

Adolescents in Remarried Families A Pastoral-Narrative Approach

CHAPTER ONE: STIMULI FOR THE STUDY

1.1 STIMULUS ONE: MY STORY

My sons are called my wife's "stepsons" by most people in our community, but not in my family. I call them "our sons", because I am a father in a remarried family. To introduce this inquiry into adolescents in remarried families, I would like to begin by sharing my own story, because it shows you my journey toward becoming interested in studying adolescents in a remarried family. It also reveals why I have chosen the pastoral-narrative approach and qualitative methodology for this study.

1.1.1 My story

1.1.1.1 Why me? My childhood

Let me begin with my own story, which provided the impetus for this study. Thanks to my experiences as a child, I have subliminally perceived that there is a need to care for the family and for children since my early childhood. I was raised in a family where my mother, a single parent who lost her husband very early, worked very hard. I grew up in Korea, which is characterized by a male - dominated society. I suffered not only from poverty, but also from the prejudices of people who look down on children who have no father. They believe that

fatherless children lack good home support for their education with a single parent (a mother), and that such children's behaviour is problematic, both at school and in society. That was the usual mindset constructed by people in the Korean hierarchical and patriarchal society when I grew up. In this society, as in others, people with power not only shape norms, criteria, a dominant culture and knowledge, but they also force life-styles in a certain direction to a greater or lesser degree (Dallos 1997; Foucault 1975; Freedman & Combs 2002; Lukes 1974; White & Epston 1990). In this instance, those people who had power and those who did not have power were clearly manifested.

Based on the experiences of my early childhood, I came to believe that caring for the family is not only a matter for and the responsibility of individual members of a family within that family, but also a social issue that requires all of us to fight against patriarchal structures in society that restrict the lives of marginalized families, such as remarried families and single parent families.

1.1.1.2 *"Please resign from our church!": the story of my marital failure in my ministry in Korea*

After becoming an ordained church minister and ministering for several years, I started a church in Korea. Unfortunately, I lost my wife during my ministry. For that reason, I could not serve as a pastor at the church any more --in most Korean churches, if a pastor has no spouse, he or she is not eligible to serve as a senior pastor. Therefore I was under pressure from my congregation, who

tacitly directed me to resign from the church. Even though I wanted to go back to the ministry after my resignation, I have not yet tried to find another church, since I have been afraid of being rejected as a pastor owing to my marital status as “a pastor of marital failure”, a member of a “remarried family”.

Since then, I have never once questioned myself as to what mistakes I made in the church, but rather, I wondered why I had to walk out of my ministry. What were the reasons that prompted my congregation to want me to leave them? Why am I afraid of revealing my marital failure story and my remarriage story?

1.1.1.3 *“Don’t let him remarry!”: the story of my children*

When I was about to get remarried, an interesting comment summed up the situation: “Brother! Don’t let him remarry, he is being deceived and you probably will get a cruel stepmom.” That was what my niece told my son. After I remarried, my son (then 11 years old) said: “I used to be called ‘son’ but now am being called ‘stepson’, and I don’t want to hear, so I hide.”

1.1.1.4 *Being an adolescent in a remarried family*

Years later, my son, now an adolescent, had to attend an anger management programme as detention, due to his misbehaviour in his school. In the meeting, his teacher, who knew my son was in a remarried family, said that he had told her that “he is still loyal to his biological mom and feels guilty toward both his biological and step-mom”. After his schooling, he and I talked about that, but he

told me that he had never said that to the teacher. I did not know who lied. Yet, some existing traditional research on issues of the remarried family report that children in remarried families tend to show their emotional loyalty to their biological parents and feel guilty (Belovitch 1987; Carter & McGoldrick 1999; Ihinger-Tallman & Pasley 1987; Pasley & Ihinger-Tallman 1987; Prinsloo 1993; Schwebel et al. 1991). My child was not necessarily a case in point, but the teacher believed the above assumption. This is a story of an adolescent in a remarried family, and of facing prejudice. After failing in my first marriage, I have suffered not only from my inner family situation, but also from prejudice held by my community of fellow Christians, as well as by society.

1.1.1.5 Where are they? The story of what I experienced at the start of my research on the stories of South African remarried families

This story contains the reason why I changed the main protagonists of this study, shifting from the topic “stories of remarried families” to the subject “stories of adolescents in remarried families”.

Because of my earlier questions and my own marital experience, I initially decided to focus on issues that affect a remarried family for my Ph.D in practical theology as my action field. Before I started my empirical research, I was very confident that I could easily find interviewees (my co-researchers) who were remarried in South Africa. However, no sooner had I started to try to find them than I became frustrated. Here is the story. At first, I tried choosing Korean

South African Christian remarried families, but I soon became worried because some Korean pastors ministering in Korean churches in South Africa told me that they could not give me a list of remarried families. This was because they thought the members of their congregation did not want to be identified by name. Other pastors said that there were no such families in their congregations. Next, I approached the Korean embassy, but their answer was also negative.

I was still locked in disappointment, when, all of sudden, an offer for my empirical research came along by itself. One day, I had a casual chat with the principal of the Doxa Deo School. He volunteered his congregation as an action field to me, on condition that he could ask them first whether they would be prepared to participate or not. Unfortunately, his endeavour to find volunteers for my project was also unfruitful. He and I could not find even one family willing to participate. One day, I discussed this difficulty with my supervisor and he recommended that I consider other ways to listen to stories about the remarried family. Finally, I changed the main focus from the remarried family to adolescents in remarried families.

In short, my own questions, those that arose from my personal story, remained. Did I have to resign from the church? If I had to, what caused me to do so? Why did my niece (7 years old) have that particular concept of remarriage? Was that her own speculation about remarriage or an echo of an adult opinion (social discourse)? Why did my son want to hide his status? What reasons and circumstances make him think that he needed to? Are our stories able to be

fully told in that situation? Why was I unable to find interviewees from remarried families in either Korean and/or South African families, even though there are many, according to existing research and its statistics? These questions and my story have resonated in my heart for so many years that they have prompted me to study the issue of the remarried family and its children, focusing particularly on adolescents in this research.

1.1.2 The purpose of sharing my story for the study

Firstly, sharing my story helped me to develop my future stories. Müller (1999), who shares his story in many of his writings, says:

Sharing a story from my past is tantamount to being [now] an attempt to construct my future...The stories storied in our memories form the framework of our attempts to discover meaning in life. It also aids our approach to the future...Our stories give form to our lives. With such form we organise our lives and try to provide handholds which will help us step-by-step to cross the unstable rope-bridge towards our future.

In order to weave the stories of adolescents in remarried families and my future story towards more developmental and meaningful life, as Müller (1999) suggests, sharing a story is an attempt to work for the future and to be sustained by other stories, and it is critical not only for me, but also for my co-researchers in the process of this research. It is our own personal biographies that collectively came together to form a greater social awareness.

Secondly, telling my story facilitates telling and retelling. Telling my story is not only important for the sake of my future story, but also for that of my co-researchers. Telling and retelling are very beneficial aspects of this research. First of all, when stories are being told, at least one teller and one listener are in a certain relationship, identifying their selves and the making of meaning in “the moment of interaction” (Vay 2002:38; Wood 1991:4). Cattanach (1997:3) comments: “There is a very special quality to a relationship based on storytelling. There is the storyteller and the listener, and the story acts in the middle as a way to negotiate a shared meaning between the two.” The established relationship in storytelling reveals a tendency for the two to be concerned with and about each other and their community, and it is a communal and mutual act. Thus, a characteristic of this research is both the communal and the mutual attitude. In addition, in the developmental phase of this project, we will see how important telling, retelling and listening are in bringing up adolescents in a remarried family.

When one tells a story, one’s story, which is “full of gaps” (White & Epston 1990:13) and which is revealed in terms of its limits or margins (Brooks 1984:52), should be filled in order for the story to be meaningful in the teller’s life and to emancipate the teller from its bondage, if any. Through and in telling stories, the protagonists of these stories can link to the stories of others, finding shared themes, purposes and values (Cattanach 2002:218). With regard to the therapeutic experience, Roberts (1994:84) shares his experience as a therapist, that stating “when thoughtfully shared, therapists’ stories offer ways to link

therapists and clients in exploratory, collaborative relationships...many said that it was very supportive to hear stories from therapists' lives about issues that were similar to their dilemmas. Clients stated that ...they were connected by common concerns”.

In the process of the research, however, I have had to be careful not to lose my focus, and to disturb the interviewees' (the co-researchers) world by over-storying myself. I would like to share my story, but for a limited purpose and only when it is appropriate. As Roberts (1994) said, my story should be “thoughtfully shared” so that it can be “exploratory, collaborative and supportive”. Although two purposes of sharing my story were to show my empathy for others in a similar situation and to implement an in-depth interview, I had to control my own involvement so that it did not hurt the research (Rubin & Rubin 1995:13).

Lastly, I share my story to explain why I chose particular paradigms and methodologies for this research. As Müller (1999) says, “with our stories we take a position”. I have spontaneously shaped my stories throughout my experience of personal and communal events and incidents in a particular situation in Korea. My stories have always played a large role in my choices, moment by moment and event by event, about where I want to go and what I have to do.

One of results of my stories and the role they play is that I preferred following the paradigms and methodologies for this research: postmodernism, a narrative

approach, a social construction approach, Minjung Theology as a practical theology (including servant leadership), and imaginative pastoral work. They share communal and mutual values, ethics, worldviews and practices. I chose a narrative approach because, as Jones (2003:7) argues, narrative therapy is especially useful for stepfamilies and members of any stigmatized group because of its focus on client narratives and their social cultural context. The central focus is on the story and telling it, because only through stories can the meaning and significance of important life events or themes be conveyed. For stepfamily members this may include not only telling their personal stories, but also deconstructing some of the larger constraining cultural stories.

Because I studied Christian education and adult ministry, including marital problems and counselling, for my master's degree, I am supposed to know what to do when conflict arises between my son and me in my family's daily life. Yet, my "knowing" does not mean that things always work. With this story, my desire to study issues regarding the remarried family and its adolescents has been growing.

Consequently, my purpose in this research is to take these opportunities for me to listen to, and learn from adolescents and their families how they cope and resolve conflict in the family (if any), how they identify their roles in the family, and how they fill these roles and how they see for their future - oriented story within the family. As a result, therefore, my family's future story will be

abundantly sustained by other stories and, as I mentioned before, I hoped to help my co-researchers to open fully to tell their heartfelt stories and regard me as a part of their own story beads, which are like miniature bundles of secrets waiting to be revealed and of possibilities to be authored and re-authored. This work intend to renovate their old house and build their new house by implementing telling and retelling.

1.2 STIMULUS TWO: STATISTICAL URGENCY AS THE IMPETUS FOR THE STUDY

Although no one denies that many marriages (almost half of first marriages) end in tears today, marriage is still a central item on most people's wish lists (Marano 2000:2). Positive views about marriage steer divorced people into remarriage, despite the pain and disruption of their divorce. However, studies show that more than half of remarried couples are divorced again and that the sadness comes to them at a greater pace (Cornes 1993: 12; Martin & Martin 1992:47; Pasley, Dollahite & Ihinger-Tallman 1993:315; Stone 1990:39). As a result, many children receive a prefix to their name, so-called "step-".

1.2.1 Divorce in South Africa

In South Africa, for officially recorded marriages, the Central Statistics Services (Statistics South Africa, P O 307: [www. Statssa.gov.za](http://www.Statssa.gov.za)) indicates for 1999 that 26.4% of couples were divorced, and for 2000 that 23.8% of couples terminated

their married life. Also, among the officially recorded marriages for 1999 and 2000, 9.3% and 9.1% respectively were remarriage rates, which only referred to civil and religious remarriages and excluded marriages classified as “unspecified”.¹ Almost half of all divorced people get married again under the law in South Africa. In consequence, their children have to adjust their life structures completely, and have to enter into a new life which can be totally strange to them.

1.2.2 Divorce in other countries

In America, 75% of divorced individuals remarry. Unfortunately, of these, about 60% eventually terminate their remarriage, according to a 1989 survey in America, and many of them do so within two years. Studies predict that remarried families will be the most prevalent form of family in the United States by 2010 (Marano 2000:2). This phenomenon is very similar to what is found in the European Community (Cornes 1993:9-12).

1.2.3 Discussing the statistics

What these figures show is that many issues surrounding remarriage and remarried families should be discussed in society and in the church today.

Personally, before failing in my first marriage, I thought there were “some”

¹ Civil marriages refer to all marriages solemnized in courts or churches, either by a magistrate or by a designated marriage officer. Religious marriages refer to marriages that were solemnized under Christian or Jewish and Hebrew rites. It excludes customary, traditional marriages, and certain religious rites, notably Islamic marriages. In cases where the religious denomination is not known or when the church description is vague, these marriages are coded as “unspecified”.

remarriages and preached marital issues in the abstract. However, now remarriage is part of my life; it has become a lens of how I see myself and the world, and a catalyst for this research.

1.3 STIMULUS THREE: PROBLEMS WITH EXISTING RESEARCH ON THE ISSUE OF REMARRIED FAMILIES AS A REQUIRED ALTERNATIVE METHODOLOGY FOR THE STUDY

1.3.1 The problem of categorizing remarried families and their children

Thus far, a research problem has occurred in that most family research has focused on categorizing remarried families even though they are so dynamic, and are all so unique, especially in their subjective experience, that categorization is difficult. One result of categorizing is the situation in family studies today that we are “writing about ‘the families [remarried families] with no name’ or to be more accurate, the families with no widely agreed on name” (Ganong & Coleman 1994:1), which is a dilemma in a study of issues related to remarried families and their children.

In categorizing, researchers and theorists try to use some form of measurement, criteria, regulations or categories which result from fixed features of information, shallowly observed by people who cannot be objective. It is highly problematic in research on dynamic and diverse human lives to attempt to categorize their flexibility and the unpredictable events in their daily lives.

Moreover, once people or groups are categorized, they are classified as different, and the rest of their identities get lost or blurred, “out of focus” (Smith & Nylund 1997:259). Furthermore, traditional researchers usually allege that their research is relatively objective, but that is not possible. When researchers categorize families, they already have some rules and norms for what they prefer for the purposes of their research. Their notions of categorizing are caught up in meta-narratives and are manipulated by their cultural boundaries. Accordingly, it can be said that categorizing is merely a process which makes social stereotypes and is in some degree a producer of prejudice (Jones *et al.* 1984). In this regard, Müller (s.a. Families:100) warns that “we should stop applying special names to such post-divorce families”, including remarried families.

1.3.2 The problem of the point of departure

It has been argued that the “first married” family was viewed as a customary criterion in empirical research (Pasley 1987:23), and much of the research on remarried families has analysed problems in terms of that criterion, and is often based on a clinical population in treatment for problems (Kelley 1995:1). Several researchers, for example, Booth and Edwards (1992), Cherlin (1978), Duberman (1975), Furstenberg and Spanier (1984), Vemer *et al.* (1989), have simply compared remarried families and their children with first married family members using clinical words such as “satisfaction”, “stability”, “healthy or unhealthy” and “function or dysfunction”. The main paradigm they have used

was a “deficit-comparison paradigm”: the idea they held was that a remarried family and its children are somehow deficient, compared with members in a first-marriage family (Ganong & Coleman 1994:xii).

Few changes have taken place theoretically or clinically in studies on remarried families, and most have an individualistic problem-focused orientation. This approach is based on a personality theory which attributes personal problems to human behaviour which is influenced by the distant past. Müller (2004b:s.p.) points out the following theoretical problem:

The point of departure is that there are things somewhere in the past, which need to be ‘treated’, and then the individual is supposed to function optimally. Other theories, including theories of family therapy, are more inclined to emphasize the immediate and functionality. The future and the unity between future, present and past, still do not receive adequate emphasis.

According to this view, remarried families and their children and the way they function are compared to biological families, their children and functioning, and the differences are treated negatively (Kelley 1996:536). In doing so, researchers have tried to formulate or find similarities in the name of universality. Their description and mindset focuses on using words such as “healthy” or “pathological”, “functional” or “dysfunctional”, but they are not interested in detailed and dynamic stories of remarried families and their children.

1.3.3 The exclusion of children from research

Children were excluded not only by researchers in their analyses but also by therapists in the processes of their therapeutic actions in general (Smith & Nylund 1997:258, 377; Freedman, Epston & Lobovits 1997:72). Literature and research on the child issues in remarried life delete and exclude children's voices. Researchers' empirical findings include such dangerous assumptions as that the most problematic members in a remarried family are children (Ihinger-Tallman & Pasley 1987:63; Prinsloo 1993:41). They appear to think that children need to be supported in their emotional needs, directions and discipline during their transition stage (Campbell 1992; Wallerstein 1991). Children are just objects to be taught. Simons and Freedman (2002:140) point out the problem of the phenomenon that children's daily activities and events are overlooked "in an adult-centered society". However, some therapists, especially narrative therapists, poignantly undermine that view and practice, and instead, try to listen to the children's point of view (Com-Graham 1991; Dowling 1993; Freeman et al. 1997; Smith & Nylund 1997).

1.3.4 Failure to integrate therapy and research

It is predictable that traditional researchers and therapists may fail to integrate their approaches due to their different sets of methodology, goals and points of departure. According to Ganong and Coleman (1986:315), Ihinger-Tallman and Pasley (1987:138) and Pasley (1987:95-107), there has traditionally been a lack of integration between family researchers and therapists, and they have been

segregated. Researchers have usually relied on gathering data by means of questionnaires as a method. These traditional researchers (such as systematic and psychological researchers) were merely concerned about the numbers of samples, the times of doing research and the methods of observation and analysis used. The goal of these researchers was to establish generalizations and to make predictions (Lalljee 1996:93). On the other hand, for therapists, the most frequently used method was impressionistic, and the purpose of a clinical publication was typically the description of an educational or counselling programme (Ganong & Coleman 1986:316). Because of the different goals and methods they used, researchers and therapists have often failed to integrate the purposes of research and therapy cogently.

Another reason for their failure to integrate their findings derives from the tendency for researchers to overlook the live events in their context. Ganong and Coleman (1994:20) clearly note the tendency that researchers also “generally ignored the influences of events that occurred prior to remarriage”. Their approaches lack attention to meaning and place little emphasis on social context (Kelley 1996:538-539). Instead, they try to pin down, as White and Epston (1990:69) put it, “the documentation of lives” via a “normalizing gaze”. As a result, I argue, they have produced “commercialized families”. In turn, these commercialized families exclude any family which does not fit their norms and criteria.

In the case of traditional therapists, by the very nature of their pathology -

focused perspective on remarried families, and of their “deficient-comparison model”, they stick to “immedia[cy] and functionality” (Müller 2004b:s.p.). Hence, they are unable to see remarried families and the dynamic and diverse aspects of their lives as a whole. They have “produced” problematic families who need professional treatment. In consequence, they fail to capture the issues that remarried families deal with in their daily lives, instead, they theorize them as a whole.

With this awareness, this research endeavoured to listen to the stories of some remarried families and their adolescents. This listening is an integral part of this study, which aims to explore alternatives. In Kelley’s (1996:541) opinion, “exploring alternatives with the family [the remarried family] usually works better than offering specific advice”. Through listening, as I mentioned earlier in Section 1.1.2, “The purpose of sharing my story for the study”, a researcher can gain theoretical knowledge in depth and the persons being researched can receive therapeutic outcomes by telling their own stories. Thus, this endeavour enabled me and the adolescents from remarried families who entered into the research process with me to attempt to integrate theoretical and therapeutic outcomes on the issue of remarried family members.

1.3.5 Indifference of pastoral care

Remarried families are not biblically, historically, socially or demographically strange. Although remarriage is one of the great controversial issues in biblical discourse, as understood by the Bible, remarriage is a union of God’s children,

an option and a matter of choice for a family life, and the members of the church involved in a particular situation (Cornes 1993; Keener 1991). Ellisen (1977: 71) argues that Genesis 2:18 (“It is not good for the man to be alone”) cannot imply a rule that is not applicable to divorced people or excludes them. The Bible allows remarriage for the purpose of fulfilling personal and family needs of a physical, psychological and social nature.

Remarriage itself is not a sin and was even required at times under the Mosaic Law which was not declared by Jesus (Mt. 5:32). Also, throughout the Old Testament, whenever divorce occurred, the right of remarriage was presupposed, Bontrager (1978:33) interprets Deuteronomy 24 as affirming that, when a couple’s marriage ceases, they are free to remarry, but that does not mean that divorce is encouraged by Mosaic Law. It gives a form of permission rather than prescription (Atkinson 1981:102). The motive for consent to remarriage under the Mosaic Law is to preserve God’s grace and forgiveness, and to secure protection for divorced women, who were socially and economically defenseless (Atkinson 1981:107).

In spite of the affirmation of the biblical concept of remarriage, many believers still hold negative views about remarried families. Also, a theological framework of pastoral care for remarried families and their childrearing is hard to find. I assume, due to my personal and ministry experience, that, just like other types of family, Christian remarried families not only need the emotional and welcoming support of the community of the Christian faith, but are also eager to

hear biblical messages sustaining their family life and their children.

1.4 THE PIVOTAL TERMS IN THE RESEARCH: ADOLESCENCE, REMARRIED FAMILY

The terms “the remarried family” and “adolescence” are defined by various theories and therapists in their writings. I introduce their terms here, but my interviewees (my co-researchers) and I reserved the freedom to rework these terms in our own language if necessary.

1.4.1 Remarried families

Most family theorists and practitioners refer to a remarried family as a two-parent unit that arises from the legal marriage of divorced or widowed people. In this study, following the formulation by Visher and Visher (1988:2), I delimit a remarried family as “a household in which there is an adult couple, at least one of whom has a child from a previous relationship”. This definition is therefore not restricted to the notion of a legal marriage.

1.4.2 Adolescence

In terms of one dictionary definition, “adolescence” is the process or period of growth between childhood and maturity (*Webster’s New Explorer Dictionary*). “Adolescent” is used to describe young people who are no longer children but who have not yet become adults. It also refers to their behaviour (*Collins*

Cobuild).

In the academic field, Carter and McGoldrick (1999:42), psychologists and systemic family therapists, regard adolescence as that stage of the human life cycle that ranges from about the age of 13 to 21. The characteristic of adolescence is that

during this phase, young people go through major bodily, emotional, sexual, and spiritual changes: evolve their sexual and gender identities; learn to relate to intimate partners; and develop the ability to function increasingly independently. They renegotiate their identity with their parents as they mature; refine their physical, social, and moral identity; and begin to define who they want to become as adults.

By contrast, a social constructionist, Madigan (1996:50), views adolescence as a social construction as opposed to a developmental truth. Using a postmodern lens, he sees adolescents' identity and the stage of adolescence as culturally manufactured.

1.5 CHAPTER SUMMARY

Although within my family, we have built an intimate and supportive relationship with one another, and have lived in love, I have purposely shared only my stories of stigmatization in this chapter. The reason is, firstly, that sharing my story enclosed by meta-narratives illustrates how ethics should be conducted in

the process of this research and who the subject of this research is. Second, my stories led me to consult mainly with my chosen paradigms and methodologies for this study, which suit me well. Bearing this in mind, I expound my paradigms and mythologies in the next chapter. In the process of telling my story, I could experience both the “painful process and freeing process” at the same time. When Müller (2004b:s.p.) shares his story in his article, he tells of his experience in the process that I experienced: “...my own progress from ‘storytelling’ to ‘story making’. By telling the story...I was enabled to tell a new story ... towards a better future.”

1.6 OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY

The following outline explains how this research is set out.

Chapter Two deals with the research paradigm and methodology. I believe, because of my own marital experience, that the paradigms and methodologies I have chosen are the best for this research. The reason is that new approaches need to be applied to research on issues regarding remarried families. The approaches I chose are postmodernism, social constructionism, a narrative paradigm, practical theology as a doing theology, Minjung Theology and qualitative conversational research.

In **Chapter Three**, two narrators are presented as the protagonists of stories (my co-researchers), running through some of the difficulties and triumphs of being in a remarried family. I also tell of my research journey, the agenda of the

interviews and how I met the co - researchers. With a view to preserving the voices of my co-researchers, I made transcripts, thematically divided.

In **Chapter Four** a background on remarried families is presented. This chapter introduces “other’s voices surrounding those of the co-researchers”. In this chapter, many aspects, discourses and findings of existing research on remarried families are summarized. Also, as an interaction phase, deconstructive aspects concerning the above views were formulated.

In **Chapter Five**, firstly, I re-account for the various issues of the remarried families discussed in, previous chapters. To do this, the researched and the researcher tried to integrate their experiences with other perspectives, so as to present our developmental perspective. Secondly, the result of the evaluation from all the participants in this research, critical self-reflection and my own research experience are summed up.