of the other.

Blowers and O'Connor (1996:11) state that the person who is in a role relation "plays out his part in the light of his understanding of the attitudes of his associates, even though his understanding may be minimal, fragmentary, or misguided". This means that he anticipates the views of others.

Through our personal actions, "We are then faced with the potential validation or invalidation of these central constructs in the public domain of interpersonal actions - not only in the private confines of our thoughts". Furthermore, the ongoing nature of personal investment within role relationships implies that we are risking major invalidation for extended periods of time. All in all, role relationships are important for experiencing meaning in life, yet are potentially terrifying. Faced with this challenge, many people decide to limit their investments in role relationships (Leitner, 1995:359-360).

Leitner's interpretation (in Leitner, 1987:39) of Kelly's view on role is that essentially, one's construction processes are governed by core role constructs. "Core constructs are those which *govern a person's maintenance processes* - that is, *those by which he maintains his identity and existence*" (Kelly, 1955:482, emphasis in original). They are thus more important than what Kelly refers to as *peripheral constructs* - constructs that "can be altered without serious modification of the core structure" (Kelly, 1955:482). Leitner, in Leitner (1987:40) explains that in a role relationship, we risk experiencing a combination of threat, fear, anxiety, hostility and guilt, which can be termed terror. If role relationships are too terrifying, we may retreat from them. If there is massive avoidance of such relationships, we are left experiencing life without an important aspect of the human condition - deep interpersonal relating. Such an avoidance can be seen as pathological in two ways. First, it seriously limits the potential of the person. In addition, persons respond to this retreat by experiencing emptiness, meaninglessness, and guilt.

More specifically, we see that Kelly (1955:565) had complete explanations for some of the feelings he supposed we encounter in role relationships: Threat is considered to be the awareness of an imminent comprehensive change in one's core structures, whilst fear is the awareness of an imminent incidental change in one's core structures. Anxiety, on the other hand, is the awareness that the events with which one is confronted lie mostly outside the range of convenience of his construct system. Guilt, again, is the awareness of dislodgement of the self from one's core role structure. Finally, aggressiveness is the active elaboration of one's perceptual field.

Winter (1992:11) says that in discussing the core role, Kelly concluded that a person acts upon that core role as if his life depended on it because it actually does depend upon it. It should be noted, however, that this need not involve the person behaving in a way which is bad in any conventional moral sense: for example, the person who has built a core role around a construction of himself or

herself as unattractive to others is likely to experience guilt on the receipt of advances from other people which indicate a loss of this role.

Leitner's own (1999:239) conclusion is that intimate human relationships -termed "role relationships" within the Personal Construct approach - are, despite being filled with potential terror, absolutely essential to a meaningful life.

If core role is truly as crucial as Kelly would have us believe and if all behaviour, no matter how misguided or "abnormal" it may appear, is actually serving the purpose of testing one's beliefs, the researcher considers a detailed applied example of constructivist thinking to be in order at this stage in the discussion, in order to provide clarity:

Suicide is a specific behaviour or act that is often not only associated with depression but frequently appears to be, in the eyes of the enactor, the final solution to such a condition. It therefore comes as no surprise to her that Neimeyer in Stefan and Von (1984:141) is able to offer evidence of certain cognitive similarities present in depression and suicide: (a) constriction of events; (b) system disorganisation; (c) anticipatory failure; (d) negative self construing; (e) polarisation of dichotomous construction; and (f) interpersonal isolation.

We are no strangers to the conception of suicide as a pathological behaviour. Indeed, Stefan and Von (1985:137) suggest that there is a tendency - within formulations outside of constructivism - to attribute a lack of logic to the enactor's motives and to ignore simultaneously the central issues that channel the individual's behaviour towards the act, when in fact the focus ought to fall on determining what it was that the suicidal act was designed to accomplish or avoid.

Stefan and Von (1985:137) use the gravest possible terms to create an understandable context for the act of suicide: "If continuing to live requires turning one's back on one's core system (that which provides structure and

determines direction), then the resultant situation may be more costly than suicide." This, they say, is especially true if death via suicide promises confirmation of those core issues. The anticipated confirmation stems from the possibility that others may extend the meaning found in the suicidal person's life. In this way, suicide becomes a sensible and dedicated act. The authors quote Kelly in this regard: "the act is designed to validate one's life, to extend its essential meaning rather than to terminate it."

"Mere" suicide, according to the abovenamed authors, can result from a personal system that is flawed: an individual finds him- or herself in circumstances wherein their constructions do not allow for extension or clarification. It is not that circumstances do not provide opportunity (they never do), but rather that the person is unable to consider alternatives. In effect, the person is caught in his own trap. In this regard, Stefan and Von (1985:139) refer to Ryle, who termed the same phenomenon "frames and cages". Similarly, Rowe (1996:1) speaks of the depressed person as being in a prison where he or she is both the suffering prisoner and the cruel jailer.

Kelly (1961:260) in Stefan and Von (1985:139) viewed "mere suicides" as resulting from "two limiting conditions" of personal construction which he labelled realism (determinacy) and indeterminacy. From the first attitude, the person anticipates utter boredom, constancy and repetition, so his conclusions point toward a predictably determined future. The second condition, indeterminacy, occurs when "everything seems so unpredictable that the only definite thing one can do is to abandon the scene altogether". The authors (1995:261) explain that those who behave suicidally from either pole of limited construction are validating their point of view (the researcher recognises Kelly's Man-as-Scientist theme here) and in the following words expand upon the idea:

> The determined outlook seeks definition via suicide for a system that does not promise extension, where all future outcomes are expected to end with

the same results. For those experiencing chaos, suicide promises certainty to a system which is already beyond extension. Further experimentation simply is expected to add to the overwhelming confusion. The only certainty left is simply death.

Stefan and Von (1985:139-140) conclude that by creating the dualistic categories known as mere suicide and dedicated acts, Kelly provided a way out of the trap of being forced to view suicide as necessarily pathological. In dedicated acts, the aim, then, is to preserve one's system; in mere suicides the choice is to abandon it. In dedicated acts, the purpose of the act projects its meaning to others whereas in mere suicide, the assignment of meaning is clouded by the idiosyncratic nature of the act. In other words, an outsider observing the act can identify alternatives, which the enactor does not.

It is the researcher's express view that the above provides substance to a personal construct theorist's reasoning that there is strategy or "method in madness" even when we look at the self-inflicted pain; thus, suicide, desperate though it may be, can, with a little thought and insight, be construed as a logical, non-random act.

Neimeyer (1985:88) refers to the fairly early study of Silverman (1977) whose findings imply that while the depressed client may be able to make fairly fine perceptual discrimination in many areas of his or her experience, he or she may be prone to much more global, inflexible construing when confronting emotionally charged issues. A second distinctive feature of the depressed individual's cognitive structure may be the relative absence of intra-system conflict it displays. By contrast, Fransella (1985:28) reports that in a study of the treatment of a group of people who were depressed, Sheehan (1984) found that the amount of "conflict" in their construing system did indeed increase as they moved toward being less depressed. As suggested by the fragmentation corollary (Kelly, 1955:103) our construct systems are seldom without loopholes (Compare Neimeyer, 1985:88). Usually, they are permeable enough to permit some degree

of inconsistency (i.e., when we come face-to-face with things that are different, we can usually accommodate and accept them).

On the topic of depressive self-schema, Neimeyer (1985:89) states that one of the most interesting specific structural characteristics of depressive construing concerns the nature of the individual's "core role structure" or self-schema: while normal, non-depressed individuals typically construe themselves in predominantly favourable terms across a number of social roles, with this evaluative consistency reflected in a relatively undifferentiated but positive self-schema. Such an individual thus tends to apply to himself the positive poles of his self-referent constructs in virtually all contexts. With the onset of depression, though, negative self-evaluations begin to be assimilated into the person's core-role structure. This typically produces loss to some extent of organisation in the self-schema. However, as depression deepens, a consistent self-structure may gradually crystallise once again, but along negative rather than positive lines.

Kelly (1955:565) creates an additional distinction between, amongst others, two further types of constructs, namely the tight construct, which leads to unvarying predictions, and the loose construct, one which leads to varying predictions but which retains its identity. The description alone causes the researcher to consider the latter as a more healthy alternative to the former, as it permits room for a degree of flexibility yet maintains its integrity. In this manner, it appears to represent a state of equally-weighted balance.

Efran, *et al.* (1992:267) quote George Kelly (1969) in saying that "None of today's constructions - which are, of course, our only means of portraying reality - [are] perfect and, as the history of human thought repeatedly suggests, none is final". They add that problems - mental or otherwise - are not circumstances or actions taken in isolation. They are ascriptions of meaning that arise within a particular tradition. (e.g. retirement, in and of itself, is neither a curse nor a blessing; however, in a person's life, situated as it is in a particular familial and

cultural context, retirement may prove to be either). Neimeyer (1993:222) informs us that constructivists reject both a correspondence theory of truth and its corollary assumption which stipulates that any beliefs failing to correspond to objective reality are, by definition, dysfunctional. Instead, as Blowers and O'Connor (1996:65) state, Kelly defines a disorder as any personal construct that is used repeatedly in spite of consistent invalidation. The researcher views an invalidated construct as non-viable and therefore not useful. In its entirety, it serves absolutely no purpose.

In view of the frequent comorbidity noted in the previous chapter with regard to depression and anxiety, the researcher is of the opinion that a little more space in this dissertation should be afforded to anxiety: Neimeyer (1987a:14) explains in detail the construct of anxiety, which he refers to as being "caught with our constructs down," i.e., the confrontation we have with events that we are unable to anticipate or control. In an earlier publication (1985:83-84) he says that by analogising human behaviour to scientific enquiry, construct theory highlights our need as persons to build informal theories which enable us to interpret, organise, and anticipate a widening range of experiences as we encounter what he refers to as "novel experiences". According to Kelly himself (1955:476 & 495) this process represents an ongoing "dilation" of our awareness, a "broadening of the perceptual field in order to reorganise it on a more comprehensive level". Almost by definition, this dilation entails a certain degree of *anxiety*, as it was defined earlier in this chapter. Of course, if the novel event being construed is only minimally discrepant with the individual's existing system, he or she may experience nothing more than a mild arousal that acts as a motivator to elaborate construing in order to interpret the experience meaningfully. If, however, the novel event is too discrepant, the anxiety it generates can be substantial. In making this process clearer Kelly (1955:847) states that if dilation presents the person with a situation he cannot handle, he can do one of three things.

The first option open to the individual dealing with the not-so-pleasant results of dilation is to live with the anxiety for a time. The second is to crawl back into his shell for a time (Neimeyer, 1985:84) and the third is to start doing something immediately about his constructs. If he crawls back into his shell he is using a mechanism known as *constriction*, which is a device enabling him to postpone the revision of his constructs. The procedure is also a concession that his constructs are impermeable and that, while they fit the sorts of things he had previously found them useful for, they are not applicable to his newest venture. At times, all of us use constriction to reduce the number of incompatible events with which we have to deal; it can in fact serve as a temporary respite from the relentless process of reconstructing our outlooks. However, such necessary constriction becomes depressive (and here Neimeyer refers to Kelly) at the point that "spontaneous elaboration is sharply curtailed" by a person in an effort to cut his field down to manageable size. Novel events are in effect placed psychologically out of bounds in order to minimise the risk of further invalidating the existing construct system. Ironically, this constrictive stance is often adopted, adds Neimeyer (1985:84) after considerable invalidation (particularly at the level of the person's self-concept or "core role structure") has already been sustained. Thus, the depressed person may continue to feel vulnerable and self-critical, but refuse to experiment with the new behaviours or self-construction that might lead to the development of a more satisfying identity or way of life. It sounds, the researcher feels, almost as though the person wants to help himself but is too afraid that the action required from him in order to do so might somehow result in further deterioration of his situation. He holds on to that which he knows, no matter how bad it might be, simply because he is familiar with it. This, in short, displays the well-known "fear of the unknown" which is actually a protective mechanism. Soffer (1990:357) is of the opinion that the implication of this model is that all disturbing experiences (perceived as negative feelings) indicate the temporary failure of one's construct system to assimilate events.

According to the researcher's observations, Fransella (1985:282) succeeds in "de-clawing the bear" that is this very idea of disorder - at either the "manic" or "depressive" end of such a dichotomy: this is achieved by her through the construal of each of these as just extreme examples of the commonplace processes of dilation versus constriction. So commonplace, in fact, are these self-exposing and self-protective processes, that the researcher feels compelled to remind the reader that they are readily observable in biological components such as the pupils of the eyes, and can even be witnessed in the movements of a flower's petals. Fransella states that in the normal course of events as we go through life there are times when it is an advantage to narrow or constrict the breadth of the world in which we live and, at other times, to expand or dilate it. But occasionally we take up an extreme position and then find it difficult to carry out our daily life activities. Both strategies can be seen as attempts to deal with incompatibilities. When dilating their construing, a person starts jumping from topic to topic, lumping past and present together. Everything suddenly becomes relevant to, say, their problem. In psychiatric terms this is commonly called "mania". The opposite way of dealing with incompatibilities is to retrench or draw in one's boundaries. This process may be called "depression" if it continues.

An illuminating light on the perception of mental illness from a constructivist point of view, is shed by Leitner (1999:247) who states that overwhelming trauma often limits awareness because the actual process of meaning-making can stop. Many seriously disturbed persons report experiences in which their conscious experiencing "freezes" and they are "shut down" for periods of time.

In this regard Neimeyer (1985:99) makes the contribution that the depressed individual has so seriously constricted his range of activities that he is arrested in his movement through the cycle, preventing him from encountering the events that could invalidate or enlarge upon his rather rigid and negative constructions.

With regard to the actual behaviour associated with mental or psychological ill-health, Button (1985:4) says that what we sometimes call mental illness may be re-conceptualised as occurring within the context of the need to anticipate. Faced with a breakdown in an ability to anticipate events, the potential patient may engage in unusual or uncharacteristic behaviour as part of his or her attempts to make sense of an experience. At the same time, however, people around the potential patient, having been "thrown" by this new behaviour, may eventually latch on to the possibility that he or she may be "ill". This amounts, the researcher postulates, to a need on the part of people to "know" psychological health or illness objectively when they encounter it. At any rate, we all know that there are many who are frightened, even terrified, by the very concept of emotional disorder. Neimeyer (1987a:5) says that, if we assume that the client - like more formally accredited members of the scientific establishment - is actively interpreting, hypothesising, and theorising on the basis of that experience, then even "disturbed" behaviour can be seen, based upon the views of Kelly (1970) as an experiment designed to test important implications of the client's personal theory. This view that the person exhibiting the behaviour is simply trying to make something out of his social and biological experience is very different from viewing it as the *outcome* of some experience or biological event. As such, it reflects the open-ended nature of life, which can be viewed as something of an exploration whose end is never quite certain. Perhaps the crucial thing about life is that "it goes on and on" (Button, 1985:29, emphasis added). Because of life's ongoing nature, the researcher is strongly of the opinion that the sooner individuals come to regard "threats" (in the form of novel events that are incompatible with the existing construct system) as part of everyday life (granted, to a greater or lesser extent) the sooner they will be able to move away from the idea of viewing *each* of these events as *necessarily* constituting a crisis.

It occurs to the researcher that on one hand, the view just proposed sketches psychological health as being tremendously fragile and vulnerable: at any given moment it could succumb to the impact of an event that is incompatible with the

existing personal construct system. On the other hand, however, it removes the "sting" and the stigma from conditions such as depression and anxiety by placing them within the reach and experience (at least for a limited period) of all people.

As we have seen, a personal construct approach to issues related to psychological health does not tell the full story about the development of emotional pathology. On the subject of psychological health in a social context, Saari (1996:143-144) states that participation in a cultural meaning system as a criterion of psychological health strongly implies a social component to the achievement of that health. The perspective presented here assumes that human beings are fundamentally social animals and that not only is the cultural meaning system transmitted through social interaction but also the human capacity to create meaning. The meaning-making capacity is dependent upon interpersonal transactions for both its development and its maintenance throughout life. Thus, any judgement about an individual's psychological health must be made in the context of the culture to which that person has had an opportunity to be socialised. Additionally, in this approach, "pathology" may be envisioned as a limitation in the individual's capacity to create meaning, with that capacity based in the ability to participate in human relationships. Saari adds that in the course of everyday life, an individual ordinarily encounters not a singular or static environment but a wide variety of contexts that make differential demands for adaptive behaviour. In order to function maximally, therefore, an individual needs to be capable of accommodating to, or comprehending his or her relationship to, that contextual variety. Werner in Saari (1996:144) has the following to say in this regard:

> Assuming that identity is the personal meaning system upon which the individual bases his or her comprehension of the environment, it follows that a healthy identity, capable of dealing with a range of situations, would be complex in the sense of being highly articulated, differentiated, and integrated.

Often, as White and Epston (1990:42) indicate, therapeutic intervention is very much needed when people become identified with their problems and subjected to a dominant narrative that disqualifies, limits, denies, or constrains their personhood. Neimeyer (1993:227) expresses the view that to analogise lives to stories or texts that are co-authored by their protagonists and the culture in which they live, does not automatically imply that such narratives always have the quality of good literature, namely coherence, clarity, poignancy, and impact. This view is echoed by Leitner (1999:246-247) who says that these framing assumptions are limiting. Because they are assumptions we make about the nature of the world, the world itself owes no allegiance to them. When we confront events in our lives that challenge these assumptions or are incompatible with the givens of our meaning-making (and Leitner makes it known that we invariably will), we may tend to distort them such that they are compatible with our givens or we may have "vague glimmerings" (which are probably unwelcome and uncomfortable, the researcher would like to add, for they perhaps indicate that all is not well). These indicators come from deep inside and leave us with the impression that there is more to life than we are currently experiencing. However, due to our inability to understand the bases of these glimmerings, Leitner adds, we often end up ignoring this profound message from us, to us, about how we are fundamentally approaching the world. Support for this view comes from Leitner (1999:244) who states that when an option is not well elaborated (the researcher understands "elaboration" in this sense to mean "explored" or "experimented-with"), we do not have a well-defined set of experiences associated with it. Rather, feelings of discomfort and threat may be felt with great intensity even though one has little ability to verbalise the basis of them.

The researcher must point out that our personal meanings can and do affect the lives of others, for better or for worse. According to Rosen (1996:23), we frequently take our handed-down narratives to be objective realities that are true for all universes and cultures. Thus, the story that might have been merely a prism of the mind now becomes a prison of the mind. The stories of other groups are

then viewed as false while our own are believed to be true. However adaptive our earliest self-constructed stories may have been at one time, it could be that they are no longer adaptive as we move on to new phases, relationships, and places in our lives. Yet, as Freud has taught us, we all too often repetitively live and relive the same story - the researcher might add that it was probably from Freud, then, that Kelly obtained the basis for his view of mental or psychological illness. In fact, we are informed by Greg and Robert Neimeyer (1993:9) that:

> We forget, in short, that we are the authors of these constructions and attribute them instead to intrinsic properties of an extrinsic world, a process that Kelly (1955) is reported to have irreverently dubbed "hardening of the categories".

With Rosen (1996:23-24) there is talk of what he refers to as our "embeddedness in stories": We are born into stories: the stories of our parents, our families, and our culture. These made meanings, which predate us and envelop us upon our arrival into the world, can be constraining, even imprisoning, or they can be freeing and liberating.

On the dominating power of stories, Rosen (1996:24) suggests that it is not only our own stories that can imprison us, for we also find ourselves to be characters in the stories written and lived by others. At times, we may change our own story to accommodate a role assigned to us by another. Indeed, sometimes we may feel as if we have no story of our own but are condemned merely to playing a role in somebody else's story. At such times, the author adds, we experience no sense of creativity, autonomy, or agency, only a sense that we are caught up in another person's plot and speaking lines being fed to us. Being a character in others' stories is inevitable, due to the social nature of our lives. The issue is one of dominance. It is not uncommon for clients to enter therapy at just that point when they realise that they are feeling no sense of self-authorship but instead are living roles in other' stories. Just as one client may feel dominated by another's story, a

second client may be attempting to dominate others by subsuming them within his or her own story. This attempt often leads to frustration and failure in human relationships.

The researcher would like to share something on her views about narratives: considering the overlap between our personal stories and those of others, as well as the ability of narratives to imprison their owner in a certain mind-set or to dominate those around him or her, the number of cruel deeds committed by people in the firm belief that they are doing the "right thing" is not at all astonishing. All brands of racism can be viewed as examples of this phenomenon.

Similarly, the researcher is amazed that there is not more demand for counselling. Freedman and Combs (1996:39) quote White (1991:14) as arguing that people come to therapy either when dominant narratives are keeping them from living out their preferred narratives or when the person is actively participating in the performance of stories that he or she finds unhelpful, unsatisfying, and dead-ended, and that these stories do not sufficiently encapsulate the person's lived experience or are very significantly contradicted by important aspects of the person's lived experience.

Payne (2000:34-35) states that according to the more traditional perspectives, individuals or couples may be affected, influenced, even "conditioned" by interactions with others, or by the impact of unfortunate experiences, but then they "contain" and perpetuate the "damage" or "pathology" as an inner essence or dynamic. Social constructionist psychologists, in contrast, focus not on theories of assumed "inner" damage or pathology, but on the social and cultural processes through which we gain our views of the world, and the nature of those views, which in turn influence our actions. They propose that this range of unexamined and invisible socio-cultural norms take on "truth status" for individuals, subgroups and communities.

Matto (1998:634) explains that rather than viewing negative emotions as problems caused by faulty cognitions with a goal of eliminating or controlling such emotions, constructivists consider emotions to be functional and transformative. The researcher would like to mention that although people try to be "unemotional" when making decisions, they often think and reason with regard to any given issue as a result of the emotions they experience in connection with the matter. She is not alone in her thoughts. Watson and Greenberg (1996:264) state that negative emotions, in particular, alert people to problematic aspects of experience that require attention, and it is often these problems that clients bring to therapy. Greenberg and Pascual-Leone (2001:173) add that affects and emotions are frequently a signal that one's needs or goals have not been attained; and this sets problems to be solved by thought and reason.

Neimeyer (1987b:57) writes that it is typically the case that people seek professional therapy only when their efforts at surmounting a life problem have failed. The person is no longer capable of entertaining the idea that there may be new and untried courses of action which could be employed in order to address a problem. In terms of constructive alternativism, this is the sense that all workable means of approaching the problem have been exhausted and that one is indeed the victim of one's own biography, hemmed in by circumstances beyond one's control.

Payne (2000:19) expands on the relationship between narrative and that which is known by us as "depression": A person will often project this narrative, this existing story, into an *assumed* future: "So I've always been depressed and I suppose I always will be"... Sometimes, again, a person will narrate his story into a *preferred* future: such a person might say something to the effect that they have always been depressed but expect that they will be capable of resolving it. On the matter of viability, the researcher would like to postulate that the latter statement is certainly a good deal more *useful* than the former, somewhat hopeless one. However, she feels that she must play devil's advocate, as it were, by reminding

the reader that depending upon the circumstances involved, it may prove to be *unrealistic*. This comment would at first glance appear to be more in keeping with a cognitive viewpoint rather than a constructivist one. However, that is not all: an unrealistic statement might in the long run also be unhelpful in the sense that it might prevent the depressed person from making healthy changes that actually are available to him or her.

Yet construct theorists, according to Neimeyer (1985:92) have taken at least a first step in the direction of including interpersonal as well as intrapersonal processes in their study of depression, by exploring the degree to which distressed persons construe themselves as isolated from or unidentified with significant other people. It appears, the researcher notes from the literature, that there may well be a perceived distance between the psychologically ill person and those around him. Rowe (1996:138) writes that the message the depressed person gives is "Help me, help me - stay away." Empirical support for this view, was subsequently provided by Space and Cromwell as quoted by Neimeyer (1985:92): they discovered that depressives indicated much less perceived similarity (or identification) between self and others (parents, spouses) than did either other psychiatric patients or non-disturbed control subjects.

The researcher would like to draw the reader's attention to the possibility that a contribution to the distance perceived by the depressive may well be made by that person him- or herself. For example, in their article on the American Psychological Association's website, Giesler, Josephs and Swann (2001) suggest that people suffering from depression often engage in certain unhelpful behaviour which might even be aimed at eliciting negative feedback:

> Those behaviors, which tend to alienate people who might otherwise try to help, include excessive self-disclosure, hostile speech, negative self-evaluation, lack of responsiveness, reduced eye contact, negative facial displays and slowed or monotonic speech.

According to the dichotomy corollary, the researcher assumes, mental health can be described as everything that mental illness (described in the foregoing discussion) is not. As such, the researcher assumes that it would include features such as flexibility, balance and discretion. However, she acknowledges the need for greater substance to our understanding of what mental health *is*. Carlsen (1995:137) refers to two independent studies by Hurwich (1992) and le Clerq (1992) in naming characteristics of a group of subjects who are growing older in a creative, healthful manner: they experience life as meaningful, hold an optimistic perception of health, maintain close relationships, continue to grow, live in the present, practice spiritual development, have developed an attitude of forgiveness towards themselves, see themselves as still developing and are active mentally as well as physically.

Neimeyer (1987b:57) (From: Core role reconstruction in personal construct therapy): Although it is undeniable that factors in our social and physical environment frequently contribute to these impasses (e.g. lack of satisfying work opportunities), it is equally true that obstacles to change often originate within ourselves. Perhaps the most fundamental of these obstacles arises when those changes necessary to resolve the problem are somehow precluded by our very sense of who we are. Trower, Casey and Dryden (1995:1) write that when people hold unrealistic and negative beliefs about themselves or their experiences, an emotional upset will result. If this negative thinking is extreme or persistent, it may lead to an emotional disorder. Depression is likely to result, for example, if a client starts to hold false beliefs such as that his life is totally pointless and that he is worthless.

## 2.6 THE CONSTRUCTIVIST APPROACH TO THERAPY

The reader should be reminded that the purpose of this study is not aimed at the development or even the improvement of constructivist therapy with the chosen

target group. Rather, a constructivist approach will be followed as a tool in exploring the meaning and experience of such individuals with regard to one aspect of their lives, namely their family roles. At the very most, the case study interviews conducted with these selected persons may be viewed as part of the initial stage of such therapy, insofar as a concerted effort will be made to elicit clients' personal truths. Nevertheless, it is the researcher's express view that no chapter on the constructivist approach would be complete without some explanatory pages about what real therapy within such a paradigm might entail.

Given the variety of sub-angles from which we have seen constructivists to operate, it would be a gross oversimplification to present constructivist therapy as a single school of psychotherapy, despite the similarities between the approaches. Instead, as Neimeyer (1993:224) so aptly puts it, constructivist psychotherapy may be more accurately viewed as a "fuzzy set" with indistinct boundaries, whose members manifest considerable diversity and even occasional contradiction. In the interests of clarity, however, the emphasis will fall upon therapeutic intervention from the point of view of the constructivist approaches previously discussed in greater detail, namely Personal Construct Theory and Social Constructivism/Narrative Theory.

## 2.6.1 Therapeutic relationship and assessment

Blowers and O'Connor (1996:61) explain that in personal construct psychology the first task for a therapist is to discover all the elements of the problem, be they cognitive, emotional or situational. (Compare Greenberg & Pascual-Leone, 2001:173) This, they say, is to be done using what the researcher can only refer to as a particular *mindset* or *paradigm*: the person's history and actions are to be understood on his or her own terms. (Compare G.J. Neimeyer, 1995:114.) According to Leitner (1999:242) we learn more about where we are in our life journey by honouring all of our experiences as "real". As Feixas (1995:307) says, the problem of a constructivist position has to do with the question of how people

assign validity to their knowledge. (Compare Neimeyer, 1987a:6) After all, though our personal meanings are created out of the dynamic interaction between us and the world, they are our *personal* creations. Since our actions in the world are based on these meanings, we have the potential to act from each pole of the self constructions we have created. One cannot choose to elaborate the "healthy" pole without having enough awareness of the "psychotic" pole to make one believe that greater meaning will come from the healthy one (Leitner, 1999:245). Leitner suggests that the therapist can ask about what implications had been discarded so that others could be elaborated, and pay careful attention when the client is describing choice points in life. The therapist can ask questions such as "What made you choose to take your life in this direction as opposed to...? This can be followed by wondering with the client about how life might have gone if the alternative choice had been made. Neimeyer (1987a:10) explains that both poles of the client's fundamental constructs must be attended to in order for the therapist to appreciate the personal meaning that the client attributes to people and events. This will include looking at the implied alternatives, as the client sees them, as well as those which the client is not saying. Greg and Robert Neimeyer (1993:9) offer the following in this regard:

> Because our constructions simultaneously enable and disable particular courses of action, constructivist assessment is directed in part at dislodging the person from a trenchant adherence to the "reality" of current constructions.

It was Kelly (1955:322) who first introduced and suggested the use of what he termed a *credulous approach* to assessment: "If you don't know what is wrong with a person, ask him; he may tell you." Fransella (1985:279) explains that in practical terms, the therapist takes everything the client says at face value. Should the client say something that appears to be a definite lie, it is still believed because the client must be lying for some good reason. In such cases, therapists should ask of themselves what it is that the client is trying to communicate by means of that

lie. It appears to the researcher that there is sound reason for this unique focus: from a constructivist point of view, our own personal, immediate, lived experience is all that we can truly *know* (Payne, 2000:25.) Such experience is powerful: Social realities may not be essentially true but that doesn't stop them from having real effects (Freedman & Combs, 1996:36).

Nevertheless, an author such as Berlin (1996:332) is still of the opinion that as practitioners, we should also invest creative energy in understanding the nature and meaning of incoming environmental cues; although we may thus not always be able to change the social conditions affecting clients' lives, at least we will not imply to a client that it is all in his or her mind. This author in other words does not fully discount the possible existence of an objective reality. As the researcher understands it, there are some events that are experienced by most people as unpleasant or as joyful, whatever the case might be.

It should be clear from the above that, as Blowers and O'Connor (1996:65) state, clients themselves are the source of information about their own invalidation. (Compare Fransella, 1985:278.) However, Austen (2000:128) rightly cautions that assessment is always an ongoing process; a client's reality can never be fully revealed and therefore knowledge thereof is continuously in a state of evolution. Consequently there cannot be a definitive diagnosis of our clients. Instead, our assessment will evolve as our knowledge of them gradually increases through our interactions with them. It is for this reason, the researcher presumes, that Neimeyer (1987a:14) informs us that therapists should persistently ask themselves what the private meanings of the client's words are.

Greg and Robert Neimeyer (1993:19-20) list the following as amongst the representative strategies used in the constructivist approach to assessment: the interactive interview rather than the prefabricated questionnaire, the laddering or downward arrow techniques and the use of repertory grids. Laddering might proceed from an intriguing, but ambiguous self-description volunteered by a

client in psychotherapy or an expressed decisional impasse (Neimeyer, Anderson & Stockton, 2001:87). On the other hand, Robert and Greg Neimeyer (1993:210-217) list several other assessment techniques, namely content and discourse analysis, journal work, characterisation sketches, metaphoric reconstruction and systemic "bowties". In fact, Viney (1993:107) states that content categories can provide the basis for content analysis scales with impressive psychometric qualities.

The researcher would like to clarify the nature of the ambience we can expect to find in a constructivist therapy session: Carlsen (1995:141) emphasises that what is needed in the therapeutic situation is an atmosphere of acceptance, respect, and personal safety. (Compare Leitner, 1999:250.) Button (1985:29) draws our attention to the more challenging approach of viewing mental health services as a kind of "personal laboratory" or "college of living" rather than acting as if we can "cure" people of the problems they are encountering in their lives. The researcher is in agreement with this author, who finds it hard to see how such a goal will be achieved unless we recognise that above all, we as professional helpers are basically people whose most powerful tool is likely to be our concern, care and respect for people as well as our willingness to try and help people achieve the understanding they have failed to elicit in their life. (Compare Mahoney, 1995b:391; Leitner, 1999:251.) This, says Carlsen (1995:140) is a matter of careful listening, of respect and openness.

The humble attitude described above will of course come as no surprise to social work students, for it is naturally a hallmark of good counselling principle and practice. In fact, Guidano in Guidano (1995b:155) states that self-observation is the essential method for carrying out the primary tasks of both assessment and intervention in constructivist psychotherapy. It seems to the researcher that this author is implying that the therapist should at all times be vigilant with regard to his or her own personal and interpersonal processes in their entirety. These would of course include own constructions.

Neimeyer (1995a:17) refers to Gonçalves (1994) and Woolum (1994) in saying that the emphasis in constructivist assessment falls on the identification and eventual reformulation of the central metaphors that inform clients' self-narrative. Hoffman in Neimeyer (1993:227) says that "ideas, beliefs, attitudes, feelings, premises, values, and myths have been declared central again". Greg J. Neimeyer (1987:23) agrees. Put differently, elaboration of life problems and self-characterisation help locate the main transition points in a person's life (Blowers & O'Connor, 1996:64). (Compare Erickson in Freedman & Combs, 1996:9.) Blowers and O'Connor (1996:73) add that, since therapy is centred on the present constructions of the person, it is also crucial that clients reveal what they do not consider to be a problem. (Compare Efran & Fauber, 1995:298.) The researcher should imagine that if something is indeed a problem for a client, the therapist would have to make an attempt to determine to what extent this is the case. According to Winter (1992:199) Kelly says that it might be more helpful for the clinician to ask more general questions to elaborate the client's construing of particular stages in his or her life (e.g., what kind of a child they were, what plans they had then for the future, how these have turned out). The clinician's primary concern in asking such questions will not be to obtain a catalogue of life events but rather a picture of the client's life role by attending to consistent themes in the client's constructions of what he or she considers to be salient events, and therefore to the thread of meaning upon which the client strings the events of his life.

Neimeyer (1987a:8) suggests that if a client's present behaviour is construed (in keeping with Kelly's Choice Corollary) as an informed choice in light of the alternatives that he himself envisions, then his choices can be closely examined for their problematic implications, rather than dismissed as either irrational or predetermined by his learning history, genetics or family dynamics. Kelly's Fundamental Postulate implies an equally fundamental question: *What crucial prediction is the client testing with his or her behaviour?* (Neimeyer, 1987a:5). Button (1985:29) adds that once clients have discovered a way to make sense of

themselves and others, they can focus on "living" rather than just existing. These words, the researcher feels, remind us of Kelly's theory that people's behaviour is simply aimed at making sense of themselves and the world around them, with a view to anticipation.

Several authors have commented on the nature of therapy: Efran and Greene (1996:72) express the view that in the final analysis, therapy is "basically just talk - ordinary conversation" and therefore actually an extremely straightforward process despite the fact that it has often been made to sound complex and mysterious. By contrast, Efran, *et al.* (1992:269) consider it a specialised form of conversation. The researcher is not greatly concerned with which view is more accurate - for her it is simply important that conversation is involved. Similarly, Papadopoulos and Byng-Hall (1997:1) claim that psychotherapy is based primarily and almost exclusively on the verbal medium, hence the expression "the talking cure".

Hanna and Brown (1999:22) say that the narrative view of the therapeutic process places more emphasis on developing collaborative dialogues with and among clients than on searching for a given reality that is assumed to be flawed. The theme of co-operation between therapist and client is evident in the writings of Duncan, Hubble, Miller and Coleman (1998:304) who state that searching for and discovering the client's theory is a coevolutionary process. Still other authors (compare Papadopoulos & Byng-Hall, 1997:1; Strong, 2000:146; Blowers & O'Connor, 1996:61) concur on this shared responsibility for the excavation, as it were, of the client's personal knowledge of self and environment. This notion is not new, the researcher would like to point out, for insight development on the part of the client is often viewed as a prerequisite for lasting change; in other words, the client must achieve some degree of understanding before he or she can implement new behaviour.

Freedman and Combs (1996:29) are of the opinion that what is important here for psychotherapists is that change, whether it be change of belief, relationship, feeling or self-concept, involves a change in language. According to other authors, such as Giblin and Chan (1995:325), in therapy, a constructivist looks at how language creates reality, together with how perceptions and assumptions about a problem contribute to either the constriction or the expansion of problem-solving possibilities.

The researcher considers the concept of cybernetics to be relevant here. Cybernetics is a term coined by Norbert Wiener to refer to an emerging body of knowledge about structure and flow in information processing systems. When the metaphor of cybernetics was used to guide thought in therapy, it tended to focus attention on whether therapy was "on target" or not. In other words, it was thought that the help therapists offered was help in controlling things so that a specific goal was reached (Freedman & Combs, 1996:3). The requirement in constructivism that therapist and client work together is in keeping with a term coined by von Foerster, as quoted by Loos and Epstein (1989:153): he spoke of "second-order cybernetics" which actually amounts to the cybernetics of cybernetics. Loos and Epstein (1989:153) further explain, quoting Keeney, that with the shift from what had come to be known as "first-order cybernetics" came a shift in focus from that of *observed systems* (involving a therapist who was detached and objective) to that of *observing systems* in which (1) the observer is inextricably a part of the system under observation (compare Keeney & Ross, 1985:12; Loos & Epstein, 1989:157) and (2) the very act of observation changes what is observed.

It is interesting and even slightly confusing to note Gonçalves' (1995:217) claim that "Constructivism firmly opposes the empiricist philosophy of objective reality and the idealism of subjective ideas." This appears to imply not only that constructivism is more than the sum of its historical stages, with Personal Construct Theory being one of these, but also that it could be equated with only

the last of Pare's three views of knowledge. However, it seems to the researcher that the way to make sense of Gonçalves' remark is to understand that, when speaking of "constructivism", he is actually referring to "social constructivism" - the most evolved of these - and not to the movement in the broadest sense. Such an approach also lends credence to Freedman and Combs' (1996:20) opinion that there is a rough correlation between Pare's three worldviews and the first-order cybernetic, second-order cybernetic and narrative/social constructionist views of the world that we have encountered.

There is no mention of the therapist having all of the answers. In any event, the fact that we are not dealing with a universal reality "out there" means that an individual's interpretations are neither truly right nor wrong (Fransella, 1985:277). Papadopoulos and Byng-Hall (1997:2) state that the emphasis has gradually been shifting from the accent on "historical truth" (to be uncovered by the therapist) to that on "narrative truth" (to be co-constructed by both therapist and patient). In any event, explanations are inevitably just "partial explanations or pseudoexplanations" (Efran & Fauber, 1995:286). D'Andrea (2000:12) goes to the extent of cautioning that when counsellors operate from theoretical constructions that are not in accordance with the beliefs that clients hold about psychological distress and mental health, negative dynamics may enter the counselling scene. (Compare Anderson, 1997:301.) Nevertheless, Erickson in Freedman and Combs (1996:9) insists that the therapist's beliefs are not to be inflicted on others. Rapmund and Moore (2000:21) state that, according to social constructionism, the way people perceive or make sense of their world is informed by their social and cultural context. It also implies that the way in which a story will be told by the researcher, will reflect the researcher's way of viewing and making sense of her world which in turn is influenced by her particular social and cultural context. (Compare White in Payne, 2000:21.) Hanna and Brown (1999:64) explain that, for social constructionists, the meaning that family members attribute to an event determines their behaviour.

Strong (2000:144) indicates that instead of knowing, there is not only a more tentatively curious feel to the conversation - the therapist might ask what the client thinks about something - but implicit in the discussion is also a willingness to shape the direction of the conversation around the experiences and preferences of clients. By orienting to the language used by their clients, therapists also enable themselves to be influenced by clients' unique ways of representing their difficulties and resources. (Compare Blowers & O'Connor, 1996:61; Cecchin in Loos & Epstein, 1989:155.)

## 2.6.2 Narrative - a process of storying

In an earlier part of this chapter, we noted that the stories people carry around with them are crucial for the simple reason that they actually constitute reality for their owners. In narrative therapy the process of a person's telling such narratives is often called "storying" (Payne, 2000:20). The researcher feels almost compelled, therefore, to ask the question: "What could possibly be more important than working with the client's "truths" about his various life arenas?" (Compare Leitner, 1999:250.) After all, the constructivist knowledge he possesses, as it has evolved through his anticipations and "scientific" testing as well as by virtue of his interaction with others, is the only knowledge he can ever expect to possess - in terms, that is, of the postmodern rejection of the idea of an objective or knowable reality. According to Leitner (1999:246) even our constructions of others are our personal creations. Fodor (1998:61) goes so far as to mention that narratives are regarded as the meaning-making glue of our lives, whilst Sween (1999:193) contributes the following view:

> Narrative therapy consists of understanding the stories or themes that have shaped a person's life. Out of all the experiences a person has lived, what has held the most meaning? What choices, intentions, relationships have been most important? Narrative therapy proposes that only those experiences that are part of a larger story will have significant impact on a

person's lived experience. Therefore, narrative therapy focuses on building the plot which connects a person's life together.

The hint was made earlier that therapeutic conversations may be viewed as narratives. It is only apt, the researcher believes, that in dealing with problems from the point of view of narrative theory, its central theme i.e. *stories*, be carried through to the therapeutic context. People's stories have been shaped through experience and through the passage of time. On the other hand, according to Burck (1997:64) memory is not seen as recovering and remembering the "facts" but is considered to be a process of storying and restorying (Compare Freedman & Combs, 1996:33.) But if a story already exists, the researcher wonders, what would be the purpose of engaging in a process of restorying? Several authors offer reasons for such actions: stories may be lacking in dimension or, as Payne (2000:20) states, they may be "thin". According to Bruner, as quoted by Burck (1997:64) the narratives we develop about ourselves in interaction with others will not encompass all of our experiences; other stories would also "fit" and would indeed be more liberating and helpful. (Compare White & Epston, 1990:11.)

Rogers in Soffer (1990:368) tells us that a person is motivated to seek therapy when his organised self-structure is no longer effective in meeting his needs in the reality situation, or when he dimly perceives discrepancies in himself, or when his behaviour seems out of control and no longer consistent with himself. Watson and Greenberg (1996:264) concur in that they view a person in therapy as someone who is engaged in a search motivated by unpleasant affective arousal in addition to a desire to know and understand the significance of his or her experience in order to create new meaning. By bringing the need for *meaning* into the equation, these authors make a clear move in the direction of constructivism. In the opinion of the researcher it is, however, Lax (1996:213) who articulates the crux of such a person's woes by writing that clients seek help because they are limited in their preferred actions, experiencing an incongruity between how they see themselves

as individuals and how they conduct themselves in their lives. As the researcher sees it, therefore, no matter what one's definition of the problem situation might be, it can be summed up by stating that it is such that the client's life is not flowing in the manner in which it ideally should. He or she may or may not be aware that this is the case but in many instances, the researcher would assume, has experienced a nagging concern that something is just not quite comfortable.

We are again made aware of the need for communication (about a problem) between client and therapist, this time by Loos and Epstein (1989:160):

> Through dialogue, the therapist and client coconstruct and coevolve the reality of what is called a problem. It is within the domain of conversation that meaning is generated and it is through dialogue that meaning shifts...The role of the therapist might be best described as 'manager of the conversation'.

By implication the researcher surmises that when there is no longer a problem, there is - strictly speaking - no longer a need for the continuation of the therapeutic conversation. (Compare Loos & Epstein, 1989:161). Regardless, Giblin and Chan (1995:325) state that in social constructivist and narrative therapeutic approaches, reality is understood less as "out there", objective, absolute, or scientifically knowable, and more as constructed by participants within a specific context (compare Strong, 2000:144). In fact, they add, the very core of therapy is to be found in the conversations or discourses - in the words, language, stories and meanings - of clients and therapists. (Compare White & Epston, 1990:13.)

De Shazer, as quoted by Freedman and Combs (1996:30) makes a unique suggestion, namely that the conversations between therapists and clients can be seen as stories or narratives. Like any story, this author contends, each case or each session of each case has a beginning, a middle, and an ending, or at least a

sense of an ending, Like any story, the conversation is held together by the patterns involved, by the plot. Like many stories, therapy conversations deal with human predicaments, troubles, resolutions, and attempted resolutions.

In summary, the researcher draws the reader's attention to the following statement by Sween (1999:192) for it includes a phrase that captures the importance attached to who a person is, regardless of his or her circumstances:

> If narrative therapy had one slogan, it would be: 'The person is never the problem; the problem is the problem.'

## 2.6.3 Therapeutic goals

It is hoped that the reader has developed an understanding of how fundamental the idea of stories or narratives are to our very being. What kind of an achievement, then, could be regarded as a happy ending to a story taking the form of a therapeutic conversation? In the previous chapter the views of various theorists about the treatment of depression were explored. It was seen, for example, that some rate certain thoughts as dysfunctional and aim to correct these whilst others target attributional styles or seek to restore chemical imbalance. The view of Greg J. Neimeyer (1987:21) is very relevant here: therapy, he insists, does not concentrate on the eradication of discrete dysfunctional behaviours in a person's life as if one were applying some sort of therapeutic spot remover to the soiled aspects of his or her behavioural repertoire. (Compare Saari, 1996:143.) Constructivism has a contrasting agenda, as is explained by Neimeyer (1995b:2):

> To understand what constructivism is, it might be useful to ask what psychotherapy is, when viewed through constructivist spectacles. From the constructivist vantage point, *psychotherapy* can be defined as the variegated and subtle interchange and negotiation of (inter)personal meanings. This is done in the service of articulating, elaborating, and

revising those constructions that the client uses to organize her or his experience and action.

This definition appears to encompass both the subjective and the social nature of experience, which is reminiscent of the two slants to constructivism which were introduced by Personal Construct Theory and Social Constructivism or Narrative Theory. Giblin and Chan (1995:325) note that each problem a person encounters has both social and personal meanings. Meanings are viewed as alterable, and the goal of therapy is to find or create more life-giving meanings, narratives and stories. (Compare Matto, 1998:634.) White and Epston (1990:13) write that every telling or retelling of a story, through the performance, is a new telling that encapsulates, and expands upon the previous telling.

Prochaska and Norcross (1999:440) state that narrative therapy is one of the most influential therapies based on social constructivism. Narrative therapists, they say, assert that clients construct their past by stories they tell in the present. Therapeutic narratives must be more consciously constructed as liberating stories. According to Hanna and Brown (1999:22) constructivists try to capitalise on this human capacity for change by shifting attention to alternate ways of thinking. The past can be changed by constructing new narratives or stories, with one of the wonders of narratives being that they are open, ongoing and never-ending (Prochaska & Norcross, 1999:445). Indeed, Freedman and Combs (1996:33) remind us that where a modernist worldview would invite us to close down options and work methodically to identify a universally applicable interpretation, postmodernists encourage themselves to celebrate the diversity of interpretation itself. (Compare Payne, 2000:20.)

Mention has been made of stories as being potentially "helpful" or "liberating". The researcher finds it significant that the notion of "right" or "wrong", "true" or "false" does not seem to be a theme with which constructivists concern themselves. She finds support for her observation in the stated view of Rosen

(1996:24) who considers it to be the task of the therapist to assist clients in reviewing their old stories and in constructing new ones that have more relevance and meaning for their current and future lives. Similarly, in constructivist terms, a successful narrative should be beneficial or useful to the client, according to Erwin (1999:355). This view is echoed by Granvold (1996:346) who emphasises that constructivism rejects validity in favour of viability. (Compare Hanna & Brown, 1999:21; Efran, *et al.* 1992:265.)

Lax (1996:213) sketches a picture of human beings' lives as already being multi-storied, so that when we become taken by a single version of a story, we are limiting our range of possibilities for engaging the world. This author even warns that if we as therapists allow our work to become saturated by one chosen narrative, we may even fall into the same position as our clients, for we then shut off all exploration of alternatives. (Compare Goldberger, 1996:189.)

In the opinion of the researcher, Kleinke (1994:11) touches on the very core of constructivist psychotherapy when he expresses the view that one of its important processes is to help a client who is "stuck" to see from a new perspective a problem that he does not know how to solve, and to become aware of coping responses they had either not considered or never thought were possible. According to Prochaska and Norcross (1999:441) the key point in solution-based therapy - which, like narrative therapy, is based on social constructivism - can be viewed as the need to move people from a stuck position into a happier and healthier future through the process of setting positive, specific, practical goals. The researcher notes that the theme of "stuckness" is furthermore echoed by Neimeyer (1985:99) who is of the opinion that, from a constructivist standpoint, the therapeutic challenge facing the therapist working with a depressed individual is to reactivate the client's movement through the experience cycle. In a later publication (1987a:7) he suggests that the therapist should try to determine at what stage of the experience cycle the client has become "stuck" so that constructive revision of his or her system has become impossible. A first step

toward this might well be an initial therapeutic goal referred to by Lyddon and Alford (1993:53) as *pattern awareness* - the recognition on the part of the client of recurrent themes in the content and emotional experiences of his or her life story.

This brings us, the researcher believes, to a crucial point in our discussion, namely that there has to be a valid reason for narrative therapy's chosen focus as being on the future: we must remember that, by the time clients decide to attend treatment sessions, they have probably already begun to develop the belief that there is very little, if anything, that can be done about their problems. The future, as the researcher views it, is an unwritten book. Therefore, if it is skillfully experimented with by means of storying in therapy, it may well come to represent a degree of hope for the client in need of help. Efran, *et al.* (1992:274) indicate that the hopefulness of the approach lies in the possibilities generated by the exploration of fresh terrain. Having said that, the researcher wishes to remind the reader, by way of reference to the suicidal act, of the very distinct possibility that the future might have come to mean the exact opposite to a client. It is for this reason that the researcher is of the opinion that tremendous skill and sensitivity is at all times required on the part of the constructivist therapist when dealing in particular with a severely depressed client.

The researcher has her own concerns with the fact that constructivist therapists have less interest in the identifying of past precedents for current dilemmas and more in options for the future (Efran & Fauber, 1995:289). Upon becoming aware of this, she immediately wondered how such an approach would fall upon the ears of a depressed individual. Might not his or her pain (and the need to express it) be totally overlooked by an attitude which, at least on paper, sounds a good deal like "It's no use crying over spilt milk" combined with a call to "move on". However, the authors just referred to are not suggesting that the past is of *no* significance in the constructivist agenda, only that it does not form the focus of the therapeutic encounter. Indeed, Giblin and Chan (1995:326) indicate that past experience is

helpful as a source for determining and understanding the language, assumptions and views of clients. Similarly, says Berlin (1996:332) the acknowledgement that - at least on some level the environment does matter - makes it worth our while to explore. In other words, the researcher finds herself concluding, constructivists use information on the past in a way that is different from their counterparts who work from other viewpoints. In her opinion, this line of thinking will surely banish any scepticism we may find ourselves entertaining with regard to the sensitivity of narrative or other constructivist therapies.

According to Neimeyer (1987a:13) Kelly acknowledged in his range corollary that no construction, whatever its scientific credentials or personal relevance, could be an apt interpretation of all experiences we encounter. With the help of the therapist's acceptance, the client gradually loosens his or her constructs (Soffer, 1990:368). It must be borne in mind, however, that either too rapid a dilation of the depressed person's construing or premature loosening in a client who fears letting go of control can lead to anxiety, for both face a world relatively unconstruable. As we have seen in the previous chapter, depressed persons are somewhat inclined toward a fear of losing control. Nevertheless, Kelly, as referred to by Fransella (1985:286) argues that some level of anxiety accompanies any change as we push ourselves into the unknown; hostility, he says, is a way we have of protecting ourselves when we do not seem able to deal with changes appearing on the road ahead.

Payne (2000:25) describes deconstruction as the term used for the detailed, scrutinising, nothing-taken-for-granted, fresh look at assumptions and beliefs so evident in narrative therapy. When we re-examine the effects that our stories have on our lives and those of others, the researcher believes, we avoid the "I am a victim of my biography" scenario alluded to by Kelly in Blowers and O'Connor (1996:73). According to Rosen (1996:29) people can become trapped in their stories and the simple act of telling these stories to others brings new meaning and perspective to their lives. Lax (1996:214) further reminds us that when prevailing

narratives are examined and deconstructed, we are better able to see the social/cultural context out of which they arise. After all, memory distorts in ways that are culturally and socially influenced (Payne, 2000:41). We can then understand how we have fallen into the cultural domain that privileges those narratives in our own lives. This then creates the possibility of escaping from their power. Thus, all the therapist can do is try to understand the client's views of the world (and thereby the problem) and so go hand-in-hand with the client exploring possible alternative ways of viewing the world, which will ultimately lead to reconstruction and a more useful slant on the problem area. This reconstruction is in other words a reconstruction of meaning as the client alters both plot structure and character delineation (Rosen, 1996:24-25).

Kelly (1955:187) views the basic theme of his theory as being *the psychological reconstruction of life*. Watzlawick (1996:68) has the following to say: "Seen in this perspective, psychotherapy is concerned with reframing the client's worldview, of constructing another reality..."

According to Efran, *et al.* (1992:273) constructivism is essentially a theory of knowledge rather than a collection of therapeutic directives or techniques. In fact, Duncan, Hubble, Miller and Coleman (1998:303) state that it is therefore the task of the therapist simply to listen and then amplify the stories, experiences, and interpretations that clients offer about their problems as well as their thoughts, feelings, and ideas about how those problems might best be addressed. The researcher would like to draw the reader's attention, however, to some techniques that have nevertheless evolved in the use of personal construct and narrative therapy. In spite of the historical head start enjoyed by personal construct theorists, researchers from other schools of constructivist psychotherapy are also beginning to contribute to the empirical constructivist literature on psychotherapy process and outcome (Hoffman, 1990:3).

"Naming the problem" either with generic categories such as depression or with personal ones such as "wistful thinking" (Lax, 1996:208) can be morale-boosting for people whose problems have gained power over them but can also provide an enhanced feeling that they can position themselves differently in relation to problems and so regain a sense of control (Payne, 2000:50). (Compare Neimeyer, 1993:227; White & Epston, 1990:63; Weiner-Davis in Sykes Wylie, 1992:166.)

Lest we forget the use of metaphor, the researcher refers the reader to Carlsen (1995:131) who describes metaphors as transports into the meanings of life - they facilitate the remaking of the story. (Compare Freedman & Combs, 1996:1.) They have even proven invaluable to psychotherapists as a means of enriching emotional communications with patients and deepening the mutual understanding of experiences.

Available to the therapist is also the creative use of other forms of written documentation, such as "declarations of independence" from the problem or "certificates of special knowledge" gained as a result of clients' grappling with and surmounting their difficulties (White & Epston, 1990:201). According to Loos and Epstein (1989:42) one of the well-known techniques in the conversational construction of meaning is the use of circular questions, which are aimed at revealing relationships among family members and differences among relationships. (Compare Neimeyer, R.A. & Neimeyer, G.J., 1993:218.)

Because he believes a mood resisted tends to linger longer - having more material to feed on - Watzlawick (1996:96) mentions the successful use of a technique whereby a client's pessimism is legitimised rather than attempting to argue against it. Because conversation is dialogical, when one conversant changes themes, the other must also change its tune. In the context provided, in other words, there is little motivation for the client to continue arguing that life is unfair, that circumstances are miserable, and that little can be done to change matters, for the therapist already accepts all that and may even point out some dismal aspect that

the subject forgot to include in his own "catalogue of horrors". Hence, the situation may be even worse than he himself had imagined!

Williams (1992:253) states that assumptions, beliefs and construct systems are in principle accessible, though not commonly accessed. In the grid technique, patients are asked to make a series of individual judgements which, after integration by grid analysis, can be fed back to the patient and produce genuinely new insights. (Compare Neimeyer, G.J., 1987:23, on the use of the Role Construct Repertory Test or "Repgrid".)

George Kelly's philosophical credo (as quoted by Fransella, 1985:286) was that "There is nothing so obvious that its appearance is not altered when it is seen in a different light." He firmly believed that anything which exists can be reconstrued. Based on the idea that there are always alternative ways of construing an event, his "as if" approach provides the client with an opportunity to toy with various ideas whilst looking at some aspect of life "as if" it were in fact different. By looking at it from a different perspective, the client might become mobilised to start experimenting with and later adopting, new and alternative behaviour patterns (Fransella, 1985:277). Winter (1992:241) refers to this as a "mood of hypothesis". Kelly's abiding constructivist belief was that no matter how disturbed people might appear to be, and no matter now long they had been rattling back and forth in the same old conceptual tracks, they had the ability to notice the kinds of templates they had created and that they typically used to make sense of the world. He also believed that they had a large untapped capacity to invent and make use of alternate conceptual "glasses" that would bring new perspectives into view (Efran, *et al.* 1992:270). The rationale behind narrative therapy appears to be: "As our stories change, so too do we change." Given that our experience of problems is a function of the theories we have constructed, then resolution of our problems emerges from deconstructing our old stories and constructing new ones (Prochaska & Norcross, 1999:440). As Strand (1997:338) puts it:

Narrative therapy is based on the idea that the stories we construct have a profound effect on our present behaviour and future possibilities. Furthermore, it suggests that, by examining with people the stories they have constructed, new stories emerge and may lead to new realities.

Little wonder, then, that Gergen in Rosen (1996:4) refers to constructivist therapy as a "transformative dialogue". A re-examination, thus, of the bases of these stories can potentially lead to richer, more "experience-near" narratives, which incorcorate previously sidelined knowledge not covered by the existing story. An awareness of these recovered knowledges, told through more experience-near narratives, can give persons an enlarged sense of the possibilities of life, facilitate their overcoming problems, allow them to redefine their identities in more positive terms, and promote their movement towards effecting the changes they discover they wish to make.

Saari (1996:143) considers one advantage of this approach for a theory of psychotherapy to be its recognition that while coherence (that is, interconnectedness and unity of content) in an individual's identity or meaning system is important for that person to be able to function well, there is no ultimate "truth" upon which that person's identity rests. Rather, an identity capable of encompassing the meanings found in a variety of contexts and cultures must be developed. Freedman and Combs (1996:35) say that instead of looking for an essential self, we work with people to bring forth various experiences of self and to distinguish which of those selves they prefer to which contexts. We then work to assist them in living out narratives that support the growth and development of these "preferred selves".

Hermans (1995:250) says that when a person values something, he or she always feels something about it, and in these feelings, basic motives are reflected. (Compare Matto, 1998:634.) In this process, the construction of new meaning is greatly facilitated by the vivid evocation in therapy of emotionally laden

experience in order to bring emotional experience into contact with reflective processes (Greenberg & Pascual-Leone, 1995:182).

If narratives about the world can be restrictive, there is no reason why self-narratives that clients bring to therapy might not also be lacking in this sense. Kleinke (1994:260) reintroduces the notion of "possible selves". He views this term as relevant to psychotherapy due to its implication: learning to view oneself as fluid and ever-developing - rather than fixed and immutable (compare Neimeyer, 1998:143) - can provide a strong sense of hope or encouragement and can inspire possible achievements as opposed to possible selves that result in fear and avoidance. As a result of the loosening of constructs in therapy, a new or revised configuration of self is constructed in order to assimilate formerly incompatible experience. As this new self-structure is organised, it becomes firmer, more clearly defined, and offers a steadier, more stable guide to behaviour (Soffer, 1990:193).

In a similar vein Leitner (1999:243) holds that if we turn to explore implications, we will have new experiences - experiences that are a result of new elaborations of who we are. These new experiences are thus not located in an unconscious, waiting to be discovered. Rather, they are newly created by the evolving person. As Saari (1996:145) says, the client is assisted in creating a narrative identity that has a potential to achieve a satisfying end to the autobiographical story. Neimeyer (1985:99) is of the opinion that since this revised system then provides a point of departure for new anticipations or predictions, the continuous movement through this cycle describes the process of psychological growth. Ultimately, then, the goal of therapy is to help the client encounter a richer, more dilated field of experience, and to use this experience to elaborate a more adequate view of self and others. Treatment becomes a creative, rather than corrective, process and the constructivist agenda strives to broaden and transform constructs and to build upon existing schema (Matto, 1998:635).

## 2.7    A WORD OF CAUTION

Efran, *et al.* (1992:273) are of the opinion that one of the most "widespread and mischievous" misinterpretations of constructivist thinking is the notion that since reality is "invented" anyway, "anything goes". This interpretation, they say, misses the fact that we do not live alone and that our shared language distinctions quickly become our realities. In the social domain, for example, the way an event is construed becomes inseparable from how it is experienced. Constructivism does not therefore serve as an invitation to take established words and meanings any less seriously. Nevertheless, the authors make it clear that an invented social reality, once it has been invented, is as real and as solid as any other. So, no matter how hard you try to "language" your table differently, it remains a table. It has, so to speak, earned the right to be a table through years of being languaged and experienced that way. Constructivism is not a license to fabricate indiscriminately for immediate effect. Notice that there is a subtle but critical difference between taking liberties with established definitions and proposing fresh problem-solving frameworks (Efran, *et al.*, 1992:274).

Freedman and Combs (1996:35) are in agreement. They state that when we say that there are many possible stories about self (or about other aspects of reality), we do not mean to suggest that "anything goes." Rather, we are motivated to examine our constructions and stories - how they have come to be and what their effects are on ourselves and others. Freedman and Combs (1996:36) do not allow themselves to be in any way "thrown". According to them, even if we wanted to foster a value-neutral, "anything goes" reality, we couldn't, for the simple reason that one cannot make up and inhabit a completely new social reality overnight.

Efran and Fauber (1995:286) say that radical constructivism is a mode of analysis, an approach to understanding how the world people think they know, comes into existence. That does not mean that it is easy to change, and so, radical constructivists have not promised to change anything. Furthermore, precious little

evidence exists to support the belief that the activity known as constructing, actually leads to better solutions. Indeed, not knowing the causes of breast cancer doesn't keep oncologists from curing it (Prochaska & Norcross, 1999:440). In fact, many aspects of the world are next to impossible to modify, including some elements that are clearly products of people's opinions or belief systems. Berlin (1996:334) suggests that we need to avoid assuming that individuals are at complete liberty to model and remodel their life experience. Although as practitioners we want to help our clients find more adaptive interpretations of debilitating life situations, it is important to recognise with them that real obstacles and constraints exist.

This is echoed by Efran and Fauber (1995:286) who are of the opinion that constructivists, perhaps even more than objectivists, respect the labels that society has assigned to various phenomena. The reason certain diseases are called *terminal* is to acknowledge the current relative ineffectiveness that humans have to influence their course. When constructivists maintain that we humans, in language, create our world, the implication is not that we should therefore ignore or trivialise that which we have just gone to the trouble to create. In other words, when the sign says "Thin ice," it is probably a good idea to skate elsewhere, regardless of epistemological orientation.

Efran, *et al*. (1992:268) state that the theoretical sword of constructivism cuts in all directions. It teaches that hard-and-fast boundaries cannot be objectively drawn around *any* particular unit, family or otherwise. If we are forced to acknowledge that not only black holes, but the very laws of physics, are "invented," then we must also admit that families exist as units only in the mind of the construer and that there are as many different "families" as there are construers. Moreover, the same person may construct different families for different purposes or occasions.

Neimeyer (1993:230) informs us that almost inevitably, constructivist epistemology lacks the straightforward elegance of more linear cognitive models, making an immersion in the perspective daunting for traditionally trained students and psychologists. Similarly, it is generally appreciated by sociologists of science that knowledge decays in the process of standardisation. Matto (1998:635) holds the following opinion: "Indeed, the frequent criticism that accuses constructivism as being "long on theory and short on practice" (Neimeyer & Stewart, 1996:360) is a legitimate concern and one that requires a pragmatic response."

The researcher finds it interesting that Gergen as quoted by Maze (2001:394) should comment as follows: "In the constructionist perspective neither 'mind' nor 'world' is granted ontological status'. One wonders, then, what constructionists refer to when they freely use terms like 'posit', 'theorize', 'perspective', 'argument', assumption', and so on. It becomes apparent that these seemingly mental phenomena are viewed not as beliefs held by individuals, but as merely spoken or written verbal formulations that have achieved acceptable currency in a given social milieu and exert a powerful influence on the way the members of that social group interact with each other and with outsiders. Maze (2001:394) believes that the central feature of social constructionist epistemology, namely the denial that objective knowledge is possible, is inescapably self-contradictory.

According to Giblin and Chan (1995:326) a further risk potentially associated with the constructivist approach is that if all constructions are held as equally valid then the therapeutic context easily becomes valueless. In other words, unconditional acceptance seems to negate any need for personal and communal transformation in the healing process. Similarly, D'Andrea (2000:7) expresses the concern that for the following reasons many postmodern constructivist therapists avoid dealing with social justice issues: Firstly he says that according to Ivey, Locke & Rigazio-DiGilio, postmodern-constructivist approaches to counselling overemphasise clients' intrapsychic experiences, constructions and ideas of reality - resulting in therapists often failing to address "what IS" going on in their clients'

environments that contributes to their sense of well-being or distress. Second, because postmodern-constructivist counsellors embrace relativistic thinking, they are able to argue that one person's construction of "social justice" may be construed as a form of "oppression" by someone else. Thus, the relativity argument enables many postmodern counsellors to avoid supporting the notion that mental health counsellors' roles should include acting as social change agents and social justice advocates, whereas in his opinion, postmodern thought - at its best - requires that good ideas be converted into action and that changes occur.

Yet another author who has a contribution to make regarding this problem is Erwin (1999:360):

> Whoever first named the Big Dipper did not also bring it into existence; it existed for aeons before we did. Whoever coined the expression 'labour union' might also have created the first labour union, but not merely by introducing the expression ...Sometimes the logical mistake of moving from a statement about our constructing certain terms to a very different one about our constructing reality is hardly noticed.

Moore (1997:585) states that although constructivism, which plays an important part in current ecosystem thinking, is regarded as an extremely useful point of departure, attention is nevertheless drawn to the dangers of taking it too far. In addition, she says, criticism is levelled against adherence to an extreme or radical constructivism, where the existence of an objective reality is completely denied. In this regard she quotes several authors such as Hoffman (1990), Tjersland (1990) and Keeney (1983b). The latter, she adds, is strongly opposed to a total denial of an objective reality, while Atkinson and Heath (1987) also point out that a constructivist position does, in fact, accept the existence of an external reality, but holds that this reality cannot be accessed through objective observation. In the same vein, Moore explains that Gergen (1985) refers to a 'social construction of reality' which implies that certain similarities will actually exist between the

realities that people construct within the same social context. Finally she indicates how Speed (1991:401) proposes an alternative which he terms 'co-constructivism' and which he views as referring to:

> ...the view that what we know arises in the relationship between the knower and the known. It takes for granted that a structured reality exists but recognises that this reality is constructed and mediated in the sense that different aspects are highlighted according to ideas that people individually or in groups have about it.

In the light of the entire foregoing discussion, it would appear to the researcher that, as is stated by Barker (1992:30) the search for the Fundamental Truth, which might explain the origins of all depressive experiences, could be a futile exercise, for the answer may well be that there are many answers! Whatever we wish to call It, however we wish to describe It, no matter how often we try to dismiss It, one inescapable fact remains - depression 'is'. Our task would appear to be to respond constructively.

Prochaska and Norcross (1999:440) are of the opinion that we can never know the "reality" of personality and psychopathology. After a century of searching, personality theories have been able to account for very little of human behaviour. This is not surprising when one considers that Iran-Nejad (1995:19) has explained knowledge not as being known by organisms simply by means of obvious acquisition, but as being self-created. As human intelligence emerges, correspondence between "reality" and individual constructions of reality progress to a level of distinction between subjective and objective experiences, and is ultimately capable of dealing with the nature of physical relationships to form an objective world view that is consistently refined by experience.

Neimeyer (1993:230) is of the opinion that, given the variety of research paradigms (broadly defined) that characterise constructivist psychotherapies at

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this point in their development, perhaps the only safe prediction is that they are likely to increase in their diversity. One of the future challenges for the constructivist movement will be to articulate criteria for choosing what therapies to teach and to practise from a growing diversity of approaches. One problem is that predetermined criteria for choosing the most promising approaches can run counter to a constructivist philosophy (Prochaska & Norcross, 1999:455).

Nevertheless, Neimeyer (1993:221) writes that several divergent scholarly disciplines (not only in the social sciences) are converging on a distinctively postmodern conclusion (he quotes Kelly in this regard: "What we think we know is anchored only in our assumptions, not in the bed rock of truth itself, and that world we seek to understand remains always on the horizons of our thoughts". The currents of constructivist thought identifiable in contemporary clinical practice are both broad and fast moving, even if it is impossible to determine at this point where they might eventually lead, but however this inchoate tradition develops, it seems clear that it will continue to offer fresh glimpses into one of the possible futures of psychotherapy (Neimeyer, 1993:230).

Ellis (1998:84), similarly, notes that constructionist approaches often put down science - especially rational science - and in some ways they make good points. Science has many advantages but is hardly sacrosanct. REBT holds, with postmodernism, that science has its limitations, especially because the objective truths that it often claims to reveal are basically person-centered and include important subjective aspects. Science, however, is important for psychotherapy. For if we can agree, suggests Ellis (1984:84) on what the main goals of counselling and therapy are - which is not as easy a task as one might think - then scientifically oriented observation, case history, and experimentation may check our theory and show us, not certainly but at least approximately, how accurately our goals are achieved. So science has its usefulness, and REBT - along with other cognitive-behaviour therapies - uses science and rationality as well as other criteria to check its theories and to change them and its practices. Healthy

constructivism includes rational scientific method while abjuring dogmatic scientism.

Prochaska and Norcross (1999:452) rightly ask the following question:

> Who says that we must choose between constructivism and empiricism, words and numbers, art and science? As a scientist and a therapist, I have both ways of knowing. Art is the source of my inspiration. Science is the source of my validation.

The researcher is of the opinion that, as is suggested in the above quotation, there is ample room in this world for all of these various disciplines. In keeping with a constructivist stance, she also wishes to make the reader aware that it is highly unlikely that any person could at all times hold either a scientific or artistic outlook to the total exclusion of an alternative approach.

## 2.8    CONCLUSION

The foregoing discussion commenced with a focus on three constructs relevant to depression: "meaning", "interpretation" and "reality". This was followed by a detailed description of the most influential types of constructivism to have evolved over time. The spotlight was later to fall upon language, narrative and metaphor as they relate to constructivism. Thereafter, several terms relevant to depression were highlighted as seen through a constructivist lens. Some of the possible approaches that may be employed in constructivist therapy were then covered and, in conclusion, various potential stumbling blocks in the use of constructivism were afforded attention.

For all the emphasis on constructivism, if we are to remain true to its essence it must be acknowledged that there are multiple realities with regard to virtually any

experience in life, mental health and role being no exception. In the chapter that follows, the researcher will aim to highlight some alternative approaches to the phenomenon we know as depression. These alternatives of course represent other realities. In the interests of completeness, the researcher also looks at the very experience of being a man and part of what it might entail as far as roles are concerned.

# CHAPTER 3

# DEPRESSION AND THE MALE EXPERIENCE

## 3.1 INTRODUCTION

Depression is so common in our modern society that Richard Dayringer (1995:xiv) refers to it as "the common cold of mental illnesses". Indeed, statistics on the incidence of depression are unsettling, to say the very least. For example, in his internet article Hempel (2001) quotes statistics from the National Institute of Mental Health which indicate that ten million Americans suffer from depression each year, with the annual direct cost amounting to 12.4 billion dollars and the indirect cost, including time lost from work, totalling more than 30 billion dollars per annum. 16 000 deaths occur annually and roughly 15% of patients with a major depressive disorder ultimately commit suicide.

It would seem, thus, that there are solid reasons why we should take note of depression. Dill and Anderson (1999:94) express their concerns in this regard:

In addition to the emotional trauma and psychological suffering inflicted on the victims, these problems exact a heavy monetary toll on society. Like a pebble tossed into a pond, these problems have their most obvious effects at the point of entry, but the impact radiates outward in an ever-widening circle. The health care costs, lost days at work, increased accident rates, and decreased productivity of the immediate victims and these "ripple effect" victims are all consequences of shyness, loneliness, and depression.

Judging by the information obtained during interviews conducted with experts at the outset of the study, South Africa is also no stranger to sobering figures in this

regard. Scarcely a day goes by when we are not reminded in some way of the ever-encroaching threat of depression and almost every local popular magazine or newspaper has in recent years run at least one article on the disorder. In urban populations such as the one in which the study is to be conducted, the most common nonpsychotic disorder is depression, often accompanied by anxiety (the next most common psychiatric condition). Only very rarely has an onset of nonpsychotic psychiatric disorder been found to occur without the sufferer becoming depressed (Oatley & Bolton, 1985:372). This suggests to the researcher that much of what can be termed "depression" might go either undetected or undiagnosed.

According to the constructivist movement, that which is observed by a person, takes on the meaning attributed to it by this observer rather than some objective meaning that can be understood by all (Moore, 1997:559). Since the persons selected for case study purposes have already been assessed or diagnosed as suffering from depression, it is this psychological state of mind that will form the backdrop for the proposed qualitative study of the meanings held by working men with regard to their family roles. Quite possibly, therefore, the researcher may discover, during her constructivist clinical interviews, certain tendencies that have already been found (through the process of research) to be associated with the phenomenon of depression. For this reason, she considers it only logical to provide, firstly, a summary of the most important empirical findings as well as the other significant theories in this regard. Secondly, since the gender of an observer is inextricably part of him or her and as such will inevitably colour the way they view the world, the researcher also saw fit to include several authors' views on roles and the experience of masculinity.

## 3.2    THE EXPERIENCE OF DEPRESSION

It is assumed that the intended reader of this study will already be familiar with the clinical symptoms of depression as they have been laid out in the DSM-IV. It is obvious that these are far-reaching and may encompass (in a multitude of combinations) not only behavioural changes but also disturbances in physical, cognitive and emotional systems. The complexity of the syndrome is such that the U.S. Surgeon-General (2001) has stated in an "Internet Mental Health" article that any one or more of the following factors may be etiologically involved: biological factors, monoamine hypotheses, psychosocial and genetic factors, stressful life events, cognitive factors, temperament and personality, as well as gender.

In the researcher's mind, the symptoms referred to above amount to the cold, hard facts, as it were, of the condition.  However, since this study is very much concerned with the *experience* of depression, a little additional information will be provided hereunder in order to expand the reader's understanding in this regard. It is hoped that this will also contribute to a more complete background to the study.

We use the term "depression" very often in our day-to-day lives as a means of attaching a descriptive label to a "low" mood.  Sometimes this usage is appropriate, at other times not. At any rate, most people will have noted that there are benefits to a degree of negative experience such as anxiety or stress in that these can act as motivators to performance and achievement. The researcher does not believe that there is anyone who can honestly say that they have at no point in their lives felt "down". However, when this feeling becomes too much to bear, there may be cause for concern.

The researcher wishes to suggest that because each person is unique, their experience of the events in their lives will be different, depression being no exception to the rule. Yet, according to Dayringer (1995:3) there are two

symptoms that can always be relied upon to diagnose depression: one is anhedonia, a term used to denote a loss of interest or pleasure in all or almost all usual activities. The other is dysphoria, the name given to a relatively persistent disturbance of mood. It is Williams (1992:1) who, in the opinion of the researcher, offers a useful and thorough "experience-rich" account of this common psychological state when it reaches serious proportions:

> Mood spirals downwards, the person experiences hopelessness and despair, and almost total emptiness, feels unmotivated to do many of the things they used to find enjoyable, or feels that they would rather not meet other people. It is no accident that the metaphors we used to describe increasing severity of depression speak of 'depth' or 'spiralling downwards'. Whereas anxiety 'rises', depression 'deepens'. The severely depressed person finds himself trapped, in darkness, not daring to make any move for fear of making things worse, helpless about his prospect of escape.

The experience of entrapment and fear has been cited by at least one other author (Rowe, 1996:4) causing the researcher to surmise that there often creeps in at some level a sense of having a lack of alternatives. Nevertheless, Craig and Dobson (1995:xii) state that issues of definition present difficulties since depression, like anxiety, means different things to different people; because both are private experiences that cannot be observed directly by others, inferences are all that can be made. These authors make another point, namely that these are experiences of a highly heterogeneous nature - people experience them in different ways, hence one person's depression will not be the same as another's. Individuals also react differently to similar events or stimuli (Craig & Dobson, 1995:xiv).

The researcher has drawn the conclusion that more than anything else, it is the degree of intensity that is important when contemplating the gravity of a

depression. Support for this view comes from Williams (1992:4) and Dayringer (1995:3).

Associated with depression is a tendency to construe oneself as dissimilar to others (Winter, 1992:133). This tendency has been compared by Rowe (1996:42) as akin to solitary confinement in a prison consisting of propositions or constructions whereby the person sees himself as being cut off from and as choosing to be cut off from interactions with others. This applies both to people in his external reality (such as a spouse or friends) as well as figures in his internal reality (examples would be his God, his good self or his successful future). A 1996 study by Giesler, Josephs and Swann which appears on the American Psychological Association's website (2001) notes that studies have found people with depression to have a tendency to engage in behaviours that "create around themselves the very environments that sustain their negative self-views" and ultimately make them feel isolated from others.

It is not without reason that the researcher has allowed the condition of anxiety to enter into the discussion at hand, for it seems that anxiety often accompanies depression. In their essay, Kendall and Brady (1995:13) explain, using Izard's Differential Emotions Theory, that although these two psychological states amount to different combinations of the same negative emotions, a specific overriding emotion characterises each: fear - in the case of anxiety - and sadness in the case of depression. Brown, Bifulco and Harris (1987:35) state that there is widespread agreement that it is particularly the experience of loss in various forms that is involved in the onset of depression. Ingram and Malcarne (1995:45) conclude (based on the finding of four studies) that negative appraisals appear to be of a specific, tentative and future-oriented nature in the case of anxiety, yet in the case of depression these present as pervasive, absolute and past-oriented. In layman's terms, the researcher would like to offer, it is almost as though the person with depression and accompanying anxiety is preoccupied on one hand with everything that went wrong (as well as, probably, everything that he did

wrong) in the past. On the other hand, he is frantically worried and concerned about the future. She can only comment that the presence of anxiety in cases of depression is to be expected, given the abovementioned experiences and sensations that are so often part and parcel of depressed mood. After all, as Gilbert (1998:10) so bluntly puts it: "Life loses its joy..." when depression sets in. Who would not become anxious?

## 3.3    THEORIES ABOUT THE ETIOLOGY OF DEPRESSION

By means of the intended study, the researcher wishes to make a useful contribution to the body of social work knowledge related to depression as a phenomenon regularly encountered by practitioners from various social science disciplines. From the point of view of the researcher, thus, the case study interviews will be approached with an open mind and ears that are willing to listen, as opposed to pre-conceived ideas. This is in keeping with the constructivist ideology forming the basis of the study. The expectation is that she *might* find family role dynamics to have had a major hand in the initial development of client depression. Then again, perhaps not; it is just as likely that these may in some way later have contributed to the aforementioned "deepening" of an existing condition. Whatever the case may prove to be, the gathering of information on a topic about which no research has been done amongst men - namely their personal meanings, during depression, with regard to their family roles - is envisaged.

Having taken cognisance of the above, the fact remains that there are countless ways to look at depression. Although this particular study concerns itself with a constructivist approach to one aspect of it, the researcher nevertheless considered it important to acquaint herself with the major theories (all of which have supportive treatment models) that have shaped our current thoughts about

depression. The reason for this is that, again, some of the tendencies they suggest might be observable during the personal interviews.

An interesting comment is made by Hollanders (2000:49) on the subject of depression and treatment: "While the research evidence would seem to suggest that cognitive-behavioural therapy (CBT) is likely to be more effective than less structured psychotherapy treatments, direct comparisons show only small differences among the different forms of therapy." The researcher respectfully requests that the reader bear this in mind whilst absorbing the ensuing information, rather than making any judgements about the potential effectiveness of therapeutic approaches. She would also like to remind the reader that the purpose of this study is not, in any event, to construe depression in a new way or to offer suggestions regarding treatment. In her opinion, they are all likely to be useful in their own right under certain circumstances, as they attend to different aspects of depression.

## 3.3.1 Cognitive theory

In the opinion of the researcher, the essence of cognitive therapy, which is based on cognitive theory, is captured in the words of Gilbert (1998:47): "We change emotions by changing the way we think about events and situations".

Aaron Beck was one of the great names in the development of cognitive theory with regard to depression, with specific reference to cognitive vulnerability. According to Barnett and Gotlib (1988:106) he implicated three cognitive constructs in the etiology and phenomenology of the disorder: schemata, cognitive distortions, and the so-called "cognitive triad".

For the purposes of this study, the schema definition of Fodor in Fodor (1998:57) will suffice (compare Kihlstrom & Nasby in Hammen, Marks, Mayol & deMayo, 1985:308):

Schemas are conceptualised as dynamic (not static) knowledge structures that organise experience, that is, internal organisations of the field. Such schemas are active, continually changing structures, and experiencing persons are thought to be active participants in their own schematic constructions.

Schema theory, Fodor (1998:57) explains, is informed by contemporary research in cognitive science, neuroscience, and information processing theory. Ingram and Malcarne (1995:39-40) note that the negative self-schemata present in depression reflect self-representations concerned with themes of personal inadequacy and loss. They appear to filter information processing, resulting in negatively biased, dysfunctional results. According to Swallow and Segal (1995:211) schematic information is stored in long-term memory in the form of beliefs, judgements, assumptions and general propositions together with rules for self-evaluation.

Winter (1992:107) tells us that tight, logically consistent, and polarised construing of the self has been observed in severely depressed clients. (Compare Neimeyer, 1985:91.) According to Aaron Beck (1976) as quoted by Blowers and O'Connor (1996:25), individuals who have a well-developed schema can easily process information about the self, form judgements and make decisions; they are consistent in their responses, have better recognition, memory and recall; they can better predict future behaviour; and can better assimilate relevant information and reject incompatible information. Fixed notions of self arise when the more frequently used schemata become less flexible and more rigid.

Beck, in Trower, Casey and Dryden (1995:2), has described how the type of emotional disorder produced will depend upon the content of the thoughts: if a person's thoughts centre around danger or threat, then anxiety may be produced. If loss is the dominant theme of a person's thoughts, depression may result. In other words, whilst anxious individuals should manifest with a vigilance for

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information that threatens or endangers their physical or psychological safety, those who are depressed will most likely be sensitive to (and indeed be able to process efficiently and effortlessly) that information which is self-devaluative in nature (Ingram & Malcarne, 1995:40).

From the above, the researcher gathers that schemata, which seem to be both a result and a foregoer of experiencing, obviously play a significant organising role in dealing with the incoming - and often chaotic - load of information with which people have to deal in their daily lives. However, as with all things in life, it appears that a situation may develop in which there is, quite simply, "too much of a good thing" and the process becomes dysfunctional. Thinking may become restricted and could, in her opinion, have a good deal to do with the experience that depressives have of being enclosed and without options from which to choose.

Beck's original idea was that vulnerability to depression consists of tendencies to interpret the self, the environment and the future in negative ways (Hammen, Ellicott, Gitlin & Jamison (1989:154). Zuroff and Mongrain (1987:14) elaborate: "depression results when stressors activate latent, negative cognitive schemata, which typically have their origin in childhood experiences, generate 'automatic thoughts' concerned with the person's inadequacies and the frustrating, depriving nature of the world". These automatic thoughts may be negative and unrealistic, resulting in emotional disorder (Trower, *et al.* 1995:2). When one observes Beck in action (video, 1977) it is also obvious that he encourages his clients to consider the types of thoughts they are having and what impact these might be having on their anticipation of events and ultimately their actions.

The researcher speculates that over time, any of these cognitive constructs may become entrenched in the client's make-up. She finds support for this view in the words of Kovacs and Beck in Barnett and Gotlib (1988:106) who state that cognitive processes may represent a stable characteristic of their personality.

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Similarly, Weissman and Beck - again in Barnett and Gotlib (1988:106) - indicate that these dysfunctional attitudes often represent perfectionistic standards by which the self is judged.

Wills and Sanders (1997:2) mention that one of the criticisms levelled at therapy based on the cognitive model has been founded on the idea that it downplays or ignores emotions. However, they explain (1997:5) how Beck has frequently pointed out that "If you're not working with the emotion, you're not where the action is." Besides, clients very rarely enter therapy requesting help with their negative thoughts. They come to therapy because they are feeling bad (Wills & Sanders, 1997:9). Clearly, in the researcher's opinion, they wish to negotiate in order to feel better once again. It is her understanding that, in short, cognitive theories regard dysfunctional thought as not only the predecessor but in fact the actual *cause* of negative mood. It does concern her that one factor is ignored: the possibility that there are certain events in life that would be distressing to most people.

In conclusion, the researcher refers to Barnett and Gotlib (1988:107) who state that, overall, there is little empirical support for the contentions of the cognitive theorists that dysfunctional attitudes represent a stable vulnerability to depression.

## 3.3.2 Behavioural theories

As was the case with the cognitive approaches (sometimes known as cognitive-behavioural approaches - one should not, therefore, in the opinion of the researcher, attempt to separate these entirely), it was not until the late 1960's and early 1970's that behavioural approaches began to be applied in the treatment of clinical depression (Williams, 1992:ix). Gilbert (1998:42) explains that behaviourism is founded on the following basic formula: S + O = R (stimulus interpreted by the individual organism produces a response), which was an

expansion on the original formula developed by psychologists. This original formula read: S = R (stimulus equals response).

Students of counselling know Albert Ellis as the founder of REBT (Rational-Emotive Behaviour Therapy). He himself defines REBT as being based on the assumption that cognition, emotion and behaviour are not disparate human functions but are, instead, intrinsically integrated and holistic in the following manner: "When people are disturbed, they think-feel-act in a dysfunctional, self-defeating manner and when they undisturb themselves they almost invariably change some of their cognitions, change their emotional reactions, *and* change their activities." (Ellis & MacLaren, 1998:3). Trower, *et al.* (1995:2) refer to him as another major pioneer in the development of cognitive-behavioural theory in relation to the conceptualisation of depression since his emphasis (1962) fell upon the role of "irrational beliefs" in emotional disorder. These beliefs are evaluative and may be harmful to the extent that clients adhere to them. The abovementioned authors go on to explain that Ellis (1977) identifies three major irrational beliefs that hinder people from achieving their goals: a) I *must* do well and win other people's approval or else I am worthless; b) other people *must* treat me considerately and kindly in exactly the way I want them to (otherwise, they should be blamed and punished); c) life *must* give me all that I want, quickly and easily, and give me nothing that I don't want. Thus, whereas adaptive beliefs are usually expressed in relative terms denoting what a client's wishes or preferences about something might be, irrational beliefs are expressed in extreme terms including "shoulds" and "oughts". Gilbert (1998:43-44) lists even more irrational beliefs identified by Ellis.

Ellis (1977) in Trower, *et al.* (1995:3) was also responsible for the development of a simple "ABC model" explaining the relationship between thought and emotion: Activating event A leads to emotional and behavioural consequences at C, with the emotional consequences being mediated by beliefs at B. The authors warn that the aim in behavioural therapy based on the model is not to reach a

person to "think positively" but rather to think realistically. What distinguishes someone with an emotional problem is the severity and duration of that person's distress, and how extreme and global his negative thinking about the situation is. This view, the researcher would like to point out, is exactly in line with the normality/abnormality discussion conducted earlier in this chapter.

Dryden (1995:11) refers to the general principle of emotional responsibility: "We are largely, but not exclusively, responsible for the way we feel and act by the views we take of the events in our lives." This author has further identified four types of cognition:

- **Description** seeks to describe the nature of a stimulus without adding any non-observable meaning;

- **Interpretation** goes beyond the data at hand, but is non-evaluative and is employed in non-emotional episodes;

- **Inference** also goes beyond the data at hand, but is partly-evaluative and used in emotional episodes;

- **Evaluation** is fully evaluative and is centrally involved in our emotional experiences

Trower, *et al.* (1995:4) explain that one way in which maladaptive thoughts and beliefs create a self-fulfilling prophecy is by the influence of the client's beliefs on his behaviour. Another way in which a vicious circle is set up is when a client selectively perceives evidence which supports his maladaptive beliefs. It is common, for example, for depressed people to discount positive aspects of situations and to focus on the negative aspects.

### 3.3.3    Learned Helplessness Model

Just reading about this theory, which seems very closely linked to early behaviourism, conjured up images in the researcher's mind of Pavlov, his dogs and mice everywhere! Gilbert (1998:58-59) explains that in terms of social learning theory, depression itself may be seen as being learned. If a behaviour is intermittently reinforced, it is difficult to eliminate. Consistently ignoring a behaviour will lead to discontinuation thereof. Every form of behaviour, he says, has its own reward or "payoff" for the person exhibiting it. Those who tune in to the "Oprah Winfrey Show", which is broadcast every weekday on ETV, will be accustomed to hearing the accomplished psychologist, best-selling author and regular guest Dr Phil McGraw challenge his clients on live television to find out what it is that they are gaining by continuing to indulge in certain dysfunctional behaviours.

According to Gotlib and Colby (1987:32) Abramson, Seligman, and Teasdale's (1978) Learned Helplessness Model postulates that depressed persons have learned that outcomes are uncontrollable, and expect that future outcomes will also be out of their control. Persons who are prone to depression tend to attribute negative outcomes to internal, global, and stable factors and, to a lesser extent positive outcomes to external, specific, and unstable causes.

Vulnerability to depression, seen from the point of view of this model, originates from a habitual style of explaining the causes of life events, known as attributional style, which means that the onset of a depressive episode is precipitated by the occurrence of a negative event that triggers a latent expectation of the uncontrollability of future negative events. Depressogenic or self-deprecating attributional style comprises the use of global, stable and internal factors to explain negative events and, to a lesser extent, the employment of specific, unstable and external causes to explain positive outcomes (Seligman, Abramson, Semmel, & von Baeyer, 1979, in Barnett & Gotlib, 1988:101).

Interestingly, research with adults that has controlled for the effects of concurrent symptoms, has for the most part, failed to support the causal hypotheses of the reformulated learned helplessness model (Barnett & Gotlib, 1988:103).

### 3.3.4 Other theories about depression

New theories emerge all the time. Neither the scope nor the emphasis of this study makes out a good case for the inclusion of all of these, even if this were really possible. Although the cognitive and behaviourally-grounded theories have been the most significant contributors to our conceptualisation of depression, Ingram and Malcarne (1995:37) caution that cognitive processes, like any other factor, can never be viewed as the sole cause for either anxiety or depression. This appears to the researcher to be a definite invitation to explore other constructions of depression.

According to Dayringer and Eicher (1995:41-42) *Gestalt* therapy is a theory based on a view that unlike sadness, which is an alive and even active state, depression should be acknowledged as very different because people have feelings of nothingness and become immobilised without hope or a way out. This impasse means that there is an inability to act and to relate to anything or anyone. It can, as the authors explain, occur at any time on the continuum between joy and sadness, both of which are clearly active states in which one can find oneself. Those who deny their sadness also deny their joy, leaving only the midpoint of depression, so it is with this nothingness and lack of hope that Gestalt therapists work. Their aim is to reach a person's sadness or, if at all possible, their joy.

Several other theories listed by Barker (1992:29) are deserving of a mention:

- **Reinforcement theory** suggested that people become "dysphoric" as their level of positive reinforcement declines, complemented by a concurrent increase in unpleasant "life events";

- **Interpersonal theory** extended these ideas to focus more specifically upon the role of "disturbed" interpersonal relationships. Here Barker refers to Coyne (1976);

- **Biochemical theories** have homed in on changes occurring in the neuro-transmitter system which subserves emotionality, sleep regulation and motor activity.

With regard to the aforementioned biochemical theories, Dziegielewski and Leon (1998:475-490) explain the three broad categories of pharmacological treatment developed for use in patients with major depression: a) the tricyclic antidepressants (TCAs), b) the monoamine oxidase inhibitors (MAOIs), and c) the newer generation antidepressant drugs such as the serotonin-selective reuptake inhibitors, whose popularity has increased tremendously in recent years. These antidepressant medications affect the neurochemical pathways chemically rather than electrically, as would be the case with electroconvulsive therapy or "shock treatment".

A type of depression that is described by Kendall and Brady (1995:14) as being based on a cognitive-behavioural theory, is the "Helplessness-Hopelessness" depression of Alloy *et al*, 1990. According to this theory hopelessness is affected by perceived negative life events and by whether these are attributed by the individual to global, stable, internal causes, as well as the perception of such events as uncontrollable. The sense of hopelessness must precede the depression and is in fact a cause of depression. The researcher notes that this theory is very similar to the "learned helplessness" model (discussed earlier) as regards the manner in which events are seen to be perceived by the depressed person.

In conclusion, it is worth noting that Barker (1992:30) rightly states that while each school claims to have identified a single causative agent which might account for the onset of a depressive episode, it may be that each of these models

is correct because, as we have said earlier, there is an almost limitless number of factors that can make a contribution to a depressive episode.

## 3.4 ROLE, IDENTITY AND SELF

Ackerman in Bloch, Hafner, Harari and Szmukler (1994:8) makes it clear that one of the social purposes of the family is to promote socialisation into various social roles. Obviously, then, role must be important. The researcher wishes to remind the reader that, as was obvious in the first chapter of this study, the very idea of "role" assumes the existence of a context that includes not only the owner of the role but also other people. In the opinion of Schaefer (2001:122) a social role is a set of expectations for people who occupy a given social position or status. (Compare Neimeyer, 1987b:58). In turn, Oatley and Bolton (1985:377) state that roles are well-practised, complex social plans or well-learned skills, whereby a person fulfils major social goals. A role, they explain, provides an identity and is bound up with personal goals, plans, and expectations. To make this clearer, the authors also add that the very coherence of a pattern of actions recognised as role derives from the goals and plans that underlie it. An enactment of one coherent set of plans - for example, those of a work setting - is a role. Its appropriateness is continually judged and commented upon, so that the roles of the enactment become clear in any particular community. An example would be an expectation that students should be attentive. The authors quote Ryle, who states that self-definition goals are at the highest level and are pervasive. At lower levels are goals and strategies local to specific roles. The researcher interprets this as creating the impression that fulfilment of roles is a sub-division of self-definition and that if successful, will contribute to self-definition.

Blowers and O'Connor (1996:12) explain that sociologists speak of roles as pre-existing the individual, who assumes them according to circumstance, and this fits well with the general view that the social pre-exists and over-arches all individual

development. The researcher is of the opinion that this view would be in keeping with that of the social constructivists, for the very reason that they emphasise the social side of construing. She feels, further, that it is precisely because of this pre-existence that we have what is referred to as "role expectations", which are defined in the Social Work Dictionary (1995:54) as behaviour patterns considered appropriate in terms of the values and norms of a particular group, community or social institution.

Still, this is not the full story as regards roles: there is still the issue of degree of commitment by a person to a specific role performance, i.e. to certain behaviour within a role. This type of commitment is referred to in the Social Work Dictionary (1995:54) as role obligation. Again, though, we must look deeper: it is quite possible that not all individuals will view this obligation in the same light, so one would also have to take into account an individual's role perception. His role *perception* is his "vision in respect of his commitment to and the suitability of his role in a specific situation" (Social Work Dictionary, 1995:55). Closely linked with this is the individual's role *conception*, which is a person's interpretation of the suitability of his behaviour patterns in interaction with other persons or within a given social context (Social Work Dictionary, 1995:54). Beyond all of these terms is the matter of actual "role performance", which according to the Social Work Dictionary (1995:55) is the behaviour patterns of persons on account of their status in and membership of a group, community or social institution. Finally, a "role network" is defined in the same publication (1995:55) as the totality of a person's roles.

In view of the above, the researcher would like to suggest that it is quite conceivable that terms such as role commitment or role conception would be influenced by factors such as cultural background and orientation. It is also conceivable that not all people's role networks will be equally complex. When we are reminded that, as has already been indicated, role provides identity, this

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translates into a situation where some people will have many sources of identity, whilst others will find themselves with fewer of these.

All of the above amount to the more general definitions of role. However, since this study deals with related concepts from a constructivist point of view, the researcher considers it vital to go back to what the constructivists say about role. In this regard we turn to the so-called "father" of construct psychology, George Kelly: According to Kelly (1955:97) a role is "a psychological process based upon the role player's construction of aspects of the construction systems of those with whom he attempts to join in social enterprise". According to Blowers and O'Connor (1996:11) Kelly's definition places emphasis on the outlook of the individual, as opposed to that of others with whom he is engaged. However, the researcher must mention at this point that in including others at all in his definition of a person's role, Kelly seems to her to have been quite advanced, even though he was what we call a personal construct therapist whose emphasis would fall on the personal nature of constructs. In other words, he does not fully recognise the social aspect but does at least acknowledge its presence.

There is some support for the researcher's view: Button (1985:12) quotes Kelly as having said that role behaviour may not just be something to *act out*, but may also be a means of understanding the world. He then adds that rather than seeing role as a socially prescribed set of expectations, he brings the individual and society close together.

Loos and Epstein (1989:150) provide a definition of role as a continuous interpersonal process that reflects the local coordination of understandings between people. In turn, Tomm in Nylund and Corsiglia (1998:403) argues that one's sense of self is generated in relation to others. Both of these definitions emphasise the interpersonal nature of role. As the reader will see, it is the interpersonal quality of the human experience that is emphasised by the social

constructivists whose views the researcher regards as both a refinement and an advancement on personal construct theory.

Kelly does not stop at a simple definition of role but moves on to a concept he named "core role" (1955:503) which he says is based on a construction whose elements are the presumed constructs of certain other persons. He believes that it involves that part of a person's role structure by which he maintains himself as an integral being, with the more peripheral role structures not included here. As such, the researcher thinks it makes good sense for Kelly to add that it is "a part one plays as if his life depended upon it" for it clearly forms the characteristic way in which a person interacts with others.

The importance of self in mental health is clearly delineated by Blowers and O'Connor (1996:24) when they state that information touching on self-esteem and self-worth often plays a crucial role in a person's mental and affective state, with the concept of self being a strong reference point for acting and feeling. In attempting to define mental health, Van Staden (1988:260) concedes that this is difficult due to the complexity of the human mind and the diversity of human behaviour. However, she does list several components of mental health, one of these being that mentally healthy people feel that they are important actors on the stage of life - actors who can and do make significant contributions; they feel appreciated most of the time (Van Staden, 1988:261). They gain satisfaction from roles played at home, at work, at church, and at play. They are also not rigid but have open minds. She quotes Hansell (1976:192) who developed a theory of seven essential bands. One of the most basic of these is the second one, namely that the individual wants to be seen as possessing a unique identity, yet he must also have a family or a group with whom he can identify. Most importantly, in discussing band five, Hansell brings in the connection of roles: every individual has certain roles to fulfil within his family group or community, with role fulfilment heightening self-esteem.

## 3.5    DEPRESSION AND MEANING

During the course of the preceding discussion, the reader will have noted the conclusions that role provides identity and that role fulfilment enhances self-esteem.   The view of Oatley and Bolton (1985:372), namely that depression may occur when an event disrupts a role that had been primary in providing the basis for a person's sense of self and there are no alternatives that allow that sense of self to be maintained, is therefore, in the researcher's opinion, a logical one. As to precisely how this happens, we now come to some of the significant empirical findings with regard to two aspects alluded to earlier on in this chapter.

### 3.5.1    Provoking agents and vulnerability factors

According to Brown, *et al.* (1987:31) there has been a great deal of uncertainty about the importance of the aetiological link between life events and the onset of depressive disorders. Indeed, the researcher has the distinct impression that this state of affairs may in part be accounted for by the apparent complexity of that link.

In the first place, we have already seen that the behaviourists modified their original explanation of behaviour to include an interpretation (sandwiched between the stimulus and the actual response). This view is also consistent with the closely associated cognitive theory - again, the distinction between these two is an almost imperceptible one. It seems that the behaviourists are by no means alone; Hammen, Ellicott, Gitlin and Jamison (1989:154) note: " In particular, theorists have argued that individual "meaning" of events needs to be considered (Brown & Harris, 1978; Hammen, 1988; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984)." However, the authors further state, there have been few advances in the direct study of meaning, how best to measure it, and how it relates to individual responses to events, bearing in mind that the concept of meaningful events refers to the appraisal of events as relevant to the definition and evaluation of the self. In fact,

Hammen, Marks, Mayol and deMayo (1985:316) add that for all practical purposes, "meaning" as conceptualised by Brown in Brown & Harris (1978) has been synonymous with objective impact, and other investigators have not explored meaning empirically at all.

In the second place, mention was made of so-called "provoking agents" that can give rise to a condition of depression. Yet if we recall our earlier conclusions that not everyone's depression is the same, we also expect that not everyone's provoking agents will be the same. In other words, "One man's meat is another man's poison". The researcher is certain, furthermore, that if only certain stimuli could be termed "provoking agents", these would long ago have been identified by one or more of the brilliant minds operating in the social sciences and bound into a volume billed as "The book the world has been waiting for"! Most unfortunately, depression is not that easy to explain after all. Apart from the uniqueness of human beings, there must be some moderating factors that account for differential reception of negative stimuli. One such factor which has been identified is personality style.

Barnett and Gotlib (1988:108) mention that theoretical formulations based primarily on clinical observations identify (using various labels, the researcher might add) two personality styles that may predispose certain persons to depression: excessive dependency and autonomy. A study of Hammen, *et al.* (1989) is quoted by Segal, Vella, Shaw and Katz (1992:26) as having found that patients' periods of worst symptoms followed assessment times when the life events experienced had direct bearing on their specific domain of concern (i.e. affiliation and autonomy/achievement) and that this relation was greater for achievement concerns than for those of an interpersonal nature. (Compare Hammen, *et al.* 1989:158; Blatt, Quinlan, Chevron, McDonald & Zuroff, 1982:121; Zuroff & Mongrain, 1987:15; Robins, 1990:395.)

As Hirschfeld, *et al.* (1976:385) state, individuals who are high in interpersonal dependency are able to maintain their self-esteem by satisfying their dependency needs. The autonomous person, by contrast, displays a preference for independence and goal attainment (Segal, *et al.* 1992:26). A comment by Oatley and Bolton (1985:377) offers additional food for thought: "Distress from a provoking agent, therefore, is a species of disappointment, a disappointment of goals to which a person is implicitly committed and by which that person has defined her or his own worth..." In the opinion of the researcher, it goes quite a distance towards explaining the finding of Folkman and Lazarus in Barnett and Gotlib (1988:116). Their finding was that, compared with nondepressed individuals, depressed persons perceive themselves as having more "at stake" when appraising stressful situations. Considering that their very self-esteem is dependent upon their obtaining satisfaction for specific needs, they probably *do* have more at stake, as far as the researcher can see.

Interestingly, a self-deprecating attributional style and a high number of dysfunctional attitudes appear to be two among many cognitive abnormalities that come and go with the onset and remission of depression (Barnett & Gotlib, 1988:117). The dimension of autonomy appears to be a contentious one. Robins and Block (1988:851) added a new dimension to the discourse on depression by finding that, far from being a vulnerability factor, autonomy may even serve an event-buffering role. Blatt, *et al.* (1982:114) refer to Blatt's (1974) distinction between depression types: (a) an "anaclitic", dependent type of depression is characterised by feelings of helplessness and weakness, by fears of being abandoned, and by wishes to be cared for, loved, and protected; (b) an "introjective", self-critical or guilty type of depression is developmentally more advanced and is characterised not only by intense feelings of inferiority, guilt and worthlessness but also by a sense that one must struggle to compensate for having failed to live up to expectations and standards. In their study, Zuroff and Mongrain (1987:20) found that self-critics reported more introjective state depression than the controls in response to both rejection and failure. The self-

critical subjects appeared to have assimilated the rejection episode to their predominant structures, responding to the loss with more self-blame and self-criticism than the controls. The authors postulate that the reason could be as follows:

> It is possible that it is easier to construe an event in introjective than in anaclitic terms. In other words, it may be possible to interpret a wide variety of events as evidence of one's inadequacies, but only a smaller set of events can be interpreted, even symbolically, as loss or abandonment.

Having said all of the above on the subject of autonomy and self-criticism, the researcher must warn that it certainly cannot be assumed that these are more critical factors in the etiology than those related to interpersonal issues. For example, Roberts and Monroe (1999:168) refer to both the study of Roberts, *et al.* (1996) and to Bartholomew and Horowitz's (1991) attachment typology when concluding that "secure attachment appears to buffer against the impact of stressors." Similarly, based on the results of their own study, Barnett and Gotlib (1988:120) suggest that social integration or, conversely, social isolation, is involved in the etiology of depression and that the loss of any meaningful relationship by a socially isolated person might elicit a dysphoric response by eliminating one of a restricted number of sources of self-definition and worth.

How can social support be usefully conceptualised? Cohen and Wills, in Barnett and Gotlib (1988:111) dichotomised social support as either structural or functional. Structural support refers to the number and degree of integration of relationships, whereas functional support comprises various content dimensions, such as esteem, informational support, social companionship, and tangible support. Finally, the most fine-grained analysis reveals from whom support is received, with perhaps the most important distinction to be made at this level being that between marital and extramarital support. This appears to be a useful distinction. For example, Barnett and Gotlib (1988:120) take the position that the

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results of their own review specifically suggest that the disruption of a primary relationship, such as the marital relationship, may lead to depression. (Compare Oatley & Bolton, 1985:376.)

The study of Brown and Harris (1978) as quoted by Oatley and Bolton (1985:373) was conducted with women. In the opinion of the researcher, it takes the most balanced view, based on its findings, in stating that an onset of depression at the case level usually occurred following a *provoking agent*, in the presence of one or more *vulnerability factors*. Vulnerability factors, they say, are circumstances such as lack of social support, that are not themselves severely threatening. The authors hypothesis was that these factors potentiate the effect of provoking agents in a fashion sometimes referred to in epidemiology as *synergy*.

## 3.5.2 Self

The researcher would like to mention at the very outset of this section that, as will be shown very shortly, self can in itself be seen as a potential area of vulnerability when it comes to the etiology of depression. This is yet another example of the complexity of the phenomenon. Consequently, she suggests that it should not be considered as necessarily separate from the aforementioned section.

According to Mead (1912/1964) as quoted by Oatley and Bolton (1985:377) the sense of self depends on an internal representation of previously external relationships. Oatley and Bolton now quote Ryle (1982) who states that a role supports an experience of selfhood insofar as (a) it fulfills central or self-definition goals, that is, of feeling valued or respected, and (b) it is enacted with an actual other or others who play the parts specified for them satisfactorily. It is in the second part of this explanation that the researcher picks up echoes of Kelly's definitions of both role and core role. She believes that the same applies to Kohut in Givelber (1990:174) who states that one's self-esteem and well-being are to some extent derived from and embedded in a relationship.

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"If all roads lead to Rome, it must also be true that most if not all, psychic roads lead to feelings of self worth." In making this statement, Dayringer (1995:13) does not specify whether the feelings of self-worth to he refers are positive or negative. It appears that they might develop in either direction. Winter (1992:128) points out, firstly, that a consistent finding of a number of studies has been that self-esteem is particularly low in clients diagnosed as depressive and secondly, that these findings are consistent with theoretical formulations and research evidence concerning depression from the cognitive perspective described in, for example, Beck, *et al.* (1979). Beck (1973) in Neimeyer, (1985:85) mentions that self-devaluation is observed in about 80 (eighty) per cent of depressives. The researcher does not consider this surprising since this has been considered to be one of the cardinal features of depression at least since the seminal writings of Freud in 1955 (Neimeyer, 1985:85). (Compare Roberts & Monroe, 1999:151.)

Self-esteem, it seems, is a significant factor when dealing with self and depression. For this reason, the researcher considers it important to define. Though it is admittedly an old one, its 1890 definition by William James as quoted by Roberts and Monroe (1999:152) is considered by the researcher to be one of the most accurate yet: Self-esteem, he says, can be viewed as "one's evaluation of the degree to which important aspirations, ideals and values are being met". Roberts and Monroe themselves are of the opinion that within these perspectives, the process of self-evaluation is as important as the end product or outcome of self-evaluation. This end product of self-evaluation can be referred to as the level of self-esteem, which is a dimension of how positive or negative a person's feelings of self-worth are (1999:152).

There still appears to be a question mark as to just what role self-esteem plays in depression. According to Hirschfeld, *et al.* (1976:380-381) self-esteem can rest on any of a number of determinants: fulfillment of interpersonal dependency wishes is but one way of maintaining self-esteem. Other means include mastery over the environment, general physical and emotional health, professional or financial

success, success in an endeavour, performing charitable deeds, and helping others. In commencing their study, Brown, Bifulco, Harris and Bridge (1986:2) accepted as a proven fact that low self-esteem acts as a vulnerability factor. They concluded that negative evaluation of self (NES) and chronic subclinical condition (CSC) were associated with each other and with later onset of case depression after a provoking agent (Brown, *et al.* 1986:15). Roberts and Monroe (1999:157) mention that overall, there has been weak and inconsistent support for the hypothesis that low levels of self-esteem precede the onset of, or remain subsequent to, depressive episodes and symptoms. In the present study, the researcher will not concern herself further with this matter as her focus lies not with an attempt to establish or prove a causal relationship of any kind between poor self-esteem and depression but rather to view the manner in which roles are perceived by the depression sufferer.

The social comparison literature suggests that members of one's social network play an important role in self-evaluation and the regulation of self-esteem because they serve as sources of comparative information. Positive, mutually rewarding relationships give individuals the message that they are worthy of care and affection, whereas rejection and hostility within close relationships give the message that they are unworthy. Social comparisons appear to be a critical aspect of self-evaluation that contributes to overall feelings of self-esteem (Roberts & Monroe, 1999:158-159).

McGuire in Blowers and O'Connor (1996:25) proposes that self is not an entity but a realm of relationships with significant others, so that the self is embedded in a network of interpersonal exchanges that locate it in the world. Oatley and Bolton (1985:377) propose that provoking agents increase the risk of depression by posing threats to selfhood, where the sense of self is realised in a role or roles. By way of explanation, the authors offer the example of a person whose sense of self is largely derived from their being in a particular relationship with someone. If this other person leaves the relationship or comes not to care about fulfilling

their role in the relationship, the former person's valuation of self that derives from the role will collapse. This view brings into sharper focus and indeed emphasises the researcher's earlier comment that not everyone has an equal number of roles. Just how crucial roles can be thus becomes apparent and we again find ourselves facing the inescapable issue of personal meaning.

Based on the above research findings, the researcher is in agreement with Roberts and Monroe (1999:175) when they suggest that one direction for future study will be the discovery of the underlying mechanisms that link self-esteem and interpersonal relationships to the other symptoms of depression and to the syndrome of depression, which amounts to an exploration of *how* these processes occur.

Some authors have debated the question of whether there is only one self. Jack (1999:223) states that in a person's self-reproach, which the researcher takes to be a reference to self-evaluation in the extreme, standards for the ideal self are employed in judging the actual self. These standards alert researchers and clinicians about what a person believes he should be like and how she or he should interact in order to be loved, socially valued, and safe (Jack, 1999:223). These standards, furthermore, emanate from three major sources: the individual's family, the current context, and the wider culture. Thus, the researcher notes, there is the possibility of the existence of an ideal self and an actual self. (Compare Freedman & Combs, 1996:35.) From a personal construct approach, Blowers and O'Connor (1996:23) remind us that though we hear talk of self-esteem or self-efficacy, there is usually no coherent definition of self, despite there being an assumption that the self is the orchestrating element of the person - a kind of overseer of mental and physical operations. A theme of coherence and single selfhood can also be found in the teachings of Erikson (in Balswick, 1992:147) who states that the primary developmental task of mature adulthood is ego integration, bringing the various parts of one's life structure into a consistent

and integrated whole. (Compare, by contrast, Linville, 1985:95 and Berlin, 1996:330.)

Self-judgement may involve the development of shame. According to Balcom (1991:166) shame, in its simplest sense, is a judgement of the self as worthless, inadequate and devalued by the self as well as by others. Normal shame passes with the immediate experience (which the researcher takes to mean the event which made the subject feel shame - such as failing at a particular activity) and is the result of accurate, reality-oriented self-judgement. However, instead of shame remaining linked to the situation at hand, it may become embedded in the person's character. The result of this shift is significant in that the person begins to experience mistakes and failure as the total devaluation of self. This author hints at the possibility that there are different elements or aspects of self and the researcher finds this an obviously useful description since people have, as we have already seen, different roles in life.

The researcher has the following view: the very fact that such a term as self-esteem exists in the social science vocabulary provides an indication that people have definite ideas and views of themselves. According to Linville (1987:674) people's "self-representations", as she calls them, develop over time into more differentiated structures in the following manner:

> First, increased experience in varied roles, relationships, and situations increases the opportunity for self-differentiation... Second, an increasing range of experiences relevant to the self (e.g., family, professional, social, aesthetic, physical) also creates functional incentives for self-differentiation.

Thus, as the author concludes, a person's number of cognitive self-aspects may depend partially on the number of actual roles and relationships in their life.

People occupying multiple personal and professional roles may therefore exhibit greater self-complexity than those whose lives are centred on only a few roles.

According to Linville (1985:96) self-representation may include information about specific events and behaviour. An example might be: "I worked on a project for five hours today". However, included might also be generalisations developed from repeated observations, such as: "I am a hard worker". In addition to such behaviours or traits, one of the forms that such generalisations may take is that of roles. That self is thus cognitively represented in terms of multiple aspects is the first of the assumptions on which Linville's self-complexity model is based. The remainder are as follows (Linville, 1985:97-100):

- *Self-aspects (self-relevant cognitive categories, concepts or schemas) vary in the affect associated with them:* How people feel about themselves will vary over time and circumstance, depending partially on the specific aspect of self that is activated either through associations in memory or through a current self-relevant experience. This means that an individual might feel good about him- or herself as an athlete but not as a student. Likewise, success in one aspect enhances positive feelings about the self, while failure diminishes these feelings;

- *People differ in the degree of complexity of their self-representation:* Self-complexity as defined here is a function of two things: the number of aspects that one uses to organise knowledge cognitively about the self, and the degree of relatedness of these aspects. The number of aspects is likely to be a function in part of the number of actual roles one has in his or her life, for example that of parent or lawyer. Feelings about different self-aspects may be correlated in at least two ways. First, actual events in the real world regarding different aspects may be correlated. An example of this could be a woman whose life is comprised mainly of two aspects - her profession and her relationship with her husband. What would happen if she were to lose her

professional success and her husband's admiration depended heavily on that success? Secondly, feelings about different aspects of the self might be cognitively related, the assumption here being that self-aspects vary in their degree of perceived relatedness to one another. The assumption made here is that the impact of an experience with respect to one aspect spreads to other aspects according to the strength of their relatedness. One interpretation of being simple, then, is to experience a greater degree of spillover from one aspect to another. To be complex is to experience a lesser degree of such spill-over that can colour many other aspects;

- *Overall affect and self-appraisal are a function of the affect and self-appraisal associated with different aspects of the self:* The author assumes that overall affect and self-appraisal are a weighted average of the affect and self-appraisal associated with different aspects. In this averaging process, important or salient self-aspects will receive more weight than other aspects, though this averaging process does not, she adds, occur consciously.

According to Linville (1987:663) her 1985 self-complexity model suggests that individual differences in vulnerability to stress are partially due to differences in the complexity of self-representations. Greater self-complexity, she says, entails cognitively organising self-knowledge in terms of a greater number of self-aspects and maintaining greater distinctions among self-aspects, the basic hypothesis being that greater self-complexity moderates the adverse impact of stressful events on physical and mental health outcomes.

Linville's 1985 model led to what she calls her *self-complexity-affective extremity hypothesis* which claims that people lower in self-complexity will experience greater swings in affect and self-appraisal in response to life events. As she explains (1987:664) those lower in self-complexity will experience a more negative change in affect and self-appraisal in the wake of a negative life event and a more positive change in affect and self-appraisal after a positive event. This

is because the greater a person's self-complexity, the smaller the proportion of self-aspects that are likely to be affected by an emotionally salient event. This is true for two reasons. First, the greater a person's self-complexity, the more self-aspects the person is likely to have. Thus, if an event directly affects only one self-aspect, this one self-aspect will be a smaller proportion of the total self-representation for a person high in self-complexity. Secondly, because greater self-complexity implies less spill-over, the impact of emotionally salient events is less likely to spread from the immediately affected self-aspect to other self-aspects. In her earlier article (1985:102) she had already stated that regardless of whether simplicity results from a smaller number of aspects or a higher degree of interdependence between aspects, the result is the same: greater affective reaction. Her second experiment in this article also showed that simple persons were not more positive or more negative in their moods; they were just more variable (Linville, 1985:111). Also, self-complexity appeared to buffer against affective consequences of a failure experience, including depression, sadness, anxiety, and lower self-appraisal. On the basis of this finding, the author suggests that high self-complexity might reduce the likelihood of serious depression, or reduce the depth of or duration of a depressive episode (Linville, 1985:115-116).

The researcher's personal opinion of the aforegoing discussion is that the issue of *meaning* is to be found running like a thread throughout. In other words, she does not believe that we can honestly speak of vulnerability factors, provoking agents or self-related factors without taking into account the personalised significance that these have for different individuals. It is these unique meanings that she will have to take into account in dealing with her case study subjects.

## 3.6    ON BEING A MAN

Up to this point, the discussion has focused on general aspects related to depression. It must be borne in mind, though, that in this particular study the

researcher will be homing in specifically on the experiences of men. As she has already indicated, research with regard to men and the meaning they attach to their family roles - even in the absence of depression - appears to be, at best, sparse. It cannot be *assumed* that men's meanings and views will necessarily differ from those of women but the researcher would like to point out, for example, that a man cannot in the traditional sense be a wife, just as a woman cannot be a husband, so one could reasonably expect to observe a difference. The researcher wishes to expand somewhat on this point.

Bearing in mind that organisation may be referred to as that which specifies a system as a unit (Maturana in Le Roux, 1987:36), both men and women as systems are in other words respectively and individually organised in a manner that cannot be changed. However, using the family as an example of a system, Spies (1988:20) explains that systems are self-regulatory in the sense that interaction with other systems does not determine how a system will behave, though it does indeed determine the structure of the system. It is thus the structure itself that determines the functioning of the system by specifying with what events the system may interact as well as how the system will behave during one of these interactions. Everything that occurs within the system is thus subject to the autonomy of the system. This autonomy amounts to the system's ability to maintain and regulate itself through its own laws (Le Roux, 1987:36).

From the above, the researcher would like to point out, it is clear that although organisation is unchanging, structure and therefore function is alterable. To use a relevant example, once a man becomes a father, he is always a father, but he may be either a depressed or a non-depressed father. Le Roux further makes it clear that, according to Maturana, structural change with loss of organisation is disintegration.

From our own experiences we know that boys are socialised in ways that differ from those to which girls are exposed, which means that by the time men and

women enter into family roles, they are already, quite apart from their biological differences, two distinct sets of people with specific gender roles that provide them with an identity. For example, as stated by Jack (1999:223) beliefs about how to relate interpersonally are powerfully influenced by gender as well as by power differentials. This author's own experience has also shown that standards used for self-evaluation are key in understanding gender differences in the prevalence and dynamics of depression. He also emphasises that the observation of the values that a person subscribes to (via enquiry through language) is useful since standards of "goodness", including measures of social worth, vary by gender, ethnicity and social context. In the interests of completeness as far as this discussion on depression is concerned, and as an aid to understanding the men who will be interviewed as case studies, the researcher therefore feels that it is necessary to pay some attention to the socialisation of men as well as to the various phases of adult male life. Depression can, after all, occur during any of these stages. Finally, that which we know about men and family roles will be shared with the reader.

### 3.6.1 Socialisation: what is expected of a man?

O'Neill (1982:10) defines gender role socialisation as the process by which children and adults acquire and internalise the values, attitudes and behaviours associated with either femininity, masculinity or both. As Pittman (1992:370) so rightly cautions, we may like to think of masculinity as something natural, but most of its manifestations are in fact cultural and historical rather than biological. On this topic Balcom (1991:168) states that families and society teach boys to be tough, to harden themselves to feelings, and to treat their bodies as machines. The expressing of emotional or physical vulnerability results in shaming, a primary method of male socialisation. In fact, Farrell as quoted by Solomon (1982:58) identified "Ten Commandments of Masculinity", one of which reads as follows: "Thou shalt not cry or expose other feelings of emotion, fear, weakness, sympathy, empathy, or involvement before thy neighbour". This process of

socialisation seems to be further supported by the input of other males. Pittman (1992:370) has the following to say in this regard:

> And as a guy develops and practices his masculinity, he is accompanied and critiqued by an invisible male chorus of all the other guys, who hiss or cheer as he attempts to approximate the masculine ideal, who push him to sacrifice more and more of his humanity for the sake of his masculinity, and who ridicule him when he holds back.

According to the website of the National Institute of Mental Health (1999) close to one third of patients (male or female) who need help for their depressive disorder don't seek treatment. The reasons given are: either because neither they (nor those around them) recognise their symptoms as being those of depression, or because of the social stigma that is still upheld in many areas of society, namely that a depressive person is actually weak or lazy. Then there are also times when the symptoms are so completely debilitating that such patients simply are not able to make the effort required to reach out for help. Furthermore, many symptoms are incorrectly diagnosed as being of a purely medical nature and, quite often, only individual symptoms are treated rather than the underlying cause. (Compare Williams, 1992:5.) The researcher would like to point out that certain symptoms as they appear in men may also be misconstrued and ignored. Such an example is offered by Taffel (1992:360) who explains that in the not-so-distant past, no one even thought it strange that some men were chronically angry, silent and passive, or that they had no real friends or fun, few interests beside work and could not relate well to their wives and children. The important thing was that they did what they were supposed to do: they had jobs, they held up their responsibilities, "...they functioned - they were *men*". (Compare Bernard, 1992:206.) Similarly, Dill and Anderson (1999:94) suggest that aggression might be a hidden result of depression.

Let us add to the above tendencies the views of authors such as Goldfried and Friedman (1982:314): it is the experience of these authors, that men seek therapy when their lives are not going well and that they frequently do so only at the insistence of someone else (such as a wife, girlfriend or employer). It is then not surprising, in the opinion of the researcher, that many men do not receive the treatment they so desperately require. Goldfried and Friedman further explain that men will often enter therapy because of problems related to either a less than successful or an overly successful incorporation of the male sex role into their functioning. Still others enter therapy in a state of crisis following the loss of a job and the associated loss of self-esteem. Whatever the situation might be, Taffel (1992:362) mentions that most men recoil at the suggestion that they are sick or in pain or even that something is bothering them. They view depression as something that strikes women. The women with them are often alarmed at being with a man who has so vague and obscurely "unmasculine" a flaw. In some cases, a man's suffering so threatens his idealised masculine self-identity that he cannot even admit to any pain (Taffel, 1992:363).

Paykel as quoted by Williams (1992:5) indicates that the proportion of women who are depressed exceeds the proportion of men. Naturally, this by no means implies that there are not many depressed men. However, women are between two and three times more likely to be depressed than are men (Weissman and Klerman in Williams, 1992:5; Dayringer, 1995:3.) Williams does suggest, though, that it is also quite possible that many men who would meet the criteria for depression never actually seek treatment (potentially for the reasons already discussed by the researcher) with the result that their condition goes undiagnosed. In a far more recent study, Rapmund and Moore (2000:20) again refer to Paykel - albeit a slightly later publication - as well as Weissman and Klerman when they state that there is a higher incidence of depression among women than men. More specifically, they refer to studies by Paykel (1991), Ridsdale (1986) and Webster (1990) in stating that the ratio of such incidence is 2:1 among women as opposed to men.

The theme that dominates the life cycle of heterosexual men is a profound sense of challenge, a sense of being constantly tested, whether at home or in the world of work. How a man perceives himself as meeting that challenge is likely to underlie his fundamental sense of self. In other words, what we do know about being a man is that masculinity is something that needs to be proved, constantly and regularly, to one's self and to others - to men, to women, to parents, to co-workers. This may be one of the heaviest burdens borne by men (Rosen, 1999:126 & 127). Balswick (1992:14) goes so far as to state that the traditional definition of the male role is like "an emotional strait-jacket that constricts men's development" and adds that amongst the most binding aspects of the traditional male role is an emphasis on task achievement as proof of self-worth, together with compulsive competitiveness. In short, men compete for glory and prestige (Pittman, 1992:369).

## 3.6.2 The life stages of the adult male

The stage in male adulthood with which the average person is most familiar is that of the midlife crisis. Rosen (1999:135) states that if men have been acculturated to judge their worth by how high they have risen and how much money they have accumulated, then their mid-forties may indeed create a crisis. The researcher might add that this is often the time when, simultaneously, they are raising adolescents. In the opinion of the researcher Rosen (1999:136) effectively sums up the quest for meaning at this time:

> A man will find himself examining his life and wondering whether his work and his marriage have met his expectations. He is less likely to consider the question of whether he has met the expectations of others. Many men at this stage seize the opportunity to affect a midcourse correction and focus on deepening family ties, carving out recreational opportunities, reconnecting with extended family, renegotiating their marriages, and intensifying efforts to spend more time with their children.

However, this confluence of predictable life cycle crises may also result in men suddenly confronting their mortality, contemplating leaving, retreating from contact with their wives, turning to drugs, to alcohol or to an extramarital affair.

This evaluation process is not unusual when one considers the issues of gender-role conflict and strain, which is defined by O'Neill (1982:10) as a psychological state where gender roles have negative consequences or impact on the person or on others. These negative consequences occur when there is a discrepancy or conflict between the real self and the ideal self-concept that is culturally associated with gender. The ultimate outcome of this conflict may be the restriction of the person's ability to actualise their human potential.

Balswick (1992:143-147) offers insights with regard to the other adult stages of a man's life cycle:

- *Young adulthood* (ages 22-28) means that men need to set about developing a workable adult life structure. This might include gaining a full-time job, living on their own and getting married. There may be a tentative quality to this period, with a need to explore possibilities, to keep their options open and to avoid "premature strong commitments". For these reasons, this period may be experienced as both confusing and exciting;

- The *age thirty transition* (ages 28-33) is a period of re-evaluation in which a man might decide that he is either happy with the choices that he has made or finds himself with a "last chance" to do what he really wants to do - an example would be a person who is unhappy in their work;

- The *settling down period* (ages 33-39) amounts to a second attempt at adult life structure. Here a man invests deeply in work, family, friendships, leisure, community or whatever is most important to him. Gone is his earlier

tentativeness. He also begins to seriously climb the occupational ladder and is generally very busy, as the demands of fathering also require him to spend a good deal of time with his children;

- The *midlife transition* (ages 40-45) follows a period towards the end of the settling down stage when a man may begin to assess the progress he has made in view of the goals he has set up for himself. If he has not reached these goals or does not feel that he has achieved in line with others, he may experience a crisis of self-esteem. Alternatively, he may realise that he has spent too little time with his children, who are now unresponsive when he tries to reach out to them;

- In *middle age*, men with high ego integration live with a confidence that their life has meaning, value and direction. However, for men who were born into an atmosphere of distrust rather than trust, life may have been experienced as a series of failures to master the primary developmental tasks at each stage. Lacking the needed inner resources, such men experience mature adulthood as a state of "ego despair". Thus, the accumulated strengths or deficiencies in men's lives at this stage have a profound impact on their experience thereof;

- A *late adulthood transition* begins for most men at around age sixty and continues until retirement at around age sixty-five. This is the time when men need to conclude the efforts of middle adulthood and prepare for retirement. In other words, they begin to disengage from situations, relationships and commitments that have held or even driven them during their years of mature adulthood. For some men, retirement becomes a difficult adjustment - for example, they may be too tied to accomplishment. For more fortunate men, retirement, late adulthood represents "the pot of gold at the end of the rainbow".

### 3.6.3 Men and their family roles

Dennerstein and Farish as referred to by Oakley and Rigby (1998:104) note that families appear to be better for men's health than for women's. Family life seems to be one of the conditions of ordinary life that depresses women. In a similar vein, Pleck and Lang as well as Douvan (both in Bernard, 1992:213) found that family roles and values are psychologically a greater priority than either work or the work role itself. A supportive, though slightly different view is offered by Rapmund and Moore (2000:21) who state that women seem to experience stress in roles and role-related activities. The authors furthermore add that according to Walters (1993:397) women often make an attempt to be everything that everyone around them wants them to be (Rapmund & Moore, 2000:21).

According to Pittman (1992:375) masculinity has little to do with being married; to be a husband means more than the art of acting macho. To be a husband means "to take thrifty care of domestic affairs". Elliott (1996:83) states that family breadwinning is presumed to be of secondary importance in women's lives, but to be not only men's primary responsibility but also the basis for their masculine identity and even central to their status and authority in family life and the wider society. This was not the case years ago in the old subsistence economy in which husbands and wives ran farms, shops, or businesses together. There, a man could be regarded as a good, steady worker, but he would not typically be seen as the provider in the household (Bernard, 1992:204). Despite that, Clarke and Popay (1998:203) highlight a significant gap in our understanding of men and family roles: "The actual meanings and definitions attached by men to fatherhood, and their personal experiences of fathering, are themselves unclear from the literature. We still have little knowledge of how most men perceive fatherhood."

Interestingly, Balswick (1992:154) mentions that he believes there to be a "crisis of fathering" today and explains that this situation has its roots in the Industrial Revolution and the resulting separation between work and family that removed

fathers from the home. The result, he says, is the existence of an entire generation of men who have been less emotionally bonded with their fathers than have men of previous generations. Not having been fathered themselves has left them without the knowledge of how to be fathers toward their own children. Fathers have thus been able to commit themselves only to a lifetime of hard work and economic support of their family. It is this, then, that has become a part of the ethic of traditional masculinity. (Compare Rosen, 1999:127 and Bly as quoted by Erkel, 1992:350.) Yet, Pittman (1992:377) insists, theories of human development keep assuming that fathers are there, actually living in the same house with the rest of the family, performing some useful functions, interacting emotionally with his wife and children, playing a role in his son's life and generally being a model for the boy! Faludi (2000:375) adds that even events such as World War II contributed to a situation where fathers were physically and psychologically lost.

Farrell in Rosen (1999:127) has argued that marriage is an unfair arrangement for men because women have many more options and men are stuck with only one choice: to work full-time. Balswick (1992:159) is in agreement, describing men's jobs outside the home as a "structural barrier to fathering". Indeed, Bernard (1992:207) informs us that there were both costs and rewards for those men attached to the good-provider role, the most serious cost perhaps being the identification of maleness not only with the work site but especially with success in the role. The above does not tell the full story: Balswick (1992:159) explains that for approximately eight hours a day, the father is in an environment that tends to reinforce his initial tendencies not to be nurturing. It does so by stressing rationality and emotional control rather than emotional expression. By way of additional obstacles to fathering, the author goes on to say that:

> Society expects a mother to give up her job, should it interfere with her relationship to her children, and if the family can possibly do without the income; but the father is expected to give priority to his job over his role as a parent. Finally, as a barrier to the development of deep, meaningful

bonding between a father and his children, the legal system plays down the father-child relationship in that divorce courts usually give the mother custody of the children and relegate the father to the position of a periodic visitor. Fathers can be brought into court for failing to support their children financially, but little is done about the absence of emotional support from fathers.

According to Rosen (1999:135) fathering, which he defines as "the active, and intimate involvement in the lives of one's children - is frequently diluted for and by men to the comfortable notion of "quality time". His view is that contemporary fathers appear to be caught in an either-or dilemma regarding their roles as parents: either they relinquish the role to their wives because they believe themselves incapable or too responsible for the real-world tasks to do it themselves, or they assume the most superficial dimensions of the role, since even that is "more than their fathers did". Clarke and Popay (1998:202) are in agreement, stating that the one theme emerging from a number of studies on the meanings that men and women attach to fatherhood and parenthood, is the disparity between stated beliefs and actual behaviour. They mention, for example, that the findings of Brannen and Moss (1987) were that while lip service was paid to an egalitarian ideology, women in "dual-earner" households were still doing the bulk of the work and bearing most responsibility. (Compare Aronowitz, 1995:312.) LaRossa (1992:528) even suggests that at some level fathers seem to have internalised the idea that they should be more involved with their children, yet on another level of consciousness they do not find the idea all that enticing. As a result, they might be there in body but not in spirit.

It is clear from the article by Balcom (1991:169) that men's socialisation also has an impact on their relationships with life partners. He suggests that boys, having been rewarded for hiding their vulnerability, become men who find the emotional world frightening owing to the wrong training, on one hand, and inadequate preparation on the other. They find intimate relationships to be a frightening adult

task. Although they have learned to fear closeness, they still seek it by virtue of their humanity. A struggle ensues in which men can only tolerate relationships through a denial of their dependency. Because they emphasise accomplishments rather than emotion, they are perplexed and intimidated by the latter. (Compare Rosen, 1999:131.) Balswick (1992:15) offers a glimpse of what the cost is to the female partners of such men: they invest themselves in the relationship, only to discover that in return they are receiving very little in the way of emotional support.

Pittman in Rosen (1999:133) stresses that for a man, "the most terrifying thing he can imagine is making a commitment to an equal, honest, intimate relationship with a woman". Rosen (1999:133) adds that this notion has been so consistently reinforced as to create a self-fulfilling prophecy in which men are led to believe that their masculinity cannot survive closeness with the opposite sex.

With reference to the self-distancing that is so often, as has already been discussed, a part of a depressed person's profile, it is interesting to note that Jack (1999:224) makes mention of the withdrawal behaviour that men so often display. His view of such behaviour is that it may be intended to create distance and to control women's emotional, engaging style. In this way, the author concludes, the man may be seeking to control the interaction in a relationship. Somehow, this possible attempt at control does not seem unusual, given the fact that Faludi (2000:9) makes the following profound statement: "Men cannot be men, only eunuchs, if they are not in control." After all, Pittman (1992:369) states that masculinity on the one hand has connoted strength and activity in protection of the family, but on the other hand it has also connoted escape from domesticity and resistance to the control of women!

It also appears to be true that men are experiencing some confusion as to their roles. According to Balswick (1992:13) most of them have learned a traditional image of manhood that has formed the basis of their masculine identity. The

author explains, however, that as traditional definitions of gender roles have been called into question, they find that they are sometimes criticised for being who they were taught to be and doing what they were taught to do. This author believes that men sometimes engage in what he believes to be a number of unhelpful reactions: one is to react negatively and defensively to all changes combined with attempts to restore gender roles to what they were in an idealised past. Another reaction is to simply welcome all new definitions of masculinity as they are introduced (Balswick, 1992:203).

In the opinion of the researcher, a crucial point is made by Bernard (1992:214) who states that regardless of how men feel these days about the restrictions and the burdens placed on them by the role of the good provider, most have, at least ostensibly, accepted them, despite the fact that desertion and divorce occurred even as far back as colonial times. For this reason, the researcher considers the view of Jack (1999:238) to be a logical one. He states that having been given more permission from the culture to be aggressive on their own behalf and living in a social world in which their dominance is still most often assumed, their dilemmas appear to have less to do with fears of asserting their voices in a relationship and more to do with feeling inadequate in gender-specific roles, such as breadwinner, successful professional, or father, or with revealing vulnerability to others. Sidel (1992:500) even states that some men leave because they feel that they cannot live up to their roles as fathers because they cannot live up to their roles as breadwinners. Based on this comment, the researcher thinks, it might even be the case that the breadwinner role is first and foremost in a man's mind.

Bernard (1992:209) explains that as we know, not everyone lives up to the specifications laid down by roles. Two extremes in this regard have attracted research attention: (a) the men who could not live up to the norms of the good-provider role or did not want to at one extreme, and (b) the men who overperformed the role, at the other.

In reviewing all of the above literature on family roles, the researcher concludes that two broad factors have played a role in developing male views on family roles up until the present time. The first of these is that of historical events: the role of breadwinner is relatively new and that its emergence has largely been the result of industrialisation and the associated "advancement". In recent generations fewer men have enjoyed the privilege of having a male role model in their lives from whom to really learn the art of what it means to be a father or husband, or indeed, what it means to be a man. The second factor is the actual socialisation of men to behave in a certain way. For this reason, the researcher holds that it is very much a case of "Nature plus Nurture" as opposed to "Nature versus Nurture" for the simple reason that had history done to women what it has done to men, the resultant effects might well have been different simply by virtue of women having been raised differently from men.

## 3.7 CONCLUSION

In order to create a complete background for this study, with its intended constructivist flavour, it was necessary for the researcher to focus upon providing the reader with an understanding of the experience of depression as well as the major theoretical viewpoints with regard to the disorder. The centrality in depression of constructs such as role, identity, self and meaning were discussed because of their constructivist tendencies. Thereafter it was necessary to offer some kind of an impression of what it means to be a man and how men view themselves or even their family roles. Research of this nature as it relates to both depressed and non-depressed persons is not exactly abundant, which clearly indicates the need for studies such as the intended one.

In the next chapter, the researcher will present, in the form of three case studies, her empirical data as gathered for the purposes of the present research project.

Using a constructivist approach, some of the possible meanings and interpretations that may be derived from this data, are explored in detail.

# CHAPTER 4

# PRESENTATION OF EMPIRICAL DATA

## 4.1   INTRODUCTION

The two foregoing chapters have offered, respectively, a detailed description of the two key elements of the study: In Chapter 2, the major types of constructivism were delineated and the relationship of constructivism with certain concepts salient to the study of depression was discussed. Thereafter, in Chapter 3, some general insight was offered into the world of persons who experience depression. In the latter portion of the chapter, specific emphasis was afforded the experience of being a male.

In the present chapter the researcher will present the empirical data obtained during the fieldwork phase of her study. This presentation commences by way of a brief description of the use of the interview schedule, and continues with a family background of each case study. This is accompanied by a genogram to illustrate family relationships more clearly. Thereafter comes a narrative, as obtained from each respondent, with regard to the experience he has had of his family roles and depression. This is followed, finally, by a co-construction of some of the possible meanings and implications emanating from these stories.

## 4.2   RESEARCH PROCEDURES

As has already been indicated in the first chapter of this study, the researcher wished to interview persons who meet the following criteria:

- Male
- Caucasian
- Working (whether an employee or self-employed)
- Identified as experiencing depression but already in the recovery phase (in the sense that some therapy has been undergone)
- Family man (married/cohabiting with or without children)

Upon embarking on the empirical phase of her study, the researcher found herself in the difficult position of having to deal with some extremely time-consuming problems as far as the recruitment of respondents for case study purposes was concerned. Following the completion, at Vista Clinic, of the proposed pilot study, not one of the nine psychiatrists approached in person by the researcher was able to refer to her any additional suitable patients. In an effort to recruit, she then approached three of the psychologists at the clinic. One responded by providing the researcher almost immediately with three potential candidates. Two of these were eventually included in the study. The third was in the throes of some personal problems which, despite his initial willingness to participate, ultimately made it impossible for him to do so.

Meanwhile, the researcher contacted two members of the South African Police Services' Social Work Services. The impression gained by the researcher was that although these persons or their juniors (with whom the project was discussed) may have known of at least one suitable candidate, this male person experiencing depression was unwilling to participate in a study such as this. Of two Police Services chaplains subsequently approached by the researcher, one agreed to read her research proposal. However, he later indicated that from a confidentiality point of view, he did not see his way clear to discuss the possibility of participation with any of his clients. Finally, the researcher's third case study respondent was recruited via a social worker in private practice.

Suitable respondents for the study were selected as follows: Having identified certain persons on their caseload as meeting not only the DSM-IV criteria for depression, but also the aforementioned criteria set by the researcher, the aforementioned psychologist and social worker then discussed with their respective clients the possibility of inclusion in the study. Once these clients had indicated that they would have no objection to participating in the study, their names and personal contact details were submitted to the researcher. It was then her responsibility to contact them and to arrange suitable appointments with them, as required. During an initial introductory meeting with each respondent, the consent form (Annexure A) was signed, and the researcher talked to them about their understanding of depression as well as the symptoms that they themselves had been experiencing.

A total of three to four clinical interviews was conducted with each respondent included in the study. In keeping with a constructivist approach, it was from these interviews that the empirical data for the study was obtained. Every effort was made to allow respondents to feel relaxed and free to talk. This required flexibility on the part of the researcher in the sense that she had to be willing to meet with respondents at a venue of their choice. Consequently, interviews with Case Study *B* took place in the researcher's office whilst Case Study *C* was interviewed in *his* office. The interviews with Case Study *A*, on the other hand, were conducted in a more social setting, since he had indicated that he would feel uncomfortable meeting with the researcher in an office environment.

The purpose of these semi-structured face-to-face sessions was to allow each man to narrate his story as he related it to his experience of depression and family roles. It was the duty of the researcher, as co-author of the narrative, to simply manage the conversation in such a manner that a family background or history was obtained, as well as information pertaining to the interview schedule topics. It was essential also for her to ensure that included in the story would be an indication of the man's constructions relating to his family roles both before and

during the experience of depression. Here the researcher's interview schedule was used as a guide. It should be borne in mind, however, that for purposes of later effective and relevant content analysis, a narrator whose story emerges by way of semi-structured interviews must be permitted to express the curves and turns in his life as he or she sees fit. In this way, a better understanding of its significant moments is obtained, as opposed to what would have been gathered had the telling of the story been restricted to a logical movement through an *a priori* constructed interview schedule. Respondents were permitted to offer their family background as they saw fit, with some guidance from the researcher. Questions pertaining to the research objectives as identified in Chapter 1 were approached by way of six topics noted in the interview schedule. As explained above, these topics did not emerge in a logical or necessarily chronological fashion during the interviews but nevertheless covered the following areas:

- Firstly, a delineation of family roles to be obtained from respondents would need to include a listing of their perceived family roles. Circumstances behind changes in these perceived roles would also have to be explored to some extent so that these would not become confused with potential changes resulting from feelings of depression.

- Secondly, respondents would be interviewed about their initial constructions regarding their family roles. This would include an indication of respondents' perceptions about the origins of these constructions and how they had been shaped by family background and other social influences.

- The third research topic on the interview schedule related to the circumstances under which respondents entered their perceived family roles. Perceptions about whether or not they felt they had had a choice in the matter would be included, as well as expectations with regard to these roles.

- Topic four would ensure that the researcher explored respondents' actual experience of their family roles, including a comparison of this experience with their initial expectations. Feelings and perceptions pertaining to the total experience would be looked at also, in keeping with the somewhat holistic nature of constructivism.

Despite the researcher's intention that this study should be of an *exploratory* rather than an explanatory nature, she nevertheless views questions related to the first four topics contained in the interview schedule as the providers of *baseline* or even *control* information in that they do not contain specific references to depression. This could foreseeably act as a measure to prevent confusion with regard to the origins of feelings and experiences.

- The fifth topic in the interview schedule concerned respondents' perception of their own family role functioning, with specific reference to their ratings of themselves in these roles and the criteria they used in order to evaluate themselves. This topic indirectly introduces the idea of depression into the interview situation, as a part of the respondents' experience of their family roles would have included a time when feelings of depression were present.

- The sixth and final topic below directly introduces the element of depression with a view to understanding how, if at all, respondents' family role constructions changed once such feelings were perceived to be present. This topic was designed to assist in the exploration of any changes that may have occurred in the family role constructions of respondents since the onset of an experience of depression. Questions related to this topic would cover changes in the areas listed as previous topics, namely: changes in listing of family roles, changes that may have taken place with regard to the initial constructions the respondents might have had with regard to their family roles. Also included would be changes in the expectations and experiences the

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respondents have of their family roles. Finally, changes in respondents' perception of their family role functioning would be covered under this topic.

The researcher discovered, whilst engaged in the study, that in many ways the constructivist approach to meaning interpretation makes quite unique demands upon the social scientist. These include the ability to listen carefully in order to gain an understanding of the respondents' experience world and pivotal life moments. This is particularly true of a situation where no tape recorders are employed, as was the case in this study. Furthermore, the identification of implied meaning and significance must be accomplished without falsely assuming anything and without misquoting the interviewee or allowing important themes under investigation to remain unexplored.

It should be mentioned that the researcher realised from the outset of the empirical data collection phase that she needed to be prepared for the possible entry of themes such as masculinity and self-esteem into the narratives of the respondents, for these had featured quite prominently in her literature study. She discovered that she then had to be in a position to link these with her chosen research areas of role and depression, for in many cases one could not be meaningfully evaluated without the other.

## 4.3    CASE STUDY NARRATIVES

### 4.3.1    Case Study *A*

#### 4.3.1.1    Family background

*A* was born in 1961 and is 41 years old. He knows that his mother had some siblings but has no details in this regard as there has been no contact with them for

as long as he can recall. He is the only child of his mother's second marriage. Her first husband passed away but *A* has no idea of when or how it happened. Not only did it happen before he was born but his mother also never spoke about any of her marriages, the first of which produced four children. The eldest of these, who used to work for a cement company, divorced his first wife then married a woman who was overly jealous and possessive towards him. *A* thinks that this was probably why he eventually committed suicide in 1978 by gassing himself. As far as *A* knows, the couple had two sons and possibly a daughter. *A* has no contact with them, so does not know what happened to the widow and children.

*A*'s second-eldest half-brother was the one to whom he felt closest. This brother and his wife never had any children and treated *A* almost like a son, fetching him for visits and taking him out with them. The brother used to work for a shoe retailer and did very well indeed for himself. He obtained his pilot's licence a long time ago and a few years back purchased a small aircraft, despite his wife's opposition to the idea. *A* and his wife were invited to see him fly not long afterwards. They were unable to attend as they had something else on that Sunday morning. Later they received a call from the brother's wife: the aircraft had run into trouble close to the ground and had crashed. *A*'s brother was instantly paralysed. He spent many months in hospital before he finally died in 2001. *A*'s own family and the widow have remained good friends. They are still in regular contact with one another.

It has been four or five years since *A* had contact with his third half-brother, who is married and has two sons in their early twenties. He lives in a well-to-do suburb of Pretoria and *A* describes him as "very larney". The last *A* knew, he was working for the Post Office. *A* does not know why it is that he never hears from his brother but assumes that for some strange reason he just doesn't want to have anything to do with him and his family.

*A*'s half-sister is 15 years older than he. She also lives in Pretoria and *A* gets to see her quite often. She has been married for many years now to a man who used to drink and sometimes even beat her up. As a result, *A* once hit him with a baseball bat! According to *A*, the man has fortunately long since ceased that kind of behaviour and the marriage appears to be a good one. The couple has three daughters who are now in their early twenties.

*A* was only three years old when his father died in 1964 of a heart attack. *A* does not remember him or know when his parents were married. In fact, all that he knows about his father is that he was an engineer. When *A* was in primary school, his mother married once again. This third husband was a crane operator. *A* did not feel close to him. Eighteen months after the wedding he died when one of the main arteries feeding into his aorta burst.

According to *A*, neither he nor his siblings ever had the feeling that any one of them was favoured above the others. By contrast, he states that he got along well with all of them, as they also did with one another. He describes his mother as having been a very "normal" mother in that she was loving but strict. She was a soft, gentle-natured person but one would not do well to disobey her rules or to step on her toes. In raising her children she emphasised the importance of being tidy and of not being lazy. If she had issued an order and it had not been carried out, one had to explain what had happened and then immediately carry it out. *A* observed that when her third husband passed away, she seemed able to move on with her life. She died in 1988 of organ failure, having originally broken her hip. *A* feels that he is much like his mother in his ability simply to carry on: though he was sad about losing her, he did not cry.

*A* thought that marriage would offer him an opportunity to love a wife and children and to provide for them. He expected this to be a positive experience. He married for the first time in 1983. The couple had a daughter who must be almost 19 years old now. He admits that, whereas he regards himself as belonging to the

middle class, his wife came from a low-class family whose ways (which included the abuse of alcohol) were not his. In 1994 he filed for divorce after catching her in bed with another man. She begged him to take her back but he was adamant. His ex-wife went "downhill", he says, after the divorce. He paid maintenance regularly and was very fond of his daughter but he lost touch with both the child (who must now be about 18 years old) and her mother. When asked by the researcher how it happened that they lost touch, he stated that he did not know. It was very obvious to the researcher that *A* was extremely reluctant to discuss his first marriage, especially his daughter and the loss of contact. Consequently she did not press him for details in this part of his narrative.

Sometime during 1985 or 1986 *A* met the woman who would later become his second wife. They married in 1987 and have two sons who were born in 1991 and 1994 respectively. His wife had never been married before and has no children from any previous relationships. She is a branch manager for a retail outfit. *A* describes the relationships within the nuclear family between himself, his wife and his two sons as being very good, despite the fact that the marriage has had its fair share of ups and downs, particularly as *A*'s depression deepened.

The reader is referred to Figure 1, on the following page, for clarity.

FIGURE 1: GENOGRAM OF CASE STUDY A'S FAMILY
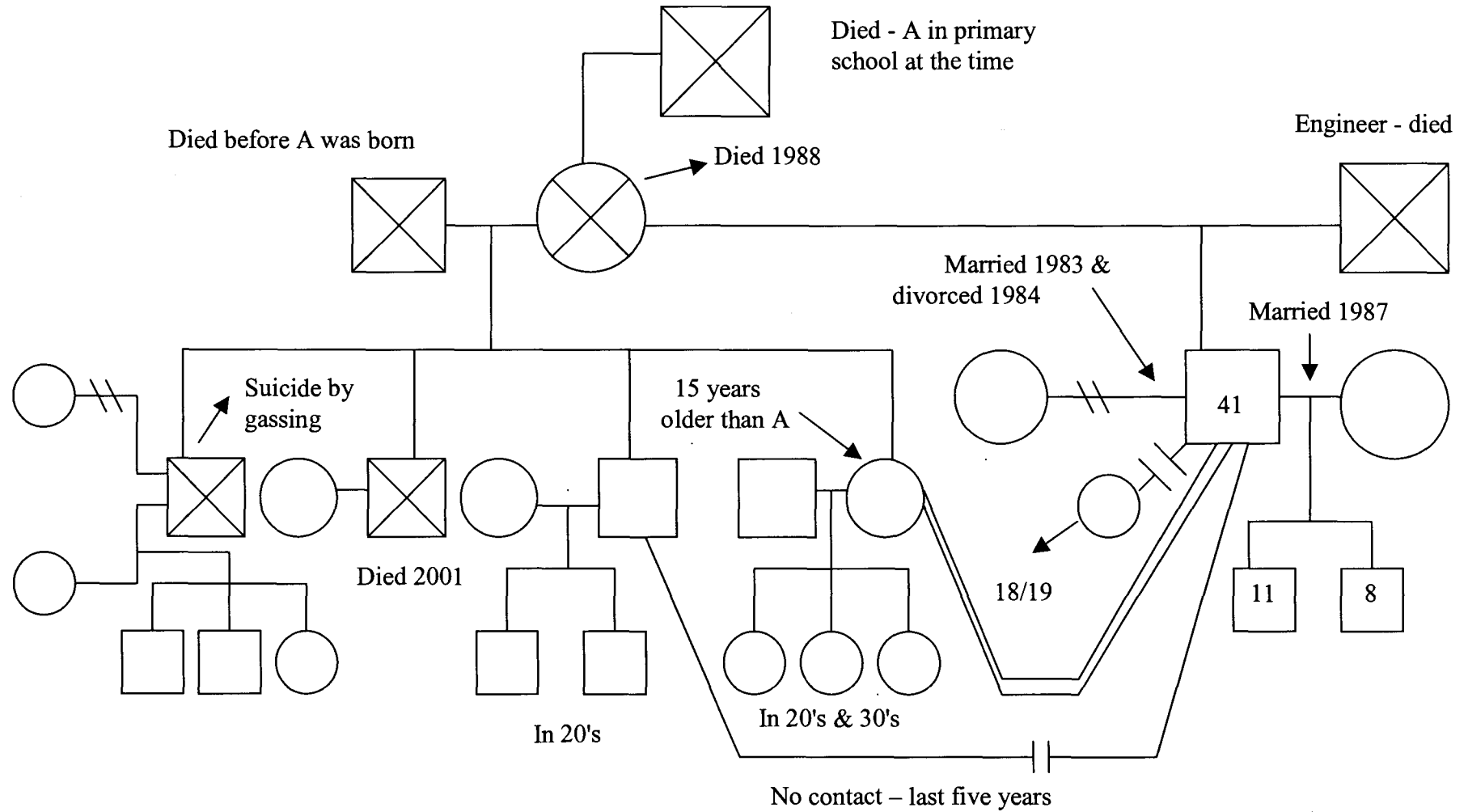
### 4.3.1.2 Experience of depression and family roles

According to *A*, his depression had its origins at work. Though he had originally planned on completing a trade, he later decided to accept a position with a government department. By 1995 he had been with the department for many years and had up until that time been very happy there. At around this time, however, he increasingly began to feel that after South Africa's change of government, he and other colleagues were being undermined in their attempts to do their job. He was charged with negligence on one occasion but was exonerated of all blame. This event did not cause him undue stress, as he had known that he was blameless. Being undermined on a daily basis was the real problem, particularly as he liked to do his work according to the prescribed rules that had always applied in the job situation. Furthermore, he felt that colleagues on the whole did not stand together, preferring instead to sell one another out in order to cover themselves. As a result he found himself looking forward less and less to a day at work.

As a result of the above factors which caused unhappiness and distress for *A* in the workplace from about 1996, he began to experience various symptoms which he understands to be those of depression. These were to last for several years and are still with him to some extent: he became irritated and unreasonable towards his wife and children: the slightest thing would annoy him and he would then take out his frustrations on them by shouting at them or, in the case of the children, immediately saying "no" to any request they came up with.

Unlike many of his colleagues at the time, *A* never used - and still does not use - alcohol as a means of coping with his frustrations, so he found himself increasingly sidelined by these colleagues. In any event, he did not feel like talking to anyone. Even when visitors would come to his house, he would come out and briefly greet them before retiring inside. They started to wonder why he was so uninterested. Gradually his remaining friends withdrew. As time went by he felt more and more "down" and alone. He also discovered that he no longer felt

like participating in any of the activities that he had previously enjoyed, such as fishing. He had simply lost interest in them. His sex life suffered, as did his general relationship with his wife and children. He was "boarded" in 2000, having eventually been declared medically unfit for work by the mental health professionals to whom he was referred. He receives a monthly government pension and now runs his own small removals and deliveries business from home. He is still on his prescribed anti-depressants.

*A* says that the depression has taken a huge "bite" out of his life. He used to be very happy with the way in which he was fulfilling his family roles and he wishes he could get back to where he thinks he was about six years ago, in this regard. At that time he felt as though he was succeeding 120 per cent. At present he feels that he is only succeeding to a level of about 30 per cent. This is a big improvement, he admits, for there were times when he felt like he was at minus 30 per cent! However, though he knows that he has a long way to go, he is absolutely determined to dig himself out of this hole. The problem, as he perceives it, is that he finds his struggle against depression to be a day-to-day one: some mornings he will feel all right but the next he might feel awful. *A* feels that he really was "broken" at one time and, as the psychologist he consulted prior to going on medical pension told him, "One can fix something that is broken but the cracks will always be there." He still feels "cracked".

*A* says that since his mother passed away some years ago, he is no longer anyone's son. He views his family roles as being those of husband to his second wife, as well as father to his two sons. In his opinion, certain principles must be borne in mind: a husband must be head of the household and must "call the shots" as it were. His wife must be subservient to him - here *A* mentioned that the Bible is of this view also. He added that by subservience he did not mean that a wife should be inferior to or dominated by, her husband, but simply that he should take care of her. To him, being a husband means being loving, which he understands as helping his wife out wherever possible and listening to her problems. It is also his

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duty to provide properly for his wife and so be the household breadwinner. Similarly, *A* believes that a father ought to be someone whose children listen to him. They should also obey and respect him. He must provide for their needs but should also be loving in the sense that he must be willing to listen to their problems and to help them wherever possible.

*A* was raised seeing the aforementioned principles in action: he was obviously not able to learn first-hand from his father how a husband or a father ought to behave, but he observed the principles in his siblings' marriages. As far as he could see, they were principles that worked really well. He does realise that things have changed over the years in that women now have more opportunities to enter into fields of work to which they previously had little access. Nevertheless, he is of the opinion that a more traditional role fulfilment made marriages last longer: there was less divorce, at least. The researcher asked him whether he thought the lower divorce rate of before could be viewed simply as a reflection of women experiencing a lack of alternatives beyond staying with their husbands, in the absence of an income of their own. He acknowledged that this could perhaps be the case. He believes that children were also better brought up under the old system.

According to *A*, he has observed that very often men like him, whose wives earn more than they do, develop an inferiority complex as a result of this state of affairs. There were times when it caused a degree of conflict between himself and his wife but they succeeded in resolving the issue years ago. He notes that for many people, the world revolves around money. He himself acknowledges that money is important, but it is not the most important aspect of life. For him, it is largely about building a happy home and positive family relationships. In fact, he has noticed that in many obviously wealthy homes where he has had to pick up or deliver goods, there are marriages that clearly are not happy ones. He also thinks that it is important not to try to impress people with money when you really can't

afford to do so. He has never fallen into that trap and quite recently confronted someone who was looking down at him because of the old car he drives.

According to *A*, when one is able to fulfil one's role as a husband or as a father using the criteria he mentioned, it is a truly wonderful feeling. In particular, it made him feel important, as though he had the ability to keep his family happy. It made him feel like a leader and a provider in the household when his wife or sons asked him for something and he was able to say "yes" to them. He stated that it also felt good to be in the presence of his wife when she told their friends about something good that he had done for her, adding that the researcher should bear in mind that there is always tremendous competition amongst men to excel at this. Knowing that one has a partner who can be trusted definitely does, he believes, assist in relieving one's stress levels. It was these rewards that *A* hoped for when he entered into each of his marriages and became a father. However, his attitude regarding those expectations differed somewhat from one marriage to the next: when he went into his first marriage, he did realise that one cannot have ideas about how things are going to work that are too fixed. By way of illustration, he used the analogy of deciding that in one week's time you want to spray your cellular phone blue, only to find that when the time comes, there is no blue spray paint to be found in the whole of South Africa! Thus, though he hoped that the marriage would be for keeps and that he would enjoy these benefits, he did not have terribly fixed ideas on how he was actually going to conduct it.

*A* is not of the opinion that the failure of his first marriage was in any way his fault. Again, he used an analogy to explain to the researcher what he meant by this: whenever you have a car, you are aware that you need to look out for trouble spots like when one of the lights on your dashboard goes on. In his second marriage, *A* found that he became increasingly sensitive to looking out for signs that something was wrong. His depression simply heightened this tendency. For example, if his wife told him that she would be attending a meeting after work, he would immediately and with great suspicion want to find out exactly where it was

and what it was all about. After his first marriage, he felt just like a car owner: it was as though, having owned a Volkswagen which started out looking as though it would offer him what he wanted, he serviced it to the best of his ability only to find that it left him in the lurch after all due to a manufacturing fault. But that did not put him off having another car, this time a Toyota.

*A* says it has never occurred to him that it might not be a good idea to be a husband and father because in principle these roles, with their benefits, appeal to him even though he would prefer that they not be in the form or state in which they are currently, due to his illness. He has always thought that a happy marriage is a stress-reliever. The responsibilities that come with being a husband and father are heavy ones, but he has always taken these on with pleasure. They have never been a burden to him. He added that this is after all what men have always done since the earliest of times. In addition, *A* has never felt as though he has lost anything as a result of marrying and having children. However, he did jokingly mention that since he got married, he has not been able to participate in rallies. He once took his wife along as navigator during a night race and she was not only terribly frightened but she also made it very clear that she did not particularly want him to continue with this sport! However, *A* told the researcher that this really is not an issue. In a similar vein, *A*'s ideas about husbandry and fatherhood in general have not changed with the onset of depression despite changes in his view of the manner and success with which he is fulfilling these roles.

Far from being in a position to put extra effort into his family roles and relationships in the face of increasing unhappiness at work, *A* found that these roles also began to suffer. It is his interpersonal relating towards his wife and children at which he is presently working extremely hard and which cause him considerable worry. If anything, these are the roles he has neglected as a result of his depression. He explained as follows, how depression has affected his opinion of himself as a husband and father: with the onset of the condition he discovered that he was becoming more and more irritable. As a result, his wife and children

withdrew from him. Nowadays they don't seem to ask him things anymore. Even when his wife finds that a lightbulb needs replacing, she prefers simply to do it herself rather than ask him. This makes him feel worthless, as though he is not good enough anymore. He does admit that since he has become depressed, he does have a tendency at times (despite his efforts to the contrary) to lapse into feelings of despair and of not caring what happens. It is as though it all just becomes too much for him. He furthermore admitted to the researcher that he had previously tried to gas himself in his car but his wife found him in the garage and stopped him from carrying out his intentions. It has never occurred to him to murder his wife and children. His opinion is that when men do that, their heads have somehow snapped out of joint.

## 4.3.2   Case Study *B*

### 4.3.2.1   Family background

*B*, who has born and raised in another province, has just turned thirty. He began his story by informing the researcher that he comes from a highly "dysfunctional" family. He is nevertheless not angry at his parents today, despite everything that has happened. He had only one other sibling, a sister who was a housewife. She was fifteen months older than he. Unfortunately she passed away last year as a result of kidney stones combined with pancreatic poisoning, leaving behind a husband and two sons aged five and three years respectively. Both children are now living with *B*'s parents. *B*'s brother-in-law is a tyre builder and the couple had experienced serious financial troubles over a period of time because they spent money indiscriminately on unimportant purchases. After his wife's death, *B*'s brother-in-law was so upset and confused that he resigned from his job and is now unemployed. *B*'s parents are telling the boys that their father does not care about them, which infuriates *B*. *B* would very much like to help his brother-in-law to get back on his feet so that he can take his children back. *B* still feels very guilty about his sister's death. He was quite close to her and wishes that there was

something he could have done to save her. As it was, though, she only mentioned her physical discomfort after much suffering and by the time she was admitted to hospital it was already almost too late. Meanwhile, her parents are boasting about the fact that they have obtained custody of their grandchildren, which is not the case. They insist that their son-in-law was having an affair whilst their daughter was still alive. *B* says that there is absolutely no evidence whatsoever that he was ever involved with anyone. Besides, *B* told his parents that they were a fine lot to talk.

*B*'s parents have been married for 32 years but there have been many problems in the marriage. His father, who is fifty-three, is a fitter and turner who was retrenched some time ago. His mother is one year younger and is a housewife. *B* says that although he got on reasonably well with his mother when he was younger, he really is tired of both his parents' nonsense: his father has had at least two affairs over the years. One of these was with *B*'s neighbour's mother, when *B* was staying in his own flat several years ago. *B* was so disgusted with the idea, particularly as his father insisted that he show some respect toward this woman, that he moved out. He describes his father as a very bombastic type of a person who sometimes has moods of extreme self-pity. *B* states that his mother is someone who just loves to laugh. She doesn't take anything seriously, which *B* finds really annoying. She also cannot work with money. This has meant that she has wasted a good deal of her husband's earnings over the years. One of the ways in which she has done this is to channel money to her elderly parents, who live close by. She and one of her sisters have done things with his money without his knowledge. Although *B* admits that his relationship with his father is not at all good, he still does not appreciate what is being done to him financially.

*B*'s maternal grandparents, both pensioners, are still alive. *B*'s mother has a twin sister who gambles heavily and is described by *B* as an aggressive person. She had an illegitimate son with an Italian man. This cousin is close to *B* in age and the two of them have a very good relationship. *B*'s other aunt was divorced years

ago from her husband, who died about two years ago. She has now become involved in a lesbian relationship. She has two daughters from her marriage. The eldest has never married, whilst the youngest has been married and divorced twice - to the same man! There are two young children - a son and a daughter. *B*'s uncle, his mother's youngest sibling, is divorced from his wife. He is also the one in the family who achieved some kind of tertiary education. His youngest son alternates between staying with his father and his mother, whilst the eldest son stays with his father and attends university from home.

*B*'s paternal grandfather passed away years before he was born. His grandmother died of cancer in 1979. *B*'s father is the youngest of three siblings. His eldest brother committed suicide in 1979 by shooting himself twice in the head. The couple had a son and three daughters. *B* has no idea where they are. There is no contact between the widow and the rest of the family. *B*'s father's sister was the second oldest sibling. She was unmarried and had no children. She was decapitated in an accident many years ago.

*B* met his wife in 1992 through a mutual friend. They later started dating and planned to marry in 1997. He expected marriage to be a positive experience, for what he sought, mainly, was a friend. Even during his engagement, *B* continued to flirt and engaged in a number of other relationships. He was also still drinking heavily. There was a baby on the way, however, so the wedding took place in late 1996. *B* says that from the moment he stood in front of the pulpit, he took his marriage vows very seriously. For one thing, he stopped having affairs and reduced his alcohol intake enormously. In March 1997 the couple's only child was born. He had always thought that having a child would be a rewarding experience for one would have the chance to love him or her and to offer guidance. According to *B*, his in-laws are totally different from his own family. His wife, who works for the South African Police Service, is the youngest of three children: her adopted brother is about a year older than her, whilst her half-sister is fifteen years older than her. The brother is not married, whilst the sister is happily

married with two daughters aged twenty-one and twenty-three respectively. *B*'s wife is the only child from her parent's marriage. The two older siblings are from her father's previous marriage. All of the relationships within the family are positive. Both of *B*'s parents-in-law are pensioners. His mother-in- law worked for a tyre manufacturer before becoming a housewife, whilst his father-in-law worked for a motor company.

The reader is referred to Figure 2, on the following page, for clarity.

**FIGURE 2:  GENOGRAM OF CASE STUDY B'S FAMILY**



Married 32 years

Married 1996
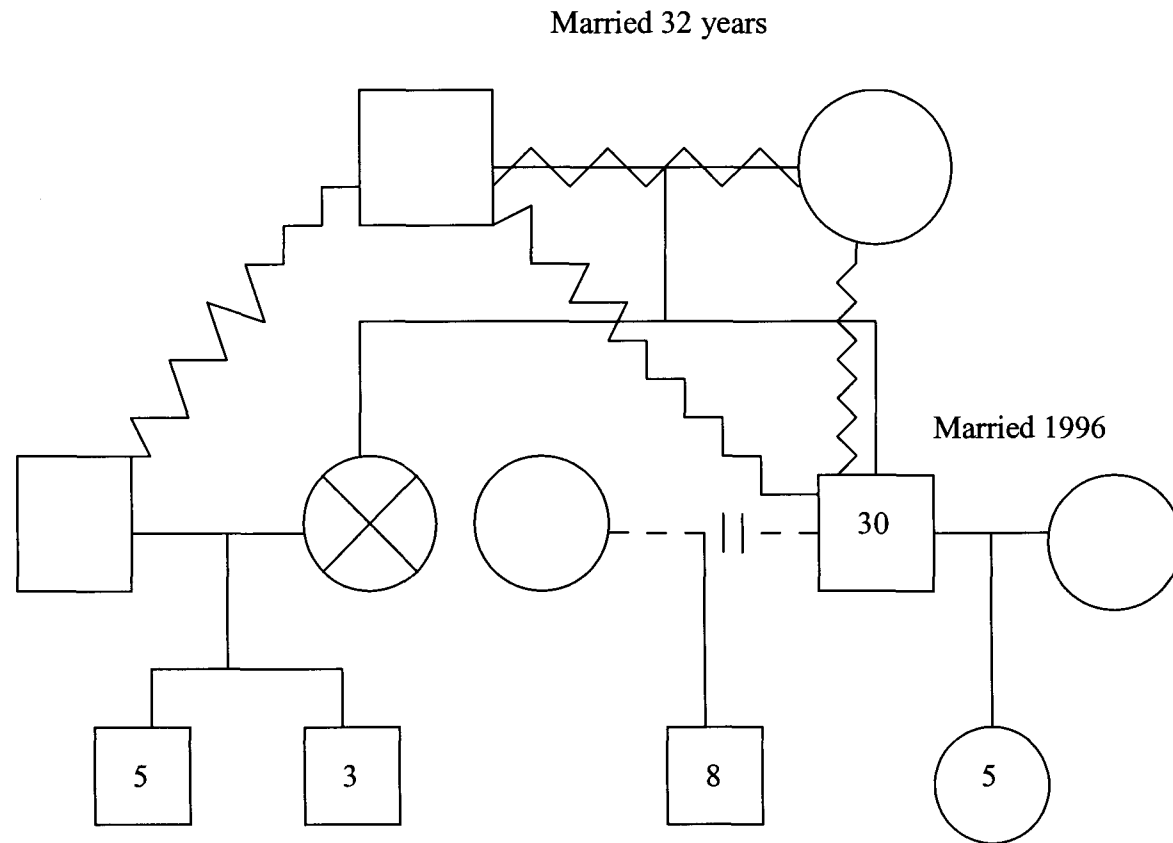
## 4.3.2.2 Experience of depression and family roles

It was always clear to *B* that both of his parents preferred his sister to him. His particularly troubled relationship with his father started when *B* was very young and has continued to deteriorate with every year, to the point where *B* did not even see him when he and his wife recently went to their home town on holiday. *B*'s wife's parents also live there but there is no contact between the two sets of in-laws. When *B* was in primary school he took up wrestling and did very well in this sport. His father supported him to some extent but when he later decided that he would rather play rugby and do some athletics, his father was furious. The result was that even when he excelled at the 1 200m event, his father did not support him or come to watch him run. The same situation prevailed when he made the school provincial rugby team, played Craven Week Rugby and participated in the Toyota Club Series.

Over the years *B* suffered numerous severe beatings at the hands of his father. Once, as a scholar, he was even knocked unconscious by him. *B* turned into a rebel and ran away from home several times during high school. Eventually he ran away at seventeen and joined the army. He never completed his final year of high school. The army was tough and he was very young, he says, to be in an environment like that, but he liked the discipline and has retained some of what he learned there in this regard. He does admit that he has pushed to the back of his mind many of his army experiences and reminded the researcher that there had been no psychological treatment offered to soldiers such as himself.

Over the years, *B* started to drink "too much". He was even "locked up" for driving under the influence of alcohol. He describes himself as having been a real "joller". He got into fights, had numerous "one-night stands" and several short-lived relationships. He also had two consecutive live-in relationships with women and has a son with one of them, a fact of which he was unaware for several years. He has no contact with the child or its mother. At one time *B* was engaged to a

woman who today is an advocate. Even back then she was earning more than him. Though she did not view this as a problem, he could not deal with this situation, which led to the end of the relationship.

When *B* had completed his military training, he rented his own flat and started to work for a government department as a security officer. He excelled and quickly received several promotions, despite the fact that he was so young. During this time he was also a Police Reservist. In 1996 he moved to another government department, again securing a position as a security officer - by this time he was a senior. He thinks that when he initially joined this department, he was viewed as a threat to others because he did his job so thoroughly.

Although *B* was initially very happy in the department where he is still employed, it really started to annoy him that rules and regulations were not being adhered to as strictly as had once been the case. He did very well indeed and only worked shifts for a very short time after joining. Thereafter he was always on day shift. He had a wonderful record and had caught many would-be thieves. He even won the "Employee of the Month" trophy several times. He made very good money working overtime, though, and felt that he and his wife were living "like kings".

According to *B*, things started to go wrong early in the year 2000 when, in a state of anger, he gently "pushed" a non-white co-worker, was accused of assault and was released from the supervisory position he held in his building to go back to doing shift work. Then came the worst part: in mid-2000 he was charged with having stolen several reams of government photocopy paper whilst leaving the building at the end of the previous day. He was immediately arrested but the criminal charges brought against him were later dropped as there was insufficient evidence. However, he was found guilty departmentally - without a proper trial. His outbursts of anger had increased dramatically by this stage. In an attempt to be placed on pension on medical grounds, he went to see the necessary mental health professionals and was diagnosed as suffering from depression and post-

traumatic stress disorder. He was admitted twice to Vista clinic. During one of these stays, he actually broke some of the furniture in an outburst. In the two years that have passed since the incident at work, *B* has sought legal assistance as well as support from the trade union of which he is not only a member but of which he himself used to be a representative. No one has been able to help and a decision has not yet been taken as to whether he should be "boarded". The latest news from work is that he will have to reapply for his own post. This announcement sent him into a rage and he chased away the two young officers who recently brought to his home the necessary documents for this.

According to *B*, being a husband means being a breadwinner and taking care of one's wife. He even says that the Bible is clear about this. As he does believe in God, the Bible and the hereafter, this fact is important to him. Personally he would love it if his wife could stay home and look after their daughter full-time but he knows that she is not the kind of person who would be able to do that - she likes going out to work so he would not like to deprive her of the opportunity to do so. *B* also believes that being a husband means being a partner - and a loving one at that. He considers himself to have been a very soft-hearted person in the past, adding that at school he was "a lover not a fighter".

*B* states that to him, being a father in the first place means offering guidance with regard to life. It also involves, in the second place, giving a child the love that he himself never had back then and applying discipline in a civil, respectable manner so that that child does not feel inferior. He is even trying to apply this principle in dealing with his sister's children, who are currently spending some time with him and who he admits are very naughty. He believes that as a husband and father a man should be a problem-solver and a protector. For example, he told the researcher that if anyone were ever to rape his wife, that person had better hope that he dies before *B* gets hold of him, because he would rearrange his face for him! It is also important that he make a success of himself and his life. He ought to be "something" - a person with self-respect as well as one with respect for

others. People should be able to look up to him. His views on family roles were gained from watching others, observing what works and what doesn't.

*B* stated that from his roles as husband and father, he had hoped first of all to find in his spouse a friend, someone with whom he could share his innermost problems and worries. He has enormous respect for his wife for she has been through hell and he realises that it is not every woman who would have put up with him and his rage. At times she has not only been a mother to their daughter but also to him. Marriage has turned out to be everything that he had hoped it would be and he does not feel that either it or fatherhood has stood in his way or prevented him from pursuing other roles or interests. Still, he has told his wife that if she wants to leave him, he will release her - she should just tell him if she is no longer up to the marriage. He has also found, in his daughter, his best friend. They have grown especially close since he has been the one at home taking care of her most of the time. *B* admits that before, his work came first in his life and he put in everything he had there. Regardless, it was by no means a case of his not caring for his wife and child. In fact, everything that he ever did, he did not for himself, but for them. *B* says that he loves his wife dearly but knows that if she should leave him, he will survive. He has even told her this. However, should something ever cause him to lose his child, he will no longer have anything to live for.

It has been very frustrating for *B* to sit at home doing nothing all this time, so much so that he began to drink heavily once again. He did go into business with an ex-colleague and friend for a while but they had a fall-out and so did not speak to one another for a very long time. This very same friend recently approached him with a new proposal, though, for what appears to be a potentially lucrative business. The contracts have been signed and are valid for a period of three years. It is this business in which he hopes to involve his brother-in-law. If that doesn't work out, he might even consider going to Ireland for six months, for he has heard from his neighbour that there is money to be made over there in truck-driving. He does have a heavy vehicle licence. His wife is not in favour of the idea. *B* has also

considered the possibility of pursuing some kind of a qualification in nature conservation, as this field has always interested him. He was busy with his National Diploma in Security when the incident at work occurred, but totally lost interest in his studies due to all the circumstances that followed.

B explained that throughout his working life he had always made a point of leaving his work-related issues at the office. He never brought them home with him, but when things became really impossible at work, he found that, far from being able to put extra effort into his home life, he has really just lost interest in everything. He knows that his marriage has suffered because of this. Whereas his wife used to tell him, for example, about regulations and prescriptions that were being discussed in her workplace, she now no longer consults him for advice or views on anything and tends to go along with what her colleagues say in spite of what he thinks. He feels offended: just because he is employed, yet not currently officially working, this does not mean that he doesn't know anything. On more than one occasion he has consequently told her that she is trying to be "smart" now. Nowadays, he admits, he has to some extent been trying to hurt those closest to him, which in most cases happens to be his wife. He added that his wife doesn't ask him to do anything around the house anymore, probably because she knows that he is not in the mood for it. He does acknowledge that he just doesn't feel like gardening, for one thing. He recently brought a Sony Playstation back from his holiday for someone here in Pretoria and he has been playing with it a great deal.

B says that his relationship with his wife has really suffered as a result of his depression. He understands that his wife has withdrawn to a great extent because he has withdrawn. There are times when he feels that it is no use talking to her because she wouldn't understand anyway, even though he knows that she is genuinely concerned. Most of the time, however, he just wants to be alone. Sometimes, instead of staying and talking to her about his feelings, he simply gets in his car and drives until he reaches a bar where he knows no one. He finds it pleasant to play a bit of pool with strangers he will never see again. One night he

got so drunk in such a bar that he passed out and when he came to, he could not even remember how he got there! His withdrawal includes the physical side of his relationship with his wife. He is just not interested in sex.

Then there are *B*'s outbursts of rage. There are times when he does not even realise what has made him angry, but he explodes instantly. Then he just wants to be alone and those are then usually the times when his wife wants to know what is wrong and tries to get him to talk. As soon as she starts with that, he warns her to please just leave him alone. Sometimes she does so but sometimes she carries on trying to get him to talk. Once it happened that before he really knew what had happened, he had slapped her and she started attacking him with her fists. He was so shocked by what he had done that he turned around, left the house and immediately went to a friend and told him that he had "done something terrible". *B* repeatedly spoke about the "blind rage" that he experiences at times. He is sometimes frightened by what he might do as a result of it, particularly when he thinks about what has happened to his happy life as a result of the unfair charges made against him at work. It is not only him who has suffered, but also his wife and daughter. It worries him that his daughter appears to be far more tearful than she used to be. Unfortunately he cannot afford to have her see a psychologist. He cannot even afford one for himself. He is no longer the same as he used to be and the family's financial security has been threatened. For example, *B* repeatedly mentioned that although he has been receiving his full monthly salary to date, he has lost an enormous amount of money because he has not had the opportunity to work overtime.

*B* indicated that it had always given him so much joy to be able to give his wife something she really wanted. Most recently, she gave him a watch for his birthday but he felt awful for not even being able to afford to buy her anything on her birthday. It used to be the case that all of his overtime money was used purely for spending. There was in fact scarcely a weekend when the three of them did not drive out somewhere and have a good time together. They had nice holidays more

often, as well. Now, *B* feels that their lifestyle has gone from that of "a king to a pauper". This, together with the effects of his withdrawal from his wife, have come to make him feel "useless" and purposeless - like a real flop or good-for-nothing. As he did earlier in his life, he does not feel that it is "manly" for him to be earning less than his wife. In totality, he feels that he is only living his family roles as husband and father to the level of about five or ten per cent. This is a severe drop, for prior to the arrest at work, he was at a level of about 120 per cent.

*B* has a firearm and says that one day not long ago he was sitting with it in his hand, ready to kill himself. Were it not for the fact that at that moment his daughter made a sound in the next room and he got up to go and see if anything was wrong, he is convinced that he would definitely have shot himself there and then. He is trying very hard to be positive but his hopes have been falsely raised many times during the period that he has been suffering from depression. He finds that he has to take it one day at a time for he cannot assume that he will wake up feeling good. Sometimes it all just becomes too much for him. He has never, however, considered killing his wife or his child. When the researcher asked him what he thought went through the minds of people who wipe out their entire families as well as themselves, he indicated that they must simply not be thinking straight in order to consider harming their wives and children. He repeatedly told the researcher that he absolutely cannot get over the fact that he, who was such a hardworking and loyal employee, was charged for something that he did not do. The researcher suggested to him that he might be having special trouble with the seemingly absent "success" factor when considering his present fulfilment of family roles, to which he replied that this was true and that it had made him feel like he was no longer a man.

### 4.3.3 Case Study *C*

#### 4.3.3.1 Family background

*C* is the third of four children and also the third boy. His only sister is six years his junior. He did not experience any trauma when she arrived and he was no longer the youngest. She and *C*'s middle brother also live in Pretoria, as do their parents. *C* sees his parents from time to time and his mother tends to be the one who will call him from time to time to find out how he and his family are. *C* thinks that he is probably closer to his mother, but even so he would not consider telling either of his parents about his problems, for he just doesn't have that kind of an "entrance" with them. His father retired at a very high post in government. His mother has been a housewife for as long as he can recall, though he thinks she did work prior to the birth of her children.

According to *C*, his mother is a soft, sensitive kind of a person, whilst his father is strict. He adds that he believes this would be how all of his siblings would describe their parents. *C* himself never felt that any one or more of the children was preferred above another. He also does not think that any of his siblings thought so. His recollections of his childhood are not *unhappy* ones. *C*'s parents emphasised the importance of going to church every week - they themselves went twice every Sunday and neither of them smoked or took alcohol. *C* says that even before he married, he always wished that he could have a relationship like the one his parents have. Despite the normal ups and downs, he would describe it as a very good one. Furthermore, it has lasted over forty years!

*C* says that his brothers always shone at school: the eldest did very well academically, whilst his middle brother was a member of the rugby team and so was very popular. *C* says that he himself was just "there" and was a very average student. He struggled to study if there was anyone around watching him. As a result, he found that he could work better late at night after everyone had retired

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to their rooms. *C*'s parents thought that perhaps music would be something he would enjoy. He started taking organ lessons whilst at school and although several people (his teacher being one of these) told him that he was doing well, he didn't think that he was good enough to play for others and so he stopped playing altogether.

As far as *C*'s relationships with his brothers are concerned, he says that as a child he always was a little closer to his eldest brother, who used to pay him more attention than did the middle brother. However, he admits that it was not always the kind of attention he wanted, for his brother would, for example, come into his room and tickle him! Over the years, their relationship has deteriorated to the point where there is now virtually no contact. *C* noticed from an early age that this brother tended to make unkind comments toward him and his sister. For example, when *C* once proudly showed him a new hi-fi he had bought, he commented: "Oh, since when are you a capitalist?" or something to that effect - *C* cannot recall the exact words. Gradually, *C* withdrew.

*C*'s father had travelled extensively in his work situation and had always promised his family that when a certain policy paid out, he would take all of them, together with their spouses, on an overseas trip. That is how *C* found himself going to Greece, Turkey and Scotland with his whole family a few years ago. On that trip he really saw his brother displaying the kind of behaviour that he did not like, such as always knowing better than everyone else. It is since that trip in particular that there has been no contact between the two of them. *C* says that his mother has also noticed his brother's attitude and refers to him as "the grand brother".

*C* told the researcher that his sister coped really well with the comments from their eldest brother in the sense that it made her stronger - she has her own ideas and opinions. Having married within the last few years, she and her husband seem to be planning a family. *C* feels closest to her and the two of them still call one another from time to time.

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*C*'s second brother, now married, lives within walking distance of *C*'s home. He is in the banking field. *C* knows for certain that at one time, at least, there was a great deal of contact between his two brothers. The eldest, who is also married, works in the field of personnel management and lives in another city, He used to come through to Pretoria regularly. Thus, the two families had a good deal of contact. *C* and his family were never a part of this.

*C* told the researcher that when he was in Grade 10, all the boys of his age registered for the army. He did not get around to it, so when matric arrived, he realised that he was in a bit of trouble. His father made some calls and sorted the matter out for him. *C* had no idea what he wanted to do with his life but was not particularly worried about this, as he knew he would have to spend two years in the army. He did not experience the time there too negatively: he enjoyed learning Morse Code and Portuguese before being posted up to the Caprivi Strip, where he spent some time listening to intercepted English radio transmissions. He was not one of the best students, for those were selected to go to Angola to deal with intercepted Portuguese messages.

*C* told the researcher: "The wind blew me into my profession". Actually, he had had some contact with persons in that profession whilst he was in the army and it had seemed rather interesting to him. That is how he made his choice. He does not recall what his aptitude tests at school had indicated, only that the results suggested he go into something in which he sincerely had no interest.

*C* says that he enjoyed his university years. He liked the group of people he studied with and would take part in activities together with them, though he would not have considered going to any larger university function (including float-building with another house) without his own group being there. However, he was a management member of his group's student society and actually arranged a group excursion to Cape Town.

*C* had met his wife when he was a student. His brother had arranged some practical work for him at a company in another town. Her father worked at that company. At the time, she was studying towards her Education Diploma but later gave that up and has been doing administrative work ever since. What initially attracted *C* to her was the fact that she was outgoing and not shy. They dated for several years before marrying in 1992 and have a daughter who is turning seven years old soon, as well as a son who is almost three.

The reader is referred to Figure 3, on the following page, for clarity.

# FIGURE 3: GENOGRAM OF CASE STUDY C'S FAMILY



Married over 40 years

Married 1992

7 years     2 years
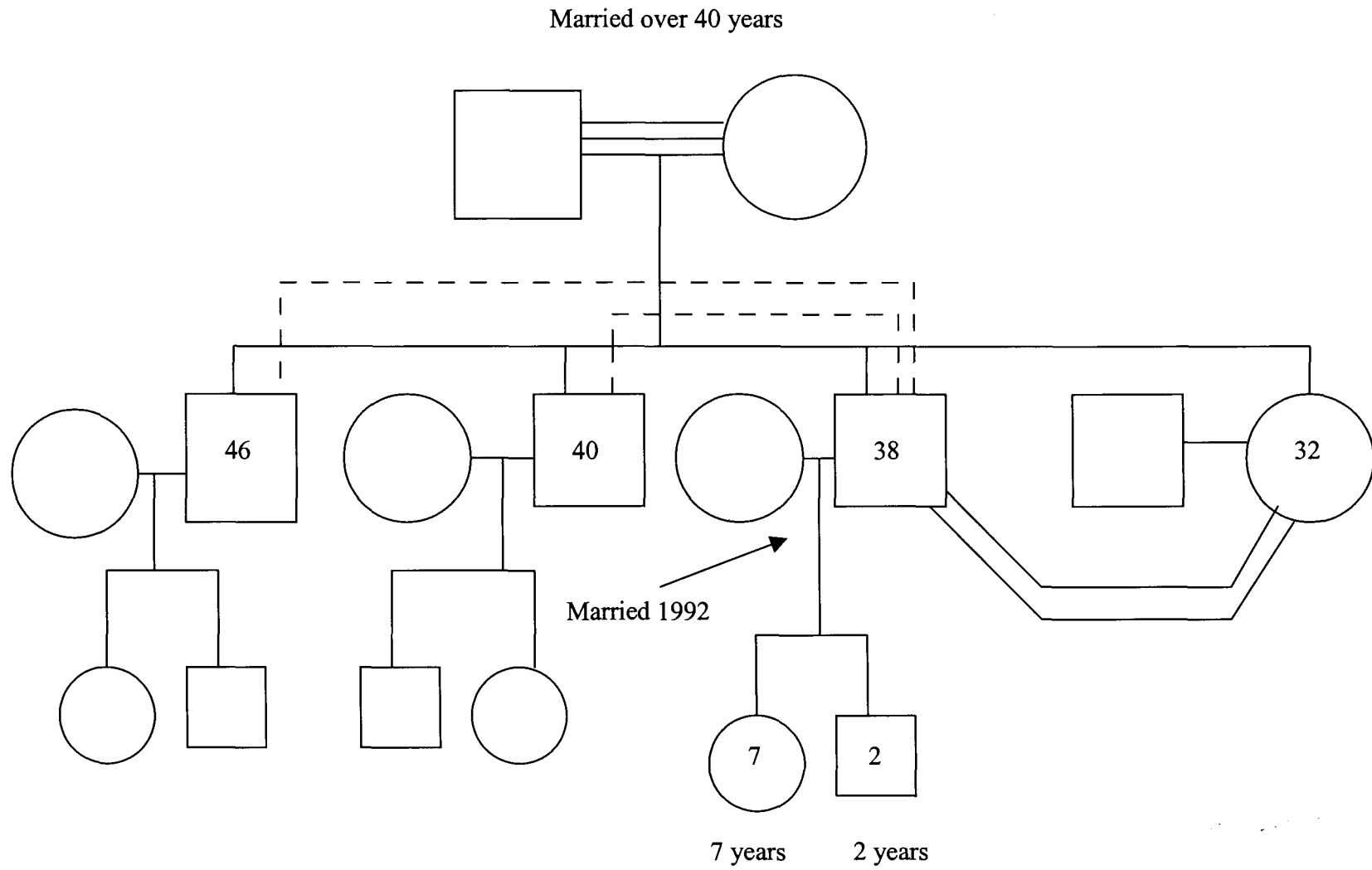
### 4.3.3.2 Experience of depression and family roles

Having graduated from university in 1990, *C* immediately joined his first employer, where he completed an internship and then stayed on. He had been with the organisation for ten years when, last year, his office computer crashed and his hard drive had to be removed in order that an attempt could be made to retrieve the information stored on it. Unfortunately this was not possible and, because he had not made any backups, all the work he had done over the course of the preceding year was lost. His anticipation was that he would simply have to catch it all up again - he still had his notes, after all - but that was not to be the case: instead, he was charged with negligence (within the organisation) and found guilty. He hired an advocate, who advised him to resign as the chances were good that he would be asked to leave anyway. *C* admits that he was negligent, though he also feels that the superior, two ranks above him, "had his knife in" for him. This person had been *C*'s supervisor years before when he was doing his internship. *C* admits that he did not work as hard back then as he should have. As a result, it took him considerably longer than is usual to complete the process. Later, someone else came in as *C*'s immediate supervisor and the aforementioned person moved up to the level above that. For a long time this arrangement worked well, in *C*'s opinion. That is, until the loss of the hard drive. *C* found the immediate supervisor to be not unsympathetic but also not particularly sympathetic to his plight.

*C* told the researcher that an old classmate from university had heard that he was looking for work and had offered him a position with the firm he had started up just after they had finished their studies. *C* says that he immediately agreed as he knew he needed an income, even though it would have been nice to have a bit of a break. He is very happy in his new job despite the fact that he does not make as much money as he did in his previous position. In the other organisation, he was just one of a group of people and if he was not around, then someone else could quite easily take over. Presently, his opinion is valued. Previously, he did not feel

that he was an expert in anything and felt unworthy. For example, he did a course several years ago but never handled anything like that in reality, a situation that has since changed completely. He feels that he has gained more experience in the past sixteen months than he did in ten years in his other position. It is also the first time in his career that he has put his qualifications up on his office wall - these never were important to him for he knew that he was allowed to do what he needed to do and was appropriately registered. His new employer had them framed and encouraged him to hang them up in his office.

When asked by the researcher whether he had experienced any anxiety regarding his loss of employment, $C$ indicated that a situation such as that does make one anxious but it wasn't too bad. He added that perhaps he deserved to be fired, for he was not always fully "there" at work. He had received several warnings over the years when he was not performing and there was even a time when his promotion was held back because he was not delivering as was expected of him. In cases like that, he would simply take note and carry on again. As he sees it, he had for a long time been unhappy at work, so in a way they did him a favour by reacting as harshly as they did.

Despite the gravity of the situation, $C$ does not view the incident at work as having been anywhere near as serious as the unhappiness his troubled marriage had already caused him for so many years. He believes that had he divorced his wife and married someone else, he might have got over everything much more easily, but the fact is that he has stayed in his marriage and wanted it to work throughout. He had thought that marriage would be an overall "nice" experience.

$C$ explained that the sexual difficulties between him and his wife started as far back as their honeymoon, which they cut short as a result. He tried everything he could think of to make it work and over time experienced a whole range of emotions. For example, he tried being patient and understanding. He tried pleading with his wife. At other times he felt angry and at other times sad or

frustrated. In his opinion, "depression" referred to a person's "feeling down". He never recognised his own feelings as being depressive and assumes that his therapist must have realised that he was.

*C* says that on the whole, he had spent several years feeling "cheated" because he had not been able to experience that which he thought he deserved, namely a happy marriage. He thought that he deserved it because he had done everything in his power to make it work, to no avail. In other words, he didn't think that he had brought his problems upon himself or done anything to cause them. For example, a few years ago his wife embarked on affairs, one of which was of a sexual nature, with two male colleagues. She even had *C* dropping her at one's home early in the mornings because she had told him that she and this colleague needed to work on something! Because these affairs occurred at roughly the same time, *C* views them as one incident. Although there was already a considerable distance between them due to the problems they had experienced, *C* noticed that their relationship had changed. He confronted his wife and she admitted to extramarital involvement.

To *C*, the sexual relationship his wife had had was an especially hard blow: How could someone just come along and succeed where he had been unable to for so long? He told the researcher that he had always vowed that if his wife had an affair, he would leave her. However, in reality it was not as simple as that. His wife ended the affairs but did so under protest. Nevertheless, she and *C* realised that the affairs were a symptom of the problems in their marriage and as a result, they had sessions with a number of counsellors before finally settling on the one they have continued to see. It was in therapy with this person that *C* and his wife discovered that *C*'s wife had been molested as a child. Four of her remaining six siblings had also been molested. According to *C*, some of the hurt that she suffered has managed to come out but he thinks that the pain is such that it may never fully surface.

*C* says that his reaction to the strain in his marriage was to withdraw. This happened early on in the marriage. He spent a good deal of time worrying about the future, with specific reference to the marriage. As a result he was physically present but not otherwise aware. He also spent a lot of time on his computer and, in an Internet chat room, he met a woman in another South African city. She is also a married person with children but her husband suffers from depression accompanying another psychiatric disorder. His condition is kept under control through the use of medicine but there is a limit to what this can achieve. *C* and the woman became very good friends and it seemed to *C* that she had the ability to pick up even in his e-mails what he was feeling. He liked the attention he received from her. His wife knew of her existence, though she was not in favour of the contact they had. However, she allowed the woman to come and spend *C*'s birthday weekend with them. *C* says he suspects his wife knew then that there was already more to the relationship than just friendship.

Despite the geographical distance, *C* became romantically and sexually involved with the other woman. He knew that it was something he should not be doing and experienced an enormous amount of guilt throughout the affair. On the other hand, he admits that he didn't feel so bad because he also thought that it was his turn now, considering that his wife had had two affairs.

The other woman seemed to understand *C* in a way that his wife did not. He suspects that it could well be because this woman has a husband who suffers from depression. For example, she would understand that when *C* was down, he simply wanted to listen to music and be left alone. He kept the relationship a secret but his wife found out one weekend when he thought he had the perfect alibi, namely shooting game with a friend. He had in fact flown off to see the other woman. His wife discovered that the other woman was not at her workplace. Then she called the airlines and confirmed his destination. With all of this information at her disposal, she called him to let him know that she knew exactly where he was and whom he was with.

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*C* says that this whole incident was very unpleasant indeed. When he arrived home, he and his wife arranged for someone to take care of the children so that they could have a proper talk. It turned out to be a very meaningful talk, in his opinion. He also says that he believes he said the things his wife wanted to hear, such as that he had never cared about or loved the other woman as much as he loved and cared for her. This helped the discussion. However, he meant these words and still means them today. Also, divorce had never been an option as far as he was concerned. He was simply not brought up that way, though he does not think that anyone in his family would have been overly negative towards him had he divorced his wife.

*C* ended the relationship with the other woman, telling her that his marriage came first now. However, he broke up with her under protest, his main objection being that he didn't want to hurt her. After all, she had meant far more to him than he could have to her. He then rephrased, stating that they had meant a great deal *to one another* at a certain time. Although a good deal of time has passed since the break-up, she still contacts him from time to time and tries hard to get him to reconsider, but he simply doesn't respond to his cellular phone when he sees that he is being called from a private number. He also doesn't chat on the Internet anymore.

*C* views his major family roles as follows: being a father to his children, a husband to his wife and, as a result of his being a worker, a breadwinner also. Owing to his despondency about his marriage he gradually withdrew from his wife, yet the fact that this area of his life was not succeeding did not mean that he was able to put in extra energy or achieve greater success in the workplace. Instead, it was as though his feet had been knocked out from under him. He couldn't succeed in his marital relationship and he then also couldn't succeed in any other aspect of his life. At his worst, he experienced a total lack of energy. It amounted to a kind of a dull, dead feeling and then he didn't feel like doing anything. For example, if his wife mentioned that something in the house needed

doing, he would simply view it as unimportant. He had not suffered particular *anxiety* at any time. He just tended to not worry very much about things that appeared trivial.

*C* says that he gradually came to put most of his efforts into his relationship with his children. This, he explains, did not occur consciously or purposely - it simply happened. Being a father has been a "pleasant surprise" to him. He never wanted children, whilst his wife wanted seven. They never really discussed the issue, though. One day she informed him that she wished to start a family and he objected. She stopped using the birth control measures (he was aware of this) and she fell pregnant. He was not happy with the news and she was upset with him for feeling that way.

When the researcher asked *C* whether he understood his feelings about not having children, he said that he had known at the time that he was not ready for the responsibility that this would entail but, more than that, the relationship between him and his wife was not going well. Above all, though, he did not want to have a child who would have to go through what he had gone through: in retrospect, he does not think that he had a very happy childhood. For one thing, he was very lonely. He also looks back now and realises that even as a child he had periods of unhappiness that were more than just "flashes".

*C* says that his recollection of his first few days in Grade 1 are not pleasant: he was very lonely indeed and had no one to play with. As soon as break time arrived, he would sit outside the classroom and cry until it was time to go inside once again. In subsequent days his eldest brother would come and sit with him at break. Throughout the rest of his school years, he had two good male friends. He is still in contact with them today and the two of them also keep in touch with one another. However, of late he has not been able to see one in particular as much as he used to because he (the friend, that is) and his wife recently had twins who are keeping them very busy.

The researcher asked *C* whether he has had anyone to confide in over the years that he has suffered in his marriage. He replied that he had not confided in anyone, though there were people around to whom he could have reached out. As children, he and his siblings were given everything they needed but were not encouraged to talk about their feelings. Today he believes that he has never been very "in touch" with his emotions and it is difficult for him to talk to anyone, though he finds that it is getting a little easier to do so. His therapist knows him very well.

According to *C*, he has never been a person who engages in self-pity. When he is feeling depressed, he tries to banish such thoughts from his mind and keeps himself busy instead. That is how he came to teach himself computer programming in various languages, design and compile a web page, and then wonder why he had done all these things - in any event, people are using tools like JavaScript these days rather than HTML! He says, though, that if he had to choose a career all over again he would probably go into something related to computers. People have told him that he is talented in that area.

*C* admits that the thought of suicide has crossed his mind in the past and that he even thought about what methods one could use, yet suicide is not something he has ever actually considered because he regards it as an act that indicates weakness. His idea at the time, though, was that if he were to go through with the deed, it could not look like a suicide or his policies would not pay out. He actually thought that his wife and children would be better off without him. He thus wanted to make life better for them. For this reason, he has never been able to understand how a man can kill his wife and children as well. One thing he does acknowledge is that such a man must be feeling so "down" that there is virtually nothing left at that point. He also feels very, very sorry for people like that, as they must have totally "lost control".

Prior to becoming a father, *C* had not had any specific expectations about fatherhood, other than that it would be a huge responsibility. Yet, he discovered in this role that he receives a great deal of respect from his children. In their eyes "Daddy can fix anything". Being a father has thus provided him with a big "ego boost" and has made him feel better about himself. When the researcher asked him what it was about himself that he did not feel good about, he said that it had been "everything". He enjoys a very good relationship with his children. There have nevertheless been times when he has been moody and irritable with them, telling them to sort something out themselves when they have nagged him. Being a father *is* a great responsibility. He also knows, for example, that he needs to try to keep them safe from influences like drugs - but it is a role that he enjoys. Still, when he has been "down", there have definitely been times when he has thought that he would have been better off without his wife and children for they had drained him of energy that he just didn't have. He believes in the institution of marriage and whilst there have been times when he has been of the opinion that he ought not to have married the woman he in fact married, he would like to be married to *someone* because he does not wish to grow old alone.

When *C* married, he hoped to find in the relationship not only the fulfilment of his basic needs, such as those related to sex, but also acceptance of him as a person. Both these types of needs remained largely unmet in the marriage. Upon entering his marriage he wanted happiness and thought that marriage would for the most part be pleasant. His actual experience of it, though, was that it amounted to hard work and a type of punishment. The sexual aspect (or lack thereof) was significant but then so was the lack of communication.

According to *C*, his expectations of marriage are not unrealistic. In fact, he does not view them as being at all high: even if he just had "bread and jam for supper" in a happy marriage, that would be fine for him. He has also seen other marriages that are happy and so he believes that marriage can work. He has the need to feel needed by his wife and children. Although he does not believe that his wife would

be able to cope very well without him from a financial point of view, he honestly does not get the impression that she needs him very much at an emotional level. He is trying very hard to work at his relationship with her and told the researcher that he honestly does not miss the other woman. One of the ways in which he tries to communicate with her is to use as a point of departure the little stories that she tells him about her colleagues. She is a very sociable kind of a person and has a good number of friends. Even though he doesn't feel that it is his or his wife's "fault" *per se* that the relationship ran into trouble, he does see himself as having a very great responsibility to make it succeed.

The researcher asked *C* whether he had felt his needs were being met in the affair that he had. His reply was that he had never thought about it in that way, but actually, yes, they had. The researcher also suggested that this woman had in fact been a *friend* to him. He agreed. He describes his wife as "rather nice", however. Nowadays he finds that she will quietly bring him a cup of tea when he is working on his computer and wants to be alone. This is something he really appreciates, though he does wish that she *would* ask him what is wrong or what he is feeling. The other woman used to do that. He does not think that his wife has ever been able to understand that it is perfectly easy for him to spend four to five hours by himself, wandering around a shopping centre and spending time in a bookstore.

*C* sees his unhappiness regarding his marriage as the single most important basis of his feelings of depression. It has made him feel "robbed, cheated and sore". These feelings did not develop overnight. At school he had, amongst some people, the nickname of "Smiley" because he was always friendly and happy, and because nothing seemed to bother him. He would usually have a tune playing in his head and would whistle quite a bit. After he had been married for several years, he became aware that he simply wasn't smiling anymore.

*C* says that it struck him one day when his brother-in-law told him that he really admired him because he had "everything" - a house, a good job, a wife and

healthy children. *C* decided to let him think whatever he liked. For his part, he has always admired his brother-in-law for his determination despite setbacks. He is roughly the same age as *C* and held a position as a sales representative, amongst others, before he got into the line he enjoys. He now works for an air charter company and has also succeeded in obtaining his pilot's licence. Furthermore, he is an extrovert. By this *C* means that everyone likes him and everyone knows when he arrives at a party. Nevertheless, *C* says that he has no desire to be an extrovert.

*C* says that he does not beat up on himself or have major regrets in his life about decisions he has taken. He does nevertheless recognise that there were times when he could have been more loving and more supportive towards his wife and children, but he didn't know this at the time and he doesn't feel that it does any good to beat oneself up about this.

*C* says that he does not think of himself specifically as a "man" with "manly" roles. He views himself as a "person". For example, when their first child arrived, he and his wife had an agreement that she would be the one who would tend to the baby at night whilst he would do a good part of the housework when he got home from work. That was the arrangement and it worked very well indeed.

From what he observed in his parents' marriage over the years as well as what he has read in magazines, *C* believes that the role of a husband should be to provide financial and emotional support, in addition to providing encouragement to his wife. It is also important that a husband should be loving towards his wife in the sense of acting in a constructive manner rather than a destructive manner towards her. *C* adds that both a father and a mother should give their children security and emotional support. *C* says that based on the above criteria, in which he fully believes and which he in fact uses to measure his fulfilment of his roles as husband and father, it is his opinion that as a breadwinner, he has not done too badly. However, at the best of times he was functioning at about sixty to seventy

percent regarding his role as husband. His "lowest" time, which would have been some time back, even before the loss of his job, was when he realised that his wife was not interested in the marriage. He believes that he may as well not even have been there. Consequently he views his functioning then as having been at nil percent. When he looks at other people, it is as though he just isn't as much "there", living in the moment, as they are. On the other hand, he has never been a person who gets very excited about anything. As far as he is concerned, the only time in recent years when he has felt any excitement was when he and his wife decided a couple of months ago that their relationship could work. *C* says that of late, his life has been going a little better. Both he and his wife have accepted the Lord into their lives and this seems to be helping the relationship. They are both doing their best to achieve their goal of a happy marriage.

## 4.4     INTERPRETATION OF EMPIRICAL DATA

In reviewing the case study narratives, it dawned upon the researcher that one way of looking at her case study respondents' constructions might be to describe these as possessing a multi-layered quality. What she means by this is that people can have constructions *about* something, yet that "something" may itself be little more than a construction. It is likely that a seemingly infinite number of "layers" could accumulate in this manner. Thus one might expect the men's constructions with regard to their family role functioning, for example, to be based on their constructions as to what is expected of them in certain roles. It must also be borne in mind that the only reality a person can ever know is his or her own - a second-order, non-empiricist reality created personally (according to Personal Construct Theory) and/or by social means (as the Social Constructivists would have it), with acknowledgement of influences such as Developmental Constructivism.

In his groundbreaking 1955 publication, George Kelly (1955) has made his views abundantly clear: people are *active* meaning-makers who base what they think,

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say or do in their individual worlds on that which they perceive to be reality. We must realise that this reality is not final but will continue to be shaped, altered and modified by subsequent experiences, all of which again order our world (Guidano, 1995a:94). In the opinion of the researcher, the individual meaning-making processes of the men interviewed will thus continue throughout their lives. Indeed, without these processes they would not be human. Their realities will always be unique but necessarily unfinished works of art, art being in the mind of the researcher anything that is *created*.

Based on the above, the researcher imagines that it would not be too difficult to imagine the potential impact of an initial construction on the development of others. The cognitivists would focus on ensuring that such a construction is "true", "correct" or "accurate". We, on the other hand, stand to be reminded that ours is a *constructivist* endeavour. As Efran, et al. (1992:265) explain, "'Utility,' as opposed to 'Truth' is high on the good constructivist's list of priorities." For what purpose, then, would we wish to know for certain whether such constructions were right or wrong anyway? Besides, would we have the ability to do so?

Were this a strictly therapeutic constructivist study, it might have been important to a lesser or greater extent, depending on the circumstances, to encourage respondents to develop more *viable* or *useful* constructions. In keeping with the spirit of the discoveries the researcher set out to make by way of this project, she simply hopes to engage the reader in a credulous approach to observing respondents' evolving reality *as they tell it to us in their stories*, by peeling away the various layers and examining each for what it means in their world.

The above can be considered as the backdrop against which the empirical findings of the study may be viewed. These will now be discussed at length within the framework of the interview schedule topics which were described earlier on in this chapter:

## 4.4.1 Delineation of family roles

In exploring participants' constructions about their family roles, we must first and foremost recognise that "roles" themselves are constructions, so when we ask men about *family* roles, we are asking them to describe not only what different parts they play in the production that is their life but also those they play specifically in the "playlet" or microcosm of the family environment.

In focusing on case study *A*, we note that he considers his family roles to be those of husband, father and breadwinner. The same applies to case studies *B* and *C*. There is one minor difference in that *A* and *B* view the construction of "breadwinner" as a subsection of their roles as husband and father. In the opinion of the researcher, these fine distinctions are of no real significance when we see that no new roles are added and no existing ones omitted.

Constructivist theory stipulates that we should also look at what is left unsaid, so we take each subject at his word but note that the possible roles of "brother" and "son" are omitted. In this way, we gain a clearer understanding of what the participant regards as "family roles". It appears that the reasons for these omissions may differ. For example, *A*'s parents are deceased, *B* has a conflictual relationship with his and *C*'s relationship with his parents is such that he cannot gain with them what he calls an "entrance" to a discussion of his problems. What is important, though, is that we have already learned something about the reality of these persons and what is significant to them in terms of role when the word "family" is mentioned.

This is a qualitative study which was conducted with a very small sample of men and it is extremely unlikely that any of them have ever met. However, it occurred to the researcher that it is almost as though the three of them at some point discussed the matter and came to an agreement regarding what family roles are most important, so similar are their views. In constructivist terms, it appears that,

informed by their experiences, they have elected to elaborate along certain lines as opposed to others. The Dichotomy Corollary (Kelly, 1955:103) also appears relevant here. Shakespeare's Hamlet agonised over the question "To be or not to be". In the case of *B* and *C*, there appears to have been some thought about "To be or not to be, a son". This stands quite apart from the objectivist stance that they *are* sons simply by way of circumstances. Similarly, *A* seems to have decided not to continue with his role of father to the daughter from his first marriage.

It is significant to the researcher that there does not appear to be any literature bearing conclusive evidence to the effect that some family roles are more important than others to a man. The researcher's own study bears this out. Perception of family roles seems to be highly individualised according to, amongst others, the perceived quality of the relationship and how it has been construed by each party.

When one looks carefully at the narratives offered, it is apparent that apart from their family roles, the men all mentioned their work roles but barely referred to any other roles such as those in relation to friends or the community. When friends were mentioned, for example, it was not in particularly positive terms. Substantiation for this is to be found in some of the literature reviewed in Chapter 3, most notably Linville's (1987) study suggesting that self-complexity can act as a buffer against stress. It appears from the narratives of the respondents that none of them appear to have much in the way of roles outside those of husband, father and worker/breadwinner. As such, they seem to be fairly simple in terms of their role complexity and *A*, *B* and *C* could be construed as being in a position that renders them vulnerable to depression.

### 4.4.2   Initial constructions regarding family roles

In general it appears that *A*, *B* and *C* have always viewed marriage and fatherhood as situations in which men have the task of caring for and supporting their wives

and also their children. Thus, these views do not appear to have changed significantly over the years from their original form. In terms of the interview schedule, one additional point does require attention: the origins of the men's views on marriage. According to Hanna and Brown (1999:22) social constructivists consider a person's view to be the product of conversations, dialogues and interactions. Seemingly the respondents views are socially based to some extent, though much was gained in the cases of *A* and *B* from pure observation. Even *C*'s admission that he obtained some of his ideas about marital and parental roles from magazines, has a social aspect to it, in the opinion of the researcher, for what is a magazine other than a mouthpiece for one or more persons who wish to communicate something?

Interestingly, *C* is the only respondent who did not offer traditional views on male family roles. He even cited as an example the fact that he did much of the housework in the months after his daughter's birth. *A* and *B* indicated directly and indirectly that the man should be the strong, protective and even dominant person in the household. This was with specific reference to the role of breadwinner.

As we have seen, Kelly (1955:503) introduces the idea of a role played as if one's life depended on it. Case studies *A* and *B* both hint at the perception that apparently sometimes exists amongst men that it is not "manly" to find oneself in a situation where one's wife is the principal earner in the home. Indications are that *A* has grappled with the problem in the past and reached some kind of inner and shared compromise about it. The fact that he omitted to mention any other matters related to manliness, seemingly offers some indication that this is not a burning question for him. Similarly, *C* says that his roles are not in his mind related to his distinction as a male. He does not even think of himself as a male, preferring to refer to himself as "a person".

The story told by *B* is an entirely different one. It indicates that his earning power as compared to that of his partner has been a bone of contention in a past

relationship and continues to be so at the present time. Unable to excel as he believes he should, in what he perceives to be his family roles, he admits that he no longer feels like a man. The researcher would like to suggest that this could amount to an example of the "hardening of the categories" of which Kelly reportedly spoke. In other words, *B* has very fixed ideas of what he should and should not be doing as the man in the household. This corresponds with a view held by Balswick (1992:13). He states that men sometimes engage in what he believes to be a number of unhelpful reactions, one of these being to react negatively to all changes and to attempt to restore gender roles to what they were in an idealised past. Even though *B* himself appears to have fixed ideas in this regard, he does not appear to be enforcing them on his wife. Nevertheless, it certainly would not console *B* if we were to inform him that prior to the start of the Industrial Revolution it was not expected of a man to be *the* provider in the household. *B*'s experience is based in the present time, hence the researcher's guess is that no matter how much one may try to "language" away his obligation, it remains in the context of the here-and-now, staring him squarely in the face and waiting expectantly for him to "perform". From this perspective, it would appear that there may be a limit after all to the optimistic "…Whatever exists can be reconstrued" idea expounded by Kelly (1969) as quoted by Efran, *et al.* (1992:270).

The conclusions drawn by the researcher from the abovementioned empirical data are new ones not supported by literature: Firstly, manliness may or may not be a role that men adhere to as if their lives depended on it. In the researcher's opinion *B* certainly does give the impression that his does. This is not to say that *A* and *C* do not have specific expectations of themselves. As we shall see in due course, they most certainly do. Secondly, where the idea of "manliness" was raised by a respondent, the researcher found that that respondent held very traditional ideas about manhood as it relates to a family situation. The third, and very straightforward, conclusion that can be drawn is that it is not only men with traditional ideas about family roles who fall prey to depression. Without even

touching on the causal aspects of depression, we therefore find support for the idea that the nature of depression may be even less predictable than we might initially have thought.

Having interviewed the respondents, it makes perfect sense to the researcher that there would not be any conclusive literature on male views with regard to family roles. Erkel (1990:350) quotes author Robert Bly, who makes it clear that modern-day men are experiencing "a deep confusion". Pittman (1992:380) even offers a suggestion that might, in the opinion of the researcher, offer a useful antidote to any "hardening of the categories" in this regard:

> All men need a variety of ways to be a man so we can be free to do whatever life requires of us and particularly to do whatever our marriage and our family require of us. Just getting men to question their models is a significant step.

### 4.4.3 Circumstances surrounding entry into family roles

One of the questions the researcher asked at the outset of the study concerned the circumstances of the men's entry into their family roles. One way to explore these is to examine the metaphors introduced by respondents into their narratives. As has been emphasised in Chapter 2 of this study, metaphors or analogies introduced by narrators are important in constructivist assessment. As the researcher understands it, they aid in the development of our understanding of the constructions of others by helping us to understand one aspect thereof in terms of something else.

Case Study *A* likened being a husband to being a car-owner: if one had serviced it to the best of one's ability and it had left one in the lurch, then all that one could do would be to move on, with a heightened awareness of what could be expected to go wrong and the warning signs in this regard. He wanted to get married the

first time and he also wanted to get married the second time. By this he seems to imply that in order to choose for himself that alternative which would best define him as a system, he was quite at home with the idea of "trying out another car" rather than abandoning the idea of being a car-owner altogether! In a sense, then, he was acting on Kelly's Choice Corollary, to the extent that he was anticipating a greater extention of himself (Kelly, 1955:103).

It has occurred to the researcher that she would be hard-pressed to find a formula with regard to depression that would fit every sufferer. People possess unique versions of the construction we know as personality and their experiences are different. There will always be contradictory situations. *C* is a case in point. He says that "the wind blew" him into his profession. This seems to the researcher to imply a lack of active choice on his part with regard to one of the most important decisions of his life. Still, she wonders whether it really is possible to "not choose", an idea that again lends credence to Kelly's Choice Corollary. The corollary suggests that any choice is a choice between two alternatives only. So, by doing no more than objecting to his wife's wishes, he became a father for the first time. He later told the researcher that his second child had also been unplanned as far as he was concerned.

In reviewing the family role expectations of the respondents upon entering these roles, it appears that these were for the most part positive, even in the case of *A*'s second marriage, when he had already survived a disastrous first marriage. This should come as no surprise. The researcher reminds the reader of the literature reviewed in Chapter 3. It was noted by Dennerstein and Farish, as referred to by Oakley and Rigby (1998:104), for example, that families appear to be better for men's health than for women's. There is no literature indicating the contrary. Small wonder that these roles appear to have been entered into without much in the way of negative expectations.

### 4.4.4 Experience of family roles

Though none of the respondents indicated that being either a husband or a father had constituted an impediment to entry into other desired roles, the findings with regard to their experiences varied according to both personal circumstance and the type of family role under consideration.

Though marriage the first time around had not proved to be lasting or indeed at all satisfactory for $A$, his expectations appear to have been flexible enough not to cause the collapse of himself as a system. Those expectations appear to have been met in his second marriage. This seems to have made him able to enjoy his second marriage without regret. $B$ is even more complimentary, stating that marriage has been to him everything that he had hoped for. His expectations, in other words, have been met. $C$, on the other hand, feels that his marriage has to a great extent been hard work and a kind of a punishment. His initial expectations have largely remained unmet. Nevertheless, he still does not believe that these were unrealistic. Consequently, he has stood by them.

$A$ used metaphors in other parts of his narrative. For example, we see from his "cellular phone-spray-painting analogy" that he did not have specific expectations of his marriages. This seems to point toward the presence of some flexibility in his constructions. It is interesting to compare, similarly, $C$'s indication that his expectations of marriage were never particularly high. However, despite their not being high, the experienced lack of fulfilment of these expectations appears to have wreaked havoc in $C$'s life. The researcher would like to suggest, therefore, that regardless of whether an expectation is high or low, the very fact that it is present and remains unmet could prove to have a disillusionary effect on the relevant person.

In addressing an important aspect that appears to have been hitherto untouched in formal research, namely what it is that men gain from being a father, the

responses received from the text are as follows: *A* indicated that in being a father one receives obedience and respect from the children - they listen to one; *B* said that he had found in his daughter a "best friend" and even a reason for living, for on the occasion when he was about to take his life, hearing her in the next room stopped him. Today he is still of the opinion that without her he has nothing to live for. *C* admitted that being a father brings him respect and an ego-boost, so it is a role that ultimately makes him feel better about himself. In addition, *A* described a feeling that he gains from being in the role of either husband or father: it makes him feel important, like a leader and a provider, when his wife or his sons ask him for something and he is able to say "yes" to them.

*A* and *B* did not list any negatives to being a father. Neither had ever felt that they would have been better off if they had not been fathers. Only *C* mentioned that there had been occasions when it had seemed to him that his wife and children were draining him of the energy that he just did not have. In that respect he did at times think that he would have been better off without them. Thus, although it does seem as though there is a kind of status or encouragement to be gained from being a father, results under circumstances of depression were inconclusive to the extent that such a situation may or may not make a man feel that things would be better for him if he did not have a wife and/or children.

Whereas the information obtained with regard to the men's experiences of their marriages differs greatly in terms of affective elements, the role of father (once accepted) appears to be one that brings great joy to all three of the respondents. The researcher wonders whether it has anything to do with the "other" in such a relationship not being an equal adult. After all, whether directly stated or implied, being in a position to help and to provide for children seems to be a significant part of the men's perceptions in this regard. This is new information not covered by earlier literature that certainly, in the opinion of the researcher, offers food for thought.

## 4.4.5 Perception of own family role functioning

In asking men how they rate their own functioning within their family roles, we introduce an evaluative aspect that by its very nature cannot be anything but subjective and constructivist. According to the researcher, the reader would benefit by keeping this in mind whilst reading the ensuing discourse.

The "outer layer of the onion", as it were, with which we are dealing in this study, is the depressed man's perception of the way in which he functions within his family roles. The reason for this designation by the researcher is that this perception is likely to be in some ways the most evolved, for it has probably developed on account of other, earlier constructions. Yet a paradox appears to be operating here: Despite the possibility that we may view this perception as an outer layer, it is simultaneously possible to conceive of it as being "closest to home" and therefore one of the "innermost" layers. In other words, it lies closest to the self. Thus, when *A* and *B* offered the researcher some very positive as well as some decidedly non self-flattering personal ratings with regard to their own family role functioning, they were also sharing with the researcher part of their perceptions regarding their very *selves*. Oatley and Bolton (1985:377) quote Ryle (1982) in stating that role supports an experience of selfhood in so far as it fulfils central or self-definition goals. Of course, this is applicable if we accept the notion that role creates and feeds identity and self-esteem. That self, after all, has developed as a result of the man's interaction with others - or so the social constructivists and the narrative theorists insist (Burck, 1997:64). Furthermore, everything that happens, happens to the self, and the self recognises events as such (Blowers & O'Connor, 1996:92).

According to *C*, there were occasions when he may as well not even have been there, so poor was his functioning in these roles. He did, however, sometimes feel as though he had improved to a level of about 60 percent or even a little more. When he compares himself with others, he does not regard himself as being as

much "in the moment" as they, in terms of living his life. It is Rowe (1996:42) who offers support for this experience by informing us of the tendency sometimes displayed by persons with depression, to view themselves as somehow different from others. The researcher should imagine that this could contribute significantly to experiences of both loneliness and "abnormality".

*C* does not appear to have ever thought of himself as reaching the great heights mentioned by the other respondents. Based on the researcher's understanding of Linville's Self-Complexity-Affective Extremity Theory (1985) in the etiology of depression, this could well account for the extreme manner (both positive and negative) in which *A* and *B* rate themselves. However, the experience of *C* also shows us quite clearly that even if one may be described as simple rather than complex, that is not to say that evidence supporting Linville's (1985) theory will come to light. Put differently, role simplicity is not necessarily linked to affective extremity. This conclusion on the part of the researcher is borne out by *C*'s description of himself as someone who rarely becomes excited about anything. To the best of the researcher's knowledge, this is the first time that such a conclusion has seen the light of day.

The wives of all three respondents may indeed have suffered tremendously for the duration of their husbands' struggle with overwhelming feelings of depression yet it is doubtful whether either one of them would have rated their husbands as low as the husbands rated themselves in terms of their family role functioning. They might not even have used the same criteria as their husbands or even as one another! This again lends credence to the idea that constructions are largely personal and are a result of "evidence" collected by an individual (Winter, 1992:4). The point, according to the researcher, is that these men have construed these ratings and continue to experience them. Consequently, the ratings may also have come to form part of their core role structure i.e., a part of who they perceive themselves to be. It is important to note that in terms of Kelly's (1955) dichotomy

corollary, a perception of the self as faring poorly is simultaneously a perception and therefore an experience of, *not succeeding* rather than succeeding.

The constructivist point of view urges that we pay attention to the *context* in which a story is told. As we have already seen in Chapter 3, self-esteem tends to be particularly low in persons who experience true depression (Winter, 1992:128). In the context of depression it is therefore not surprising to find our three subjects offering a highly negative rating of their own functioning. Indeed, we might have expected it to be so.

It could be argued that what we have done thus far in our discussion is to listen to the men's stories in the context of their having admitted to experiencing feelings of depression. But there may be an even wider context to be reckoned with: they are *men*! This relates to their organisation, which is a fundamental part of who they are and cannot very well change.

It was noted in the previous chapter that any indication or admission of weakness on the part of a man is frowned upon by other men. In other words, the "Invisible Chorus" to which Pittman so eloquently refers in the subtitle of his 1992 work, would not approve. The implication seems to be that anything outside of that which is approved is considered unmanly. In the opinion of the researcher, there is a definite social constructivist flavour to this, for manliness is one of those constructs that has developed over time with the input and views of many people. It nevertheless means different things to different people. It has already been noted in 4.4.2 above that even amongst a small sample of persons, such meanings may differ drastically.

There is yet another element of context which the researcher believes needs to be dwelt upon for a moment, and that is the ages of the men included in the study. According to Balswick's (1992) adult stages of a man's life cycle which were highlighted in Chapter 3 of this study, *B* is right in the middle of the *age thirty*

*transition*. This appears to be significant in that it implies that he may be finding himself in a period of re-evaluation, during which he experiences himself as having a "last chance" to do that which he really wants to do. The researcher chooses to construe the recurring, anxiety-provoking themes of "work" and "money" in *B*'s story as *preoccupations* which could be accounted for by way of this interest in "taking stock". The same could apply to the meaning that these hold for him.

Case study *C* is in the settling down period, which we have seen amounts to a second attempt at adult life structure. He is busy and tends to invest in that which is most important to him. Finally, *A* is the eldest of the three study participants. Being in the early stages of a midlife transition, one might expect that he could start experiencing something of a crisis with regard to any goals that he has set up for himself.

We have noted that according to constructivist literature, the way in which something is languaged makes an important contribution to the constitution of a person's beliefs and even his or her world (Freedman & Combs, 1996:28). That is why this approach states that people in effect *become* the stories that they tell (Neimeyer, 1993:226). Or, as Kelly (1955:8-9) states in his explanation of how people use templates, something must first be construed in order to be experienced. When we look at the type of language used by the men in the study, we must therefore accept that having languaged themselves in a certain way, they will experience themselves accordingly. In his family roles *A* felt, at his lowest point, "worthless" and "not good enough". *B* still feels that he is useless, purposeless and "a flop" or a "good-for-nothing". *C*'s language is a little gentler. His description of the situation was simply that he had "not felt good about" himself for significant portions of his life.

In embarking on this study, one of the key questions posed by the researcher, related to how men evaluate themselves in their family roles. We have already

discussed the actual ratings. What still needs to be resolved is the issue of what criteria they were using in order to measure themselves. In other words, on what constructions are their ratings based? We must peel away another layer of our so-called onion in order to discover more.

According to *A*, a husband ought to "call the shots" and should be the dominant partner in the household without actually dominating his wife. Rather, he should "take care of her". To *A*, being a husband also means being loving, which he understands as helping his wife out wherever he can and listening to her problems. He must provide for her and so be the household breadwinner. According to *B*, being a husband amounts to being a breadwinner and taking care of one's wife. It also means being a loving partner. As a husband and father a man should be a problem-solver and a protector. Making a success of one's life is also a part of these roles, so that one can be "something" - a person who has self-respect and whom others can respect. *C* lists as important the offering of financial and emotional support, as well as being loving and encouraging. From the above it appears that the one openly stated thread common to the three narratives with regard to being a husband, is that of "being loving". For *A* and *B*, "taking care" of one's wife is an important factor. In the opinion of the researcher, though, the essence of "financial and emotional support" could be construed as "taking care of" or as "being loving". Perhaps there might actually be a trace of traditionalism in *C*'s opinions after all. Even though the wording or language might differ, then, the meaning that participants intended to convey appears to be close enough to indicate a general consensus.

## 4.4.6 Changes in family role constructions since onset of experience of depression

If identity is dependent, at least in part, upon roles, then not fulfilling these stated roles, for whatever reason, might well in some cases be the benchmark for identifying "unmanliness" or "non-manliness" as the other end of a dichotomous construct. The same could apply to "weakness" as opposed to "strength". After all,

according to Hansell (1976) as quoted by Van Staden (1988:261), role fulfilment does appear to heighten self-esteem.

In that case, even men who are without medical insurance and who have been paralysed could count amongst those who have felt their sense of their own manliness affected. It is nevertheless quite possible, based on their circumstances, that others would not view them as either weak or unmanly. This would amount to action based on a construction that falls outside the scope of this study.

It was *A* in particular who made use of metaphors to describe the way depression. had made him feel. He firstly told the researcher that it had taken a huge "bite" out of his life, causing him not to fulfil his family roles in the way that he used to. It appears that he has been experiencing a deep-felt sense of loss. Certainly, the 1996 study by Giesler, Josephs and Swann (Internet, 2001) made it clear that people who are depressed engage in behaviours that are not conducive to positive interpersonal relationships. Since becoming depressed, the other two respondents also displayed behaviour that can be viewed as working against the establishment and maintenance of positive relationships.

Seemingly, we can deduce from the above that the men view depression as something that causes them to behave in a manner that is very different from the way they would ordinarily interact with such persons. This affects their role performance in these roles. An example would be *A*'s tendency when depressed to always say "no" to his children when they asked him something. Similarly, *C* indicated that he would tell his children to sort out their own problems as opposed to actually helping them. Like *A* and *C*, *B* preferred to be alone rather than to talk to anyone close to him about his feelings. According to the researcher, this behaviour appears to amount to a form of constriction with the aim of reducing the number of incompatible events with which the three men have to deal. This is generally a temporary measure, for it is used only "for a time" but it is often adopted after considerable invalidation has already been sustained, especially at

the level of a person's self-concept or "core role structure" (Neimeyer, 1985:84). Invalidation appears to have been focused on the lack of success and support in the workplace as far as *A* and *B* were concerned, whilst *C* seemed to have experienced incompatibility with regard to his experience of his marriage.

Fortunately there are indications in the narratives of all three men that they are moving away from constriction and into the process of starting to do something about their constructs: The data obtained thus appear to suggest that a dilation of awareness may be on the cards for the three respondents interviewed, which might lead to more useful storying and viable options.

As we have seen, both *A* and *B* regard their personal rating in terms of family roles as having been far higher prior to their experience of depression. These figures form a sharp contrast with *A*'s belief that he is currently fulfilling his family roles only to a level of about 30 percent. Similarly, *B* puts his family role functioning at the extremely low level of just five to ten percent. *C*'s narrative makes it sound as though he has barely functioned at all within his family roles when highly depressed. Again the researcher notes the huge impact of depression on the way in which a man perceives his role functioning.

Though we may not question how *realistic* either rating might be, we can briefly touch on how *useful* it is. One might have expected the fall to 30 percent and below to have been less painful had it been from just 75 or 80 percent as opposed to all the way from 120 percent!

The researcher notes that the participants are all viewing their marriages as a priority nowadays - *A* applies his analogy of climbing out of a hole (depression-related circumstances) to his family roles. He has been working very hard at them and they cause him a great deal of worry. Similarly, *C* indicated that his priorities right now are his marriage and his children. He feels as though in all areas of his life he has just left the very lowest point and has started to climb a hill. He does

not know how high the hill is but is taking it one day at a time, in "small steps" (his words) rather than worrying about that. The financial part of caring for his wife and child are uppermost in *B*'s mind for now. He feels that he will really have to start to do something to address his financial situation. Despite their doubts, the men have all stayed in the relationships they were in when the feelings of depression struck. It is quite likely, as *C* says, that if he had left his wife and married someone else, he would have accepted such a separation more easily for it would have meant that he was not as heavily invested in the marriage. There appears to be some support for this in the experience of *A*: having divorced his first wife, he was able to start a new life with someone else. The fact that the researcher has some questions in her mind as to how possible it actually *is* to disengage from one's child (this pertains to *B* also, regarding the son he never knew he had) is not really relevant from a constructivist standpoint.

*A* agreed with the psychologist who said that even when something is fixed, the cracks will always be there. He felt like he had been "broken" and was being put back together again. Broken *how*? In the opinion of the researcher, this is another metaphor demonstrating a sense of loss - loss, specifically, of something about *A*'s *self*. Quite possibly this loss could be with respect to an ability on the part of *A* to perform a role or roles in the way that he would like. From the discussion thus far, it seems as though this would include family roles also.

Two of the metaphors used by *B* relate to financial abundance and need. He firstly indicated that he, his wife and his child had been living "like kings" on his overtime salary. He later stated that their lifestyle had gone from that of "a king to a pauper". Despite the financial emphasis, this metaphor also denotes loss at an emotional level, for we have noted that *B*'s role as physical provider appears to be crucial to his sense of self-worth.

All three men indicated directly or by implication that they have always believed in the institution of marriage, the benefits it can hold for a spouse such as

themselves and their suitability as potential partners to someone. This lack of doubt has obviously extended to phases when they felt depressed and phases when they did not. It saw *A* through his short-lived first marriage, leaving him ready and willing to give it another attempt, albeit with a new partner. *B* reportedly changed his wild ways the moment he married. He implied that in some ways his relationship with his wife had been like that of parent and child, which the researcher construes as being quite a dependent one. Even *C*, whose marriage has survived three affairs, is making a concerted effort toward making the relationship work. *C* admitted that although there were times when he was at wit's end, he "never gave up on" his marriage and never lost hope altogether. By implication, this includes the lowest of his low points. Nevertheless, he added that had he decided to leave his wife, he would have been able to move on to a new relationship.

Believing in the *idea* of marriage is of course not the same as believing in one's own marriage. The narratives of all three participants suggest that there have been times, whilst feeling depressed, when they have not been happy with some aspect of their marriages. *C* even went so far as to question his choice of life partner. In *A*'s narrative he tells us that he still sometimes has the "don't care" moments when he just feels like giving up. *B* implies that he experiences the same thing when he explains how he sometimes tells his wife that she can leave if she likes. These actions become perhaps more understandable from the literature in the words of Pittman (1993:241) as quoted by Rosen (1999:133), who states that for a man "the most terrifying thing he can imagine is making a commitment to an equal, honest, intimate relationship with a woman". Rosen himself (1999:126) refers to what he regards as a typically male conundrum:

> Although Hamlet's famous soliloquy is usually characterized as the ultimate existential challenge, it can be viewed even more pointedly as a peculiarly masculine dilemma: "To be," we recall, is "to take arms against a sea of troubles and, by opposing, end them." "or not to be," on the other

hand, is "to suffer the stings and arrows of outrageous fortune." This reflects a uniquely male conundrum: If I let down my guard or allow myself to be vulnerable I will be hurt, defenceless against the vicissitudes of life and relationships; if I mobilize my defences, I will be safe.

The researcher notes with interest Pittman's use of the word "equal" which echoes her own earlier comments with regard to men's feelings and experiences of fatherhood.

The data seem to suggest that the respondents generally feel quite strongly about the institution of marriage and do not give up on it very easily despite the onset of depression. Seen in combination with the earlier part of this discussion, the researcher has the impression that when feelings of depression strike, they will preferably stay on in their chosen family roles. However, they will not fulfil these in a manner they regard as satisfactory and will be concerned about this. On the other hand, the idea of leaving and starting over again with someone else is not all that foreign to them. The data appear to indicate that men's relationships with their wives may or may not become dependency-based, yet there was no mention amongst respondents interviewed, of these being crucial to their survival or of marriage being a reason in itself to continue living. In fact, all three seemed to think that they would be capable of surviving a break-up. Indeed, *A* had already proved that he could move on after his first marriage.

The researcher is of the opinion that she cannot be alone in her view that the "commitment" of which we have apparently just seen evidence, should not include some of the behaviours exhibited by the participants in their marriages at a time when they were feeling depressed. In other words, as we have seen, constructivists cannot apply at will an "anything goes" principle. *A*, for example, was overly suspicious, *B* physically attacked his wife and *C* involved himself in an affair. Yet what is "commitment" but yet another construction? As such, it may possess an entirely different face in the researcher's books from the one it carries

in those of one or more of the participants. Once again the researcher is forced to humbly recall the non-judgemental attitude with which a constructivist must approach a client.

In an attempt to understand the abovementioned behaviours in a manner befitting a constructivist, the researcher returns at this point to the power wielded by constructions. A had been through a painful divorce involving infidelity and was experiencing severe depression as far as his workplace was concerned. This meant that his relationship with most people had, as described by him, suffered a major blow. Is it really so surprising that he should have been overly suspicious of his wife's activities? The researcher thinks not, even though she does not necessarily condone the behaviour. In taking *B* as an example we see that he has a history of "difficult" (the researcher's choice of term for non-conformist) behaviour. In light of the pent-up anger he appears to have carried with him throughout his life, he could have slapped his wife on any given occasion prior to his becoming depressed. It seems, though, that it could well have been the depression that acted as a catalyst for this action - he has even admitted that he has at times tried to hurt his wife, though the researcher believes that this may have been an action aimed at testing her dedication to him. If the researcher may be permitted to employ a metaphor, his anger appears to have been something like a blanket, without discriminatory abilities. *C*'s wife's perception of their marriage had been construed by *C*. This was how he came to experience her as being uninterested in the marriage. He acted upon that construction. He also appears to have had some kind of a construal regarding "justice" - it was his turn now and he took it.

There is another reason why the researcher's approval or disapproval of participants' actions is irrelevant: Despite the actions of both *B* and *C*, their constructions of the notion of "appropriateness" were still subject to the voice of the multitude, the researcher suggests. To put this in a different way, *B* and *C* stated that they felt guilty about what they had done. In constructivist terms, guilt is the awareness of dislodgement of the self from the respondents' core role

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structure (Kelly, 1955:565). In view of their belief in marriage, it is not surprising to find the presence of this emotion amongst the respondents. That guilt could have come from either a personal or a social construction, but it is likely to have been a combination of the two. *A* seems to have implied, whilst explaining to the researcher the family history pertaining to his eldest half-brother, that excessive jealousy is not something that he finds acceptable. That sense is most likely derived from a social constructivist consensus having rubbed off on him.

In reviewing the narratives of the men interviewed, it occurred to the researcher that the desire to somehow feel "needed" seems to be of some significance and emerges from the three stories as a miniature theme about the way in which feelings of depression have affected their marital relationships. The fact that it is mentioned by the respondents as a source of discomfort, seems to suggest that as far as they are concerned, one of the parts specified for the "other" (in this case the wife) in terms of role, is not being played satisfactorily. Yet, as Ryle (1982) in Oatley & Bolton (1985:377) implies, under such circumstances a role will not support an experience of selfhood.

We cannot automatically assume that each man attaches a different meaning to being "needed" simply because he has mentioned an aspect thereof that is different from what either of the other participants has said. It might be that these have simply been highlighted because they are aspects of their constructions with regard to "being needed" that are currently uppermost in their minds. After all, as people's realities change, so too do the stories they tell to themselves and others. From the point of view of alternative realities we could even don a different pair of constructivist spectacles and find to our surprise that the ideas of the three men on the construct of "being needed" converge completely. Be that as it may, *A* experiences from his wife a lack of need as far as functional matters go whilst *B* finds that his opinion is no longer required by his wife to the extent that it was before he became depressed. *C*, on the other hand, believes that his wife does not need him emotionally. For all three, their experiences of not "being needed" seem

to hinge on the loss of a sense of purpose. This seems to leave them feeling impoverished. By contrast, mentally healthy people feel appreciated most of the time (Van Staden, 1988:260).

At this juncture the researcher wishes to step outside the immediate experience world of the three participants for just a moment and make an attempt to construe somewhat differently the perceived failure of these wives to make their husbands feel needed - in the way that the wives might have construed the situation had they been interviewed. Firstly, what all three of these women have in common is that their husbands have admitted to displaying in relation to them certain behaviours that they themselves have described as "withdrawal". Secondly, these men have shown anything from a tendency toward irritability to full-blown outbursts of rage with admittedly very little provocation. The researcher also draws the reader's attention once again to Giesler, Josephs and Swann's 1996 study detailing the interpersonal effects of depressed person's behaviour (Internet, 2001). Little wonder, then, that the wives are no longer engaging their husbands as they used to. They might feel frightened, uneasy or simply not in the mood for any more arguments. These, again, are construed and experienced realities for them.

Another commonality amongst the participants was the finding that, just as C was unable to carry energy or effort over into the workplace when things were not running smoothly in his personal life, so *A* and *B* found that they were unable to bring positive energy into their family roles. This corresponds somewhat with Linville's theory about self-complexity (1985:99). The lack of energy that is experienced by men who are experiencing depression therefore seems to spill over into other areas of their lives, whatever these might be. Put differently, family roles are not singled out as spheres of people's lives that suffer when depression enters the picture.

On the subject of suicidal thoughts, it is interesting to note that none of the men interviewed appear to be able to identify with the idea of men ending the lives of their wives and children as well as their own. In fact, they all described the situation in terms of such people having somehow "lost their senses" (researcher's own choice of words). By implication, they seem to be saying that this is not a term that would apply to themselves. A further implication might even be that a pure suicide is not a case of a person having taken leave of their senses. In reviewing the distinction made by Stefan and Von (1985:137-139) it appears that *A* and *B* may be examples of persons who had experienced thoughts characteristic of "mere suicide", for it did not seem to them as though circumstances could provide them with any suitable opportunities. *C*'s thoughts may suggest the consideration of a more "dedicated act", in that he was thinking about suicide as a means of improving the situation for his wife and children. On the other hand, he told the researcher that he could identify with a feeling that all he had to look forward to was the same monotonous situation ahead, which is more characteristic of thoughts related to "mere suicide". There was no mention amongst any of the men of wanting anything but the best (*in life*) for their wives and their children.

We have noted that in constructivist thinking it is important to be aware of emerging themes in a narrator's story. Whilst both *A* and *B* clearly consider their work situations to have been the catalysts for their depression, *B*'s story came across to the researcher as just that much more intense and emotional, not to mention repetitive as far as particular work-related events were concerned. Self-complexity could play a role here.

Button (1985:12) tells us that Kelly emphasises the role-linked task of making sense of the world. According to this author, Kelly also views the task as being very basic to our lives. *B* appeared to be struggling far more than *A* with this task. Throughout the interview series, *B* seemed to be in a state of disbelief and definitely outrage that something like this could have happened to him in his workplace. That disbelief may well be indicative of a state of affairs whereby an

established construction has been confronted by a conflicting situation. It appears to the researcher to be a classic case of someone experiencing anxiety after having been caught with his constructs down, to use the phrase coined by Neimeyer (1987a:14). Again, for the possible content of that construction we may look to that which is not stated. Hence, the researcher should imagine that the underlying construction could be formulated as follows: "You've worked hard and you will be rewarded accordingly" or "If you do your best, you can expect the best". It is not impossible that this idea could be based on early ideas (even Biblical ones) to the effect that people reap what they sow. Since *B* describes himself as a believer, he could easily have accepted this as part of his core role structure. After all, life had presented him thus far with every indication that it could be true: he had worked hard at his sport as well as at his career and he had been justly rewarded.

As far as the researcher was able to tell, what *B* implied in his narrative, though he did not actually state it, was that the situation in which he now found himself was in his opinion *unfair*. The theme of unfairness is reflected to a smaller extent in the narrative of *A*, when he says that he had always stuck to the rules and felt undermined. However, the theme comes up strongly once again in the case of *C*, who repeatedly spoke of feeling angry for years because he had been "cheated" out of something that he felt he deserved. He even stated at a later time that he felt "robbed". In looking at his use of language, it seems to the researcher that one can only be cheated out of or robbed of something that is rightfully yours. In *C*'s case, he clearly felt that a happy marriage was his right. The researcher found that this assumption was based on the idea that he had not done anything to cause the marriage not to work. When the researcher asked him about this, he acknowledged that it had not been fair. Contrast with this his relatively calm acceptance of the disastrous loss of his previous position: "It was just something that happened". In the opinion of the researcher, the findings offer support for the U.S. Surgeon-General's suggestion that stressful life events may be etiologically involved in the onset and development of depression (Internet, 2001). The use of language comes into play once again - "just" appears to have a reducing effect on

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the importance of the topic discussed. Even *C*'s non-verbal language at that point indicated the low priority he attaches to it, for he gave a dismissive gesture with his hand!

We now focus on the criteria applied to "being a father": *A* states that a father should provide for his children but should also be loving in that he must be willing to listen to their problems and to help them wherever possible. *B* feels that being a father means offering guidance with regard to life. It also involves giving a child the love that he himself never received. Similarly, it means applying discipline in a civil, respectable manner so that the child is not made to feel inferior. *C* views the offering of security and emotional support as priorities, but he also mentions the importance of steering children through the minefield (researcher's own interpretation) of the temptations of the world. Help and guidance appear to be common themes in participants' constructions of yet another term open to multiple constructions. The principle of a socially constructed expectation appears to be at work here.

*B* seems to have had difficulty in moving on. As has already been suggested by the researcher, he is still fighting the dissonance he is experiencing. The researcher feels obliged to apologise at this point for using a term borrowed from an opposing approach. However, it seems to her that if one can experience cognitive dissonance, then constructive dissonance is surely not so terribly far-fetched!

His other metaphor has already been touched upon: he likened himself to a "flop", which the researcher understands as referring to something that has in no way worked out the way it should - a complete failure or something that has no element of success in it whatsoever. Whose judgement are we dealing with here? It seems that it is not only *B*'s, but also potentially at least a part of the "invisible chorus" that went before him. *B* also told the researcher on two occasions that he

had wanted to show his family that he could make something of himself. Once again, we have clues as to his investment level.

In summary, it appears to be safe to conclude that one common factor shared by all the men is their perception that their family relationships, as well as their role performance in these, has suffered greatly in the period since they started to experience feelings of depression. Note, however, that the assumption cannot be made in the case of *C* that his depression *preceded* the problems in his family relationships, for in his narrative he clearly states that the marriage was in trouble from day one on at least one level. It is possible that the reverse may have been true to some extent, namely that the problems in the marriage may have been partial contributors to his feelings of depression. As these deepened, however, he did withdraw. What complicates the situation is that in retrospect he believes that there were times prior to his being married when he had periods during which feelings of depression surfaced. It is therefore difficult to really compare his constructions regarding family relationships before and during the experience of feelings of depression. There is yet another complicating factor in the case of *C*: unlike *A* and *B*, who both identified factors related to work as being catalysts in the development of their depression, *C* has seemingly identified his marital problems as the catalyst in the development of his.

## 4.5    CONCLUSION

This chapter has concerned itself with the empirical aspect of the study. The procedure used to gather the information in the form of detailed narratives was explained. The three case studies were then individually introduced by way of a family history and accompanying illustrative genogram, whereafter a full account of each participant's experience of his family roles and his feelings of depression was offered. The core of the chapter followed. It was aimed at providing a

constructivist perspective on the aforementioned topics with regard to the different persons interviewed. This occurred in a semi-comparative manner.

The fifth and final chapter of the study follows. It serves as a conclusion to the foregoing chapters, by revisiting the original questions posed by the researcher at the outset of the project and by attempting to answer these on the basis of the empirical findings that emerged from the study. Problems experienced by the researcher in conducting the study are explained and, in closing, some suggestions for future research and therapeutic input are offered.

# CHAPTER 5

# CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

## 5.1    INTRODUCTION

Judging by the intensity of the changes in social functioning that are usually associated with depression, one might have expected that any shifts with regard to clients' perceived family role functioning would be equally drastic. However, the findings of this research study make it clear, in the opinion of the researcher, that this may not necessarily be so. In some cases, even, virtually no change could be identified.

By means of the information contained in this chapter, the researcher will firstly highlight the positive and negative aspects of the study. Secondly, she will attempt to offer some insight into the constructions with regard to family roles, of working men who are experiencing depression. In the third place, the researcher will offer some recommendations pertaining to future constructivist research of this nature. Finally, various suggestions will be made for therapeutic input by social workers when dealing with the relevant client group.

## 5.2    POSITIVE ASPECTS OF THE RESEARCH STUDY

The following aspects of the study were viewed by the researcher as having been positive:

- The respondents included in the study were similar with regard to the criteria as laid down in Chapter 1. Furthermore, all respondents were Afrikaans-

speaking. A measure of uniformity along certain pre-identified parameters was thus maintained.

- Respondents were thoroughly informed about both the aims of the study and the procedure to be followed.

- At no time during the study was any respondent misled.

- Respondents' participation in the study was strictly voluntary.

- The anonymity of respondents was maintained throughout.

- All information gathered was dealt with in a strictly confidential manner.

- The research project proved to be cost effective.

- The study focused on first-hand experiences of respondents, making it very "alive" and relevant.

- As far as possible, each respondent was permitted to tell his story as he saw fit and with emphasis allocated according to his own experience and feelings.

- The study contributed to an understanding of the dynamics of depression as manifested in some males, and indicated certain points for consideration when dealing with working family men who are experiencing depression.

## 5.3   NEGATIVE ASPECTS OF THE RESEARCH STUDY

The following points of criticism may be levelled at the research study:

- The number of respondents referred for inclusion in the study was very small, hence findings cannot be generalised to the larger population of men.

- Since the focus of the study was limited to a specific group, namely Afrikaans-speaking Caucasian male respondents, it cannot be viewed either as multicultural or as representative of all men who occupy family roles and experience depression.

- Constructivist analysis, such as that conducted by the researcher with regard to narratives of respondents, is by its very nature subjective, which may even amount to some bias.

## 5.4    CONCLUSIONS

According to the researcher, the following conclusions may be drawn from the study:

### 5.4.1    Delineation of family roles:

- Narratives gained from the respondents clearly indicate that, notwithstanding minor differences regarding the manner in which roles ought to be subdivided, all three view their family roles as being primarily those of husband, father and breadwinner.

- Perception of the importance of other family roles appears to be dependent upon how respondents view the quality of relationships and how these have been construed by each party to the relationship.

- Respondents seem to be fairly simple in terms of their overall role complexity, with the work role being the only other prominent aspect referred to in each narrative.

## 5.4.2 Initial constructions regarding family roles

- Initial expectations of respondents were similar with regard to both the role of husband and that of father, in that they had understood these to involve caring for and supporting a wife and children.

- The abovementioned constructions appear to have developed by way of social situations involving both learning by example and interaction with the views of others.

- Men's constructions pertaining to family roles may or may not be traditional in their nature, with "traditional" in this sense meaning a view that the man should be the strong, protective and even dominant member of the household. This dominance appears to relate specifically to the role of breadwinner.

- Family roles may or may not be linked to men's concept of themselves as being male.

- Manliness itself is not necessarily a role that men adhere to as if their lives depend upon it. Where the idea of "manliness" does feature in a narrative, it appears that the narrator holds very traditional views about manhood as it relates to the family.

- Holding strictly traditional views about family roles is not a prerequisite for the development of depression - men who do not hold such views may also be prone to the development of the condition.

## 5.4.3 Circumstances surrounding entry into family roles

- With one exception only (regarding parenthood), there was no indication at any time of resistance or opposition on the part of respondents to their listed roles of husband, father or breadwinner.

- Family roles were generally entered into voluntarily and, more significantly, by choice.

- Expectations with regard to family roles were mostly positive but differed in terms of precise content, ranging from, for example, an opportunity to look after someone and to have a friend to confide in, to an expectation of "pleasantness" and even of relieved stress.

- The responsibility associated with each listed family role was, for the most part, initially accepted with ease.

## 5.4.4 Experience of family roles

- Respondents did not view their family roles and associated obligations as ever having been an impediment to entry into desired other roles.

- Results showed that in two of the three cases, expectations with regard to family roles had been met. The third respondent felt that he had been a good provider but his expectations regarding his relationship with his wife had remained largely unmet since the very start of the marriage.

- Regardless of initial expectations, all of the respondents indicated that they enjoyed the role of father.

- None of the respondents felt that their initial expectations of their different family roles had been unrealistic.

## 5.4.5 Perception of own family role functioning

- Results with regard to own family role functioning appear to be inconclusive. Two respondents indicated that they had functioned extremely well prior to the onset of depression. The third had mixed ideas about his functioning even before he fell prey to the condition.

- Role simplicity is not necessarily associated with affective extremity.

- The criteria used by respondents to rate themselves in the role of "husband" generally had an emotional as well as a practical component. Taking care of the wife and offering various kinds of support appeared to constitute the general theme.

- "Loving" and "providing", with various elaborations on these by individual respondents, formed the gist of the criteria used by them to evaluate their functioning as fathers. As was the case with the role of husband, the same respondent referred to in the first point above did not feel that he had always been a loving father, though he was able to acknowledge that had managed to provide well for his family.

- All of the respondents appear to have experienced some degree of guilt (in constructivist terms) with respect to their particularly "negative" behaviours.

### 5.4.6 Changes in family role constructions since the onset of experience of depression

- All of the respondents felt that both their family role fulfilment and their family relationships had suffered with the onset of their experience of depression, regardless of the perceived origins of the depression. Judging by their stated efforts to work at, for example, their marriages, this deterioration of family roles was a concern to all of them.

- According to the experience of respondents, the onset of depression meant that changes occurred in the manner in which they interacted with their wives and children. These behaviours included withdrawal (possible constriction), irritability and a lack of interest or helpfulness, none of which were viewed by respondents as conducive to the establishment or maintenance of positive family relationships.

- Despite the above, only one respondent said that during his depression there had been occasions when he felt that he would have been better off without his wife and children.

- Respondents' delineation and expectations with regard to their family roles did not change with the onset of depression, even though their perception of their own functioning within those roles most certainly did. Similarly, respondents' views about how realistic their initial expectations had been, did not appear to change.

- Respondents communicated having experienced a complete lack of energy with regard to all of their life roles, regardless of which life role was perceived as having been the catalyst for depression. It can therefore be concluded that family roles are not the only areas in which a lack of energy may be observed in association with an experience of depression.

- Rather than experiencing a sense of purpose and appreciation within their family roles, it was the experience of all of the respondents that, since the start of their depression, they were not "needed" by their wives. They did not express similar views with regard to their roles as fathers.

- The two respondents who indicated that they had been functioning very well indeed in their family roles prior to the onset of depression, registered a marked and even extreme drop in the success with which they had done so after the onset of depression, according to their own criteria as mentioned above. The third respondent did not display such variability, therefore the results were inconclusive.

- The respondents have all verbalised and to some extent demonstrated a belief in the institution of marriage. Furthermore, they have all remained in the marriages they were in when they first started to experience depression.

- Despite the above, marriage was never afforded, in the narratives of the respondents, the status of being crucial to the men's survival. Instead, they seemed to feel that had they made the decision to move on with their lives with another partner, they would have been able to do so. By contrast, one of the respondents told the researcher that if he lost his daughter, he would have nothing to live for.

- Although thoughts of suicide had crossed the minds of all three respondents, they all indicated that they had never thought of taking the lives of either their wives or their children. All displayed constructions to the effect that to do so would be behaviour reflecting a degree of abnormality or of not functioning properly.

- The disappointment and disillusionment so characteristic of depression were not limited to specific role areas. In other words, if investment in the work

situation had taken place but this had not worked out as hoped or expected, a sense of "unfairness" or invalidation of prior constructions prevailed. Similar feelings developed where family matters were not working out despite having been invested in.

## 5.5 RECOMMENDATIONS

### 5.5.1 Future research

The researcher launched her enquiry from the point of view of *personal meaning* for the very reason that she had gathered, from the literature on the complex nature of depression, that it could prove to be a key factor. Little did she realise just *how* important it would turn out to be. Respondents were carefully selected for their similarity in terms of certain criteria such as gender, culture, employment status, family roles and, naturally, an experience of depressive feelings.

The reader will have noted in the section above as well as in the previous chapter that one case study in particular often showed results that differed from those obtained from the rest of the respondents interviewed. In some ways this was frustrating for the researcher, as it would have been greatly satisfying to report absolutely conclusive results on every single aspect covered in this study. In retrospect, however, once she had revisited the purposes of exploratory research, she was delighted to find that the study had been very useful to the extent that it had clearly showed the way for future research of this nature.

The main difference between the abovementioned respondent and the other two appears to be the researcher's perception that while that respondent regards his marriage as having been a real starting point for his unhappiness, they considered work-related issues to have been the root of their problems. It is not for us as constructivists to judge the accuracy of such assessments. Our task would appear

to be to simply take them, as Kelly (1955) would have said, at face value. In the researcher's opinion, it may very well be that a subject experiences a role differently if he or she perceives that role to be the "cause" of the depressive feelings. This could ultimately affect the findings. Furthermore, a situation was created wherein the researcher could not be certain that the depression had actually *preceded* the deterioration in family role relationships. It was in other words not possible to identify exactly when the depression started. Lastly, the nature of this respondent's heaviest investment appears to have differed somewhat from that of the other two.

In view of the above, the researcher wishes to make the following suggestions for the effective execution of future qualitative constructivist enquiries of this nature:

- Respondents should be selected on the basis of how they regard the *origins* of their depression. If all are the same or at least similar in this regard, comparison of results will in all likelihood be greatly facilitated.

- For the sake of the constructivist emphasis on both context and developmental issues, it is also recommended that respondents be of similar *age*. Again, if this guideline is adhered to, a meaningful comparison of the findings will most likely prove to be far simpler.

- In view of the difficulties encountered by the researcher in simply securing suitable and willing respondents, it is recommended that additional time be allocated for recruitment and referral procedures. The researcher imagines that considerable extra time will in any event be required in order to implement successfully the preceding suggestions.

In making the aforementioned suggestion, it is not the researcher's intention to suggest for a moment that such a selection process will be an easy one. Indeed, it is for this precise reason that the researcher earlier on elaborated somewhat on the

trouble she had experienced in recruiting her respondents. Compounded by the researcher's newly-offered selection criteria, the task may prove to be a real challenge. Indications are, however, that the persevering researcher of the future who heeds these warnings, may be rewarded with rich narratives that can be meaningfully compared with one another.

Finally, the researcher would like to mention that she would naturally be delighted if the above suggestions could be incorporated into a replication of her study. Such replication could be focused on a similar or different group of caucasian males, from a language or cultural point of view. Alternatively, it could be extended to other ethnic groups in order to determine what differences, if any, exist between males from various groups as far as their constructions about their family roles in times of depression are concerned. The researcher's own study suggests concurrence, even in the presence of depression, with the idea that family roles may be good for men. A direct constructivist comparison could therefore even be attempted between males and females of the same ethnic group with a view to establishing just how these constructions differ.

## 5.5.2  Therapeutic work

No research study in the field of social work would be complete without recommendations pertaining to the future practice of the profession. The present study focused on men and their depression as it relates to their constructions of their family roles. In view of the findings listed in 5.4 above, the researcher therefore wishes to make certain constructivist suggestions with regard to therapeutic input in respect of such persons and their families.

- Unless clients verbalise or imply that they are in some way unhappy or dissatisfied with the delineation of their family roles, the therapist should accept these and attempt to work with them as they are, for the benefit of clients and their families.

- The therapist must always try to establish, by way of the words and actions of the client, what meaning a role holds for him. No attempt to judge the accuracy or correctness of such meaning should ever be made.

- It should never be assumed by a therapist that role simplicity, as opposed to complexity, is necessarily a negative situation as regards the development of depression. As was demonstrated by the case of one of the respondents, it is neither a prerequisite for affective extremity nor for the onset and maintenance of depression itself. Where clients with or without depression are decidedly simple and display an unwillingness to incorporate additional roles into their role network, every attempt ought to be made to ensure that the roles they have offer them sufficient meaning and satisfaction. "Meaning" and "satisfaction", of course, must be defined on their terms.

- Constructions about family roles in general appear to remain fairly constant regardless of the circumstances. They also seem to develop over many years through processes such as socialisation and interaction with others. It is therefore highly unlikely that an attempt to make a client abandon them would prove useful. After all, the moment he steps outside of the therapeutic environment, the so-called "male chorus" will be waiting for him, no matter how hard he tries to "language" them away. Rather than breaking down or eliminating a construction that appears to the therapist to be an example of a "hardened category" (such as an overly traditional world view or a conception of what it means to be "loving"), the way forward might be to suggest to the client that his constructions might be *incomplete* rather than *false*. From there he could simply be assisted in expanding these constructs to include more options.

- The therapist should be sensitive to the extent to which the client's family roles are tied to his sense of being a man. In other words, the therapist should

not assume that the issue of manhood either plays a role or does not. Careful individualisation is required.

- Where family roles have been gladly entered into, these memories can be bolstered by the therapist, perhaps by encouraging the client to embark on "a trip down memory lane". In this manner, the client may again get into touch with his earliest needs and wishes.

- It appears that whilst marital roles and the institution of marriage are important to men, they do not necessarily have much trouble conceiving of a move to a new partner. The researcher would also like to suggest that the respondents' failure to leave the marriages they were in when depression struck, may well be partly due to the lack of energy often associated with depression. In other words, if energy levels were to rise and they were to find themselves still unhappy in a marriage, it seems quite possible that they might walk out of such a marriage. As can be imagined, the hold that a relationship has on a man becomes even more tenuous where he is not married to his partner.

- Since fatherhood appears to be a role from which most men derive a great deal of pleasure, they should be assisted to develop it to the best of their ability and in such a manner that they achieve a sense of personal satisfaction. However, it should be borne in mind that there is no evidence suggesting that men will necessarily remain in marriages just for the sake of the children.

- Any constructivist therapist should remember that he or she is not there either to save or to doom a marriage. The focus should always fall on the action which allows the greatest extension of the client. Where this action clashes with the extension of other members of the family, some negotiation and/or compromise may be necessary.

- Male clients experiencing depression should be properly informed of the symptoms of depression. Having completed such education, the therapist should help the client to develop insight into the potential ramifications of depressive behaviour such as aggression or withdrawal, so that he will be better able to understand the responses of his wife or children and be able to take responsibility for his own actions.

- It is vital that the wives of depressed men be properly educated with regard to the nature and symptoms of depression. Although the client should take responsibility for his actions, the spouse ought to be assisted to develop a degree of sensitivity for her husband. Certain actions such as nagging may then be avoided and the spouse coached to behave in a manner that her husband will experience as more supportive. For example, an ability to communicate caring concern and interest may be cultivated in place of a pressing for information.

- In particular, spouses of depressed men should be informed about how self-esteem and role are related to depression. The "need to feel needed" may also be discussed, as well as ways in which a man's requirements in this regard may be met.

- Both men who are depressed and their spouses should be briefed about the enormous lack of energy often experienced as a result of depression. This will surely lead to greater insight and understanding of, not only the self but also the partner.

- No confirmation could be obtained for findings by other researchers referred to in Chapter 3, namely that family roles and values may be psychologically a greater priority than either work or the work role itself. The researcher reminds the reader that outside of family roles, the only roles that featured strongly in men's narratives were those related to work. The importance of the

work role can therefore never be underestimated by a therapist. It appears to be one area in which no amount of "languaging" will make up for unhappiness or dissatisfaction.

It can be said that so much about people appears to change when they begin to experience depression. Consequently, one might have thought that there would be a greater discrepancy between men's views of their family roles before, as opposed to during, depression. This does not necessarily appear to be the case under all circumstances and a surprising degree of stability was discovered instead. The therapist would do well to bear this in mind when dealing with men and their families where depression is concerned.

In the final analysis, it is clear from the findings of the empirical study, that depression has far-reaching effects on the manner in which men construct their family roles. Not only that, but roles within their family systems may indeed have shifted in order to accommodate or adjust to, this depression. The residual effects of the depression may therefore make themselves felt long after the so-called "crisis" has passed, by way of continued role confusion and, quite possibly, an associated loss of self-esteem. Consequently, the helping professions may not assume that men who are in the process of recovery from depression, will automatically be in a position to resume their former roles with ease. Accordingly, it is not the task of the social worker to treat depression per se, but rather to assist such clients in dealing with the effects that the condition might have on family role functioning. In particular, the social worker should be instrumental in facilitating a process whereby such persons can develop new constructions regarding their family roles with a view to eliminating role confusion. Should these role issues not be revisited in therapy during the recovery phase, a recurrence of acute depression may well be the end result.

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**Participant's Name:** ……………………………………  **Date:** ………………………………………………

**Researcher:** Sonja C. Warren
    MSD Student (University of Pretoria)


## INFORMED CONSENT

1. **Title of Study:** A Social Work Construction of Family Roles by Working Men who experience Depression.
2. **Purpose of the Study:** The purpose of the study will be to explore the causes as well as the nature of depression amongst working men, in terms of the meanings they assign to their family roles, with a view to more effective future therapeutic intervention.
3. **Procedures:** I will be interviewed by the above researcher on the following topics: my family roles as I view and experience them, as well as the relation between these roles and my feelings of depression. This interview will take approximately 1 to 2 hours. The interviewing process will be scheduled at my convenience and may even be broken up into two shorter sessions if this suits me better.
4. **Risks and Discomforts:** There are no known medical risks or discomforts associated with this project, although I may experience fatigue and/or stress when being interviewed. I will be given as many breaks as I feel I during the interview(s).
5. **Benefits:** I understand that there are no known direct medical benefits to me for participating in this study. However, the results of the study may help therapists gain a better understanding of how depression develops in people like myself.
6. **Participant's Rights:** I may withdraw from participating in the study at any time.
7. **Financial Compensation:** I will not receive any reimbursement for my participation.
8. **Confidentiality:** I understand that my anonymity will be maintained throughout the process. Results will be cumulatively reported without reference to names. Furthermore, should the highlighting of my particular case prove to be especially useful, my real name will not be used. In the interest of transparency, the results of the report will be made available to me upon request.
9. **Contact details:** If I have any questions or concerns, I can call the above researcher on 083-260-8733 at any time.


………………………………………………………………

**Subject's Signature**                            **Date**


………………………………………………………………

**Signature of Researcher**

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ANNEXURE B

# INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

## 1. Delineation of family roles:

- Listing of perceived family roles
- Changes in family roles

## 2. Initial constructions regarding family roles:

- Origins
- Family background and social influences

## 3. Circumstances surrounding entry into family roles:

- Perceptions about choice
- Expectations

## 4. Experience of family roles:

- Feelings and perceptions; roles neglected; roles impeded
- Comparison of expectations with experience
- Opinion with regard to how realistic expectations were

**5. Perception of own family role functioning:**

- Rating
- Criteria used

**6. Changes in family role construction since onset of depressive feelings:**

- Changes in listing of family roles
- Changes regarding initial constructions of family roles
- Changes in expectations of family roles
- Changes in experience of family roles
- Changes in perception of family role functioning