

**THE SOUTH AFRICAN INDIAN MUSLIM FAMILY: PERSONAL NARRATIVES**

**By**

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## SUMMARY

This study can be seen as an exploration of the contributions (or lack thereof) made from various schools of family therapy with regards to culture, and, as an augmentation to the current literature, through articulating a South African Indian Muslim family narrative.

It commences with a review of the academic literature, comprising of the studies and general approaches taken towards the subject matter of culture and family therapy within this field. The study thereafter offers a description of the epistemological framework from which the author is operating which can be seen as a combination of second-order cybernetics and social constructionism. This serves to familiarize readers with the frame of reference that has guided the approach to this study as it impacts significantly on the manner in which research is conducted. A detailed discussion of the research approach adopted in this study thus ensues. The research approach assumes a postmodern flavour and can be regarded as alternate paradigm research.

The study also engages in an examination of the various discourses or schools of thought that have provided the predominant epistemological orientations within the field of family therapy. These are the systemic, first and second order cybernetics, constructivist, social constructionist and narrative approaches. The core characteristics of these discourses are critically described and their associated ramifications for culture are explored.

Finally, the study attempts to articulate a South African Indian Muslim family narrative. In doing so, it draws on a number of combined resources. The primary source of data is in the form of personal narratives that are extracted from the author's own experiences and observations of being a member of this specific cultural group. This data is supplemented with community narratives regarding the family. These narratives are extrapolated through participant observation in a community setting. The main themes that emerge from both sources are then utilized as areas of discussion. At the same time, these narratives reflect specific cultural and religious discourses as the latter is threaded into the fabric of the former. The main areas of discussion involve family structure, cohesion, role allocation, communication, hierarchy and life cycle. Those academic narratives which are considered to be applicable and relevant are applied to the data where necessary, thereby highlighting

features of significance and illuminating points of convergence and contrast. The author also attempts to explore the systems of meaning that may inform the patterns in the family.

Keywords: South African, Indian, Muslim, family therapy, epistemology, social constructionism, narrative, culture

## OPSOMMING

Hierdie verhandeling kan beskou word as 'n ondersoek van die bydrae (of gebrek daaraan) van verskeie skole van familie terapie met betrekking tot kultuur. Deur die weergawe van 'n Suid-Afrikaanse Indiër Moslem familie-narratief kan dit ook gesien word as 'n toevoeging tot die bestaande literatuur.

Dit begin met 'n oorsig van die akademiese literatuur in die veld, wat uit studies en algemene benaderings tot die onderwerp van kultuur en familie terapie bestaan. Daarna gee die verhandeling 'n beskrywing van die gekose epistemologiese raamwerk ten einde die leser te oriënteer met die verwysingsraam van die skrywer. Die kombinasie van tweede-orde kibernetika en sosiale konstruksionisme het 'n groot impak op die manier wat die navorsing uitgevoer is. 'n Omslagtige bespreking van die navorsingsbenadering wat gebruik is in die studie volg daarop. Die navorsingsbenadering het 'n posmodernistiese aanslag en kan gesien word as alternatiewe paradigma navorsing.

Die verhandeling ondersoek verder die verskeie diskoerse wat tot die heersende epistemologiese oriëntasies binne die veld van familie-terapie aanleiding gegee het. Hierdie sluit in sistemiese, eerste- en tweede- orde kibernetika, konstruktivisme, sosiale konstruksionisme en narratiewe benaderings. Die sentrale eienskappe van hierdie diskoerse word krities beskryf en die geassosieerde ramifikasies vir kultuur word ondersoek.

Ten slotte, poog die verhandeling om 'n Suid-Afrikaanse Indiër Moslem familie narratief weer te gee deur 'n kombinasie van bronne te raadpleeg. Die primêre bron van data is in die vorm van persoonlike narratiewe vanuit die skrywer se eie ervarings en waarnemings as lid van die spesifieke kulturele groep. Die data is aangevul met gemeenskapsnarratiewe ten opsigte van die familie. Hierdie narratiewe is verkry deur deelnemerobservasie teen 'n gemeenskapsagtergrond. Die hoofemas wat vanuit hierdie bronne gedistilleer is word dan as aftrekpunte vir bespreking gebruik. Terselfdertyd reflekteer die narratiewe spesifieke kulturele en religieuse diskoerse soos wat die laasgenoemde die eersgenoemde deurspek. Die hoofareas van bespreking sluit familie-struktuur, kohesie, roltoewysing, kommunikasie, hierargie en lewenssiklus in. Waar nodig word gepaste akademiese narratiewe dan op die data toegepas ten einde betekenisvolle kenmerke en die punte van ooreenstemming en

teenstelling uit te wys. Die skrywer poog verder om die sisteme van betekenis, wat patrone binne die familie kan beïnvloed, te ondersoek.

Sleutelwoorde: Suid-Afrikaans, Indiër, Moslem, kultuur, familieterapie, epistemologie, sosiale konstruksionisme, narratief.

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## **CHAPTER 1 Contextualisation of the study**

### **1.1 Introduction**

Although the notion of ‘context’ has featured from the outset in the field of family therapy, it referred mainly to the family context. In the same way that individual psychotherapy remained confined to the unique personality of the individual, family therapy directed its attention to the unique interactional patterns within the family. The advantage of this focus on the interior of the family is that it allowed for the evolution of a significantly progressive understanding of the family. Its main shortcoming however lies in its conceptualization of the family as enclosed and secluded (Falicov, 1983).

The broader socio-cultural context was far removed from the families of which it was constituted. This represented a major drawback. Every individual can be located within a family and every family has inherited cultural baggage. The role that cultural values play in the functioning of the family cannot be negated or disregarded. Just as the intricacy of the individual is appreciated through a recognition of uniqueness, the complexity of an individual reality is recognized through an appreciation of its similitude and variance with different groups. Culture indeed operates at the very pith of every family (Falicov, 1983).

This thesis sets out to explore some features of the landscape that frame the family-culture territory. It attempts to provide an account of the terrain on both an academic as well as a personal level. Different stories are provided; some old, some new, some revised. Personal narratives of the South African Indian Muslim family are reflected on as part of and in contribution to this array of stories. However, this is done against the backdrop of some of the academic discourses in which these narratives occasionally find themselves and against which they often are framed. Thus, this thesis engages first in an exposition of the academic literature and discourses related to culture in the field of family therapy. It thereafter ventures forth into the world South African Indian Muslim

family in an attempt to offer glimpses into the delicate nuances that bind their stories.

## **1.2 Rationale**

### **1.2.1 Context of the study**

In order to explore the requisiteness and feasibility of this thesis, as well as to familiarise the reader with the backdrop against which the impetus for this study arose, it is necessary to first provide a brief account of the context in which it unfolds.

#### **1.2.1.1 Local context**

South Africa is undergoing or working towards large scale physical, social, economic, political, legislative, moral and ideological restructuring with its multi-cultural and religiously diverse population. The main thread in all these factors is the move towards undoing past injustices and creating a more egalitarian society, which has greater potential for more positive growth (Trevis, 1999). One of the main steps in this direction involves giving voice to those cultures that have not been heard. This resonates on some level with the aims of this study. It is thus hoped that this thesis can have the potential to contribute towards and to support the process of transformation in South Africa.

In the local context many physical developments are occurring such as job creation, low cost housing, and the development of material infrastructure. The social sphere has also been targeted for reformation. Injustices in the form of cultural, racial and religious oppression are being rectified and freedom of expression rejuvenated. Social policy is undergoing transformation and social control is being reformulated. In the context of the economy there are moves towards the repossession of land, the funding of minorities in small businesses, affirmative action policies, changes in economic interest groups, the re-establishing and nurturing of cut off or neglected economic ties, and the encouraging influx of foreign capital into the country. Politically, a new government has come into being with liberal and democratic aims. In terms of the legislative domain, the legal system in South Africa is being amended to support and legitimate those who have been previously declared as deviant by the system. An example of this is the recognition of traditional marriages (Trevis, 1999).

In addition to this, moral and ideological trends reflect the basic principles of a framework geared towards a respect for the notion that ‘we are all different but equal’ (Trevis, 1999).

In light of South Africa’s historical background, its current needs and future aims, the social and political necessity of such an undertaking becomes all the more valid.

Academically, culture has featured in the South African literature concerning individual therapy but is largely neglected from the paradigm of family therapy. Family therapy is practiced widely in South Africa. It has promising potential for this context but is limited by the paucity of research initiatives that facilitate the ease of its application. It has in fact been suggested that the inappropriate application of family therapy in South Africa has resulted in the loss of many therapists who may be able to provide a relevant contribution (Mason & Rubenstein, 1989).

The ‘quest’ to provide a **relevant** psychology to South Africa’s diverse population needs little introduction. It is however suggested that the most valuable contribution of the relevance debate (Mason & Rubenstein, 1989) lies not in its urgings towards the development of a new psychology but in the space it has created for therapists to reflect on the relevance and applicability of their own worldviews. The degree of validity and applicability is partly a function of the perspective that one adopts (Mason & Rubenstein, 1989). This lends credence to the creative potential of an epistemological exploration, which is provided in this thesis.

While the cultural domain is emerging in academic literature and research studies [Falicov & Brudner- White (1983), Ho (1987), McGoldrick, Pearce & Giordano (1982), Minuchin (1974) and Minuchin, Montalvo, Guerney, Rosman & Schumer (1967)] as a dimension of therapy with indisputable relevance, the significance of its exploration is heightened within a multicultural context such as South Africa. In addition to this, while the family therapy literature concerning the Indian family is still at its pioneering stages

(Nath & Craig, 1999) that based on the South African Indian Muslim family is almost non-existent.

This research is thus necessary to begin to rectify the lag in academic literature and in practical resources from South Africa concerning this area. It can contribute towards further legitimizing the paradigm within this context. Subsequently, the research can potentially support the trend towards rendering therapy more accessible and relevant to a greater diversity of people.

### **1.2.1.2 International context**

On an international level, the context is also characterized by features which resonate with, act in support of, and have implications for the present study. The social sciences have become internationalized and development is a priority. Disciplines are no longer narrowly confined to operating exclusively on an internalised level, within their own boundaries. Information and ideas are being actively negotiated, exchanged and adopted across disciplinary boundaries and fertile links are being forged with ‘foreign’ networks. The aim is to broaden and deepen the exposure of each discipline to resources as well as the applicability of its products, thereby allowing for greater inclusivity, extended representation, and consequently, reinforced credibility. Thus, new and more progressive perspectives can be generated. Cultural considerations are naturally placed at the forefront of this development.

The field of psychology itself is undergoing a paradigm shift in which the centrality of culture is receiving growing affirmation. Furthermore, the sprouting international interest in indigenous healing is resulting in stronger support for a historico-cultural contextualisation of individuals. Another central factor is that the striking increase in rates of migration and in the number of refugees has contributed towards a heightened awareness of heterogeneity and greater exposure to cultural diversity. Moreover, global changes in the economic, political and social balance of power have stimulated a reconceptualisation of how minority cultures are perceived

On multiple levels then, the local and international contexts seem oriented towards an acknowledgement and inclusion of the minorities who have been previously marginalised, thereby creating the space for diversity to emerge more respectfully and progressively. It is felt that this research endeavour carries with it the flavour of the current zeitgeist. The research can contribute towards these trends and may help to promote the advancement of the social sciences along with its macrocontext. Thus, along with these other changes, there also needs to be a transformation of thinking.

### **1.3 Description of the study**

This study can be seen as an exploration of the contributions (or lack thereof) made from various schools of family therapy with regards to culture, and, as an augmentation to the current literature, through articulating a South African Indian Muslim family narrative.

It commences with a review of the academic literature, comprising of the studies and general approaches taken towards the subject matter of culture and family therapy within this field. The thesis thereafter offers a description of the epistemological framework from which the author is operating in order to familiarize readers with the frame of reference that has guided the approach to this study. This frame of reference impacts significantly on the manner in which research is conducted. A detailed discussion of the research approach adopted in this study thus ensues. The thesis also engages in an examination of the various discourses or schools of thought that have provided the predominant epistemological orientations within the field of family therapy. These are the systemic, first and second order cybernetics, constructivist, social constructionist and narrative approaches. The core characteristics of these discourses are critically described and their associated ramifications for culture are explored.

Finally, the thesis attempts to articulate a South African Indian Muslim family narrative. In doing so, it draws on a number of combined resources. The primary source of data is in the form of personal narratives that are extracted from the author's own experiences and observations of being a member of this specific cultural group. This data is supplemented with community narratives regarding the family. These narratives are



extrapolated through participant observation in different community settings. The main themes that emerge from both sources are then utilized as areas of discussion. At the same time, these narratives reflect specific cultural and religious discourses as the latter is threaded into the fabric of the former. The applicable and relevant academic narratives are applied to the data where necessary, thereby highlighting features of significance and illuminating points of convergence and contrast.

#### **1.4 Aims**

It is the aim of the thesis to provide a discussion of various personal and academic narratives relating to culture and the family, through exploring the differing voices that have resonated in the field of family therapy, as well as those that have not been heard. This thesis thus seeks to create a creative opening in which different stories can be heard and differing stories can be created. Through its inclusion of personal, community and academic narratives it intends generating a baseline index from which existing approaches can be explored, assessed, and modified as well as from which alternate and more useful ideas can be generated. More directly, in articulating a South African Indian Muslim family narrative, it hopes to foster a familiarity with the potential implications of a family with this particular cultural background engaging in family therapy.

## **CHAPTER 2 Literature review**

### **2.1 Definition of culture**

Before delving into the academic complexities surrounding ‘culture’, it is necessary to provide a working definition of the concept. Several attempts have been made to define culture, producing both shared and alternate points of reference. Initial definitions of culture in the literature were primarily tied to ethnic group membership. Those individuals who shared a common heritage and ancestry were classified as belonging to the same culture (McGoldrick, Pearce & Giordano, 1982). It became evident however that this conceptualization was simplistic and reductionist revealing many flaws and providing a superficial account of a larger complexity. Ethnicity is not equivalent to culture. Similarly, one cannot substitute the notion of race for culture. Race assumes more of a biological connotation (Gladding, 1998). While the colour of one’s skin is an indication of race, the meaning ascribed to it is a remnant of culture (Pederson, 1997).

Culture has been described as an invisible multi-layered sheath that has been formed with the influence of country, race, religion, neighbourhood or geography (Mason & Rubenstein, 1989). Poortinga (cited in Pederson, 1997) declares that what differentiates one cultural group from another is the limitation on their behavioural repertoire imposed by shared constraints. Falicov (1983) defines culture as a group of individuals who have collectivity in their experiences and adaptive behaviours as a result of affiliation in a variety of contexts. Another attempt to define culture conceptualizes of it as an epistemology. Culture is that set of features which determine the manner in which one thinks about him/herself and the world (Mason, Rubenstein & Shuda, 1992).

According to Webster’s dictionary culture can be defined as: “the concepts, habits, skills, art, instruments, institutions, etcetera of a given people in a given period” (Pare, 1996, p. 25). This definition refers to the outputs of a particular group. Alternatively, from a more social constructionist perspective culture has been defined in terms of the individuals themselves. Pare (1996) for example describes a culture as the sharing of interpretations of experience by a specific group. This shared perspective can be a result

of ethnicity, gender, race, religion, geography, and so on. In concordance with this, culture is defined in this study as being constituted of that group of individuals who share, construct, interpret, maintain and transmit particular meanings of experience (Pare, 1996).

Thus the notion that culture is not simply a reflection of ethnicity has received increasing support. Howard (cited in Pare, 1996) also suggests that we are impacted on by a multiplicity of cultural subgroups simultaneously. These various cultural contexts combine in contribution to the construction of meaning. The author has chosen to subscribe to a multicontextual definition of culture as is reflected in the specification of the South African Indian Muslim culture.

## **2.2 Culture in the field of family therapy**

The culture of a family has a profound effect on its members. It infiltrates every aspect of family life. The cultural imprint can be observed in the beliefs, expectations, convictions, behaviours, and practices of the family. It leaves its mark on the size, shape, structure and organization of the unit. Boundaries, rules, roles and definitions have all been sculptured through the tools of culture (Thomas, 1998). Family patterns and belief systems are reflections of culture (McGoldrick et al., 1982). The family socializes its members into a particular culture through transmitting its cultural code. Thus in both a covert and an overt form, members of families learn a particular cultural worldview through their membership of it (Thomas, 1998). The cultural dimension is thus intricately connected to family dynamics. It would be assumed then that a study of the one would automatically include the other. Despite this, the family therapy literature has for many years lacked any meaningful exploration of culture. Culture remained the concern of anthropologists and sociologists (McGoldrick et al., 1982). Gradually the field began to evolve towards greater complexity, moving from the intrapsychic to the familial, to the inclusion of the level of the cultural system (McGoldrick et al., 1982).

A glance at the literature confirms that the theoretical basis of family therapy was derived from specific cultural contexts, this being primarily the central European and North

American cultures (Nath & Craig, 1999). “Psychology is accused of using a framework of understanding that implicitly represents a particular point of view, that of currently dominant social groups, all the while acting as though its own voice were neutral, reflecting reason, rationality, and with its ever expanding collection of empirical data, perhaps truth itself” (Pederson, 1997, p.59). This realization started emerging more explicitly within the field through the work of only a few authors such as Falicov & Brudner- White (1983), Ho (1987), McGoldrick, Pearce & Giordano (1982), Minuchin (1974) and Minuchin, Montalvo, Guerney, Rosman & Schumer (1967). One of the most notable works at the time was that of McGoldrick, Pearce & Giordano (1982). They refer to many studies involving different cultural groups within the United States of America. The cultural features of various groups are addressed and the diversity of practices and beliefs with regards to emotional difficulties are outlined. With the exclusion of the aforementioned authors, the cultural experiences of minority cultures were largely dismissed. McGoldrick et al. (1982) also pointed out that theoretical and research endeavours were thus mainly composed of attempts to mould conceptualizations of health and dysfunction around the ideals of the American, white, middle class, nuclear family (Nath & Craig, 1999). Furthermore, they urged the recognition of the impact of socio-cultural factors on families and an appreciation of the natural resources within the different cultures. This sentiment was later echoed on our own doorstep at the fourth national conference of the South African Institute of Marital and Family Therapy by Dr. Stan Lifshitz. He stressed that the application of an ‘Americanised utopian’ (Mason & Rubenstein, 1989) worldview to a third world country such as South Africa posed many limitations and dilemmas of relevance. In order to alleviate some of this, there is thus a need to gain perspective on the differing cultures in the country (Mason & Rubenstein, 1989).

The field of family therapy has thus increasingly diversified allowing for the inclusion of work that can be regarded as culturally ‘relevant.’ Sprenkle and Bischof (cited in Nath & Craig, 1999) metaphorically describe the field of family therapy as “a complex tapestry in which cultural issues are becoming a prominent thread” (p. 3). Literature has extended to explore non-Western and minority populations as well as the cultural biases on which the

traditional family therapy models are based. The literature addressing cultural diversity is expanding considerably. In fact the term multicultural family therapy (MFT) now features often in the literature and is becoming a major field of interest (Odell, Shelling, Young, Hewitt & L'Abate, 1994).

### **2.3 Culture-specific approaches**

The cultural aspect of family therapy literature has tended to focus on *ethnic* minorities, traditionally defined as individuals who share a common ancestry and heritage (Thomas, 1998). The main concern has been on the cultural *content* of certain groups such as values, characteristics and rituals. (Kurilla, 1997). These studies can broadly be categorised as 'culture-specific.' This position assumes that a particular group of people will have similarities in thought, behaviour, and practices by virtue of membership to that group (Falicov, 1995). One thus needs prior knowledge of the characteristics of different groups in order to engage in therapy.

#### **2.3.1 Studies based on a culture-specific approach**

Lee's (cited in Kurilla, 1997) description of the Asian American culture is one such study. He describes the value orientation of Asian Americans as taking on a collectivist stance, in terms of responsibility and conformity. Individuality and independence are discouraged. Members of this culture are very accepting of the status quo and adhere strictly to role obligations. Lee offers further description as 'conservative' and 'fatalistic.' Gladding (1998) portrays the Asian American family as focused around the maintaining of specific relationships in specific roles through the mechanisms of shame and obligation. Failure to conform to the expected roles within relationships results on a 'loss of face' for the whole family. The primary relationships are that between husband and wife, father and son, and younger and elder siblings.

Other examples include various articles in the literature which attempt to provide a depiction of Jewish characteristics. Schlossberger and Hecker (1998) for example provide background on the history, traditions and religious beliefs that are linked to

prominent Jewish cultural characteristics such as within group marriage, the use of guilt to shape behaviour, and the valuing of education and achievement.

Similarly, individuals from the Hispanic culture have been noted by several authors (Gladding, 1998; McGoldrick et al., 1982; Kurilla, 1997; Sue & Sue, 1990) as having an orientation towards subjugation. Loyalty to the family is demonstrated through submission, sacrifice and complete dedication. Extended families have a special place in imparting the traditional values of *respecto* (respect), *dignidad* (dignity), *confianza* (trust and intimacy) and *orgullo* (self-respect and self-sufficiency) (Gladding, 1998).

The cultural characteristics of Native American Indians have also been highlighted. For example, Locke (cited in Kurilla 1997) maintains that there is a valuing of silence and a warding away from verbal communication. This culture also has a great respect for nature and natural processes. Sexuality is conceived of as part of the natural way and members of this culture are therefore very comfortable with it. Anger is however not considered to be natural and is strongly discouraged. The extended family is valued and older generations are highly regarded.

Lau (cited in Nath & Craig, 1999) has stressed the importance of and need for, culture specific work with minority cultures such as Indians so that a greater cultural sensitivity is nurtured. Indian and Bangladeshi families in the United States and London have received the attention of Hines (cited in Nath & Craig, 1999) and Messent (cited in Nath & Craig, 1999) respectively.

In a similar vein, there are numerous other descriptions of the cultural characteristics of particular ethnic groups, which can be found in the literature (Sue & Sue, 1990). Italians have been noted for closed boundaries around extended families, Greeks with a concern for upholding pride, the Irish with a focus on the 'wake' and death, and the Chinese for ancestral connections (McGoldrick et. al., 1982).

### **2.3.2 Contrasting culture-specific characteristics**

Many studies have made contrasts between the cultural characteristics of the American or ‘Western’ white middle class and that of other ethnic groups (Kurilla, 1997). The former group is often described as being idiocentric, individualistic, competitive and geared towards achievement (Falicov, 1988; Walsh, 1982). In contrast, other cultures value collective responsibility, social utility, and the acceptance of authority (Pederson, 1997). In comparing British and Japanese families (Tamura & Lau, 1992), it was found that the main point of departure between the groups is the Japanese emphasis on interconnectedness and the British preference for separateness. Within the American or British culture, the transition of ‘leaving home’ is considered to be an integral part of the life cycle, an important milestone that represents a significant step towards the valued goal of independence. The preferable aim to work towards in Japanese and other cultures is a greater sense of belongingness and interdependency, and stronger bonds to the family as time matures (Colman, 1986).

### **2.3.3 Culture-specific practices of families**

Some studies have considered cultural differences in the *specific* practices of families. Shapiro (1996) offers a socio-cultural perspective on family bereavement. Working with diverse families in America he asserts that even the process of grief is culturally embedded. Similarly, other authors have for example looked at child rearing practices, processes of individuation, childbirth, discipline, weddings, courtship behavior, and celebration of holidays. (Falicov, 1988; McGoldrick, 1982; Sue & Sue, 1990).

### **2.3.4 Culture-specific approaches to therapy**

The literature has also considered what the culture-specific needs are of different ethnic groups in therapy. The covert implication here is that the therapy must ‘fit’ the cultural norms of the family. Working with African American families, Goldberg (1993) suggests that this group prefers and responds better to an approach that is directive and structured. Tamura and Lau (1992) suggest that when working with a Japanese family, the therapist must more frequently utilise silence and nonverbal communication, and take

on an authoritative stance. With Asian-American families the compassion and self-disclosure of the therapist is an important tool. Therapy must be problem/solution focused and involve indigenous resources. The structure of dominance and hierarchy within the African family encourages the adoption of a structural approach (Bernstein cited in Mason, Rubenstein & Shuda, 1992). Assessment and intervention proposals that are congruent to the needs of a particular group can also be found in the texts (Goldberg, 1993; Sue & Sue, 1990). For example, Thomas (1998) proposes the use of the multicultural genogram to assess and explore the culture of the client.

McGill (Falicov, 1983) looks at culture specific therapeutic needs in terms of ‘life strategies.’ He describes life strategies as that set of values and ideals which define and resolve that which can be considered as problematic, and which guide the preferable structure and development of the family. He asserts that in order for therapy to be effective, the therapist needs to join with the life strategy of the client. Cultural skills are therefore required in therapy. Other literature has also addressed the need to develop or promote certain therapeutic skills in working with families of different cultures. Odell et al. (1994) for example, advocate that relationship skills should include a sensitivity to difference, liberal thinking, awareness and perceptivity to content and process, skilled communication, openness and flexibility.

The exporting of ‘traditional’ family therapy constructs to differing cultures for example, the Japanese (Colman, 1986; Saito, Nomura, Noguchi & Tezuka, 1996; Tamura & Lau, 1992) and Chinese (Lewinson & Werner, 1997) families has come into focus. These studies confirm that importing these models without modification poses numerous problems. They further highlight significant differences in family functioning and organization. Lifshitz (cited in Mason & Rubenstein, 1989) similarly questioned the appropriateness of European or American models for therapy with black clients in South Africa. The metaphors and symbols contained in these imported models do not encompass the explanations, practices and meanings that are recognisable and acceptable to such clients. Breulin, Cornwell and Cade (cited in Falicov, 1983) examine how models and interventions of family therapy mainly reflect the values of the country in which it



was developed. When these models are imported into another country they often need to be adapted and culturally translated. They review the values associated with the American derived communications approach, which reflects the values of the United States. British and Australian value systems are also highlighted. These countries use the American communications model. Their value orientations however differ from those reflected in this model. Modification thus had to occur in order to accommodate its applicability. Falicov and Brudner-White (cited in Falicov, 1983) utilise the concept of family triangle to demonstrate the pertinence of the cultural domain. A family triangle occurs when an additional member of the family is drawn into a subsystem that usually comprises of a dyad. They assert that the structure of the family is a reflection of its cultural code. The family triangle must therefore be seen against the backdrop of the culture of the family in which it is found, and not be interpreted in isolation as dysfunctional. They show how different ideological systems conceptualize of the marital dyad in differing ways thereby impacting in varying ways on the relationships within the system.

Perspectives from therapeutic work in India are starting to emerge. Nath and Craig (1999) present some of the cultural complexities involved in applying Western based family therapy conceptualizations to Hindu clients in India. They particularly focus on the difficulty involved with the application of structural constructs of family organization to the contrasting Indian family structure. It is suggested that Indian families organize in different ways because of their contrasting worldviews. For instance, what can usually be seen as an unbalancing triangulation, is rather a necessary cross-generational coalition in the Indian family. This kind of triangulation is not regarded as unhealthy but serves as an important means of maintaining connectedness. Also, there are often more than two people involved in the marital subsystem. There seems to be a consistent inclusion of same-generational and cross-generational alliances in the subsystem. In order to adequately work with the family without labeling every apparent idiosyncrasy as dysfunctional, constructs must be adapted and modified.

Similarly, Raguram (cited in Nath & Craig, 1999) has explored the impact of the Indian value system on working within a systemic framework. Psychoanalytic conceptualizations of the Indian psyche and family have been postulated by Rolland (cited in Nath & Craig, 1999) and Kakar (cited in Nath & Craig, 1999). Interest is also being stimulated on Indian family rituals, demonstrated through a study carried out by Singh (cited in Nath & Craig, 1999).

### **2.3.5 Assessing the culture-specific approaches**

The literature that has operated from a culture-specific stance has contributed significantly towards repairing family therapy's historical neglect of cultural minorities. It brought intercultural differences from the periphery to the fore and stimulated a sensitivity to different worldviews. These studies do however pose certain limitations (Kurilla, 1997). The culture specific approach runs the risk of promoting cultural determinism. It advocates that certain cultural groups *are* unchangingly a particular way. It seems only natural then that some of the potential byproducts of this mentality are rigidity and stereotypy (Dyche & Zayas, 1995; Kurilla, 1997). This can be received with serious personal and political consequences in South Africa.

In comparing different cultural groups the assumption is often made that the groups are mutually exclusive. Areas of overlap are seldom considered (Kurilla, 1997). This stems from the notion that individuals are mono-culturally composed. More recent work however postulates the bicultural or multi-cultural nature of all individuals. The notion of bicultural affiliation presents in the literature as the process which occurs when a family immigrate and encounter a new culture (Ho, 1987; Pederson, 1997; Strier, 1996; Sue & Sue 1990). They thus incorporate features of both cultures. An individual is more than likely to be attached to more than one culture. The individual is exposed to a number of cultural contexts (see definition of culture) rendering him/her composed of multicultural components (Pederson, 1997). Lifshitz, Kgoadi and Van Niekerk (cited in Mason, Rubenstein & Shuda, 1992) argue that the notion of a pure culture is misleading. Individuals are multicultural, being constantly exposed to different cultural contexts, which they assimilate into their own. Any individual thus subscribes to a synthesis of

cultural contexts. This is especially applicable in a multicultural setting like South Africa in which various cultures are in close contact and involved in constant interchange.

There is thus the realization that many variables (not just ethnicity) interact within the domain of culture. These variables may include race, class, geographical location, and religion (Falicov, 1995; Pare, 1996; Pederson, 1997; Speight, Meyers, Cox & Highlen, 1991). For example Bernal and Alvarez (cited in Falicov, 1992) conclude in their study that the cultural dimension is related to the economic dimension. It can in fact be subsumed under the domain of culture. In order to obtain a more complete and integrated understanding of the culture of a family, one needs to also focus on its economic position. According to Pederson (1991) we are involved in many different environments, exposing us to different contexts and requiring different roles. Falicov (1995) supports this notion and asserts that we are simultaneously members of multiple contexts. He contends that culture is multidimensional and encompasses many other contextual variables besides ethnicity. The literature which neglects other variables as well as their interaction, can only present one dimension of a multidimensional complexity

In addition to this a picture is presented of ethnic groups as if they were all homogenous. Studies increasingly highlight that there is great variation within any cultural group (Gushue & Sciarra cited in Kurilla, 1997). Intracultural variations (within as opposed to between cultures) also suggest that same culture therapies do not necessarily escape the dilemma faced by different culture therapies. As Toledano (1996) has shown in working with his Jewish clients, one must always be aware of intracultural differences and exercise the same precautions. Assumed similarities and a preference for intra-cultural homogeneity can be detrimental to the process of therapy. The tendency to characterize cultural groups as monolithic and homogenous could lead to the reification of culture (Lifshitz, Kgoadi & Van Niekerk cited in Mason, Rubenstein & Shuda, 1992).

Some authors emphasize caution, since as Bateson (cited in Dyche & Zayas, 1995) so eloquently puts it: “the map is not the territory, and the name is not the thing named” (p. 391). One must not mistake the client for the culture. Families also bring process over

and above cultural content. It has also been argued that the observer who is describing a particular group is not completely objective and has an effect on the manner in which description occurs (Falicov, 1995).

One of the most important implications of the culture-specific approach is articulated by Nell and Seedat (cited in Mason & Rubenstein, 1989) with reference to the South African context. It has led to the assumption that in order for South African therapists to effectively join with their culturally diverse clients, they must have a substantial grasp of traditional customs and beliefs, be able to assume the role of anthropological participant observer and have achieved fluency in most of the black languages. While these authors acknowledge the potential usefulness of these features, they throw into question their absolute necessity. It is both theoretically and practically impossible for therapists to master ALL cultural nuances (Odell et. al., 1994). The notion that therapists “cast off all their past theoretical and clinical moorings to become chameleon-like experts at shifting cultural lenses...” is neither “possible” nor “desirable” (Odell et. al., 1994, p. 153).

It becomes evident then that while the culture specific approaches have generated a much needed cultural awareness, it is not adequate alone to tackle the task of cultural appropriateness (Kurilla, 1997).

## **2.4 The relativist, absolutist and universalist approaches**

### **2.4.1 The relativist position**

The culture-specific framework is not the only one adopted in the family therapy literature. Pederson (1997) differentiates between the relativist, absolutist and universalist positions. The relativist position is described as looking at each culture in its own terms. Each culture is assessed according to its own internal criteria and external descriptions are invalidated. From this perspective, one cannot make comparisons across groups. Cultural similarities are thus of minimal importance. With this framework there is a tendency to confine culture to a very limited sphere. Cultural context is ‘all-important.’ Special interest groups can have greater sway, and ethnocentric domination may result (Pederson, 1997).

### **2.4.2 The absolutist position**

The absolutist approach assumes the opposite extreme and applies the same fixed criteria to all cultures. Inter-group comparison is encouraged, as cultural context is negated. Evaluative criteria are defined by those in power who continue to dominate. The minority cultures are subject to the continued domination by a powerful majority under the banner of absolutism. These criteria structure what is to be considered as ‘normality.’ Deviations from the norms are not regarded as differences but are seen as deficits. Cultural differences have no place and it is only cultural similarities which are sought after. Reality and truth are singular (Pederson, 1997).

#### **2.4.2.1 Cultural encapsulation**

Cultural encapsulation is noted in the literature (Gladding, 1998) as a major by-product of ‘ethno-centric’, absolutist thought. It is described as an ideological cocoon, which encloses the individual in a barrier that does not allow meaningful intercultural experience. One of the main features of cultural encapsulation involves inferring ‘reality’ from one’s own culturally stereotyped assumptions. This leads to a recognition of only one viewpoint at the expense of others. As a result cultural variations are thereby invalidated, assessment tends to occur from one’s own self-reference criteria and subsequently, no responsibility is taken to accommodate the behaviour of others. In addition to this the culturally encapsulated therapist disregards collectivism in favour of an assumed universal preference for individuality. There is thus a failure to perceive the social aspect of support systems and a neglect of the historical contextualisation of relationships. Evaluation is based on a ‘norm’ and can only be seen in terms of linear cause-and-effect (Pederson, 1997).

### **2.4.3 The universalist position**

With the universalist position, it is assumed that basic psychological processes can be found in all cultures and are universal. The manner in which they manifest however varies due to cultural filters. The different cultural contexts modify these processes so that their direction, extent, purpose and form become altered (Pederson, 1997). While

differences are acknowledged, one is encouraged to look past them in order to perceive the similarities. Some authors in the literature who operate from this position advocate that families bear greater similarity to each other than difference. Contextual variables such as culture and race are of secondary importance to the basic characteristics of families (Falicov, 1995).

Friedman (1982) dismisses cultural idiosyncrasies as being diversions away from the more basic family dynamics. He argues that they act as camouflage which disguise the actual process. Families have core universal characteristics which become hidden through superimposed cultural accessories. Through attending to these cultural idiosyncrasies the therapist is absorbed by the seemingly distinctive peculiarities of that specific family and becomes detracted away from their shared resemblance to other families. He advocates that the therapist rather focuses on the universal aspects of the family.

Similarly, Montalvo and Gutierrez (cited in Falicov, 1983) present a strong view on the place of culture in family therapy. They advocate that cultural idiosyncrasies act as masks that disguise and distract away from actual family problems. Families have basic qualities by virtue of their being human. A focus on the ancillary cultural aspects of the family is ultimately to the neglect of its more rudimentary ‘human’ aspects. The danger exists that one becomes entangled in the complexity that the cultural variations produce, and is blinded to the simplicity of the family dynamics. Thus they assert that it is preferable to attend first to the invariant aspects of the family. The unique cultural issues that spontaneously arise thereafter, if any, can be utilised effectively in the process of therapy. The cultural ignorance of the therapist is not necessarily a deficit but can be employed as a tool through which the family can teach the therapist about their culture, if it is required. Prior access to the characteristics and values of a particular culture act as an impediment to effective therapy. The universalist approach however does not consider the possibility that, what it identifies as universal may represent only a particular perspective and thus may actually be local. Its local nature lies in the notion that any perspective is created based on certain cultural premises (Falicov, 1995).

#### **2.4.4 Multiculturalism**

The rise of multiculturalism has stimulated the emergence of the politically correct position. This position strives to promote and celebrate diversity. It therefore regards the universalist disposition as oppressive and engendering a hostile and threatening environment (Pederson, 1997). It does not take much effort to imagine how the universalist framework can be conceived as derogatory within the South African context. Racism, bias and social injustice are likely products of the negation of cultural complexity. South Africa's history of exclusion has defined minorities as nonentities unworthy of equitable treatment. The oppressive maintenance of the status quo is one of the sociopolitical implications of asserting one truth/authority (Pederson, 1997).

The study of similarities and differences has in fact been historically fueled by the need to provide 'valid' rationale for the 'invalid' colonisation of other cultures (Pederson, 1997). According to Nell and Seedat (cited in Mason & Rubenstein, 1989) an emphasis on difference was used to justify exploitation. With reference to the South African context then, the large scale need to disqualify the concept of culture, relates to its synonymous identification with race or its deployment to delineate differences (Van der Hoorn cited in Mason & Rubenstein, 1989). Nell and Seedat (in Mason & Rubenstein, 1989) further assert that of all the potential obstacles to South African psychologists, "...the notion...that there is very substantial and virtually unbridgeable cultural differences between South Africa's 'ethnic groups', is perhaps the most debilitating and misleading. A scrutiny of this belief, widely held among a sector of the professional community, reveals it to be ideologically suspect in that it lends tacit rationalisation for the system of separate development" (p.40). Thus while a familiarisation with the 'indigenous background' of the family advantageously locates it within an ecology and fosters a vigilance concerning a Euro-centric bias, it inadequately equips one with the necessary historical and ideological features of the context for therapy to achieve cultural sensitivity. According to Nell and Seedat (in Mason and Rubenstein, 1989), what one requires then, especially in the South African context, is not the anthropological powers called on by the 'cultural mystics', but an acquirable sensitivity to power dynamics and

the intricacies of cultural and social transformation (Nell & Seedat in Mason & Rubenstein, 1989).

## **2.5 Alternative perspectives**

### **2.5.1 Cultural ignorance**

The literature (although acknowledging the importance of cultural knowledge) thus began to offer increased challenges to the notion that specific content about cultural groups is *alone* sufficient (Imber-Black, 1997). Alternative perspectives are increasingly emerging. Dyche and Zayas (1995) argue that cultural competence in therapy is not based on prior cultural knowledge but more on a cultural naivete and a respectful curiosity. This notion bears close resemblance to Anderson and Goolishian's (1992) stance of 'not knowing.' "Not knowing requires that understandings, explanations and interpretations in therapy not be limited by prior experiences or theoretically formed truths and knowledge" (Moathlodi, 1992, p.43). It is not necessary to have prior cultural knowledge. Through these qualities the therapist will learn whatever is of cultural importance directly from the client and not rely on his or her supposed 'expertise'. Ignorance can be usefully employed, as has already been suggested by Montalvo and Gutierrez (in Falicov, 1983). A receptivity with a heightened awareness is generated. One suspends one's own assumptions and begins with the client's perspective (Dyche & Zayas, 1995).

### **2.5.2 Cultural sensitivity**

Hardy and Laszloffy (1995) advocate the development of cultural sensitivity as opposed to cultural knowledge. Cultural sensitivity is not cognitive but is affective and can be facilitated through beneficial cross-cultural experiences. They suggest the utilisation of their cultural genogram to aid this process. It traces the development and transmission of particular cultural worldviews in the family. Looking specifically at the presence and effects of culture, it highlights the impact of one's own cultural influences on relationships with individuals from similar and different cultures. Different cultural variables such as race, ethnicity and class are explored. Culturally derived stereotypes



and culturally motivated emotional triggers receive focus. The organizing principles of one's own culture is explored and its contrast to other cultures become manifest. Pre-informed knowledge of the cultural content of different groups is thus not necessary to engender a cultural sensitivity.

### **2.5.3 Cultural skill**

Similarly, Gladding (1998) feels that while being an expert on every culture is impossible, there are several general skills which can be acquired to work with different cultures. Sensitivity to cultural similarities and differences is required to prevent cultural encapsulation. Moreover, general experience with a diversity of cultures is an asset. He encourages an open acceptance of difference so that prejudices are curtailed. In order to achieve this the therapist needs to engage in a constant assessment of his/her feelings about the family. An ingenuity which allows the therapist to use the natural and cultural resources is required. Lastly, it is recommended that the therapist tailor therapy to each family's specific needs.

### **2.5.4 Anthropological approach**

Schwartzman (in Falicov, 1983) also asserts that an 'inside-out' approach is a more effective means to learn the family's culture than an 'outside-in' approach (i.e. prior knowledge). He proposes an ethnographic model which allows metaphorical classification of the family's worldview. Schwartzman (in Falicov, 1983) advocates that family therapists adopt some aspects of the traditional anthropological approach used to study social systems, for their own work with families. Thus families can be seen as socio-cultural systems rather than dysfunctional clinical subjects. Corresponding to an ethnographic approach the therapist's premises should not be seen as the appropriate and only way, but represent one possible belief system. A self-reflexivity is thereby encouraged where the therapist continuously questions his/her assumptions about family life. In order to further foster an inside-out approach (characteristic of ethnography), the therapist needs to make a family diagnosis, which comes to constitute the family ethnography. This will include the cultural context, the worldview of each family member, and the relationship of the family as a whole to its social context. If adequately

carried out, the elementary assumptions of the family will emerge from the family ethnography. These assumptions are those that have become self-sustaining and go unquestioned. They are maintained by particular beliefs and myths, and communicated in a certain manner. The particular form in which the family expresses itself can be seen as a metaphor that reflects the family's idiosyncratic cultural mode. This form of communication, together with the belief structure, highlights the main features of the family culture.

### **2.5.5 Strategic approach**

Richeport-Haley (1998) provides a strategic alternative to therapy that is culture focused. She proposes a brief strategic therapy approach which minimizes cultural focus and places emphasis on family structure. This is based on Haley's suggestion (in Richeport-Haley, 1998) that therapy can progress at a faster rate if cultural immersion is avoided.

### **2.5.6 Culture as co-constructed**

Toledano (1996) on the other hand, describes individuals as both actively taking part in and reproducing their cultural contexts. A cultural reality is co-constructed. It is not possible for a therapist to detach him/herself from the culture of the client. A therapist also chooses and punctuates the lenses which he or she uses in therapy with a client. Toledano does however similarly deny the need for prior cultural knowledge and suggests that it is thus necessary to maintain a position of 'cultural reflexivity.' The therapist needs to pay constant attention to the manner in which he/she is listening or punctuating. This will foster an awareness about one's own and the client's cultural value systems.

### **2.5.7 Social constructionist and narrative approaches**

While most of these alternate approaches do also accord a central position to the cultural dimension in family therapy (be it in a different manner), the 'cultural turn' in family therapy has been associated with the social constructionist and narrative approaches. These approaches tend to broadly describe a culture as a group who socially construct, interpret, maintain and transmit particular meanings (Seltzer, Seltzer, Homb, Midtstigen,

& Vik, 2000). Culture is depicted within the literature as ‘storying communities’ (Pare, 1995; Mair in Seltzer et. al., 2000) and ‘meaning-constucting groups.’ This definitional stance has tended to lead to an emphasis on the ideational rather than the material dimensions of culture. Thus, the focus is on thoughts and ideas rather than on the practical, physical actions that cultures engage in. The linguistic and constructionist approaches have received criticism for their disinterest in materiality, such as ritualized practices. Their ideational focus on meaning and construction for example, have resulted in the formula that actions are guided by ideas (Seltzer et al., 2000). While this possibility is acknowledged it is argued by authors such as Seltzer et al. (2000) that there is also a dialectical reverse. The material elements of culture also influence ideas.

This dilemma of either an ideational or material focus, resonates with the problems in perspectives that primarily highlight differences as well as perspectives that depreciate cultural differences. Focusing on differences only creates stereotyped, disconnected and antithetical groups. At the same time, highlighting similarities only minimizes individuality and allows the strongest group to have the advantage of defining the whole (Pederson, 1997). These either/or dualisms subscribe to a limiting and reductionistic philosophy which draws dichotomies. This paper will therefore attempt to avoid entanglement in this restrictive web and advocate a combination of dimensions.

## **2.6 A multi-dimensional framework**

Moving away from dichotomous reductionism, Goldner (in Toledano, 1996) postulates that it is not a case of opting for either the content or the process of the family. Families are complex systems and constitute of multiple levels and dimensions. This conceptualization allows for the processes, social realities and cultural content of the family to be explored simultaneously. He advocates a both-and stance. Lappin (in Falicov, 1983) encourages a position in which there is a balance between respect for the culture and a disengagement of it. He states that a respectful curiosity is not sufficient but must be accompanied by knowledge of the culture. Thus the therapist can join with the family through his or her familiarity with the culture and at the same time allow new and different information to emerge. Content and process are thus both employed.

Likewise, Seltzer et al. (2000) call for the simultaneous exploration of ideational and material aspects of culture.

The idea of a multidimensional framework, has also been suggested in the literature by authors such as Falicov (1995). She has advocated a cultural comparative approach which does not separate groups and look at their unique characteristics or bind groups by ignoring their differences. It supports inclusiveness and diversity by exploring the connections *and* variations in groups according to certain parameters. She outlines key parameters, which are common to all models of family therapy, and employs them as a cultural lens from which to generate comparative maps. The parameters she suggests are ecological context, migration and acculturation, family life cycle and family organization. Ecological context entails the different settings in which families can be found and how they have adapted to that environment. In terms of migration and acculturation, there is an exploration of the different places from which family members originate, their reasons for leaving, how they have accomplished this and the impact this move has had on their current lifestyles. In considering family organization, the diversity of the ways in which families arrange and structure themselves and the values that inform this organization are determined. An examination of family life cycle outlines the diversity in the patterned developmental stages and transitions of a family. Similarities and differences come to the fore and a cultural reflexivity is encouraged (Falicov, 1995).

## **2.7 Conclusion**

The field of family therapy as it currently stands, reflects a burgeoning interest in the interplay between culture and the family. The form this interest has taken, seems to have merged in some respects but also varies somewhat. This has resulted in studies and literature that have built on and enhanced, as well as modified and challenged each other. We have thus traveled a long way, and found many routes to follow, but the road ahead is still vast. Although there has been encouraging progress within the field in light of culture and family therapy, there yet remains a prominent gap in the theory and practice literature directly concerning Indian families (Nath & Craig, 1999). Initiatives towards filling that gap are gradually coming under way. These studies still however represent a

relatively new branch in the field of family therapy and highlight the dire need for more work in the area. Furthermore, work of this nature within the South African context is almost non-existent. There seem to be strong moves towards rendering individual therapy in South Africa more culturally relevant and aware of indigenous needs (Prinsloo, 1998). Family therapy however lags significantly behind in this aspect. Consequently, the necessity and potential value of this study seems all the more appealing.

### **CHAPTER 3 Epistemological foundations of the study**

It is felt that one cannot adequately address the significance, neglect or indifference of culture within the field of family therapy without first turning towards the notion of epistemology. Whichever way one turns, the question of epistemology must inevitably appear. One will come to see that the manner in which the issue of culture in family therapy is perceived is a function of the epistemological framework one inhabits. Since all knowledge is reflexive and represents a particular perspective (Keeney, 1983), it is necessary that the author's perspective be specified in this research undertaking. This chapter aims to familiarise the reader with the components of that perspective.

#### **3.1 Defining epistemology**

Epistemology can be defined as the premises that are behind the way one thinks and behaves. Every individual has an epistemology. Bateson (in Keeney, 1983) asserted that suggesting that one does not have an epistemology is a reflection of a 'bad epistemology' since such a claim is invalid. It is simply *how* we know *what* we know. Bateson (in Keeney, 1983) defines epistemology as "how particular organisms or aggregates of organisms know, think and decide" (p.228). Your epistemology becomes your theory on life. If one looks at what one knows, there is no doubt that it is intimately related to how one knows it. Wearing 3D glasses allows one to see the world in 3D. Using this analogy, the glasses represent the epistemology which determines how the individual sees and how he/she sees will influence what one sees and comes to know. "... Seeing is a 'theory-laden' undertaking" and "theory is a net set to catch what we call the world" (Keeney & Sprenkle, 1982, p.5). How one sees the world then is mediated by a set of beliefs and rules (culturally bound) about the way the world works (Auerswald, 1985; Auerswald, 1987; Held & Pols, 1985). It prescribes that reality = #. Therefore everything that happens must be seen in terms of # or within the framework of #. In this way, a particular experiential reality is created and maintained (Keeney, 1984).

The world in which you find yourself has as its architect the tools of your epistemology. That which you see, feel, experience, think – the very act of living, is a function of epistemology. The impetus for this study, its manner of approach, and so forth, are a result of the author's own epistemology. It becomes necessary to provide the audience with a glimpse of the fibres with which this tapestry has been woven. A further discussion will thus ensue. Altheide and Johnson (1994) state that:

... what separates ethnographers from the others is not so much the objective truth of what is being stated as it is the *process* or *way of knowing*. We should continue to be concerned with producing texts that explicate *how* we claim to know *what* we know. It is precisely the difficulty of intersubjective understanding that demands that social scientists as claim makers be clear and precise in delineating the basis for their claims (p. 496).

### **3.2 The drawing of distinctions: The construction of reality**

All individuals engage in the act of drawing distinctions and it is through drawing these distinctions that a world gets built up around us. Distinctions are made by looking at differences. One can only know A through distinguishing it from B, and one can only know B through distinguishing it from A. There is nothing innate in A that makes it A. Its 'A-ness' derives largely from its lack of 'B-ness.' Having an awareness of the notion that we know what we know not because of the innate characteristics of that which we seek to know, but through the drawing of distinctions, allows the tearing off of the heavy metal chains that have tied one to a particular distinction. It opens the avenue for exploring and engaging in many different distinctions, many different cultural possibilities – FREEDOM!- At last the cards can be reshuffled. "A world can be discerned in an infinite number of ways depending on the distinctions one establishes" (Keeney, 1983, p.79). It allows for the handsome quality of 'openness' to emerge into the foreground. As a result of this epistemological framework, one can always be open to new possibilities (Falzer, 1986).

As distinctions are drawn, we create what we see and are able to describe it. Bateson suggested that "... every description is based upon, and contains implicitly, a theory of

how to describe” (in Keeney, 1983, p.65). Thus our observations and descriptions of those observations are based on the distinctions that have been drawn. The recursive connection must be however noted. The distinctions we draw allow us to make certain observations and the observations we make inform our distinctions. Description and prescription are recursively connected (Keeney, 1983). One can only see what one’s distinctions allow one to and what one sees informs ones distinctions.

### **3.3 The self-referential and reflexive nature of distinctions**

As long as how we see what we see (and describe that seeing) is based on the distinctions *we* draw, we will always be a part of those observations. As Keeney puts it: “The dog chases its tail, the explanation is in the explained, the descriptor in the description, the observer in the observed, the therapist in the therapy...”(Keeney, 1983, p.23). You are not only the painter of the picture that you see but part of the picture as well. Reflexivity becomes apparent as the subject and object cannot be separated. All observations are self-referential, and may say more about you and your preferred distinctions, than about the observed.

The notion that the observer is always part of that which is observed has very significant consequences. Since all statements and observations are self-referential, one can never objectively show that a view is better. This generates a rare respect for difference. Some authors assume that this implies a banishment of objectivity in favour of complete subjectivity, which then becomes meaningless (Hayward, 1996). To the contrary, the realization that ones distinctions and punctuations reflect a preference for seeing things in a particular manner, encourages a constant awareness of this and a commitment to taking ethical responsibility for ones observations. It “replaces our concern with objectivity to one of responsibility...In sum, the distinctions we make in order to know the human world arise from an ethical, not objective or subjective base” (Keeney, 1983, p.81). It is when one looks at things in this way that it becomes much more meaningful.

Implicit in this is the acknowledgement that one can never be value free. It is important to recognize and take responsibility for one’s values. This allows that no one view can be



imposed on another and it generates a respect for other views – an ethical awareness and appreciation of difference. A sensitivity to the many different shades in which distinctions may be coloured acts as a safeguard against the development of stereotypes and ‘champions’ difference. It provides a context conducive to the development of mature interpersonal relations. How one sees things is not an issue because there is no right and wrong, it is only a matter of difference. What is important is the consequences of that distinction. Bateson claims that: “If a man entertains false opinions regarding his own nature, he will be led thereby to courses of action which will be in some profound sense immoral or ugly” (in Keeney, 1983, p.265).

### **3.4 Punctuation**

The value-laden nature of the act of drawing of distinctions implicates the already manifest notion of punctuation. Punctuation occurs when there is subscription to a particular side of the distinction. Distinctions are often drawn with the purpose of punctuating an experience. A specific punctuation creates a specific reality and individuals may punctuate the same incident differently. It is in this manner that different realities are created. Individuals are not able to always realize their different realities. They however relate with each other as if they have a shared reality. The result is that they do not resonate on the same frequency. Culture is one means through which punctuation occurs. Inconsistencies in reality thus need to be highlighted when required in therapy. These inconsistencies in reality are more than likely to take on a cultural flavour especially in South Africa.

As long as one continues to draw distinctions in a certain way, a particular punctuation is maintained and the reality that is constructed by these descriptions is perpetuated (Keeney, 1983). An awareness of how we know what we know allows one to move towards changing the distinctions. As an example, instead of considering a pathology as a bad and unwanted disease, the author can conceptualize of it as Keeney and Sprenkle (1982) have put it, as a ‘motor for growth.’ Being able to conceptualize of ‘mental illness’ in this way, especially in the Indian culture has profound potential. This culture has attached a heavy, sticky, smelly stigma to the idea of any psychological difficulty.

This is due to the distinctions that have been drawn which are very dominant. The epistemological framework the author now inhabits allows a utilization of alternate distinctions thereby aiding the untangling from this restrictive web.

It is sometimes a relief to know that reality isn't actually reality but just the way we are looking at things. This is especially the case where the experience is not desirable. As long as reality is not necessarily 'reality' it is not fixed and there is room for change. Thus therapy importantly provides an opportunity in which this can occur and less useful punctuations can be altered. Keeney (1983) holds that the therapist can introduce new information into the worldview of the client so that a new story can emerge which is less painful. "This is analogous to the effects of a key change on a musical composition; through a minor adjustment the entire sound and playing of the melody is dramatically altered"(Searight & Openlander, 1986, p.64). This new worldview will then be personal rather than objective. Such a therapeutic outlook points to the sphere of relationship and the social nature of creating a reality.

### **3.5 The *social* construction of reality**

The realities that we construct rather than discover, have a social component. Constructions do not occur in isolation and distinctions are not drawn independently by the observer. They are social constructions, produced in relationship, via the medium of conversation. Constructions are negotiated over time within the interpersonal context of communities through the mechanism of conversation (McNamee & Gergen, 1992). It is only through engaging in a relevant system of communication, that meaning is produced (Anderson & Goolishian, 1988).

According to Anderson and Goolishian (1988) human systems are both language and meaning generating. In conversing with each other, individuals come to make meaningful contact. The way in which individuals become organized is derived from their systems of communication which produce a shared reality. Thus, the socio-cultural system is itself a product of this communicative system. Consequently, human systems can be seen as linguistic systems. Via the medium of conversation, intersubjective

realities are produced and individuals come take membership in communities of meaning. The definition of culture proposed for this study resonates on this level.

An accepted distinction or view of reality represents the social consensus of meaning that is arrived at (McNamee & Gergen, 1992). It is an intersubjective construction. This implies that any form of understanding requires that two or more individuals have reached an agreement about having understood a particular thing in a particular manner. Models of understanding, patterns and consistencies are generated. This view of reality is however open to change as meaning can be renegotiated into a multiplicity of possibilities. A single Truth fades away in this multiverse of potentialities (Anderson & Goolishian, 1988).

### **3.6 The broader relationship**

This multiverse of potentialities can be linked to the notion that a distinction is drawn upon a distinction, upon a distinction...and there is continual change. A description of the experience actually changes that experience and requires a change of description. The ‘actual’ experience can never be captured. One can thus never completely describe a process. It follows that one can never completely ‘know’ but your picture will always only be a partial picture (Keeney, 1983).

As long as one remains confined to one’s own distinctions and the other to his/her own, then all one can see is parts. However it is when both views are considered that the broader relationship in which these parts are embedded becomes evident. Thus while the drawing of distinctions produces difference, it also indicates a relationship between the parts of comparison (Luckhurst, 1985).

A combination of both starts to provide a more encompassing view – a higher order perspective. Bateson (in Keeney, 1983) terms this process ‘double description.’ Thus:

Given two drawings of a cube taken from the perspective of each eye, a stereoscope can fuse these representations into a double view of higher logical type. In this way both two dimensional drawings are combined to generate a

higher order view of three dimensions. Extending this notion, we can assume that each side of a conceptual distinction can be fused through a cognitive act equivalent to the operation of a stereoscope that produces a higher order view (Keeney & Ross, 1983, p.376).

Although there is a move towards a broader view, one can never capture the ‘whole.’ “In other words, conscious knowing is limited to an awareness of a fragment of the whole system or context within which we are interacting” (Keeney & Sprenkle, 1982, p.15). This is important as it establishes a degree of humility. Acknowledging that our conscious knowing will always be limited and incomplete is a rare phenomenon in a context where everyone seems predominantly set to conquer and prove the superiority and completeness of their knowing. This however does not imply that since we will never know the whole, it is a futile attempt to look further than the parts. Double description, which takes cognisance of the relationship between these parts, is an important step in participating more respectfully in human relations. It is through participating in these principles that one is able to be more fully human.

Our experiences of each other is not something that is ingrained and unchangeable but can be located in a relationship in which both parties must accept responsibility for producing a particular pattern of interaction. That which a client brings to therapy is an integral part of a relationship system. What happens between client and therapist in therapy is linked to their relationship.

It is in this context that either/or distinctions become invalid. Double description is crucial. Each side of a distinction can be seen as a ‘cybernetic complementarity.’ Varela (Keeney, 1983) describes this as ‘the it’/’the process leading to it.’ In other words, both sides of a complementarity need each other in order to exist. The one emerges from the other. We can only know night through distinguishing it from day and vice versa. The sides of a complementarity are thus recursively connected but represent different orders of recursion. They are thus both related and different. Either/or is not possible since the both need each other in order to exist. And/both becomes more viable.

### **3.7 Recursiveness**

There is therefore an ecology in which everything is recursively connected: “Ecology is based on the fundamental doctrine that all things in nature are complexly, but systematically, interrelated...”(Keeney & Sprenkle, 1982, p.9). There is a sense of ‘oneness in everything (Keeney & Sprenkle, 1982). This is a notion that is actually an important part of the author’s spiritual outlook. The esoteric Sufi literature that the author subscribes to strongly reflect sentiments of the ‘Unity that is in the multiplicity.’ Sheikh Badruddin of Simawna (a famous gnostic and scholar from the European region of the Ottoman Empire) has eloquently proclaimed that: ‘All that exists is to be found in each thing; indeed in every atom’ (Chopdat, 2001, p.1).

Since all processes and events have a recursive connection, it is to the sphere of relationship that we must look. Form and pattern become more relevant than substance (Luckhurst, 1985). There is a sequence of behaviour that recurs in relationships. This produces a particular pattern of interaction. Patterns of interaction are recursive and thus recycle producing the same pattern with different contents. Events are organised through patterns (Keeney, 1983). This recursiveness emphasizes the connectedness between one’s behaviour and that of the other.

Recursion bypasses linearity but is different from circularity in that with recursion it is difficult to discern a beginning and an end – if any exist at all! Lineal epistemology carries with it the banner of reductionism (Keeney, 1979). The focus is on discrete elements.

Viewing things as recursively connected does not necessarily mean that linearity does not exist. Lineal ideas can be used when appropriate but with the reminder that any lineal view is part of a broader recursive pattern (Keeney, 1983). Nonlinear epistemology however provides a completely different perspective. It looks at relationships, patterns and ecology. There is a recursive connection among events. Events simultaneously and continuously have an effect on each other. It thus becomes impossible to discern a

starting point and an end as there is no cause or effect (Keeney, 1979). All individuals are part of an ecological context (Searight & Openlander, 1986). The patient is not blamed for his symptoms. Rather, it is located in the ecology and it is a communication about its relationships (Keeney, 1979). It is part of the cultural context and is a reflection of the nature of its relationships.

If everything is recursively connected, then one can draw distinctions anywhere, and no one distinction can be prioritized but represents only part of the picture. The criteria by which to distinguish the correctness of what you observe becomes invalid. One might then feverishly ask: what then is the use of it all? The author holds that it frees one from the silent tyranny of tunnel vision and allows one to make a wide variety of distinctions according to which is more useful. The point the author wants to convey is that one can have the choice over the distinctions one draws and can conceptualize of the situation differently from what it appears, thereby creating a reality that is more suitable.

### **3.8 Epistemology and research**

The manner in which research is conceptualized, planned, carried out and utilised is largely a product of the epistemological stance of the researcher. It is thus relevant at this stage to look at the implications of the author's epistemology for the research approach to this study.

#### **3.8.1 The postmodern approach**

A new approach to research based on a post-modernist philosophy and described as 'alternative paradigm research has become established (Heunis, 1994). It is felt that this study may be categorized as such. The author's epistemological stance can be seen as a combination of elements of both second-order cybernetics and social constructionism, and has a seemingly postmodern flavour to it. It is however with much caution the author proceeds to categorise her approach very broadly and loosely as *postmodern*. This heedfulness is derived from the fact that the banner of postmodern carries under it an immense collection of varied, contrasting and even conflictual orientations. The term itself is subject to great contestation and has defied a unified consensual definition

(Cheek, 1999). Rather than being a homogenous and clearly defined theoretical approach, the postmodern framework comprises of as Bertrens (in Cheek, 1999) calls it, a ‘set of intellectual propositions.’

### **3.8.1.1 Describing the postmodern**

The author has chosen to describe the features of this framework by drawing on some similarities that can be found. Postmodern approaches commonly pose a challenge to modernist assumptions. The defining features of modernism (science, progress and truth) all undergo dis-enthronement. Modernist approaches tend to produce ‘grand theories’ which provide all-encompassing explanatory accounts. These meta-narratives serve as sources of universal truths. Such attempts are severely criticized by proponents of the postmodern approach (Cheek, 1999). Lyotard (in Cheek, 1999) in particular, suggests that the most basic defining feature of postmodernism is its “incredulity towards meta-narratives (p. xxiv).” Rather, a conceptualization of reality is preferred that allows for plurality, multiplicity and diversity to emerge. ‘Explanatory’ accounts do not converge into a coherent singularity but introduce an incoherent, multi-layered perspective. Thus, a particular view of reality is just that- *one* view amongst many possible views, which can only provide a partial representation. Instead of arriving at one particular answer, the postmodern approach to research is likely to facilitate the flourishing of more questions. Reality is plural. There are therefore many layers to be uncovered, many voices to be heard, and many truths to be spoken. There is no necessary or ‘given’ manner in which to understand a phenomenon (Cheek, 1999). Best and Kellner (in Cheek, 1999) conceive of postmodern approaches as involving a rejection of “modern assumptions of social coherence and notions of causality in favour of multiplicity, plurality, fragmentation and indeterminacy” (p. 4).

### **3.8.1.2 Reflexivity**

Another central point of critique involves the expulsion of the so-called ‘Archimedean standpoint’ (Bruce & Greendorfer, 1994) ushered in by the ‘reflexive turn’ in qualitative research. The concept of reflexivity demonstrates that the observer is always a part of the context and culture being studied (Altheide & Johnson, 1994). Due to the reflexivity

involved, it becomes impossible to pursue a subject-object dualism (Heunis, 1994). The knower cannot be separated from the known and thus is unable to provide a rational and objective account of the ‘truth.’ The dichotomy between subject and object is seen as artificial. All knowledge emerges from a subjective/intersubjective position, being contextually and socially constructed. Knowledge is submerged in cultural and historical discourses. It is created rather than discovered (Bruce & Greendorfer, 1994). All research and its outcomes can be seen as constructions. They thus carry with them the social, cultural and historical circumstances of their production and cannot be reflections of the nature of the world (Atkinson & Hammersley, 1994).

As Bruce and Greendorfer (1994) proclaim:

As researchers...we are all caught in the postmodern moment- a time of ferment, challenge and change in intellectual circles. Disciplinary boundaries are blurring and the sense of security that went with being able to clearly label ourselves, of being able to identify the right way to conduct and evaluate research, has been given notice, if not disappeared (p. 259).

### **3.8.1.3 Critique of modernist research**

The way in which one conceptualizes of research will determine what is to be regarded as an appropriate field of research, the context of the research and the manner in which research should be represented. It is thus not a neutral or value-free endeavour but the result of a specific understanding of research, a specific epistemology (Cheek, 1999).

The long retained Enlightenment code of values which have preserved a particular mode of social enquiry have undergone disintegration due to a broad ranging critique of the natural science model of research (Bruce & Greendorfer, 1994). Bernstein (in Heunis, 1994, p.21) contends that “it is an illusion and a deep self-deception to think that there is some overarching framework, some neutral descriptive language, some permanent standards of rationality to which we can appeal in order to understand and critically evaluate the competing claims that are made.” Virtually all aspects of this model including ontology, epistemology and methodology have come under scrutiny. The most common and prominent challenges posed are often seen in methodological terms an



example being qualitative vs. quantitative. It is however argued that one must look deeper than this, at concerns around ontology and epistemology (Bruce & Greendorfer, 1994).

### **3.8.2 Alternative paradigm research**

‘Alternative paradigm’ research is receiving increasing support. There is a need for new conceptual research models that employ alternate defining criteria which do not necessarily cohere with the modernist model, and are based on an alternate epistemology (Heunis, 1994). Alternate research models should include a contextual component and recognises the reciprocity in relationship between researcher and ‘subject’. It is acknowledged that any form of interpretation reflects the principles of the interpreter’s constructed worldview (Heunis, 1994). These constructions affect the manner in which reality is described. Thus observation itself transforms what is being observed (Heunis, 1994).

Alternative paradigm research assumes a qualitative rather than a quantitative nature. The results of qualitative research take the form of words rather than numbers. It is felt that quantification produces very limited results (Stiles, 1993). Empathy is commonly employed in qualitative research as a strategy. Empathic understanding involves both the researchers own understanding, experiences and knowledge, as well as intersubjective meanings shared by a community (as has been utilized in this study). Thus unlike with quantitative research, meaning becomes central here. Through mechanisms of control quantitative approaches remove contextual variables which may alter findings. This actually minimizes the applicability of the research as it can only be generalized to other similarly context-stripped situations (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). With qualitative research, the context is always taken into account. Research must be contextualised and understood in terms of its context. The cultural and personal context of the researcher and the researched comes to the foreground. Therefore it is not necessary for qualitative research to have a wide-ranging generalisability. Traditional research assumes linear causality. However, in experiential and behavioural systems where environmental conditions cannot be completely controlled, it is not as simple as one thing causes

another. Elements interact with each other and there is feedback which impacts subsequently. There is thus difficulty with prediction and causality is rather conceptualized in non-linear terms. The aim is not prediction and control but to enhance the reader's ability to understand (Stiles, 1993).

### **3.8.3 Implications**

The basic implications of the aforementioned assumptions for this study are as follows: There will be no attempts to articulate a grand theory but research findings can be seen as products of the socially negotiated distinctions subscribed to by the researcher. This also guards against the possibility of stereotyping and over-generalizing.

Reflexivity is recognized. Subsequently, the account provided will not be presented as separate from the assumptions of the author. Potential effects of the author's worldview, cultural and personal context will be acknowledged. The account that the author will provide represents an amalgamation of personal, community, cultural and religious narratives mediated through her own epistemological tools. It thus incorporates the author's voice along with multiple other voices. While it includes however, it also excludes since not every voice is incorporated. The possibility exists for yet many more divergences and variations. There are always multiple perspectives and layers of meaning within any setting. This multiplicity is not always explicit and even members of these contexts remain oblivious to it. Understanding of every dimension is thus not possible, nor is it in this case, desirable. The author also acknowledges that what is presented may not at all speak on behalf of others since one's observations have the potential to say more about the observer than the observed. The author's own background and history is likely to have a bearing on the type of material presented, as well as the way in which it is done. It is therefore necessary to provide further information in this regard.

Furthermore, the author's epistemological foundations should be specified (which has already been discussed) and the desired evaluative criteria for the research need to be made explicit. Based on these foundations, there will be no testing of hypotheses or

attempts to establish linear causality. The aim will rather be to generate understanding and different layers of meaning. Research results will be presented in qualitative, descriptive form and the study will be contextualised.

### **3.9 Conclusion**

The epistemological space described above, invites complexity and honours it at its arrival. A profound awareness of oneself and the other emerges as the different threads we use to weave are displayed. At the same time, the intricately connected larger tapestry takes shape. This nurtures a sense of deep responsibility for the pieces we produce and a striking respect for how we handle articles produced by others. An attractive curiosity about the world emerges and what one finds when one looks, is most humbling.

The author has chosen to engage in what can be classified as alternate paradigm research. This preference stems from the author's amalgamated second-order cybernetic, social constructionist epistemology, which has a distinct postmodern flair to it. The author conceptualizes of the postmodern approach as entailing a pronounced rejection of grand theories or metanarratives in favour of multiple, local realities and truths. The apparent reflexivity of research does not allow for the researcher to be separated from the researched. One is thus unable to provide an objective account but merely constructs a view that is heavily laden with the contextual and epistemological discourses from which it arises.

## **CHAPTER 4 Methodology**

### **4.1 Research method**

It must be noted that one will not find a distinct set of postmodern research methods that can be applied to a particular subject matter. Rather, the postmodern approach offers a way of thinking which guides the types of questions asked, the form of research conducted, as well as its resulting analysis (Cheek, 1999). Seale (1999) asserts however, that particular methods that have originally been developed from within particular paradigms to serve certain ends can be utilised within different paradigms for different purposes. For example, this research endeavour can be conceptualized as utilizing the notion of ‘triangulation.’ Triangulation involves the employment of more than two sources of data collection (Seale, 1999). In this case it involves the author’s own experience, the experiences of community members accessed through participant observation of them and the formal use of academic literature. Traditionally, triangulation was used to establish the rigour of the methodology by obtaining data from a variety of sources that converged on the same conclusions and confirmed a single unitary truth (Seale, 1999). In this study it is utilized to acknowledge and assist the inclusion of multiple voices. Participant observation, personal experience, ethnography and academic literature have thus been used in conjunction as a means data collection.

### **4.2 Data collection**

#### **4.2.1 Participant observation**

The primary method of data collection for this study was participant observation, the definition of which defies consensus (Adler & Adler, 1994). It basically involves research in which the researcher engages in observation within a natural setting to collect data, while at the same time maintaining some degree of membership in that context. Since all research findings are reflexive and the act of research is social, research should be based on the experiences of people who are actually members of their settings (Altheide & Johnson, 1994). Literature generally distinguishes between three alternative researcher roles with this type of research, viz. the complete participant, the participant-as-observer, the observer-as-participant, and the complete observer. The current research

involved the researcher as a complete participant as the researcher was already a member of the research field and thus was both an active member and a researcher (Adler & Adler, 1994). It must be noted that self-observation was also used. Adler and Adler (1994) cite self-observation as having the potential to yield an immense depth of meaning into experiences. The ‘authenticity’ of such research can be gauged from the extent to which it corresponds to the experiences of readers and shows plausibility (Adler & Adler, 1994).

#### **4.2.2 Personal experience**

The data provided with reference to the South African Muslim Indian family is derived mainly from the author’s own personal experience of being a member of this community. Clandinin and Connelly (1994) assert that all social science enquiry must necessarily start from and be based on experience. The social sciences occupies itself with the study of individuals, their relationships with themselves, others and the environment, which is grounded on the study of experience (Clandinin & Connelly, 1994). The means of inquiry for this study thus occurred through the vehicle of participation. Rather than there being a formal and conventional academic method through which the author sought material, it was achieved through what Reason (in Denzin & Lincoln, 1994) calls “the living processes of coming to know” (p.325). It is felt by some authors that the accountability of the research study is enhanced when the inquiry occurs within the context and process of real human experience (Altheide & Johnson, 1994).

The two main features of experience are its temporality and its storied form. Experience is perceived, expressed and translated through stories. The personal, cultural and social history that a story provides bears testimony to its fullness (Clandinin & Connelly, 1994). Clandinin and Connelly (1994) advocate that: “Experience, in this view, is the stories people live. People live stories, and in the telling of them reaffirm, modify them and create new ones. Stories such as these, lived and told, educate the self and others, including the young and those such as researchers, who are new to...communities” (p.415). One may enquire about the utility of narratives as they do not seek to and cannot

predict what others will do. It does however provide a basis for understanding others in similar situations and introduces plausible possibilities (Stiles, 1993).

#### **4.2.3 Ethnography**

It may be acceptable to categorize this study as a form of ethnography. The definition of ethnography has likewise been controversial. It does however customarily involve the collection and use of unstructured data, reject the testing of hypotheses for the exploration of certain social phenomenon and use a small number of cases, the results of which are expressed descriptively rather than statistically. Ethnographic studies usually involve considerable participant observation. From its inception, ethnography has been driven by the interest of the West in Non-Western societies and is stimulated by a ‘recognition of difference.’ Thus Altheide and Johnson (1994) attempt to relate the aim of ethnography as being: “to grasp the native’s point of view, his relation to life, to realize his vision of his world” (p.487). Ethnographic studies originally sought to understand individuals from the *past* and from *other* societies. Its application has however extended to the study of one’s *own* society in *present* times (Atkinson & Hamersley, 1994). The suitability of this type of research and the methods used for the nature of this study are of a high degree.

#### **4.3 Research procedure**

The account that is provided represents an amalgamation of personal, community, cultural and religious narratives mediated through the author’s epistemological tools. Personal narratives have been informed by the author’s own experiences of family life. Participant observation involving members of the community was a primary source from which community narratives were derived. Previous experiences as well as those of a more recent nature have been used as resources in this regard. This was done on an informal basis. Individuals were not formally inducted into the study but randomly observed as naturally interacting with their families. No form of interviewing occurred. Explicit, directed or purposeful conversations with individuals were not pursued at any stage. Data was extracted only on the basis of observation. In order to help preserve a

naturalistic and unobtrusive approach, data was extracted in a random manner and where convenient.

#### **4.4 Access to participants**

Participants could be accessed wherever possible for instance, at community centres and cultural or family gatherings. This however required prior consent from relevant gatekeepers. It was important that venues and occasions be utilised which have the broadest possible exposure to the community of concern, are easily accessible to members and widely recognized and utilized. The context should also as far as possible encourage an environment in which families can relate naturally. Having explored the possibilities, a key community centre was identified as the most viable option. The author is already actively involved in the centre. Gaining access to the centre as a participant observer was thus unproblematic. It was decided that the centre's annual fund-raising fete, attending some of the functions held in the hall and maintaining the already established involvement in the activities of the centre would be used for the purposes of research.

#### **4.5 Research setting**

In compliance with the specifications of the centre, the name and details of the centre are not used in the study, neither was it necessary for the objectives of this study. It is hoped that a basic description of the centre is suffice. The identified centre is a prominent and established resource in the community. It is actively involved in community issues at all levels and consistently engages members of the South African Indian Muslim community in its affairs.

The centre is a hub of activity comprising of many different components. It has a home for orphaned and abandoned children. Well-resourced library facilities are available. A day-care and pre-school program is being run. Primary health care facilities and a child care clinic are on the premises. A legal advice centre has also been set up. In addition to this, feeding schemes and welfare or charity based work occur from its offices. There is a catering service for functions and occasions or just everyday meals. The centre also

provides regular courses in spiritual training for children and adults. Classes for children are held every weekday after school with large-scale attendance. Mosque (church) facilities are on the premises, serving a large congregation for all five daily prayers. A huge hall is also available to the community for hiring. Both formal occasions and social events are held here. Members of the community hire the premises for fundraising events, special occasions such as weddings, religious gatherings, community meetings and lecture series.

The centre is a non-governmental organisation dedicated towards serving the community, and relying on the voluntary assistance of its members. A strong network of individuals volunteer their services to the centre on various levels for whatever purpose or occasion. The activities ventured into by the centre usually rallies together considerable family involvement both from those who assist in providing the services and those who utilise the services.

#### **4.6 Sampling**

There were no specific sampling criteria which participants had to meet except for belonging to the specified South African Indian Muslim culture. As the author made very limited direct contact with the participants, the personal or biographical details of individual subjects remain unexplored. The author did not make note of the ‘who’ in the study but was rather interested in the ‘what’ and the ‘how’ of the subject matter.

Anonymity was thus not an issue of concern. The author’s observations were noted at a later stage, when the author had left the field of observation.

#### **4.7 Utilisation of data**

Cultural and religious narratives tend to operate on the level of personal and community. Their presence and influence can thus be detected in the personal and community discourses. The author’s substantial grounding in specific cultural narratives (in accordance with preferred definition of culture, ‘cultural’ will include religious narratives) derived from consolidated membership of the group allowed for the identification of dominant narrative themes. From the data the author identified and then



utilised shared personal and community narratives that reflect common cultural (and religious) narratives or themes. Thus, there is an attempt to link specific practices and beliefs (personal and community narratives) to particular dominant cultural narratives, and to compare it to what the literature says about other families. This exercise builds a bridge between the organisation of the family and its meaning structures. In doing so, the author has attempted to identify/describe the ways in which the South African Indian Muslim family derive meaning, organize and experience their lives from their particular cultural position. The applicable and relevant academic narratives, concepts and models have been applied to the data where necessary, thereby highlighting points of convergence and contrast, as well as allowing for these narratives to be translated into a form that is appetizing for academic consumption. It must be noted however that the description that is offered has been filtered through the author's own epistemological sieve rather than being representative of an objective reality.

Through this amalgamation, this study thus attempts to incorporate the author's voice along with multiple other voices. While it includes however, it also excludes since not every voice is incorporated. The possibility exists for yet many more divergences and variations. There are always multiple perspectives and layers of meaning within any setting. This multiplicity is not always explicit and even members of these contexts remain oblivious to it. Understanding of every dimension is thus not possible, nor is it in this case, desirable. The author also acknowledges that what is presented may not at all speak on behalf of others since one's observations have the potential to say more about the observer than the observed. The author's own background and history is likely to have a bearing on the type of material presented, as well as the way in which it is done. It is therefore necessary to provide further information in this regard. The author is the eldest of two children in a working class Muslim Indian family. All four members of the family were born and bred in South Africa. The family can be described as being religious and moderate subscribers to cultural practices and rituals

#### 4.8 Research aims

In light of the epistemological assumptions of the author, conventional scientific aims, means of advancement and its goals do not take precedence. Modernist methodological rules, which dictate the assessment of quality research under the auspices of ‘reliability’ and ‘validity’ are gradually losing ground with the emergence of alternate paradigms (Seale, 1999). The conventional positivist concerns about validity and reliability do not assume the same relevance within a postmodern framework (Adler & Adler, 1994). For example, the social constructionist and postmodernist flavour of the author’s own stance does not allow for validity, generalizability, replicability and reliability to be used as research criteria. This does not necessarily imply that with postmodern qualitative research “anything goes.” Quality is still important but its defining features need to be reassessed (Seale, 1999). There is a widespread critique of modernist notions of acceptable research. The modernist notion of valid research was based mainly on the extent to which proper and precise methodology was executed. In other words, *how* the study was conducted claimed priority. Alternative paradigms which challenge the positivist framework have rejected methodology as criteria (Bruce & Greendorfer, 1994).

Lincoln and Guba (in Seale, 1999) for instance take issue with four criteria through which positivist research is assessed, namely, indication of truth, degree of applicability, level of consistency and neutrality. They contend that the first criteria assumes that there is a unitary truth that can be investigated and discovered. It contrasts strikingly with the possibility of multiple realities that are constructed. Degree of applicability suggests the need to be able to generalise from a limited sample to a larger population, based on the untested premise that both bear similarity. From an alternate perspective, it can be argued that all contexts are potentially unique. Any generalisation beyond the local requires the establishment of the similitude of both contexts. This also throws into question the concept of consistency. Neutrality, they suggest, is inconceivable as values can only be artificially separated from the researcher.

These two authors instead propose their own criteria as a replacement. One needs to establish credibility rather than truth. This can be accomplished through checks by other

members. Auditing, which provides a self-critical account of the manner in which the research was conducted can establish confirmability (in place of objectivity). Peer auditing can arrive at an indication of dependability (in place of consistency) and transferability can be swapped for applicability (Seale, 1999).

Realizing that these criteria still pose a quest truth, Lincoln and Guba have formulated an additional criterion. This criterion revolves around the notion of ‘authenticity.’ This criterion adds a relativist tone by qualifying research accounts as true only in so far as they conform to current consensus. In order for research to be authentic it should represent many different realities (fairness), empower those involved and thus be oriented to action, educate and facilitate a more sophisticated understanding. This contribution is also not without its cracks since the notion that these features are desired by everyone in every context, is itself a culturally biased and value-laden assumption (Seale, 1999).

There is thus a need for alternate and more appropriate criteria to be established. However, a lack of agreement exists on what those criteria should be since the different paradigms are founded on varying epistemological and ontological features (Bruce & Greendorfer, 1994). It has been argued that the abdication of one set of universal (modernist) research criteria does not necessitate a reinstitution by an alternate set, be it postmodern or not. There need not be research criteria that transcend all paradigms. Rather, since there are multiple truths, one can only apply criteria to a specific paradigm that are derived from within the epistemological and ontological assumptions of that paradigm. The world will be studied and interpreted according to the way in which one views it. Criteria and methods employed by a particular researcher are a reflection of that researcher's worldview (Bruce & Greendorfer, 1994). The implications of this view are that researchers need to develop an awareness of the epistemological and ontological foundations of the differing paradigms, and each researcher must specify the evaluative criteria by which his/her research should be assessed. It must be noted however that assessment is employed for the purposes of ‘quality control’ and not to grade the superiority of one theory over another (Bruce & Greendorfer, 1994). Emphasis is placed on the impact the research has on its readers. Rather than being aimed at obtaining the

objective truth through theory testing and verification, it seeks to generate understanding by people through description (Stiles, 1993). Cole (in Bruce & Greendorfer, 1994) asserts that in response to postmodern challenges research becomes aimed at producing “more adequate, honest, and useful representations of cultures” (p. 266).

As already stated, the aim of research of such a nature is not the testing and verification of hypotheses in order to converge on a single dominant truth. Rather, the aim is to facilitate understanding, usefulness, the acknowledgement and proliferation of many (‘other’) voices, and an awareness of different realities. In keeping with these tenets this study seeks to create a creative opening in which different stories can be heard and differing stories can be created. It attempts to provide a baseline index from which existing approaches can be explored, assessed, and modified as well as from which alternate and more useful ideas can be generated. These aims are also the evaluative criteria by which the author hopes to be assessed.

#### **4.9 Conclusion**

The research can be described as ethnographic and is qualitative, descriptive, and contextualised. It utilizes the author’s own experiences and understanding, as well as the inter-subjective meanings shared by the community informed through participant observation. Shared personal and community narratives will be linked to the dominant cultural narratives that inform them, thereby allowing for multiple layers of understanding and meaning to be generated, instead of pursuing the testing of hypotheses to yield an objective truth.

## **CHAPTER 5 Discourses in schools of family therapy**

This chapter seeks to explore the core epistemological orientations that have framed the various paradigms in family therapy. It is the aim of this chapter to facilitate a basic epistemological contextualisation of differing family therapy approaches and their implications for culture. As such, the complexities of therapy itself will not be of centrality to the discussion, except where necessary or applicable to the subject matter.

The progression of family therapy over time has witnessed several significant shifts. There is a move from a focus on the observed object, to the observing subject, to the intersubjective involving that between the object and subject (Pare, 1995). Also, at its inception family therapy mainly reflected modernist features but increasingly evolved into a postmodern stance (Pare, 1995). The progress of family therapy and its evolution of perspective regarding culture can be seen as a reflection of broad epistemological shifts from modernity to postmodernity. It is thus necessary to briefly outline the characteristics of these viewpoints to facilitate a better contextualisation. A further discussion will elaborate on these ideas.

### **5.1 Modernism**

The family therapy movement was initially characterised by a strong modernist stance (Goldenberg & Goldenberg, 1996). This stance is demonstrated through the features of the models of therapy at the time and their approach to culture. Later conceptualizations such as social-constructionism and narrative therapy embraced the folds of postmodernism.

Modernity assumes that reality is singular and perceptible. The component parts of this reality can be objectively observed and studied separately (Weingarten, 1998). Based on the assumption that there is an objectively verifiable reality and the primacy of it, it proposed the use of science and reason as the best means towards the production of legitimate and progressive knowledge. Demonstrable and observable rationality and

logic assumed priority over feelings, process and that which cannot be observed. Knowledge must be informed through empirical facts which are apprehendable to all individuals through their sensory functions (Giddens, 1984).

Modernist thinkers initially tended to use the individual as the starting point for all knowledge and action. Individual reason prevails. It is assumed from this perspective that individuals are not part of a larger whole but are autonomous (Hall, Held, Hubert & Thompson, 1995). Society is merely a conglomeration of individuals. The potential of culture is thus minimized.

Modernity, because of its preoccupation with science and the individual, also expressed a conception of human nature as coherent and fixed – subject to the universal laws of scientific reason. There is a belief that there is an essential human nature that is universal and has a stable core. This demonstrates a modernist belief in the possibility, and indeed desirability of, universally applicable narratives or explanations of reality. Modernist thinkers valorized the importance of absolute truths and the conclusiveness of knowledge production (Hall et. al., 1995). Universality is a central feature of modernism. It advocates that there is consistency in findings across time and space. All-encompassing generalisations can be made and grand theories articulated (Moathlodi, 1992).

It thus sought to explain all phenomena in terms of a predetermined model/ norm (Hall et. al., 1995). There are universally valid prescriptive norms (standards of reality) to which one is expected to subscribe. Variations from these grand theories are not accepted as cogent but are punctuated as mere deviations from the norm, as being defective. This notion leaves little room for difference and disqualifies the experiences and even the existence of the other. All observations are made according to a pre-existing norm and must be altered to fulfil normative criteria (Hall et. al., 1995). According to Shuda (in Mason, Rubenstein & Shuda, 1992) in South Africa this mode of thought filtered through political and social institutions who propagated an ideology that completely dismissed the value of an alternate worldview. Any difference was looked on with disdain and this influenced the manner in which contact was made between people.

With the dominance of science and empiricism comes the refutation of value positions. The role of values is denied. One is believed to be able to assume a position of absolute objectivity, suspending any bias, and to be able to stand outside of the phenomenon under observation (Hall et. al., 1995). Culture is unlikely to feature in the domain of objectivity, as an acknowledgement of culture is ultimately an acceptance of the operation of value systems. The idea of cultural variation introduces the notion that different cultures do legitimately exist and operate from differing value positions. One is always operating from that particular cultural position which one inhabits. Observations are made partially based on the principles of this position, and therefore have the potential to reflect bias. Proposing objectivity negates the plausibility of cultural variations, thereby denying the involvement of particular value positions and blinding one to the possibility of cultural bias. In modernity, the observer can be separated from the observed, from the client, and from his/her observations. He/she is in no way part of what is being produced (Goldenberg & Goldenberg, 1996)). Thus the focus of family therapy was on the micro-environment of the family without a consideration of the historical and cultural factors that impact on it (Moathlodi, 1992).

Knowledge has scientific origins and is therefore necessarily based on experimental method. Linear causality, where ‘A’ causes ‘B’, is a dominant mode of thought. Thus modernist thought involved the testing and verification of linear hypotheses in a scientific manner in order to objectively prove/disprove theoretical assumptions, based on pre-established norms. In this manner the ‘truth’ is discovered, confirmed and maintained (Moathlodi, 1992).

### **5.1.1 First-order cybernetics**

First-order cybernetics can be seen as an outgrowth of the modernist school of thought. The term cybernetics has Greek origins, implying the study of self-regulation and control (Heunis, 1994). First order cybernetics made its appearance within the field around the 1940’s. Its principles were derived from computer science and communications engineering (Goldenberg & Goldenberg, 1996). According to Keeney (1982) first order cybernetics presents a different worldview to that of the systemic view. He contends that

in this paradigm, it is the pattern of organization or form that takes precedence. Both parts and wholes are examined in terms of form.

From this perspective, still strikingly modernist, there are universal laws which dominate all systems. The therapist is the objective expert who ‘single-handedly’ changes the family through intervening in a particular way and achieving a pre-determined outcome. The therapist is not part of the system but remains outside of it and does ‘to’ the system without being affected by it (Goldenberg & Goldenberg, 1996). This conceptualization creates a closed model which becomes impervious to the influence and effects of the cultural domain.

There is a distinct tendency towards reciprocal determinism or circular causality. Instead of one factor simply causing another, all members of a system are simultaneously affecting and being affected by every other member (Goldenberg & Goldenberg, 1996).

The control of feedback cycles became more important. Feedback information is based partially on past experience. This feedback from past performance is reintroduced into the system, thereby guiding current performance. Feedback information is thus altered and the system is able to regulate itself. The sequence of current exchanges of communication that occur within a family or their interactional pattern i.e. the process between its members is more important than the content they bring. As a result historical facts are not included into the contemporary understanding of the problem (Moathlodi, 1992). Cultural facts fade into the background.

### **5.1.2 General systems theory**

General systems theory, being an example of the first-order perspective, can be seen as one of the major schools of thought that have framed the field of family therapy. Systemic thinking can be described as one of the most important turning points (away from its limited intra-psychic origins) in the field of family therapy. It presents a view of human functioning, that served as a foundation from which progressive works could



sprout (Pederson, 1997). This approach also presents an important departure away from traditional scientific thought (Heunis, 1994).

#### **5.1.2.1 Context**

The family systems metaphor importantly began to point to the importance of context. As a result, pathology in one member came to be seen as serving a function of particular significance within the family, as indicative of dysfunctional family patterns, or as a result of a specific transitional family difficulty. The identified patient is located within the family context, within the interpersonal, and the family becomes the focus of treatment (Pederson, 1997).

#### **5.1.2.2 Systemic interdependence**

This contextual focus can be associated with the notion that it is not just the cumulative parts of the system which constitute the whole, and the system does not gain characterization solely through its output. The system is instead understood and defined in terms of its interactive pattern, the interrelationship of its component parts. The object of analysis becomes the system as a whole (Heunis, 1994). Bateson contended that the members of a family function as thermostats that help stabilize temperature. This notion importantly alludes to the concept of systemic interdependence (Pare, 1995). Each member of the family is dependant on the other and there is therefore mutual causality (Pederson, 1997).

#### **5.1.2.3 The systemic metaphor**

The systemic metaphor describes living organisms as being open active systems where information flows continuously into and is directed out of the system. Interaction with the environment is bi-directional. This process is not merely a passive adaptation that occurs but a purposeful exchange through permeable boundaries. The boundaries of closed systems on the other hand are impermeable. Interaction with the environment is limited. Isolation results and possibilities for change are therefore restricted (Goldenberg & Goldenberg, 1996). The system becomes rigid, does not respond to environmental changes and disintegrates. According to Auerswald (in Mason, Rubenstein & Shuda,

1992) there are two possibilities that may follow. Depending on the availability of appropriate new information to the system, a restoration of its former chaotic equilibrium or a total restructuring and transformation can occur. New information will allow transformation to occur. It can be argued that in order for this new information to be effective, it must be congruent with its context, i.e. culturally relevant.

#### **5.1.2.4 Feedback mechanisms**

Feedback mechanisms are necessary in order to maintain a state of internal equilibrium and stability, thereby allowing for homeostasis. Exchanges with the environment are monitored and any threatening change sets off mechanisms to restore homeostasis. It is when the elements of an ecosystem interact in a dysfunctional manner that pathology results (Goldenberg & Goldenberg, 1996).

#### **5.1.2.5 Critique of the general systems approach**

The general systems perspective represents a major shift away from the individual towards a more environmentally inclusive understanding of pathology. Its focus is however limited to the microenvironment, the family. The broader cultural and historical hierarchy is neglected (Pare, 1995). Rosenblatt (in Pare, 1996) criticizes traditional systemic metaphors as obscuring important issues. The areas of culture, gender, class, race and power have not been adequately dealt with.

In addition to this, the central systems metaphor and its related concepts do not make provision for the inclusion of the cultural aspects of epistemology. This is a significant flaw as it is not the system that constructs meaning around experience but it is culture. We come to know the world through a cultural lens (Pare, 1996). Systems epistemology is directed at describing how the world *is* rather than exploring how we come to know it (Pare, 1995). Indeed the initial mainstream models of family therapy were ontological rather than epistemological. (Pare, 1995). This reflects modernist tendencies: knowledge of how the world ‘should’ be, the belief that this knowledge was rigorously elicited, and therefore a lack of accountability of how this knowledge was produced. Also, ‘adjusting

the system’ at the expense of exploring cultural meaning places the therapist in the position of working *on* the family rather than *with* them (Pare, 1996).

The *ecosystemic* framework on the other hand, has been advocated as more relevant and inclusive. The applicability of an ecosystemic framework to a culturally diverse context such as South Africa has been argued for. This framework requires attentiveness to the *complete* range of interconnected systems with which the individual interacts. It thus considers the individual, familial, social, political, economic and cultural systems. These broader systems need to be taken into regard in order for family therapy to be relevant in South Africa (Mason, Rubenstein & Shuda, 1992). It has been argued that its focus on the person-environment reciprocity allows cultural concerns to surface (Bernstein in Mason, Rubenstein & Shuda, 1992).

## **5.2 Postmodernism**

In attempting to define postmodernism, one encounters a vast array of sometimes complementary, sometimes supplementary, at times competing, oppositional or miscellaneous definitional proposals. It is clear however that a shared proclamation of disillusionment in and opposition to the principles of modernity gave way to the postmodern movement. In fact, Lemert (Rosenau, 1992) frames postmodernism as being born out of the betrayal of modernism.

It is useful to describe this movement in terms of these shared characteristics. Rosenau (1992) argues that all postmodernisms, by virtue of their anti-modern stance, reject the notion of truth as an absolute category. There is a denial of certitudes. According to Lyotard (1984) postmodernity dethrones the notion of the grand narrative. There is no single, privileged, overarching, theory/view under which everything can be subsumed. Rather, there are many different views and thus a multitude of realities (Moathlodi, 1992). Rosenau argues that the postmodern version of truth is “necessarily fragmentary, discontinuous and changing” (Rosenau, 1992, p.78). Instead of working towards a unitary, definite, unified, congruous truth; there is an embracement of contradiction, complexity, uncertainty and disunity (Rosenau, 1992). Postmodernity thereby rejects an

absolute truth (Weingarten, 1998). There is not one truth, but many truths. It thus not just the voice of the dominant culture which is heard, but all cultural realities gain voice. Thompson (1993) asserts that while modernism was the yield of a distinctive culture, postmodernism involves the recognition of a multiplicity of cultures.

Objectivity does not exist. Knowledge is always permeated with subjectivity and intersubjectivity and thus assumes a partial, particular and fragmented nature. Nothing is seen as natural- as having inherent qualities. Rather, knowledge and therefore reality, is socially constructed within the context of social and historical interaction. Truth is context dependant and local. Any reality is only reality within the confines of particular socially negotiated constructs and specific contexts (Moathlodi, 1992). The truth merit of something is a consequence of social construction on both the local and cultural level (Kogan & Gale, 1997). Knowledge is always culturally and personally based and is thus a reflection of our biases. There is an explicit acknowledgment of the operation of value systems (Goldenberg & Goldenberg, 1996).

Truth is a social construction formulated through language. People construct knowledge (and thus meaning and reality) through conversing with each other. Meaning is always based in language (McNamee & Gergen, 1992). Knowledge accordingly arises out of a specific social context and therefore a particular cultural discourse, usually the dominant one (Weingarten, 1998). Thus the idea of knowledge representing an objective reality is further challenged (Moathlodi, 1992). Foucault (Gordon, 1977) asserts that knowledge arises out of a particular discourse and is intimately connected with the dynamics of power. It is more representative of this, than of a supposed reality. Whether or not knowledge is a reflection of the truth is no longer the issue, its usefulness or lack thereof in a specific context becomes more relevant (Moathlodi, 1992).

### **5.2.1 Second order cybernetics**

Second-order cybernetics marks the beginning of the postmodern influence. It must at the outset be noted that second order cybernetics is not an invalidation of first-order cybernetics but an extension and modification of it. Some of the authors commonly

thought to be affiliated with second order cybernetics are Bateson, Keeney, Maturana, Varela and Hoffman. The principles framing first-order cybernetics came under increasing scrutiny and criticism (Goldenberg & Goldenberg, 1996). Particularly, the notion of homeostasis whereby the symptom served to maintain equilibrium, received critique. Its implications of the stagnant nature of living systems and the division between the observed and the objective outside observer, were raising many questions (Avis, 1990). By the 1970's alternatives to this limited mode of thinking were being sought. The above-mentioned authors offered attractive challenges and modifications to the original cybernetic metaphor (Goldenberg & Goldenberg, 1996).

#### **5.2.1.1 Observing systems**

A major point of contention was the notion of the separate and objective therapist who changed the system from the outside. Authors such as Maturana and Varela (in Goldenberg & Goldenberg, 1996) asserted that the observer is a part of that which is being observed. A shift in thinking from *observed* systems to *observing* systems takes place. This represented a very significant epistemological shift, a transition in thought. Lifshitz asserts that there was a desperate need “to acknowledge and credit the notion of alternative epistemology.....and to create contexts of psychotherapy which recognize and embody epistemologies of the observing client system” (Mason & Rubenstein, 1989, p.2). With this development, a higher level of complexity was introduced and the distinction between the observer and the observed faced dissolution (Pare, 1995).

#### **5.2.1.2 Objectivity and truth**

With the notion of observing systems, objectivity is not possible as the therapist is part of the system. The therapist affects and is affected by the system. His/her description of the system therefore presents a view of a reality to which he/she has contributed. Reality no longer assumes an objective, tangible existence. It is an exercise in construction in which the observer is an active participant. The potential thus exists for many realities or truths (Keeney, 1982). A respect for difference and thus cultural variation is fostered. The manner in which the therapist views reality is merely a demonstration of the way in which he/she has punctuated the situation, a description of the describer. It recursively

connects the story to its author. The therapist's description of the family cannot be any more valid than that of any member of the family. It is plausible then that each member of the family may have a different description or view of reality, none of which can be considered to be a distortion. The therapist must take responsibility for the reality he generates through reflecting on his/her epistemology (Keeney, 1982). This nurtures an awareness of one's own cultural values and biases and an appreciation of the plausibility of different cultural perspectives.

### **5.2.1.3 Whole systems**

The therapist and the family are conceptualised as a whole system. The whole system is autonomous and does not depend on its relationship with the outside environment as in first-order cybernetics. The therapist's interactions with the environment are no longer seen as inputs but rather as 'perturbations.' Change cannot be dictated towards a predetermined goal as the system assumes a collaborative rather than hierarchical form (Hoffman, 1990; Golann, 1988). The notion that one must produce a change is negated. It is inevitable that the therapist will be part of the changes that occur (Moathlodi, 1992).

## **5.2.2 Constructivism**

### **5.2.2.1 Structure determinism**

Bateson is also associated with constructivism. He and other authors in the field asserted the notion that knowledge never reflects an external objective reality but has been constructed. All knowledge represents the individual's active organization of the world through experience (Watzlawick, 1984). The individual actively defines his/ her reality. It is the unique structure of the observer that produces knowledge. Constructivism subscribes to the notion of 'structure determinism.' It is the individual's structure that attracts him/her to a particular view which is perceived as the 'correct' view (Avis, 1990).

### **5.2.2.2 Objectivity and truth**

Implicit in the idea of structure determinism is the notion that the reference point of knowledge is the observer (Pare, 1995). The individual is always part of that which

he/she is observing. This is congruent with the second-order cybernetic notion of observing systems. It is here that one finds that the interests of the observer are always reflected in what he/she observes (Moathlodi, 1992). An objective reality is an illusion. Values always come into play and these values are products of a particular cultural worldview (Goldenberg & Goldenberg, 1996).

### **5.2.2.3 Knowledge**

Constructivism has been associated with the Kantian as opposed to the Lockean approach to knowledge. Locke proposed that knowledge was out there waiting to be *discovered*. Kant on the other hand, conceptualized of knowledge as an *invention* which takes form through man's interaction with his environment. The former notion is synchronic with objectivist thought while the latter conveys strong constructivist sentiment (Avis, 1990).

### **5.2.2.4 Context**

In exploring a particular claim to knowledge, history becomes an important influence on the contemporary. It is not past facts that inform the present but the manner in which language was used in the past that impacts on meaning (Moathlodi, 1992). This allows for the impact of cultural history (in the form of language) to be included. Context and meaning are central to constructivist thought. All knowledge and views of reality arise out of a particular tradition and have meaning only within that tradition (Watzlawick, 1988). *Thus, all knowledge and views of reality arise out of a particular culture and have meaning only within that culture* (author's own words). Problems occur when particular meanings from that tradition/*culture* have been ascribed to experience (Watzlawick, 1988).

## **5.2.3 Social constructionism and the narrative approach**

### **5.2.3.1 Constructivism and social constructionism**

Social constructionism bears much resemblance to constructivism. The primary difference lies in the notion that the latter assumes a cognitive perspective which attends to the way in which individual's unique structures contribute towards the creation of reality and perceives of human systems as closed. It therefore does not view the process

as intersubjective. Social constructionism on the other hand, emphasizes the intersubjective component (McNamee & Gergen, 1992; Pare, 1996). Reality constitutes of that which, through social interaction, has been consensually agreed upon (Keeney, 1982). Cultural consensus informs one's perspective on reality.

### **5.2.3.2 Truth**

Like constructivism, social constructionism conceptualises of the universe as a “multiverse”. This concept implies that there are an infinite number of possible realities, that may even be conflicting. Human nature cannot take on a universal form. There is no single truth from which all else can be assessed. All theories have been created in a specific time and place, and within a particular historo-cultural context. It thus reflects the values and ideals of its creator (Pare, 1996), as Pare (1996) puts it, “theories construct the world in their own image....” (p.24).

Rather than *discovering* a true pre-existent reality, we set about *creating* the realities we ‘find.’ Thus, the validity of a particular reality is arbitrarily derived, based on who is observing and describing this reality, for what purpose, when and where it is taking place (McNamee & Gergen, 1992; Moathlodi, 1992). Thus all claims to truth can be subject to altercation.

### **5.2.3.3 Truth and power**

A single dominant truth marginalises other realities. It labels them as deviant, and thereby silences them (McNamee & Gergen, 1992). The result is the restraint and suppression of any form of alternate description (Pare, 1995). This was noted by Foucault (Gordon, 1977) who demonstrated the inhibiting effect of grand theories in that they necessarily involved the subjugation of ‘other’ realities. For Foucault, the dynamics of power were a major part of this process. It must however be noted that his concept of power is both novel and complex, and thus a ‘valid’ appropriation of it would require a lengthy, specialized discussion. This is beyond the scope of this thesis. Rather, it is hoped that the few points utilized here will suffice for the purpose of this discourse. Foucault conceptualized of relations of power as permeating the fabric of every society.



These relations cannot however be exercised and maintained without an economy of discourses which construct Truth. While the consolidation of power requires the cultivation of certain truths, these truths can only be instated through the deployment of power. In other words, power produces truth and it is through truth that power is maintained (Gordon, 1977).

Michael White (in Pare, 1995) further argues that communities engage in processes whereby a particular knowledge is legitimated and power is retained. This power in turn further consolidates the privilege of retaining the dominance of one's story. Modernist systemic thought however cannot fit the notion of power into its scheme of things and invalidates it.

The concomitant implications of 'power', 'domination', and 'subjugation' render an absolute meaning as potentially oppressive. This has far reaching implications in light of historical and cultural inequalities, especially in the South African context. Unlike the systemic metaphor (lacking in a temporal component), whose primary focus is the internal dynamics of the family, social constructionism places the family and its meanings in the context of history and communities (Pare, 1996). It locates the dynamics involved as being derived from specific historical and socio-cultural contexts (Heunis, 1994). Issues of power and hierarchy come to the fore. A proper contextualization of the family requires attention to their valence of power, thereby rendering therapy inherently political. "To downplay cultural context runs the risk of encouraging more of the same-of duplicating the cultural practices that have given rise to the family's distress" (Maisel, 1994, p.39; cited in Pare, 1996). Edith Vries (in Mason and Rubenstein, 1989) in her address to the fourth national conference of the South African Institute of Marital and Family Therapy, declared that any claims in therapy to be *apolitical* is derived from an *acontextual* stance. She further asserts the pertinence of this claim within a context such as South Africa where the needs and experiences of families are filtered through a political funnel. Tamamese (in Pare, 1996) assert that any therapy that neglects cultural meaning can be declared as racist. An acknowledgment of the wider socio-political

context is of utmost pertinence in a context such as South Africa. Without it, therapy will probably cease in its relevance.

#### **5.2.3.4 The social construction of reality**

From a social constructionist perspective all realities are socially constructed, being products of relationships. Meaning does not emerge from within the individual but arises from in between people (Shazer & Berg, 1992). The social sphere is thus the reference point of knowledge. “These particular practices and knowledges have been negotiated over time within context of communities of persons and institutions that comprise culture” (Pare, 1992, p.6).

Interpersonal interaction becomes the domain from which reality emerges. The ‘collective’ receives focus rather than the ‘individual’ (Parry & Doan, 1994), the most influential form of collectivity being culture. It is argued by the social constructionist that individuals are constantly impacting on and being impacted on by others. Social interaction produces the social rules of a particular culture. These rules serve as standards of relating which should ideally be conformed to. From this perspective individuals are always viewed within their macro-contexts (White & Epston, 1990). “Our history is more than a history of biological evolution. We are coupled not only to a biological niche, but also a cultural niche- a world we have created, and are creating, through language, in dialogue, and in community with others” (Sellick, 1989, p.6; cited in Pare, 1995). The place and ‘power’ of culture is thus very different here than from a modernist perspective.

#### **5.2.3.5 Language and the construction of reality**

It is via the medium of conversation that a consensus is arrived at, which serves as reality. Conversation or the language one uses influences meaning. Meaning is therefore intersubjective and rooted in language. One cannot describe the world or make distinctions without language. To know is thus to language. Language is influenced by culture and history. All languages arise out of a particular cultural milieu and reflects the values of that culture (Pare, 1995). Reality is therefore not constructed in a neutral

manner but propogates the values of a particular culture. The ideological component therefore cannot be denied. Mair (in Pare, 1995) asserts: “we think and speak and act in forms that our culture has prepared. It is through these already existing and unquestioned means that we are moulded toward what we are supposed to know...and we are coated and permeated by the ideology of our place and time” (p.7)

Howe (1993) asserts that the manner in which people understand their experiences is dependant on the way they describe them. Description in turn is contingent on the linguistic and semantic structure of that particular culture. In other words, a particular culture determines the type and form of language that is used in description, thereby shaping its meaning and producing a particular understanding, a specific reality.

### **5.2.3.6 The narrative approach**

#### **5.2.3.6.1 Meaning**

The narrative approach (which is an outgrowth of social constructionism), in keeping with the centrality of language, employs the metaphors of ‘story’ or ‘narrative.’ It similarly suggests that it is the stories we construct around our lives which generate meaning and determine our experiences of reality (Semmler & Williams, 2000). Meaning is the organizing principle in all our lives and it is intricately connected to culture.

#### **5.2.3.6.2 Culture and meaning**

Anthropological works are rife with the notion that culture and meaning cannot be understood without each other. Culture represents a system of meaning and the meanings which families nurture have cultural origins (Pare, 1996). Reality emerges from a social\cultural context (Semmler & Williams, 2000). “Thus, reality depends on the perspective one brings to a situation, and one’s perspective is shaped in a culture laden with values and biases” (Gergen, 1991, p. 50; cited in Semmler & Williams 2000). Culture not only determines the manner in which we construct our world but also how we are constructed by it (Pare, 1996). It helps us make sense of the chaos involved in experience (Pare, 1996). From this epistemological stance individuals are engaged in a

culturally informed construction of the world. Their stories are constitutive and do not reflect the world as it is as much as they highlight our cultural preferences for what is important (Pare, 1995). The narrative approach makes the most explicit acknowledgement of the cultural dimension with its social constructionist epistemology. It encourages a cultural contextualization of every story (Pare, 1995).

#### **5.2.3.6.3 The concept of normality**

These ideas have very important implications for the concept of ‘normality.’ The idea that there is no inner reality questions the possibility of the existence of inner states. This throws into disarray almost all of the most basic assumptions in the field of psychology. Normal emotions, traits, development, life cycle, etcetera do not exist (McNamee & Gergen, 1992). They are a mirage arising out of the eye of the beholder. Cultural variations in the experience and expression of emotion, traits, development, life-cycle, health and illness, bear witness to this claim. These cultural variations are constructions of different versions of reality. Social constructionism questions any prescription for the normative, be it regarding boundaries or communication. The diversity across cultures in our most basic conceptions of functioning deny origination from natural resources and point to the co-operative outcome of relationships (Pare, 1995). Pare (1995) asserts that proponents of normality suffer from an overdose of ethnocentricity.

Walsh (in Falicov, 1982) proposes that there are several dominant ideologies in society which set the standard against which normality can be assessed. She presents several concepts which supposedly represent normality within the American culture. These she terms ‘cultural myths’ as they continue to prevail even in the face of rapid social change. The result is that the ideology lags behind the changes that have occurred. Walsh indicates that these ideologies have a profound effect on the way the family perceives itself, as well as on the way the family is perceived by the therapist.

The notion of ‘normal psychotherapy’ also comes under the spotlight. Gergen (1992) contends that subscribers to this concept, reflect a colonialist mentality. The powerful therapist is “practising down” to the submissive client. Normal psychotherapy places the

therapist in an expert position where hierarchy and control become the silent order of the day. The social constructionist position with its ‘cultural anthropological lens’ (Pare, 1995) encourages a collaborative context in which many voices are heard. The expertise of the client is honoured, treated respectfully and explored non-judgementally.

Acknowledging and allowing for the co-construction of meaning removes the element of restraint and replaces it with co-operation. Relations of domination and submission within the therapeutic relationship must constantly be examined (Gergen, 1992). It is the author’s contention that the concept of “normal psychotherapy” does not simply imply a colonialist attitude but evokes a colonialism that has a distinct cultural flavour. The dominant culture imposes its normality on the marginalized one. As Abu Baker (1999) has noted the cultural history that the therapist carries with him/her acts as a cultural lens which restricts the view in therapy. Both the therapist and client bring their cultural contexts with them into therapy. Therapy can thus be conceptualized as the ‘meeting of cultures’ (Pare, 1996).

#### **5.2.3.6.4 Social constructionism and the systems view**

Social constructionists feel that systemic assumptions do not match current assumptions and it glosses over current sensitivities (Pare, 1995). According to Goolishian and Anderson (1992): “ Family therapy would be better served at this developmental stage if the useful insights and approaches generated by the systems view could be reconstructed around a body of metaphors that convey how families interpret their experience and construct their realities in a cultural context” (p.10). It is impossible to situate ourselves outside of the stories of our cultures (Pare, 1995). An either/or position is not advocated here. Instead of completely excluding systemic ideas, it is suggested that they be incorporated into a cultural anthropological framework.

#### **5.2.3.6.5 Factors promoting an adoption of the social constructionist perspective**

McNamee and Gergen (1992) identify several possibilities that have contributed towards rendering this paradigm more attractive. One of them is that it has become recognized that the current system of classification which is utilised by the mental health profession is loyally serving particular interests, by virtue of the afore-mentioned truth-power

connection, and thus becomes oppressive. A possible alternate route that could bypass this predicament is the narrative, social constructionist approach.

Furthermore, the apparent impossibility of neutrality, on any level, within the therapeutic context also highlights the silent cultural nepotism that has already been suggested. In other words, since one cannot be neutral, there is a tendency to favour a particular cultural stance, without an explicit acknowledgement of it. In addition to this, the reign of the objective therapist is elapsing. Constructivism has demonstrated that the observer and the observed are intimate partners, one is part of the other. The subject-object dualism is nothing more than a fallacy. Being unable to attain separation from the observed, the intended ‘objectivity’ of the observer is clouded (McNamee & Gergen, 1992).

As an adjunct to this, it has become increasingly accepted that it is not only the individual but also the context and the interaction between the two that warrants attention. Thus, the consequent implication is that one needs to include the cultural context when considering pathology (McNamee & Gergen, 1992).

### **5.3 Conclusion**

The field of family therapy has evolved towards a greater inclusion of culture. General systems theory and first order cybernetics can be seen as subscribing primarily to modernist principles. There is thus a single objective reality that must be found, promoted, reinforced and reproduced. Culture is conceptualized in an ontological manner. Second-order cybernetics reflects a postmodern turn with its reflexive account of the observer and the observed. The socially constructed nature of things and thus the likelihood of a multiplicity of plausible realities begin to emerge. These sentiments are echoed with extended and intensified momentum from the constructionist and narrative quarters. Cultural variability consequently gains acknowledgement. These observations act in support of the notion that the manner in which a therapist deals with the cultural domain is ultimately a function of the school of thought of which he/she is a student.

## **Chapter 6 The South African Indian Muslim family: Observations**

### **6.1 South Africa's multicultural context**

It is beyond doubt that as far as cultural diversity goes, the South African setting presents an opulent and challenging spectrum. While a recognition of the complicated diversity is necessary, it does not necessarily imply a submission to Pandemonium. “Culture is complex, but it is *not* chaotic. There are patterns that make it possible to manage complexity” (Pederson, 1997, p.29). It is not necessary or possible to master *all* cultural patterns. One can however become attuned in varying degrees to *some* of these patterns. While differences must be respected, it is also vital to identify the common ground that binds different individuals to each other. It is with this in mind that the author set out to try and identify some of these patterns. The observations noted in this chapter can be seen as part of this endeavour.

### **6.2 The South African Indian Muslim family**

The author has chosen to focus on the cultural group represented by the *South African Indian Muslim family*. In identifying the cultural group in this manner specifications have been made with regards to nationality, geographical location, ethnicity and religion. This demonstrates an inclination towards a multi-contextual and at the same time, local, understanding of culture. It is felt that this group is likely to construct, interpret, maintain and transmit similar meanings of experience by virtue of their shared contexts. This is however not necessarily the case. One of the implications of this conceptualization then is that an alteration in any one of the contextual variables may result in alterations in systems of meaning. The author is thus fully alerted to the possibility of both inter and intra group variations. It is also acknowledged that some of the features described here may not be exclusive to this particular cultural group.

### **6.3 Outline of chapter**

This chapter attempts to provide some idea of the data with which the author is working. Selected pieces of data are presented, being categorized according to specific subsections, under which the author has chosen to frame the discussion.

These categories will be further elaborated on in the following chapter which provides a discussion based on these observations as well as others, and the systems of meaning that are believed (by the author) to inform them.

This chapter however merely contains a description of some of the common observations made by the researcher, in both a personal and community context, which are considered to be relevant to the subject matter.

### **6.4 Structure of the family**

#### ***Observations***

Drawing from the author's own experiences of family life, it is particularly notable that households are seldom confined to a solitary couple. Households usually consist of a married couple, their parents, their married children and grandchildren. The author's home context is an average case in illustration. The author resides with her husband, his younger unmarried brother, older married brother and his family, as well as mother and father in law. This seems to be common practice. The occurrence of a single (unmarried) individual living alone is very rare.

Once a marriage occurs, a wife becomes part of her husband's family. She often moves into the home of his family and cohabits with his parents and possibly other brothers and their families. The couple do not develop a completely separate identity as a new family, even with the birth of a child. The husband seldom detaches in a considerable degree from his family of origin. It is seen as the responsibility of the male child to care for his older parents and the welfare of the larger family. His wife should not be a diversion in this respect but act as support to that role. There are of course many families who do not actually live under the same roof as their larger families. This is however usually only a



minor difference as they may be physically categorized as separate (in terms of living autonomously) but their family involvement remains committed to the larger family.

In looking at the author's own upbringing as well as those that she has been in contact with, parents do not encourage children to become more autonomous, this is in fact frowned upon. Rather, there is a constant promotion of a consistent contact and involvement with members of a larger family unit.

It is apparent that family gatherings are frequent and not just initiated through the occurrence of some or the other special occasion. The author's own experience has been that members of the larger family unit meet with each other almost every week-end. It has also been observed that individuals go out together mainly as families, be it to shop, or just to dine, or even merely to visit. The individual does not always do this independently.

People become involved at the centre, be it on a social or more formal level, not as autonomous individuals, but as clusters of extended families. It is indeed rare to encounter an individual maintaining an independent engagement in activities at the centre. Such an occurrence seems to stand out as an oddity and becomes a cause for concern. Other members of the community then begin to enquire about this individual's circumstances, and attempt to alleviate this dilemma through drawing this individual into their own family network.

Attendance at functions, lectures and social gatherings is often made jointly by members of extended families. It is common that if one makes acquaintance with a particular individual at the centre, that one is soon introduced to a number of other relatives who are accompanying this individual. Thus one rarely gets to know a single individual but rather comes to meet entire families.

Activities at the centre are organized and arranged depending on the needs of the community. It is important then to note that most of the functions and events held at the centre are predominantly of a family-oriented nature.

## **6.5 Cohesion**

### ***Observations***

The author's personal experiences reflect a multiplicity of occasions in which either the author herself or other family members were undergoing some form of difficulty. There always seemed to be a great deal of emotional support from members of the family. The author's family members are always very sensitive to her situation and are so attuned that they become aware of her feelings even without an overt clarification of them.

Individual problems are shared by the family. There is a tendency for immediate and extended family members to be furnished, sometimes with the intimate details, of a particular member's difficulties. This is accompanied by several attempts by these members to intervene and offer varied means of support and advisory plans of resolution to the troubled member.

Instances in which strangers are called upon to help a family member are considered to be shameful. The larger family must be made aware of the life circumstances of a particular individual or else offence is taken. It comes to carry greater meaning and often is construed as an act of marginalisation, a move towards weakening kinship ties. The life circumstances (mainly if of a negative nature) of that individual must however be 'hidden' away from non-family members, in order to protect the family's name and privacy.

In general, any occurrence draws the involvement of the larger family unit- death, birth, illness, misfortune, success or failure. One would find that on hearing news about a particular member's predicament, large groups of relatives can predictably be expected to visit at that household in that time period. The author's own family would even make the effort of travelling far distances (from Gauteng to Durban) for these purposes.

If a particular family member is felt to be straying away from the family, concerted effort is undertaken to re-establish emotional linkage with this member. In an instance such as this, the author's family would hold an informal family gathering to discuss ways in which the family could remedy the situation. The preservation of contact within the author's family is in fact so important that Sunday afternoon tea parties are organized regularly at different family houses as a means of ensuring continued emotional attunement.

At the centre it is easy to observe the emotional bondedness that members of families have with each other. Members of a particular family are constantly enquiring about the needs of each other. A particular member who is undergoing some difficulty is in a manner 'protected' by other members. His or her physical and emotional needs are attended to. Any duties that the individual is committed to are temporarily carried by other members. Family members go to all lengths to maintain a physical and emotional closeness to this particular member. In fact the emotional closeness of members to each other is such that one will be able to infer their kinship ties without even verbally enquiring about it, but just through observing the manner in which they interact.

While one can observe that particular individuals are related, it becomes difficult at times to distinguish between so-called immediate and extended relatives. All members seem to enjoy a similar level of intimacy. Rather than their being several separate family units, there is in its place, one large bonded family system.

At occasions such as weddings the amount of help and support that is offered is overwhelming. These occasions can never be private affairs and on average yield approximately 400 guests. Family members not only ensure their presence but also generously contribute physically, materially and emotionally towards the function. The sincerity in the tears and laughter that come from a wide range of relatives at the wedding testify to the emotional intimacy of the family.

With functions at the centre, one commonly finds that some family members will take it upon themselves, without being asked to do so, to attend to the welfare of all the children that belong to that family. One is thus often not sure who the actual parents of a particular child are. It is common practice to also find that children are picked up and attended to from school or other classes by a range of relatives. It is not necessarily the parents who perform this function. Children are cared for by a grandparent, aunt or even a sister-in-law or cousin- all depending on the needs of that parent and the availability of members. Members of families are usually readily accessible to act in the role of mother or sister, whether or not the actual relative is available. This is owing in part to the strength of the emotional ties that have already been fostered.

It is also interesting to note how for example an uncle would introduce his niece as his daughter or cousins would refer to each other as sisters. This can be used as an indicator of the bondedness of the family.

Members of the South African Indian Muslim family seem to take great pride and pleasure in nurturing family ties. The larger family that one originates from becomes of central importance to the identity of the individual. My own experiences have demonstrated this in the significance that is accorded to one's surname when meeting a stranger from the community. It is often the first detail that is enquired about, as it carries with it a marker of lineage and standing. It can often be heard in conversations that a particular individual (even though he/she may be an absolute stranger) is believed to have a decent background because of his/her family name.

## **6.6 Roles**

### ***Observations***

The author's own family experiences reflect clarity, stability and certainty in terms of role allocation. Even as a young child, it was always clear to the author who was expected to do what in the household. It was never a case of anybody can do anything or everybody is expected to do everything. It is easy to observe that there are definite limits and boundaries. There are certain things (like making family decisions) that only the

older members can do. Even then it may be only a particular older member, such as an older male member, who has this authority. Older members have more say in matters and can do a lot more than their younger counterparts. In addition to this, there are certain issues which can only be authorized by one's father, and others that only a mother could be approached about. One could not trade roles. This is reprimanded and looked upon as an act of disrespect. There seems to be relative consensus over these issues. One does not often find husband and wife, siblings, or parents and their children engaged in purposeful battle over their roles. Little confusion or revolt could be found in this respect. One is thus always aware of one's 'place' and obligations in the family.

Where dissonance does arise, it is usually due to an infusion of ethnic values. As an example, some of the researcher's male family members believe that they only need to be active in activities involving leisure and entertainment at home, while being served by the females, who are responsible for executing household chores. While this is not part of religious instruction, it does represent a strong component of an ethnic ethos originating out of India. This has filtered through to many households and it has become customary to find household chores labeled as women's chores and others as that for men only. The researcher notes that it is when this occurs that one then finds argument and dissatisfaction with one's role, accompanied by both overt and covert attempts to bring change.

The author has experienced occasional instances in which an individual has challenged his/her particular role. This has resulted in the generation of great family concern about the foundations of this individual's present belief structure and future welfare. It is often suggested that this individual is becoming too 'Westernized.'

It is considered honourable when one is able to fulfill his/her respective roles. This can be observed in the level of respect with which family members treat this particular individual. He/she comes to be seen as an individual who has a good upbringing, is steadfast in belief, who can be trusted and relied on, and is promoted as a role model.

Numerous occasions arise in which younger family members are alerted by the elders of the family to the merits of a sexual division of labour that is appropriately assigned. It is stressed that this role structure must be respected and upheld.

With the households that the author has been exposed to, it is the primary responsibility of the male to go out and work to bring in income. One will not find male members staying at home while women go out and work. As the male child matures, he is constantly reminded of the need to secure a stable job in order to provide for the family and as part of his maturation. The same inclinations are not directed at the female child.

The occurrence of the South African Indian Muslim woman occupying the position of ‘home-executive’ is thus common, depending on the needs of these women as well as on whether the family can afford this. Voluntary services at the centre for example, are rendered mainly by females, owing mainly to their ‘employment-free’ status and thus greater availability of time.

Even when female members are employed, they are not expected to contribute financially towards the upkeep of the family. A case in illustration is the extended household in which the researcher now resides (after marriage). Despite the fact that all the females in this household have careers outside the home, every month it is only their husbands who meet together to discuss and share responsibility for household expenditure. Rather than seeing this as an act of discrimination, it is considered a privilege.

At family gatherings, functions at the centre or any social event, it is immediately observable that female members of the family play a greater role in the care of children. They seem more involved in, accessible for, and attentive to the needs of the children. One will notice at these functions that female members attend to the children, while their male counterparts occupy themselves in other activities. They do however make themselves available if the mother needs to be relieved. It is interesting to note however that grandparents tend to also be actively involved in the lives of their grandchildren.

Female members thus often pass on their responsibilities for child-care to their parents. As such, grandparents often accompany or pick up children from the centre.

## **6.7 Hierarchy**

### Observations

Only certain family members can do certain things and enjoy certain privileges. It is usually a case of- the younger one is, the more constrained one's position is in the family. Older members can act more on their own decisions. As a younger member, the author is required to consult with both her parents, her in-laws, grandparents and/or aunts and uncles before making a decision. The author's advice is not usually sought concerning important family decisions. Rather, all members turn almost instinctively to older members for these purposes. While the elders of the family have unlimited access to any particular family issue, there are restrictions regarding what younger members may become involved in. Only older members are allowed to modify family rules.

Older members occupy a high position in the family hierarchy and are consulted as figures of wisdom. That which an older member feels or thinks is usually regarded as more credible and is more readily accepted. Older individuals enjoy more freedom, carry more weight, are allowed an extended range and depth of involvement, are entitled to more and assume a higher status.

Those higher up on the hierarchy have responsibilities that usually carry more weight and significance. Along with this, there are sometimes special privileges given to these members. An example is the common practice of a grandfather deciding on the name of a new baby, instead of the baby's parents. It is not necessarily a case of all the older members having the same responsibilities and privileges. This all seems to depend on a combination of one's age and familial position.

Children are taught from a very young age that elders must be respected and receive explicit instruction on how to behave in the presence of an older family member. For example, it has often been heard in the researcher's family and at the centre that: one

should not raise one's voice in front of someone older; when greeting it must be done with both hands; stand when an elder person enters the room so that they may be seated; older members must be served their meals first at functions; the more important the decision is, the greater the necessity of consulting an older individual with a higher status. One is thus treated differently depending on one's age.

The position that a particular individual occupies in the family additionally acts as a significant contributor to the status one is accorded. For instance, the author occupies an important position in her mother's family. Being the eldest grandchild resulted in a special position in the family hierarchy. The author was always given more attention as a child and would receive gifts and praise at every family gathering. The other grandchildren were always urged on to follow in my footsteps. As an adult, the author is the only grandchild who is consulted on some of the family decisions. There are certain issues which the other grandchildren are not allowed to approach but which the author may address with the elders.

Along with this, the author is expected, more than any other grandchild to think and act responsibly, and to act as a role model. Aunts and uncles would often consult the author on decisions regarding their children. The children themselves also expect the author to act as an advisor to them. While other grandchildren may not be expected at some functions, as the eldest grandchild the author's presence is essential at every family occasion. Older family members would always enquire about her welfare and make it a point to ensure consistent contact with her.

The author does not however have these hierarchical privileges or responsibilities in her father's family. In this half of the family, the author is merely one amongst many other grandchildren. She receives little privilege, am hardly involved in the major family roles, and little is expected of her.

Hierarchical position is not determined by age only. For example, while my father's suggestions carry more weight in the family than my own, his uncle is more influential in



the family than he is. Although my father's uncle and my grandfather are the same age, my grandfather has greater power, by virtue of his position as head of the family.

The author's grandmother is the chief authority amongst the female family members but her influence can be diluted on a particular matter, depending on the input from the grandfather.

## **6.8 Communication**

### ***Observations***

In observing the manner in which the author's own family interact, as well as individuals from the centre, it becomes evident that communication is not simply a casual affair.

There seems to be a code of conduct that is followed. One does not address everyone in the same way, all of the time. The specifications around communication tend to increase as the age of the person with whom one is communicating increases. An adult communicating with a child is allowed a great deal of freedom in expression. The child however, is not allowed to communicate back in the same manner. Children are often reprimanded for this. They are instructed to dilute what they have said with 'softer' and more polite words and to use a tone that is more submissive. A child who does not comply with these demands is easily labeled as unmannered and disrespectful. Similarly, any younger person who displays such behaviour to an older relative is automatically categorized as rebellious. Such behaviour usually elicits large-scale disapproval. Others take an instant disliking to this individual and parents start to warn their children not to associate with him/her.

The author's own parents would often remind us that we cannot communicate with them in the same way as with our friends, as they are our parents and not our peers. Thus, one needs to observe different rules when communicating with older individuals. From a young age one receives training in a distinct code of communication which is expected to be religiously adhered to. The manner in which older individuals in the author's family or at the centre are interacted with, is thus often quite predictable.

The author has herself noticed that when conversing with older individuals, she tends to be more vigilant about what says and about how she says it. In these instances, there seems to always be a need to create a good impression. One is not free to be as one desires. In observing communication at the centre, it is interesting how a change in conversation from person to person also brings changes in the code of conduct. When moving directly on to speak with a younger relative, from a conversation with an elder family member; there is an immediate change of facial expression, a raising of the tone of voice, and communication seems more uncensored.

The topics of conversation are limited depending on one's relationship with the individual. It can be observed that some topics are never brought up in front of elders but are rather indulged into in a separate context. Only specific content areas are commonly addressed in the presence of elders. If one is already engaged in a conversation with a family member and an older relative enters the room, the topic of conversation is immediately altered (if considered unsuitable). This topic is consequently replaced with more suitable content.

The public and open expression of certain emotions have received consistent discouragement, both from the author's own family and in the larger social context. For example, the individual who displays anger in an unrestrained form is ostracized to a certain degree in public by family members and treated discourteously. At home, this individual becomes subject to numerous disciplinary lectures by family elders and is the center of family concern.

## **6.9 Life cycle**

### ***Observations***

Inferring from the author's personal experiences, transitions that were made, such as those to adulthood or marriage, were not as distinctly marked and encompassing in metamorphosis as expected. While they did bring about some significant changes for the author, in many ways, these transitions also simply strengthened and extended existing patterns of living. All major life changes experienced by the author generally reiterated

the importance and value of familial connectedness, sustained mainly through the nourishing of networks of inter-dependence. Thus marriage was not seen as a separation and creation of a new family but the enlargement of an existing family. No matter what life changes occur, the already established physical and emotional intimacy (sometimes even to a greater degree) with ones family is always protected and promoted. This to a certain extent has lessened the impact of life changes for the author and her family.

Both as a child and as a maturing adult, the author experienced very little pressure to develop independence. The author's level of independent activity in fact decreased with time. She started spending more time with the family, became more involved in family affairs and exerting renewed effort towards family welfare. The author would share all her fears and fantasies with family members, look towards family support in everything she did, and attend to the satisfaction of most of her needs through family resources. This was prompted not only through observing and replicating what other family members did, but also through both overt and covert reinforcement from the family as a whole. The family responded to increasing interdependence with acceptance, amongst other things. The author's 'place' in the family became increasingly acknowledged and appreciated. There was a greater sense of belonging and more security in the significance of her membership.

The possibility of moving out of the family house is not even mentioned and is thought to be absurd if at all considered. This usually only occurs after marriage and even then is limited in its extent of separation. Married children and their families of origin still maintain a high level of involvement. One can also observe at the centre that adult children remain attached to their families sometimes indefinitely. This can be observed in their consistent physical presence with the family and emotional availability. It is very unusual to observe an individual complain about the dependence of other family members on themselves. This is rather welcome and is applauded as it is seen as proof of the value assigned to connectedness.

It can be observed in public and private contexts that all life transitions (be it birth or death) are seen as opportunities for the utilization and reinforcement of kinship networks. This can be noted by the extent, level and depth of family involvement these occasions seem to generate. They always tend to elicit immense family participation and lead to enhanced family ties. For instance, personal experience has shown with the occurrence of a death in the family that large numbers of family members can be found at the home of the deceased for a considerable time after the death. These family members attempt to offer some form of assistance and stand in solidarity with the bereaved family. There are many shoulders to cry on and ears to listen.

### **6.10 Conclusion**

The observations made by the author have been extracted in context of her own family as well as in a community setting. It is hoped that these observations provide some idea of the way in which the South African Indian Muslim family is organized. While some observations are familiar and can be found in other cultures, other observations are unique and distinct. The relevance of these observations however is not derived from their frequency but rather from the systems of meaning around which they are organized. This will be the concern of the following chapter.

## **Chapter 7 A South African Indian Muslim family narrative: Discussion**

### **7.1 Introduction**

It is at the outset acknowledged that the following discussion has the danger of producing a stereotype that may not accurately reflect the entire population of concern. At the same time however, it is felt by the author that there are common threads in this culture which surface due to a strongly shared background. It is not intended that the data be used as a prescriptive formula but rather be seen as avenues of possibility, open for further exploration.

One can begin to identify threads of commonality as Turner (in Pare, 1996) suggests, through looking at patterned and consistent expressions of meaning, as they are useful reflections of a culture. Since it is the stories, patterns and rules that furnish the cultural context with meaning, it is to these features that we must turn to understand culture (Pederson, 1997). The history of a particular group is a synthesis of stories reflecting the manner in which groups have negotiated their cultural contexts (Pederson, 1997).

It is important to note that the impact of religious beliefs can be found in most South African Indian Muslim families, regardless of the strength of their adherence to its principles. Some of these principles will thus be mentioned. It must however be clarified that the narratives which are provided do not necessarily represent the ideal Islamic code of conduct or the makings of a model Muslim family. Rather it relates the stories of families who through a *combination* of cultural variables have come to live their lives in a particular manner. It is common to find that ethnic values become entangled with religious teachings to the extent that they are rendered indistinguishable. Thus the organisation of many homes is mapped according to ethnic traditions but given the status of religious practice. This confuses and distorts the associated meaning systems.

What follows will thus be a description of the traditions, practices, rituals and theology which underpins the cultural mode of this group.

In the ensuing discussion, the term ‘Western’ will be used to denote that which has been described in the literature as typically representing a European or Anglo-American flavour. There will be points of comparison between the affirmed notion of the Western family and South African Indian Muslim family. This does not however imply that the Western family is a preferred standard of comparison. To the contrary, it aims to legitimate and bring into recognition alternate systems of meaning by which families can live.

It must be again be emphasized that this discussion offers a descriptive rather than prescriptive account. This renders the material a possibility and not necessarily a reality. Specific models and concepts will be occasionally alluded to, not because they are believed to have a superior standing or are thought to be preferable, nor because they are concordant with the author’s epistemology. They are merely utilized as points of reference to illustrate particular occurrences.

## **7.2 Organisation of the family**

The author originally set out to furnish the reader with completely separate sections involving the structure, practices and beliefs of the family. This is however a futile task. The way in which a family organizes and behaves is informed by its systems of belief or cultural narratives. In this manner, meaning is generated. Thus the term organisation has been used as being inclusive of all these components. Although these components are intimately intertwined, subheadings have been utilized to aid the ease of understanding. Components of the one can however be identified in the other.

As has already been suggested in the methodology section, the author has used the data to highlight and then elucidate shared personal and community narratives that can be associated with common cultural (and religious) narratives or themes. There is therefore an attempt to relate specific practices and beliefs (personal and community narratives) to particular dominant cultural narratives, and to briefly compare it to what the literature says about other families. This exercise builds a bridge between the organisation of the family and their meaning structures.

### 7.2.1 Structure of the family

The structure of a family can be seen as the way that it is internally organized, which thereby defines rules of interaction and moulds transactional patterns. The functional demands that organize patterns of transaction between members constitute the structure of the family (Minuchin & Fishman, 1981). Families engage in repeated sequences of interaction which produce a structural pattern. These patterns regulate functioning. Covert rules determine who interacts with whom, when and in what way (Minuchin & Fishman, 1981). The concept of structure helps make sense of how the consistent patterns around which the family is organized, are central to its maintenance and adaptation (Goldenberg & Goldenberg, 1996). It is crucial to note that there are cultural variations in the way in which families are organized, and in the structures they take on, depending on the systems of meaning that inform them (Nath & Craig, 1999). As suggested in the literature review section of this thesis, Falicov and Brudner-White (Falicov, 1983) assert that the structure of a family is a reflection of its cultural code. It must therefore be interpreted against the backdrop of the culture in which it is found and not be interpreted in isolation as dysfunctional.

One way in which to describe the structure of a family is using the term *nuclear*. A nuclear family is basically comprised of two generations, a married couple living together with their unmarried children. This type of family is usually privatised, in that it has very weak community links. The marriage is often an outcome of a romantic courtship. Multi generational *extended* families on the other hand, include additional relatives such as grandparents, aunts and uncles. The extended family has a strong community ethos and marital ties stem predominantly from mechanisms of ‘arrangement.’ (Morris, 1993).

Western families occur predominantly in a nuclear form. Separateness and individuality are valued qualities. Healthy families are conceptualized as allowing for the individuation and autonomy of respective members. Rolland (in Nath & Craig, 1999) utilizes the concepts of ‘familial’ and ‘individualized’ self to describe the contrasting psychological make-up of families. The former is characterized by a joining of self and

other, so that functioning is communally based. With the latter, an autonomous, separate identity is pursued entailing a sharp differentiation between the self and the other. This concept reflects affiliation to western family structures.

The familial self bares resemblance to the features of the South African Indian Muslim family. The extent of this will become more clear as other related features of the South African Indian Muslim family are examined. The above description falls within the ambit of the extended family. The extended family structure is still largely a dominant component of the contemporary South African Muslim culture.

Marriage is thus not the formation of a new family structure but implies the enlargement of an extended family structure. Whether or not a product of arrangement or courtship, marriage does not necessarily mark the birth of a fresh beginning, a new life. In many ways it is merely an extension and continuation of an existing structure. Therefore, unlike Western families, the South African Indian Muslim family does not place the marital (husband-wife) dyad at the center of the system. The concept of the ‘dominant dyad’ locates family organization in terms of its centralised relationship. Western communities place significant emphasis on the husband-wife relationship as being the nucleus of the family (Falicov, 1995). To the contrary, there is a de-emphasis on the marital couple within the South African Indian Muslim family. One’s obligations and duties are equally to the larger family.

Nath and Craig (1999) appropriately describe this form of organization, in stating: “marriage is never between individuals but between families” (p.7). The husband is at the same time a son, and his wife has a primary role as a daughter-in-law. Thus, other sub-systems also carry great significance in this type of family. For example, the sub-system comprising of the husband and his brothers, the daughters-in-law and mother-in-law, the father-in-law and his son/s. One would subsequently find that the ‘normal’ functions that are expected to be executed (by western standards) by the marital dyad are rendered by other subsystems. For example, grandparents play an active and invested role in the physical and emotional upbringing of their grandchildren, whether or not it is



necessary. Important decisions concerning the child are not made without consultation with the authority figures in the extended family.

There is thus intergenerational interdependence and often one will find what some authors term as ‘triangulation.’ This occurs when a third person is drawn into a dyadic subsystem for a particular reason. Triangulation usually occurs between the married couple and one parent (Goldenberg & Goldenberg, 1996). While western standards would in most likelihood define this as being unhealthy (Goldenberg & Goldenberg, 1996), it seems to be a necessary part of the South African Indian Muslim family. For instance, the mother-in-law would have an intimate link with either her son or daughter-in-law, and be an active agent in the relationship. This is not a consequence of things gone wrong but a product of a ‘normal’ course of growth. The possibility does however exist for this arrangement to become unhealthy. Over-involvement by the parent to the degree that the voice of one partner in the dyad is completely usurped, is a common factor associated with marital discord. It is thus important that a balance be found.

The discourse that informs this type of organization can be associated with the notion that the individual is always part of the greater unity and cosmos. Individuals are constantly reminded of the larger context and their connections with each other. Great value is placed on interconnectedness. The most important component of the larger context being one’s family. Families are considered to be both the most basic unit and the foundation of one’s linkage to a greater unity. Thus, it is mainly through the family that one is reminded that one does not exist independently but is part of an intricate network of relationships. These relationships must be nurtured and preserved as they are necessary for the optimal survival of the individual. Relationships thus assume precedence over individuality. One’s relationship with family members represents kinship ties that have been Divinely ordained. An acceptance and acknowledgement of this implies that ties with family members must be maintained and family welfare must be protected. Extended family households are a necessary consequence of this belief system.

### 7.2.2 Cohesion

Since relatedness seems to be of immense significance in this context, its implications for emotional contact in the South African Indian Muslim family will be explored. The author will employ the concept of ‘cohesion’ (Olson & Thomas, 1993) for this purpose. The concept of family cohesion entails the extent to which there is emotional bonding between members of the family. It ranges from disengaged (very low), through to separated (moderate), connected (moderate) and then enmeshed (very high). A survey of the literature reveals that the dimension of separation is preferred over that of disengaged and enmeshed, from a Western perspective (Olson & Thomas, 1993).

Increasing individuation is taken as a sign of progressive maturation. The individual must be able to function more and more as a separate and independent unit so that he/she can eventually differentiate and ‘leave home.’ Continued dependence and blurred boundaries between members signal warning signs of maladaptive relationships. This orientation towards separation does not however necessarily imply a complete disengagement of family members from each other. Healthy families are able to maintain an appropriated balance between autonomy and connectedness. The independent individual should still be available to other family members when and if required (Daneshpour, 1998).

A striking contrast to this picture can be seen in the South African Indian Muslim family. The dimension of separation takes a back seat. At the fore is a concern for the generation and maintenance of connectedness. There seems to be a tendency to embrace ‘togetherness.’ In comparison to the Western emphasis on separateness and autonomy (Tamura & Lau, 1992), Indian families tend to have a much more intensified familial emphasis (Nath & Craig, 1999). Ties with extended members of the family are a given (part of the implicit rules), and are often of central importance to the functioning of the system. It is in fact rare to come into contact with a family that completely embodies the notion of nuclear. Families can be seen as united systems with strong networks of interrelationship.

A system of narratives are in place to ensure continued family cohesion. Members of families are bonded together by virtue of their kinship ties. Kinship ties are considered to be sacred as they have been Divinely ordained. Blood ties are thus prioritised and come before any other relations. These ties must be respected and upheld as a demonstration of appreciation. One of the most important ways to do this is through developing and cementing emotional closeness with family members. Family loyalty is a priority and it is considered honorable to nurture immediate and extended family ties. The severing of these ties can be equated to having performed a ‘sinful’ act.

In addition to this, this system of narratives declare that family honour is crucial to the survival of the family. A family whose honour is degraded become outcasts in the community. Strong family networks raise the status of the family. Members thus remain attached to the family in service of preserving the integrity of the unit. A strongly bonded family seems to qualify to obtain a respectable place within the community. The ‘family name’ is held high and others value links with this unit. Considerable emphasis is placed on the reputation of a family and one which is loosely bound, receives a low standing. Emotional bondedness between family members thus has great significance for the welfare of the family as a whole as well as for individual interaction with the larger community.

This bondedness also has meaning in terms of individual needs. Relationships in the South African Indian Muslim family provide a profound and almost sacred sense of belonging, of support and of security. ‘Belonging’ to a family is important for the individual as it acts as affirmation of his/her place in the greater unity and cosmos. The fear of isolation is thus reduced and one’s networks of support are extended. This allows the individual to have a greater sense of security in interaction with the external world.

Families not only live together but they share their hopes and their fears, their laughter as well as their tears. They collectively venture forth into the world and receive the world as an entirety. In many ways the survival of the South African Indian Muslim family can be seen as being a consequence of its degree of connectedness. For the South African

Indian Muslim family the notion of ‘strength in unity’ has immediate relevance. Members are consistently involved, on both a physical and emotional level, in each other’s lives. Healthy families do not necessarily have clear and distinct physical and emotional boundaries. There seems to be high levels of emotional intimacy. Individuals seem to be readily receptive, sensitive and available to the needs of his/her family members. Personal sacrifices often tend to be made for the welfare of others and of the family.

In structural terms the concept of boundaries becomes relevant. Each family has boundaries that separate it from other families and each subsystem within a family has its own boundaries. These boundaries determine the type and the amount of contact the family has with each other and with others. *Clearly defined boundaries* are seen as the ideal. This type of boundary allows members of a family to maintain their independence while still remaining connected to the family. With this arrangement, members can pursue their own individual needs and at the same time request family support and involvement when necessary. *Rigid boundaries* however only encourage separateness and autonomy. Members of such a family are disengaged from each other and lack in emotional availability.

A third kind of boundary is the *diffuse boundary* (Goldenberg & Goldenberg, 1996). The South African Indian Muslim family seems to be characterized by diffuse boundaries. These boundaries are not distinct and thus permit easy access of members to each other as well as others. There is little independence and privacy but rather an over-involvement can be found. This alludes to the notion of ‘enmeshment.’ By Western standards, the term enmeshment (Goldenberg & Goldenberg, 1996) can be easily applied to the South African Indian Muslim family. This refers to a form of family structure in which a high degree of connectedness exists. Family members are overly concerned about each other and become intimately involved in each other’s lives. There is extreme closeness and excessive emotional intensity. That which affects one member of the system, is felt by the entire system and every other member also becomes affected by it. One is expected to sacrifice one’s own needs for the welfare of the family. Belonging to

the family is far more important than any steps towards individual development or aimed at autonomous achievement. It is in such a context that individuation from the family comes to be construed as act of betrayal and produces immense guilt (Goldenberg & Goldenberg, 1996).

Bowen's term *undifferentiated ego mass* can be used to describe the level of cohesiveness that can be found in the South African Indian Muslim family. The term suggests a family who have an emotional oneness and in which members become fused with the family. According to Bowen, the greater the individual's sense of self is, the less likely that he/she will be fused with the family and can maintain emotional independence. When there is fusion members are so close on an emotional level that they feel able to accurately relate each other's fears, fantasies, feeling and thoughts (Goldenberg & Goldenberg, 1996).

The narratives that operate in this context have important implications in terms of privacy and independence. The notion of privacy seems to diminish in laudable status and assumes an alternate character. Its meaning is cast with negativity, as it is punctuated as a preference for isolation. The overly independent individual who withdraws attachment from family members, is seen as self-absorbed and selfish. One who feels that he/she does not need others is predictably ear-marked for failure. Dependence is not only acceptable but is considered as preferable, the most important form of dependence being on God. The notion of dependence is also cast in a different light. It is not conceptualized as a weakness or that which implies a deficiency. Rather, it is an indication of humility, a banishment of pride, an acknowledgement and acceptance of one's limitations. There is thus an extensive system of interdependence in the South African Indian Muslim family.

With this emphasis, it is assumed that all problems are inherently family problems and require family involvement (Messent, 1992). The emotional problems of an individual are seldom left to unfold within solitary confines. Members share each other's pain. The meaning related to this can be partly illustrated in a religious tradition which specifies

that the community is of such a nature that it is analogous to the heart in the human body. Pain experienced by any one part of that body is felt by that organ (Nazlee, 1996). In a similar way, the pain of an individual member is felt by the entire family. Families must be able to stand together, draw on their own *internal* resources, and sort out difficulties. Help is seldom sought from outside. For instance marital problems that persist sometimes require the services of one/more arbiters who can offer guidance. These arbiters are selected mostly from within the family ‘inner circle,’ one from each family of origin.

Thus this discourse implies that the strength of a family becomes tantamount to its ability to care for itself. A family that is capable of adequately caring for itself is sometimes taken as an indication of the value members have for that family. Implicit in this is the notion that family must surely be of worth if members are committed in this way to its welfare. This attaches a sense of duty to the upkeep of the family. It ultimately becomes a matter of family pride that members are attuned to and available for each other so that the family remains self-sufficient. One consequence of this discourse is that it becomes ‘shameful’ when a family is needy of external help.

In addition to this, this discourse often associates extended outside involvement with ‘intrusion’ and the possibility of ‘threat’ against which the family must be protected. This can be related to Braten’s concepts of dialogue and monologue (in Goolishian & Anderson, 1987). He asserts that since meaning and reality evolves intersubjectively, it requires dialogue with the individual and others. When there is a monologue no new meaning is formed and reality is maintained. Thus, through relying on internal resources and limiting external influence, the South African Indian Muslim family attempts to protect and maintain its reality. When members only converse with other members who share the same reality it can in a sense be seen as a form of monologue. Contact with external sources can be seen as a threat in that it has the potential to produce a dialogue which may introduce difference. Once a different conceptualisation of reality is communicated, the perspective and experience of family members may be altered. This could be detrimental to the survival of the family.

One is thus naturally led to wonder about an external relationship which has the potential for such intrusion, such as courtship and marriage. A large sector of the community still adhere to the principles of ‘arranged marriage.’ This is however some misconception over what this implies. Contrary to popular opinion, arranged marriages within the South African Indian Muslim family do not involve the enforced betrothal of perfect strangers. In fact Islamic law (Shariah) would declare such a marriage null and void. The marriage is *arranged* in the sense that the meeting of the couple is planned by family members. Once an individual decides that he/she is ready for marriage, he/she consults with older family members about the kind of partner that is sought. These members in a sense ‘put out feelers’ for a suitable partner and arrange a meeting between them. If the couple like each other *and* their families are compatible and agree to the pairing, further steps are taken. The couple get to become more familiar with each other (within specified boundaries) and marriage is soon initiated. The potential for threat and intrusion is thus monitored and controlled.

At the same time this system which necessitates the drawing together of exclusive internal resources, functions to keep members bonded to each other. Sharing a common loyalty to the family often generates intense emotional bonding.

### **7.2.3 Roles**

According to Pederson (1997) there are notable differences between individualist and collectivist cultures. The former he describes as having greater freedom to choose their various roles and affiliations. With the latter however, roles and affiliations are derived from one's family of origin. Roles in the South African Indian Muslim family are not only derived from one's family of origin, but based also on religious beliefs and adherence to customs. These ideas allude to the concept of flexibility. According to Olson and Thomas (1993) flexibility can be described as the extent to which the roles, leadership and relationship structures can be altered. It ranges on a continuum from rigid, to structured, flexible and chaotic.

The ideal Western family is believed to be characterized by flexibility. This family has sufficient fluidity to allow for both rules and roles to be changed when necessary. Roles can be shared and the power structure can be negotiated. While malleability is an important feature, there is however some structure to the family. Consequently, malfunctioning and maladaptation is thought to reside with the overly rigid or chaotic family. While chaotic families have no structure and stability, rigid families are highly structured and are not open to change. Specific individuals have specific roles. Decision-making is carried out via an established hierarchy. There is usually a central figure who acts in an authoritarian manner, in the leadership role. Relationships are expected to follow predictable patterns (Daneshpour, 1998).

The South African Indian Muslim family falls somewhere between structured and rigid on the continuum. The healthy family is one in which there are clearly defined boundaries, leadership structures and role allocation. Parents have certain roles to perform and children have role specifications. In this respect, it is crucial that parents remain 'parents' and children remain 'children.' Boundaries must not be crossed over. For instance, children (regardless of their age) are not expected to take on the parental role of decision-making on major issues. Parents decide for children, children do not decide for themselves or for others.

Thus the appropriate *respect* is maintained and conflict is minimized. Respect is an important part of the narrative related to role allocation. The maintenance of a child's respect for his or her parents and vice versa; respect between brother and sister, husband and wife; child and elder; are all integral to the functioning of the family. The respectful and kind treatment of parents in particular, is considered close to the worship of God. The notion of respect is considered to be one of the most basic requirements of a good family upbringing and is an indication of the level of maturity and discipline of that individual. It implies an ability to appreciate, understand and accept the natural order of things. Respect suggests a resignation of the individual to conformity. It comes to be seen as an act of obedience.



Challenging the power structure or attempting to reformulate roles is seldom associated with personal discontent. Rather, it can be considered as a personal insult to the person at which it is directed. This is because of the meaning assigned to a role. Roles are predetermined and Divinely willed. Fulfilling these roles is thus a matter of honour and pride and shows strength of character. Thus posing a challenge to a family member's role implies questioning of the adequacy and capability of that individual.

Beyond this, such behaviour has more significant meaning. It suggests a rebellion indicative of a straying from the religious path towards alternate modes of thought. The family would often turn to the religious teachings and practices of the pioneers of Islam along whose footsteps their own behaviour can be modeled. Individuals thus strive to fulfill their roles as part of an effort to emulate a preferred way of life. Degrading the preferred system of role allocation and adopting an alternate one becomes almost equivalent to losing religious faith.

Roles and rules of relationship are primarily informed by religion, but eventually become filtered through an ethnic funnel. It is common to find the fusion of religious and ethnic practices and beliefs. One is thus unable to discern what originates from where. Ethnic traditions are sometimes ascribed to religious ideology and vice-versa. The meaning systems associated with these roles thus undergo considerable modification.

Roles are not only allocated along lines of authority but there also seems to be a gender component to it. The discourse that informs this allocation suggests that men and women have a commensurate status in their relationships to God. The nature of man and woman is however believed to have basic variations on both a biological and emotional level. There are thus also variations in the roles they are expected to perform. In Islam, men and women are equal but different. It is felt that men and women were created contrastingly in order to carry out diverse roles in life. Rather than this notion being punctuated as indicative of the domination of one sex over the other, it is considered to be a much welcome determinant of role differentiation. The physical and emotional differences in males and females serve to aid them in the roles they carry out. They have

the capacity for ‘specialization’ in certain tasks. Men and women act as complements to each other, both of which are indispensable parts of a larger whole. One is incomplete without the other. Marriage is seen as the joining between two counterparts of society. Aside from the generation of life, its aspirations are emotional well being and spiritual harmony (Nazlee, 1996).

This kind of role allocation alludes to Minuchin’s notion of *complementarity of functions*. He asserted that reciprocal role relations are a necessary component of well functioning families. Different family members must be assigned distinct roles which complement each other. Roles must be clearly defined and specifically allocated. This allows for the family to pursue its tasks and maintain equilibrium. Such role differentiation promotes teamwork and encourages interdependence (Minuchin & Fishman, 1981).

Due in part to the extended nature of the family as well as to the value assigned to kinship ties, there are mutual obligations of support and help, and shared responsibilities for maintenance amongst particular members of the South African Indian Muslim family (Jithoo, 1987). There is an entrenched and heavily saturated, almost revered sense of family duty and obligation that bonds a member to the respective extended family. Despite a woman’s ability to sustain herself financially, the responsibility for the **maintenance and protection** of a family resides with the male figure/s. The men of the family must be able to satisfy that family’s material needs. The wife or mother is not obligated to do so but may offer her assistance if she wishes. In Islam, a man is discouraged to enter into a marriage and start a family until he has the means to offer financial support (Nazlee, 1996). Western families divide this responsibility between husband and wife. With the South African Indian Muslim family, these beliefs are still strongly adhered to and many women enjoy the luxury of this arrangement. Not as much pressure is felt to secure a position of equivalent financial contribution. ‘Who wears the pants’ in the house is not a contentious matter. This is however not always the scenario. A lack of sufficient income into the family is one of the main reasons sometimes leading to dual sex financial support in families. While a female’s role as mother and wife is

considered as the most sacred and essential, women are not prevented from working, as long as the work does not detract from their status as Muslim women.

Women are also not obligated to execute **household chores**. She can engage in these chores voluntarily and if she feels able to do so. The husband is required to provide his wife with ‘servants’ (if necessary) who take care of the household and himself contribute towards the tasks (Nazlee, 1996). With the South African Indian Muslim family many ethnic norms have filtered through. As such situations can be often found where the female members of the family are expected to carry out household chores by virtue of their sex. Men seldom cook the food or tend to the chores. Their roles become primarily confined to ‘manly’ duties.

The task of the early **childcare** is assigned primarily to the female partner. There is great status and honour associated with the role of the ‘mother.’ A mother is believed to occupy a status that is three times higher than that of the father. The biological and psychological make-up of the female predisposes her towards the nurturing of the child. She is the best possible medium through which the child can build a solid emotional, social, educational and religious foundation. Since the mother is regarded as ‘the school’, she is expected to be well versed in all spheres of knowledge. This does not however imply a complete absence of the father figure. He is expected to support and assist his wife in this role as far as possible (Nazlee, 1996). With the South African Muslim family, the predominant caregiver to the child is still the mother. Although this task is sometimes shared depending on the external commitments of the mother, motherhood remains her pride and joy. One will often find that grandparents are actively involved in the upbringing of their grandchildren. The grandmother, in particular, acts as a figure of wisdom, who through her own experience guides the parents. There are even contexts in which the grandparents assume greater responsibility for the child than the actual parents. This occurs especially in extended family homes.

The role of **decision-making** is generally a function of the elder members of the family. The input of older members of the family, even on personal matters, is consistently

sought and readily embraced. Decisions are rarely made alone. The responsibility of assuming a leadership role however is usually assigned to a male figure. This does not imply a dictatorship of the ‘Big Chief.’ Islam highlights the necessity of consultation and consensus in family decisions. It must be noted however that taking counsel with and securing agreement on issues in the South African Indian Muslim family is less important with younger members. For instance, the husband may consult with his wife but not necessarily with his children. In the end, the onus of executing a particular decision is still with a central elderly male figure.

Children do not have any distinct roles. They are expected to show respect for the family hierarchy and execute the tasks that are required of them. As they mature, children take on more supportive roles in conforming to and thus maintaining the organisation of the family. They also begin to assist their seniors in their roles, but only on a manual level and to a limited extent. They do not usually partake in those roles which have some form of ‘power’ attached to it. Children cannot take over the role of adults. More influential responsibilities are handed over, ordinarily only approximately around the time of completion of schooling. The financial contribution of that child to the welfare of the family is acceptable. Then too, a child is not expected to take over a ‘parent-role.’ Particular roles such as that of decision-making, remains within the reign of the older members or parental figures, for as long as possible. At times, even after a child is married, the final decision on important issues still tends to lie with the respective parents.

The division of roles in the South African Indian Muslim family can be associated with the notion of *instrumental* and *expressive roles*. The male family members can be described as executing instrumental roles in that it involves managerial type functions. Women on the other hand perform expressive roles which require an attendance to the emotional needs of the family. Such a conceptualisation of role allocation has received large-scale critique from feminist quarters as being male stereotyped and gender-biased (Hansen, 1983).

#### **7.2.4 Hierarchy**

In structural terms, the healthy family must have an appropriate hierarchical organization. Parents should have more authority than their children and older members should have greater responsibilities and privileges than their younger counterparts (Goldenberg & Goldenberg, 1996). This stipulated hierarchical organisation bears close resemblance to that found in the South African Indian Muslim family.

It is observable that a definite system of hierarchy exists in the South African Indian Muslim family. Respect is an important factor in the family hierarchy. A similar form of narrative as the type associated with respect in role allocation can be found with hierarchy. Here it functions specifically as a powerful tool aimed at preservation of the hierarchy.

Younger family members are expected to exercise the necessary respect to older members of the family, who usually have greater authority by virtue of their age and the membership status they occupy. Although the degree of respect obtained can be associated with depth of age, one does not however have to be considerably old to warrant respectful treatment. Even with young adults, where there is a minor age gap, the older sibling has more authority and is higher up on the hierarchy. This means that the hierarchical system permeates all components of the family and its effects are felt on every level.

The status attributed to age can be related to a system of narratives that portray the act of aging as ideally involving a progression towards a more complete understanding of life. Thus age is associated with wisdom. These older individuals have ventured into and explored the world before their younger counterparts and much can be learnt from them. They come to be seen as guides to all those family members who are of a younger age. In this way, they are assigned the status of caretakers of the family, which is awarded a high hierarchical position.

There is a code of conduct between the young and the old which must be followed. For instance, in some cases, a younger person will not even smoke in front of an older family member. Such a code of conduct creates distinct levels of differentiation. In doing so it affirms and reinforces the hierarchical labels assigned to members in the family. The privilege and status assigned to hierarchical position acts as an incentive to encourage conformity.

One may find that while the main hierarchy will subsume both the male and female members of the family, each gender also has its own separate hierarchies, the boundaries of which are determined mutually by age *and* position in the family. Older females enjoy a status amongst female members that is not necessarily shared by the family as a whole. They seem to have special positions in their own subgroup. It can be argued that this type of organisation is necessary for this particular family structure. The extended nature of the South African Indian Muslim family furnishes it with a large membership. Thus the central hierarchy may not be able to keep track of all affairs and separate hierarchies are needed. These separate hierarchies however get dissolved when contact is made with the larger hierarchy. This allows that there is ultimately one system of authority and the possibility of competing views is minimized.

The hierarchical organisation in the South African Indian Muslim family can be seen as serving many functions. It fosters a harmonious system of relationships between members by according a place and a position to everyone. In this way members do not cross each other's boundaries, there is less room for ambiguity and space for rivalry. The hierarchy requires from each member and at the same time trains each member in acceptance and obedience. This allows for the preservation of a preferred status quo to be perpetuated. It additionally ensures that there is order and stability in the family. An entrenched hierarchical system lessens the possibility of uncensored change. Change is only permitted by the hierarchy if it meets the organisational criteria of the family system.

Using structural concepts to attempt to describe this organisation, subsystems are hierarchically organized with the parental subsystem (of the separate and extended family) on top, holding and maintaining ‘executive power.’ In addition to this, there is a complementarity of roles, so that tasks can be carried out in such a way as to maintain family equilibrium. A complementarity of roles also allows members of each subsystem to maintain the hierarchy of the system (Minuchin & Fishman, 1981). Minuchin (1974) illustrates that in order for a parent to be ‘the parent’ his child must be ‘the child,’ and vice-versa.

Generational boundaries are clearly defined through the family hierarchy. This contributes towards ensuring that boundaries are not blurred and older members can maintain authority over younger members without interference. The maintenance of this authority also requires that the leading subsystems be aligned on issues regarding the other subsystems. If one were to override the authority of the other and side with another subsystem, the hierarchy will be weakened. The family is thus organized in a manner that reinforces the hierarchical definition and differentiation of subsystems, as well as the complementarity of roles (Goldenberg & Goldenberg, 1996).

Haley (1980) implicates hierarchical inversion as the main culprit in families that produce disturbed youth. “The inversion of power hierarchies is often labeled as the single most destructive force in a family’s structure” (Umbarger, 1983, p.29). A family in which the husband has always/’normally’ been at the top of the hierarchy will run into trouble if his wife starts working and takes over while he loses his job. When the child becomes the parent and assumes responsibility for major decisions attaining executive power, it is a sign of possible future pathology (Umbarger, 1983).

This type of family hierarchy can be accused of reinforcing sex stereotypes and serving to maintain the status quo.

### **7.2.5 Communication**

Proponents of the communications paradigm have described the communication patterns between members of a family as important determinants of the relationships within that family. It is thus useful to review “the style or manner in which information is exchanged (that is coded and encoded) within a family, the precision, clarity, or degree of ambiguity of the transmission, and the behavioural or pragmatic effect of the communication- as much as the content of what is communicated...” (Goldenberg & Goldenberg, 1996, p. 209).

From a Western perspective, overt, direct and open communication in which there is self-disclosure and expressiveness, is valued (Olson & Thomas, 1993). Looking at the South African Indian Muslim family, members are not encouraged to be as explicit in their communication. The narratives around communication do not sanction explicit communication. These narratives construe overly bold communication as being disrespectful and confrontational. A confrontational stance is not received positively because of the emphasis on harmony within the family. Communication tends to take on more of an indirect nature. Members of the family must be humble, sensitive to each other and be dedicated to the welfare of the larger family. Overt communication can easily be seen as derived from self-absorption, as acting in accordance with one’s own wishes and desires, as putting oneself first, as an opinionated act. The welfare of the family must be prioritised, which requires a form of communication that ensures this.

Thus, communication with older and more respected individuals usually assumes a covert form. Rather than directly stating things, matters are implied and suggested. The words used are of a subtle nature and the tone of voice ranges from low to medium. This is motivated by the need to maintain mutual respect. It also serves to reinforce the organisation of the family and ensure a distinction of roles. A different form of interaction may occur between age equivalent peers. Communication may be more focused and direct. Feelings and thoughts can be openly expressed and discussed. Even then however, one may not find the same level of explicitness that emanates from



members of Western families. Explicit communication can have a harsh overtone and have the potential to generate divisiveness.

This kind of scenario does not however hold all the time and in every situation. The way in which one communicates depends to a large extent on the context. More specifically, it hinges on the relationship one has with the person communication is directed at. This not only affects *how* one speaks but also *what* one is allowed to speak about. Thus, looking at it from a communications perspective, the relationship affects the manner and content of communication which in turn itself reinforces that relationship.

Some therapists can describe communication in the South African Indian Muslim family as concealed, covert, ambiguous, incongruent, and as not allowing information & affect to be effectively exchanged. It must also be looked at a meta-level in that it serves to define the nature of the relationship as one in which there is a distinct hierarchy and an explicit code of conduct for members at each hierarchical level. According to the communications approach the sender and receiver's manner of communication is indicative of the type of relationship they share. Communication can be described as complementary or symmetrical. Symmetrical communication involves a pattern where individuals engage in similar styles of communication and mirror each other. The individuals in this relationship are likely to be peers and have equivalent control and authority. In fact, this communication pattern can lead to competitive behaviour where each individual attempts to minimize differences and gain a 'one-up' position (Goldenberg & Goldenberg, 1996).

The interactive pattern between the older and younger members of the South African Indian Muslim family however is more similar to complementary communication. Here the communication of the one individual complements the other. If one individual in the relationship communicates assertively, then the other will be submissive. In this relationship, one individual is superior and the other is inferior. There is a maximization of differences and inequality in the relationship (Goldenberg & Goldenberg, 1996). It

can be argued that this type of communication is necessary in the South African Indian Muslim family in order to maintain the structure and hierarchy of the family.

While the family can be described as enmeshed and lacking in privacy, there are distinct areas of conversation that must be confined to the private domain. Amongst these areas are that concerning sexuality and marital affairs. The meaning attached to certain issues render them as sacred, mainly due to the level of intimacy they involve. These issues however only remain sacred if they are restricted to the private sphere. Once these issues are transported to the public sphere, a conversion occurs and these issues can no longer be regarded as sacred but become shameful. This is owing to the belief that bringing certain private issues out into the open debases the significance attached to them and they become trivialised. Such a discourse thus works to organise a taboo around particular areas of conversation. Breaking this taboo additionally suggests a lack of regard for those involved and for those listening, for their feelings and expectations. Self-disclosure is thus also subject to certain conditions. Other family members do not necessarily want to engage in conversation around these areas, particularly in light of the meaning assigned to them. It usually generates feelings of uneasiness, embarrassment and shyness. Once more it can be noted that the individual is not expected to be preoccupied with him/herself but concern should rather be directed at other family members and the family as a whole.

Generally, it is not common to find a raw and pure expression of emotion. Emotions are usually controlled and modified when expressed. There are also rules around which emotions may be openly expressed and limits around their expression. Negative emotions like anger have certain restrictions. One is not expected to directly express anger at an older member of the family. This is regarded as disrespectful. Vulgarity and physical outbursts are not tolerated at any level. Anger can be expressed towards status equivalent members or external figures, but even then it is restricted from achieving full expression.

It may be useful at this point to offer an elaboration of the narrative structure around emotion, using the notion of anger as an illustration. Islam does not encourage the cultivation of anger. The aim however is not to altogether eliminate anger. It is believed that each emotion exists in an ambivalent state, in that it has the potential for both positive and negative tendencies. While anger can be instrumental in the survival of the individual, in resisting evil and in establishing justice; its unbridled expression often leads to forceful self-justification. Anger is often driven by pomposity and the need for domination and glorification. Both a lack and an absence of the emotion is thought to be harmful to the individual. Instead, it must be in a state of balance so that its potential for good can be more easily realised (Mohamed, 1996). The approach is similar with other such emotions.

Positive emotions such as happiness and excitement can be readily proclaimed but not over exaggerated. It is a common occurrence that the showing of marked affection between adults is not widely practiced. A public demonstration of affection and intimacy, especially on a physical level, between husband and wife is even more rare. This is considered to be sacred and indiscriminately indulging in it removes that element of reverence. The system of meaning around this has already been illustrated. On the other hand, the showing of open affection towards children occurs frequently and is in fact encouraged. It is not regarded as an act of intimacy on the level described earlier but instead becomes associated more with the showing of compassion.

The asking of too many questions is not looked on favourably. It can be seen as posing a challenge to the other individual, as doubting his/her sincerity and capability, as lacking in trust. This is especially apparent when interacting with older people. This type of behaviour being carried through, one will notice how individuals from this culture generally are not predisposed to asking questions for example, in a school or university context.

### 7.2.6 Life cycle

The family life cycle framework suggests that there are predictable stages of development which a family navigates, despite its structure or composition. Thus, particular points of transition are considered to be universal. There are developmental tasks at each stage which are brought on by a specific life event. These developmental tasks require a modification in the organisation of the system. This allows the family to progress to the next stage. Symptomatic behaviour has been associated with a difficulty in negotiating a point of transition (Goldenberg & Goldenberg, 1996). It has been argued however that the life-cycle framework is based on Anglo- American middle class norms and that its blueprint approach is flawed. Family life cycles are culturally informed and thus vary with context (Falicov, 1995).

Most life-cycle models emphasize the move towards greater independence of members. Western norms dictate that the appropriate time for achieving differentiation and autonomy is somewhere between late adolescence and early adulthood. The individual is expected to become self-sufficient and ‘leave home.’ An inability to do this implies a failure to deal with the threat of separation and is seen as resulting in the development of symptomatic behaviour (Falicov, 1995). No such developmental task or threat of separation can be found in the South African Indian Muslim culture. This can be related to the narratives organized around familial connectedness, cohesion and unity.

The South African Indian Muslim adolescent is not expected to ‘grow up’ and work towards ‘leaving home.’ There is no specific age requirement by which one is expected to differentiate and achieve ‘manhood.’ One usually leaves home only when entering the bond of marriage, despite having the capacity to fulfil the external standards required for independent financial and emotional sustenance. It is usually the female child who will leave her home and resettle in the abode of her husband and his family, thereby cementing further kinship networks. The male child sometimes continues to reside with his family of origin after marriage. The ‘leaving home’ issue in this community thus occupies a tentative space. There seems to be little ‘leaving home’ and when this does

occur, it facilitates a more complex integration of interrelationships, instead of separation and individuation.

In light of the positive meaning attributed to dependence (described earlier), interdependence remains a prominent part of the life-cycle. This meaning structure encourages family members to openly accept and demonstrate their neediness of each other. Consequently, another set of meanings become associated with this. Interdependence produces feelings of belonging. Knowing that one is needed suggests that one has a 'place' in the family. Once the individual feels secure that he/she is an imperative part of the unit, a sense of ownership is generated regarding that family. This in turn encourages a commitment towards the family.

The child is taught interdependence in the family of origin and easily extends this type of relationship when entering marriage. There does not seem to be much difficulty in establishing couple interdependence. Parents do not have to deal with the separation of their children on the same level as with Western families. Despite this however, marriage still constitutes some form of loss to both the parents and the child, as the child (especially when female) must direct his/her loyalty towards another kinship network as well. The transition may be difficult for the newly married individual in having to transfer this loyalty to a foreign family, in a sincere manner. A new member of the family is expected to adopt and adapt to this new environment with earnest dedication. It is not anticipated that he/she will retain a 'stranger' or 'outsider' status for too long. As Falicov (1995) suggests, committing oneself to new relationships, usually requires an re-assessment of loyalties and prerogatives with the family of origin.

Parents do not usually have to deal with an 'empty nest' as the family tends to remain connected. It is actually considered to be of greater importance to strengthen relationship bonds between parents and children as both grow older. Thus the occurrence of old age homes within this culture is rare.

The birth of a new child is a meritorious occasion. It is openly celebrated and publicly proclaimed. One will observe that for many couples the new addition does not require a total re-adjustment. In Western terms however, it has been cited as the most significant life cycle milestone due to the vast change it is associated with (Goldenberg & Goldenberg, 1996). The impact of these changes in the South African Indian Muslim family are diluted partly because of the frequent involvement of other members of the family, especially the grandparents. The guidance from these members and their willingness to share in the responsibility and give constant encouragement, serve to enhance the ease with which the transition is made. Owing partially to the entrenched system of interdependence, the new parents are able to freely accept and accommodate the child's dependence on them. The possibilities that the baby will 'tie them down', restrict their freedom and mobility, constrain their individuality and independence or limit their social life; are not usually issues of concern. An alternate set of narratives are associated with the arrival of a child. The birth of a new child affirms one's allegiance to the family. One's commitment to the family is demonstrated through the fact that one wishes to contribute towards its survival by furnishing it with increased membership and by extending its generational ties. In this way the possibility of the family becoming extinct is lessened. Since the strength of a family is seen in terms of its ability to independently care for its members, offering a new addition to the family implies that the parents feel assured that the family has the capability to care for their child. The family is 'worthy' of their child and is seen as valuable. Thus, for the family, it additionally confirms the significance of its membership. The birth of a child is seen as an extension of the familial bond, a contribution to the family heritage, an investment towards the future welfare of the family.

While death in a Western culture is seen as a further step towards separation (Goldenberg & Goldenberg, 1996), it acts to reinforce unification and the realization of connectedness in the South African Indian Muslim family. Extended family involvement and support is pronounced with the advent of death. This occurs on both a physical and emotional level. Unity and loyalty become even bolder. For that matter any transitional crisis is not ordinarily handled by individual members or isolated family units, but often involves and

rallies together an extended supplement of contributors. The narratives around this involve those associated with family cohesion, loyalty and interdependence.

### **7.3 Marginalisation in the community**

Since everything can be subject to altercation, there can be different interpretations derived from alternate systems of meaning. Therefore it is likely that there are those individuals in the community who feel differently and conceive of this type of family arrangement in a contrasting manner. Bateson (in Goolishian and Anderson, 1987) highlights the importance of the receiving context in such a situation. The receiving context controls and delineates the meaning that gets assigned to events. It selects those meanings that concur with its narratives. Alternate discourse is not supported and thus is unable to become established as ‘facts.’ There are thus experiences that are not included in the dominant story. These alternate stories tend to be ignored by the community since they represent a different way of seeing the world and are likely to foster discomfort amongst those who share a common reality. Thus, individuals who do not conform to the dominant discourse are consequently marginalised.

Marginalised voices in the community are silenced in a number of ways. They come to be labeled as deviant. These individuals are relegated to the status of dissidents and become seen as outcasts. They are felt to have not only defiantly opposed a highly valued structure of organisation but to have more fundamentally abandoned the revered belief system that informs it. There is a marked sense of betrayal and the individual is believed to have broken a significant bond of trust both with the larger community and one’s family. These individuals are also portrayed as being ‘weak.’ Their belief systems are easily influenced and they do not have the capacity to defend their own views. They are seen as ‘lost souls’ who have become overcome by confusion. In this way boundaries around these individuals are closed and contact with them is dissuaded. This serves to prevent others from being likewise influenced and following in their footsteps.

#### **7.4 Effect of the author's perspective**

It is likely that the author's discourse may have affected her writing in many possible ways. The possibilities however are numerous and it would be too cumbersome at this point to engage in an examination of each one. There are however a few points of which she is aware and that require elaboration.

The stories which are provided have been filtered through the author's own discourse and thus may say more about the author than anything else. It can therefore be taken merely as an indication of the manner in which she perceives her world and not necessarily as a reflection of the dynamics of the South African Indian Muslim family. In addition to this the author subscribes to most of the narratives that have been described. This made writing particularly difficult as there were times when the narratives assumed a very personal nature. As a result, describing the narratives felt in a sense as though the author was 'exposing' her family and her life. This stimulated feelings of vulnerability and it at times generated a defensiveness. Writing may consequently have assumed a protective tone. Thus the author was aware that her writing may amongst other things, serve to proclaim, verify and validate her own story.

Since the narratives may sometimes reflect the author's preferences, the possibility can exist that these narratives are amiably framed and therefore present a one-sided picture. Furthermore, the narratives may have been inadvertently selected on the basis of their congruency with the author's own discourse. As a result, competing stories may not have been given voice. There are some narratives that the author does not espouse. This could have similarly affected her writing in that these discourses may have been portrayed with negativity or omitted altogether.

The author embraces difference and feels that every story must be granted an opportunity to be heard without restraint. A major form of restraint in this respect and in the author's life has been that of 'judgement' or unfounded evaluation. She is thus sensitive to judgement, particularly when it involves her own story. This may have affected her writing in that the narratives were not freely expressed but were written with caution. In



addition to this, with components of the story that she felt were likely to receive judgement, care was taken to ensure that they were framed in a manner which encouraged their acceptance.

There are dominant discourses in the community to which the author does not adhere. This may have an effect on the way in which she sees things. While not intended as such, the author may have been less likely to notice the extent of their impact on members of the community and on her own family. She may thus possibly be unable to adequately see the patterns that they generate. The meaning structures around them may become substituted for alternate systems of meaning with which the author feels more comfortable. Thus while acknowledging the existence of these discourses the author may not be able to completely accept their legitimacy. The author may thus begin to see these discourses as ‘foreign’ to her own and as not providing an adequate basis to make sense of the world.

With those discourses to which the author does subscribe it becomes easy to identify the associated patterns and accept their occurrence as the norm. These discourses and the patterns that they generate are possibly seen as positive and useful. The author will probably punctuate these discourses in a manner that resonates with her own system of meanings.

### **7.5 Conclusion**

In comparison to Western conceptions of the ideal family, the way in which the South African Indian Muslim family is organized and functions, differs vastly. This difference activates the easy and almost automatic classification and interpretation of the types of arrangement in this family, according to dominant (external) points of reference, as pathological. Until and unless the system of meaning and preferred cultural code is made manifest, a superficial judgement will be passed. It is once these elements are revealed that a whole new world unfolds. The story is retold, with a different voice, in a different way.

## Chapter 8 Conclusion

The aims of this study were on three broad levels namely, societal, academic and therapeutic. It is thus the intention of this concluding chapter to explore the potential contribution of this study on a therapeutic level, an individual and societal basis and to take stock from an academic standpoint.

### 8.1 Implications of findings for therapy

There are many potential consequences to this study. In therapeutic terms it can encourage a more respectful outlook on the experiences of different cultures, along with an enhanced awareness of the complexities involved in a multicultural setting. This could facilitate a more informed approach to the employment of therapeutic skill. These factors have the capacity to contribute towards easing some of the personal and professional dilemmas a therapist in South Africa faces. Additionally, it may serve as a generative source that guides and nurtures *some* familiarity with the Indian Muslim family of South Africa.

The description of the South African Indian Muslim family that the author has provided can have many possible implications for therapy. It is the author's intention to offer some of them here. It must be noted however that the implications that are suggested are by no means exhaustive and do not necessarily hold in all circumstances. The individual context of the family that presents in therapy must be taken into consideration to allow for the possibility of variation.

- Resorting to therapy is usually an act of desperation and a last resort after all other attempts of the family have failed. Therapeutic efforts may not be readily accepted as it implies an inability of the family to deal with their own problems and thus reveals a perceived weakness in the family. This can often be associated with a 'loss of face.' One way in which the therapist can try to work around this is by framing therapy as geared towards restoring the family's capacity to promote and maintain family

welfare. It can therefore come to be seen by the family as a progressive move towards ‘saving face.’

- Since the South African Indian Muslim family seems to try to draw exclusively on internal resources even in times of need, the therapist as an ‘outsider’ will not be easily accepted. The potential for rejection is very high throughout the course of therapy. The family’s acceptance of the therapist may however be crucial for the progress of therapy. This makes the process of ‘joining’ all the more crucial. One way in which the therapist can work towards this is by using the genogram in therapy. With the aid of the genogram the therapist can become acquainted with the multigenerational stories that have surrounded the family. It is through showing interest in learning about the family’s background and history that the therapist’s eagerness to join with the family and his/her receptivity to cultural variation is shown. The therapist becomes less of a stranger to the family.
- The therapist must try to as far as possible to use resources that are indigenous to the family.
- The striking interdependence in this family context can be used as a tool to generate internal resources by exploring ways that members can help each other without becoming overbearing.
- The prominence of the extended family network and the notion that all problems are family problems and require family involvement is likely to have implications for the selection of participants to involve in sessions. It is preferable to hold family sessions with as many members of the extended family as possible, rather than having only the nuclear family or individual sessions.
- The value assigned to family harmony in the South African Indian Muslim family has the potential to act as an obstacle by not allowing supposed family dysfunction to be revealed. The therapist can however convert this obstacle into an asset by suggesting that it is precisely because family harmony is so important, that any dysfunction must be exposed so that it can be rectified and harmony restored.
- The system of values in the family will probably render the family receptive to the therapist reinforcing and applauding their connectedness and unity. Through working

with these characteristics (and not against them) the therapist can use them to motivate therapeutic involvement and to reinforce their commitment to therapy.

- Since the preservation of kinship networks is sacred, therapeutic attempts at highlighting points of contention between members will be construed as divisive and probably be met with resistance. The therapist can thus expect that confrontation between members may be particularly difficult to elicit. Similarly, hostility between members will not easily be made overt or readily be heard by the family.
- The therapist needs to be cautious around initiating any moves (implicit or explicit) associated with the individuation of members as this may be seen as an attempt to weaken family ties and possibly lead to rejection of the therapist.
- It is not advisable for a therapist to insist on an adult child achieving autonomy through leaving home. This occurrence is better accepted as a norm.
- It may be anticipated by the therapist that members of the family are likely to have suppressed feelings and views. This is owing to the notion that differences in opinion/feeling (from that of the family) are seldom permitted full expression in this family context. If necessary, separate individual sessions can additionally be held to cater for the expression of these feelings.
- The therapist can therapeutically utilise the norm of high emotional intimacy to modify and enhance support networks for troubled members. At the same time however it is necessary to define and establish boundaries around the kind of over-involvement which becomes a source of distress to members.
- Similarly, the sensitivity that members seem to have for each other can be used to generate an empathic understanding of each individual's situation, that is as he/she experiences it and not involve enforcing what *should* be felt.
- The preference for the sharing of pain and collective attempts at resolution in this cultural group requires the therapist to always actively involve other members and make them feel needed.
- The therapist needs to become familiar with the dominant dyads in the family and their functions instead of assuming prior knowledge. Triangulations should also be treated similarly.

- It may be useful for therapists to respect the family's role structure and to meaningfully use these roles. The therapist can observe how they play out in therapy and in the story that unfolds. It may be too risky for the therapist to spontaneously question or attempt to alter a particular role as this can be seen as an act of immense disrespect. The therapist can however venture into it if members show significant dissatisfaction with their respective roles. Even in this instance it must be done cautiously and the grievance can be related to the associated meaning structure and not the role itself.
- The therapist needs to observe and respect the rules of hierarchy and communication. These structures must not be openly and directly challenged but the therapist can use more subtle and tentative means to work around them.
- The hierarchical organisation of the family may restrict options in therapy. Interventions will have to be framed according to the hierarchical code of conduct in order to be accepted.
- Due to the hierarchical structure of the family it is advisable that therapists consistently consult with authority figures about what they think and feel. These individuals can be used as link therapists.
- The therapist must try to convey his respect for the family and their organisation at all times. This requires that the therapist not engage indiscriminately in an unacceptable form and content of communication. Selectivity needs to be exercised concerning the type of topics which are addressed in extended family sessions. The therapist may consider first asking for permission to discuss a particular content area or looking for alternate means and contexts to address these issues.
- There will probably be a lack of direct, overt communication in therapy. Other forms of communication can be used in which the therapist can access feelings more clearly. Amongst the possible options are drawings, nonverbal communication or even sculpting. The therapist can explore indirect forms of communication which still convey the message to the therapist, but are not explicit enough to cause unwarranted discontent from other members. Perhaps the therapist (provided that he/she has been

accepted in his/her role as helper and promoter of family welfare) can assume responsibility for translating communication into a more direct form.

- While encouraging the expression of a particular emotion, the therapist can ensure that it is expressed in a balanced manner. This means that both its positive and negative potentials can be explored.

## **8.2 Impact on individual and larger group**

With reference to the individual, group, organisation and society, the present study has attempted to cultivate a permissive space in which their voices can be respectfully heard. It allows for other voices to be heard so that the multiplicity of the context is seen, acknowledged, respected and encouraged. This has the propensity to encourage understanding, rather than judgement and marginalisation. A supplementary outgrowth of this study is its capability to act as a potential catalysing agent in the process of social development in South Africa.

### **Concluding remarks**

This study could also potentially provide an academic point of reference from which current standpoints can be assessed and reviewed, and new and progressive ideas can be generated.

While originally receiving criticism for its lack of cultural exploration and its ethnocentricism, current work in the field of family therapy bears witness to the notion that just as there are a many different cultural variations in the form, feel and functioning of families; there are also multiple ways in which to deal with it. While the lenses of some have been magnified to capture and elucidate cultural idiosyncrasies, others wear 'rose-tinted' spectacles so that the world becomes coloured with universality and uniformity.

Whether one chooses to ignore it or to embrace it depends on the view one is looking at, and the scenery one sees is matter of which window one is looking through. It may however be more useful to cast aside these windows, and open the door and step outside.

Instead of just looking in one direction, it allows for an extended circumference of imagery.

The field of family therapy hosts a number of schools of thought, each propagating its own discourse, each housing a differing epistemology. The manner in which culture is approached is a reflection of the structures of which individual epistemologies are constituted. While the foundations of family therapy can be described as having skirted around the issue of culture, as reflected in the implications of general systems theory and first order cybernetics, later conceptualizations such as social constructionism and narrative therapy place it at the centre. Although the author chooses to punctuate this move as being progressive, jumping from one extreme to the other is not advocated here. One cannot be blind to culture, but neither can one be blinded by it. Discretion needs to be exercised in this respect. One is warned to steer away from the tendency to equate culture with dysfunction. At the same time, it is cautioned not to neglect dysfunction in honour of cultural sensitivity. An appropriate balance must be negotiated.

Whether culture is at the fore or the periphery need not be entirely reliant on one's epistemological urgings, but is better in seen in context of both the family and the therapist. The therapist (social constructionist or not!) can only use what the family brings into therapy.

As such, the author's epistemological framework advocates the employment of a both-and perspective. Thus while accepting the *possible* value of "not knowing", "cultural naivete and respectful curiosity; it may also be *potentially* beneficial to have some background concerning a particular culture.

While the knowledge about a particular culture equips one with some tools to manage the cultural context, its *effective* management requires more than just this. One also needs to maintain a continual reflexivity, to sustain a constant awareness of one's own cultural and epistemological constructions, as well as that of the client. Any amount of prior knowledge of a particular culture does not necessarily mean one actually *knows* the culture of that specific family (Falicov, 1995). It merely generates road markers for

pursuing relevant pathways. Where these lead to, could result in an encounter with entirely uncharted terrain. Thus, while the bedrock landmarks of probable cultural meaning of a family can be adapted from prior knowledge, its local territorial features must be explored and refined through actual dialogue with that family. Many different stories can be told and many differing versions can be invented.

Families usually organize according to a cultural code. The features of the code that have been included in this study are partly a result of the author's personal experiences and preferences within and outside her own family of origin. They are by no means all-inclusive or encompassing or intended at imposing a specific cultural blueprint. What is presented here, only introduces selected fragments of possibility, thereby hoping to usher in a receptivity towards a plethora of potential cultural variation.

The narrative of the South African Indian Muslim family articulated in this study provides a story of family life that is coloured with order and hierarchy, loyalty and obligation, respect and commitment, sacred bondedness, unity and lifelong interdependence. One is at times amazed by the simplicity of its organizing principles, yet at the same time struck by the complexity of the meaning which informs it. Some of what has been described has been heard before, but not in this way, and not by this audience. It thus urges the family therapist to not only look and find, but also to see and to hear. It must be emphasized however that these narratives mark only the beginning of a multiplicity of stories, which still have many pages to fill. It is hoped that this attempt has stimulated the impetus both for further narration and reading.

The range and level of complexity that present when the family and culture combine in therapy, far exceeds the spectrum provided here. This study however represents a concerted effort to encourage family therapists, especially in South Africa, to more discerningly wade through the morass. It is most appropriately exclaimed that what South Africa requires now is “a slow process of opening and exchanging across the boundaries that had kept us apart for so long” (Shuda, 1989, 1989, p.xiii). In order to work towards this we need to attend to features of divergence *and* give care to elements



of convergence. Where there are similarities, bridges of relationship can be nurtured and where differences are found, a rejuvenated understanding and respect can be fostered. It is hoped that this research endeavour can be interpreted as a meaningful step towards these ends.

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