

**THE TRAUMATIC EXPERIENCE OF DIVORCE AND ITS IMPACT ON WOMEN**

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## Declaration

I, Ruben Benjamin Kitching declare hereby to be the author of this dissertation on :

### **The Traumatic Experience of Divorce and its impact on women.**

I also declare that all the quotations cited in this study were acknowledged through the citation of their authors, books, year and places of publication, as well as their publishers.

Signed:

Date: 30 July 2008

Supervisor:

Date: 30 July 2008

## Summary

This dissertation is about the traumatic experience of divorce and its impact on women. The author used the narrative research method, which gives new meaning, to be, to divorcees, involved as co-researchers. This new meaning, to be, were found by divorcees in storying their cultural and individual experiences within an understandable framework.

Three divorcees, which includes the author, told their stories of hope for a future with God. One of the participants did not write her story, as she chose not to do so. Her wish was respected and valued, as she represents the millions of unstoried stories, telling us about the impact of the trauma of divorce that divorcees go through. The people involved and their stories have become part of this research and the healing process. Understanding is valued, as narrative therapy strives to find a better understanding of the person of the story (Friedman and Combs, 1996: 1-41).

The author gave a brief description in chapters two and three about the theory of divorce as a process and the theory of trauma. In doing so, this theoretical background was found very helpful and has added value to provide a better understanding of stories, as told in chapter four.

This theory amongst others, include the following:

- An alternative Biblical and theological standpoint on divorce;
- Trauma and divorce are the reverse sides of the same coin;
- The word "trauma" means "wound" and is used to describe some unique and painful human experience;
- Each person is unique. So is the trauma that comes with each experience and the handling of it; and
- Where trauma is viewed as a part of life, meaning is found in the

cross of Christ, where it has been discovered that God is present in suffering. Not as the One who sends suffering, but as the One who shares in it.

In chapter four the author shows how people interact through their stories and what narrative involvement is about. Stories are not right or wrong, good or bad, as they are ways and means people have used to describe and interpret their lives. For them, a new story has been discovered. A story of hope. By telling their stories, divorcees did not mean to deny the traumatic impact of divorce of them, but has proven that, by having the courage to tell their story, it rather denies the power of the trauma of divorce over them. This courage is rooted in the God who appears when we disappeared in the trauma of meaninglessness.

We should help people to break the silence about the inner struggle of pain and suffering, they as divorcees go through. Divorcees have special needs, but also special gifts that need to be respected and used in the Kingdom of God. We should be on the look out to value understanding and to help in different ways according to the Gospel of Jesus. There is hope for every divorcee.

## Abstract

This dissertation will contain chapters on research methodology, divorce as a process, trauma and storying the untold stories of hope about the traumatic experience after tragic divorce of three divorced women in Wierdapark in Pretoria. Lastly the dissertation will draw the author into a few conclusions. In doing so the women will be valued throughout as co-researchers and not as objects. The formula of Alis Adams to which Lammot is referring to could be very helpful to counselors in this regard.

The formula is:

- A) Describing the action or story
- B) Provides the background of the story and also includes literature studies of applicable themes or topics
- D) Development. This refers to a new development of stories emerging from the trauma
- C) Climax. This explains the climaxes reached or discovered in storying the un-storied
- E) Ending. Because our lives and so our stories never end, this leaves the co-researchers and the author with a new story and a sense of what it all means and where we are now.

Peterson describes the story as "... the most adult form of language" (1987:119). He describes the characteristic of the story and said that all stories display basic similarities. All stories are unique, but the basic elements of a story are to be found in each one. He has identified five characteristics and distinguished them as follows:

- Every story has a beginning and an end. Stories happened within a specific context and time. There is always a past and a future.
- Each story always describes some or other crisis.

- In a sense we will find in each story, some way of deliverance, which forms part of the plot.
- Development of characters and their relationships takes place. Good or bad people with names are to be found within the story.
- Everything in a story has meaning. Nothing is coincidence.

Peterson says “...all the stories in the world display the same characteristics. They will vary from story to story, sometimes they will be more explicit and other times less explicit, but they are always there” (1987:121).

To tell your story, means to regain one’s power (HAT 1984:1245).

## CHAPTER ONE

### RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

#### 1.1 Introduction

I became interested in what happened to couples after their “traumatic” experiences of divorce, because of several reasons such as:

- I went through a divorce myself some seventeen years ago, overcoming the discourse by the grace of God.
- All along pastoral carers, psychiatrists, psychologists and social workers, with whom I worked as supervisor in team context for the past thirty years, are using a problem-solving model in their work to understand and help divorcee.
- The problem-solving model is outdated and provides very little hope for a better life or coping with aftermaths of divorce at all.
- In overcoming my discourse I was wondering if other divorcee also, amongst others, struggle with issues such as:
  - Forgiveness;
  - Self-esteem;
  - Finding of hope;
  - What happened to the one who left me?
  - Do I understand what I am going through?
  - Will I ever remarry again?
  - Can divorce be meaningful?

- Am I valuable? And
- Is my story worthwhile to listen to?

Life is a journey. By making use of this metaphor I give expression to the cradle-to-grave existence of men (Müller, 1998:3) who from time to time became companions on this journey and found that their roads are blocked (Müller, 1996:115). In our effort to find alternatives to go on “...we often represent life in terms of metaphors of pilgrimage, trail...” (Browning, 1991:6).

Life is a journey and the metaphor suppose “associative networks” (Müller & Maritz, 1998:66) with the purpose to describe “...the complex purpose of characterizing the concept...in all of its aspects...” (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980:105).

Discourses are part of life as a journey and form part of a network of systems of the journey metaphor. The discourse of divorce should be replaced with an alternative story of hope that becomes the treasure, which could lead to new meaningfulness.

In this study I am making use of this metaphor of the journey in order to describe our stories, our discoveries, as well as our search to find our new “pot of gold”. By making use of this metaphor I confirm “...that metaphor is pervasive in everyday life, not just in language but in thought and action. Our ordinary conceptual system, in terms of which we both think and act, is fundamentally metaphorical in nature” (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980:3).

Companions on the journey of life discovered together in this study the treasure of meaningfulness and self-value within their stories. This is more than the telling of stories together with one another. This is more than the stories of a few divorcees – this is our story. The author believes that by discovering God's story with you, a person can experience God. God is the big Author of everyone's story. Therefore each story manifests the Grace of God. My story is a story of hope about a living God who is involved in my life and who has set me free to take me into His care. He has empowered me to share my tragic story of divorce with divorcee in a hopeful way of helping them. My prayer is that our stories will give hope to the hopeless in order for them to find meaningfulness in the One who told me a story of Hope at Calvary.

In this research I focus in Chapter one on the specific introductory problem statement / aim, objective, research gap and research methodology that I am going to use. It will help me to hopefully find the treasure which is going to lead our search. Emphasis will be placed on the tragic experience of divorce and I will use positioning and storying to help me focus on the aim of my research in order to contribute to practical theology.

Chapter two will provide a literature study of divorce as a process and will serve together with Chapter three on trauma, as the background of stories to which Lammot is referring to. It is only against this background that new development of stories could emerge from the “trauma” of divorce.

Chapter four will contain the storying of the unstoried stories of divorcee and it will show how they interact and impact on one another.

Chapter five will draw the script to a closure and/or new beginning. It will contain new terminology, new research topics and will consist of my own conclusion of the healing process.

This research will value women as co-researchers and not as objects. As a narrative researcher I did not strive for objectivity, but rather for subjective integrity. Through story sharing and writing we interact with one another. This method does not pathologize or victimize my narrators, as I deliberately choose not to use language such as ‘research objects’ or ‘research population’ (Graham, 2000:112). The author chooses to refer to participants as co-researchers. For the author, it is important that his research will value research partners as persons in the first place. Therefore they will participate as co-researchers (LINAIDS: Communications Framework for HIV/Aids. A new direction, 1999:11).

An important advantage of the narrative research over traditional research methods is that it allows active involvement of divorcee as co-researcher in the process. It allows participation in interpreting outcomes and in concluding remarks. This approach is also advocated in the LINAIDS Publication Communication Framework of HIV/Aids. A new direction (1999:11).

## 1.2 Positioning

As a narrative researcher, I position myself within the post-modern paradigm. In doing so I don't want to "pathologize or victimize my narrators" (Graham, 2000:112). I therefore choose to use language such as co-researchers and choose not to talk or refer to participants as 'research objects' or 'research population'. "In Africa we do things through stories" (Manaka, 2001:5). With a postmodern and narrative approach towards my co-researchers I am aware of myself and my tendency towards dominance in the research process. "For us, the aim of this type of research is not to bring about change, but to listen to the stories and to be drawn into these stories. The structuralistic researcher has objectivity in mind by trying to bring about change from the outside. The narrative researcher has subjective integrity in mind and strive for participatory observation" (Müller, van Deventer and Human, 2001:76-96). This research will give a voice to the stories of my co-researchers and will allow them to play a partnership role in all phases of my research. It also opens the opportunity for us to construct interactive social partnership with other divorcee, whilst inter-involve in each other's actions or stories.

As researcher I will be taking a 'not knowing position' about my co-researchers, as well as to the outcome of the research. The principle of deconstructing my own power, as a researcher, will be applied throughout. Freedman and Combs see this principle as valuing local knowledge as a trademark for post-modern narrative research (1996:1-41). The author agrees with Freedman and Combs. In the narrative research, the co-researcher becomes the expert of his/her own story.

My goal with this study is to, amongst others, not to reach universal answers and conclusions, but rather value the understanding of the stories of co-researchers from a social constructionist perspective (Freedman and Combs, 1996:1-41).

In order to achieve this in an orderly and systematic way, I have decided to base my methodological process on the article of Müller, van Deventer and Human (2001:76-96). They developed a research process based upon the metaphor of fiction writing used by Ann Lamot. The formula A, B, D, C, E:

- A = Action (story)

- B = Background
- D = Development
- C = Climax and
- E = Ending

This is not a linear process but reflects circularity, flexibility, interactiveness and continuity.

In A which represents the story or action, the story is told in a complete sense. This includes its background (B), development (D), climax (C) and it's ending (E). The author agrees with Human (2003:41) that the narrative researcher value the story of a person, instead of working with hypothesis of what should be or might be.

The background of a story provides more information about history and/or theory against which the story can be better understood. The deeper the background the better the understanding of the person of the story. Background is embedded in the story. Each story consists of development or growth in terms of progress or improvement of choices in relationships, better living conditions, etc. The context reflects the socio-cultural milieu, the time, etc in which the storyteller lives. The end (E) of the story is more likely to be the beginning of a new story. Story actually never ends.

### **1.3 Research Problem**

Although the statistical figure on the trauma of divorce and its impact on women are sky high, I found no little to none research done on valuing the untold stories of divorcee. The main problem about divorcee is not a single uncomplicated problem or a various amount of problems that needs to be overcome. According to Stinnett and Walters "divorce is a way of terminating a marriage situation in which one or both partners cannot relate to each other in a satisfying manner or cannot interact together without psychological injury to one or both" (1997: 87). This definition confirms the complexity of divorce and why it is experienced as traumatic. Callahan also describes the crisis aspect triggered by a sudden and unexpected loss, emphasizing the complexity of the

problem. “Divorce is an emotional crisis triggered by a sudden and unexpected loss which force you to look at yourself and to analyze where you were and how you got there. Crisis puts you in a position from which you cannot return to what used to be” (1979: 31). For my purpose and from my experience I experienced divorce as a traumatic, complicated, critical, tension filled process, impact on the functioning of the family structure, the communication and support network, as well as the interaction amongst family members. This experience caused me to research this issue as a way of healing myself.

The main problem, however, on which my research will focus will be the not viewing by a divorcee of the “divorce problem” as part of life and opportunity to find meaningfulness within the discourse, by re-interpretating situations from the past, the present and the future. The stuckness of divorcee by focusing on problems withholds them from development and growth towards their new lives to be lived holistically.

Müller developed a pastoral-theological concept of narrative involvement and wrote: “Pastoraat wat vanuit ‘n eko-hermeneutiese paradigma gedoen word, mond uit in ‘n pastoraat van betrokkenheid by totale narratiewe werklikheid wat ter sprake is. In so ‘n pastoraat gaan dit nie bloot om rasionele, dialogiese diskoerse nie, maar om ‘n ervaring van die geheel van die verhaal en ‘n totale betrokkenheid daarby” (1996:15).

The author translates this quote as follows: ‘Pastoral care done within an eco-hermeneutic paradigm, flow into a pastoral care of involvement, concerning the complete narrative. In such a pastoral care it is not just about the rational, dialogic discourses, but about an experience of the complete story and to be involved in total with the story’.

The following problem statements which form part of the present, past and the future story, will be explored:

- We don’t forgive those who left us;
- We don’t care what happened to the one who left us;
- We are desperate to re-marry because we are afraid to be alone;

- We find it hard to cope as divorcee;
- We tend to project our failure on our children in handling them in unacceptable ways;
- We don't understand what we are going through;
- We tend to nurture our sexual desires in unacceptable ways;
- Is divorce really a "traumatic" experience or do we need to find another term, best describing the situation?;
- Can divorce be meaningful?;
- People don't meet one another in relationships;
- People are not ready to be engaged in their next relationship;
- Divorce can be overcome;
- We don't have to have answers for everything; and
- We don't value our stories to be told, because we don't value ourselves.

The narrative theology departs from the unity of human experience as within the widest possible context. Central to the narrative theology stands Niebuhr's term "...the story of our life..." as the way in which Christians formulate their faith (Müller, 1996:20).

The problem is not divorce per sé and how to deal with it in a pastoral sense within the context of the marriage and the family. Must divorce be seen as negative and harmful for all divorcee and their family members or can divorcee find meaningfulness within the discourse? It is not to provide therapy within the context of marriage and family, but rather what your approach towards divorcee is going to be. This will determine whether you are going to implement the problem-approaching model or the narrative model where the discourse will become part of the present, past and future story of hope.

Model fits logically here at the end of the discussion on the research problem. The narrative approach model is something completely different from a problem-solving model. The problem-solving model for providing help to people is based on the medical model where cause and effect are determined. This is usually done by an expert, called the 'doctor' and does not allow much participation and/ or involvement of the patient. The patient is seen as the object who's problem needs to be resolved. Problems are viewed as negative, blocking the healing process. Medicine is prescribed that needs to be used by the patient in order to discover the approach is fixed and linear.

The problem identified in this research requires a more circular approach that will integrate various methods of work into a workable pastoral model that is true to theology and that will have a positive and helpful effect on this dissertation and on the work of pastors with divorcees. The narrative approach model provides this opportunity. The model is one of pastoral-narrative involvement and provides the opportunity to pastors of integrating various methods of working with divorcees.

This model does not pathologize or victimize narrators. It values participative involvement in the healing process. It views problems as 'good' in the sense of having a function to fulfill for a certain period of time. The therapist is referring to himself rather as caregiver than that of an expert, being aware of the discourses of both expert and non-expert. The process he/ she followed is rather one of circularity than linearity, where the person of the story and not the story per sé, are valued. In this model the story is changed through re-interpretation and restructuring and that is all. In the narrative approach, the story is not used as is in the case with the problem-solving model, as information resource to change a person and/ or family, by using another method. To come to story your story, is to come to story with God's story with you.

This dissertation is searching for a 'therapy-friendly' model, which is true to a practical theology, where the experience of tragic divorce can be transformed into hope. In the cross of Christ, pain is transformed into hope in the God who appears when He disappeared in the pain and trauma of divorce.

The narrative model is based on the theology of Jesus who touched the untouchables through interactive participatory, as can be seen, when stories told in this dissertation meet.

#### 1.4 Research Gap

The research gap identified is: “The unheard stories of three divorcee staying in Wierdapark, about their experience of traumatic and/or tragic divorce and its impact on them”.

In the area of the narrative method, contributions found in “narrative means to therapeutic ends” by Michael White and David Easton (1990) are important. Locally, literature studies focusing on the narrative approach are that of Kotzés (1991; 1993; 1997) and Müller (1996; 2000; 2002). Van Staden also made a huge contribution on divorce per sé (1987). On the area of trauma telling, contributions are found in the work of McCann & Pearlman (1990), Roos & Du Toit (2002). Eagan in his work contributed to the process of help (2002).

A research gap in literature was found, shifting focus in working with divorcee from a problem-solving approach, to a narrative approach. Divorcee can be empowered to live a meaningful life, despite and in the midst of their traumatic experience of divorce. By traveling together in our stories, divorcee can find freedom from their situation and be empowered with hope within a new story.

By storying the untold stories of divorcee, my contribution to practical theology will include:

- To share the pastor’s own story in order to journey with, and meet, divorcee in their search for freedom from their traumatic experience of divorce and its impact on them.
- To help pastors to shift from a problem solving approach to a model of development and empowerment. The problem solving approach and its effects on divorcee and their relationships are one of the most negative discourses standing in the way of development and empowerment of divorcee.

- I want to provide hope for the pastor to work with a tool namely storying, which can provide hope to the hopeless. In such a way pastors can contribute to the development of the quality of moral support to divorcee and their loved ones.
- In this study I will make use of the work of Müller (2000: 72-103) in order to determine the value that the narrative approach could have in empowering divorcee. Müller is referring to five huge movements which can enrich pastoral conversation:
  - The story of need;
  - The story of the past;
  - The camouflaged story of the future;
  - The retold story of the past; and
  - The dream story of the future

Each of the above movements or characteristics will characterize stories told within their pastoral care context in this dissertation. These elements of a story will be applied by the caregiver in terms of guiding divorcees in the telling of their full stories. In storying untold stories, divorcees will be guided in such a way to tell and retell their stories, that reinterpretation occurs. The task of the caregiver to apply these movements in this research work will be :

1. To help divorcees to tell their stories of need.
2. To guide divorcees to tell their stories of the past.
3. To help divorcees to tell their stories of the future, so that the camouflaged story of the future can be verbalized. A new story is created when the story of the past and the future meets.
4. The third movement is only possible when divorcees are guided to reframe the stories of the past, to view stuckness for example, as a new opportunity, to discover one's hidden abilities to create a better now. A new story, a story of hope, is created.
5. The dream story of the future, where the victim becomes the survivor and thriver

is created.

This model does not operate with techniques to change people. The point of argument is, that the story per sé consists of enough potential to change people in a way that suits the relevant system. The movements are not applied linear, but rather within a holistic circular approach.

## 1.5 Research Question

The research question is: “What does the unheard stories of divorcee tell us about the impact of divorce on them and how they found hope and meaningfulness and/or lack of it, within their stories?”

The following questions, amongst others, could be very helpful to discuss in the group as part of storying, also in an effort to find answers, clarification and focus:

- Do we ever forgive those who left us?
- Do we care as to what happened to the one who left us?
- Do we find it hard to cope as divorcee?
- Do we understand what we are going through?
- Is divorce really a “traumatic” experience or do we need to find another term best describing the situation?
- Can divorce be meaningful and/or hopeful?
- Can divorce be overcome?
- Do we value our stories to be told and listened to?
- Am I valuable?

## 1.6 Aim of the research

Because divorce is one of the most common 'problems' of our time and various forms of research has been done on the topic by various disciplines, the aim of my research is unique in the sense that I want to achieve the following:

- Storying the unstoried stories of divorcee about the impact of divorce on them and how the stories provide hope for the hopeless
- To reach a holistic understanding of the stories of my co-researchers impacted by divorce, concerning their experience about the meaningfulness and/or not about divorce
- To help pastors to change their focus from a medical approach in handling divorcees, to a narrative approach, whereby divorcees can function more independently to restore their human dignity (Coyne, 1976:29).

The above will be possible by listening and writing of stories of hope from divorcee, the completion of a questionnaire, the discussion and sharing of feelings concerning the impact of divorce on divorcee in group discussion and by discovering together the meaningfulness and/or lack of it concerning traumatic divorce. By being drawn into one another's stories the person of the stories as well as the understanding of stories are valued (Müller, 1996:97-201).

In all the stories the co-researchers are playing a significant role in giving hope to divorcee on the edge of giving up on life.

In order to reach a holistic understanding of these stories, the following were part of my attempt:

- Listening to and being drawn in by the stories of my co-researchers.
- Discovering together the meaningfulness of divorce and/or lack of it within networks of relationships. The support group that has been established will also

hopefully help to reduce the impact of divorce on divorcee and their loved ones and

- To value understanding of stories.

## **1.7 Method of Research**

This research is not quantitative or qualitative. It is not about questionnaires and numbers. It's about the one sheep and not the ninety-nine.

The author chooses deliberately not to describe his work as quantitative. This type of research, according to literature, is linking to the medical model of cause-effect, assembling detailed descriptions of social reality. The qualitative method relies on deductive logic from an objective viewpoint, whereas the narrative method strives for subjective integrity to reach its purpose in storying the unstoried. Qualitative methods employ inductive logic derived from concept and theory from the social reality being studied. The narrative approach works with the story. In quantitative research focus is placed on the ninety nine sheep, so to speak. Data are here collected through structured interviews and census data. Qualitative research relies on purposeful conversation, focusing on specific themes, with minimal effects on the system being studied. In the narrative method themes are not isolated, but are seen as integrated in the story as a whole.

The narrative method safeguard against scientific exclusiveness. In the opinion of the author the narrative method, which is non-exclusive of nature in its approach, minimizes the dangers of excessive selectivity in the collection of data and allows for much more clarity in contextual contributions of stories. Narrative methodology in practical theology is an ongoing hermeneutical process within the immediate storied context of ministry. Stories does not end but open the future to creative possibilities.

The narrative the author followed in his research, includes listening to the stories of co-researchers and to be drawn in by the stories. This method allows for participative interactivity in the research and does not pathologize or victimize participants. This method prefers language such as, co-researchers and deliberately choose not to speak of participants as research objects or research population. This method values the person of the story in the first place and not the story per sé.

This approach is also advocated in the LinAids Publication Communication Framework for HIV-AIDS and was serving co-researchers in this study. An important advantage of the narrative research over traditional research methods, such as quantitative and qualitative methods in this study, is that it allows interactive involvement of co-researchers in the process of storying, interpretation and re-interpretation of outcomes in their stories.

The narrative research method will be used. The narrative approach gives new meaning to be. The new meaning is found in that "...kulturele en individuele ervarings binne 'n verstaanbare raamwerk geplaas kan word" (Müller, 1996:4). Translated it will be '..cultural and individual experiences placed within an understandable framework'. I am of the opinion that this method provides divorcees the best opportunity to become aware of God's presence or to be set free from hopelessness.

By applying the narrative method the narrative approach will be used to obtain involvement in order to enrich one another in the search of hope within feelings of hopelessness. Each person had the opportunity, after the group process, to tell his story, and by that unlocked hope for a future with God. According to Vos a person like Paul Ricoeur placed special focus on the meaning of the narrative (1996:24).

The following procedures will be used:

- Storying of untold stories
- Sharing of stories
- Writing of stories
- Re-writing of stories
- Group discussions on various themes concerning the impact of divorce

- Questionnaires from which the content will be integrated within group discussions.

A group of divorcees has been established and helped to process questions raised in the questionnaire. These people and their answers will become part of the research and the healing process.

Three women as well as myself are going to tell our stories, guided by a model of storytelling of Ann Lamot. By telling and re-telling of stories, the research problem and the problem statements will be discussed and used as positives. In viewing them as part of life, an attempt will be made to find meaningfulness therein. Focus will be changed from a problem-solving approach, to one focusing on the abilities and successes in order to empower divorcee to live their lives holistically in a positive relationship with God.

## **1.8 Preliminary Summary**

Both researcher and co-researcher participate in the development of storying unstoried stories, which could provide hope to the hopeless. By building the bridge, new stories and/or new possibilities of meaning are unlocked for both researcher and co-researchers, as well as for the pastor working with divorcee. This research changes the emphasis of thinking about people as co-researchers, and not as objects. It also provides co-ownership to the co-researchers for the outcome of the research.

In the next chapter I will be dealing with the issue of divorce and the process that divorcees go through.

## CHAPTER TWO

### DIVORCE AS A PROCESS

#### 2.1 Introduction

Within the group there were three women. Three of the women are storying their experience. For one of the three women the trauma was so intense that she is still struggling with her pain. She is not ready to write her story and have requested the researcher to respect her wish. In chapter four the author is going to share two stories of divorcee as well as his own. The names of people used in the script are not their real names because of ethical reasons. The stories of the discourse shared will show how trauma has become part of their lives. Co-researchers choose their own anonymous names.

Francine (this is not her real name) told me that she was married for seven years. She could not bear the way her husband withdrew in communication and how he withdrew in his responsibilities as father towards their newly born child. His choice was to fulfill his own needs for relaxation as a “man” above those of his family by mostly playing golf and watching television. She had also been shocked about his sexual desires, which were almost in full focused on the satisfaction of his own needs. Although married, the relationship between them had come to an end. He had also been involved in a relationship with a friend of her sister. He started to show diversion in his behavior. He continued to humiliate her on a regular basis. He never beat her, as if he knew that would exceed the limit of his control over her. For seven years the relationship continued in a spirit of humiliation, verbal rape and unnatural demands. Until one day when she took the brave step to walk out on “it”. She left with only her clothes and her child. She described her divorce as a “traumatic experience”.

Hetta (this is not her real name) was a successful secretary for the past twenty years. She was married twice. Every time the careers of her husbands started to blossom she resigned her work. She supported her families financially and emotionally during their difficult times. Both her husbands had problems with alcohol, extra marital affairs, unnatural sexual demands that she could not meet as well as dysfunctional personalities in their relationships. Because of her history in developing a low self-esteem, she experienced herself as rejected and constantly blamed herself for their

relationship problems, when both these men chose someone ten years younger than herself. She opted for divorce and described her experience as “traumatic”. She had to start all over again. She hasn’t got a job and she hasn’t got a future. But what is hurting the most: “I have been the perfect wife for so many years. The situation just doesn’t make sense to me”.

Estie (this is not her real name) had been married for almost seventeen years with an angel of a man. They have three small children. She came from a very conservative background. His frame of reference includes parents that have also been divorced and a father who struggled with an alcohol problem. His low self-esteem, which he hides in career success and academic qualifications, then suddenly started to change. He started to humiliate her in front of their friends, especially other women resulting in an “I’m okay, you’re not okay-relationship”. She is a very pretty woman but described herself as ugly and useless. She experienced herself as being the reason of his frustration. The bomb exploded when he got involved in a relationship with another married woman, which he denied constantly. She tried for various reasons to save her relationship for a couple of years, but he refused any help with “I don’t love you anymore”. She eventually decided to opt for a divorce and describes her experience as "traumatic".

The three stories above confirm the experiences of many divorcees – that marriage is not always the institution that fulfils their expectations. The author is of the opinion that relationships, especially as described in these stories, are tragic for women and for men. The above also describes why most women choose tragic divorce as a solution to their relationship problems. The author knew also from experience that divorce is seldom the ultimate solution for a relationship problem but brought forward its own challenges to deal with. Sometimes the challenges is bigger to stay divorced and be happy, than to re-marry and be unhappy. The opinion of the author as expressed above is supported by Louw (1983:3-4) when he remarks: “Die huwelik is ‘n voltydse beroep en ‘n professie waarvoor mense geskool en opgelei moet word. Dit is dringend noodsaaklik dat egpare bewus word van bestaande gevare in ons huidige kultuursituasie wat bedreigend op man-vrou verhoudinge inwerk”. In other words, couples need training and skills to deal with marriage, which he considers a full-time job and a profession. He is also of the opinion that couples need to be made aware of cultural issues that could have a negative effect on their relationships.

This script will value the understanding of the stories of these three divorcees, as well as my own and will show how they interact. These stories will not be seen as criteria or a standard for others in the sense of prescribing what a story should look like, but are seen as criteria to other to serve as model, as unique stories, storied by people who are in a process of dealing with the trauma of divorce. They describe their efforts to change their traumatic experience of their divorce as one of embarrassment into one of opportunities by which they want to give hope to the marginalized. In doing so the most important thing in the process is not the story, but the person of the story who God values.

In this chapter emphasis will be placed on divorce as a process and the traumatic experience of a relationship coming to an end which links divorce to trauma. The theory will help us to provide some background in the understanding of stories of divorcees.

It is somehow important to understand how personalities are formed, how human beings, God, relationships, marriage, divorce and trauma are being viewed and interlinked before we can even try to understand the impact and process of divorce on divorcees, and how divorcees impact on the process of divorce. The understanding of people within their stories is valued and it is of great importance.

## **2.2 A short overview of the theory of object relations**

According to Schaff & Schaff the theory on object relations is an important tool to help therapists to explore unresolved issues of the self (the person) and the object (the other person involved in the relationship). Imbalances in relationship, with mother and father, could be better understood if seen how good and bad elements of that relationship is brought into relationships with infants, and their future functioning within relationships (1989:112-163). When, for example, a women internalizes an obsessive or emotionally abusive male object, they will tend to liberate themselves from oppressive or humiliating relationships with males who contributed to their difficult circumstances.

Object relations is one of many theories, which try to understand the pathologies that arise from these unconscious materials. This theory, as will be seen, is well-known within the field of psychology and will only be described here in brief as one that helps to provide a better understanding of divorcee involved in narrative research. The

narrative model differs from the object-relationship theory in the sense that the narrative approach is not a problem solving approach-model, but one that values people in the research as “co-researchers” and not as objects. Co-researchers are participants in narrative research (Graham, 2000:112). The narrative model, according to Graham doesn’t “pathologize or victimize” its narrators (2000:112). The narrative researcher, which I, as theologian, deliberately choose to be, is one that according to Manaka, “do things together through stories (2001:5). More about the narrative theory a little later.

According to Schaff & Schaff “object relations theory is fundamentally a theory of unconscious internal object relations in dynamic interplay with current interpersonal experience” (1989:112). They continue to say that Freud believed that psychology should be rooted in science. At the time of his writing science derived from Newtonian physics. Freud emphasizes the libido as the source of motivational energy. His views have been criticized, and are no longer in the light of newer scientific knowledge, accepted within psychoanalytic circles.

The term “object” as used by Freud could be a person, idea or anything that was valued. Schaff & Schaff viewed object relations theory as a theory that: “Refers to a psychoanalytic theory of human personality that holds that the human infant is capable of relating actively from birth” (1989:113). According to them the infant seeks to develop a relationship with the mother from birth. Subsequent progress in the two-person situation (mother-infant) of pre-oedipal development, and later the three person situation (mother, father and infant) of oedipal development rest on this foundation, be it shaky or secure, and is affected by its specific confirmation (1989:114).

These views of Schaff and Schaff differs from that of Freud who sees the infant as a narcissistic creature ruled by its instinctual impulses. According to Schaff and Schaff the term “object” does not simply refer to another person, memory or a person or an experience. “It’s deeper meaning can be explained as an “internal object” which is a mental structure inside the Ego, made up of intrajected experiences with the significant other (mother, father or caretaker) over the course of development (1989:114-115). Object relations is a theory that focuses its attention on the human personality, developed from the studies conducted between the relationship of the therapist and the help seeker as it reflects the mother and the infant situation.

According to object-relations theory the core of personality foundation is the experience of the infant's relationship with his/her mother. His/her need for bonding with the object (the mother) is the motivating factor in the development of the self.

Various theorists developed their own theory concerning object relations. For the sake of this study the author will not discuss each one in depth, but will summarize the essence of the views of Freud, Klein, Winnicott and Fairbairn.

### **2.2.1 Freud's theory of adult personality**

Freud identified three unique components of adult personality, which related very intimately with one another namely the Id, the Ego and the super-Ego (Schaff & Schaff, 1989:116). His model for the understanding of the development of the personality also includes his understanding of object relations.

Schaff & Schaff refer to Strachey (Vol. 19:239) who said what Freud said about the Id. "The Id, completely unconsciously, gives mental expression to or psychic representations of instinctual drives and serves as the source of psychic energy. Its basic role is to gain satisfaction of instinctual needs". The Id is forever seeking to reduce needful desires, e.g. the need for food. The Id is operating on the "pleasure principle" and is seen as the most archaic part of all three (Schaff & Schaff, 1989:116-117).

The second component of the personality structure is the Ego. The Ego acts as mediator between the Id and the external world and is described by Freud in the following way: "It is easy to see the Ego as that part of the Id which has been modified by the direct influence of the external world...moreover, the Ego seeks to bring the influence of the external world to bear upon the Id and it's tendencies, and endeavors to substitute the reality principle for the pleasure principle which reigns unrestrictedly in the Id (Schaff & Schaff, 1989:117). The Ego represents the reason or common sense. It helps to satisfy the needs of the Id.

The third component is called the Super-Ego. The Super-ego is taking the place of the parents and does exactly what the parents do in threatening and judging. It also makes the values and morals of the parents its own and is witness in rewards and punishments. The Super-ego then becomes the conscience and the ego ideal. Freud

defines the Super-ego as follows: “For the Super-ego is as much a representative of the Id as for the external world. It came into being through the introjections into the Ego of the first objects of the Id’s libidinal impulses namely the two parents: (Schaff & Schaff, 1989:118)

Freud discovered the conscious and the unconscious through the process of hypnosis and it led him to three categories namely: unconscious, pre-conscious and conscious. This was Freud’s final formulation of the personality structure (Schaff & Schaff, 1989:119).

### **The process of personality development according to Freud.**

The dynamic issues on personality development are identification and introjection. Freud sees development through various stages that he outlined as the oral, anal, phallic, genital and latent (Schaff & Schaff, 1989:120). In the process of learning and growth a person is forever finding new and better ways to satisfy his/her needs.

Freud considered the oral, anal and phallic stages as pre-genital. They are from birth to seven years. They form personality traits. Focus in choices shift from self to other objects to love. Each stage links to a specific part of the body and has to do with incorporation in the process of identification and introjection.

The oral stage reflects interest in feeding. All these stages are basically narcissistic. In the oral stage the intents are very much the center of attention. In the anal stage the focus is now shifting to the other person with needs too. If this stage is not handled with care, the infant may develop into a cruel, violent or otherwise destructive person (Schaff & Schaff, 1989:121).

The third stage is called the phallic stage. In this stage the sexual organs are very much in the forefront. This is where the Oedipus complex comes into play, where the relationship with the two parents becomes complex. The child enters the adolescent period where the choice is heterosexual objects. The period from seven to adolescent is called latency (Schaff & Schaff, 1989:121). This stage is less narcissistic than the pre-genital stage. Feelings towards parents are still the prototype of relations to come (Schaff & Schaff, 1989:122). Personality is formed within the expression of the self in

relationships. Successful development is viewed as achieving whole object relationships.

It is important to note that Freud's discussions are based on stereotypical roles for men and women.

### **2.2.2 Melanie Klein's Theory of Personality**

Unlike Freud who based his understanding of childhood on the recollection of the parents, Klein was working with troubled children. She focused on the quality of relations between the developing child and its object (Schaff & Schaff, 1989:123). In her use of play she discovered that the child's world from as young as two years was filled with primitive and savage conflicts, murderous and cannibalistic tendencies and erotic urges and that the Super-ego was already at work. She connected the stages of development with anal pleasure. The fantasy world of the younger years has a huge influence on their development. The infant, however, is not able to differentiate between reality and its own fantasy life. Frustration and discomfort are experienced as personal attacks by a hostile force. The infant can only experience deprivation (Schaff & Schaff, 1989:126).

#### **Klein's Projective and Introjective Identification.**

Klein views the above terms for large scale unconscious communication of internal objects. She is of opinion that through this process a person or object is able to project unwanted parts of self into the other, influencing behavior in the other that the projector unconsciously identifies with an attempt to control the handling of conflict inside him or herself (Schaff & Schaff, 1989:127). Project identification according to the author is a way of thinking and can result in the self becoming identified with the object of its projection. It also occurs when a person fakes in an aspect of another person as a way of adding to or controlling aspects of the person's own personality, and then identifies with these important aspects and acts as if they were part of the self (Schaff & Schaff, 1989:128).

Project identification also has the effect of splitting. The infant protects itself by splitting its Ego and its objects into more manageable aspects that is separating these into good and bad facets and keeping it separate (Schaff & Schaff, 1989:129).

Introjection and projective identification causes a close bond between internal objects and external objects, inner instincts and the environment. Introjection builds up an inner world that partly reflects the external world. In an effort to defend him- or herself, the infant tries by a fantasy process to impose his/her own inner world into the external world and then re-internalizing that world. The infant is actually creating his/her own world. The use of projective and introjective identification is involved in pathology and will be helpful in exploring the unconscious world of the help seeker (Schaff & Schaff, 1989:129-130).

### **2.2.3 Donald Winnicott's Theory of Personality**

Winnicott has been strongly influenced by the work of Klein. His work helps to understand the development of the infant. He focused on maternal-infant relationships and the effects it has on personality development. The interaction leads to a belief by the infant of control over the mother. The infant does not distinguish between self and mother, inner and outer world, or between fantasy and reality. The latter is reached by substituting the mother with e.g. a blanket or a teddy bear.

Klein focused on intrapsychic mechanisms while Winnicott focused on the interaction of the infant with the mother. He is of opinion that the mother's responsive sensitivity to the infant's needs, which he terms 'good enough mothering', is of utmost importance (Schaff & Schaff, 1989:31). During this stage the infant doesn't distinguish between the self and the mother, or fantasy and reality.

According to Winnicott the infant finds a trustworthy object in his/her experience with the mother. If experienced oppositely a split is caused (Schaff & Schaff, 1989:133). Furthermore he says: "Unempathatic mothering can cause the baby to try to mold itself to its mother's needs, when its mother cannot respond flexibly to her baby. This leads to the infant's suppression of its "true self" in favor of the development of a "false self" that is apparently compliant, while the true self dwindles or is now misled secretly inside the self (Schaff & Schaff, 1989:133).

What is essential in the core of the self is an experience of the true self. The false self safeguard the true self from extinction, doing the best it can to care for the self's inner

well-being while maintaining the life-sustaining relationships” (Schaff & Schaff, 1989:134).

#### **2.2.4 Fairbairn’s Theory of Personality**

Fairbairn built his work on Schizoid help-seekers between the late 1930’s to the early 1950’s. He fashioned a model of object relations that was different from Freud’s model of biological motivation and personality. He placed emphasis on purely the psychological that was free of the biological base. He explored the Ego and not its struggle with impulses, and commented that: “The Ego seeks relationships with real, external people. If these relationships are satisfactory, the Ego remains whole. Libido is object-seeking and highly directional, with the object always being a person” (Schaff & Schaff, 1989:134). This led him to his drive theory as a way of seeking satisfaction. He was of opinion that Schizoid states results from the infant feeling unloved. If an infant relates to a difficult mother or harsh life, a split in the personality, good or bad, will occur. The infant will mentally split the mother into two objects, which as he or she internalize, as a way of coping with a troubled situation. A good or bad mother (objects) depends on the way she satisfies or fails to satisfy him or her libidinally. The infant will try to transfer the traumatic factors into his or her inner realities and will loose the need for this object (Schaff & Schaff, 1989:136).

Fairburn says that only the bad object is internalized, because the good one is already available to the infant. The bad object becomes the representative of the infant’s own problem and he or she finally regards him- or herself as a bad person, while the mother becomes the good object. The infant’s needs are satisfied and frustrated at the same time (Schaff & Schaff, 1989:136-137).

Fairburn tried to explain motivation and behavior by saying that: “The Ego is at the mercy of an internal persecutor against which defenses must be erected. As the Ego defends itself it banishes the internal bad object to the unconscious. But the inner repressed bad object acts out by causing the infant to behave badly or to feel bad about him- or herself” (Schaff & Schaff, 1989:138). Fairburn located the Libido in the Ego, which gives the Ego power to create its own energy rather than getting energy from the Id. This then modify the Super-ego as a result of the Ego illuminating the Id (Schaff & Schaff, 1989:138).

In observing the inner structure Fairburn created a theory of development through all various stages. The infant is helpless and depends solely on the adult for his or her development. He proposed a model of how the infant copes with life, which also fosters patterns of growth. The three stages of development he proposes are:

1. Infantile dependence which means an identification of the infant with the object;
2. The intermediate or transitional stage which means that the infant's relationship with the object expands;
3. In the last stage of mature interdependence the capacity to give predominates, and here we are talking about two independent people who are completely different from each other (Schaff & Schaff, 1989:139).

This developmental model explores the movement from an infantile object relationship to a mature object relationship with a whole and different object. As differentiation increases in identification with the object, there is also a decrease in identification with the object by the individual. There is also a change in the Libidinal aim or a way of getting satisfaction, such as going from a talking position to one of giving. Lastly Fairburn emphasizes the importance of the quality of the relationship and secondarily how it is Libidinally manifested (Schaff & Schaff, 1989:142).

In their work with help seekers, these four authors viewed pathology problems, which they referred to as mental or emotional disturbances, in various ways.

For the purpose of the study, the author will not collaborate on these views, neither on Freud's view of the Oedipus complex, the male process, the female phallic stage or the feminists reaction. The narrative research is not about the resolving of problems per sé, but seeks to understand the person of the story. Object relations theory is an interpersonal theory and provides a good background in exploring and understanding the developmental phases in the processes during relationship forming with mother, father and between men and women. Through this background or object relations, one is reminded about the importance or the establishment of secure object relations during early years of infant development. This theory also emphasizes the necessary foundation of the first year of the infant to grow from one phase of development to

another. This thorough understanding of object relations provides a better theoretical understanding and background of relations, when unstoried stories are storied. Building on elements from object relations will help to create a better understanding of people and will be helpful for pastors in their work with help seekers.

### **2.2.5 Explanation of the application of the Object-relations Theory to this research and also to practical theology**

The theories discussed are useful for understanding the brokenness and the healing of relationships of divorcees, who experienced divorce as tragic. The theories discussed also provides a theoretical background to the understanding and applying of healing processes in storying and re-storying of the unstoried.

The women in the stories of this research were bonded in what can be seen as abusive relationships. Practical theology, or what can be applied in this research as liberation theology, helped to transform belief systems, through storying and re-storying, from oppressive relationships with males. Object-relations theory helped in this research to explain and understand the pathologies that arise from earlyhood identification as infant with mother and/ or father of divorcees.

Object relations as understood by the author and applied in this research, is fundamentally a theory of conscious and unconscious interpersonal relationships. When co-researchers will be taken through the processes of a marital relationship and that of divorce, rediscovery of the own identity in Christ will form part of the healing process in storying and re-storying of interpersonal relationships. Practical theology is about helping divorcees to heal as God's people and to experience the touch of the Untouchable. Object-relations theory centers upon the exploration of the relationship in which co-researchers resist change in an unconscious way in the face of their current trauma of divorce.

Object-relations as a theory are not applied in the sense of therapy as with psychologists in the narrative approach, but provide as theory a better understanding of people within tragic divorce relationships. This better understanding of people within their stories is in the opinion of the author, the impact which the theories discussed have on the subject in discussion, but also in working with divorcees. Understanding

and better understanding of people, supported by this theoretical background, is what is valued within the subject in discussion.

Object-relations can also be viewed as an inclusive technical term that spans the intrapsychic and interpersonal dimensions of divorcees. It refers to the system in-built parts from education and gender identification of the personality in relation to each other inside the self. These are expressed and impact relationships of divorcees as described in their stories. In the marital relationship and the after divorce story of divorcees, their personalities are mutually influenced their relationships. Interactive involvement are then better understood and valued, which is the aim of narrative research.

## **2.3 Marriage and divorce**

Very little is written about dealing with the trauma of divorce in a narrative way. In founding in object relations a better understanding of the development of the personality, a gap also occurs in the literature about the elements of a marital relationship that interact with one another, providing a better understanding of the trauma of the dissolution of a marital relationship, including the relationship with children, family, friends, the self and with God. Also the need to get help is underemphasized in literature and amongst divorcee. The pastoral counselor will be confronted with huge expectations by marital couples and divorcee, because very complicated adaptations and feelings need to be addressed. Divorcees need to be debriefed from their traumatic experience before, during and after marriage. In this study the author foresees that pastoral carers will found this work helpful in their relationship with divorcees.

Firstly, before focusing on the process of divorce, the author is of opinion that we need to understand the unique relationship of a marriage.

### **2.3.1 Beginning a marital relationship**

Although we do have various cultures, religions and marriages in various forms or structures, all marital relationships built on the development from object relations personality theory, have at least one element in common namely, the commitment that partners have made to each other through the act of marriage. Marriage is not an

answer, but a process and a search for life. A relationship through a marriage reflects a person's choices and show the product of the values, expectations and efforts partners invest in it.

Preparation for a marital relationship, according to the author, starts with the forming of object relations, continues throughout family life education and proceeds during school life, with some partner or individual seeking premarital counseling.

The wedding ritual as well as other symbols do have a huge impact on the forming of an union between couples. Role making involves communication, decision-making, sex and intimacy patterns, job responsibilities, equality, child raising, budget and handling of money, parenting, etc. Role making continues throughout marriages.

### 2.3.2 The development of the marital relationship

Weeks in Van Staden as translated by the author provides a theoretical frame of reference of the marital relationship within its various phases and focus areas (1992:9-40).

Table 1 is a summarization of the phases and focus areas of a marital relationship. For the purpose of the study these phases and areas won't be discussed in depth. The marriage per sé won't be discussed here either, but the author will focus on the effect of tragic divorce on this relationship and specifically the traumatic experience of three divorcees in the later chapters.

Table 1. Phases and focus areas of a marital relationship

Stage of marital relationship	Development stages	Focus Areas	Critical Areas
First two years of marriage	Forming of an union	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Differentiation</li> <li>• Identity</li> <li>• Intimacy</li> <li>• Trust</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Communication</li> <li>• Handling of conflict</li> <li>• Skills</li> <li>• Family of origin</li> </ul>
2 – 4 years Settling	Differentiation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identity</li> <li>• Inclusion</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Communication</li> <li>• Handling of</li> </ul>

Stage of marital relationship	Development stages	Focus Areas	Critical Areas
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Exclusion</li> <li>• Authority</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• conflict</li> <li>• Skills</li> <li>• Family of origin</li> <li>• Phase in life</li> <li>• Parents in law</li> <li>• Role fulfillment</li> </ul>
3 – 7 years Decision making	Practicing	Involvement and commitment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Needs in phase of family cycle</li> <li>• Value system of both and individually</li> <li>• Abilities to resolve problems</li> <li>• Self-concept</li> <li>• Aspects of religion</li> </ul>
7 – 15 years Latent Phase	Advancing towards	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identity</li> <li>• Production</li> <li>• Dependency</li> <li>• Involvement</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Parentalship and general skills</li> <li>• Tension</li> <li>• Communication</li> <li>• Handling of conflict</li> </ul>

The development of the personality in the theory of object relations, are a very complex process when coming to two people to create a relationship with one another and with God. In this structure needs on various levels are fulfilled. Love, grace, forgiveness, emotional security, understanding, respect and commitment are some of the components that will mark this relationship as one of development of two adults functioning towards each other on a mature level.

When this relationship starts to disintegrate over a period of time and ends in tragic divorce, the traumatic experience impact on the divorcee by emphasizing the vulnerability of the individual.

Once entered into divorce, this table changes dramatically as shown in the outline of the phase after divorcee on page 37. Where experiences with husbands are blocked out and not worked through, these blockages will continue to hurt divorcees. They deny themselves the opportunity to grow by not learning from mistakes of the past.

### **2.3.3 The ending of the marital relationship**

According to Stinett and Walters “Divorce is a way of terminating a marriage situation in which one or both partners cannot relate to each other in a satisfying manner or cannot interact together without psychological injury to one or both” (1977: 34). Pfeffer describes divorce as follows: “A process whereby the marital partners plan and implement arrangement for the dissolution of their marriage” (1981:20-33).

Divorcees experience their divorce as traumatic, tense and complex. Divorce impacts on divorcees through a complex emotional process of mourn, where support systems crumbles and where very little hope is experienced. In the next section emphasis is placed on the process of divorce and how it impacts traumatically on divorcees. These impacts will be described by the telling of divorcees themselves, by focusing on the uniqueness of each divorce and the various losses it contains.

## **2.4 The process of traumatic divorce as pastoral issue**

### **2.4.1 The trauma of divorce**

The co-researchers described their experience which came as a result of questions asked and discussed as follows: (see Appendix A and B)

- A landmine explosion that blows up your life in millions of pieces.
- Sinking into the deepest and darkest ocean imaginable.
- A nightmare.

- A relieve.
- Freedom from patriargi.
- Valuing myself again.
- Finding meaningfulness through divorce.

#### **2.4.2 Each divorce is unique**

Each divorce is unique as each person is. It will impact differently on each person depending on the openness, the age, previous experiences, the stage of development of the relationship, frame of reference, children involved, circumstances, support system, finances, faith and level of spirituality. This entitles that the co-researcher is the only expert of her or his traumatic experience of divorce and the finding of meaningfulness therein. The position of the counselor is that of 'not knowing'. The not knowing position will be discussed as a discourse in Chapter three.

#### **2.4.3 Each divorce is a comprehensive loss**

It is the end of a long-term relationship that leads to various losses (De Klerk, 2004: 35-40).

- Loss of a good past, unless reconstructed and re-interpreted to be viewed as a new past.
- Loss of the present. The lost is situated in the crisis of his or her identity. Divorced people are sometimes viewed by society as a failure, as a bad parent and as available. A new language to express and explain yourself are required.

The challenge to create a new present in which divorcees can blossom provides hope to find a new worth of the self.

- Loss of the future. A unified dream about a prosperous future is lost. Divorce can destroy dreams and can cause feelings of loneliness, worthiness, emptiness and hopefulness.

To dream about a new future brings hope and can fulfill divorcees with strength to rebuild a new life. “Whether we know it or not, to be human is to be a skilled interpreter” (Tracy, 1987:9).

- Loss of self esteem and confidence

When through object relations the personality develops mistrust in an opposite object as the self, divorce can have a devastating effect on the self-esteem and self-confidence of divorcees. Divorcees see themselves easily as victims of divorce where a third party was involved, experiencing rejection. According to De Klerk divorcees question their decision making about the past and tend to lose confidence in future decision making (2004:39). When through counseling new interpretation emerge about understanding oneself better, divorcees can change this around to an even better self-esteem and confidence about future decision making. As I have observed from counseling, many divorcees changes occur such as:

- Finding sense in the trauma of divorce;
- Finding of trust in their abilities to function independently; and
- Rediscovering of own unique identity in Christ.
- Loss of sense

It is a hard loss to lose your dream of an mutual enrichment and supportive relationship, especially when you were brought up as a women with the idea that it is your responsibility to preserve your marriage.

Life becomes sensible when loss of sense is turned around in a new interpretation of being a woman and in the meaning of equality in the marital relationship (Browning & Evison, 1997: 29-73).

- Loss of support

The experience of being on your own can create feelings of helplessness, loneliness and overwhelming with responsibility of being multi tasked. Where there is no support system, feelings of anxiety about decision making, tension to adapt to new circumstances, being single, guilt feelings about the decision to divorce within a community of faith, as well as the frustration with the time to recover, can cause that the impact of the loss of support will emphasize helplessness and hopelessness (De Klerk, 2004: 39-43).

- Loss of status

Divorcees are labeled by society as the 'untouchables'. Often divorcees are seen as objects to be exploited and experience themselves at functions as 'excluded'. In our society the status of a woman is mainly linked to that of her husband. She is Me. Doktor Venter. After divorce she loses that status.

The author is of opinion that the crisis caused by divorce and its impact on women, (as well as men) can lead the way to a new future and a story of hope. The impact of divorce caused by the crisis, urge divorcees on to change their experience of loss and their fear to be drawn into one of a better one, than the one they are experiencing now. The imagination of the resurrection of a new person in Christ and the dream to become what one can be, becomes the way to a new future and a new story of hope.

This is possible when :

- The loss past is remembered, told and re-interpreted as a new past.
- Divorcees and others viewed them in the present sometimes as odd ones out, whilst they actually need to be viewed as unique ones in. A new language is required to explain and express divorcees. The challenge to create a new present provides divorcees the hope to find a new worth of the self.

- The dream about a new future brings hope and will fill divorcees with strenght to rebuild a new life.

Once a new dream has been formulated, it links the past with the future. According to Müller, the Andrew Lloyd-Webber production, Joseph and the amazing Technicolor dreamcoat, is just doing this (1996:135-136). The lyrics 'any dream will do' which is written by Tim Rice, has pastoral wisdom, 'especially if we link the last three lines with the opinion of the author: "Hang on now Joseph you'll make it some day; Sha la la Joseph you're doing fine; you and your dreamcoat ahead of your time". When dreaming of divorce also as a healing experience, which could be connected to the topic of this research, the group found their production and lyric very helpful as we worked through the phases of divorce.

#### **2.4.4 The Bible and divorce**

There are many parts in the Bible referring to divorce. According to Jesus the bond of the marital relationship between a man and a women is an even stronger bond than those of family ties (Mat 19:5). Despite this strong bond, the possibility of a bill of divorcement exist (Mat 19:7). According to Jesus this was not the will of God from the beginning with the marriage, but is written because of the stubbornness of the human heart. There are also quite a lot of scripture that are dealing with divorce and the responsibility thereof (Dt 24:1-4, Mat 19:2-9, Mk 10:2-9, 1 Cor 7:15). It is important to understand, despite certain pronouncements about divorce, that divorce must not be seen as part of creation. According to Thielicke divorce is not in line with God's will for the marriage. "Here it is clear that the legal ordinance of divorce is a mark of 'this aeon'; it is definitely not an order of creation, but rather – like all law – a regulation of necessity for the fallen world in the sense of the Noachic Covenant" (1978:109).

The author will pay shortly attention to some of the Biblical pronouncements regarding divorce in order to provide a background perspective about the issue.

- Dt 24:1-4

This part allows the discourse of divorce, without prescribing it as a norm within a specific lifespan. According to Dt 24 such a procedure did exist within the Jewish Society. Louw is of opinion that: "Die bedoeling van die egskeiding was

om in 'n sondige situasie verdere verwarring te voorkom en die heiligheid van die huwelik te beskerm" (1986:18). It is still the meaning of the Old Testament to protect and honour the marriage as an exclusive lifelong bondage between a man and a women.

- Mt 19:2-9

Jesus did his pronouncement about divorce within the framework of Mt 16:13-20. After His teaching about forgiveness (Mt 18:15-34) He found Himself in a conflict discussion with the Pharisees (Mt 19:2-9) where we found, according to Kegner two schools of Shammai and Hillel on the reasons for divorce. Jesus did not fall in the trap by choosing a side, but pointed out the sin of divorce (1991:38). His focus is not on what a man must do or not do, (v.3) but rather on what God expects from mankind. He answers the question by referring to the creation of mankind in Gen 2:24.

The Pharisees are hanging strongly on what Moses was saying, but every time when Jesus says: "I say unto you ... (v.9) he underlines his authority against that of Moses. Jesus expresses Himself very clearly against the current divorce practices of His day. Divorce was not God's idea from the beginning of the creation of mankind.

According to Louw, scriptures as found in Mt 5:22, Mt 19:9 and Mt 5:43-48 confirm that Jesus wants to normalize marriage (1986: 28). Jesus is turning down any reasons justifying divorce and rather promotes unity, as Gods original plan with marriage.

- Mk 10:1-9

Against the view of the Pharisees as to be found in Mt 19:1-9, stands the point of view about divorce in Mk 10. Mk 10 is part of what we found in Mk 8 :27 – 10:45 where the focus is on discipleship and to follow Jesus. In the pericope we found that discipleship is very much linked to marriage, family relationships, possessions and our relationship towards our neighbors.

In Mk 10 the Pharisees want to know from Jesus whether divorce is permitted. Jesus answers the question by referring back to the Law of Moses (Dt 24:1-4)

which he said was given because of the stubbornness of the human heart. What Moses had said, should rather be seen as a judgment over their lives, as to an indulgent. Jesus appeal is not on the Law of Moses, but rather on the Law of God in creation (Gen 1:27 and Gen 2:24), but because of sin even Christians are still divorcing today.

- **Alternative standpoints about what the church and the Bible teach about divorce.**

Many people witness and felt that God has led them to divorce their husbands (or wives) by linking their experience to Jes. 30:21 as the right direction to their lives. The question is how this corresponds with the view that divorce is always a sin? Is the general exepctable idea that divorce is always a sin, no matter what the circumstances are, the only justifiable pronouncement? In the author's research with divorcees, he came to the conclusion that divorce is not always a sin, but under certain circumstances, it could be the will of God for a person's life. God can also forgive sin.

We are all aware about what various churches in the Christian Faith Community teach about divorce, death or remarriage. Right or wrong, divorce has been marginalized by the church. The church has no longer become a friendly place for the divorcees to come to with their pain. Through all the theology, rules, knowledge and 'wisdom' the church has created a huge distance between itself and its members. For many divorcees coming to me for counseling, the church has become irrelevant, because their real need are not met, and they don't experience assistance and understanding, but condemnation. The church condemns divorcees at a time when they need pastoral care the most. One of the co-researchers who has her own church, is just experiencing this.

- **Impact of the standpoint of the church and certain perceptions about what certain people say the Bible teaches.**

The author has discussed the standpoints of the church and the perceptions of theologians that have been described earlier, with various divorcee over a period of time, as well as with the co-researchers of this research study. Reactions vary from anger to disbelieve. Susan was asking: "Who decides if 'regret' is real

or not?” And Elsie wants to know: “Who decides when remarriage is just for “the lust of the body?” Hetta is of the opinion that these decisions are bearing witness to condemnation and lovelessness. She wants to know if the church has heard about grace, love, time and room to come to story yourself.

The above reaction emphasizes the perception that the church doesn’t offer many care to those in undesirable marital relationships, or to divorcees or to those aiming to get divorce. They must live with the idea that they trespassed the will of God or are going to do it, and they will be under the judgment of God. (Fortunately there are forgiveness for those with ‘real’ sorrow). To go through a divorce is a traumatic experience. Divorcees, according to the author, need to be helped by a counselor or to get rid of guilt and sorrow, because of their existing experience of sorrow and guilt and not to be counseled towards it.

The author is of opinion that the church and counselors must keep in mind the patriarchy society as background in which the Bible was written. It is therefore important to understand that certain perceived authoritative standpoints from church(es) or theologians do not take the following into account:

- The unacceptable position of certain women in their marriage;
- Monitor relationships where certain women are humiliated, thrashed physically, mentally, spiritually and emotionally;
- Divorce can be for many women an outcome from patriarchy dominance, in order to obey their first calling to be a carrier of His image.

It is the observation of the author that counselors should rather say to divorcees: “Divorce is not always a sin. There is also an innocent party involved. God does not only permit divorce under certain circumstances, but also expects from you to divorce your partner. You can be sure of the blessing of God and that He is with you in your decision to divorce for e.g. to escape patriarchy dominance”. If this could be said to those that are caught in undesirable marital relationships, they can be helped and empowered.

Divorce will still be a traumatic experience, but their pain will become more tolerable with the thought in Rom 8:31: “If God is for me, who can be against me”.

- **An alternative Biblical standpoint**

The Bible prohibited divorce. Do we accept this statement unchallenged? (Mat 19:6 and 1 Cor 7:10). Or is it possible that the context of certain texts is being ignored? When the context of certain texts is ignored, it can cause an unbiblical approach. A balanced Biblical standpoint, is taking the following into account:

- The cultural background of Dt 24:1-4;
  - The context in which Mal 2:16 was written;
  - Radicalism – the style of writing of Mt., Mk. and Lk.;
  - The pronouncements of Jesus protect women against exploitation of men;
  - The law/evangelic paradigm in the preaching of Jesus; and
  - The applicability of the prohibbitance to divorce according to the circumstances of each congregation.
- The cultural background of Dt 24:1-4

What is striking from this text is the position that is allocated to men. The man can decide. It is accepted that he initiated the process, that he is the only innocent party and that he shall provide the divorce letter. It is against this background that Jesus made His view clear about divorce in Matthew, Mark and Luke. This cultural background helps to understand the absolute authority that men had over women. During the time of the New Testament this custom still existed and even today the defenselessness of the women are not pointed out, when coming to discussions about the standpoint of theologians, Christians and even the church(es), concerning divorce. Women are people in their own right who Jesus has justified as equal partners.

- The context of Mt 2:16

It was during and after exile of Israel that Jewish men married women from other nations. The prophets Nehemia (13:25-27) and Esther (chapter 10) recommended that Jewish men must divorce these women. What God hated and what the prophet were preaching against was that these women and children were suddenly left defenseless. This should not be, even if they are pagans. According to the author, when this text are used against divorce in a universal sense and we want to apply it for all times, that would meant the misusing of the Bible. This text wants us to understand that women should not be left defenseless.

- Radicalism the style that trademark the writing in Matthew, Mark and Luke.

We found the announcements of Jesus about divorce in Mt. 5:31-32; Mt. 19:1-9, Mk. 10:1-18 and Lk. 16:18. The style that we used to say and write things is well known as radicalism. This was used to dramatize a standpoint. Jesus didn't mean things literally as we tend to believe when coming to the amputations of organs which troubles you (Mk. 9:43-48). Just as little did He meant it literally that divorce is always, under all circumstances sin and that all people that re-marry commit adultery.

- The announcements of Jesus protect women against exploitation

Jesus lived in a world where women were dehumanized. Women were hand over to the grace of men. The word of Jesus can be seen according to the author, as a reaction against the discrimination towards women. He condemned these practices. For Jesus God's will for the marriage was permanency. Its not ethical to disband the marriage arbitrariness as been confirmed by the announcements of Jesus about divorce. He wants to protect defenseless women and didn't want to keep them in dehumiliating marriages.

- The Law/Evangelistic – Paradigm in the preaching of Jesus

Jesus teaching wasn't rigid. His words are not law, but brought life and happiness. On the one hand is the message that His presence will enable us to implement Gods meaning that the marriage is a life long commitment. On the other hand, the four evangelists described His action against sinners, divorcees and adulterers for whom he provided forgiveness. Jesus gave His life for sinners despite the fact that He knew that we are not able to keep His law and to obey Him.

Every person is responsible towards God for his marriage and divorce. That is why the author felt to agree with Anderson and Guernsey who say: "To create a 'law of marriage' that would deny God the authority and power to put a marriage to death and raise the person to new life ... appears to be a desperate and dangerous course of action. What God has joined together, indeed, let no man put asunder. But where God has put asunder, as a judgment against sin and disorder, and therefore as His work, let no man uphold law against God" (1985: 67).

- Applicability of the divorceban according to the circumstance of each congregation

One get the impression, when reading the various texts on divorce within its context they arised, that the circumstances of each congregation were unique.

Mark were writing for instance to Christians in Rome and extended the rules in connection with divorce in order to allow women to take initiative to start a divorce (En as 'n vrou van haar man skei...../ and if a women divorce her husband ....)

In the congregation of Matthew he wrote to Jews staying in Antiogie and "allowed" them to divorce for the reason of adultery, but refused re-marriages (Mt 5:31-32).

In Luke divorce is not allowed. Paul was writing to Christians in Corinth and said that divorce is acceptable when it comes to marriages between Christians and non-Christians that leads to conflict (1Cor 7:12-15).

According to the author the interpretation of the education of Jesus' words on divorce differ from congregation to congregation, because his words weren't seen as a rigid law, but as good news for those experiencing bad news. The women I worked with prayed for their marriages and were hoping that God would intervene, and God did, but in various ways. We don't understand always how and why. (Combrink, H.J.B. 1985: Nuwe Testamentiese uitsprake oor die ontbindbaarheid van die huwelik. Ned Geref Teologiese Tydskrif 26 (2), 131-149).

#### **2.4.5 Summary of the divorce process.** See Lamanna and Rietmann (1994:545)

The topic of this research is the traumatic experience of divorce and its impact on women. The divorce process within its various phases as identified here below with its emotions, behavior and outcomes as experienced by divorcees in each phase has been discussed within the group. As divorcees worked through these phases they became aware of the impact of this traumatic discourse as we discussed the various emotions and behavior experienced. One member remarks: 'it feels as if you are swimming in wet cement'.

These phases, feelings, behavior and outcomes are summarized as follows:

- **Phase before Divorce**

- **Emotions**

- Consideration and hesitance
- Mourning and emotions involved
- Shock and disillusionment
- Anger and depression
- Finalization of psychological divorce and becoming of new life
- Anxiety

- Disbelieve
- Ambivalence
- Low self respect
- Loss
- Frustration
- Pain

### **Behavior**

- Avoid reality
- Annoyed
- Arguments
- Confrontation
- Denial
- Withdraw
- Blaming
- Pretending everything is right
- Effort to win back partner
- Seeking advice from friends and family

### **Outcomes**

- Counseling
  - Restoration of relationship
  - Divorce counseling
  - Pastoral care
- **Phase during Divorce**

### **Statutory Separation**

#### **Emotions**

- Isolation
- Depression
- Anger
- Failure
- Self pity
- Helplessness

#### **Behavior**

- Make agreements
- Avoid reality
- Threats
- Consultation with attorney or mediator

### **Economical separation**

### **Emotions**

- Loneliness
- Discouraged
- Anger
- Relief
- Defend

### **Behavior**

- Effort to organize emotional separation
- Prepare for statutory divorce
- Bettering of economical position
- Preparation for contact and care of children

### **Parental Separation**

## **Emotions**

- Concern about children
- Ambivalence
- Uncertainty
- Emotionless

## **Behavior**

- Complains of dissatisfaction
- Re-adaption with family, work and friends
- Unsure with decisions

## **Separation from community**

### **Emotions**

- Optimism
- Excitement
- Discouragement
- Dissatisfaction

### **Behavior**

- Finalization of divorce
- Reaching out to new friends

- Positive attitude towards new suggestions
- Stabilization of new lifestyle and routine with children
- Discovering of new occupation and new interests

### **Outcome**

- Individual counseling
- Group work (pastoral care)
- Play therapy with children
- **Phase after divorce**

### **Recovery and psychological separation**

#### **Emotions**

- Acceptance
- Self-confidence
- Excitement
- Independent functioning
- Empowerment
- Having a new dream

#### **Behavior**

- Discover new identity
- Complete psychological separation and freedom
- Satisfied with new lifestyle
- Implementing new dream
- Help children through the divorce process
- Better relationship with father of children
- Reconciliation
- Re-marriage (with same or other partner)
- Restoring of respect and trust
- Willingness to work through issues that have created separation
- Forgiveness

## **2.5 Preliminary Summary**

In this chapter the author started off with three stories of three different women. Their stories are described in chapter four. I did not use the real names of these women who came to see me individually. Their input is valued as it adds to so many unheard stories. Each of these experiences supports the topic of this dissertation and will add to the painful experience and trauma of the divorces they represent. Their stories also support those of co-researchers in the author's experience.

The author went on to focus on the theory of divorce as a process, which he summarized at the end of the chapter. These stories will be worked through with divorcees in the group in order to help them in understanding what is happening to

them. A better understanding of oneself also provides courage to work through the phases towards independent functioning.

A short overview of the theory of object relations has been described in order to provide some better understanding on which foundation a relationship is built. This understanding also provides the background against which broken relationships can be understood. This will add value in the understanding of stories that will follow.

Moving on from the focus on the personality of the individual, the author provided the theory of the development of a marital relationship, as well as the process of dissolution of such a relationship, which he summarized at the end of the chapter. He also gave a description of how this links to the topic of this dissertation.

Lastly a Biblical and theological view on divorce is discussed. The author also provided an alternative standpoint.

Against the above theoretical background on the process of divorce, stories of divorcees can be better understood. Narrative therapy strives to find a better understanding of the person of the story (Friedman and Combs, 1996: 1-41).

In the next chapter the author will focus on the theory of trauma in order to extend the theoretical background against which persons and their stories could be understood and valued. The author has come to the conclusion that divorce and trauma are reverse sides of the same coin.

## CHAPTER THREE

### TRAUMA

#### 3.1 Introduction

People build their lives as they interact with their environment. They create their own understanding of how things work for them and their world. When their world is disrupted by a traumatic event, these creations and understandings become meaningless and dysfunctional in many ways. The disruption affects the functioning of the person physically, psychologically, socially, mentally, emotionally, spiritually and relationally. The question about the meaning of life is also disrupted (McCann & Pearlman, 1990:1).

The word “trauma” is used to describe some unique and painful human experiences. Trauma can either block the way to growth or development or according to the author; it can become a tool to discover the real meaning of life. Tillich, in his book *The Courage to be*, is of the opinion that “meaninglessness” is the crisis of our time (Tillich, 2000:1). People try as Christians to explain everything, even things like trauma, divorce, sickness and disability. By doing so God has been taken out. Darwin, Freud and Marx have contributed to creating a world where it was possible and even desirable to live without religion. The result however is not freedom, but anxiety. Being soaked by endless doing and by being busy, anxiety is manifested and irrelevant answers provided by Christian faith to trauma are witnessed. Tillich refers to George Orwell who describes anxiety in the following way:

“The lights must never go out,  
The music must always play,  
Lest we should see where we are –  
Lost in a haunted wood;  
Children afraid of the dark,  
Who have never been happy or good” (Tillich, 2001:1).

According to Means, trauma encompasses all the forms and degrees of hurt experienced by other persons and/or done to others. Trauma is induced by the evil of mankind. It is an expression of evil (Means, 2000:2).

The experience of divorcees about their divorce as meaningless corresponds with the view of Tillich about the crisis of our time. Being in crisis, being meaningless relates to the core of the meaning of the word trauma. Here we see how psychology and theology, for whom the caring of souls are important, interact. Means prefers not to refer to the counselor as therapist or counselor, but caregiver (Means, 2000:2).

One's usual coping skills are never sufficient to handle your trauma. Trauma, according to Roos and others (2002:1-10) causes feelings of hopelessness, that divorcees also experience. The word trauma means "wound" caused by an external person and/or force, and causes injury to the body, soul and mind, and produces discomfort. Trauma affects the whole person.

The aim of the caregiver, according to the author, is to help the traumatized to return to 'normal' functioning as soon as possible. In order to do so trauma survivors should be understood and helped. A theoretical background helps to provide a way of understanding the person of the story, and also provides a framework for exploration, in order to come to an even better understanding and process of help of all aspects of the traumatic experience. The person that is traumatized is seen as a survivor who is active involved and not as a dehumanized victim (McCann & Pearlman, 1990:1-20).

According to Tillich it takes courage and faith to believe in love in the face of hate, good in the face of evil and day when there is darkness. Faith, according to him is not an impossible set of churchly pronouncements, but it is the courage to accept the acceptable of the unacceptable: namely oneself (Tillich, 2000:xxiv). Divorcees will be urged amongst others to make a life and not just a living. By living the author means where the partner will gain when separating from the spouse.

Certain terms and concepts need to be described for the sake of communication and a better understanding when used. The author will explain certain elements linked to divorce that cause trauma to people.

### **3.2 Definitions**

Definitions of the concept trauma will be discussed in this section.

**3.2.1 Definition of McCann and Pearlman.** “An experience is traumatic if it is sudden, unexpected, non-normative, exceeds the individuals perceived ability to meet its demands, disrupts the individual's frame of reference and other control psychological needs and related schemes” (1990:10).

**3.2.2 Definition of Krystal.** “Trauma is a paralyzed, overwhelmed state, with immobilization, withdrawal, possible depersonalization, evidence of disorganization” (1978:90).

**3.2.3 Definition of Figley.** “Trauma is an emotional state of discomfort and stress resulting from memories of an extraordinary, catastrophic experience which shattered the survivor’s sense of invulnerability to harm” (1985:XVIII).

**3.2.4 Definition of Mitchell.** “Trauma means ‘wound’ and is a term used freely for physical injury caused by some direct external force or for psychological injury caused by some extreme emotional assault” (1983:814).

**3.2.5 Definition of Means.** “Trauma can be defined as something sudden, violent, brutal or catastrophic which touches a person’s life in some intimate way. It comes from the Greek word “wound”, which can be on physical, emotional psychological, relational and spiritual level. These levels are interconnected; therefore trauma affects one’s entire life. Trauma is a state of being overwhelmed, physically/psychologically in the sense of more than what one can normally tolerate” (2000:3).

**3.2.6 Own definition.** Trauma is an abnormal event that happened to normal people. Type and intensity of trauma varies and so does the response to it, because each one is unique. Intensity is affected by gender, age, religion, previous experiences, life orientation, support system, values, culture and the courage to make your life a life. You are not a victim, but a survivor that has become a thriver. Finding meaning within suffering means to discover that God is present, not as the One who sends suffering, but as the One who shares in it.

### **3.3 Concepts**

In the following section concepts that have to deal with trauma as it affects relationships, will be analyzed.

### **3.3.1 Evil**

Jim Poling (practical theologian) defines evil as “The abuse of power that destroys bodies and spirits; evil is produced by personal actions and intentions which are denied and dissociated by individuals; evil is organized by economic forces, institutions and ideologies, but mystified by appeals to necessity and truth; evil is sanctioned by religion, but masked by claims to virtue, love and justice” (Poling, 1996:110).

According to Means evil divides. It becomes entrenched and supported by social structures and cultural values. Evil affects many dimensions of a person’s life. The more indirect/subtle form of evil against another is neglect (2000:2-3).

According to the author not all evil is trauma and not all trauma is evil. The goal of evil is to destroy, to fragmentate, to turn people against one another, themselves, as well as against God. Evil wants to disconnect relationships and keeps people jailed in many ways. In short, it affects a relationship between two people who once loved each other.

### **3.3.2 Traumatization**

“A person who has been exposed to a traumatic incident has been traumatized. If the person does not get help in dealing with the emotions regarding the trauma, she or he might develop post-traumatic stress syndrome (PTSD)” (Roos & Du Toit, 2002).

**3.3.3** Brown and Wolfe define PTSD as follows: “PTSD is classified as an anxiety disorder (American Psychiatric Association, 1987) and consists of a constellation of symptoms associated with exposure to extraordinary traumatic events (e.g. Childhood physical and/or sexual abuse, adulthood sexual assault, combat, natural and technical disasters)” (1994:51-59).

Roos and Du Toit (2002:96) state the following regarding post-traumatic stress syndrome (PTSD) DSM-IV (1994) “The development of characteristic symptoms following exposure to an extreme traumatic stressor involving: direct personal experience of an event, actual or threatened death or serious injury, threat to the physical integrity of another person, learning about unexpected or violent death, serious

harm and threat of death or injury experienced by a family member or close associate. The response must involve intense fear, helplessness or horror”.

PTSD has a special feature that sets it apart from many other diagnoses in the official psychiatric nomenclature: the linkage of the psychological reactions of the patient for the nature of an external event. Such events frequently involve other people. The person needs special care or compensation for the effects of the trauma. PTSD, according to the author, develops where an exposed person to trauma, hasn't been debriefed. Emotions and fearful thoughts return in the form of nightmares, eat- and sleeping disorders, anxiety and helplessness.

### **3.3.4 Traumatic events**

Roos and Du Toit (2002:82) quote Meichenbaum, who defines traumatic events “... as events that are unusual events which are so extreme or severe, powerful, harmful or threatening, that they demand extraordinary coping efforts. They represent an extreme, intensive, overwhelming, threat to people or their significant others, they cause people to lose their sense of safety and security, they can cause long-term changes in affect (emotions), stress-related behavior, psychological functioning and mental health and they can reactive unresolved issues from previous traumatization”.

These events are usually distinguished in various types.

### **3.3.5 Trauma Debriefing**

Roos and Du Toit (2002:86) is of the opinion that trauma debriefing is not counseling or therapy. It occurs directly after the traumatic incident. It consists of intervention techniques used to assist survivors. It is a way to review the impressions and reactions of people after having experienced traumatic incidents. Trauma debriefing gives persons the opportunity to ventilate and verbalize their feelings in a safe and controlled environment. It can be done individually or in a group.

The goal will be to provide a feeling of hope, to prevent PTSD, to reassure survivors that their reactions are normal to an abnormal situation and to redefine their perception from 'victim' to 'survivor'.

## 4. Trauma Theory

### 4.1 Types of trauma,

Meichenbaum in Roos and Du Toit, distinguished between type one and type two traumas (2002:92).

- Type I Trauma

Rape, shooting incident, car accident, earthquake.

Type 1 trauma is a single, dangerous and overwhelming event of limited duration, which is sudden and surprising and where quick recovery is more likely.

Symptoms of PTSD that can be experienced or re-experienced are avoidance and hyper-arousal.

- Type II Trauma

Multiple, chronic, repeated traumas eg poverty, divorce, child abuse and neglect.

These traumas are caused by human design, they are expected to reoccur, they make you feel helpless to prevent it. You block out memories. It may lead to an altered view of self and the world, it leads to interpersonal problems, it detaches you from others and has a restricted range of effect.

When these group of people don't receive counseling and/or debriefing the following symptoms of PTSD can be identified: denial, avoidance (not going to remarry), re-experience of traumatic event, numbing of responsiveness, (don't participate) body remains on 'alert', survivor guilt (it should have been me) and/or false guilt, anger, anxiety, difficult to find meaning in life, impact on belief system, more pre-occupied with e.g. death than before and others 'don't understand'.

The above-described reactions are usually very strong and it does interfere with a person's ability to function. The author will now continue to briefly look at the various phases in the experience of a traumatic event, which will differ from person to person.

## **4.2 Phases of experience the traumatic event**

Roos and Du Toit (2002:103) distinguish between three phases, which is very helpful in the understanding of the process and the experience of trauma. A person, according to McCann and Pearlman, absorbs information from their environment: e.g., deprived circumstances, the family's attitude towards the world, etc. (1990:2-3). The person develops certain expectations and beliefs about themselves, other and the world within a specific social and cultural context. This forms the framework for the interpretation of experiences and attributing meaning. The stage of development of a person, together with the phase of experience of the trauma, will determine the impact on him or her. The impact on a person's worldview if experienced in childhood, on his/her identity if experienced in adolescence and the impact on behavior if experienced in adulthood will thus be different.

### **4.2.1 Phase 1 : Before the Incident**

- Some people live as though nothing can happen to them.
- Others constantly live in fear and worry about what might happen to them.

According to the author, too much or too less stress caused by worrying about one's own safety, can be psychologically harmful. Balancing the levels of stress will help the person to make a plan to fulfill his/her need to feel safe and reasonably invulnerable to harm.

Tillich (2000:67), however, warns against the certainties offered by traditional theology and said that they have been discredited by the critical scrutiny of modernity. Easy answers are not acceptable. Life, of which trauma is part of, has become complex and complicated. What is a balance level of worry?

### **4.2.2 Phase 2: During the Incident**

During the incident of trauma, feelings will vary from person to person. The following feelings, however, have been identified by Roos and Du Toit (2002:105):

- Shock and disillusionment;
- Disbelieve;
- Helplessness;
- Confusion;
- Feeling extremely unsafe.

These feelings are acceptable in the normal course of events and they now require modes of action and thought. The above described reaction need to be understood by both survivor and counselor.

#### **4.2.3 Phase 3 : After the Incident**

Emotions, according to McCann and Pearlman, that are typically experienced during this phase are:

- Anger (where was God when this happened?);
- Frustration;
- Guilt (what did I do to deserve it?);
- Disbelief;
- Look for someone to blame;
- Tend to generalize (all men are bad);
- Isolation (nobody understands);
- Nobody cares;

- Not belonging anywhere;
- Plans to improve safety (implements of great cost) (1990:1-21).

Experience will again differ from person to person and so will be the debriefing. This is the time for debriefing. Round about 24-36 hours after the incident the numbness of shock dissipates and reality dawns on the person.

The counselor will give persons the opportunity to ventilate and verbalize their feelings in a safe and controlled environment. He will listen and allow himself to be guided by the person of his/her story.

### **4.3 Responses to Trauma**

McCann and Pearlman provide the following scheme, as a way to help survivors to organize their experience, in order to help them to understand their world (1990:2-26):

#### **4.3.1 Emotional Response Patterns**

- Fear and anxiety;
- Depression;
- Decreased self-esteem;
- Identify problems;
- Anger;
- Guilt and shame.

#### **4.3.2 Cognitive Response Patterns**

- Flashbacks and nightmares.

- Dissociation. An alteration of consciousness in which experiences and effects are not integrated into its memory and awareness (defense mechanism); in severe cases it leads to multiple personality disorder.
- Cognitive decline such as impaired verbal fluency, memory, attention and general decline in intellectual functioning.

#### **4.3.3 Biological Response Patterns**

- Aggressiveness and antisocial behavior;
- Suicidal behavior;
- Substance abuse;
- Impaired social functioning;
- Personality disorders;
- Fight of flight response;
- Severe stress.

#### **4.3.4 Interpersonal Response Patterns**

- Sexual problems;
- Intimate relations problems;
- Revictimisation;
- Victim becomes victimizer.

The author is of the opinion that people also respond in relation to God. Where was God when this happens? Is God punishing me for sin? Does God want to teach me a lesson? Do people grip the message of a suffering God on the cross?

In order to cope, one needs the ability to process new information, to maintain control over own emotions and to move freely in the community. Coping is not an automatic process. It requires an effort to come to terms with your trauma. In order to do so, one needs structured, as well as unstructured support.

#### **4.4 Trauma and Evil**

##### **4.4.1 Trauma**

Trauma, according to Means, impacts all corners of our lives. Nothing is left unaffected. It has much intensity and various degrees of hurt. The counselor is faced with evil and its effect, when people in front of us express their pain and fear. Trauma on the levels of physical, sexual and emotional abuse and torture is caused by persons against other persons. This trauma is an expression of evil and takes one beyond the psychological level to the dimensions of the moral, the ethical and the spiritual (2000:98).

In the Psalms (e.g. Ps 23) we are helped to find voice for the human struggle and pain, that afflicts us all. In the Psalms we found people like us struggling to find sense, meaning and purpose within their hurt by evil. Fighting with an overwhelming desire to strike back in revenge to evil caused by others. These passages also express people's destructive reactions to felt fears, loss and hurt.

##### **4.4.2 Evil**

The Presbyterian Church in the USA in a 'Study Paper of Family Violence' (1991:11), condemns the practice of making domestic violence and sexual abuse "women's issues" and emphasizes that these issues should be rather be issues of concern for the whole church. "When the church fails to confront evil at any level, it ultimately robs those touched by evil, of the faith resources for which they so desperately long" (Means, 2000:10).

Evil is to be found in structures of oppression (e.g. certain marriages). We discover evil in “evil people” who do bad, and hurtful deeds to others. The potential of evil is also in us, “good church going people”.

#### 4.4.3 Defining and Redefining Evil

Ted Peters defines evil as follows: “Radical evil as symbolized by Satan is engaged consciously, for its own sake, and in an unapologetic way” (1994:9).

Poling’s definition of evil is: “Genuine evil is the abuse of power that destroys bodies and spirits; evil is produced by personal actions and intentions which are denied and dissociated by individuals; evil is organized by economic forces, institutions and ideologies, but mystified by appeals to necessity and truth; evil is sanctioned by religion, but masked by claims to virtue, love and justice” (1996:10).

Listening to the stories of divorcees that have been brought to story, the author became aware of experiences of distinctiveness and hurtful human interactions. Evil, according to Means is “...built upon brokenness in the world by threatening, attacking, destroying and desecrating the integrity of the relational nature of life” (2000:98-99). Evil turns people against one another, against themselves, their environment, their loved one’s and against their God. It becomes entrenched in values and it is sometimes supported by social structures, like the marriage. Evil can be done indirectly or subtly, like marital partners neglecting each other and their children. When done intentionally, evil becomes divisive and the trauma becomes worst.

Evil is a major obstacle and work against reconciliation of people in a marital relationship. According to Means evil forces are working ‘within and amongst others’, they are destroying relationships and are leading to behavior such as violence and abuse. These forces, paradoxically, also cried out for healing (2000:99).

It was these processes within the co-researcher’s that drew the author towards narrative research and looking for narrative outcomes. The co-researchers were caught in family dynamics, abusive relationships, brokenness, presenting their problem at first as just a ‘divorce’, but inside they were divided by a war against themselves.

As the author became involved in group work with these women, he was struck with the clear observation of lack of understanding they had about the actual roots of their crisis. The author was reminded of the reality of the power of mental processes outside our conscious awareness. The question arises if they have any idea what their real problem is and what can be helpful to find meaning within. In the discussions it came out that there is a mixture of the known and the unknown in terms of what they most need.

The attention of the author was drawn to their interpersonal relationship and how the storying of untold stories can contribute to their development in their search for general life satisfaction.

The split with the partner, but also the split within, brought the author as well as co-researchers to the major role evil is playing in creating conditions that are conducive to the perpetration of abuse and neglect that leads to divorce. (For a theoretical background see the discussion on object relations in Chapter Two).

If these issues on evil are to be changed and addressed, as referred to in the definitions, it is the opinion of Means, that in order to deal effectively with these splits of the self and in relations, focus should be in two areas:

- Helping victims (survivors) heal from abuse and violence that have torn their lives apart and often lead to acts of self-harm, such as beating oneself, even suicide, and
- Healing perceptions within that lead to abuse and violence directed to others (links the partner and/or children in marriage) (2000:101).

#### **4.4.4 Theological Perspective on Evil**

According to Means evil is an ever-increasing state of disconnection to God, our world, one another, and from the true self (2000:170-171). In what is previously seen, evil leads to trauma in the sense of isolation and loss of reality. Persons with a history of trauma are often easier perpetrated with similar abuse and neglect on others. “The more anxious our lives are, the more we naturally resort to defensive maneuvers in an attempt to safeguard whatever developing sense of self and security we do have.

Exposure to traumatic events makes these defenses even more crucial, and they become more entrenched” (Means, 1995:298).

Means (2000:170-171) quotes Jack Scott in his work on trauma and evil by saying: “...he lifts up the Exodus Liberation Model of Theology as a resource that addresses three important levels: (1) the isolated self that needs to find mutuality and equality, (2) structures of society that must be based on justice and equity, rather than might, and (3) the need to change images of self from that of object to subject”.

The people that the author interviewed in the research, needed support and storying in developing an image of themselves as co-researchers and not as objects. For this reason the researcher valued co-researchers as participants. Narrative research is honest when claiming its character of subjective integrity.

Scott in Means suggests, “...The Exodus Liberation Model offer these guiding and helpful principles: (1) the realization that suffering is a focus of hope and transformations, (2) the solidarity of all humanity, and (3) an emphasis on practical theology, or ‘what are we going to do with that which grab us?’ (1995:299) .

These principles will help to form part of the heart of the author's focus, contributing to his theology of liberation in working with victims (survivors) of evil. In dealing with evil the incarnation, the crucifixion and the resurrection stands out as resources. No longer was God “out there”, but rather through His actions He became “with us and amongst us”. In Christ God was vulnerable and He suffered with us. He was the supreme model of empathy. Through meeting the co-researchers in their stories, the researcher has shown willingness to be affected and/or effected and changed by those who seek help. This theology is about connectedness, about having the status of a divorcee, a person that went through a divorce himself, about uniting and about being drawn into their stories and about to be allowed to be drawn in as a way of help.

In the crucifixion of Christ God knows exactly the degree of suffering humans go through. In this God unites with us in our suffering. Bonhoeffer writes: “God let Himself be punished out of the world on the cross ... and that is precisely the way, the only way, in which He is with us and helps us ... The Bible directs man to God's powerlessness and suffering: only the suffering of God can help” (1997:360-361). The crucifixion, according to Means “...symbolizes the many layers of suffering and was

brought on by evil", (2000:173). He quotes Jony (1998) when saying that crucifixion is a pain suffered by both victim and perpetrator who suffer respectively "anguish of abuse and accountability". The cross offers in a powerful and paradoxical way an opportunity to the victim and the perpetrator, who accept their accountability, to come together in an empathic way that opens the possibility for healing, transformation and reconciliation within and with one another (Means, 2000:11).

The resurrection is our insurance of hope that God is God and we are not. It reminds us of life's power over death, love's triumph over hate and God's triumph over evil. By the grace of God, fallen people, like divorcees, can stand up too and find a new self. We stand up in our stories over the pain of our trauma, as new people with stories of hope to others.

#### **4.4.5 Recognizing Evil**

The presence of evil, according to Means, could be identified in the following symptoms (2000:3):

- Basic human needs are made ugly. The hierarchies of Maslow serves here as a good reminder of the spectrum of needs all people have. When these needs are turned down, the presence of evil manifests.
- Persons are turned against themselves. Divorcees often hear these voices from inside: 'you are useless ... make an end to it..'
- Persons are disempowered, especially divorcees felt intimidated by men and have experienced in many ways being denied participation in decision-making on eg economic matters.
- Invalidating of resources. Demeaning of a mother's and/or a father's role in marriage as a supporting or helpful resource in the relationship.
- Removal of resources. 'My husband has taken my car or our house'.

- Persons are disrespected and disregarded. The crumbling of a marital relationship ending in a divorce is a painful process over a period of time. During this phase people act towards one another in words, behavior and attitude in dehumanizing ways that disconnect and destroy one another and themselves.

- Hurt.

### **Obstacles in recognizing evil**

- Means refer to these obstacles as follows (2000:3) :
- Consensus trance

This is one of the most common obstacles standing in people's way to recognize evil from within. The trance is being used to the way things are, from patriarchal structures.

- All women are evil from the beginning;
  - Men is authorized by God to have authority over women;
  - It is part of our culture that men hit women;
  - Divorce is always a sin; and
  - All traumas are evil.
- Dissociation
    - What is dissociated is split or blocked out from the rest of the experience and is not available to learn from. Because of this we see people making the same mistakes over and over again. Remarrying to another abusive man or an alcoholic again is what we witnessed, also in the stories of divorcees.

- Evil evolves over a period of time and its work is subtle. This makes it very difficult to recognize. It builds up and people take one another for granted.
- Denial of credibility

Women and children, and sometimes also men, are not believed when telling their hurt or story. Victims/survivors of trauma (divorce, abuse, rape, etc) and/or trauma related events are not believed and it becomes a stumbling block in the search for help. Nobody will believe my story, so why go for help. PTSD disorder can emerge as a result of this denial.

People, and this includes counselors, need to understand, what the co-researchers discovered. The traumatic experiences are part of life. “We cannot expect to live life fully without being traumatized and we depend on one another as wounded healers for the healing of our trauma wounds (Means, 2000:67).

#### **4.4.6 Keeping us in touch with suffering**

We have been taught by divorcees and other people in need whom we serve, that our world, our models, our churches and our cultures are in need of reformation. In the research process, co-researchers have brought us face to face with the trauma of suffering and pain through their divorce in the context they live. They keep us intimately connected to the truth that suffering is not an abstract thing, and that it can not be sanitized and cleansed of its pain. The tragic suffering, which has been presented to the author in the stories and lifes of divorcees, demonstrated the face of suffering and the vulnerability we all share as human beings. “Making our own wounds a source of healing is not a matter of us finding ways to share our own personal pains, but rather involves a ‘constant willingness to see one’s own pain and suffering as rising from the depth of the human condition which all men share” (Means, 2000:221). Narrative research is in a certain sense a dangerous type of research as it drew the researcher into the lives of co-researchers and theirs into his. We met and traveled together through our stories. The importance of such an attitude as caregiver cannot be overstated. Without such connectedness, we are easily overpowered by the prestige our respectable positions as healers give us, respected by the communities in which we live. This will make us wolves amongst lambs.

#### 4.4.7 Dilemmas facing the church

If the church wants to address the forces of evil in the world effectively, it must address the issues as described intentionally, and by touching the untouchables with a theology of involvement. According to Means, this will include the following three areas:

- (1) “The vitality and life of the church;
- (2) The extent to which the church will be a place that offers care and support to those who have been hurt by violence and abuse (divorce), and
- (3) The extent to which the church will offer an environment of healing for those elements within people that set them up to interact with others in hurtful ways” (2000:179).

Transformation from ‘wolves’ to ‘lambs’ will be necessary in pastoral care work if we want to contribute and break the circle of trauma and evil that destroys people’s lives.

When there is no shared life (story) experience in the church, people feel as though they have been left “unread”. Means, refers to Anderson and Foley (1998:167) when they state, “telling our story honestly is a necessary component of reconciliation and wholeness in human communities” (2000:180). Storying the unstoried about the impact of divorce on divorcees, according to the author, will bring healing to the wounded and will make the church the place it should be for the devastated.

In order to address the second dilemma, stories of pain and hope according to Anderson and Foley (1998:40 in Means, 2000:181) need not to be kept to ourselves, but needs to create interaction between a community and its members. This requires honesty as well as protection of people and their stories from stone throwing.

The third dilemma the church is facing is helping people to deal with the block out parts of their experiences of trauma, with the rest of themselves (Means, 2000:182-183). When people condemn themselves and allow fear to overwhelm them, they tend to put themselves out of touch (untouchable) with the grace available to them. This type of spirit can be healed when the caregiver and traumatized allow themselves to become one in journey through this valley of darkness.

#### 4.4.8 Sexism and Gender

In general human society is still sexist, racist, ageist, classiest and heterosexist. The passion of caregivers is confronted on a daily basis with these harmful dynamics to our relationships, marriages, cultures and institutions. Sexism refers to male and female differences, while gender refers to social and cultural constructed differences. “Contemporary critical enquiries into gender identity, relations and representations have moved from empirical studies of difference towards a broader analysis of social order and human behavior of which gender is an integral element” (Graham, 1996:31).

In history of humankind the stories of women are being ignored to a large extent, or left out when stories were recorded (e.g. in the Bible). Women did not have the same access as men when coming to resources such as the economy and even within the church.

Double messages are making it very difficult for women to live a life equal to their calling to be. Through the ages women were, according to Neuger kept in these double-bind situations by messages from society, church and culture, such as:

- You are valuable because of your nurturing and relational capacities. We value independency and autonomy.
- You are created in God’s image. God is male (e.g. Our Father in heaven...)
- You are weak, dependent or need male protection. You have the power to destroy the lives of men and children.
- You represent moral and spiritual purity. Your body is needed for sexual features in advertisement and pornography.
- You are unselfish as a woman and a mother. Your husband and children comes first. You are responsible for sin (sexual) in the world.

- You must be submissive, patient and supportive in your family life. Why did you leave your battering husband? You must like the evil.
- You must be modest, pure and sexually contained. You must use your body to sell products, gain power and to make men feel good.
- You are welcome as a full member of the church. You support the work of the church from behind the scenes, not in a decision-making capacity.
- You need the protection of a husband. Nearly half of female murder victims are killed by their husbands or lovers.
- Women are respected, cared for and protected. Women are raped, one every 1.3 minutes in the USA. (In South Africa every 60 seconds).
- The church supports justice. The church expects women to be silent and submissive and does not believe women who reports abuse by her “respectable” husband or even pastor (Neuger, 2001:45-46).

According to Ballou and Gabolac (1987:41) women are born into a sexist culture that helps them to “adapt” to the harmful and disempowering narrative about women. They identified five steps in the process of harmful adaptation. The phases which link to the phases of divorce as described in Chapter Two are as follows:

- Humiliation

The experience of being demanded and devalued in one’s own and other’s eyes. This is done to women by the media, incest, rape, jokes about Blonde’s and mother-in-law jokes, and how they are treated by husbands, sons, bosses, brothers, etc. This affects girls and women very deeply in terms of themselves and their potential.

- Inculcation

Girls and women are taught what it means to be female hence they endure suffering in their marriage. They learn the ‘rules’ about being female, what should and what should

not be done. Women are so much broken down that they do not object when these rules are unappealing or unfair.

- Retribution

This is the punishment for breaking the rules of being female. This is done by labeling, (bitch), being diagnosed (depressed, borderline personality, co-dependent), being battered, etc.

- Conversion

Women learn to believe that what they have been taught is true and natural. They become converted to upholding beliefs and customs.

- Conscriptation

Women attempt to persuade or convert other women to abide by the rules. This is the betrayal of women by women.

When and where pastoral counseling reinforces the status quo, it will be very harmful to women. The author was fully aware of himself as male, and that is why he deliberately chooses to overcome this discourse by using language such as co-researcher and not referring to participants as objects. Participation of women in the outcome of this research have been valued, and it helped the author to make a shift in practice, to make this study one of empowering women and putting himself in a 'not knowing' position.

Women have a double workload. In addition to their wage-earning work they also do most of the domestic work and childcare. According to Neuger "By the time a woman is sixty-five years old, she is almost twice as likely as her male counterpart to be living in poverty" (2001:18). Women are indeed the poorest of the poor. When divorce strikes they finally are left extremely poor, sometimes with children.

Women will learn from an early age that it is unsafe to be a woman or a girl. The message of danger is thus enforced to women. Pastoral counselors should remember that most violence or trauma events, such as divorce, happen to women in relationships

that are supposed to be trustworthy. Women tend to feel guilty as a result of such trauma, because they view their story and themselves not 'worthwhile' to tell and to listen to, thinking that they will be held responsible for it.

When women go to a psychologist, injustice might occur. Some of the flaws a woman will have to look out for, are what Tavris described as: "We are used to seeing women as the problem, to thinking of women as being different from men, and to regards women's differences from men as deficiencies and weakness" (1994:40). There has also been no adequate definition of mental health for women. The problem according to Neuger is when a sociostructural analysis is not done and the psychologist believes that the problem is located in the counselee herself or in her relationships (2001:37). Many psychological theories are pathology-orientated. They look for problems and women have been taught to see their inabilities more clearly than their strengths, especially when they relate to men in a family and community.

The author will now focus on the narrative theory, the theory on which the counseling process of this research is based upon.

#### **4.4.9 Narrative Theory**

According to Neuger "Narrative theory provides the framework for pastoral counseling with women (and also men, children, marital couples, families and divorcee according to literature). The assumption is that personal history consists of stories by means of which they make meaning out of the past, make sense in the present, and find directions for the future. When experience contradicts the stories by which a person lives, the experience is ignored, or reshaped to fit the story, or used to transform the meaning by which the person lives. The more deeply ingrained the interpretive lens of a narrative is, the more difficult it is to challenge" (2001:43).

- Narrative counseling is based on postmodern and structuralist philosophies. The assumption is that reality is socially constructed. Its aim is to help people generate new languages and new interpretations in order to create new stories. Trauma is a concept that is socially constructed which for the sake of this study, fits the definition of divorce, experienced by divorcees as traumatic. The word trauma is used to describe certain painful human experiences. The language on

trauma in literature includes terms such as posttraumatic stress-disorders, trauma, therapy, trauma counseling and trauma debriefing.

- The author has chosen to do narrative research from a narrative approach with co-researchers. Throughout counselee determined the agenda. The author used the model used by Anne Lamott for fiction writing as a metaphor. The formula is:

- A - Storying
- B - Background
- D - Development
- C - Climax
- E - End (new story/begin)

Practical theology cannot function in a general context, it can only function in a specific context. The context is of the utmost importance in postfoundationalist theology, developed out of very concrete and specific moments. The narrative approach forces us to listen to the stories of people struggling with real life situations. In this type of research participants are referred to as 'co-researchers'. The research will serve the objectives of the researcher, as well as valuing participants through their position and by using specific language. Participants are involved in decision making together with the researcher. With a narrative approach we are more likely to invite respondents to tell their stories in their own way and to speak in their own voices. We will allow them to control the topics raised. We will try to facilitate a situation where they can tell their stories un-interrupted (Müller, van Deventer & Human, 2001:81).

The narrative researcher is not working with hypotheses of what should be or might be. He tries to understand how people construct and reconstruct their life stories in the socio-cultural milieu in which they live. The narrative researcher values the people of the stories (Human, 2003:41).

- The brief narrative model for counseling (ABDCE), helps counselee not to focus on 'pathology', but rather to shift it towards their strengths. The counselor does not know the counselee or his/her problem or the person him/her-self.

The counselor is seen as the facilitator who will guide the search process for the treasure. The counselor adds comments and asks questions in order to reframe problems, by inter alia engage previous ignored resources, which help to reinterpret the story (Neuger, 2001: 90-97).

The shortened narrative model for counseling consists of the following phases:

- 1) Identify the story content that causes distress. People are not their problems, and they need to be externalized.
  - 2) The researcher and co-researcher work together to discover whether the problem has less or more power. They discover their own strengths and resources. They look for expectations in the plot.
  - 3) The story of strength and resources are now positively strengthened.
- The context of the research is about three divorcees staying in Wierda Park, a suburb of the city of Tswane. Wierda Park consists mainly of hundreds of young couples between their thirties and forties. People are flocking to this suburb, mainly because of the still affordable homes/town houses and flats. They come here with a dream for themselves as a family to have a better life than in the city or to what they were use to. Sadly reality strikes and they have to reckon with the high cost of living that adds pressure and stress on their relationships. Together with work stress, young people fall prey to extra marital affairs in their search for emotional support. Moral standards drop and family structures start to fall apart. It is mainly the women and children who suffer the most. This does not exclude men who also suffer tremendously. Relationship problems are reported (CSC, 2008).
  - The stories of the women I chose as my co-researchers, were women that volunteered to participate. Because of my position I had to be very alert

not to overpower the co-researchers with knowledge, position and gender as emphasized by White and Morgan (2006:59).

- I have done intakes at the Christian Social Council (CSC) over the past thirty years in various regions and I have met thousands of women reporting to our offices for help. They don't need food and clothes; they need the courage to be and to be healed. They need to find meaningfulness. They need to find God within their suffering. Tillich confirms this experience, by describing it as follows: "The courage to be is rooted in the God who appears when God has disappeared in the anxiety and doubt" (2000:32). To work with these women in a narrative way was difficult, but also a rewarding experience. Because of heavy workload and full programmes of divorcees, it was a problem to see these women during working hours. I had to see them in a group as well as individually after hours. Many times appointments had to be postponed because of practical needs of the divorcees and/or counselor. These women amazed me. Although experiencing relationship and divorce trauma, they were living with hope, which motivated them to take part in the fight against the suffering, pain and trauma of divorce. I came to the conclusion that listening to their life stories, meant a lot to them as it became a life changing experience for them and me.
  
- Discourses that provided meaning to the context, were mainly:
  - The discourse in which the counselor is the expert, and
  
  - Secondly, the discourse in which the client is the expert.

Firstly, the discourse is which the counselor is the expert: "I am the expert and you are the victim that needs help" (Müller, undated article: 79). This sentence is summarizing the discourse. This model is referred to as the medical model (Freudman and Combs). The hierarchy relationship is obvious: I am empowered and informed and the counsellee is the uninformed victim. The author agrees with Bird (2001:9) describing the negative effect of this discourse as follows: "The ambiguous and the contradictory moments, which fill people's life, are nullified by the power of these grand theories. The 'we know-you don't know' position which uses the therapeutic power relationship to confirm and

impose meaning, disregards and hides the effects of privileges through gender, culture, class on people's psychological and physical well-being. In other words this position does harm by confirming universal psychological truths, which relegate those people of the margins to both professional constructions of inadequacy – sickness, badness and madness together with subsequent self-constructions of inadequacy, sickness, badness and madness” (1996:43).

Secondly the discourse in which the client is the expert and the counselor the ‘not knowing’. Discourses need to be deconstructed. According to Müller, (undated article: 81) ‘deconstruction is a continuous process accompanied by a sustained sensitivity to power relations’. Bird deconstructs this position, with which the author agrees, as follows: “These attempts to “even up the relationship” (2001:9-10) have acted to disguise the inevitable power relation that exists in the therapeutic relationship, supervisory relationship, while at the same time moving the therapist, supervisor, consultant, teacher into a subject position. From this position it is very difficult for the other (client, supervisee, student) to speak to a sense of discomfort or difference or an experience of the power relation. To speak in this environment is to challenge the good intentions of the other. When people experience receiving good intentions by a member of the professional classes (this includes the dominant cultural group and other classes of domination) this can create either/ or a sense of gratefulness (i.e. “This person is really trying, they’ve got it wrong but if I tell them they’ll be really hurt”).

Falling in the trap of this discourse can be as dangerous as in the case of the first discussed discourse.

### Counseling Theory

Counseling is about change and healing. But change is a process where the counselor tells his/her story. The counselor listens in order to externalize the internalized problem. When the counselor identified exceptions to the presented problem he/she can deconstruct the problem. The counselor listens and find stories that he/she can strengthen. People construct and interpret their own narratives.

Researcher and co-researchers are partners. Together they will figure out how to resist the power of problematic ways of understanding life and to restory the story into a meaningful story.

Neuger, identify certain conditions which is necessary to generate adequate security, hope, energy and vision to move through the process of change in ways that will nurture, leak and empower the counselee in his/her own life and relations and in the culture in which she lives. “These conditions are:

- 1) Safety and trustworthiness
- 2) Motivation (give hope to counselee that something better will be achieved)
- 3) Supportive environment (a safe place to express feelings)
- 4) Respect for the complexity of the whole story. The story should be the version of the counselee (2001:52).

According to Neuger “Narrative therapy does not consist of a set of techniques used to change counselors. It is a set of beliefs about the strengths and resiliency of people who have the possibility of re-authoring their lives in ways that make them more able to live full responses to their locations” (2001:56).

When there is openness, honesty and respect, there will be true mutuality in pastoral counseling. Neuger understands pastoral work as participation in the liberation and empowerment of the Exodus. It reflects a movement away from a community of bondage to a new community based on freedom and solidarity under the leadership of God (Neuger, 2001:57-64).

According to Bons-Storm (1996:47) “...Pastoral caregivers are embedded in the dominant patriarchal culture. They cannot escape it. They often have difficulty believing the stories and experiences of women if these go against the 'truths' of that culture”. The counselor and counselee should work together to find adequate language for his/her to tell his/her story. When empowered to speak, change becomes possible.

A narrative approach was used to help divorced women to come to voice and to find new meaning and possibilities for their lives. “The narrative counselor looks for alternative stories that are enabling..” (Drewary and Winslade, 1997:43). Listening to women to tell their story, calls for empathy, validation and deconstructive hearing,

where the problem can be externalize, named and new stories and/or possibilities can emerge. Constructing and reconstructing of stories needs to be handled with care.

Support of the new story should be organized. Credibility can be given by inviting friends, family and even other in the same situation, to applause the newly told story by counselees.

Neuger summarizes the process of narrative theory by using the 5 R's:

- 1) Remembering those experiences that run contrary to the problem story.
- 2) Reframing takes the story as accurate and truthful and then offers new angles from which to make meaning of the content.
- 3) Reversing interpretations that are harmful to the person.
- 4) Re-imagining means using the imagination as a creative, integrative power within the person to find out what symbols open her up to more meaningful connection with God, with self, with others and with creation.
- 5) Restorying is the process of taking the unstoried stories in experience and builds them into the core narrative, providing a new lens for the interpretation of one's life, for the making of meaning (2001:141-147) .

#### **4.4.10 Hope**

Hope is not possible without suffering. It is the hope to become free. This hope is serious and focused and it brings hope to the hopeless. It motivates those who suffer from the trauma of divorce, to take part in the fight against the suffering of trauma in their marriages and/or broken relationship. Communication, by storying untold stories, breaks the isolation caused by suffering.

#### **4.5 Preliminary Summary**

In this chapter the author provided a detailed background about the theory of trauma. Various definitions of authors, as well as an own definition, were given. Trauma which

means “wound” is described in terms of the concepts linked to the content of the word. The author focused on trauma and evil, PTSD, traumatic events, trauma debriefing, trauma theory, types of trauma, phases involved and response to trauma affecting all aspects of the person.

The chapter was brought to a close by describing sexism and gender, a couple of dilemmas facing the church and an explanation of the narrative theory and hope, in order to provide a better background against which this type of research can be reflected.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### STORYING OF UNTOLD STORIES OF HOPE

#### 4.1 Introduction

The stories in this dissertation are the stories of women who went through tragic divorce. They have been violated, abused, dehumanized, disappointed, paternalized and traumatized by their husbands, the very people they thought they could trust and love. Sadly these stories can be multiplied around the world. Each of them is unique. What really is incredible, is how consistent the emotions and behavior of divorcees are. The consistency of women's responses indicated how each one struggle to preserve themselves, and at times the lack of support from her husband.

The meaningfulness of these women within their stories are, that they are members of the church. They are part of the broken body of Christ, seeking to come to story in order to find meaningfulness through the courage to be and to be part of the church. Tragically, all too often we have failed them. All too often they have been blamed, rejected, condemned, stigmatized, persecuted and retraumatized. Sometimes women like these left the church in order to survive. Those who left, represent a huge loss in terms of skills, energy and faith. Those of us, who have stayed, are now walking from the inside to change practices that are harmful to congregants.

In this dissertation you will read about divorcees who see themselves as victims, some referred to themselves as survivors. This means that they had begun their journey towards a new story. They have survived against great odds. Some have referred to themselves as thrivers. This means that they have survived and are now moving on with their lives (new story). There are certainly many voices missing here of women who would want to tell their stories. Nonetheless, the voices present here speak on behalf of themselves and those silent voices.

The two stories you will read, except my own, involve female divorcees, whose stories are linked to traumatic experience of divorce. These women are vulnerable and they deserve entrusted help. Listen to how these divorcees struggled with self-blame, guilt, meaninglessness, wrong choices and a sense of responsibility for what happened. This was very difficult for them, especially when they believed they don't have the

power to choose for themselves. Choices had been made that some of them later regretted. Listen to the price that has been paid.

These stories also tell us about courage, profound faithfulness, finding meaning within meaninglessness, resilience against evil and the resurrection of traumatized women with stories of hope. Stories of hope within suffering. There can be no hope without suffering (Tillich, 2000:25). They are in my opinion witnesses to the Gospel. If you have been divorced, I hope that our stories will share light and education of how to survive. In them you will find that you are not alone and that you are not crazy. This can happen to anyone. Just listen to these stories. None of us is unconditionally trustworthy, because we all make mistakes. But some of us can be trusted and will really listen to your unstoried story. Just tell it. If you are a friend of a divorcee, let her heal at her own pace. Try to understand the trauma she is going through. One way is to avail yourself and listen to their stories.

If you have a clear understanding of what is going on, grounded in a theoretical background, you will also be much more effective in the action you take to support. The stories we have heard here are a gift to us. These women powerfully speak the truth in the hope that they will be heard, and that things in pastoral care will be changed when divorcees voices their stories.

The authors of these stories had plenty of reason not to write their stories for the script. All of them had hectic schedules and didn't need yet another deadline. So I value confidence in their ability to write their story. It was anxious memories calling back most painful periods of their lives. Nevertheless, each woman was eager to take on the project. Over and over again I was told, "I want other divorcees to know that they are not alone and that healing comes". The author hopes that these narratives will lead you to a better understanding of the suffering and trauma about divorce.

All identifying particulars of divorcees have been changed in stories. A dissertation such as this raised many questions:

- How many unheard stories are out there?
- Where do we find the voices of those who left us?

- What about storying the impact of the trauma of divorce on children?
- What are examples of counselors doing the right thing?

Working with these women has been an inspiring experience. In the group, individually, over the phone, through email and sms, we added, we deleted, clarified and we cried. We revisited the past and we thanked God for each one and for the courage of each one, not only to confront her own traumatic experience of divorce, but also to become a wounded healer for the wounded ones.

## **4.2 Collection of Data**

The content of each story are forming the result of data collected. As a narrative researcher I don't follow a linear process, trying to observe and bring about change from the outside. "The narrative researcher has subjective integrity in mind and strive for participatory observation" (Müller, van Deventer & Human, 2001:76-96). This is a circular process, implying flexibility, interactiveness and continuity. In order to achieve this, co-researchers participate in the formulating of questions and discussing of answers raised, as set out in the questionnaire (Appendix A). The goal of the questions was not to reach universal answers and conclusions, but rather to value the understanding of the reality of co-researchers from a constructionist perspective (Freedman & Combs, 1996:1-41).

The following procedures have been used to collect data:

- Questionnaire (See Appendix A, page 126);
- Additional questions (See Appendix B, page 141);
- Group discussions;
- Individual sessions;
- Story writing;
- Story sharing;

- Observation.

To tell one's story, means in a certain sense to regain one's own power (HAT, 1984:1245). Succeeding to do so also provides the opportunity to escape the chaotic and to find a little bit of stability (Müller, 1996). According to Bons-Storm's model, the purpose of pastoral care is to come to an understanding. Stories are, according to the author, people's ways of expressing themselves and their experiences about their lives. To come to story means to tell your story. "The story brings healing when it ends up in involvement in one another's stories" (Müller, 1996). A story is a way of understanding and is not the sum total of all data collected. Data helps, when telling one's story, to provide a deeper understanding of the stories. Each story is unique and will be told in an unique way. A story is not complete or incomplete when certain data are left out or when data are all inclusive. The story belongs to the co-researcher. Collected data are a source of knowledge, which co-researchers can decide to use or not if they would like to do so in storying. According to Müller (1996:21) each story consists of invisible pieces of string of God's story with the person of the story. Where these stories met, people really 'comes to story', and it becomes quite possible to meet God in the process of storying, which is of course the main aim of pastoral care (Müller, 1996:21).

#### **4.2.1 Questionnaire (See Appendix A, page 126)**

#### **4.2.2 Additional Questions (See Appendix B, page 141)**

I asked the co-researchers to also consider the following questions and/or statements in order to help them working through their traumatic experience of divorce and its impact on them.

- We don't forgive those who left us!

The group agrees that it is difficult. But they realize it's a timely process and a struggle that they had to work through in their own time and for their own sake. They agree with the claim of Jesus ... to forgive.

- We don't care what happens to the one who left us!

The group agrees, because they felt the 'hurt' very deep inside. Sometimes the feelings of revenge are overwhelming. When the feeling of care was discussed the group felt that there are many factors influencing the content of the word, e.g. their children. The author observed their feelings as ambivalent, despite their claims that they sometimes feel they do care about him.

- We are desperate to remarry again because we are afraid to be alone!

The group agrees and some shared their experience of getting involved in another relationship too soon. Two of the three co-researchers are not remarried yet, while one is not involved in another relationship at the time.

It is the observation of the author that, especially younger women, tend to either remarry quickly, because of blockages (see discussion on object relations in Chapter Two), or engage in a short time in a next relationship.

The author is also of the opinion that where the blockages have been worked through, women provide themselves a better opportunity not to repeat the same mistakes by e.g. remarry the same type of person than the previous one.

- We find it hard to cope as divorcees!

Group members agreed wholeheartedly. It feels as if the church and the community do condemn easily, which makes it extremely difficult not to condemn yourself. They struggle financially to survive, but also emotionally as they do have the need to be loved and accepted.

My observation of the women in the group is that they do struggle, but has succeeded to find their own identity in Christ.

- We tend to project our failure on our children in handling them in unacceptable ways!

The group discussed the concept of ‘unacceptable ways’. The divorcees shared their losing of control over themselves from time to time when feelings of irritation, impatience and anger were experienced because of their struggle, and will shout at their children or even swear at them. This could even lead to child neglect. The discussion leads to new insights in managing one’s own emotions by choice, in order to maintain control over the children and self control.

- We don’t understand what we are going through!

The group responds with a yes. The situations are very complexed, but discussions of issues shared in the group serve as support of similar responses to same situations.

- We tend to nurture our sexual desires in unacceptable ways!

When the statement was brought to discussion, the group was of the opinion that because of their experience of rejection, and ‘not feeling good about themselves’ that they didn’t experience any sexual desires. When the various phases and the normality of sexual desires were discussed, the group agreed that the answer to this question would differ from person to person depending on the stage of their divorce.

- Is divorce really a ‘traumatic’ experience or do we need to find another word describing the situation better?

The group unanimously agreed that this word ‘trauma’ really describes their feelings and the impact of the situation on them.

- Can divorce be meaningful?

The group responded with a 'no' at first. After discussing the article of Tillich (2000) on suffering and trauma, as well as other examples, the connection was made with the cross of Jesus Christ. The group then found meaning in their own experience of their meaninglessness about their lives, after tragic divorce.

The author observed this 'arrival' as a major breakthrough in the process of providing hope through suffering to divorcees and others.

- People don't meet one another in relationships!

When the concepts of meeting one another through the sharing of stories were explained and examples were given, the group agreed. We interact in relationships through stories (e.g. we are all divorced).

- Divorcees are not ready to engage in their next relationships!

When the group discussed the content of a relationship and the processes involved in the forming and dissolution of a relationship, they agreed that it takes time to trust again and to regain self-confidence. The issue of blocking out unpleasant experiences and how it can stand in the way of growth concerning one's own choices were also explained. As the group was lead through the various processes, a new insight about their own relationship emerged that they expressed as helpful or in the prevention of engaging too soon.

- Divorce can be overcome!

The group agreed. One of the women in the group was still in the phase before divorce. She felt so hopeful that her husband would come back and that she could not get out of the feeling of shock and denial. Any further development was blocked, although she remained part of the group until the end. She was also not able to write a story of hope or see her decision as a contributing one.

The group shared their experiences about the healing effect of time and how they felt they have changed from where they were up to where they are now. From my point of observation this sharing serves as a support for the women who got stuck in her emotions. People can never be forced into story traumatic events, if these events are still experienced too traumatic, as a way of self-protection. One of the three women was not able to write her story because of the traumatic experience there-of. It is the opinion of the author that this proves that divorce is indeed a traumatic experience which impact heavily on women in the sense of silencing them.

For those who shared their stories at the end, we are thankful that they have seen the tragic around them and know that they can help by voicing their stories.

- We don't have answers for everything!

The group felt that we don't need to have answers for everything. No pain or trauma can be explained in such a way that it can replace the feelings about it. Divorcees keep wondering why divorce happened to them. Where did they go wrong? They have tried their best, but also realize their mistakes. The author's observation is that each one is struggling to find an answer to live by.

- We don't value our stories to be told, because we don't value ourselves!

One of the three women, who have not yet completed her process of divorce, could not write her story. It is the author's observation that she doesn't value herself or her story to be told, but it is also linked to the heavy impact divorce has as a traumatic event on divorcees. Her wish was respected as she has added value to the topic of this research.

#### **4.2.3 Group discussions**

The group consists of three women who went through tragic divorce, experiencing its impact of shock, disbelief, labeling, marginalizing, anger, ambivalence, depression,

rejection and anger, but also experiencing its impact in their struggle in finding meaning and their own identity in Christ.

Of the three women in the group, two provided their stories. For the one member, although sharing her story in the group, the writing of the story was verbalized as too much exposure. She phoned me after a while and shared with me her wish not to continue writing her story. She did not feel ready to write her story. The traumatic experience and the feeling of shock blocked her to voice her story.

What is this telling us? The observation of the author is that if divorcees is stuck in a certain phase struggling with a specific feeling which impacts so heavily that they don't want to continue with storying, then we as counselors need to respect the tempo in which each person moves through the process. Then this tempo needs to be understood and respected. Divorcees cannot be pushed with storying for the sake of study purposes. The narrative researcher values people and not the story in the first place. The author is of the opinion that not-storying is also storying. This is the storying of the traumatic impact of divorce on a divorcee. It confirms that each divorce is unique and that each divorcee is experiencing the same feelings individually and at their own pace.

#### **4.2.4 Individual sessions / story-telling**

The divorcees had also been interviewed in individual sessions. Sometimes the sessions use telephonic equipment as a way of doing therapy. Sometimes thoughts were just shared by sms. The venues where we met, were always safe, warm and one which contribute to the need of support. We clarified in these sessions the phases and feelings of divorce, the questionnaires, the story, some theory on divorce and trauma. The interpretation about their traumatic experience of divorce as observed by the author, is as follows:

- It was very traumatic;
- It motivated change;
- It was a challenge to overcome;

- The remembering of the past was painful;
- It forced them to adapt and to learn;
- It enhanced their understanding about themselves and those who separate;
- It promoted empathy;
- It brought them close to self-understanding;
- It makes them aware of their values;
- It encouraged them that this discourse can be overcome; and
- Each divorcee had his/her own tempo, which needed to be understood and respected by counselors.

#### **4.2.5 Story writing**

The components of a story have also been shared with the group. The writing and/or telling of a story are a challenge and an adventure, but it can also be terrifying as a divorcee in one case was not willing to write her story. To unite mean that one is starting to ask for willingness and courage (Müller, 1996:149). In the narrative method, using stories is not something new in therapy. Here the story is not a source to gain information to change people, but the stories itself changed and that's all (Müller, 1996:101). Change occurs when stories met and/or when they become one (Müller, 1996:102).

The researcher used story telling, but also story writing, not as a method to 'gain' information for therapeutic purposes, but value the 'story' per sé to be the agent used for change.

#### **4.2.6 Story sharing / How stories interact**

The sharing of stories is seen as a way in which people 'connect'. When people met through their stories that interact, it provides us with the opportunity to discover how we

travel together through our stories (Müller, 1996:102). Life is a journey. We traveled together in our stories:

- We are divorced, but not forsaken;
- We are all victims, but we are all survivors of the impact of tragic divorce;
- We have all sinned, but our sins are forgiven;
- Poor, but rich;
- Dehumanized, but standing up with an own identity in Christ;
- Dependent, but not a beggar. Growing in independency at all levels;
- Useless, but having external worth;
- Silent, but having the courage to voice our stories;
- Depressed, but not destroyed;
- Stuck, but beginning of real change;
- Come to an end, but discovered a new beginning;
- Losses, but gain more;
- Divorce is meaningless, but divorce can be meaningful as it provides the opportunity for outcomes and development of abilities and own identity;
- Paternalised, but liberated to discover God's will for women;
- Guilty, but not condemned.

#### **4.2.7 Observation**

Observation is a well-recognized method used in science to gain and interpret information. For the narrative researcher, valuing people and their stories, is to be found in an understanding of how things are perceived. Understanding is necessary before one enters cross-cultural counseling (Müller, 1996:161). According to the author all observation should be tested in order to avoid prejudice. The author's own interpretation of a divorcee not willing to provide her story, was in the beginning very negative, but when his observation was tested with the divorcee, the author as well as the divorcee had to readjust their way of thinking about this 'stuckness'. Eventually it was reformulated as the beginning point of change.

#### **4.3 Processing of data in Questionnaire (Appendix A, page 126)**

##### **4.3.1 Personal information of the three co-researchers**

###### **4.3.1.1 Name**

The co-researchers have requested confidentiality and have preferred to stay anonymous

###### **4.3.1.2 Faith Group**

Christian

###### **4.3.1.3 Church Group**

Dutch Reformed, Reformed and Apostolic Faith Mission

###### **4.3.1.4 Age (group)**

35-45 years

**4.3.1.5 Level of Education**

Graduated

**4.3.1.6 Occupation**

Varies from secretary to professional

**4.3.1.7 Netto income p.m.**

R5000 – R15 000

**4.3.1.8 Number of Children**

One or two

**4.3.1.9 Age and Gender of Each Child**

Three teenagers - one boy and two girls. One girl of two years.

**4.3.1.10 School and Grade of Each Child**

Co-researcher has preferred to keep identification of school and grades confidential.

**4.3.1.11 Current Marital Status**

One of three women is remarried and two women is still single.

**4.3.1.12 Current Relationship Status**

All of the divorcees are having relationships again.

**4.3.1.13 Current Living Conditions**

All the divorcees owe their own house.

## **4.3.2 Information on Divorce**

### **4.3.2.1 Who received Custody?**

All the women involved received custody.

### **4.3.2.2 Date of Divorce**

All the women involved have been divorced during or before 2005.

### **4.3.2.3 Do you Receive Maintenance?**

All the women involved are receiving maintenance.

### **4.3.2.4 Amount of Maintenance Per Month**

Averaging R2000,00 p.m. per child.

### **4.3.2.5 How do you Evaluate your Maintenance Per Month?**

The maintenance has been evaluated as enough and frequent.

### **4.3.2.6 Are you aware of Procedures to Increase your Maintenance?**

All the women are.

### **4.3.2.7 Are you aware that a Parenting Plan can help you in Ruling Visits, Payments of Maintenance and Managing Relationships of your Children towards Families and Friends?**

All the women are.

### **4.3.2.8 Do you need such a Plan?**

No one did.

**4.3.2.9 Are there any Information other than the above that you would like to give?**

Nothing was added.

**4.3.2.10 Did you experience the completion of content of the above sections on Personal Data and Divorce as Traumatic?**

No one experienced the completion of the two sections as traumatic. They described their experience of those sections as helpful to confirm reality.

**Interpretation of data on divorce.**

Data on divorce are interpreted by the author as follow from a narrative perspective:

- Despite the pain of divorce, these women still have the courage to grow financially, in terms of knowledge of the law, in gaining custody and in allowing themselves a healing time.
- To fight against poverty and to strive toward independent functioning has brought me under the impression of the abilities of these women to create a new story on hope to others.
- There's no hope without suffering.
- Acceptance of reality is part of life.

**4.3.3 Information on contact with children**

**4.3.3.1 Describe your Agreement with your Ex-husband as laid out by Court Order, in terms of Contacts with your Children.**

Contact is limited to visits of children by their fathers, every second weekend and alternative holidays. Restrictions have been placed on contact by telephone, sms and email, but vary from case to

case. Time is also agreed upon on fetching and bringing back the children.

**4.3.3.2 Are you in Favor of this Agreement?**

All these women were in favor of the agreement, of which the impact of the divorce on the children involved, are hurting.

**4.3.3.3 How do you feel about the situation?**

Co-researchers described their feelings as hurtful, shattered, depressing, traumatic, but also relieved to be free.

**4.3.3.4 How does your Ex-husband feel about the situation?**

Varies from willingness to talk, unhappiness, acceptance, non-acceptance, anger, jealousy, manipulating, intimidating, finger pointing and satisfaction.

**4.3.3.5 How do your Children feel about the situation?**

The children love their father. They are not divorced. They don't understand what is happening and want their parents to be together. They also go through a mourning process.

**4.3.3.6 What impact in your opinion does this situation have on you?**

Divorcees feel terrible to trust their ex-husband with their children. Feelings are shattered, they feel rebellious, but also see it as time out or time with themselves.

**Interpretation of data on contact with their children by their ex-husbands**

- Everybody's story is folded within a broader narrative of their children and own socio-economic culture.

- This information enhances a better understanding for the persons of their stories.
- Every child has the need to belong. Not all children are as privileged as those of the co-researcher to have a home from where they can hopefully leave from one day.
- Home in the sense of 'emotional home' has largely been lost by 'legal contracts', which creates insecurity amongst children.
- It is sad that divorce impact so viciously on children in terms of a legal ruling, because of two adults separating.
- Impact of divorce on a divorcee is an ambivalent experience. Feelings of people involved tell us about stories of courage, stories of hope and stories of healing.

#### **4.3.4 Reaction and Response to your reaction on your divorce**

##### **4.3.4.1 Write your own story in a separate format.**

The following can be helpful:

- Your story (past, present and future and future imaginative story)(A);
- Background of your story (B);
- Identity developments or describe them in your story (D);
- Highlights in your story (describe) (C);
- New stories that flow from your story (new beginnings) (E);
- See stories in separate format.

(see 4.5 and 4.6)

#### **4.3.4.2 Describe your Feelings of being Divorced.**

Feelings vary from relieved, happy, positive, exited and everything is going to be different, to feelings of uselessness, feeling ashamed, everything is not lost, negative, traumatized, heartbroken, having a new identity, enjoy freedom and a willingness to go on. Feelings are like riding a roller coaster. It just goes on.

#### **4.3.4.3 What impact does your feelings have on you?**

It varies from:

- Feeling like I am swimming in wet cement.
- Feeling of giving up.
- Feeling motivated to prove that I could stand up.
- Feeling good in what has been achieved already.

#### **4.3.4.4 What in your opinion would make it easy or difficult for you to discuss your story (experience) with -**

- Me: 'Nothing, because you understand our stories in that you have also been through a divorce like us'.
- Within a group: 'We do welcome the feeling of not being alone and the opportunity to share feelings and our stories with others in the group. It won't be the same in a group with strangers'.
- The opportunity to talk and experience listening make us feel worthwhile, because we felt our stories are worthwhile to tell.

**4.3.4.5 Your traumatic experience must have been a shock to you, yet you have managed to take certain accountable actions there after. What are these actions and how do you feel about them?**

The group was sharing the following:

- Opening an own bank account.
- Paying bills on my own.
- Organizing own financial security (vehicle and house).
- Buying what we want, without explaining ourselves to someone else all the time.
- Making our own decisions about raising children and our time.

The group said this makes them feel liberated from their ex-husband, worthwhile again and having an own identity.

**4.3.4.6 I have used the term ‘traumatic’ in my attempt to understand your story ‘experiences’. Would you say that this term describe your experience the best? Are there other terms that would better describe what you have experienced?**

The group claims that the word ‘traumatic’ is an all-inclusive term. Including also the emotional wounds, effecting value systems, running down of self-esteem, gap in security system about the future and it quieted us. The word trauma is fitting.

**4.3.4.7 Do you know of other people who have the same kind of experience than yours?**

All the women know others that have been divorced, but they realize after group discussions that there are many like them who needed to tell their stories.

**4.3.4.8 Would you say that your experience of divorce is very much different from others?**

The group felt that although many other women go through the same process, each one would experience the impact of their divorce as unique.

**4.3.4.9 In telling/writing your story – of which other stories in your life have you been becoming aware of?**

The group shared the following:

- Our school stories;
- Stories of our own families and how our parents have educated us;
- Stories of our value systems;
- Relationship stories;
- Stories of our social life;
- Church stories;
- Stories of abuse and neglect;
- Work related stories.

#### **4.3.4.10 What impact do they have on you?**

The group felt it keeps them evaluating and questioning the decisions they have made in terms of what could have been if they had acted differently towards their relationship.

The impact of various stories is experienced differently and uniquely by each one. Sometimes divorce impacts negative and sometimes positively on each one.

#### **4.3.4.11 What emotions did you experience when writing and telling our story to other divorcees?**

The group shared the following:

- Reliving the trauma;
- Feeling valued;
- Feeling relief;
- Lifting of our burdens, because we are not the only one's experiencing these traumatic feelings;

#### **4.3.4.12 What emotions did you experience when listening to the stories of other divorcees?**

The group unanimously felt that they no longer felt useless, because stories shared tell them what happened to them, also came along the life path of other's. It's not the end of your life to be divorced. It's a new challenge.

**4.3.4.13 Did you become aware of any new emotions experienced when telling and listening to the stories?**

The group unanimously shared and felt the following:

- Everything was not my fault.
- Satisfaction to know everyone makes mistakes.
- Not good for this one, doesn't mean not good for another one.

**4.3.4.14 Who in your opinion, understands your story/ 'experiences' the best and why?**

Group members felt that those like them who went through the same processes understand the best, because they don't condemn so easily as 'outsiders'.

**4.3.4.15 Did your experience while telling your story and listening to the stories of others, change your understanding of yourself?**

Group members agree that in experiencing the traumatic feelings they went through, they are not abnormal. The impact and experiencing of identified feelings are 'normal' for every person confronted with divorce (shock, anger, depression, trauma, ambivalence, guilt, feeling useless and acceptance).

**4.3.4.16 Are there people in whose company you feel empowered in respect of understanding yourself and the actions you have taken? Explain**

Group members felt at ease in the company of divorcees when talking about divorce. This company doesn't make them feel uncomfortable or self-conscious when sharing their emotions and/or behavior.

**4.3.4.17 In what respect has this story-sharing-group, contributed to your understanding of yourself and your divorce?**

The group discussions left the members with a feeling that they are 'ok'.

**4.3.4.18 Did this research create any new challenge for you?**

Group members responded as follows:

- Yes, it motivated us to never give up;
- It helps us to continue to live and to stay positive;
- Divorce can be overcome.

**4.3.4.19 What would indicate to you that you have overcome the discourse of your divorce?**

- Some has reached this point.
- Some of the group members (two) have overcome the discourse.

One of the group members still gets upset when her ex-husband visits with his new girlfriend. The feeling she felt of 'hurt' still indicates to her that she is not there yet. She wanted to work on this.

The other two members indicate their choice in their unwillingness to accept their ex-husbands back and the finding of a new identity in Christ. Viewing their divorce as a gift.

**4.3.4.20 What in future would indicate to you that you have gained an even better understanding of yourself after your experience?**

Group members indicated the following:

- Thinking different about themselves as people in their own right who could function independently on all levels (including maturity emotional and financial independence) and they said it with pride.
- Giving themselves enough time to heal before engaging into a new relationship.
- Visiting the past as if they have arrived there for the first time. Allowing themselves a new past, a newly dreamt future, meeting in the life they live now.
- Divorce doesn't strip people from their gifted talents.

**Interpretation of reactions and responses of divorcees on their divorce**

The author would describe and summarize these reactions as follows:

- Suffering and isolated divorcees from others and from own identity;
- The presence of others sharing the same process, provides warmth and eases suffering;

- Not suffering alone creates meaningfulness;
- Sharing of stories creates closeness and meeting of one another;
- Participation in one another's suffering creates and overcomes distance of misunderstanding and broken relationships;
- To suffer together means to know one another better. It creates compassion;
- Telling/sharing of stories breaks isolation of traumatic divorce;
- New possibilities have been created within old realities;
- Traumatic divorce provides hope;
- Hope motivates to fight against traumatic divorce.

#### **4.4 The author's own story – a story of hope in suffering**

Life was good for me in 1950-1978. I was born in a small rural town called Burgersdorp in the North-Eastern Cape. Burgersdorp at that time had a population of eleven thousand. Everyone knew everyone in town. I had a lot of friends and was involved in athletics, rugby, cricket and tennis as any normal boy of my age at that stage would participate in.

I was born in a family of eight, with three sisters and five brothers. I was number six in our family. We were very poor. My father worked for the railway and my mother was a housewife. We were a very close family. We attended church every Sunday and tried to do what is right as prescribed by the Christian community or faith. I believed what I read in the Bible. At a very young age I became a friend of a blind man, for which I became his eyes. For several years I could not understand this deeply felt desire inside me to care for the uncared. Later on in my life I understood a little bit better about the calling of Jesus. I was shocked in noticing that people don't really care about each other, believing that this wasn't God's will for His church. I also felt victim of being sexually misused by my brother's friend, who is today a judge, but whose whereabouts are unknown to me. It took me years to discover the meaning of the cross in my life. It

gave me hope and inspired me to care for those who are actually the victims. I struggled with my emotions at the age of ten years during that time, but eventually overcame what happened to me through voicing my story to friends and by the Grace of God I managed to continue with my life.

After school I went to army in Grahamstown and Oudtshoorn. Life was good in 1969. I enjoyed sport very much and achieved provincial colors in hockey and cricket. My friends respected and admired me. It was a great feeling of success that helped me to believe in my abilities to overcome obstacles in life. During those years I wished I could have a pastor or mentor to speak to, but there was no one that I could trust to understand me. I was a typical teenager who believed that nobody understood me. My family contacted me after my army years to offer me a job in Pretoria, as well as a dream to become an accountant. Life started to change in 1970-1973. I accepted the offer and felt as if I had arrived in life. I stayed in a Youth Centre in Bosmanstreet in the inner city of Pretoria, after I had given up my residency with my sister in Waterkloof, a wealthy suburb in the eastern side of the city. I started to work as a collector of money from people who didn't or couldn't pay their debts. I didn't notice God's involvement at that stage, busy storying my life. My own debt started to build. I made regretful choices at the time, but thought it was good. My parents supported the work I was doing. I met a girlfriend with whom I had a sexual relationship, the first one in my life. I couldn't figure out exactly what was happening to me, as I was very much confused. When this relationship was ended by my girlfriend, I started to do everything I could in my power to restore it, even praying. Without noticing I drifted away from church, Christian values, my family and even myself. My neighbor's girlfriend at that time walked into my room (room 413 in the Youth Centre) on a Sunday afternoon, takes her finger and draws a line on the top of my dusted Bible, asking: "Ruben, is this your Bible?" It didn't bother me at all. By two o'clock the next morning I woke up, becoming aware of someone in my room. There was nobody. By half past three I again became aware of someone in my room. Again there was nobody, but my attention was caught by my dusted bible. I opened it and just started to read: 'No impure person, will ever inherit the kingdom of God'. I knew immediately it was me, but didn't know what to do. At that moment an indescribable desire to meet God started to grip me. My spiritual struggle continued for two years, taking me to become the most unpleasant person on earth to live with. I started to do what I thought was right, justifying myself by entering theological studies, going to church again and breaking up with wrong people. In my heart I was missing something, which I knew would change everything, if I could just

find it. In meeting Christian friends, one of them told me that God doesn't want me to become a minister, but a Christian. This remark stopped me in pretending any further. I was at the point of taking my own life, when late one evening in 1972 another friend of mine sat down with me in my room and we talked. I wanted to know from him how my sins can be forgiven, what the truth is and begged him not to tell me that Jesus is the Trust, because I know it. He just closed his eyes, took my Bible and read to me John 14:6 "I am the Way, the Truth and the Life..." At that moment Jesus spoke Himself. In the words, He revealed Himself to me as the Son of God and from thereon I knew my sins were forgiven and I knew that God has accepted me just as I am. This is too great to describe in a script like this. My debts have been written of by the man, Jesus Christ my Lord and Savior.

When walking to my work the next day everything has changed. I resigned with the words of Daleen, my friend's girlfriend in my mind: "Ruben if you want to help other people you've got to go to the Hugonote College in Wellington to study as a missionary / social worker. I was there myself and I know God is calling you to choose Him with your life by serving others in need of care". I then went home to my parents who were staying in Queenstown at that stage to share my story with them. My father was very upset with the idea of mine in becoming a missionary, as a black person killed his father. He refused to pay for my studies. I then just made a decision and decided to get on a train to Wellington to study without any money. I wanted others to be helped in the way God did to me.

In Wellington a Professor listened to my story and he granted me permission to study. At the end of the first quarter an unknown person paid my account. I went home by train for the first holiday to share this, as well as what I have learned with my parents. My father became converted. As time went on they started to help me financially. Life was good between 1974-1976 when I was a young student enjoying student's life in full. I also earned provincial colors in tennis and athletics.

I met a girlfriend in my second year that taught me everything about communication. In my last and final year I met Jeanette (my ex-wife) with whom I have been married for ten years (1977-1987). We both had dreams of a happy marriage. We enjoyed each others company, especially when we lived and worked as social workers in Rundu, in the Kavango, in Namibia. I also wanted my family to be proud of me in taking initiative in finding a job and a soul mate too. During the beginning of 1979 I lost my father and

we moved to Pretoria where I started to work for the CSC as a supervisor. I started to do my degree in social work and managed to complete my Masters Degree in Social Work Supervision with distinction at the University of Pretoria (TUKS) in 1987.

When arriving at home from work one tragic afternoon in 1988, Jeanette told me that she is going to divorce me. I still clearly remember how I felt the next day having dinner with my colleagues seeing them eating, hear them sharing stories of happy marriages, but not connecting with them. I felt different than I felt the previous day. I smelt the good food and experienced the laughter of my colleagues, but I couldn't relate to it anymore. Life what I knew, began to vanish. Something was stolen from the sacred heart of a young inexperienced man. I did not want to live any longer. Everybody that knew me knew that something was wrong. When my friends, family and colleagues kept asking, "What's wrong?" I finally broke down and told them. Nobody would believe me if I had to tell them that my ex-wife finally discovered a greater love for another women. It was a huge shock to me. How could healing ever occur under these circumstances? Even though I begged my ex-wife not to divorce, she refused, because she wanted children at that stage and because I was unable to have any children. I was totally confused. Looking back now I see that the refusal was a sign of some kind. Today I have been remarried for eighteen years whilst having an own daughter that is completing school next year. Sometimes I remained confused over why I didn't want to get divorced. At times I was rejecting myself, believing that I was bad and wondering about the truth.

A couple of years later I continued with a Masters degree in Theology at TUKS. This time I achieved a Masters Degree in Narrative Therapy (Practical Theology) helping me to understand, tell and write my own story in order to help others in voicing theirs. I guess God is trying to tell me something. Marriage with Jeanette was a struggle and a very lonely time. It was hard for both of us as I felt like a failure. When I found a telephone number and the names of women in my ex-wife's handbag, I confronted her but realized immediately that it was over. I was confused. We didn't get proper counseling. I went to my minister though. He laid his hands on me while I was crying, as I did when I lost my father in the beginning of 1979. At that moment I felt traumatized again, and I just know when I left the minister that I cannot return for more. I felt like trash that had been thrown to the wind. I had become so emotional that it seemed impossible to survive without Jeanette. What could help me? I know God can help me, but He didn't seem to care. Nobody came to me to offer any support. Is this

the impact of labeling? I wish my minister at that stage could visit me, as I experienced the pain of being divorced. I felt lonely and depressed. My mind was on Jeanette. Life was such a struggle that on many days I was thinking about committing suicide. I was dealing with serious dysfunctional adult problems, without getting any help. I decided to go to a person whom I trust to talk about my struggle with my emotions – Dr X. He was a wonderful caring shepherd. I drove to his house very late one evening without an appointment. I shared my story with this man, as this was my only hope to come back from where I have been dropped off. I have refused to give up on myself. This gave me enormous energy to grow from my experience of losing my dignity, to somebody that is special and gifted. I started to feel ok about myself, but still very vulnerable. It will always be a mystery to me what my ten year marriage to Jeanette might have been like had I not suffered the trauma of divorce.

When I started with a new relationship two years after my divorce, I met Henna with whom I have been married now for eighteen years. The first thing we were talking about was the truth about my marriage with Jeanette. I told her everything. The truth shall set you free.

### **From victim to survivor**

It took me years to receive the grace to discover the meaning of meaningless divorce by faith in Christ. For me faith is the courage to accept the acceptance of the unacceptable, namely myself. What I went through is not advisable for any person, because it is really painful. All along there were not many people that really cared for me as a person, but seemingly enjoying the pleasure in having power over me. I managed to survive, while living for a very long time with depression and a low self-esteem. I wasn't interested at that time in another relationship with a woman. To be single and to find my own identity in Christ was an unexpected outcome and highlight after divorce that I haven't foreseen. This was much better than to be involved in a traumatic relationship. I was motivated to stay single. But again I was wondering if life was worth continuing, even though Jeanette was gone. Four years of being in the desert on my own led to a marriage with my current wife Henna. We are now married for eighteen years and love one another with a deep love that will never stop.

The past would like to make some comebacks on me. I believe that I need to protect my new life, my marriage and my family and even more today – our gifted child. I cope

by helping others with their problems as a social worker. I entered theological studies that gave a total new and enriched dimension to the work and calling that I do even today.

The trauma and impact of divorce is enormous and impossible to measure and even harder to see with the eye. For me the cold shoulder the Christian community sometimes give to divorcees has been as traumatic as any physical or psychological injury could have been. Today I understand what a divorcee is going through. For so many years and at so many certain moments, I would have preferred to shoot myself, now it will take an AK47 to silence me. Silence doesn't allow healing for divorcees or for those who left us. I read many books on how to help myself. Being a survivor has suddenly become tedious.

### **My thriver's story**

My daily work with people helped me to realize that I could do more than just survive. I started to invite people after working hours to my home, to tell their stories of divorce, and I shared mine over and over. I shifted my focus to the truth and being honest with others and myself. To thrive requires hard work. I want to deal with myself in a constructive way. The studies on trauma and this script are very helpful in just doing this. I just know that God willed me to be happy and to be a well-equipped servant. I have decided to let go and to allow God to take my hand and to lead the way in my marriage and those of others. I really understand the pain of divorce. Without my wife, my child, my passed away friend, my family, my friends and my colleagues, I might not have made it.

Over time I was able to speak honestly about my hurt with my wife Henna, my child Tina, other divorcees and even colleagues that I know, who are hiding a lot of hurt. What enriched my story spiritually were my theological studies, helping me to enter scriptures in a personal, meaningful and life-related journey. I felt confident and empowered.

I remember a turning point in my life when doing counseling with a couple one evening. As I started to share my story for the first time, I began to cry. I suddenly stopped as I became aware of God's presence. As I shared my feelings I went through, the counselee just started crying as they shared my pain by telling their own, as a way to

connect with their understanding to how I suffered. I was no longer alone. When my story was finished we decided to have Holy Communion. This showed how God absorbs all our suffering in the cross of His Son. We could give our pain to Him. That night my spirit recovered. In my heart I was singing 'Rock of Ages...' This contributed to my becoming a thriver.

Sixteen years after my divorce I received a phone call one evening from Jeanette my ex-wife. She informed me of the death of her father and was also requesting copies of our divorce document that I posted. We enquired about each other's whereabouts which gave me a sense of satisfaction in terms of forgiveness and that I do care about the one that has left me. It made me realize that I am committed spiritually to a life of compassionate care. What a miracle!

I have been set free from the bondage of my ex-wife. I can honestly say now I live as a thriver instead of just a survivor.

I have tried to talk to people, colleagues, family, friends and even a psychologist, two other ministers and even my neighbors, but the biggest difference came when I wrote and told my story to other divorcees and in a group of people who had traveled with me through life by the connection of our stories. When coming to realize that stories can be shared without fear of hurting someone's feelings, and that it's a way of carrying our burdens, hope is provided in suffering. My prayer is that He will use my story to transform those of many other divorcees as He is storying mine.

#### **4.5 My story of hope: Finding freedom through the pain of divorce**

I met Kruger (not his real name) through friends of us, uncle Hendrik (not his real name) and his wife. He was the boxing coach of my son Danie. I was married at that time to Christo (not his real name). Kruger was also a married man at that time. The name of his wife is Elain (not her real name). All of us went to Dwaalboom, a rural town in the Northern Province, to attend a boxing tournament. I became aware of Kruger's flirting with me, but ignored it. We would see each other very often, because of the boxing of my son. I was entering the valleys of darkness in my life.

The process of writing my story will lack many facets about storying, as we have discussed in our group. I am not an author, and for me it's easier to tell my story as I

did in the group. My written story, I am afraid, will be incomplete in terms of background and maybe development. It probably also will be unable to lead the reader to understand the depth of my traumatic experience about divorce and its impact on me.

Kruger phoned me at work. I informed him that I am not interested in an affair, as we are both married. He ensured me though his interest is nothing more than being good friends. He explained to me that his wife is a very jealous person and that he actually couldn't talk to me, even when we are in a group. I can't believe that I fell for this, but I did. I also had a liking for Kruger. I went for coffee with him and he immediately found an opening in my armour when he linked to my deeply felt unhappiness in my current marriage with Christo, at that time. Christo had a drinking problem. This was the start of our relationship that I would eventually regret. I told Christo about my affair with Kruger and my feelings towards him. I felt guilty about what happened, but also in a sense relieved. As we discussed the various questions about divorce in the group, I could see what it meant to escape from a traumatic marriage that imprisoned me as a woman in being happy. I discovered what happened to me through telling and listening to each other's stories in the group sessions we had over a couple of months. What happened to me hurts and nobody understood or cared, sometimes not even myself.

I took my stuff and left the house. I found a place to stay with an uncle Bob and his wife (not his real name). For three months I struggled with my feelings of shock, guilt, shame, anger, depression and that tore me in two. On the other hand I also felt free in a certain sense. I could also identify with the feeling of other group members as they shared their discovering of themselves being able to take decisions without being blamed for it, or an explanation to someone else. My time with Christo, my ex-husband, was one that the word traumatic describes best.

Kruger also left his wife and I moved with him to a flat. We went to an attorney who warned us that a slyly relationship never work, but Kruger and I knew better. When discussing the themes of relationships, evil and suffering in our group, I had a deeply felt yearning for a man to love me, but the group helped me to discover that the values I have grown up with, were not adequate guidance or protection. We never had sex before marrying, but I know that sex doesn't equal love.

I married Kruger on the 21 July 1990. My children chose to stay with their father. For them it was good not to leave their school, friends, church and to leave him alone. I experienced this choice of them as devastating, worse and traumatic. I felt the poorest woman on earth without my children. They also blamed me for the divorce, as someone else has now taken their place. Leaving my children behind, equalize the feeling of a failure. But as bad as it might be, it also created some sort of challenge inside me to regain their love. I went on still attending school functions, serve on the school board, attend their sport activities wherever they participated. I kept on supporting them emotionally. Six months after our divorce my ex-husband remarried to Hestie (not her real name). I had two sons namely, Nardus and Danie (not their real names). The relationship between them and Hestie didn't work out and they have decided to come and stay with Kruger and me. They were emotionally torn in two and so it was with me. I became more confused about life when Kruger's daughter, Charlize (not her real name) also moved to us by recommendation of her psychologist.

Things were getting tremendously complex and tough. I didn't go to any person for counseling. I felt condemned by my guilt feelings and the culture about church, Christianity and God as I perceived it. It was a very confusing time for me. Charlize's father also had an extra marital affair with another woman that didn't work out. It is really heartbroken to be involved in such a huge collapse of a network of relationships. To see and experience the consequences of divorce, unhealthy relationships and emotional abuse of children is to understand the impact of my divorce. I have paid a tremendous prize. I was also blamed and condemned by my family and friends. Charlize was seven years of age and I felt very sorry for her. She had been dropped off and forgotten with us, as her mother enjoys herself with one man after the other. Charlize was left with us and any person that was willing to take care. For me this is child abuse that goes with divorce and environment of unsafe relationships. I was beside myself with guilt, panic and stress. In a way we adapted as a new family. I could not cope with Charlize's behavior, neither understand it when she returned to us after a visit with her mother – confused and angry. Even the psychologist, to whom I went to for advice, was choosing Kruger's and my side, assessing that Charlize is playing us off against each other and is manipulating. For me this was crazy and didn't make sense. I was even more confused and lost than ever before. Life went sour as I unfold my story in the group with the help of our counselor. I was not able to see any form of humanity as I lost the power of understanding. We did what the counselor called 'externalizing' in the group. This helped me to separate myself from my

'problems' and to view them as part of life. This also lifted me as we went through the phases. I felt empowered to fight once more the pain of divorce. When we discussed the spiritual dimension of divorce and how we perceived it, it came as an absolute surprise that God is not condemning me and that He provides the opportunity for even me, to overcome my feelings of being a victim of divorce. I didn't understand before this crisis in my life, that God has a plan for my life and that alternative perspectives about divorce exist. In sharing my story in the group, my spirituality deepens as I reject punctual Biblical interpretations about divorce women and an uninvolved God. I still felt vulnerable.

The relationship between Kruger and myself has started to fall apart as predicted by our attorney. Going back over my experiences in the group with Kruger, I now see details that I didn't notice at that time. Kruger had a split in his parental relationship, that caused him to be unfaithful, just as I. He started to dewomanize me with all kinds of weird sexual demands that I just could not met. He was also very much involved in pornography and extra marital affairs. The marriage wasn't strong anymore to overcome the challenges and also to handle the needs of Charlize. Another divorce was unavoidable and the past started to visit me over and over again. I felt traumatized.

Two months after Charlize turned twenty, I found out that Kruger had a relationship with another person. When confronted he admitted that he doesn't love me. During this time he went away 'for his work' in Bloemfontein to provide training. I was very naïve at that time believing it. This was a way of protecting myself against the truth of myself that was too miserable to face. It became an inner struggle with myself that I have lost.

Kruger now had a relationship with a twenty three year old colored girl called Mitzi (not her real name). She was very pretty and also had a baby of ten months born out of wedlock. Our relationship was no longer a relationship, but a one sided affair – his way or no way. I decided to go and see an attorney for a divorce. Kruger and I came to an agreement that favors me financially because of him feeling guilty. All the feelings involved in the divorce process as we go through the phases in the group, are the feelings divorcee goes through, revisited me. Leaving me behind in the process. Once again I felt desperate. Then Kruger phoned me from Bloemfontein asking me not to continue with the divorce, because of his relationship with Mitzi that is not working out. My struggle started again. I felt 'second best' but took him back because of my own insecurity and low self-esteem I suppose. He then moved out again after three weeks to stay with his brother in order to sort himself out. Then Mitzi sent me an email to tell

me that Kruger is the father of her child and that they have agreed that he will stay and work in Bloemfontein. I finally broke down. I was feeling like a sucked out orange and just thrown away. I had to make a decision. For me this became the turning point in my life. I haven't had life companions for all these years, just tenants. I made a decision to divorce Kruger finally. Although it was very traumatic, still feeling sucked out, not good enough, I started to turn to God. I felt down on my knees in His presence to confess my sins. I have disappointed God with my life and started to confess my sins of my first divorce, the neglect of my children and allowing myself as a person created into His image to be humiliated by men, but mainly because of my own actions. I asked Jesus to accept me because I am a sinner, and because of His Grace being with me in my years of stupidity. He took my hand. I also went to my children, family, friends and ex-husband to confess my share in their pain. I was afraid. Then they forgave me and accepted me back as well. Now looking back, I can see that I became stronger as a person finding my own identity and worth as a woman in Christ. This is tremendous.

I have become, what we have discussed in the group – a survivor. I have experienced hope for life through and within suffering. This I realized when we discussed the theology of suffering in our group. For me the cross of Christ is the greatest link of my story. During this stand-up time in my life, I also went to my pastor and counselor who supported and empowered me beyond my expectations. I know it is not going to be easy, but I am looking forward to the challenge to become what I know I can be.

In our story sharing and support group our stories unfold. As we went through all the theory of divorce and trauma, I accepted for the first time my individuality and right to be a happy creature of God by grace. I came face to face with my feeling of humanity. The counselor didn't focus on our problems, but helped us to accept them as part of life. We started to admire each other for the courage to share our stories that brought to us a sense of healing.

Kruger eventually went to Bangkok where he met another woman whom he got 'married' to according to their tradition. In the meantime he is now staying on his own in a flat somewhere in Johannesburg. My first husband got divorced again because of his alcohol problem. My new life is good and it can be seen as an outcome to live without being humiliated on a daily basis. My children are now adults and their reaction to my new life is that I must hang in there, because I am doing fine.

I know that down the road there may be more pain and hurt that is directly or indirectly related to this story of mine. But I am convinced that God will be present even in silence and that I will be whole. My prayer is that I hope my story provides some kind of hope for those suffering the trauma of divorce. My name is Hendrietha (not my real name). I just want to thank Ruben and the group for this wonderful way in allowing us to tell our stories to one another and to continue our lives with courage.

#### **4.6 My story of hope: Meaningfulness in suffering**

My name is Fransie Haakdoorn (not my real name). I am twenty-nine years old and was born in Vanderbijlpark on the 14<sup>th</sup> of November 1976. My maiden name was Van Heerden (not real name). I grew up in the Vaal-Triangle. I went to pre-school in Kosmos and spent my primary school days in Collegepark, up to standard four. Because of my father's work we moved to Ermelo in Mpumalanga.

I have been raised within a very close family. We were not rich, but my parents cared for us tremendously. We lived an averaged style of life. We have always received what we want. Once a year we went on vacation as a family. Weekends we spent together as a family. We did things together like working in the garden, walking long distances with our small dog and visiting the nursery on Sunday afternoons after napping a bit. As a family we always ate together at the dinner table, discussing the events of the day. This was always a very special time around the dinner table. Everyone could pour his heart out about good or bad things we've experienced.

I came out of a family of three children of which I was the eldest. I have a younger sister and brother. My father was extremely strict and truly patriarchal in his outlook on life. The goals he set for himself and us were very high. He can be described as an absolute perfectionist. A role model was set. My mother was also very strict, but not as much as my father. I understood from our group discussions that this type of personalities could be linked to a sense of insecurity and also hiding a low self-esteem, which I could also link to my choices of a soul companion and myself as person. My mother fulfilled the role as 'bumper' when conflict became taut in difficult situations. I was brought up with more discipline and treated more strictly as my younger brother and sister. When looking back I welcome my home and background, because it helped me to become a strong person and to handle difficult circumstances. I didn't appreciate patriarchy.

When we discussed in our group the importance of being rooted in a place called 'home', I could easily relate to it. Today I realize that to be rooted are the most basic need of any person. For me this also means emotional, spiritual and physical safety. Although rich in a certain sense, we also lacked the warmth of meaningful relationships. But nevertheless it was still a home and a place to depart from. One thing though was catching up on me, my marriage. Our relationship was heading for a disaster.

Our family moved to Ermelo where I went to school up to standard 7. I continued my schooling at the Technicon College. This was my father's choice for me at a stage where I really felt confused about my future. Although it turned out to be the best, I would have liked it to feel a little bit more inclusive in the choice. Paternalism as shown, was discussed in the group sessions, which helped me to come to a better understanding about the culture I am brought up with. I completed my diploma after four years to become a managerial secretary. I started my working career in Dec 1999. This was a wonderful time of my life. I was free for the first time. During my teenager days, and as an adolescent, I was involved in various relationships with boyfriends. I was very prim and proper and never allowed myself to overstep the boundaries of sexuality as I was brought up with. In my second year of college I met my first serious boyfriend. His name was Peter (not his real name). I felt over the moon, but there were no thoughts about a marriage, as I was much too young. He then moved to Cape Town after two years. I regretfully discovered that he has dropped me for another girlfriend. I felt devastated.

Two years went by. I met Brandt (not his real name) and started my second serious relationship. It's amazing that he, Peter and my father were the same type of men. They were all 'perfect' people when it comes to life. Brandt and I shared the same values and principles about church, involvement in churchly projects, praying together, morality and family-devotion. We met each other at the church and we loved to be part of churchly organized events. We had a fantastic relationship and he treated me with respect and dignity. But one thing was missing. He could not provide me with security and a sense of financial responsibility. He didn't fit into my role model for a man, which I preferred at that stage. He didn't have any stability in terms of a job and also lack of direction. I bought my first car and visited him when he moved away from Ermelo. After a while I realized that the relationship is not working out and I decided to end it. I

was very much confused and went through the same emotions again as with my first boyfriend.

While writing my story I now realize the importance, content, connections and impact of the following themes as we worked through it in the group:

- Alternative Biblical perspectives on divorce and gender;
- Patriarchy;
- Trauma and women;
- Object relations;
- Blocking out the real feelings about myself;
- Trauma and evil;
- Theology of suffering.

I never questioned men in authority and I am really feeling vulnerable in terms of my own identity. My vulnerability made me an easy target to repeat the relationship pattern that I felt safeguard me for so long. Although brought up with sound values, etc. I am experiencing a feeling that what has protected me, now has somehow turned against me. Maybe God wants to tell me something about Him and myself.

At this stage of my life, I was still living with my parents. We went through a very awkward time. My father lost his job. This was a huge shock for all of us, as he was our symbol of hope and role model. The tension and conflict between him and my mother, as well as with the rest of us, became unbearable. It went on for two years; until the bank eventually took our house on the day I turned twenty-one. I felt humiliated. It was painful. Very painful. We were really traumatized. We then moved to the farm. Everything then just went wrong.

I have worked for Panasonic Business Systems in Ermelo. I was the P.A. for Financial and Management Directors. The business started to show losses and Panasonic South

Africa has decided to take back the Franchise. I really enjoyed my work. This double trauma that I have been exposed to, has brought me to the point where my life was now starting to fall apart. I started to feel lost. I then went on to purchase my own policies in order to support my parents financially. Everybody in the group was just crying. I was at a low.

Then I met Wayne (not his real name) my ex-husband. We worked together for five years. He studied at RAU and did his practicals in Ermelo. He had another girlfriend and we just knew about each other. On the day we heard the news about Panasonic, I was sitting crying at my desk. Wayne came and he stood in front of me and asked me not to be so sad. He ensured me that everything is going to be OK. We must just hang in there, things will be better soon.

Immediately I felt in love with him, while still having a relationship with Brandt. We went for coffee. Totally desperate, and without knowing him really, we married one year after we have met. I took the decision because I was convinced that he is the 'perfect' man for me. I was over the moon with joy. When looking back and reflected against our group talks, I now realize that my choice was one that I regret. It was too quick, my motives were to save me from drowning, and he came as a rescuer. Although wrong, he took me away from my emotional and financial suffering. I now know it wasn't a good relationship, but still it was one.

Wayne was two years older than me. He was a very quiet person and only talkative between people he knew. He grew up in a family where things were working completely different than in my family. He was the only son and had three sisters. He was also the youngest and very much spoiled. They were very rich. His father was a Financial Director of a big firm and often went overseas. Wayne also played golf. He spent long hours, after playing, in the club with his friends. He often traveled overseas with his father. His mother had to raise the children on her own. She was supported by their full time housekeeper. They lived life as rich people, having everything they want. They had the best. Little I knew then, what the impact of his frame of reference on our relationship would be. We got married on the 7<sup>th</sup> Feb. 1998. The marriage lasted for seven years before we got divorced on 16 Aug 2005.

For the first few years, we had a fantastic relationship in the sense of financial security. Unfortunately I didn't have a soul companion in the true sense of the word. I suddenly

discovered that he was a closed book. When things were bothering him, he won't share it with me as his wife but would rather share it with friends at our dinner table. Our biggest problem came with the birth of our daughter Marni (not her real name) in Sept 2002. Our child spent five weeks in hospital and was very sick. We drifted apart and became like two tenants for each other. I actually realized, about two years ago, that our relationship is going down hill. He withdrew from supporting our child and me during the time when I was at hospital. He never helped me with the care of Marni, and I had to do it on my own. He escaped into his work, playing golf or just watching TV. So we drifted apart. I could not understand what I was going through.

I have decided to talk to him about what was bothering me. He just wanted to have sex with me and it just didn't satisfy. I started to feel cheap and withdrew. I have decided that enough is enough. I went to visit a counselor and asked my husband if he would like to accompany me to the counselor. He refused. The counselor told me that it is not going to help at all if he doesn't come to the sessions. She gave me her business card to give to him and advised me not to push him, if he doesn't respond. Then it's a lost case. He didn't. Instead, he moved out of the house and went to stay with his sister in Johannesburg. For me it was a tremendous shock. I prayed and hope that things would change for our marriage. He returned after two weeks and told me that there is no hope for our marriage and he doesn't love me anymore. I felt humiliated. I confronted him by asking him if there is someone else. He furiously denied it and told me that he will never remarry again. I couldn't believe that I was so naive to believe him. I begged him to stay for the sake of our child and promised him that I will change. His response was that he doesn't know, but he will see. So it went on.

I finally realized that everything between us was over. I couldn't cope anymore and have decided to go and see a psychologist. He moved out and he summoned me for a divorce. I've tried my best to explain to our three year old what was happening, but could feel the emotional abuse. I felt like a failure and even considered the possibility of committing suicide. For me, nothing was worthwhile anymore. I felt that my child's father could look after her. I felt so 'useless' about my marriage, that I reason with myself that I cannot be a good mother. I couldn't sleep, concentrate on my work or eat and was just crying day by day. Over and over I asked myself, where did I go wrong that my husband doesn't love me anymore. I was on my own, really on my own, for the first time.

I felt at that stage that my child was the cause of everything and started to blame her for myself, because I didn't want children. I was thinking that's why I could not adapt. He also did not support me. The lack of support during my child's illness made me cracked up completely. I love my child very much and I won't ever give her up, but I know the problem started with her arrival, so I thought. I felt bitter. Various emotions got hold of me like we've discussed in the group, namely: sorrow, anger, depression, ambivalence and disbelief, etc.

Sometimes it was easy to deal with my emotions and then there were times that I couldn't. It was a time of my life, which I don't want to have over. A time that I felt that I will never remarry again and that all men are bad. I still could not link my way of thinking and my emotional experience to the lack of a parental figure that I actually blocked out completely and whose personality didn't allow the development of my own identity. When Ruben did the theory of object relations with us in the group, it brought a welcome insight in myself, my choices of men and the interaction of my functioning in relationships. A process of healing started inside myself. I broke down in front of God, knowing that I won't be able to climb the mountain without His help. I felt sorry for my father and I prayed to God that He would touch him somehow to change and to become the father God wants Him to be. I started to find hope.

In January 2006 I was informed by my sister that my ex-husband is involved in a relationship with one of her best friends. The affair between them started when she lost her father and he started to support her as he did with me at the beginning of our relationship. It just added on to the unbearable conflict between us at the time. He offered her a job at his workplace and their relationship then started to blossom. In the meantime I have made peace with him and myself, knowing that there's a no-relationship.

The year has gone by. Through his and his new wife's contact with our child, all my feelings of anger, hatred, depression, ambivalence and guilt returned to me, whether I liked it or not. I felt surprised about the impact of the trauma of divorce on a person like me. It also brought new insight in myself, knowing that healing is going to be a timely process. These feelings as I have learned in the group are normal as I am in the process of digestion.

In looking back to what I have written, I now realize what the group meant to me. I can see that my story hasn't come to an end, but that it has just started. I can see the influence of my background in terms of my parents, especially my father, and how it connected to my choices of men and relationships. I could now also by the telling of my story and even writing, although not perfect, see the growth of myself in terms of my way of thinking about men, women, my own identity, my child, choices in life, life itself and God as my heavenly Father. Even in terms of spirituality I feel much more open towards a God as not so punitive as my dad. Especially the metaphor we did in the group about God as our Father became for me, a freeing one in helping me to view my relationships differently.

The context, lows and highs of my story has helped me to bring me closer to the person I now know I can become. I have entered a new life, made new friends, feeling good about new choices I have made e.g., like accepting a new job and like allowing myself enough time to heal, before entering into another relationship. It's not easy, but for now I am feeling good about myself. I am single but happy. I cannot believe that God has taken me through all this, that how He has used the group and our stories to help us to help ourselves, to stand up again and not to give up on ourselves. He has empowered me to function normal once again. I want to honor Him for this, for the feeling of not being a victim of the trauma of divorce, but for the feeling of being a survivor of something that nearly cost me my life, but that has helped at the end to find a new life and a better understanding of myself.

I know God through the voice of my father and through his perception of me as his child. I now know Him in many other ways:

- I know Him through my story and His story with me and the stories of our group members of suffering and healing;
- I know Him through the questions and abundant joy of my child;
- Through my child's total body smile when she sees me;
- I now know Him through the development of my own identity;

- As the true Father of my life and through my willingness and prayer that He will use my story to provide inspiration and hope to many divorcees. I want to thank Ruben and each of the group members who shared their stories and listened to mine. It was a healing experience.

#### **4.7 How our stories interact**

This research is not about objectivity; it's about subjective integrity. It wants to voice unheard stories of women, and the researcher himself, about the impact of the trauma a divorcee goes through, but it also wants to share a better story than the one we started with. The researcher hopes that more men and even children will be urged to tell and write their stories about the pain of divorce. It will broaden the picture of pain a divorcee goes through, as we journey along with each other through our stories.

The way stories interact, even better, the way people interact through their stories, provides the opportunity to get involved with one another. People meet through stories. People interact through stories. People get relieved through story involvement with one another (Müller, 1996). Narrative involvement with all the stories that interact is what it is about. Pastoral involvement is the meeting of people through their stories. To understand is to come to story. Stories have tangent-points and become the resource of change and understanding and lead to new stories. To understand means you need a story (Müller 1996).

We interact in our stories in the following ways:

- We all depart in life from a place called 'home'.
- All of us have a story to tell.
- We don't view our stories as normative for others.
- Our stories are not linear, but rather entail a circular process, which include a background, some sort of development or growth in various aspects of our lives. Our stories interact in their various contexts, as well as in the climaxes each story has. Our stories have a better end than it starts with.

- We traveled together in stuckness, but also in discovering a new start in our lives.
- We were all rejected and left behind, but we stood up and overcome the wounds caused by divorce.
- We traveled along with the same feelings before, during and after divorce, as we worked through the phases.
- We are all poor, but rich.
- We have all experience meaninglessness, just to discover meaningfulness and hope in suffering.
- We have all lost our identity, but have found a new identity.
- We travel together in our losses, but also in our gains.
- We traveled together in situations of hopelessness, but we are hopeful.
- We were all voiceless, but now we have traveled together as people, being touched by the Untouchable, in order to touch others through the voicing of our stories.
- We revisited our past and arrived there as if for the first time as we shared it with one another.
- We traveled together in our dreams and believed that even the biggest waves of the ocean cannot destroy our sandcastles.
- Worthless but worthfull.
- Humiliated, but not defeated.

- Down and out, but we have stood up through storying.
- We traveled together in our identification with one another and by allowing us to be drawn into one another's stories.
- We traveled together in rituals when we and as a group had a nice supper together to end our work.

Within the spiritual context we met, the supper helped to integrate our holistic experience, where religion is not something separated from our lives, but are part of meaningful involvement with one another. It provides a transition from the old to the new. Augsburgers once said: "...change come from encounter, contact and interaction, not from programming education or social engineering" (1986:24-25).

#### **4.8 Preliminary summary**

Although a lot of data has been obtained through questionnaires, theoretical background and storying, it is very important to understand that narrative research is not about the using of information to make an assessment, in order to provide therapy as the psychologist, or other counselors would, in a medical model of cause and effect. Narrative research value subjective integrity and doesn't label or see people as objects, but as co-researchers who participate in the outcome of the research (Müller, 1996).

Storying is not a linear process. It's rather a circular process, where stories are based upon the metaphor of fiction writing of Anne Lamott (van Deventer & Human, 2001: 76-96). Stories consist of a background, certain developments, a certain context and/or a climax with a transition into a new story. This process of storying reflects flexibility, interactiveness and continuity. It is not about the story in the first place, but about the person of the story (van Deventer & Human, 2001: 76-96).

In this dissertation we have listened to the stories of three divorcees providing hope and meaningfulness within the suffering of the effects of the traumatic experience of divorce. We saw how this type of trauma could be overcome by the Grace of God. We have met people who have received the gift of divorce, who discovered the courage to be and who has grown from victims to survivors to thrivers, despite the pain of divorce.

The wish of the person who was not willing to write her story, has been respected. For one of the three people involved, who didn't provide her story, the request was too painful to meet. Her contribution tells a story of the real effect of the pain and the impact of divorce on divorcees. Storying is a very painful and emotional process, exposing the 'stuckness' of a divorcee in a certain stage. The not providing of the story will serve to support the title of this script. A none story is also a story, it represents the stories of the unstoried and tells us about the pain people traveled through life.

We traveled together through life in our stories of bitterness and forgiveness, of pain and suffering, but with hope. We have shared our stories with those who dream to story their own and who wish to discover God's story with them. In the next chapter the author will be dealing with concluding remarks and a summary of the dissertation.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### CONCLUSION

#### 5.1 Introduction

In this chapter the author will make some concluding remarks, based on the theoretical background and the narrative research done through storying and/or lack of storying. As narrative researcher I deliberately choose the word 'we', because those who did their stories are not seen as objects, but as co-researchers. Co-researcher or partners are people who are part of the process of this type of research. They are valued as people and their pastoral involvement through out. "A Theology of Life Guidance mainly concerned with teaching people to obey rules, rather than to become responsible, is faulty. It is also ineffective, for it invites non conformity as soon as the protective conditions fostering conformity have changed (Hiltner, 1972: 195). Stories are not right or wrong, good or bad, as they are ways and means people used to describe and interpret their lives. The narrative researcher in this research helped the counselee to re-author and re-interpret their stories. By doing so and being able to come to story, co-researchers have managed to discover a new story, a story of hope. A story that has a better beginning than the one it started with. The telling of these stories did not deny the traumatic impact of divorce on divorcees, but has proven to be stories that deny its power of us. This courage is rooted in the God who appears, when we disappeared in the trauma of meaninglessness.

Stories are not a linear process, but a circular process. Co-researchers have been guided in a group by the telling of their stories and theoretical background about relationships and trauma in order to understand what was happening to them. The formula of Adams (A,B,D,C,E) was explained to them as a guideline in story writing and was left to them to integrate in a way they feel comfortable with. The result can be seen in storying their stories of hope.

This dissertation is now brought to a close with a short summary and some concluding remarks.

## **5.2 Did this research succeed in its aim of valuing the stories of hope about the traumatic experience of divorce and its impact on divorcees?**

Throughout the process of storying a holistic understanding of stories of co-researchers were followed. "...encounter (involvement) that takes place between different horizons of interpretation" (Stroup, 1981: 202-207). When described how stories interact, the author succeeded to show how divorcees, through interactive involvement, came to true understanding. Narrative research values understanding (Müller, 1996). True understanding can only happen through interactive involvement of people through stories. "The meaning of the Christian life is in the living of it. There is little reason to talk about understanding of stories, unless at some point we storied our own. This will enhance our understanding of those who do so" (Birch & Rasmussen, 1989:9). The author is of the opinion that by sharing his own story, and by listening to those of others, real understanding emerged in interactive involvement of divorcees through storying, which was the aim of the research.

In an attempt to better the understanding of the people of the stories of the traumatic experience of divorce and its impact on women, the author did an in dept study of literature about divorce and trauma. This theoretical background has been shortly described in chapter two and three of this script. Chapter one explained the research methodology the author has used to reach the aim of his research. Chapter four has provided the stories of hope of the divorcees, and has clearly identified the traumatic impact of the discourse on women. Story writing as well as the theory of divorce and trauma had been worked through in a group with divorcees, empowering them to understand themselves and what they went through, a little bit better. It also helped them to experience the freedom of writing their own story and to become participants in the process of telling stories of hope to others.

The glueing together of stories as well as theory and practice could be considered as an unique outcome of this research, connecting trauma and divorce. Throughout storying, development from victim, to survivor to thriver has been reflected against a specific context, namely divorced women staying in Wierda Park, a suburb of the City of Tshwane. Each story also led us to unique outcomes of the people involved, as each person and his story is unique.

The travelling together, through interactive involvement of people in their own reconstructed stories, showed us how meaningfulness was found within helpless situations, providing hope for the traumatized. Just here lies the heart of narrative research. A better start has been discovered than the one divorcee left with, to take us 'home'.

If the above arguments are compared with the aim of the research, then the author is convinced that he has succeeded in the achievement of the aim and objectives of his research.

### **5.3 The outcomes of this research as contribution to practical theology**

The outcomes are as follows :

- Each person, as his/ her story, is unique.
- Stories, as well as untold stories, represents millions of stories.
- A specific story can not act as a model of how a story should be told.
- Stories are not right or wrong as they belong to the person of the story.
- The meaninglessness of pain and suffering lies in doing it alone.
- Meaningfulness is found in the telling and sharing of stories, as it breaks the isolation of suffering alone. Evil wants to isolate.
- The cross of Christ was newly discovered as the place where hope and suffering meet. Divorcees discovered God as the One who did not send suffering, but who join us in our pain when we suffer.
- Story sharing provides meaningfulness to people's lives.
- Understanding of people is valued.

- In this sense, meaning can be found within a hopeless situation.
- The narrative approach does not force the process 'to take you home'.
- This type of research contributes to the development of people and does not allow the discourse of divorce to block the way.

#### **5.4 Proposals to practical theology on how to deal with divorce trauma**

- Students should be taught that alternative biblical perspectives exist on marriage, divorce and gender.
- Divorcees need to hear that under certain circumstances, divorce can be the will of God and even audit by Him.
- We should be on the look out to help divorcees in different ways, by offering God's Good News and hope to them according to the Gospel of Jesus.
- Divorcees have special needs but also special gifts that need to be respected and used in the church.
- We should view divorcees as partners in the Kingdom of God and not as objects to be studied or discouraged by non-biblical or cultural approaches of condemnation.
- Understanding should be valued.
- Divorcees should be helped to tell their stories in an atmosphere of understanding, listening and acceptance.
- We should allow ourselves as counsellors, to be served by divorcees as we serve them.
- Each person should be seen and treated in his/ her own unique context.

- A narrative approach should be advocated, as the medical model and traditional approaches are outsmarted the narrative, where the aim is interpretation and not analysis, and where the emphasis also shift from small detail to the whole.
- Divorce trauma should be handled in the light of the suffering of Christ on the cross, where love and pain became meaningful.
- Respect divorcees as participants.
- We should work with the 'now' in front of us, and value the stories of divorcees.
- The pastor should position him/ her self as non-expert/ expert relationally when dealing with divorce trauma. To be aware of the developing pastoral-therapeutic relationship, which includes the politics of power, is one of the greatest ethical challenges.
- The counsellor can relax about his knowledge of the problem, because he/ she will never be able to predict what a divorce relation is to his/ her own reaction to the problem would be. Every individual will have a unique relation to his/ her way of reacting to the trauma divorce experience.
- Externalization is a technique that needs to be practised and must include a relational externalization.
- Do it together.

## **5.5 Concluding Remarks**

- Hope is not possible without suffering.
- Hope motivate those who suffer to take part, by storying their traumatic experience and impact of divorce, in the fight against suffering in this world.
- To suffer with someone is to know and understand the person well.

- Storying breaks the isolation of suffering and pain.
- Suffering and comfort goes together as it binds people together through interactive involvement of their stories.
- Storying creates a new story from an old reality.
- Broken relationships create distance amongst people, which can be overcome with God's life in the death of Jesus.
- In the trauma of divorce God is experienced as absent, but God is very close in such time. His absence is a form of His presence.
- There is no general explanation for suffering the trauma of divorce, each person finds his/her own explanation to live with.
- Divorcees in this dissertation have come to grip with their own pain and that means that their wounds have been healed (scars remain).
- These stories are not recipes that necessarily work for others.
- Those who suffer the pain of divorce, long for the support, love and comfort of other human beings.
- God is the foundation to create an own individuality, to be oneself.
- Absolute security is not possible. Trauma, pain and suffering are part of life.
- By storying divorcees have made a contribution to the fulfillment of their destiny.
- Not storying is a story of 'stuckness' that from a narrative perspective can be the starting point of a new story of life.

- When alternative Biblical values on divorce are understood, that are not so condemning as those of a patriarchy society or culture, they give meaning to everyday life.
- Spirituality thickens when we commit ourselves to a life of compassionate caring.
- Stories are valuable because we value the people of the stories.
- Group work has proved to be a much more effective, also cost-effective way than individual intervention.
- Narrative counseling, unlike costly educational programmes for families, is not blocking government's and churches' way about development. It outsmarts current services which are focused on a costly medical model.
- This research contributes to development and empowering of people to voice their stories about becoming survivors of traumatic divorce.
- Storying helps to reduce the impact of the trauma of divorce.
- This research is in accordance with the Gospel of Jesus Christ as it touches and heals people who are involved.

## **5.6 Summary**

The dissertation started with chapter one about research methodology where the following were described:

- Positioning;
- The research problem;
- The research gap;
- The research question;

- The aim of the research, and the method of the research.

Narrative research is not, so to speak, about the ninety-nine sheep as it is with quantitative research. It doesn't value the number of stories, but it's about the person of the story, of so to speak the one sheep that has gone astray. In this light the one group member who didn't write her story, is respected and valued, as she represents the millions of unstored stories, telling us about the impact of the trauma of divorce, divorcees go through.

Chapter two gave a brief theoretical background about divorce as a process. It describes the forming of a relationship between two people and linked it to object relations, where various authors describe the forming and functioning of the personality. This helped to understand splits and block outs that occurred when a divorcee doesn't learn from previous experience and choosing for eg. the same kind of man in a next relationship. Once understanding what a relationship is and how it is formed, the author went on to describe the phases of divorce, the emotions and the behavior involved in each phase. He then described how divorce and trauma interact and impact on divorcees, as he worked through the various phases on several occasions with three divorcees in a group. In chapter three the author gave a brief theoretical background about trauma. Definitions, concepts, stages of trauma, the counseling process, the distinction between counseling and trauma debriefing and also the theology of suffering, were of the issues that have been covered.

In the fourth chapter the author used data collection through questionnaires, group sessions, guidelines for story writing and storying of stories to reach a holistic understanding of the traumatic experience of divorce and how it impact on women and himself. He valued the understanding of people by valuing the understanding of their stories of pain that provided hope to those who experienced life and trauma as meaningless. He also showed how stories interact, as we travel together through life in our stories of hope.

In the last chapter the dissertation reached its climax, by showing how the author successfully reached the aim of his research, which was to value stories of hope, which empower the unempowered. The script is drawn to a close with a few closing remarks of the group.

Those who go through the trauma of divorce need our interactive involvement. We need to proclaim the Good news of Jesus who touched the untouchables in various ways. We need to touch divorcees by our understanding and acceptance. We need to avoid condemnation, labeling and victimization of women and even more so, divorced women.

We should help people to break the silence about their inner struggle of pain and suffering, they as divorcees go through. We should look at divorcees as partners and not as objects, when we serve them and/or allow them to serve us. Divorcees have special needs, but also special gifts that need to be respected and used in the Kingdom of God. Each person and his story is unique and should be treated in an unique way. We should be on the look out to value understanding and to help in different ways according to the Gospel of Jesus.

There is hope for every divorcee. Through our stories we are inviting you to tell yours and dream with us about a future story that can be better than the one you started with.

The following topics have emerged from this study which could be further researched as new learnings:

- The traumatic impact before, during and after divorce on children;
- The traumatic experience of children of the new relationship, contacts and visits to the other parent, after divorce;
- The wounded men in divorce;
- The forming and meaning of an own identity after tragic divorce;
- The presence of God during trauma.

## APPENDIX A

### **Questionnaire on the traumatic experience of divorce and it's impact on you**

PERSONAL INFORMATION

1.1 NAME:

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1.2 ANONYMOUS

1.3 FAITH GROUP:

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1.4 CHURCH GROUP:

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1.5 DATE OF BIRTH:

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1.6 HIGHEST QUALIFICATION:

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1.7 OCCUPATION:

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1.8 NETTO INCOME PER MONTH:

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1.9 NUMBER OF CHILDREN:

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1.10 AGE AND GENDER OF EACH CHILD:

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1.11 SCHOOL AND GRADE OF EACH CHILD (SCHOOL CAN BE KEPT ANONYMOUS):

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1.12 CURRENT MARITAL STATUS:

- DIVORCED (STILL SINGLE)
- RE-MARRIED
- OTHER (SPECIFY):

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1.13 CURRENT RELATIONSHIP STATUS:

- HAVING RELATIONSHIP
- NOT HAVING RELATIONSHIP

1.14 CURRENT LIVING CONDITIONS

- OWN HOUSE
- RENT HOUSE
- OTHER (DESCRIBE):

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INFORMATION ON DIVORCE

2.1 WHO RECEIVED CUSTODY?

HUSBAND

WIFE

OTHER (DESCRIBE)

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2.2 DATE OF DIVORCE

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2.3 DO YOU RECEIVE MAINTENANCE?

YES

NO

2.4 AMOUNT OF MAINTENANCE PER MONTH:

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2.5 HOW DO YOU EVALUATE YOUR MAINTENANCE?

ENOUGH

NOT ENOUGH

2.6 ARE YOU AWARE OF PROCEDURES TO INCREASE YOUR MAINTENANCE?

YES

NO

2.7 ARE YOU AWARE THAT A PARENTING PLAN CAN HELP YOU IN RULING VISITS, PAYMENTS OF MAINTENANCE, AND MANAGING RELATIONSHIP OF YOUR CHILDREN TOWARDS FAMILIES AND FRIENDS?

YES   
NO

2.8 DO YOU NEED SUCH A PLAN?

YES   
NO

2.9 ANY INFORMATION OTHER THAN THE ABOVE THAT YOU WOULD LIKE TO GIVE:

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2.10 DID YOU EXPERIENCE THE COMPLETION OF CONTENT OF THE ABOVE SECTIONS ON PERSONAL DATA AND DIVORCE AS TRAUMATIC?

YES   
NO

DESCRIBE:

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3. INFORMATION ON CONTACT WITH CHILDREN

3.1 DESCRIBE YOUR AGREEMENT WITH YOUR EX-HUSBAND AS LAYED OUT BY COURT ORDER, IN TERMS OF CONTACT WITH YOUR CHILDREN:

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3.2 ARE YOU IN FAVOUR OF THIS AGREEMENT?

YES

NO

IF NOT (EXPLAIN):

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3.3 HOW DO YOU FEEL ABOUT THE SITUATION?

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3.4 HOW DOES YOUR EX-HUSBAND FEEL ABOUT THE SITUATION?

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3.5 HOW DO YOUR CHILDREN FEEL ABOUT THE SITUATION?

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3.6 WHAT IMPACT IN YOUR OPINION DOES THE SITUATION HAVE ON YOU?

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4. REACTION AND RESPONSE TO YOUR REACTIONS ON YOUR DIVORCE

4.1 WRITE YOUR STORY IN A SEPARATE FORMAT IN TERMS OF THE FOLLOWING:

- YOUR STORY (PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE – AND FUTURE IMAGINATIVE STORY)
- BACKGROUND OF YOUR STORY
- IDENTIFY DEVELOPMENT OR DESCRIBE THEM IN YOUR STORY
- HIGHLIGHTS IN YOUR STORY (DESCRIBE)
- NEW STORIES THAT FLOW FROM YOUR STORY (NEW BEGINNING)

4.2 DESCRIBE YOUR FEELINGS BEING DIVORCED:

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4.3 WHAT IMPACT DOES YOUR FEELINGS HAVE ON YOU?

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4.4 DESCRIBE HOW YOU FEEL AT THE MOMENT:

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4.5 WHAT IN YOUR OPINION WOULD MAKE IT EASY OR DIFFICULT FOR YOU TO DISCUSS YOUR STORY (EXPERIENCES) WITH?

ME:

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WITHIN A GROUP:

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4.6 YOUR TRAUMATIC EXPERIENCE MUST HAVE BEEN A SHOCK TO YOU, YET YOU HAVE MANAGED TO TAKE CERTAIN ACCOUNTABLE ACTIONS THERE AFTER. WHAT WERE THESE ACTIONS AND HOW DO YOU FEEL ABOUT THEM?

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4.7 I HAVE USED THE TERM 'TRAUMATIC' IN MY ATTEMPT TO UNDERSTAND YOUR STORY 'EXPERIENCES'. WOULD YOU SAY THAT THIS TERM DESCRIBE YOUR EXPERIENCE THE BEST? ARE THERE OTHER TERMS THAT WOULD BETTER DESCRIBE WHAT YOU HAVE EXPERIENCED?

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4.8 DO YOU KNOW OF OTHER PEOPLE WHO HAVE THE SAME KIND OF EXPERIENCE THAN YOU?

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4.9 WOULD YOU SAY THAT YOUR EXPERIENCE OF DIVORCE ARE VERY MUCH DIFFERENT FROM THEIRS?

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4.10 IN TELLING / WRITING YOUR STORY – OF WHICH OTHER STORIES IN YOUR LIFE HAVE YOU BECOME AWARE OF?

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4.11 WHAT IMPACT DO THEY HAVE ON YOU?

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4.15 WHO, IN YOUR OPINION, UNDERSTANDS YOUR STORY / 'EXPERIENCES' THE BEST AND WHY?

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4.16 DID YOUR EXPERIENCE WHILE TELLING YOUR STORY AND LISTENING TO THE STORIES OF OTHERS, CHANGE YOUR UNDERSTANDING OF YOURSELF?

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4.17 ARE THERE PEOPLE IN WHOSE COMPANY YOU FEEL EMPOWERED IN RESPECT OF UNDERSTANDING YOURSELF AND THE ACTIONS YOU HAVE TAKEN? – EXPLAIN:

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4.18 IN WHAT RESPECT HAS THIS STORY SHARING GROUP CONTRIBUTED TO YOUR UNDERSTANDING OF YOURSELF AND YOUR DIVORCE?

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4.19 DID THIS RESEARCH CREATE ANY NEW CHALLENGE FOR YOU?

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4.20 WHAT WOULD INDICATE TO YOU THAT YOU HAVE OVERCOME THE DISCOURSE OF YOUR DIVORCE?

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## APPENDIX B

### Additional Questions and/or Statements

1. We don't forgive those who left us!
2. We don't care to the one who left us!
3. We are desperate to remarry again, because we are afraid to be alone!
4. We find it hard to cope as divorcees!
5. We tend to project our failing on our children in handling them in unacceptable ways!
6. Is divorce really a 'traumatic' experience or do we need to find another term describing the situation?
7. We tend to nurture our sexual desires in unacceptable ways!
8. Is divorce really a 'traumatic' experience or do we find another term describing the situation?
9. Can divorce be meaningful?
10. People don't meet one another in relationships!
11. People are not ready to be engaged in their next relationships!
12. Divorce can be overcome!
13. We don't have answers for everything!
14. We don't value our stories to be told because we don't value ourselves!

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## Abbreviations

Dt.	=	Deuteronomy
Mt.	=	Matthew
Mk.	=	Mark
Gen.	=	Genesis
Cor.	=	Corinthians
Mal.	=	Malachi
Lk.	=	Luke