Working with the Impasse in Couple Relationships while working towards World Peace

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Abstract

An ‘impasse’ is a common human experience. The usual and accompanying feeling of being stuck is experienced by people in a variety of contexts. This thesis comprises personal reflections and is a professional person’s exploration of ‘impasse’ emerging from the writer’s experience of working with people in a therapeutic context. The beguiling and compulsive nature of impasses is attributed to a mix of mistrust, distorted perceptions, defensiveness against vulnerability and incongruence all of which are described as reactions by the protagonists as they seek to assuage the anxiety of disconnection or the threat of disconnection from the attachment figure. Models from Transactional Analysis are used to provide an analysis of levels of impasse and to describe the dynamics generated by ‘interlocking’ actions and reactions of the people involved. These models are also applied to the inter-community relationship on Cyprus. Some suggestions are made as to how someone with a counselling perspective may ‘add value’ to the work of non-governmental facilitators in a peace-making process.
Contents

Abstract .............................................................................................................................................. 2
Preface .................................................................................................................................................. 5
Chapter 1: Getting going ..................................................................................................................... 9
  Reflection: Learning to be like Max... .............................................................................................. 9
  The `what’ ......................................................................................................................................... 10
  The `how’ .......................................................................................................................................... 11
  Reflection: Contracting .................................................................................................................. 12
  How my interest developed: the recent past... .............................................................................. 18
  ...and the not so recent past. .......................................................................................................... 20
  A counsellor’s view ......................................................................................................................... 22
  Reflection: Hello Eric! .................................................................................................................... 26
Chapter 2: Impasse ............................................................................................................................. 28
  Trust, trusting................................................................................................................................... 28
  ...and trustworthiness ................................................................................................................ 34
  Reflection: It was really all about mistrust... and betrayal...and incongruence! .... 37
  Identifying an impasse ................................................................................................................... 41
    Reflection: Facing up to the impasse ......................................................................................... 49
Chapter 3: Impasse is also relational................................................................................................ 56
  Interlocking interactions ............................................................................................................... 59
  A model of interpersonal impasse ............................................................................................... 62
  Reflection: An impasse in a relationship ...................................................................................... 65
  An analysis of a relational impasse ............................................................................................. 71
  The flavour of impasse: mistrust, incongruence... .................................................................. 72
...vulnerability and distorted perception...............................................................79
Impasse in a nutshell............................................................................................85
Chapter 4: Impasse and Cyprus..........................................................................87
Reflection... From counselling room to Cyprus..................................................87
The Cyprus impasse.............................................................................................94
  History................................................................................................................94
  *The current situation*.........................................................................................101
  *Legacies of hostilities* ....................................................................................105
  *Mutual mistrust* ..............................................................................................106
  *Identity, distorted perception and social distance* .........................................108
Reflection....`Hitting the pipe’............................................................................113
Levels of impasse applied to Cyprus..................................................................114
  *First layer of impasse* ....................................................................................115
  *Second layer of impasse* ..............................................................................116
  *Third layer of impasse* ................................................................................120
Chapter five: Expanding the analysis...............................................................122
  Four key questions ..........................................................................................122
  Other information for making an assessment....................................................124
  Adding further value .......................................................................................129
Chapter 6: The journey is over.........................................................................133
  Reflection: Tail piece .......................................................................................133
Bibliography..........................................................................................................141
Preface

I have entitled this thesis, “Working with the Impasse in Couple Relationships while working towards World Peace”. This is a provocative and grandiose title. When I have repeated it to people who have asked me about my title, they have often times responded with shock and surprise. Often the conversation stops at that point. I hear an enormous silence whether it is there or it arises out of my anxiety, I do not know. I imagine it is a lot for other people to absorb. It links two human experiences; one is ordinary and yet personal the other is fantastic and outside the comprehension of most people. I am not sure however which bit of the title is the most stunning. Sometimes I think it is the notion of world peace which is beyond imagination for most people. Immediately the person is thrown into the realm either of world politics or of guru type mystical thinking and acting. For most people, the notion of world peace is no more than that, a notion. They have no idea how to address the issue and mostly they feel helpless and powerless in face of the unachievable. On the other hand, I sometimes think it is the notion of impasse in couple relationships which is shocking. I imagine people being immediately thrown into a quandary about the intimacy of their own relationships fearing that I might want to pry into what is private and best kept behind shut doors. There are probably lots of different reactions most of which I do not know about. Whatever, others think about the title, I came upon it early in my preparation and I have been disinclined to change it. It does after all link the two arenas in which I have an interest and which have occupied my mind for some while.

I want to thank Professor Kevin Clements, head of the National Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies at Otago University. Kevin’s unfaltering enthusiasm
has been reassuring and affirming. He has allowed and encouraged me to get on with developing my interest as if my interest made complete and utter sense, even when sometimes it did not make so much sense to me. Kevin has a broad vision about what constitutes peace-making and has been able to see the bit I was focussing on even when I had my own doubts. He enabled me to appreciate that peace-making is more than a fantasy and that it is important to make overt the largely subjugated discourse which includes harmony and non-violence as we seek to bring about a more peaceful world. I don’t know half of his experience but I value the little I do know. I think I have been lucky to have him supervise me and through him to find links to the wider world of peace-making and peace-makers. He has been most encouraging for me to do it my way, rather than be formulaic. I appreciate this.

There are other people who have helped me prepare this thesis. There are many who have expressed interest and who have asked me to forward a copy when I have finished it. Their interest has been encouraging. There have been numerous participants in workshops I have run on topics related to my thesis. Most of these people have been counselling colleagues and they have been encouraging with their enthusiasm. Early on, especially when my interest was on ‘trust’ I met a couple of times with a small group of colleagues who encouraged and challenged me. Others from the local Quaker meeting were also similarly helpful. I have especially enjoyed the unconditional regard I felt from Jan Marsh with whom I occasionally drank coffee while discussing my work. Jan was encouraging in her matter of fact kind of way. I have learned a lot from Anne Tucker with whom I have had numerous meetings as we have sought to put together an experiential workshop entitled ‘Trust and Vulnerability’. Anne’s enthusiasm for the notion of vulnerability helped me
bring it into my own thinking. Annie Rogers, my clinical supervisor has helped me clarify my thinking about impasses in couple relationships. I have appreciated the way she has embraced the thoughts and perceptions I shared with her and we have been able to make sense of them in a way that has been helpful for my thesis work and for my practice. I am a much better practitioner because of my work with her. Finally, I want to thank Claire, my wife and colleague of long-standing. She has borne the brunt of my pre-occupation over the past two years. I know I have not been ‘present’ for some of that time. She has been encouraging, affirming and has been a good sounding board on some of the ideas I have tussled with. She has read and commented on tracts of my writing. She is my best friend and I hope our friendship is enhanced by what I have done. I think I know more about relationships, about the world in general and I know more about me as a consequence.

Jim Batson, Nelson, New Zealand, October 2014
“The night Max wore his wolf suit and made mischief of one kind and another his mother called him “WILD THING!” and Max said “I’LL EAT YOU UP!” so he was sent to bed without eating anything. That very night in Max’s room a forest grew and grew and grew until his ceiling hung with vines and the walls became the world all around and an ocean tumbled by with a private boat for Max and he sailed off through night and day and in and out of weeks and almost over a year to where the wild things are.” (Sendak, 1963)
Chapter 1: Getting going

Reflection: Learning to be like Max...

When I was the parent of young children I often read Maurice Sendak’s “Where the Wild Things Are!” I pretended it was the children’s favourite but really it was mine. It is a tale of adventure with strange places and awful looking monsters who in spite of their looks are likeable, cuddly and real softies. They look as if they should be fearsome but instead they are quite loveable. Max, the story’s hero; is lively and rambunctious. In life as in his dreams he is ‘spunky’, self-contained and authoritative. He calls the shots and he can bring about control by his mere presence and a stare. He doesn’t appear frightened or if he is he manages to hide it. He remains self-assured even when faced with chaos in the world about him.

Like Max’s first face to face contact with the wild things, I am facing what feels like chaos. I confess to feeling a bit desperate. I am writing this in early June 2014. I have decided to write as if there is no tomorrow. I am writing as if there is only today and only yesterday. I have decided to pay attention to what ‘is’ and what ‘was’ and ignore what ‘will be’ or ‘might be’. This is the only way I can get started! I’ll take a leaf out of Max’s book who when faced with strange creatures who “...roared their terrible roars and gnashed their terrible teeth and rolled their terrible eyes and showed their terrible claws...” had the presence of mind to yell, “Be still!” I need some stillness. It will be helpful for me to put my exploration on hold and to be satisfied with what I have done to date. This is hard to do. I am used to the fluidity of a growing understanding when one idea leads to another. I am used to uncertainty knowing that what I
see and what I hear may not be what I think I am seeing and hearing. I am used to being shocked when what I thought was happening is not what is happening. I am used to changing the pictures I have constructed of other’s experiences, entering their world as far as my own wisdom, sensitivity and intuition allow. I am used to being in the ‘here and now’ trying to see things as they are, noticing the small and the infinitesimal, a shift of the eyes, a movement of the head, a change in the colour of the skin. I have learned not to take things for granted and I have learned that one thing leads to another; my impression forever changing. But all of this, in the short term, is not helpful to me if I am to complete this project. I have to say to myself, like Max said to the wild things, “Be still,” and then do my best to report at least what I think I know. For a while, anyway I want to behave as if I have certainty. I want to set some limits around what I see and around what I know. For a while I want to work as if what I see and know has a shape and a substance that I can hold on to. If I can do this, I hope I can enjoy myself.

**The ‘what’**

This thesis is about impasse and it is also includes a case study. Firstly, I want to describe an impasse as an intrapsychic and as an interpersonal phenomenon. I will describe some of the symptoms or manifestations by which it is possible to identify an impasse in these two contexts. I will also identify and describe some characteristics of impasses which make them both compelling and compulsive. In my experience of impasses they are difficult to resist and people are drawn into them as if they have no control over what they are doing. Impasses comprise distorted perceptions, mistrust, incongruity
and fear of vulnerability. Secondly, I will use a case study to illustrate how my description of impasse as I see it with couples may be applied to inter-group or inter-community relationships. The question I address is: “Is it helpful to apply the concept of `impasse’ as described and applied to enduring adult relationships (couples) to an understanding of impasse in other relationships, such as inter-group or inter-community relationships?”

The `how’

I will describe an impasse and its constituent parts as I observe and understand it from my work with clients in my counselling practice. I will identify resources that have informed my view and my practice. I will construct an analytical model for identifying the nature and composition of an impasse and apply this model to the impasse which exists on Cyprus. I will illustrate my descriptions with personal reflections in the form of autoethnographic vignettes. I link my process with the content of the thesis. I have experienced the writing of this thesis as an attempt to move beyond a personal impasse. My reflective writing is designed to describe my own experience. There is a parallel between my own experiences as I have worked to complete the task and the matters about which I write. I have been conscious of linking the intrapsychic with the interpersonal and inter-communal. While there may not be an identical parallel between impasses in these different contexts I take the view that there is a large measure of similarity because an impasse in any context is in some measure an intrapsychic and an interpersonal phenomenon. I have also taken the position that there is what I am calling a `counsellor’s’ perspective and that this perspective is helpful in context other than the work that goes on in the
counselling room. Hence at the end of this thesis I have included comments about how counselling might add-value to the work of experienced peace-makers.

Finally, although much of this thesis focuses on my clinical practice, I am not presenting the material as I might present a ‘case’ study. Rather I present it as a possible helpful perspective for peace-makers. I believe that counselling in as much as it focuses on the intrapsychic process and on the nature of couple dynamics can offer something unique about the way that humankind function, especially, as in this case, in an impasse.

**Reflection: Contracting**

*What am I going to do? I know that having a clear intention will be helpful for me. I also think it will be helpful for anyone reading what I write. I have tried to write within a formal framework of ‘goals, aims and objectives’ but I have struggled to produce a worthwhile statement. I get lost in the meaning of the three words. While collectively their meaning is clear, I have a struggle differentiating their meaning one from the other. More than once, I have checked their definition in my dictionary. For a short while after each reading I can hold their meanings and their differences in my mind. Then seemingly and inevitably they all go, like a wet balloon slipping through my hands. I am left with an amorphous mental clump of impressions and I am none the wiser. It is not that I think ‘goals, aims and objectives’ are unimportant; they are important. I know it is important to look ahead and to anticipate where I want to go and what I want to achieve. It is important to state what I want to create*
before stepping out on its creation. I know this from other areas of my life. Planning helps! It gives me direction and it helps me to become engaged in the process. It is one way I build excitement about what I am going to do. When others are involved it is one way I build my relationship with them.

In my professional work I am frequently interested in `direction’. I am constantly asking myself questions like; “Where does this client, these clients say they want to go with this?”; “Is this conversation going where the client says they want to go?”; “What do I think the client, clients, ought to develop?” “What do these clients want from me?” Often, I worry I did not follow-up in the direction the client may have been taking. I worry that I might have missed something the client was trying to tell me. I worry that I failed to read between the client’s lines. My attention is formed by the client’s contract. It gives our work direction. It is a statement which describes an outcome. It sets out what is to be achieved. In counselling the contract is mutually understood; (that is, mutually understood by the client and the counsellor), and is a series of expectations and goals about what is to be achieved in the treatment. Goulding and Goulding (Goulding & Goulding, 1979, p 50) describe the contract as setting the focus for treatment. It describes the client’s designated goals and the changes in thoughts, feelings and actions that will accompany the achievement of the goal or goals. The contract is a statement of the client’s intent with the therapist as a witness to that intention. The client’s intention has primacy and the therapist’s role is an adjunct to this. Contracts, according to Stewart and Joines (Stewart and Joines, 1987, pp 263 – 265), should be phrased in positive words; be achievable; with outcomes that are specific and observable. Contracts should be made from Adult (ego-state); that is, be relevant to the here and now and appropriate to the world, with Free Child
(ego-state) cooperation; that is, a contract is an expression of authentic needs and wants. Stewart and Joines also state that a contract should acknowledge cost and involve a commitment to action. It is to be expressed in clear and concise language that a “...10 year old child can understand”. From my experience, work is sharper and more focussed when the contract is clear and understood by all parties. When the work is difficult and lacking in direction it may indicate that the contract is not clear and may be misunderstood.

Contracts generate vitality and invite an engagement right from the start. I recall in my early days and in my enthusiasm, beginning all professional conversations with questions like; “What do you want from this session?” or “What outcome do you want?” or more provocatively, “What do you want to change?” In my enthusiasm, I instituted a tyranny of contracting; all conversations had to have a purpose and that purpose had to be explicit. I now shudder to think about the number of people who must have felt bullied by me and who probably gave me what I wanted even if they did not really engage with me or the process in so doing. For a while I was blinded by what I wanted and by what I thought others wanted even if they were unable to articulate it. Thankfully and gradually, it dawned on me that contracting was a sophisticated process and that it involved some pre-conditions which in my enthusiasm I could not see. I noticed that the bold questions designed to elicit a contract sometimes fell on deaf ears and sometimes, at worst, turned people off. I imagined some people felt intimidated and consequently disengaged from me and from the process. I spent hours trying to reconcile what was modelled to me by my trainers and what I observed in my own work. I was rescued by the words of a wise women at a workshop, when she stated, “Contracting can take from two minutes to two years.” In one swoop she lifted a weight from my
shoulders. I realized that the growing tension I was feeling about contracting was realistic and that what I was trying to achieve was, in fact, unrealistic in some cases. It was one thing to contract with those in the know, other trainees and counsellors, and it was another to try contracting with ‘ordinary people’. The latter required much more careful preparation. Contracting is developmentally a sophisticated process. I realized I needed to spend more time building-up the relationship beforehand (Hewitt, 1995.) The wise woman’s words gave me permission to revise my thinking about contracting. Gradually, my ideas crystallized: (1) there are some people who do not know that they can change the way they think, feel and act; (2) in order to seek change a person has to feel an entitlement to do so; and finally, (3) within everyone there is both a desire to change and a fear of the consequences of changing and that this dilemma will emerge with time. The impact of numbers (1) and (2) meant that I stopped taking for granted that people could anticipate change and that they could articulate what they knew they wanted. Number (3) meant that I saw more clearly the ambivalence people have about embarking on a process of change. People are often in a dilemma and just as often they are not able to articulate the dilemma with which they tussle. I learned to wait; to wait, to listen and to watch until they could reveal their dilemma to me.

A contract is a declaration of a desire to move towards autonomy, self-determination and towards becoming fully-functioning (Thorne, 1992). A contract is self-promoting and puts self ahead of others. It is about enhancing self-respect and generating a clearer and more secure sense of self. It is aimed at creating equality in relationships where currently inequality exists. It forms the basis of cooperation in place of damaging self-interest. It underpins an ‘I’m OK, You’re OK’ relationship within which the work will be done. These are all
noble and well-intentioned characteristics. They all indicate that when achieved a contract leaves a person feeling enhanced and self-fulfilled rather than diminished. For some people there is a challenge in this. As I sit to write, there is certainly a challenge for me. How can I write something that is both satisfying to me and that also meets the requirements for a master’s degree thesis? How can I make this thesis an ‘I’m OK, You’re OK’ experience? That is, ‘Ok’ for me and ‘Ok’ for those who will mark and assess it. This is not an easy process. In its composition I have had to create a reality out of what was a fantasy. The `doing’ is more challenging than my dream. In my dream I sat and wrote a few carefully chosen words and the thesis was completed. On reflection I now know what I had to say was vague and yet the ideas and concepts stirred my interest and curiosity. For me the reality has been far more testing. Vague ideas have had to become specific and their relationship coherent. The words and sentences should reflect that specificity and that coherence. Whether I am successful remains to be seen. It is a cooperative activity. It is a cooperative enterprise involving contributions from both the Adult ego-state and the Free Child ego-state (Stewart and Joines, 1987). It is a considered expression of the person’s authentic needs and wants and is `appropriate’ to the world within which the person operates. It is relevant to their age and stage of development. A clear Adult with Free Child contract is expressed in language like; “I want to...”; “I will...” followed by a list of the qualities, attributes and behaviour that is being developed and expressed in a straightforward grammatical form. Making a contract like this requires clarity of purpose and courage. It is devoid of ambivalence and uncertainty about what is to be achieved. It is an unequivocal statement about a desired end or goal even though the person may experience ambivalence and uncertainty on their way to attaining it.
Over the years I have learned to be attentive to the language of contracting. It may indicate ambivalence and the nature of an impasse. I listen for what appears to be unattainable. Sometimes I feel like I am trying to catch out the other person. I listen for their use of fuzzy language and I look for manifestations of their discounts (Schiff et al., 1975). Sometimes, the conversation feels unequal; I am on familiar territory and they are not. I can hear their inconsistencies and their incongruence. Sometimes, I point them out and I know that for some there is relief as they feel seen and heard with their lack of clarity. Sometimes, I note them in my mind as I build up what I hope is a complete picture of the development they seek. Over time, I know I have become kinder and gentler with people at moments like these. I can more easily recognise their vulnerability and I am careful not to humiliate them with my seemingly corrective responses. Clients at this stage are at their most courageous and inevitably they are tentative. They are giving words to the dreams they have for themselves and they are describing what it is they want to fill the gap they have lived with for a long while. However, I want to check if what they say they want to achieve is what they really want to achieve. I want to know what I am committing myself to supporting. I want to commit to working with someone who is committing themselves to positive development. When I know a person’s contract I can actively support them in its achievement. Discussing their contract is one way I can fully engage with them. When it comes to working with people (protagonists) caught in an impasse contracts help indicate a way forward. They can indicate at the start what each person is willing to do in order to move out of the impasse. They may quickly indicate differences in motivation between the protagonists and may highlight limitations imposed by distorted perceptions and blaming. Contracts can cover a wide range of circumstances affecting the process and new contracts may
need to be identified and negotiated as time goes by and as new circumstances become apparent. Contracts can focus on what is to be achieved and how it will be achieved. An effective contract can anticipate difficulties. For example, as I will describe later an impasse always involves incongruence. Incongruence is both a symptom of an impasse as well as contributing to its compulsive nature. The impasse may be detected in the incongruent transaction of the person as they describe their contract. To let the incongruence pass without it being addressed will likely lead to it being displayed and manifested in future interactions and hence stall progress and maintain the impasse.

**How my interest developed: the recent past...**

This thesis is as much a personal reflection as it is an academic report. In it, I describe my experience as much as I try to describe and define ideas that have application in a variety of settings. This document is my attempt to link together my understanding of what happens in intimate relationships with what happens in other relationships. It is a record of my beginner’s steps to ‘move out of the counselling room’. After 25 years now is the time to move on. I am moving my attention to an area that has a wider horizon. I want to apply what I have learned in my therapeutic work to understanding and resolving conflict and peace-making in other contexts. In so doing I can claim, ‘job done’; this is after all what I set out to do. My belief has been that conflict and its resolution is essentially a personal and a relational affair. It seemed important thirty odd years ago for me to find out more about the human propensity to act out violently when faced by others who are different and who have different values about something mutually cherished. This is what I have done.
Although I managed to build a third or was it a fourth career out of my curiosity, if the truth is known, counselling has never been my main interest. It has been a detour from the real focus of my attention. My main interest has been how to foster and create a world in which differences between people are dealt with in non-violent ways. I decided to become a counsellor as a practical alternative to being a not so confident and competent peace-activist and in the hope that the one would inform the other. It has been challenging, though trying to link the two. Immersed in the intricacies of the human psyche and immersed in the subtleties of interpersonal dynamics, I have at times wondered how they are linked to the political peace-making I have read and heard about. Finding a solution to the various intractable conflicts around the globe has seemed far away, literally and cognitively, from the disputes I was witnessing between the couples I was meeting in my counselling room. The former seem so much more intricate and complex and of such a different nature than the encounters I was used to observing and in which I became involved. But I retained my perspective and along the way found some inspiration from others who had gone before and pursued a similar path. There was Adam Curle (Curle, 1971, 1972, 1981, 1986, 1990, 1994), Carl Rogers (Rogers, 1989) and Scott Peck (Peck, 1987) and more recently, from the Transactional Analysis community Leonard Campos (Campos, 2010, 2012, 2014). All took their learning from psychotherapy and applied it elsewhere. Knowing of their interest I found validation of my own. In hindsight, though, I found most inspiration from Jacob Moreno, the creator of psychodrama and sociodrama. He wrote; “A truly therapeutic procedure cannot have less an objective than the whole of mankind.” (Moreno, 1953/1993, p 3). This simple statement confirmed my dream and motivated me in my purpose. He let me know that there was nothing fallacious in the track I was on. He helped me to
I appreciate the connection between the personal and the wider world! I also started to attend meetings of the Quakers. The Quakers give me a solid history and framework for my interest in peace-making.

...and the not so recent past.

Thirty years ago, in the 1980’s I found ways of promoting peacefulness. I had a vision of a world in which there was no war and in which people could manage their differences in non-violent ways. I had long held views that were supportive of non-violence and I had in my personal and professional life sought to deal with difficulties and conflict in a mutually respectful manner. Over the years I had been involved in activities against the proliferation of nuclear weapons and I had been an active member in the Committee for Vietnam which was an informal voice in opposition to the New Zealand government’s military support of the United States in Vietnam. I upheld non-violence in my close relationships, though as I came to learn, I had other ways to express my aggression. I did not smack my children and tried to find ways of building on what they did rather than detract from their efforts. In spite of their frustrations I sought to talk things through and to find `I’m OK; You’re OK’ outcomes to the various disputes that inevitably erupted. As a teacher I was equally committed to non-violence with the children in my care. I was opposed to corporal punishment when it was still accepted for teachers to use a strap to punish and to control pupils. I was active in leading a group that persuaded the Gisborne City Council to make the city nuclear free. I set-up and ran a support and counselling service for men who were violent with their partners and families. I also facilitated activities as part of the United Nations Year of Peace.
covering Gisborne and the East Cape region. I also wrote a series of articles for 
the local newspaper about non-violent living.

It was in the midst of this activity that I decided to become a counsellor. It 
seemed a logical thing to do and allowed me to shift my focus from the 
political and general to the interpersonal and specific. Working with individuals 
gave my `peace-work’ a new purpose as I sought to find more immediate 
reward for my effort. I also felt more comfortable in the relative immediacy of 
interpersonal relationships compared with the discomfort I felt in the public 
and political arena. In the latter, I felt like I was thrashing about without 
direction moving opportunistically from one small project to the next. I started 
counselling, with hardly any training, working with men who were referred to 
me with violence as their presenting issue. The local need of such a service was 
great and I was soon busy in my small practice using micro-counselling skills I 
had informally learned along the way. I received referrals from a variety of 
sources, including the then Social Welfare Department and the Police. I started 
to learn more about conflict and interpersonal violence. I also gained better 
understanding of the personal and professional attributes required of 
someone doing the kind of work I was now doing. I developed some 
therapeutic interventions that I thought were useful for working with men who 
dealt with their anxieties in a violent and controlling way. I sometimes felt 
frightened, hopeless and helpless as I got to know about male violence as near 
as I could from the inside. I became aware of my own manipulative behaviour 
and I gradually learned to hold my nerve when the anger of others was 
directed at me. I developed a deeper understanding of the ‘why’ and ‘how’ of 
human functioning. I learned how to be with others, individuals, couples and
groups while they sought to develop more intimacy and harmony in their lives and with others including me.

*A counsellor’s view* ...

Inevitably, I suppose, I have formed what I think of as a counsellor’s view of what influences and motivates humankind. One way of getting to know others is to look out to the world through their eyes, as far as that is possible. In pursuit of this, I have learned to suspend my own perceptions and ways of making sense of things. I can better accept that people make sense of their experience in their own unique and idiosyncratic way. I try to get onto the same wavelength; I try to put myself into their skin and to know what it feels like to be them. After much practice I know I can only get to an approximation of them. I am often surprised when clients indicate they feel heard or seen by me because of what I have said to them. It is easy to think that somehow what I have said is sufficiently general for them to see themselves in my words. Sometimes, in my more generous moments I imagine that indeed I do know what it feels like to be them. It is this capacity to get up close and personal that I think may be helpful to peace-makers in a setting other than in a counselling room. It is this capacity that may be especially helpful to peace-makers. This is the focal point about which my personal interest has hinged. The questions about which I seek clarity are: (1) Is what I see in couple relationships the same as what appears in relationships between groups, nations and communities? (2) Is what happens inside an individual as they seek to find more harmony in their close relationship the same experience that a member of a community has as they seek to find greater harmony in their relationship with members of another community and about whom they have felt animosity. This is a
challenging comparison. There are so many variables. Is what I see happening here the same as what I think happens there? This is an even more challenging comparison when `here’ represents something familiar while `there’ represents the unfamiliar. I work with individuals and couples but I do not work with communities and nations. My comparisons must therefore be tentative!

The reality for me of making what feels like tentative comparisons is that I already feel tentative without having to make the comparison. I am tentative about what I know and about what I observe in my work. Do I see what I think I see? Do I see it because I think I see it? These are difficult questions to answer and yet they sum up something of the nature of counselling. I am trying to create certainty where none exists. How do I know what is really happening for this person and for this couple. Do I see what really exists or do I see what exists because I think it is there. The problem is I still feel like I am a learner. There are many perspectives I do not yet have; there is so much information that is beyond my understanding. Some of what I know is based on scientific research and evidence and some other is based upon my understanding of metaphors others have used as they have tried to articulate their own observations. Some of it and this is the bit I find most exciting, is based on my observations from doing something over and over; from sitting with couples and in groups for many hours; watching and listening. What I value about the counsellor’s perspective, about my perspective, is that it is so `up close and personal’. I try to make sense of what is happening before my very eyes. I even try to make sense of what I do not see or hear; I am interested in the conscious and overt as well as the unconscious and covert. I use my intellect and I use my intuition; both are valuable in this process. My knowledge of myself is as
important as my knowledge of the other or others. Although not universally accepted among the counsellor community the personal development of the therapist is as important as the personal development sought by the client. As a counsellor, I can better know and understand my client(s) as my understanding of myself expands. While individual practitioners in the ‘talking therapies’ may differ in the specifics of their explanations they can claim and maintain a general orientation towards explaining human functioning including social, cognitive and emotional development. At least I do! I have my own explanations, of course. They condition my work and they condition the way I think about peace-making. I guess this is or was true also for Adam Curle, Carl Rogers, Scott Peck and Leonard Campo mentioned above. It is not possible to articulate the details of my theoretical model in the space I have available here, but I can outline some of the more significant factors which influence what I think and how I function in regard to my clients. It is these factors which after all, influence my thinking about moving out of an impasse and moving towards creating more harmony.

- People operate in the world and in their relationships with their own unique blend of conscious and unconscious awareness. It is possible in most cases to bring the unconscious material into the conscious. This is best done in an atmosphere of acceptance and empathy.

- People’s present behaviour, attitudes and responses are likely to be conditioned by responses they learned early in life. A person’s current set of behaviours, feelings and thoughts; their beliefs about themselves and about others and about the world in general form a cohesive whole even though the whole may not be known to the person.
• A sense of self while subjective is formed in a relationship.

• People can change their perceptions and experiences of self. To do this may mean admitting to and facing shameful beliefs and reactions. People make personal changes when they are ready to do so and at a pace that suits them.

• People seek to optimise their sense of self both consciously and unconsciously.

• People are thwarted in their self development because they are influenced by historical and introjected restrictive prohibitions.

• Most people seek reassurance and an enhanced sense of self through their relationship with others.

• Trust is developed in relationships. It is part of the early attachment experience and it is carried into adult relationships.

• Disconnection in relationships is painful and distressing and is usually founded on fear and mistrust. People have adopted all kinds of defensive mechanisms to minimize the pain of this experience.

• When people are trusting and feel trusted they are willing to negotiate.
Reflection: Hello Eric!

As may already be obvious, I have a strong orientation towards Transactional Analysis (TA). It is the modality of choice upon which my work is based. I will use ideas from TA to explain `impasse’, incongruence and trust and mistrust. I will also use a model based on TA and outlined by Hemlin (Hemlin, 2012) as an illustration of the impasse found in couple relationships. TA theory includes concepts that can be used in variety of context. It is used in psychotherapy and counselling, in education and training and in an understanding of organisations. TA is useful in working with individuals, couples and groups including community groups and nations. TA has been the dominant theoretical influence for my work since 1990 when I started my training.

Eric Berne, was a Canadian born psychiatrist and psychotherapist who trained as a psychoanalyst. He started developing TA when he gave up pursuing membership of the United States Psychoanalytical Association. The theory that he and subsequently others have developed, covers a range of aspects of human functioning. It is a theory of personality; a theory of interpersonal communication and it is a theory of human development in what Berne refers to as life scripts (Berne, 1975). The adaptability of TA theory is manifested in a range of areas in which it is applied. TA practitioners can seek qualification in TA for psychotherapy and counselling as well as work in organisations and education. TA for psychotherapy has developed over the years from an approach that was very cognitive to one which is more relational and closer to the psychoanalytical roots of its founder. In my work I frequently use the following key ideas from TA: games, rackets and drama triangle; discounting; strokes and hungers. Berne deliberately chose colloquial language for his ideas.
because he wanted TA to be understood and to be used by everyone and not just professionals. This has led to criticism of TA as being a theory about the superficial. In spite of this, Berne’s book “Games People Play: The Psychology of Human Relationships” (Berne, 1964) was a best seller. In addition to TA my work is informed by attachment theory and Emotional Focused Therapy (EFT). In the latter, I am influenced by my conversations with my clinical supervisor who is trained in this approach to couples work. EFT is based upon attachment theory and uses the idea that attachment styles learned early in life condition attachment in adult relationships. My own approach has echoes of EFT.

My approach to couples work is base on the following assumptions. Firstly, that harmony is achieved in a relationship as the couple are able to negotiate the myriad of differences that they have in the way they think, feel and act. These differences are problematic when these differences become the basis of openly expressed conflict and an impasse is created. The impasse is maintained by interactions that are incongruent and mistrustful and which threaten the vulnerability of themselves and the other. Movement out of the impasse is possible to the degree that the couple can be vulnerable and congruent with the other person. As they become more willing to be vulnerable and congruent so they are able to dispel their respective distorted perceptions and trust in the other person begins to grow. With more authenticity in the couple’s interactions they are able to be empathic and seek to move out of impasse because they are more willing to negotiate. What were once battles and demanded staunch resistance are now differences about which they are able to negotiate without losing face and for mutual benefit?
Chapter 2: Impasse

Trust, trusting...

I began my investigation for this thesis with an interest in `trust’. My curiosity was sparked when I was sitting with a client and I heard her say, “The trouble is, I don’t trust him anymore.” She was referring to her ex-husband. What she said was unspectacular but it was as if I heard the word `trust’ for the first time. I was curious. I wanted to know more. What did the word mean? The next morning I made a cursory check in the various books and journals I have around my desk, at home. I was keen to find references to what I had now identified as a key word in my work and in life as a whole. Incredibly, I found the word trust in the title of only one article in the Transactional Analysis Journals going back to 1992 (Cornell, 2007). It was also conspicuous by its absence in the indexes of books scattered around and adjacent to my desk. Most of them are books about counselling and psychotherapy. My curiosity increased. Now that I was alerted to the word I started to hear it all over the place. It did not matter that mostly what I was hearing was people’s reference to a negative experience, an absence of trust. I simply became aware of hearing the word. I heard it often. When I thought of the woman in my office, it was obvious her experience was dramatic and distressing. Circumstances for her had changed. Clearly the relationship she had enjoyed for so long now no longer existed. By confessing to her `mistrust’ of her ex-husband she was disclosing her inner turmoil and fear. Her world, at least the bit of it occupied by her ex-husband was now uncertain. Where once she could rely on him, she
now realized she could not rely on him anymore. Something awful had happened to her. She had lost something of value. She was shocked and she was trying to come to grips with her new reality.

Trust is ubiquitous. It is everywhere; in the intimate and in the mundane. There is trust in the relationship I have with my wife of 30 odd years and there is trust in the relationship I have with the person who walks alongside me on the pavement. Trust enables people to function in their world. It helps society to work. Hardin (Hardin, 2006) and Cook (Cook 2001) link trust and trusting with trustworthiness suggesting that it is easy to confuse issues to do with one with issues to do with the other. In counselling, trust is an essential ingredient in the relationships the counsellor forges with clients. Counselling works because clients trust and they perceive the counsellor to be trustworthy. They disclose about behaviour and attitudes that evoke shame usually only when they trust. Being trustworthy and being seen to be trustworthy is part of a counsellor’s honed professional image and identity. Trust, trusting and being trustworthy are essential professional attributes. In spite of this, trust in itself, is not often discussed. As I indulged my curiosity I could not remember a conversation with anyone, let alone my counselling colleagues which focussed on trust. Yet, it is part of my professional and my everyday language. It is often used even if it is used in a negative context but its significance or meaning is not discussed. It is an element in human interactions that is taken for granted. It is obviously valuable and yet, it seemed, its value is often only felt in its absence. As my interest increased I wanted to know more about trust in enduring adult relationships and in other forms of relationships.
Trust is an attitude, sentiment, feeling or a belief that one person has in regard to another person. It is a subjective and inner sensation. It is relational in that it is experienced, developed, sustained, maintained and withheld or lost within a relationship (Lazalere & Huston, 1980; Barber, 1983; Zak, Gold, Ryckman & Lenney, 1998; Luna-Reyes, Cresswell & Richardson, 2004). Trust described here, is an element in a long-lasting relationship. It is akin to what Hardin refers to as ‘thick’ trust (Hardin, 1992) and Kelman refers to as ‘interpersonal’ trust (Kelman, 2005). Not included here is the trust that people have in their relationship with things; for example, people may say they trust their computer system or they say they trust their car. Nor does it include a person’s trust in natural phenomena (‘I trust that the sun will rise every morning’), nor does it include the trust that people sometimes place in abstract or spiritual forces (“It is in the hands of the gods”); in organisations (‘I trust the power company’), or in social institutions (I trust the Quakers). Nor does my use of trust, used here, refer to the trust that is part of the mundane and ordinary interactions that occur daily and perpetually between people who are not known to each other. For example, imagine two people who are coincidentally walking along the pavement together. They may trust each other in some regards even though they are unknown to each other; their trust is manifested in their mutual expectation that they can walk along together without being intruded on by the other. The trust they have for each other is of a general nature and is the same kind of trust that they have for all other strangers in similar circumstances. While they may each have an expectation that the other person will not harm them, that expectation is one applied generally rather than specifically to a specific person and to a specific relationship.

Trust in enduring adult relationships includes these characteristics:
• It is a sense or a feeling of security or certainty that one person (the person who is doing the trusting, the trustor) has for or in regard to another person.

• It is based on an expectation that another person, (the person being trusted, the trustee) will behave or in other ways respond in ways that are predictable, reliable and consistent. In other words, the trustor’s expectations will be realized. There will be no surprises!

• It is based on the trustor’s assumption that the trustee will take them into account in some or in all circumstances. (Hardin, 1992)

• The trustor has an expectation that the other person will act in ways that enhance the trustor’s well-being.

• The trustor assumes the other person values the relationship and that they will act to protect and to preserve it.

Trust has its foundation in the earliest stage of psycho-social human development (Erikson, 1965; Simpson 2007). Trust is an aspect of the mix of emotional and neurological responses which are evoked within the intimacy of the relationship an infant has with its primary care provider (Szalavitz & Perry, 2010). The attachment style which the child develops in that early relationship is carried forward into adulthood and emerges in relationships the person forms. (Bowlby, 1979, 1982) (Szalavitz & Perry, 2010) A person’s attachment style also conditions their general capacity for trusting. People who have
developed a secure attachment style tend to be more trusting while those who tend to be mistrusting are likely to have an insecure attachment style. People who are more trusting tend to be more trusting of others and of the world in general and they are able to recover quickly when their trust in others is damaged in some way or another. The following diagram illustrates the development of trust. It is based on Eric Berne’s (Berne, 1961/1989) structural model of ego states (see an adapted version on page 29, below) and it is consistent with Mellor’s (Mellor, 1980) impasse diagram which is also shown below (see page 32). The diagram illustrates the intrapsychic development of trust.

Diagram 1: Trust diagram
P represents introjected influences which are fixated in a person’s psyche. C represents thoughts, feelings and actions from an earlier phase in a person’s life which have become fixated. A represents a mediating capability which enables the person to make sense of and to find a solution to the internal tension generated by the relationship of P and C. The plus symbol (+) represents the fixated introjected responses of others that are attuned to the expressed needs of the child and which encouraged and enhanced trusting. The minus symbol (-) represents the introjected fixated responses of others which the child experienced as being unempathic and unattuned to the child’s need and which discouraged trusting. The Parental influences in P (+) can be interpreted as ‘trustworthy’ and Parental influences in P (-) as untrustworthy. The double headed horizontal arrow in P indicates that the vertical line separating the (+) segment from (-) segment in P is movable. P may include areas for (+) and (-) which are larger and smaller depending on the experience of the child. A larger area for (+) represents interactions with significant others that were trustworthy and hence encourage general trusting. A larger area for (-) represents interactions from significant others which were generally untrustworthy and which encouraged mistrust. The double headed arrows that link P (Parent ego-state) with C (Child ego-state) indicate the internal dynamic created from the expression of normal needs and wants of the Child and the response from the significant other, the trustworthy (P+)parent or (P-) the untrustworthy parent. The dynamic created by the internalized interaction of P₂ with C₂ indicates development of trust or mistrust after age 3 approximately. The dynamic created by the internalized interaction of P₁ and C₁ indicates the development of trust or mistrust in the age range approximately 6 months to 3 years. To avoid cluttering the diagram I have not shown the dynamic created by the internalized interaction of P₀ and C₀. (P₀, A₀ and C₀ would be shown in C₁ of the diagram). The P₀ – C₀ dynamic pertains to a stage in development from pre-birth to approximately 6 months of age. In order to think of the development of trust as the outcome of an interpersonal and developmental experience it is necessary to think of P, the Parent ego-state, as being an actual person rather than as an introjected image or influence.
In enduring adult relationships trust is an essential ingredient in the on-going confidence that each person has with the other. Sometimes trust is general and all-encompassing in that one person may say of the other; “I trust him with my life” or simply, “I trust her.” Sometimes trust is specific in that it is related to an identifiable behaviour or characteristic of the other, though people vary in their capacity for trusting. (Rotter, 1970, 1980) Interpersonal trust is defined as, “... an expectancy held by an individual or a group that the word, promise, verbal or written statement of another individual or group can be relied on.” (Rotter, 1980, p 444). Considered functionally trust is the means by which one person is able to assuage their anxiety about the uncertainty of the other person in a relationship. By being trusting a person feels less anxious about the prospect that the other person will act, feel or think in a way that is threatening to them personally or is threatening to the relationship. Trusting is one way to overcome the reality that no person is ever totally predictable or consistent. Person A can never be one hundred percent sure that Person B will act in their (Person A) best interest even if they have done so in the past. Trusting is a way of eliminating uncertainty and doubt. Trust makes uncertainty bearable. Trusting is a way of self-soothing. It helps anxiety and doubt to melt away.

...and trustworthiness

Trust and trustworthiness are related concepts and experiences. They may be complementary but they are not necessarily so. It is tempting to suggest that they are two sides of the same coin but in reality it is possible for one to exist without the other. Usually a couple have mutual feelings of trust. They may
trust each other completely or they may be more selective in what they trust in the other. A couple may vary in their respective capacity for trusting; one may feel more or less secure in the relationship. One may engage in more trusting behaviour and as a consequence perceive the other to be more trusting. Together they may create a more trusting relationship (Zak, Gold, Rychman & Lenney, 1998: Mikulincer, 1998). For people to be trusting or to have trust they have to have others whom they perceive to be trustworthy. Trustworthy people do not necessarily need a person to have trust in them. A trustworthy person may not know that another person perceives them as being trustworthy. There are two perspectives for understanding trust and trustworthiness. Firstly, there is the perspective of the person who is trusting, the trustor. Secondly, there is the perspective of the person in whom trust is placed by another, the trustee. The trustor invests trust in another whether or not that person is trustworthy. For example, an unmarried woman may commit herself to a man and become his lover trusting that he will leave his wife as he promises. For a long while she may remain committed to the relationship as she waits for her lover to start separation proceedings. In another example, a man who has been betrayed by a previous partner may come to trust his current partner as she demonstrates she is committed to their relationship. Trustors trust because they have evidence of the trustworthiness of the other or they trust because the other has some personal attributes which give an impression of trustworthiness. Trustors also trust because they know that the other person values the relationship equally as much as themselves. Trustors also trust when they know or at least they think they know that the other person has their, the trustor’s, well-being at heart. Hardin (Hardin, 2002) suggests trustworthiness is linked to the encapsulated interest of the person who is trusted. Encapsulated interest
means that the trustor can trust the trustee because they know that it is in the trustee’s interest to be trustworthy. Finally it may be possible for the trustor to be trusting when it is clear what behaviour in the other they are being asked to trust. The trustor trusts the trustee to do something specific. Hardin (Hardin, 2002) suggests a three part formula in which A trusts B to do C. For example, a woman may not be able to trust her partner when managing their money but she may be able to trust him to remain faithful by avoiding any flirtatious behaviour with someone outside of their marriage.

Trustworthiness is always an outcome of perception. The trustee is trustworthy to the trustor because the trustor perceives them to be so. Sometimes that perception is based on what seems to be ‘implicit’ in the personality of the trustworthy person. The attributes of the trustworthy person appear to the trustor as if they are the natural attributes of the trustworthy person. Their trustworthiness is intangible and maybe outside of the trustor’s conscious awareness. They are trustworthy because they are experienced as trustworthy. There is something about them that makes them so. On the other hand, sometimes a person is perceived as trustworthy because they have demonstrated that they possess and display some attributes that are regarded by the trustor as attributes of someone who is trustworthy. This may happen even when the trustworthy person is not personally known to the trustor. For example; in the Reader’s Digest survey of the 100 most trusted people in New Zealand (http://www.readersdigest.co.nz/trusted-people-2014) the list of attributes of those chosen are; “...someone who will watch your back”; “someone you can trust for life”; “down to earth and humble”; “a great role model”. In other circumstances, the trustworthy person is perceived as having earned the
trustor’s trust; they have regularly and consistently acted in ways that the trustor perceives as being trustworthy. A person is sometimes perceived as being trustworthy because they are seen to consistently give a high value to the relationship or they consistently show that they highly regard the trustor’s well-being. Using Hardin’s formula B is perceived as being trustworthy to A because he or she does or is C. A trustworthy person can be forgiven transgressions by the trustor. Such transgressions may be perceived as ‘being out of character’.

**Reflection: It was really all about mistrust... and betrayal...and incongruence!**

Writing this thesis has been a learning journey. As I have focussed on one thing after another I have enjoyed clarity where once my thoughts were murky and I have enjoyed some completely new perspectives. Learning about the twin notions of trust and trustworthiness was as refreshing as they were interesting. They had a kind of `WOW’ impact. They allowed me to view relationships in a different way. I started to see a dimension which had previously been hidden from me. I had new concepts that I could bring to bear in my analysis of what was going on in the relationships I saw before me. Focussing on trust and trustworthiness I felt like I could burrow under the surface to get at elements which were at the core of the relationship. I had concepts which I could use in order to build and develop relationships. I had tools to work with! Building trust became a contractual affair. Offending clients could commit to working at being trustworthy. Being trustworthy was something to which a person could aspire. Developing trustworthiness required an active engagement. Trust and trustworthiness became lights which illuminated a part of my world. I was
excited. At the same time, I heard the word trust, often. It was used by my colleagues, friends, politicians and commentators on the radio. It was all around me. I felt self-conscious and unique. It was like I had a secret. I heard and knew something of the deeper significance of what the word meant. I, unlike them, had taken time to find out its true meaning. I could see aspects of relationships that others were not seeing. I was excited. I feared being evangelical; I had found ‘the light’. I was careful how and with whom I revealed my discovery. I was even a bit sceptical when others showed interest in what I was thinking; perhaps they were being polite. I was careful to curb my enthusiasm. In spite of this I noticed others were curious in what I shared with them. To test it out I ran a seminar for local counsellors on ‘Trust in Counselling Practice’ and forty people turned up. Others like me enjoyed the new view of human affairs by exposing something that nobody really pays attention to, though we have all known it is there.

In my practice with couples I was enjoying a refreshing new view of the dynamics I witnessed. Regrettably, in spite of my enthusiasm I could not quite work out how I could bring this new view into my work. It was soon obvious I had the view but my clients did not. The issues with which they tussled and which they displayed in front of me were other than ones to do with trust and trustworthiness. Mostly, they wanted to argue about more mundane affairs; issues about trust and trustworthiness were often far from their consciousness. On more than one occasion I interjected with an observation or question about trust or trustworthiness and on each occasion my clients refused to pick up on my cue. Their minds were elsewhere. In one interaction, the woman stated clearly that she did not trust her partner but when I asked “In what way do you not trust him?” she denied she had even used the word. Her trust, or lack of it,
was outside of her awareness or it was frightening to admit her mistrust. I imagined it would be a long time before she was willing to address that particular issue with her partner. This experience and others caused me to become dispirited. I saw issues about trust and trustworthiness as being central to the relationship but I had no idea how to bring this into my work. Clients seemed uninterested in such notions. I knew that trust and trustworthiness and even mistrust were important but I also saw how they remained unattended to. Just like in life where issues of trust remain invisible!

Trust and trustworthiness seemed far away from the place from which my clients tried to find a way forward. For most people conversations about trust and trustworthiness did not resonate with the emotional turmoil they were experiencing. They were caught up in an awful vortex of action and reaction as they sought to survive with their partner. Notions of trust and trustworthiness seemed too abstract and cognitive. They had no energy for such considerations. My urgings, whether or not I voiced them, had them moving on to a more creative and positive plain. If only they would identify what it was they mistrusted they could easily negotiate to being more trustworthy. I resisted the idea that what they were really experiencing was mistrust. I did not want to give in to that reality. That seemed a backward step. I felt the tension grow within me as I sought to avoid delving into the mistrust I knew was there. I wanted to stay focussed on trust. That was to be the topic of my thesis but I was finding it hard to sustain my focus. I was experiencing what my clients experienced. My tension built and eventually it was a relief when I gave up the struggle and reluctantly accepted the fact that what I witnessed was mistrust rather than trust. I felt like I had given in. I had weakened. I had been unable to resist the irresistible. Life was full of mistrust. Life’s dramas occurred because of
mistrust. Intrigue, deception, jealousy and betrayal all feed and are its manifestations; so are mind-reading, double-guessing, blaming and manipulation. They were part of the relationships I faced weekly in my practice. Accepting this meant I could now investigate the nature of that mistrust and find out especially why mistrust makes relationships and their interactions so intense, compelling and beguiling.

In enduring adult relationships there is an expectation that the couple will be bound by mutual trust and trustworthiness. In marriage vows couples are invoked to cherish and honour before then remaining steadfast, supportive and faithful for life as their relationship develops from healthy symbiosis to mutual interdependence (Bader & Pearson, 1988). This is an ambitious commitment. Some struggle and some fall by the wayside, their relationships ending in divorce and separation. Some couples have to deal with infidelity, dishonesty, violence and abuse while others deal with a growing resentment emerging out of matters unspoken and unresolved conflicts. For some there is an obvious betrayal and the damage to trust and trustworthiness is overt. For others the betrayal is more covert; it lingers and festers in attitudes, prejudices and incongruence pushing the couple further and further apart. Either way it is necessary to attend to the betrayal before attending to rebuilding trust. When couples mistrust they are likely to become entangled in a web of hurt, resentment, blaming, distorted perceptions and defensiveness which is absorbing and compelling. They repeatedly get drawn into a series of interactions which are bitter, energy sapping and non-productive. The couple emerge emotionally and sometimes physically wounded. They are regretful and usually none the wiser. They may hope and they may vow not to get into the same predicament again and yet they feel powerless to prevent its
reoccurrence. They attend counselling in the hope they can prevent what feels inevitable happening again.

Identifying an impasse

There were two dimensions to the dynamics I often observed and heard about from the couples I met. Firstly, there was a repeating pattern of interaction which ended with the same outcome. They felt powerless to stop it occurring and when it did they felt as equally powerless in preventing it from running its course. Secondly, these patterns of interactions were intense; they were characterized often by shouting, blaming, a lack of listening, self-righteousness and sometimes a sense of hopelessness. People often reported feeling exhausted after this experience and of feeling stuck. It was this intensity that caught my attention most. I was interested in knowing more about the nature of the experience which most people find so awful and yet which they find irresistible. What is it that gives this experience such intensity? I had long been familiar with the idea that people repeat patterns of behaviour over and over, even patterns of behaviour that leave them feeling frustrated, ashamed and in some other way diminished. Sigmund Freud (Freud, 1914) described this as repetition compulsion; the propensity of people to repeat past traumatic experiences only to end up with the same and predictable outcome. It is as if with each repeat of the early experience the person seeks to find a more satisfying outcome but in the end they do not achieve this. In TA theory this was encapsulated in notions like games (Berne, 1964) and scripts (Berne 1975). Berne (Berne, 1964, p 44) defines games as “... an ongoing series of complementary ulterior transactions (see below) progressing to a well-defined,
predictable outcome.” The end piece of a game is what is known as the payoff; a complex set of inter-related thoughts feeling and inner experiences which leave the person feeling ‘bad’ or awful. Games may be played out over shorter or longer periods of time. Similarly, scripts also have a payoff but they are likely to be played out over longer periods of time and sometimes with the payoff not coming until the person’s death. People, outside of their awareness may repetitively live out their script without achieving the payoff. Berne (Berne, 1975, p 418) defines a script as “... an ongoing program, developed in early childhood under parental influence, which directs the individuals behaviour in the most important aspects of his life.”

The payoff in games and scripts are predictable and for the person involved it is gloomy and detrimental to self. In acting out games and scripts people avoid intimacy and avoid autonomy and behave in an inauthentic manner. The absence of authenticity generates mistrust and simultaneously stimulates incongruence, distorted perceptions and fear of being vulnerable. In these circumstances people are mistrusting and they are in turn mistrusted. They are entangled and cannot move. They are in an impasse.

In an impasse people feel stuck. Movement is not possible. When there is a problem there is no apparent solution. In an impasse people feel inhibited; they may feel trapped; they cannot go forward and they cannot go back. An impasse is the point of impact between two or more equal and opposing forces; the strength of one cancels out the strength of the other. The On-line dictionary (http://www. Thefreedictionary.com/impasse) defines impasse as; (1) “...a road or passage having no exit, a cul de sac; (2) a situation that is so difficult that no progress can be made; a deadlock or a stalemate.” Similarly, the Concise Oxford dictionary (1964) defines an impasse as a “blind alley,
position from which there is no escape. “An impasse is felt subjectively and may be felt when a person is faced with making a choice or making a decision. They may be ‘in two minds’. They may be tussling with choosing ‘either-or’ or they may know what they want to do but fear the consequences real or imaginary of their desired action. Alternatively, they may have a number of good options and they cannot choose the one that is most suitable for them. Sometimes people are unable to make a choice or they think they have no options available to them. At a deeper level a person may experience an impasse when they experience fear at the prospect of doing something new.

Impasse in psychotherapy appears in various contexts. Sometimes the word refers to the subjective experience of the client and sometimes it refers to a dynamic in the client-therapist relationship (Perls, 1969; Goulding and Goulding, 1979; Mellor, 1980; Jacobs, 1989; Bernstein and Landaiche, 1992; Nathanson, 1992; Pulver, 1992; Cornell and Landaiche, 2006). Bob and Mary Goulding (Goulding and Goulding, 1979) and Ken Mellor (Mellor, 1980) developed models of intrapsychic impasse and represented them in diagram form. Their respective models are based on a structural ego-state model earlier developed by Eric Berne (Berne, 1961/1989, 1964, 1970/1973, 1975). Berne described the structure of an individual’s personality. His model accounted for changes in thinking, feeling and behaviour which a person experiences from moment to moment in life. Berne’s diagram shows three aspects of personality, which he called ‘ego-states represented by three equal-sized circles drawn vertically and touching. Berne defined ego-states’ as “... a system of feelings accompanied by a related set of behaviour patterns.” (Berne, 1964, p 23). The top circle is labelled ‘P’ and represents Parent (the initial letter is a capital), ‘A’ represents Adult and ‘C’ represent Child. The Parent ego-state
represents the behaviour, thoughts and feelings copied from parents or parent figures. Adult ego-state represents the behaviour, feelings and thoughts which are direct responses to the here-and-now and Child ego-state refers to the behaviour, thoughts and feelings replayed from childhood. The diagram of Berne’s structural ego-state model is shown below. I have copied it from ‘TA Today; A New Introduction to Transactional Analysis’ written by Stewart and Joines (Stewart and Joines, 1989).

Diagram 2: Eric Berne’s structural ego-state model (from Stewart and Joines; 1987, p 12)
Berne described an ego-state as a `consistent pattern of feeling and experience directly related to a corresponding consistent pattern of behaviour (Berne, 1966/1994, p 224). This diagram represents the structure of personality which Berne describes as having three parts. The top circle is labelled Parent and represents introjected behaviours, thoughts and feelings of actual parents or parent-like figures. Adult represents behaviours, thoughts and feelings which are direct responses to here and now circumstances. There is an `appropriateness' to these responses; i.e. appropriate to the here and now. The bottom circle is labelled Child and represents an ego-state comprising behaviours, thoughts and feelings replayed from childhood. The person experiences and displays thoughts, feelings and actions that were characteristic of them in childhood. The diagram represents Berne’s idea of first-order structural analysis. The structural ego-state model can be used to represent shifts in the phenomenological or subjective experience of a person. For example; Lois is in a counselling session with her partner, Tony. In answer to the counsellor’s enquiry about what she finds distressing in her communication with Tony she describes in general terms what she remembers about these episodes. Her language is appropriately descriptive and informative. She is in her Adult ego-state. Suddenly, she moves her right hand to the side in a horizontal sweeping motion and says; “Suddenly, it all changes. He is not there and I am thinking ‘Where are you? Where have you gone?’” She starts to cry, her voice becomes high pitched and she looks despondent as she feels the loss she feels over and over in this moment with Tony. Lois is feeling the shock and loss she often felt with her unpredictable and angry father. Lois has moved into her Child ego-state. Tony shuffles in his chair. He is feeling awkward as he listens to Lois’s expression of her feelings of loss. Tony faintly smiles with self-consciousness. Lois looks at him; her eyes wide open and staring. She shakes her head slowly and allows her body to slump back into the back of the chair. She is like her mother whom she often saw looking disapprovingly at her unempathic husband. Lois has moved into her Parent ego-state. Berne represented the sub structures of the Parent and Child ego states in what he termed second and third order ego-state structures. In the Parent ego state this is represented by the Parent ego-state, the Adult ego-state and the Child ego-state of the actual parent figure representation in a
person’s psyche. The sub-structure of the person’s Child ego-state is represented by the Parent ego-state, the Adult ego-state and the Child ego-state of the person at different and separate ages and stages of their growing up.

To identify or to make a diagnosis of ego-states Berne (Berne, 1961/1989) suggested four areas which provide helpful information. The first area is what he called ‘behavioural’ or ‘behavioural diagnosis’. This is based on observations gathered from what the person displays in their actions and in what they say and how they say it. This is sometimes the easiest to discern. The second area is ‘social’ or ‘social diagnosis’ and is gleaned from the responses the individual evokes in others. Information is gathered from observing and from finding out about the reactions of others. The third type of information is that which is gathered from a person’s history. It is an historical diagnosis, which includes the person’s recollections of events from their past and their reactions to them. It also includes information about other people who were influential at that time. Finally, the fourth area of information is ‘phenomenological’ and provides for a ‘phenomenological diagnosis’. This refers to the subjective experience of the person, either as they recall their experience of the past or as they describe their here and now experience from any of their ego-states.

An impasse occurs when one part of a person’s intrapsychic structure is in opposition with another. The resulting tension is experienced as a feeling of being stuck. Normally an impasse occurs when the natural and authentic needs of the person, represented by the Child ego state come into conflict with the constraining and introjected influence of others represented by the Parent ego state. In order to move beyond this internal struggle the person makes what is known as a ‘decision’ or a ‘re-decision’. In other words, the person finds a
solution or a resolution which meets their authentic needs, wants and wishes. Goulding and Goulding (Goulding and Goulding, 1979) and Mellor (Mellor, 1980) developed Berne’s model of structural ego-states to illustrate the experience of an impasse. Although there are similarities in the two impasse models I will continue my explanation using the one developed by Ken Mellor. It is conceptually more consistent.

Mellor identified three types or degrees of impasse; each degree of impasse represents an internalised struggle from a different age or stage of the person’s life. Each internalised struggle results in a ‘decision’. A decision in this context is made by the person in their Adult ego-state and represents the person’s best attempt to find a solution for the tension that they feel internally. The decision helps alleviate their anxiety caused by their unconscious internalized struggle. A first degree impasse represents a decision made after a person has acquired language and from about four years of age. A third degree impasse can be recalled through words. A second degree impasse represents a decision made in infancy and which may in adulthood be experienced through feelings or the lack of them. A third degree impasse represents a decision made in babyhood or in utero and the impasse is likely to be accessible through somatic responses. A person may experience their decision as being forever present with an understanding that ‘life has always been like this’; for example; the world is an untrustworthy place.
Diagram 3: Mellor’s Degrees of Impasse

In this diagram the circles shown in a vertical line, one on top of the other represents the structure of a person’s personality; i.e. the intrapsychic structure. This is consistent with the Berne diagram reproduced, above. The circles, ego-states are labelled as $P_2$, $A_2$ and $C_2$; $P_1$, $A_1$ and $C_1$; and as $P_0$, $A_0$ and $C_0$. Each set of circles shown represents the person’s personality structure at
different ages or phases of their life. The ego-states, $P_0$, $A_0$ and $C_0$ contained within $C_1$ are shown off to the right in an enlarged form. They are shown in this way for clarification only. The ego-states labelled $P_2$, $P_1$ and $P_0$ represent introjects of thoughts, feelings and behaviour of significant others in a person’s life at a specific time or age. $A_2$, $A_1$ and $A_0$ represent the person’s ‘here and now’ response to the world including their response to the internal and intrapsychic impasse. $C_2$, $C_1$ and $C_0$ represent the person’s wishes, needs and wants at different ages. The curved arrow linking the Parent ego-state at each level or degree to the Child ego-state, represent the intrapsychic dynamic or impasse.

**Reflection: Facing up to the impasse**

I am in an impasse. In the night I lay awake thinking about my predicament; feeling tense and distressed. I mulled over my options. I recalled past conversations which I now know, and with hindsight, have contributed to my predicament. I felt and I feel ashamed and embarrassed. I am self-blaming as I am wont to do. This adds to the shame I feel as I imagine critical faces and the accusing words of others. They all add to how I feel. This night-time reverie went on for nearly three hours, my head full of ideas, some ill-formed, others new and all of them in the end cast into my mental waste-bin. I went round in circles and got nowhere. I am in an impasse; the past and the present are blurred. I feel tense. I am unable to sleep. I am wide awake. I feel like giving up trying to write this thesis. Immediately, I know though, this is not an option. The problem is I just do not know how to go forward with it. I do not know how to progress. I desperately want someone to know what I am experiencing. I want an empathic ear. I suddenly feel/felt some relief; come clean, get it off your chest. The power of the confessional! I know the impact of being honest.
Others have rarely judged when I do this. My best solution is to write about what I am experiencing. Get the ideas and images out of my head and onto the computer screen. In so doing I might find clarity and relief. I might also, be able to use the words as a contribution to my thesis. After all this is what this is all about: how to proceed with my writing. Well not quite; it is not really about the writing; putting words onto the screen is not my difficulty. It is more about the ‘what’; what to include, linking the abstract with the practical; linking theory with practice; linking the intrapsychic with the interpersonal. I want to illustrate what I am trying to say with real life examples; my life examples. This is how I learn best. I make sense of my own life’s experience and then translate it into other contexts. I know what constitutes an impasse. I am living one. I am absorbed by its intensity. It demands my attention and consumes my energy.

Writing like this is my attempt to move forward; to make my way out of my own impasse. I have been reading about autoethnography (Ellis, 2004 and Wall, 2006) and I am inspired to write as I think it is being modelled to me in the text of Ellis’s book. I say, “I think...” because I am not sure if I get the point she is making. The points she makes are vague, their sharpness and clarity lost to me somewhere in the dialogue of her story. I think she says there is a difference between autoethnography and mere self-reflections, though the differences are more subtle than I am able yet to discern. I fear being puerile and appearing disrespectful and inattentive to the efforts of those who have chosen this way of doing research. Yet, at the same time, I am excited by its prospect. I enjoy ‘self-reflection’. I do a lot of it and I remember, with satisfaction, many occasions when I have moved from my preoccupation with the other to pay attention to my own thoughts, feelings and actions. I usually learn something of significance in this shift. Unfortunately, in this case, I lack
confidence because I am worried that there is something in the autoethnographic method which is oblivious to me. I know I cannot see what I cannot see. I am frightened that what I am doing will in hind-sight be thought of by others as being inadequate and inappropriate. I am not sure if this is the way out. My lack of confidence contributes to my impasse. Even as I seek this way out I am uncertain if at the end of the day it will be of any use and thus will not be used in my thesis. I fear that the effort, I am making will thus be, in this utilitarian way, a waste of my time. This is the rub; time is something, I have increasingly less and less of. I have a deadline. This too, is contributing to my impasse. It means that some things I think I might do to get out of my impasse are either too time consuming or untimely. I cannot go back. The incomplete must remain so. This adds to my feeling of being stuck.

Yesterday, I went to meet with Mary (not her real name). I have known her for about 10 years. She is a psychotherapist and I am her client. In the early days of our professional relationship I focussed mostly on my relationships with women. I was aware that I tended to hold back and to be reserved in my interactions with women in a way I did not in my interactions with men. This was an issue for me back then because most of the people who were both colleagues and clients were women. I felt like I engaged with women from a distance and I imagined that some women experienced me as being uninterested and un-engaging. I imagined that to some, I was invisible barely registering on their radar. I sometimes felt invisible. Gradually, over the years, I began to let Mary in and to more fully engage with her. By the time we notched up about 6 or 7 years of meetings I could look at her with relative ease across the gap between us and engage with her about my experience while interacting with her. My work had been slow and convoluted. I had come to
appreciate her patience and overall care and attention. Since then I have met with Mary a few times each year to discuss some aspect of my functioning arising from my work and life. Though I do not know a lot about her, of course I do not pry; I have learned that she is trustworthy and that she is interested in my well-being. I also know that she holds an image of me which is sometimes different to the image I have of myself. I am sometimes shocked by the impressions of me that she reveals and about her experience when she is with me. Her revelations are moderate in their telling and yet invariably potent. They open up an aspect of me that either I do not know or which has become invisible through the mist which shrouds my own `self’ view. This was what happened yesterday. I had explained to her that I was experiencing frequent bouts of shame and that these bouts seem more intense and more frequent. They could be about almost anything. It was like I could feel ashamed `at the drop of a hat’ and about anything whether important or insignificant. During our discussion I realized how frightened I am in general and I confessed to being worried about becoming so frightened that I am immobilized fearing to be involved and fearing to be with people. My fear of my own social isolation is never far from my awareness. I told Mary that I attributed my increased shamefulness to my increased isolation as I deal with semi-retirement and as I tussle with writing my thesis. In the past two or three years as I have dealt with both I spend more and more time at home and on my own. In the absence of distractions it is easy for me to feel frightened. I transform this fear into anxiety and shame. In the course of the conversation Mary made two observations which were shocking to me. The first was; “You have a capacity, more than anyone else I know, to be able to identify and to describe your shame.” This statement was pleasantly shocking. I liked the idea that she valued my articulateness, especially about such personal matters. I understood what she
had said and I could easily remember episodes when I talked about being ashamed either in my relationship with her or in some other and external context. Her second observation was much more shocking. She said, “You have lived your life in a world in which people are untrustworthy.” I took a while to absorb it and I did not know what to say in response. I was quiet and I was unable to look directly at her. I felt self-conscious as I contemplated what she had said. It seemed to be a contradiction to the way I experienced the world but it seemed to make sense given what I was experiencing and what I had described to her. After a while I mustered my thoughts. “It makes sense”, I said, as I took quick account of all the people in the world whose view of me I feared and dreaded. I suddenly realized the fallacy by which I had lived my life. The truth is and has been that mostly I have feared the views of others about what I do and about who I am. I do not and have not trusted that people will value either me or value what I have to say and what I do. As a consequence I have held back and when I venture forward I do so forging a way that is made up of the path of least threat and of least resistance. I fear what others might say. I fear feeling ashamed and so try to find the way forward that is least likely to evoke a shaming response from others. I avoid situations in which I expect to feel shame.

Later in the day I wrote to Kevin, my supervisor for my thesis project. I described to him feeling like the steel ball that by one means or another winds its way down the face of the pin-ball machine, banging into one obstacle after another before inevitably falling into the hole at the table’s end. I felt like I was banging into one obstacle after another as I tried to find my way forward with my thesis writing. The hole into which I fear I will inevitably fall is the outcome of the chaos I feel about what I am doing at present. Unless, I can find some
way forward then I will fall into the hole which means that even after a lot of effort I will not complete my thesis or that once completed it is ‘not passed’. Either way, I face feeling ashamed; an uninviting prospect.

In the middle of the night as I frantically considered my options I caught glimpses of the obstacles I had been seeking to avoid on my journey of least resistance. When I got up I listed them. This helped me face the reality of my situation. By making such a list I acknowledged what I was avoiding. I identified what and who it is I fear. It was a challenging task. It compelled me to reveal, albeit to myself, aspects of myself and of my functioning that I keep hidden. The exercise was very personal, it involved facing my fantasies and some of my perceptions which I know are distorted. It entailed making more visible that which had been private. I operate on the principle that as long as the thought remains secreted in my head I do not have to face it or the possible consequences for me and for others. Immediately, I was faced with well ingrained messages that support ‘Doing nothing’; “Don’t make a fuss,” “You’re too intense,” “You’ve got it wrong, it is not like that,” “Don’t upset people.” the litany of `script’ messages by which I have lived my life. My task became more daunting the more I thought about it. I felt my energy draining away. I wondered if this is really what I wanted to do. There were numerous obstacles to my moving forward! I even considered giving up as I sought to find another way out of my dilemma. I felt my ambivalence strongly and acutely. I could feel myself slipping back; avoiding the issue. I started to feel defeated and pathetic. I knew this was not good for me. The excitement I felt about moving forward by describing the impasse was draining away. I wanted to stop the slide. “This is not good for me!” This sentence reverberated in my mind. I heard it over and over. I started to reflect on my doubts. I had been motivated. I start to take
stock of what I was trying to do. Was it really worthwhile? I had often wondered if my interest and intention in this project is naive. Was I being reasonable to try to make sense of one thing by applying criteria and characteristics that emerge other situations? Was it possible to link the intra-psychic with the interpersonal with the inter-group/community? I recall how, a couple of days before, I sought to find out about the relationship between human organs, molecules, cells and tissue? There is a hierarchy. Each is related to the other. Each is in itself complex. I asked myself the question at the time “Is it reasonable to explain organs in terms of cells?” I presumed it was. Was it therefore reasonable to explain and to describe something of what happens in inter-group/community dynamics in terms of what happens intrapsychically and inter-personally? I presumed it was! Immediately, I bounced to my dogmatic position! It is something like this; ‘...in order for political or community leaders of hostile groups to arrive at a peaceful solution and to move out of an impasse it is necessary for them to experience the same ‘human’ experience that any of us face when trying to resolve differences and impasses’.
Chapter 3: Impasse is also relational

An impasse may be felt both as an intra-psychic experience and as an interpersonal experience. It is felt within a person and it is felt between people. Intra-psychically it manifests in the tension which emerges from a ‘clash’ between different parts of a person’s psyche. Interpersonally it is felt in the tension when the wishes, wants and intentions of one person ‘clash’ with the real or imaginary wishes, wants and intentions in another person. An impasse may be felt in a relationship when a person feels inhibited and unable to act for fear of an adverse reaction of another. The fear may be real in that the other person has a history or a reputation for responding in a certain way or it may be imaginary because there is no evidence of a previous adverse reaction. The imagined opposition of the other is an outcome of the distorted perceptions one person has for the other. These are generated by the psychological processes of projection or projective identification. In classical psychoanalysis projection, refers to a defensive process by which one person unconsciously ascribes to another person certain traits, dispositions and emotions which are part of their own personality while at the same time denying that these features belong to themselves. My supervisor once said, “If you see something you do not like in another person you can assume that it is somewhere between zero percent and 100% true for them and 100% true for yourself”. In projective identification the material which is projected is experienced by the other person in such a way that they are able to identify with it and respond as if it is an aspect of them. In some way they own and act as if the attribute belongs to them. Tilney (Tilney, 1998, p 95) suggests that the latter constitutes projection into the other and projection as earlier described comprises projection on to the other.
In a relationship, an impasse emerges from a display or expression of difference in something which is valued or important to the people involved. It may manifest in different ambitions, different values; different options; different wishes, different ways of doing things, different views of the same event, etc. In everyday life the moments of realizing there is a difference are mostly insignificant and are passed over with hardly a hindrance. People ‘slide past’ these expressions of difference sometimes without awareness. The accompanying anxiety is hardly discernible. People tolerate the tension and get on with their lives largely undisturbed. In these circumstances the impact of the expression of difference is neither threatening nor inhibiting. The issue at stake is unimportant and insignificant. Sometimes, however, the expression and display of difference is such that a person experiences a sudden jolt. They are stunned by what they have heard and or witnessed and immediately feel threatened or outraged. They may feel unjustly accused. They hear criticism when there might not be any and they feel threatened when in reality there is no threat. In cases like this, the issue does matter, it is important and for a while the people involved feel like they are in a serious fight, even a fight to the death. Their sense of self is at stake. They cease to be mindful. They are unable to discern the present from the past. They become lost in a blurry maze of fear and desperation. To cope, they engage in a pattern of interactions that is predictable in form and content. The matters raised, argued about and defended against will all have a familiar ring. The outcome; emotional distance and frustration for both people involved will also probably be familiar. As the interactions come to an end the couple may feel hurt, sensitive and self-conscious, guilty and ashamed. They may vow to themselves or to the other person that they “...will never do that again...” and go about their daily
business until the inevitable next episode. Couples come to counselling in the hope of finding a way to break out of this pattern of interaction.

An impasse lies latently in a couple’s relationship and is `acted out’ from time to time. The dynamic which comprises the manifestation of the impasse lies as if dormant ready to appear in circumstances that evoke powerful fixated, unconscious, emotional and sometimes physical reactions. Each person feels strongly about what they hear and see and their reactions appear out of proportion to the actual here and now stimulus. Each person has their own unique reaction to the provocation of the other person and both are equally evocative and provocative. An interpersonal impasse is like a closed system. Each episode or enactment, once generated appears to take on a `life of its own’. The pattern of interaction has a flavour and tone which is familiar as is the inevitable climax or end-point. The couple may easily recognise that `I/we have been here before’ and yet in spite of this familiarity they may feel powerless to interrupt the process. At its most intense point both people may feel frustrated, hurt, despairing, angry, and sad. Inevitably the couple feel distant from each other and it may be it takes them some time before they can regain their equilibrium. They feel stuck; unable to find an alternative to what they have just endured. Couples usually have a way of diverting themselves from the frustration and intensity of an impasse and find ways of getting on with their lives until circumstances seemingly and inevitably lead back to the impasse and yet another familiar enactment. The potential for yet another episode is ever present. It usually appears whenever one of the couple feels stress and the other person cannot resist reacting and becoming involved. Stress can be generated from a number of events like the death of a child, redundancy, moving house, and the presence of children or step children. It
can also be a consequence of developmental changes being experienced by the couple. The unconscious and sometimes primitive (early) nature of the intrapsychic and interpersonal dynamic which consequently gets enacted means that one or both of the couple can be triggered into feeling vulnerable. Then there ensues a sequence of interactions which are designed to be self-protecting but which serve to heighten emotional reactivity and to increase defensiveness. Once one person is triggered they act in a way which makes joining-in an irresistible invitation for the other person. Overt conflict emerges from an impasse. It emerges as a person tries to move out of an impasse or as they try to avoid slipping into an impasse. Interpersonally conflict may be manifested as various acts of aggression or violence, passivity and compliance.

**Interlocking interactions**

Along the way, there have been various ideas that have informed my work; most of them from Transactional Analysis. I have sometimes used Berne’s idea of ‘games’ (Berne, 1964) which I referred to above. A game comprises a pattern of interactions that is predictable and that leads to a predictable and unsatisfactory outcome for the person involved. Games are ‘played’ outside of the conscious awareness, though there is nothing trivial in these manoeuvres. Unconsciously, they are manipulative and intended to evoke particular, though unconscious responses from the other person (Berne, 1964). While ‘game playing’ is descriptive of the functioning of an individual they invite attention of the other person because the other feels compelled to participate in the game sequence. It is as if they become unsuspecting participants in the sequence of interactions. To make sense of the interaction sequence of a
couple I have assumed that while one person plays out their own game, the other plays out a different but equally dramatic complementary game sequence. Based on this assumption I have suggested to couples that they `get to know' their unique interactive sequence; to own it and then to consider ways in which they might interrupt the sequence. I have also used Berne’s (Berne, 1964, p 57) idea that games are played at different levels or degrees of intensity or seriousness. Berne described three degrees or level of games. First degree games are ones which are socially acceptable. Second degree games are ones in which there is no obvious damage inflicted on the people involved but they are likely to collude in concealing their interactions from the public. Third degree games are played for keeps, and they comprise patterns of interaction which end in “... the surgery, the courtroom or the morgue.” Couples attend counselling when their interactions are either second or third degree games. As time passes and without intervention couples may `play' their respective games with increased intensity so that a first degree game becomes a second degree game and a second degree game becomes a third degree game. In the context of this thesis the case illustration of the events on Cyprus has been a third degree game graduating from a first degree game which conditioned relationships between members of the two communities for years. Peck (Peck, 1987) and Campos (Campos, 2014) use Berne’s game theory to analyse war and war strategies.

Games involve shifting roles. The people involved shift their psychological positions in order to stay on the offensive and to sustain their self-defensiveness. Games are an enactment of a series of ‘inauthentic’ interactions which are designed to protect each person from humiliation, despair and shame. Karpman developed what is known as the Karpman’s
Triangle (Karpman, 1968), sometimes referred to as the Drama Triangle. Karpman’s Triangle describes three generalized roles taken up by people when ‘game playing’. Each of the three roles or positions depicted on the triangle, Persecutor, Rescuer and Victim involve discounting of both self and of the other. It is possible to track a person’s movement around the triangle and to observe the behavioural, the emotional and the cognitive fit the person has with other people. For example, a person with a predilection towards Rescuing will seek a Victim either seeking out someone who has that propensity or they act in a way that invites Victim behaviour in others. Also useful Berne identified rackets (Berne, 1975, 1994) and English (English, 1971, 1972, 1976) identified rackets, racket behaviour, racket feelings and racketeering while Erskine and Zalcman (Erskine & Zalcman, 1979) produced the racket system. The word ‘racket’ in this context refers to a feeling which is familiar to the individual. It is inauthentic in that it serves to cover another feeling which is more authentic or ‘real’. It is a feeling and the accompanying behaviour which was learned in childhood when more authentic feelings were not allowed and discouraged. For example, a person may laugh when they feel sad. As a child they learned to ‘laugh it off’ instead of displaying sadness and tears which their parent or parents were unable to tolerate and accept. Holtby (Holtby, 1979) came close to the idea of interlocking interactions comprising games and impasses with his idea of inter-locking rackets. Holtby (Holtby, 1979, p 132) describes how rackets are maintained by means of a ‘supporting cast’ and that “…Spouses and lovers are partially picked for this purpose” in which the “… Racket Display of one serves as the Reinforcing Experience of the other.”
A model of interpersonal impasse

In a similar vein to Holtby, Hemlin (Hemlin, 2012) demonstrates how intrapsychic impasses can be adapted and used for understanding impasses within couple relationships. He adapts Mellor’s intrapsychic impasse model outlined above and suggests it can be used to illustrate an impasse which occurs in a couple relationship. He calls this a ‘relational impasse’. In a relational impasse both of the people involved externalize aspects of their own intrapsychic impasse and create in the relationship the same dynamic as the one they each and separately experience internally. When one person feels vulnerable they project their own internalized restrictive and prohibitive Parent ego state onto the other person in the relationship. They then react to that person’s behaviour as if it is the same restrictive reaction of their own Parent ego state. This two step process is repeated and reciprocated by the other person in the relationship and the interpersonal dynamic is created. The couple create an interlocking dynamic. Hemlin explains it in this way:

“A need (Child ego state) in the first person triggers its corresponding Parent ego state ... The activation of the Parent ego state in person one, in turn, triggers the needs or vulnerabilities (Child ego state) in person two. This Child ego state then activates its own Parent ego state, which, in turn, impacts the first person’s Child ego state. So, we end up with a cycle in which the intrapsychic and interpersonal coexist in the interplay. At the same time, there is a movement in the other direction, hence the needs of persons are affected both internally (from the Parent ego state) and externally (from the Parent ego state of the other). (Hemlin p 123)

Interpersonal impasses like intrapsychic impasses may be based on fixated responses to limitations and restrictions experienced in earlier phases or periods in life. The couple each bring their own the residue of their own and
unique experience and their own sets of historical unmet needs, wishes and wants as well as their own introjected limiting internal reactions. Awareness and memories of these experiences will vary, some accessible through active memory and words and others only by somatic sensations. Hence, interpersonal impasses may be classified, similar to Mellor’s intrapsychic impasses, as first, second or third degree impasses. In any enduring relationship there is likely to be impasses at each level or degree and each degree will require its own diagnosis and treatment. Thus in working with couples it is necessary to be aware of the level of the impasse being addressed at any time and to keep in mind that there are other underlying impasses which may be influential. For example; a couple may struggle with a first degree impasse which may cover a second degree impasse which in turn may covers a third degree impasse. Attempts to dissolve the impasse at any level will firstly require resolution of an impasse at a deeper level.

Interpersonal impasses are difficult to resolve because the couple are trying to find their respective ways forward in two areas simultaneously. In order to move out of the interpersonal impasse they have to move out of their intrapsychic impasse. Hemlin suggests that it is this characteristic that makes relational impasses more severe “… because so many ego states are involved and therefore the possibilities for unlocking it are limited.” The impasse is like a double bind with both people experiencing an unempathic response to their needs because of inhibitions imposed from inside and outside simultaneously.
I have reproduced Hemlin’s diagram in which he illustrates a second degree or level two interpersonal impasse. The impasse is generated as the intrapsychic impasse as shown by the interaction of $P_1$ with $C_1$ in Person A and Person B is re-created externally so that the interaction occurs between $P_1$ in Person A with $C_1$ in Person B and vice-versa. A first degree impasse is created in the interaction as $P_2$ in Person A interacts with $C_2$ in Person B and vice-versa. The

Diagram 4: Interpersonal Impasse (Modified by J Batson 2014)
dotted lines linking $P_1$ in Person A and $P_1$ in Person B indicate projected material. Following the dotted line, $P_1$ in Person A becomes $P_1$ in Person B, and vice-versa. For the sake of clarity in the diagram I have not shown a representation of a third degree or level of interpersonal impasse. A third degree interpersonal impasse would occur between ego-states which comprise the sub-structure of $C_1$ in each person. A third degree interpersonal impasse if represented in this diagram would refer to an interaction based on early life fixations, say up to 6 months of age. The interaction would be shown as $P_0$ in Person A interacting with $C_0$ in Person B and vice versa. Second degree interpersonal impasse indicates an impasse based on pre-school age fixations and third degree impasses as impasses fixated from a period later than ages 5 or 6 years.

**Reflection: An impasse in a relationship**

The episode I am about to describe occurred approximately 20 something years ago. In spite of this, it is still vivid in my memory. Since that time `a lot of water has flown under the bridge’, as they say. I have matured. I have learned a lot about the functioning of humankind. I have also learned more about my own functioning and I know my relationship with my wife Claire is also different. It is less tempestuous and more even natured. I feel more secure: we both feel more secure, individually and as a couple. The storms that affected our relationship back then now do not occur, or if they do occur, they are less intense and pass in what seems like no time at all. Back then, the impasse we were caught up in seemed to have been ever present. It lingered near the surface of our interactions and was acted out with bitterness at the drop of a hat; fed by a sense of injustice and mutual self-righteousness. I look back and I am amazed at the strength of the feelings I had. I am amazed too at the intensity with which I defended my view of events. I am surprised at the vigour
with which I strove to make an impression on Claire. How come she could not see what I could see? How come she made such outlandish claims? My bitterness towards her, even back then, shocked me. I often felt hated by her whether or not she felt it. In the overall context of our relationship such bitterness was out of place. People might have said such responses were out of character. Generally we got on very well together. But, then there was this...! In calmer moments, I knew and I suspect we both knew we were doing the best we could to adjust to a difficult situation. Unfortunately, we seemed unable to overcome the outbursts which erupted from time to time and about which we seemed to have no understanding. We had made changes to our lives and to our life together and neither of us was prepared for what we were experiencing. We had walked into the changes with our eyes wide open but we had not in any way anticipated what their consequences might be individually and as a couple. The new circumstances we faced threw our relationship into turmoil. At times, I wondered whether our relationship would survive. It seemed that even with the best will in the world there were unknown and unforeseen forces at play that made getting along together extremely difficult. We both wanted something from the other and we were oblivious about what it was and about how to respond to the other’s needs with compassion and empathy. I wanted something and I could not put it into words. The more I demanded the more Claire resisted and withdrew. The more Claire demanded the more I resisted and became angry and controlling.

We had moved to Nelson. We had moved when Claire had been offered a job in the local polytechnic. I too had applied for a job in the same organisation but I had been unsuccessful. I felt rejected. I felt especially rejected because the people doing the hiring had once been colleagues of mine and they were people
with whom I had assumed I had a positive and mutually respectful relationship. I felt hurt and at times I felt angry and resentful. At the same time, I was also pleased that Claire had got the job she had, because it had enabled us to move to Nelson, a place we both liked. When we moved we had looked forward to begin a new phase of our life together. For the first time in a very long time I was unemployed and I had glimpses of the unfamiliar and unchartered territory of my life ahead. In spite of feeling hurt, I was both excited and nervous as I faced circumstances that I had not faced for a long while; a new career. Although my work future was uncertain I saw an opportunity to follow a new direction. I had managed to shake myself free of one career and I could now pursue work interests that had been building within me for a while. Claire on the other hand was nervous and understandably keen to do well in her new role. As is her style, she devoted herself to her new job, worked hard and was diligent in trying to find her feet in what was not only a new job for her but was also a new position within the organisation. She often talked about the challenges she was facing. They were complex and fraught with difficulties because of existing loyalties and historical associations. There was confusion in the organisation about her role and this confusion was passed onto her as she sought to find her way forward. She met people from within and from outside the organisation, who provided her with insight into the direction she might take. She was learning lots about training and management both of them areas that were of interest to me also. Until then, we had always worked together and had long enjoyed generating ideas and discussing what was happening to us and around us. In this nothing was different. We still found moments of familiar mutual satisfaction in this way. What was different was the jealousy I felt both at what Claire was doing and for the people with whom she now worked. This meant that at times it was hard for me to listen to her as she
explained to me what she was dealing with in her work. Increasingly, I felt shut out from an arena in which I had once operated. As our conversations became increasingly tense, I sensed Claire was shutting me out. I too shut her out. I became less curious and less generous in my responses to what she said. I had spent the previous fifteen years working in a similar organisation building up my wisdom and experience. Claire had always been my junior partner in this development and in the past it had been with her that I had discussed my challenges and direction. Our roles had been reversed and I was not coping well from this new position.

While the circumstances were new and challenging for both of us, they seemed at the start to be especially challenging for me. I felt increasingly disconnected from the working world with which I had been familiar and from which, as I realized I acquired my sense of self. In spite of the frustrations and the stress I had sometimes felt in my work it had given me a sense of worth and purpose. I knew who I was and I had an important reason for getting up each morning. In moving to Nelson without a `career' job to occupy me I felt insignificant and deskilled. People I met and with whom I tried to forge working relationships did not know what I could do and they had no idea about my reputation. It was like beginning on the ladder again. I had lots of skills and experience but very few people knew this about me. I had to promote myself in a way I had never previously had to do. What had happened to me previously had seemingly happened naturally without me having to try. I had been well-chosen and so did not really know how to act when I was not so. I desperately wanted others to choose me. I was unsure and self-conscious. I could not take anything for granted. The certainty and security I had felt for a long number of years fell away. For the first time in my life I felt I was on a downward slope. I lacked self-
confidence, and I became uncertain of who I was. I felt increasingly anxious and I became depressed. An acquaintance described me as ‘melancholic’. I resented being seen in this way and protested loudly, but I knew at some level that she was spot on with her description. It was not one I liked nor was it familiar to me. I had always been seen as one of life’s competent achievers and I was used to achieving with a smile on my face. Claire, on the other hand, was doing her best to get going in her new career. She was developing a new role and had demands on her time and energy that kept her out of home and sometimes out of town. I missed her presence. She had to give up being a full-time mother to our children and at best could only attend to them part-time. In spite of this she joined them in lots of in-house and outdoor activities including skiing and tramping. She formed new friendships and did her best to make sure our children were supported in what they wanted to do. She felt responsible for providing financially for our family and she felt guilty and sometimes responsible for my increasing depressive moods.

It was against this background that our impasse was acted out. We would suddenly find ourselves in the midst of a bitter argument each in turn blaming and defending against the accusations of the other. Often these episodes occurred late in the evening and would then carry on into the early hours, each of us going to sleep feeling wounded and emotionally battered and frustrated. Beneath this raft of feelings I mistrusted Claire. I feared she would leave me. I feared that my unreasonable attitude would be the straw that broke the back of the proverbial camel. I feared that with each repeat event my behaviour and attitude would serve to burst the bubble of positive regard which she had had for me. Her words, once uttered, “I would not put up with a bad marriage”, would haunt me and echo in my mind. In the period after an ‘out burst’ I was
wary and contrite trying my best not to make matters worse living in the hope that I might yet salvage what I now felt was threatened. Claire felt despondent and despairing. She felt torn between her job and her relationship with me. She felt guilty thinking that somehow she was the cause of my and our mutual unhappiness. She survived by keeping going. She too feared that I would leave her fearing that I would act out my frustration by blaming her and using that as a reason for ending our relationship. Each acting-out of our impasse led to a repeat version of our mutual fear. Knowing this, however, did little to ease the distress we each felt.

One evening we went out for dinner. It was a special occasion. We had chosen a restaurant neither of us had been in before. We were chatting away amiably when Claire said something which I immediately thought needed correcting. What it was she said I cannot recall; it is immaterial. What I remember was the knot I had in my stomach. I had to correct her misconception. I felt compelled to do so. There was urgency in me. I had been misunderstood. I was oblivious to Claire’s entreaties; “Do not do this! Don’t spoil our evening together”. But by now I was on a mission. I wanted to be understood. I wanted to correct her mistake. Her presumption was incorrect. I felt desperate. It came from deep inside of me. Suddenly the person who had at one moment been my close friend suddenly became my enemy. I was in battle mode. I wanted her to know that what she had said and the presumption that appeared to go with it were wrong. She had no idea how I felt and what I had endured. She withdrew and became silent. She was self-conscious that we were being so seemingly antagonistic in such a public place. By the time I stopped my attack the damage had been done. The closeness was replaced by distance and we ate our meal in silence; neither of us able to look at the other. It now did not seem to matter
what we said, nothing could alleviate the heaviness we both felt. I paid the bill. We walked home distant and silent. Sadly, for a while there were many episodes like this. Each acted out in a different setting on different occasions but each following a familiar pattern.

**An analysis of a relational impasse**

As time passed, we learned that the impasse within which we were entangled had been a feature of our relationship from the start. It had appeared from time to time but it appeared especially in the stressful aftermath following our move to Nelson and the radical shift in the roles we had undertaken. It seemed not to matter that we had undertaken this shift knowingly. Neither of us could have anticipated our respective reactions and the intensity of the feelings which accompanied them. At a superficial level, it was a level 1 or first degree interpersonal impasse, there were umpteen organisational matters that we argued about; parenting styles; time keeping; the amount of work time and leisure time; the when and what of recreational activities, and friendships and socializing. These were some of the umpteen matters about which we had different opinions and views and about which we argued. We were unable to negotiate even the most straight forward issue. At a deeper level, level 2 or second degree impasse, the issue was about my feeling of belonging and or not belonging. I had felt acutely hurt when my some time colleagues had been unwilling to absorb me into their working world. I felt excluded and it hurt especially that the people who had rejected me were now Claire’s colleagues. This caused distance between her and I as she dealt with the tension of having to work with people who had been rejecting of me and about whom I now had
negative opinions. Claire reacted by trying to do the best she could in her work. She worked hard and creatively. She tried desperately to build positive relationships with the people about whom she knew I felt jealous and resentful. She was in a bind. She wanted to and she felt like she had to keep working hard. I felt like I had lost a good friend and companion as I observed her expanding into her work. She too, had lost an accepting and reliable companion. Being fulfilled was coming at a cost; her relationship with me. At a deeper level still, level 3, I increasingly felt useless and worthless. In my worst moments I felt myself literally shrinking in size symptomatic of the worthlessness and insignificance I felt. I became depressed and joyless and for a while people did not find me an attractive person to be around. My fears of worthlessness became thus compounded. I felt disconnected from the world and from the people around me and as in any self-fulfilling prophecy I became more so. I felt increasingly disconnected from my wife and from my family. Claire in the meanwhile had lots upon which to expand her talents. As she strove to be more herself and to do what her job required and to pursue her interests so she appeared to move away from me. She was in a bind. So was I but I could not see it. For me it felt like a matter of life and death; without a career, without a companion I felt increasingly invisible; as if I did not exist.

**The flavour of impasse: mistrust, incongruence...**

Couples are prevented from being close because of betrayals. An act of betrayal is a cause of mistrust in the relationship. The offender, the person who enacts the betrayal becomes untrustworthy; they cannot be trusted. At one end of the spectrum there are betrayals which are major episodes which
might include infidelity, addiction and abuse. They are experienced as acts involving disloyalty and disregard. They are felt by the non-offending person as a deep emotional wounding and often come as a surprise and as a shock. Often the betrayal comes from out of the ‘blue’. The person betrayed may feel like their life has been turned upside down; suddenly, the other person is not the person they knew. The certainty in the other that once existed has now gone. Often the person betrayed is traumatised by the actions of the other and for a while they are in shock. They know their life has changed. They are confused and it is too soon to plan for what lies ahead. They are coming to grips with what they now know has happened. They are in grief and they are struggling to face a deep and personal loss. The person who has enacted the betrayal may also be in shock; that which was hidden is now out in the open. They fear the consequences of what they have done. Their life too, may appear to have changed irrevocably and they do not know how to act as they come to grips with the impact of their behaviour on the other person. They feel guilty and ashamed and may as a consequence seek to minimize what they have done. They can see and hear the pain, anger and anguish of the person who feels betrayed. They too, may feel weakened and their life may feel out of control. They may have regrets which add to the guilt they feel as they see what it means for the other person. Betrayals, such as these are major episodes evoking mistrust and damaged perceptions of trustworthiness. In these circumstances the reasons for the hurt and for mistrust are overt and obvious. One person can say to the other, “I don’t trust you because...” or“... I don’t trust you anymore...” and later, “I haven’t trusted you since...” The non-betraying person is able to attach their mistrust to a specific time or event and can relate it to a specific act of betrayal. Later they may realize that they had some inkling that something was not right in the relationship. Sadly,
sometimes the act of betrayal is in hindsight already known to the hurt victim and they painfull know they chose to ignore what they intuitively knew sometimes hoping that whatever was causing their concern in the other would pass. They then add guilt and regret to their hurt and fear. An act of betrayal is nearly always symptomatic of an impasse. Each dramatic event serves to exacerbate the problem in the relationship rather than easing it in the long term. Acts of betrayal may be a person’s unconscious attempt to break out of an impasse. Violence and other acts of malice may bring temporary relief to the tension felt by one or other of the couple caught up in the impasse. Sadly, when the dust settles in reality nothing is different. The relationship has not been restructured. Adam Curle (Curle, 1971) suggests that such restructuring/transformation is necessary to affect proper harmony. Following an upheaval of whatever kind, the couple may go about their business as if nothing has happened. If the dynamic and the issues that underpin it are not addressed then tension will build again until there is another acting-out.

At the other end of the spectrum the acting out of an impasse is more muted, less obvious and is likely manifested in arguments, blaming and withdrawal. In the illustration of a couple impasse described above other patrons in the restaurant would not have noticed our acting out. If they had been attentive they might have noticed a sudden change in my demeanour from being soft and open to being stern and angry. Those with acute observation might have noticed that suddenly there was between us a lack of laughter and smiling, an absence of eye contact and a lack of conversation. What they might also have noticed is that we had both become stiff and awkward, seemingly self-conscious in our movements. What they could not see was the anger and resentment that churned in me and the panic in Lily as she realized she could
not prevent what I was doing. If they kept watching they might have noticed a
softening in my face and attempts to get connected to Lily again. What they
could not see was the sense of hopelessness I felt when I realized that almost
in spite of ourselves we were in the same old dynamic. I was fearful and
despairing. Our impasse was close to the surface and it had erupted again
occurring as if out of nowhere. Our lack of awareness or lack of willingness to
address the issues meant that we were easy prey to arguing when the desire to
win and to be understood dominated. Our desire to be resonated with and to
resonate with the feelings of the other was lost in the to and fro of a bitter
dialogue. Our mutual incapacity to reach beyond the accusations and counter
accusations meant that we were at the mercy of the incongruence of the
other. What we each said was not all that we felt and thought, but what was
authentic in us was buried and lost in the barrage of attack and defend. Our
mutual discounting of self and of the other maintained our mutual
incongruence. We were vulnerable and felt like the only defence was to attack.
We each avoided being authentic about our fears, regrets, needs and wishes.

We were unable to clearly tell the other about our real concerns. We were
each faced with the incongruence of the other and the inevitable lack of ‘real’
connection and consequently withdrew. In any relationship failure to make a
real connection with the other person is frustrating, hurtful and threatening.
Our frantic attempts to defend ourselves and at the same time to stay
connected proved yet again to be futile and we were left to lick our own
emotional wounds knowing that unwittingly we have been drawn into the
vortex again. I lacked the awareness of what I was doing. I was too busy
defending myself.
Mistrust is integral in an impasse in enduring adult relationships. Mistrust is generated by betrayal which is manifested dramatically by acts perceived as disloyal or disregarding. Mistrust may also be generated by transactions which are perceived as being incongruent. Incongruence generates mistrust. Mistrust generated by mutual incongruence in an impasse provides the basis for the interactions to be frantic, intense and characterized by heightened reactivity. People faced with incongruity ‘know’ there is something not right with the response of the other. No matter how hard they try they are unable to get the other person to acknowledge the reality of what it is they hear and or see. Instead of authenticity in the other’s response with which they could easily resonate they see and hear something else. The intensity of an impasse emerges from this desperate mutual attempt to find authenticity when there is only incongruence. The unease which is generated by incongruence is sometimes difficult to pinpoint and to describe as a person grapples with the duplicity of what the other person says and does. Mistrust emerges when a person is unsure of what to believe, because they ‘see one thing’ and ‘hear another’. The incongruence is subtle and yet it can evoke self-doubt and caution in the other. Such subtlety is manifested in statements such as, “I know there is something but I do not know what it is.” Often such incongruence makes sense only in hind sight as new and more conspicuous evidence emerges. Incongruence is sometimes ‘crazy making’; it makes people doubt their grasp of reality. It makes them doubt what they hear and what they see. They do not know what to believe.

The subtlety and potency of incongruent interactions is encapsulated in Eric Berne’s (Berne, 1964, pp 28-32) description of an ulterior transaction. An ulterior transaction is one in which the overt message (Berne used the term
`social’ message) is delivered simultaneously with the covert message (Berne uses the term `psychological’ message). The recipient of this double message hears one message and yet `feels’ that there is another which is not explicit. The recipient may consequently experience doubt and confusion over what they have heard. They may feel unable to whole heartedly respond to either of the messages and as a consequence they may respond with equal duplicity thus setting up an interaction characterised by incongruence. The ulterior transaction is delivered without awareness of the subtle content of the psychological and covert message. For the recipient they know that what they have heard and should feel is not what they `know and feel’. The social message is likely to contain the words and is intended to evoke a desired response from the other. The psychological message has a more subtle intent and is unconsciously intended to manoeuvre or manipulate another kind of response from the recipient. It is this aspect of the transaction that causes the confusion and doubt in the recipient. Thus the recipient is left wondering; `...what’s real here....’
This diagram illustrates a transaction, a moment in the interaction between two people, Person A and Person B. In TA language it is used for a functional analysis; in other words, it illustrates what a person does and says. This is compared with the structural use of the ego-state model which forms the basis of the impasse diagram which is shown above (page .....). A structural ego-state diagram illustrates the composition of the psyche of the person. In this diagram P represents the vocabulary, tone of voice, gestures, facial expression normally associated with a person who is like a parent. A represents the vocabulary, facial expressions, tone of voice gestures normally associated with
someone who is being factual. C represents the vocabulary, tone of voice, gestures, facial expressions normally associated with someone who is like a child. The solid arrow represents the social-overt message and the broken arrow the psychological-covert message. In this ulterior transaction the social message is intended to be factual and matter of fact; e.g. “The house is untidy”. The psychological-covert message which is delivered outside of awareness is parental. Person B feels the criticism of their suggested culpability in making the house untidy and hence becomes defensive.

In the case illustration, above, I responded as if I had heard criticism in what Claire said. I (Person A in the diagram above) responded with an ulterior transaction as I pointed out the inaccuracy of what I had heard her say. At the same time I was angry and I wanted to ‘put her right’. I spoke harshly. Claire felt the pull to respond to this harshness and tried to keep us both out of an argument. The harder she tried the more intent I became to ‘put her right’. She eventually capitulated to my aggressive and self-defensive explanations and we were immersed in an argument. The impasse was being acted out and was there for all to see.

...vulnerability and distorted perception.

When I look back at my experience of being caught up in the impasse described above I find it hard to identify the character that was me. I find it hard to accept that I could be so angry, unloving and defiant. I revealed attributes that had been dormant and so deeply buried that when I revealed them I had difficulty acknowledging them as my own. Though I would have
found it hard to admit, I felt ashamed of what I said and about how I behaved and I was careful about the context in which I displayed myself in this way. I would have been mortified to think that others witnessed this aspect of my functioning. I did my best to keep my behaviour and the feelings that went with it hidden from others who might judge me adversely. I judged myself. I found it hard to acknowledge that what I felt, what I said and how I behaved was an aspect of me. I did not like this part of me but I was out of control and I could not stop myself reacting as I did. It was a knee-jerk reaction intended to defend myself against further injustice and criticism. I felt vulnerable and I was prepared to defend myself resolutely and vigorously. I was frightened; fearful that the truth behind my anxiety and depression would be revealed. It was easier for me to blame others.

Vulnerability, along with mistrust and incongruence, contribute to the nature of an interpersonal impasse. The online free dictionary (http://www.thefreedictionary.com) defines vulnerability as; “...susceptible to physical and emotional injury; susceptible to attack; open to censure or criticism, assailable.” Vulnerability infers risk (Peck, 1987; Alwang, Siegel & Jorgensen, 2001; Brown, 2012). It infers that given the current attributes, conditions or circumstances of individuals, organisations or groups they will in some way, in the future, be worse off when subjected to certain circumstances. These circumstances may be current or they are potentially threatening. Vulnerability involves a risk of being wounded or in some way harmed or disadvantaged. It means that there is a risk that one’s inadequacy or fallibility will be exposed.

Vulnerability implies being `open’ and risking being ridiculed, shamed and in some other way to be hurt or to be disadvantaged by the actions of others. It
also means being susceptible to developing unpleasant and uncomfortable attributes as a consequence of exposure to circumstances which limit or shape development. Individuals, for example, are vulnerable to developing psychological conditions like depression; psycho-social conditions like addictions; and socio-economic attributes, like poverty, depending on their exposure to relevant and significant social, political, economic, emotional, and behavioural and other influences.

In an interpersonal relationship the risk of being diminished or disadvantaged by the other lies dormant. When one of the couple feels threatened they react vigorously to protect themselves from further feelings of inadequacy. The threat whether it is real or perceived is felt as a threat to their sense of self, to their self image and in extreme cases to their physical person. The threat is overwhelming and very frightening. The person fears being exposed, ridiculed or battered. In most cases people fear they will not be heard nor seen and otherwise unaccepted by the other. At the most basic level they are fearful that the other person will see them as being as being unlovable and otherwise unworthy. They fear rejection, abandonment. The intimacy, duration and the all encompassing nature of enduring couple relationships make the risk greater. Each person has so much to lose. They are at their most vulnerable.

As they each attempt to defend against the threat they feel from the other they resort to behaviour and claims and counter claims that are intended to be self-protective. Each reacts in a mindless and unthinking way. Their defence is real but is inauthentic. That which they fear most gets lost in the desperate attempt to protect themselves from the accusations of the other. Their experience is their worst nightmare. To protect themselves they try to be invulnerable. What ensues is a self-defeating mindless and scrambled
interaction which grows in intensity and which increasingly defeats the purpose of what is wanted and desired.

Scheinkman and Fishbane (Scheinkman and Fishbane, 2002) in a model similar to Hemlin’s model (above) of impasse emphasise both the sense of vulnerability and the resulting defensiveness. They describe a pattern of interaction they call ‘core impasses’. A core impasse is a situation in which couples become embroiled in intense emotional reactivity. Their attempts to resolve their differences become derailed and the way they talk and try to negotiate with each other become part of the problem with which they are struggling. Core impasses, they suggest are experienced as difficult entanglements for the couple because they involve “… the activation of vulnerabilities and survival strategies, which complicates the couple’s process.” This activation emerges because one or both of the couple unconsciously experiences painful reactions which have their origin and legacy in other historical or relational contexts. In addition, “Core impasses may also spring from tensions related to power inequities and disconnections based on gender or cultural differences.” (Scheinkman & Fishbane, 2004, p 281.) The dynamic which the couple co-create is a self-perpetuating system of interactions which comprise both `vulnerabilities’ and `survival strategies’. In this context a vulnerability is described as “… a sensitivity that individuals bring from their past histories or current contexts in their lives to the intimacy of their relationships. Like injuries that remain sensitive to the touch, when vulnerabilities are triggered by the dynamics of the couple’s relationship they produce intense reactivity and pain.” (Scheinkman & Fishbane, 2004, p 28). The vulnerability is like a sore that is easily aggravated. It is an emotional and cognitive response which is evoked, outside of awareness, by the provocative,
or at least by what is perceived as being provocative, actions or words expressed by the other. It entails heightened emotions which follow and which feed unconscious thoughts and beliefs about self and about the other. To the outside observer the person may be over-reacting to the immediate stimulus. They are acutely sensitive to what the other person says or does. They see and hear a threat even when there is none in reality.

In the face of this awful experience or in anticipation of it occurring the person seeks to protect themselves. They adopt a ‘survival position’ which is designed to ward off the threat and to protect the person from the full-impact of the other person’s words and actions. A survival position is adopted without awareness and with speed. It is adopted automatically. It is a well tried response to the current and similar threats. It has its origins early in the person’s life and was normally adopted as the most effective protective response in the circumstances. Scheinkman and Fishbane describe survival strategies in this way. **“These positions are usually the best way a person found in the past to protect self or others in the family of origin, and to maintain a sense of integrity and control in emotionally difficult situations. Survival positions are often adopted before they can be put into words, and certainly before they can be evaluated critically. Survival positions include beliefs and premises that become mottos to live by.” (Scheinkman and Fishbane, p 283).** The ‘core impasse’ emerges or is activated at times of stress. As each person experiences a threat to their vulnerability their automatic response is manifested in the form of an activation of their survival strategy. The acting out of this strategy is felt by the other person as a threat to their vulnerability. This is in turn evokes an automatic survival strategy which is felt by the other at the point of their vulnerability. The dynamic thus co-created becomes
intense, bitter and self-perpetuating. The interactions continue until the couple run out of energy or find another way of breaking out of the cycle. As the couple gradually emerge out of impasse they experience relief because the tension has eased but they know that the problem has not been solved or resolved. They then wait for the next episode of impasse to emerge and to be enacted between them.

Diagram 5: The Vulnerability cycle (Scheinkman & Fishbane, 2004)

Person A and Person B each have their own Vulnerability which when engaged or activated automatically activate their Survival Strategies. Person A has their Vulnerability exposed by Person B’s acting out of their Survival Strategy. Person A attempts to protect their vulnerability by automatically activating their own survival strategy. This is felt by Person B as a threat to their Vulnerability. Person B automatically responds by acting out their own Survival Strategy which is felt by Person A as a threat to their Vulnerability. The process is repeated and on-going. In the illustration of the interpersonal impasse above, I felt vulnerable to criticism or to being disregarded in the struggle I was
enduring at the time. I responded by trying to `put right’ the distorted perception I detected in what Claire had said to me. Claire felt intimidated by my aggression and felt powerless to prevent my response to what she had said. She adopted her `survival strategy’ which involved withdrawing from me in order to protect herself from my verbal `attack’. Her withdrawal stimulated action from me because I felt vulnerable to her withdrawal and resorted to my survival strategy which involved an on-going monologue in which I tried to correct what I had perceived as her distorted perception. Avoidance, withdrawal and disengagement are common indicators that a conflict is escalating.

**Impasse in a nutshell**

An impasse comprises a number of elements; mistrust, incongruence, distorted perceptions and defensiveness as a means of protecting vulnerability. Together these elements comprise a cocktail of experiences which serve to establish a dynamic which is repetitive and which creates a feeling of being stuck. The couple cannot move and progress in the development of their relationship. Each element has to be addressed in some measure if the couple is to move out of their impasse. However, a change in one element generates consequential changes in one or more of the other elements. For example, if one of the people involved is more congruent about the issues facing them in the relationship they are displaying a willingness to be vulnerable. A willingness to be vulnerable by one person invites
vulnerability in the other person. At the same time, as they become more congruent so they are likely to become more trustworthy as the other person begins to see them in a new light.

Diagram 6: Elements of an Interpersonal Impasse
Chapter 4: Impasse and Cyprus

“And when he came to the place where the wild things are they roared their terrible roars and gnashed their terrible teeth and rolled their terrible eyes and showed their terrible claws till Max said “BE STILL!” and tamed them with the magic trick of staring into all their yellow eyes without blinking once and they were frightened and called him the most wild thing of all and made him king of all wild things. “And now,” cried Max, “let the wild rumpus start!” (Sendak, 1963)

Reflection… From counselling room to Cyprus

I pause as I take in what it is I am about to do. I am shifting my focus; from relationships that comprise two people to a relationship that comprises two separate ethnic communities. I am moving from that which is familiar to that which is not. One is based on 26 years of experience comprising a mixture of training, practical experience, observation and reflection and the other based on the reported observations and analysis of others. I am taking a while to absorb the significance of my task. I know this is what I want to do. I feel a compulsion! This is central to the purpose of this thesis. This is it! All that has gone before has been a prelude to this moment. I am ready to step forward. I am hesitant and tentative. I am on the edge of doing something new. I am at the point where I have often been in my mind. So in a way, I know this point very well. I have stood here often entangled in my fear, optimism and frustration. But, this where I get stuck! I can look forward and I can look back. I know I have options. I can go forward or I can go back! Unfortunately, neither is especially appealing at this time. In my mind, moving forward has always been a simple process; I `slide’! It is such a clear sensation. I move from a view
of the interpersonal, involving two people to a view of the inter-group, involving many, in one seemingly involuntary movement. It is smooth and effortless; I start in the familiar and end up in the unfamiliar. It is so easy! But then, in only a matter of seconds so it seems, as I take stock of my new and unfamiliar location I start to feel uncomfortable and I am out of my depth. I fear that what I know is too narrow. It is inadequate to embrace both situations. I fear it is not enough. I fear that what I know is irrelevant. What I know from my work with couples I fear will not be applicable to the seemingly greater complexity of inter-group relationships. I fear, above all, that I will have to invest more time and effort into learning more! It is a daunting prospect and as I contemplate this, my energy drains away. In my mind’s eye, I immediately swing back to what I know and to what is familiar; what happens in a couple relationship. This is how I assuage my anxiety and fear. Then inevitably I think, “Every person experiences the same set of responses in an impasse, regardless of the relationship and regardless of the context.” My focus is once again on a dyad, on a couple in a relationship. I am on familiar ground. It is my way of moving forward. I simplify, I generalize, I become dogmatic and for a while I feel easier. I feel relief.

I know from experience that my relief is temporary. The enduring relief I want is an illusion. I know this. I am not even convinced by my own conviction. I know that life, my life, is not this simple. I am in my own impasse. I have a problem; I move forward and then I bounce back. I hear an echo of my own voice; “If you keep doing the same thing you end up with the same outcome!” I have been caught up in this impasse for many years; ever since I thought I could continue peace-making by working as a counsellor. I am still challenged by an understanding of how the ‘world out there’ functions. I have always faced this
quandary. Suddenly, my impasse takes on a different hue. I am transported back to being a child growing up in west London, closeted in a street that was closed off by a small factory at one end and which spilled out into a ‘main road’ at the other. The wider world existed beyond the street while the street was my world. All that I wanted and needed was contained therein. I was in a big playground and I enjoyed the variety it provided. I ventured out from my street and I returned willingly, relieved to be embraced by its familiarity. I felt secure. I felt awed by the outside world, beyond my street. My current impasse is yet another version of the challenge I faced as a boy. It is an impasse I have faced many times over the years. I am reassured when I reflect that it is in the nature of impasses for the core dynamic to get played out over and over, in various contexts until the challenge is tackled head on. Back then as now, my challenge was to venture into the wider world beyond the street; to learn what I could, make some sense of it and return, a wiser person, to the street and to what was familiar. This is quite a challenge when my experience was and is limited, specific and contained. Now as then, this is the challenge I face. Cyprus is now the wider world and as I contemplate what I already know, I have a dilemma. It is the kind of dilemma faced by anyone caught up in an impasse. My dilemma seems straightforward, some are not; do what I have always done or do something new. The old and the new! The old means relying on my wondering and imagination without ever really bothering to find out. The new involves investigating to find out what is going on in relationships like those on Cyprus. Can I interpret what I know is happening thereon in the same way I am able to interpret the dynamics of couple relationships? As in all dilemmas, there is the bright prospect that what I know will be confirmed and I will be reassured. On the other hand I may realize that what I know is irrelevant and simplistic and at the end of the day I will have to let go of my fantasy in order to accommodate a
new reality. This is always a forbidding prospect. It was a forbidding prospect back then when I was a boy and it is just as forbidding now! I know it has to do with the way I learn. I am reassured when my learning seems to build on what I know. I become anxious when I am trying to learn that which appears strange and unrelated. To get out of the impasse I am in I know I have to face that which I fear. Understandably I am hesitant and tentative. I am accepting of this. Perhaps this is what is different this time around. My anxiety is no reason to abandon my work. I keep going. I know I have to come up with a different response. I refocus my mind and somewhere from inside me I find the energy to make the next step.

What I see in myself is very familiar when I see it in others. Any movement forward, any attempt to break new ground, any attempt to move out of an impasse seems inevitably to be accompanied by hesitation and tentativeness. Usually these sentiments accompany a commitment or a clear statement of intent. I presume they are present and I look for their presence, verbal and non-verbal and I am curious about their aetiology and the impact they have for clients in their `here and now' desire for something new. I am curious about the fear which seems at its best to support ambivalence and at its worst may lead to immobility and frustration. To ignore this fear is likely to mean progress is hampered and the scope of what is achieved may be limited and restricted. When people are frightened they will procrastinate, avoid, become distracted, seek scapegoats, project, blame, and undermine. They may act out by being violent, over-adapted, agitated or by doing nothing and giving up. To avoid addressing the fear, is like avoiding mentioning the elephant in the room and jeopardizes the whole process of moving out of an impasse. By acknowledging and addressing their fear the people involved often feel vulnerable. Revealing
the source of their fear is usually terrifying. They feel exposed and fear being humiliated and ridiculed. To address these sensitive experiences they need ‘protection’ (Crossman, 1966); intrapsychically from the force of introjected and ‘Parental’ messages and interpersonally from the force of the response, real or imagined, of the other person. Addressing a person’s fear requires sensitivity, empathy and reassurance. For a couple, disclosing their respective fear is an opportunity for increased mutual understanding and empathy. Addressing their fear provides the parties with a common experience. They are able to join together in their fear of each other and of the process. Fear is normal and likely when people move out of an impasse. It requires the people involved to develop a new and fresh look at the way things are. They have to let go of the old, fear-ridden and distorted perceptions, while taking on new perceptions and a new way of engaging with the other person and or with the world. This is always frightening. It is always frightening for me. People are always frightened of what is likely to befall them if they strive to create the circumstances or situation to which they now aspire. Their fear is normal and even if it is addressed it does not mean that it necessarily disappears altogether. Some people are more frightened than others and their fear keeps resurfacing. In these circumstances it is not the source of the fear that is crucial but rather what the person will do when their fear is present and evident. People have more chance of success when they know what to do to keep going forward even when they are frightened. Being frightened is no reason to stop going forward. I remind myself of this as I waiver in my task at hand.

I know of Cyprus only from a distance. I have never been there. The closest I have come to the island was cycling through eastern Greece into north-western Turkey into Istanbul in 1996 when the tension over Cyprus was evident in
posters and in antagonistic attitudes held by local Greeks towards anything Turkish. Unbeknown to me at the time, tension on the island had heightened in the wake of Greek Cypriot protests and Greek Cypriots purchase of Russian ground to air missiles. Prior to this my interest goes back a long way. In the mid to late 1950’s I was a teenager living in London. Cyprus was frequently in the news; on the radio and in the newspapers. I came to know names and words associated with the island as events on the island, and events associated with it were reported and publically analysed. Coincidentally and symptomatically the events in Cyprus were linked to the ‘cold war’ which was being enacted between the super powers, U.S.S.R and the United States. The menace of the aggression of these two powerful states was forever present. Britain as a prominent player in the international politics of the time was intimately involved both in the cold war and in the constitutional and military developments unfolding in Cyprus. In that context, Britain was in the thick of things. Similarly, the people of Cyprus were caught up in the complexities of world politics, whether they liked it or not (O’Malley and Craig, 1999). The ever present menace and threat of war made me uneasy. I was frightened. I remember feeling powerless in the face of what I heard reported about what was happening in Cyprus and elsewhere in the world. I waited for what felt like the inevitable expansion of hostilities involving Britain. The Second World War was historically close and memories of it were still vivid and impactful in me and in my family who had been more directly involved. I recall feeling dread at the mention of names like, Makarios, the then president of Cyprus and EOKA, the Cypriot based Greek Cypriot political/terrorist party promoting ‘enosis’ or union with Greece. I felt especially fearful at the mention of General Grivas, portrayed through the media as the ruthless Greek Cypriot terrorist leader of EOKA. In the turmoil, as I have since found out, 371 British military lives were
lost. The events on Cyprus felt close to home and felt closer to me personally. Cyprus was and for a long while remained one symbol of my fear and my foreboding. For a while, it was a focal point for my dread which accompanied the cold war and the build-up of nuclear arsenals. The Suez Crisis in 1956 (I was aged 14 at the time) created and added to my sense of alarm, unease and uncertainty. It showed how quickly and easily political relationships could escalate into open aggression. I feared that my father would be called up into the armed forces once again and be shipped to Egypt to fight a war. Since then, my interest in Cyprus has been enduring even as it became more distant over time. Over the years, I have heard snippets of news about what was happening on the island and my ears pricked up to listen though without registering the same terror and concern I had as a young boy. I have known the communities on the island are divided but I had not known about the significance and the detailed history behind that division. Even so, when I came to seek an example of inter-community impasse Cyprus quickly came to my mind. I could have chosen from a number of other and similar situations (see web-site, www.warsintheworld.com) but the lure of Cyprus was strong. My interest emerged as if unbridled. It is obvious that my emotional association with the island has remained powerful.
The Cyprus impasse

History

When it comes to Cyprus I am reliant for my understanding on the observations of others. I cannot rely on my own observations as I can with working with couples. I have read widely and I have included academic as well as auto-biographical material as I have sought to get a feel for what it means to be Cypriot and to grasp an understanding of the historical and contemporary issues that support the long established and on-going partitioning of the island and of the island’s ethnic communities. There has been much written about Cyprus; it has been as attractive a subject as the relationships between the two communities has been intractable. In fact, I suspect that it is an attractive subject because the relationship between Turkish Cypriots and Greek Cypriots is intractable. The fact that there is no easy way forward and that there is no apparent solution to the problems facing the island’s population generates an interest from those who seek to understand why a relationship like this should be so stuck. There is something beguiling about insolubility and intransigence.

Faced with this ‘stuckness’ my simple hypothesis throughout this thesis is that “Every person experiences the same set of responses in an impasse, regardless of the relationship and regardless of the context.” In other words, there is an intrapsychic and an interpersonal aspect in all impasses regardless of their context. Based on my work with couples I have searched for familiar concepts and ideas in what I have read about Cyprus. I have hoped that what others see in the bi-ethnic relationship is the same as what I see in my work with couples?
I have wondered if the words they use to describe what they observe would have the same meaning as the words I use when I analyse couple relationships. Would they describe the impasse on Cyprus in a way that enables me to identify the same constituent components that I have identified comprising impasses as experienced by couples? I had hoped I could conclude that the answer is an emphatic “Yes” but I think in reality the answer is more tentative and is more likely to be ‘perhaps’ or ‘maybe’ or ‘to some degree in some circumstances’. The major difficulty in making a straight comparison emerges from comparing a relational dyad, two people, with a multi-dimensional relationship comprising two collections of people. In some ways it is much more difficult to work effectively with individuals when they are members of and/or representatives of a group, especially the ethnic groups like those on Cyprus. In that context it seems impossible to identify a key and central relationship with which to work. When working with a couple, one can assume that the counsellor and the couple themselves give the relationship a primacy to which all other relationships are secondary. This means that when considering the influence of others, children or members of the extended family for example, it is done in the context of the impact the other has on the primary relationship. For example, when a women feels torn in her loyalty between her mother and her husband, the consideration for the counsellor, and consequently for the couple is the impact on the couple when the presence of the women’s mother is felt by one or other of the couple. The challenge in counselling is to find a way for the couple to remain united when one of them feels a conflict of loyalty. On Cyprus this conflict is maintained by dominant central narratives linking members of each community to relationships with a parent nation.
The focus on the dyad in couple counselling provides a unique experience for the two people involved to move through a process by which they can move out of the impasse. It is not so possible to create such an exclusive relationship when the impasse involves two groups of people, as is the case on Cyprus. In spite of this Kelman (Kelman, 2005), Rothman (Rothman, 1997), Doob (Doob, 1974), Broome (Broome, 1997 and 2004), Fisher (Fisher, 2001), Bar-Tal (Bar-Tal, 2013), and Curle (Curle, 1971, 1986, 1990, 1994) describe approaches that emphasise an interpersonal perspective. Doob and Broome focussed particularly on Cyprus and as outlined below, describe processes by which members of each of the island’s ethnic groups have opportunities for changing their attitudes about members of the other group. The processes they respectively describe include opportunities for participants to become more congruent with each other, change their perceptions of the other and to better understand their motives, to become more congruent and to become more secure in the face of vulnerability. On Cyprus, the impasse is displayed in the relationship between the two main ethnic communities; one comprising one third of the population in the north of the island and ostensibly Turks or Turkish Cypriots, and the other, Greek and Greek Cypriots comprising approximately two thirds of the population and occupying the south part of the island. It is ostensibly a political impasse in that it was created by and is maintained by politicians. It is also intractable indicating that there are more than political attitudes and differences at stake.

There are a number of circumstances that make it difficult for the two main Cypriot ethnic groups to negotiate a mutually satisfactory and beneficial outcome which moves them out of the impasse. Firstly, there is the multi-dimensional nature of the relationship between the island’s two main ethnic
groups. There is a vast range of social, political and economic issues to be settled between the two communities. Political representatives from both sides in the past have either aborted negotiations or they have disregarded agreed outcomes when they have been reached. Currently, political and diplomatic efforts appear to be at a standstill because there is a lack of will to address the issues. The most recent UN inspired negotiations have stalled in a somewhat predictable way. In addition and sometimes island politics are and have been blurred by divided loyalties as a consequence of external relationships. In the 450 years of their joint occupation the island’s two main ethnic groups have triangulated their relationship with each other and consequently have not been able to find mutually satisfying agreements. Greek Cypriots shifted to join a greater Hellenistic community and consequently were drawn politically and ethnically towards mainland Greece. This was clearly manifested in the 1950s and 1960s by the enosis movement which sought union with Greece. Turkish Cypriots at the same time developed an opposing philosophy and strategy encapsulated by the word taksim meaning separation and which included union with Turkey. The current situation best represents taksim. The Turkish Cypriots have what they wanted in the mid twentieth century. Since the invasion and subsequent occupation of northern Cyprus by Turkish troops in 1974 this part of Cyprus has been formed into the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC). It is administered as a province of mainland Turkey thus making the TRNC more Turkish than Cypriot. At present it seems inconceivable that any political, economic and constitutional developments on Cyprus will be made without developments in other and external relationships; between Turkish Cypriots and Turkey, between Greek Cypriots and Greece and between the mainland governments of Greece and Turkey. Wider afield the European Union and the United Nations have an
interest in what happens in Cyprus just as in earlier days Turkish and Greek Cypriot relationships were affected by cold war relationships involving the USA and Russia. Cyprus’s position in the eastern Mediterranean has made it historically strategically significant as part of Britain’s need to protect its Asian interests.

Secondly, it seems difficult for political representatives of either side in the impasse to maintain a solution oriented engagement with each other. Negotiations quickly become stalled when difficulties emerge in the negotiations. It appears that officials become lost in their own networks of in-group relationships to the extent that the only solution appears to be to halt the negotiations. There appears to be little accountability to the relationship between negotiators. By contrast when a couple work together on the impasse in their relationship they have an accountability which is borne out of their commitment to each other. It is impossible to work with the couple when one of the pair does not have this commitment. In the Cyprus context it is difficult to hold negotiators accountable in this way. There appears to be too much at stake for leading politicians. Doob (Doob, 1974) and Broome (Broome, 1997, 2004) illustrate how in their attempts to generate cross group understanding they ‘by-pass’ leading politicians and work or seek to work with others in their respective communities who might be influential. They work on the assumption that changes in attitude amongst people who are community leaders and perhaps opinion ‘shapers’ will have an impact on politicians. They work on the assumption that no one group seems empowered or entitled to speak on behalf of each community as a whole. When working with a couple there is always a Person A and a Person B who meet and work together to shape a new relationship. When talking about Greek Cypriots and Turkish
Cypriots it is difficult to identify people in this way. Yet, it is common for references to be made to Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots as if each of these terms refers to a single entity. It is as if there is a Greek Cypriot view and a Turkish Cypriot view. The reality is that each community group refers to a collection of people each representing many thousands of people. In spite of this strong and clear Turkish Cypriot and Greek Cypriot narratives have emerged and strive for domination. Within each collection there is a variety of ways by which people shape and form their identities and there are a range of political views. Ker-Lindsay (Ker-Lindsay, 2011) reports that among the Turkish Cypriot population there are those people who identify as being more Turkish than Cypriot and those who identify as being more Cypriot than Turkish. A similar spectrum applies to the Greek Cypriot population. Thus, it is inappropriate to think that all Greek and Turkish Cypriots speak with one voice about all matters. There is a range of views and opinions in each community group. In addition the relationship between the members of each group is fraught with the emotional legacies of the recent past. Memories of terror, torture, murder and intimidation linger and colour perceptions, forge prejudices and shape and confirm current relationships. It is hard to know how each person relates to these memories and experiences. Trauma is felt communally and it is felt individually.

Thirdly, the Cyprus impasse is essentially a political one. Politicians from both sides of the ethnic division are either unwilling or unable to seek a more unified social and political arrangement for the island. It is unclear if the political view is in line with a popular view. Sometimes there is a discrepancy between the opinions and views of politicians and the attitudes and perceptions of ordinary people. In politics there is a link between the attitude
of people, constituents and the policy of political parties. Politicians, in a democracy try to measure the sentiment being expressed by what they hope is an opinion of the greatest number of people. Their success is a measure of their capacity to capture that opinion and to clearly articulate it to constituents. Sometimes politicians and political parties shape and make policies they hope will appeal to their constituents. The appeal of *enosis* originally took hold because it captured the sentiments of Greek Cypriots educated about the might of Hellenism and the accompanying appeal to having Cyprus included within a wider Hellenist community. It was also anti-British. Britain was the administrative authority on Cyprus at the time. Turkish separatism originally emerged as a response to *enosis*. The creation of a Turkish Cypriot state however, was created out of the personal ambition of Rauf Denktas, the then Turkish Cypriot political leader. It is hard to imagine though that such an autocratic manoeuvre was made without general Turkish Cypriot support or that it was made in opposition to public opinion at the time.

The complexity arises when there is a discrepancy between political positions and opinions of those people who have political power and the general views of ordinary people. The discrepancy is apparent when the political position is more conservative than the attitude of ordinary people. The entrenched attitudes of Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot politicians may be at odds with public opinion and behaviour which indicates a greater desire and capacity for union. A YouTube documentary shows members of both communities crossing the ‘Green Line’ to join together in a choir singing Cypriot folk songs. The issues at stake in the Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot relationship are complex making Cyprus one of the most complex political situations in the world. There is no simple answer to many of the issues about which the politicians of both communities disagree. The compulsory migration, back and
forth, across the Green Line following the Turkish forces invasion and occupation of the northern part of the island created problems about proprietary rights as well as issues about sovereignty and constitutional and governmental shape and form. As time passes some of the issues become more complex. Claims of property ownership, for example, are now more complicated in the light of subsequent land and property developments and in the light of subsequent generations of people of both communities assuming inherited ownership of their present properties. There is a point at which the present seems to overtake the past. There is still a question of fair and equitable compensation for confiscated properties.

The current situation

Cyprus is a divided island. It is divided politically, economically and socially. On a map the island is divided by a `Green Line’ which runs more or less east and west. On the ground this division is maintained by a barrier constructed in 1963 and administered by the United Nations in the form of the United Nations Force in Cyprus (UNFICYP). The land above the Green Line, the northern part of the island is ostensibly occupied by Turkish Cypriots. Some are long-standing residents with their heritage going back hundreds of years. Some are refugees who moved north from southern Cyprus following the invasion and subsequent occupation by the Turkish armed forces in 1974. Others are more recent arrivals, estimated to be 10,000, comprising immigrants from the Turkish mainland who have settled since 1974. This area now comprises the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC); a `state’ created by and following a Turkish Cypriot unilateral declaration of independence in 1983. TRNC is a
satellite province of mainland Turkey and as such all dealings with the TRNC and its institutions are required to pass through the mainland. The TRNC is recognised only by Turkey and is regarded by the international community as the Turkish occupied northern territory of the Republic of Cyprus. This area has an estimated population of 300,000.

The southern part of Cyprus comprises the Republic of Cyprus. It is predominantly occupied by Greek Cypriots along with people from minority religious groups and communities including, Armenians, Maronites, Latins and a small Gypsy community. The constitution of the Republic of Cyprus comprises the land and people in the north of Cyprus but in reality the Republic has no jurisdiction in the northern area. Among the Republic’s population are Greek Cypriots who are refugees and their descendants from the north of the island who were forced to migrate south across the dividing line following the Turkish invasion and subsequent occupation. The Republic is recognised by and is a full member of the European Union.

There are many issues that contribute to the impasse and the continuing partition of the island’s population. A fundamental issue is the future composition of a Cypriot state. The present arrangement comprising a divided island is generally perceived as unsatisfactory and inconclusive. (Ker-Lindsay, 2011, p 106) It emerged out of an invasion and subsequent occupation by what is for a large proportion of the population (Cypriot Greeks) a foreign force. The geographical, political and subsequent cultural and social division of the island has been arrived at as if by default. It is particularly unsatisfactory for Greek Cypriots some of whom still have property, houses, farms and business properties, in the north. The partition may better suit Turkish Cypriots who
have gained protection and security from a clearer and closer relationship with Turkey. There are, however, Turkish Cypriots in the north who, like their Greek Cypriot counterparts south of the Green Line, had to flee their homes and businesses in the south and who still retain ownership. There is yet no way of compensating people for their losses.

The options for a future Cypriot state hinge around a constitution that supports a federation which is both bi-zonal and bi-communal. Unfortunately, while there is agreement about these principles there is considerable difference about their interpretation and the manner of their application. In the meanwhile a federation is impossible. “The problem is that a deep difference exists between the two communities as to what the term really means.” (Ker-Lindsay, 2011, p 78) Ker-Lindsay explains the difference as follows; “For the Greek Cypriots, the idea of a bi-zonal, bi-communal federation refers to a state of affairs whereby a new federation would be created with two federal units, one of which would in all likelihood be predominantly, but not wholly, Greek Cypriot, and the other mainly but not entirely, Turkish Cypriot. In other words, there would not be a distinct and definitive separation of the two communities. The two states might have features that make them more or less Greek or Turkish Cypriot, but they would not be defined in exclusively ethnic terms.” (Ker-Lindsay, p 78). By contrast the Turkish Cypriots want territory that is exclusively Turkish Cypriot. “In their view, bizonality and bicommunality are intrinsically and inextricably linked. It means that on the one side of the island there would be a Greek Cypriot federal state inhabited almost wholly by Greek Cypriots, and on the other there would be a Turkish Cypriot federal state populated almost entirely by Turkish Cypriots. The numbers of Greek and Turkish Cypriots permitted to live in the ‘other’ state
would be strictly regulated.” (Ker-Lindsay, 2011, p79). In addition to these core issues, there are a myriad of other points of disagreement. These include issues about political equality; the relationship between the federal states and central government; the form of government including whether or not to have one or two chambers in the parliament and respective communal representation in both. The list is long and each issue is complex and contentious. Political, personal and communal sensitivities are at stake.

Political leaders either are or have been unwilling or unable to find solutions. Proposals by both sides have been made without subsequent progress. Similarly, proposals made by outsiders including the United Nations in 1975, 1977, 1979, 1986, 1988 and including the 2003 Annan Plan have eventually had a similar fate (Ker-Lindsay, 2011, p 49). Politically, the current relationship between Turkish Cypriots and Greek Cypriots is as distant as at any time in their 450 years together. There has been so much attempted reparative work without success or movement.

The impasse in Cyprus is intractable (Bar-Tal, 2013). It is enduring, complex and at times it has been severe. The current arrangement and stand-off has eased the heightened tensions which were evident in the period of inter-communal and anti-colonial hostilities which erupted in the 1950’s until the invasion by Turkish troops in 1974 and the permanent partitioning of the island. As already mentioned there have been numerous attempts at breaking out of the deadlock in which the protagonists are entangled and so far none have succeeded. In order to better understand the nature of the impasse I am going to describe three sets of contributing factors. Historically these factors have emerged and gained prominence as time and circumstances have dictated.
Each of the factors alone would make it difficult to resolve the impasse. Put together they create conditions which make movement difficult and mutually beneficial peace and harmony seemingly impossible to attain.

Legacies of hostilities

The first set of factors are the legacies of the armed turmoil which began in the 1950’s and ended with the Turkish army’s occupation of northern Cyprus and the subsequent declaration of the independent Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus. In this period of Cypriot history people were murdered, hostages taken and killed, women raped and children murdered. Members in each community were in their turn both feared by and in fear of members of the other ethnic group. Greek Cypriots were thwarted in their attempts to create enosis firstly by the British administrators of the island but later by their own in-fighting. General Grivas created EOKA a pro- enosis terrorist army which sought to intimidate and terrorize firstly the British and subsequently Turkish Cypriots in a move to create closer ties with Greece. Turkish Cypriots created a counter-movement which was anti-enosis and served to protect their community members who lived in fear of ethnic cleansing which they assumed would automatically follow-on from union with Greece. Archbishop Makarios, the Cypriot president was biased towards enosis and in the period was exiled, reinstated and survived numerous assassination attempts. Guerrilla units were set-up on both sides of the ethnic divide and each inflicted their own terror on their ethnic opponents. Members of the Turkish community were entrapped in enclaves for 10 years or more surrounded by United Nations forces for protection while Greek forces acted as prison guardians. Following the 1974
occupation which was terrifying for many Greek Cypriots, especially those living in the northern segment of the island, people from both sides were compulsorily exiled, becoming refugees in their own land, leaving their homes and belongings to be occupied and rifled by strangers. People on both sides endured this uncertainty and terror for 20 years. The impact was felt by everyone; the consequences varied and yet deeply felt. The toll was emotional as well as social; certainty was replaced by uncertainty, trust by mistrust and security by fear and terror. Whatever social and emotional distance that already existed (see below) between members of the two ethnic groups it now became more solid and justified. Prejudices were confirmed by new evidence and myths and legends were created to explain and to justify views of self and others. People found ways of coping with the trauma. Volkan (Volkan, 1977), for example, describes the impact on the Turkish Cypriot population of spending a long period entrapped in enclaves. He describes how people’s distress, anxiety and identification of comfort needs were projected onto pet budgerigars which became the objects for empathy and caring. He described also the revenge and retribution that was part of people’s mourning following their release after 10 years being held in an enclave.

**Mutual mistrust**

Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots have a mutual mistrust. This mistrust influences the demands political leaders make of each other. It influences the level of confidence each has about the potential follow-on from agreements they achieve. They expect that the other will renege on matters about which they have achieved agreement. Their mutual mistrust causes members of each
community to be cautious and wary in their relationship with the other. There is a mutual fear; each perceives an ulterior motive behind the actions of the other. Members of each community can identify events that justify their fear and confirm their mistrust. Greek Cypriots perceive that the long-term aim behind Turkish Cypriot political manoeuvring is eventual separation and the creation of a separate Turkish state aligned closely with mainland Turkey. Greek Cypriots fear being abandoned by their Turkish Cypriot counterparts. They fear that taksim, partition, will become permanent. Since 1974, the reality has been that partition and separation has existed. For Greek Cypriots this is an unsatisfactory and inconclusive arrangement mainly because it was created by an invasion and forced military occupation. Under the circumstances the best they might hope for is a loose federation which gives priority to the authority of the states rather than to federal institution. Meanwhile Turkish Cypriots have historically feared being swamped and overwhelmed by their Greek Cypriot neighbours. In an extreme form they have feared extermination, an ethnic cleansing. For Turkish Cypriots the Greek Cypriot support for enosis in the 1950’s was evidence that their interests and their very existence were being disregarded. Political and terrorist activity was perceived by Turkish Cypriots as a move towards their social, ethnic and physical extermination. The coup d’etat in Greece, the threat of a Greek invasion following increased pro-enosis orientated terrorist activity all contributed to Turkish Cypriot insecurity. In addition the forced evacuation by president Archbishop Makarios and the assumption to the presidency by Nico Sampson a hard-line right wing politician and former terrorist exacerbated that fear. For Turkish Cypriots, at this time, their extermination was imminent. The invasion of Cyprus by Turkish armed forces was a response to this Turkish Cypriot fear. The invasion lessened their fear.
Identity, distorted perception and social distance

The third set of factors which influence people most deeply and contribute most directly to the intransigence and intractability of the Cyprus impasse are specifically targeted identities. If conflict is felt at a basic and unconscious level it is impossible to find political and constitutional solutions that will be permanently and mutually satisfying. It is as if there is a flaw in the foundation and no matter how sophisticated and elegant the superstructure the construction will forever be weakened making it susceptible to collapse and failure. This conflict which is now sustained by political and geographical separation has historically been maintained by a culturally embedded psychological process the function of which has served to justify and maintain cultural identity. It also served to perpetuate social and psychological distance between the two communities. The Cyprus conflict is a conflict about core values pertaining to self and to community. It is also about basic existence and survival. It is a conflict about identity; about what it means to be Greek Cypriot and what it means to be a Turkish Cypriot (Rothman, 1997). The conflict evokes anxiety and fear which sometimes manifests as grandiosity and a sense of entitlement and sometimes as insecurity and shame. When these attributes form the foundation of inter-group conflict the conflict is often fierce and bitter and difficult to resolve. Rothman (Rothman, 1997) states that these kinds of conflict, “... are rooted in the articulation of, and the threats or frustrations to people’s collective need for dignity, recognition, safety, control, purpose and efficacy.” (Rothman, p 7) They derive from, ‘...existential and underlying psycho-cultural concerns that are perceived as threatened or frustrated as a result of, or resulting in intransigent conflict... they arise from
the depths of the human heart rather than the material world.” (Rothman, p 11). Elsewhere he states (Rothman, p 5), “At stake in all of these cases (of identity drawn conflicts) are the primary group identity needs of the disputants. When people’s essential identities, as expressed and maintained by their primary group affiliations are threatened or frustrated intransigent conflict almost inevitably follows.’

The circumstances, described by Rothman generate fear and desperation. Sometimes violence is seen as a way of easing tension which it may do, albeit temporarily. On Cyprus each community feels unseen and is unseen by the other. Members feel threatened and seek to protect themselves against a loss of their cultural identity. They face intolerance and hostile actions and prejudices from the other. Enosis and taksim are each in their way attempts to ward off threats to the respective cultural identity of each community. They are manifestations of a desire for self-preservation. Attempts at solution-finding, in the meanwhile continue to be thwarted by strong and intransigent opposition. There is no movement and the impasse continues. Attempts to seek resolution to the myriad of political, economic, constitutional and equity issues are fruitless while issues generated by issues to do with identity remain unresolved.

The divide which separates the ethnic communities on Cyprus was cemented long before the UN monitored Green Line was drawn. As with couples the impasse has been and is maintained by perceptions, fears and anxieties that are outside of the awareness of the people involved and which are compounded by fixated responses to very early child experiences. These emotions, thoughts and behaviour become exposed when triggered by the behaviour or by the anticipated behaviour of the other. As each person in the
couple acts out the other responds to what feels like an intensely provocative ‘acting out’ of the other. The couple become entangled in a network of defensive responses and survival strategies that comprise the impasse. In the relationship between Cypriot Turks and Cypriot Greeks there is a similar process. Movement out of the impasse is inhibited as long as their respective attitudes and responses remain the norm and the dynamic they generate remains outside of awareness of the protagonists involved.

On Cyprus, being Greek Cypriot or being Turkish Cypriot has traditionally been significant; it indicates group affiliations and indicates how each person reacts and responds to people in the other group. In their long joint occupation of the island Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots have found ways to live and work with and around each other. Traditionally Turkish families lived side by side with Greek families in a seemingly random distribution; some areas and communities were of mixed ethnicity while others were predominantly occupied by one group or the other. Volkan (Volkan, 1979) describes the pre-1974 Cyprus population distribution as follows: “A demographic map of Cyprus showing its ethnic distribution would have looked like a tabletop covered with pepper (the Greeks) into which a small pinch of salt (the Turks) had been dropped in a random way (Volkan, p 15). Within this pattern Turkish Cypriots and Greek Cypriots cooperated, their lives were intertwined with those of their neighbour regardless of culture. Pre-adolescent children played together and learned each other’s language and games, while in the adult world Turks and Greeks worked cooperatively. This is how the relationship worked for nearly 400 years since the Ottoman conquest. It was a relationship that included involvement with each other and there were limits to this involvement. In spite of this long association Cypriots had not been able or willing to create one
nation. In many respects Turkish Cypriots and Greek Cypriots kept themselves apart in spite of their apparent intermingling. Author, Lawrence Durrell describes the nature of the inter-ethnic group relationship on Cyprus in the 1950’s when he reports a conversation he had with Sabri a Turkish Cypriot estate agent. Durrell had successfully purchased a house: he reports: “We drank deeply and in silence. `I was sent to you by a Greek,’ I said, `and now the Turk sends me back to a Greek.’ He (Sabri the estate agent) laughed aloud. `Cyprus is small,’ he said, `and we are all friends, though very different. This is Cyprus, my dear.’ (Durrell; 1957).

Volkan describes the traditional family structure, dynamics and childrearing practices in Turkish Cypriot families that contributed to the preservation of the difference referred to by Sabri in the quote above. Volkan uses psychoanalytic analysis to describe how the distance between the two ethnic groups is maintained. “Thus although the Turks and Greeks lived scattered all over the island they never came to know each other as they were in reality, seeing one another always through a hazy aura ...” . . . The cultural divide across which they carried on their interactions forever defined their differences and not so much their similarities. Through their respective cultural perspective they saw the other not so much as they were in reality but more as they appeared through the distorted lens of their own creation. Each created an image of the other and interacted with that image as if it was real. If they saw each other, then they did not see each other clearly. Being Greek or being Turkish were important aspects of people’s identities. They each had a long and noble heritage; Greek Cypriots were linked to the wider Hellenist world and Turkish Cypriots to Turkey and Islam. In addition members of each community maintained their identities by preserving their own and separate religions,
separate places of worship, their own language and culture and education. Children grew up learning what it meant to be either Turkish Cypriot or Greek Cypriot. In their early years children might have friends and play mates who were members of the other community. At or about puberty they retreated into their own ethnic group and their interaction with members of the other ethnic group became more distant and formal. There was no inter-marriage; the taboos against it as strict as taboos about incest (Interview with Volkan published in Voices, Winter, 2011). In growing up children learned the significance of the difference between the ethnic groups and of the importance of preserving their own identity while at the same time maintaining the distance between themselves and members of the other ethnic group. They learned to cut off the `all bad’ and undesired aspects of own self representations and by externalizing and projection they saw in others that which they were now unable to see in themselves. They created a ‘mirror image’. It was this mirror image which formed the basis of the interaction with the other in reality. Each had a distorted perception of the other. The cut-off attributes of the self-image and which were externalized and projected covered and served to hide the actual attributes of the other. As a consequence Turkish Cypriots and Greek Cypriots maintained their distorted perceptions of each other. Hence the `...hazy aura...’ to which Volkan refers. In more turbulent times these perceptions hardened into beliefs and prejudices about the self and other. In this way the `hazy aura’ becomes like a deep black cloud. Attempts to overcome the psychological distancing that members of each community have in regard to each other have been fruitless. In fact moves towards unity have generated greater anxiety. Volkan explains;
“Since both Turks and Greeks employ daily the mechanism of externalization supported by projection within their cultural matrix, their coexistence within the narrow confines of the island leads each ethnic group to see the other as a mirror image of itself and to receive it’s split-off, externalized, and aggressively determined images. Such relatedness demands psychological distancing, and this need may very well be a significant factor in the failure of the two groups to meld into a true Cypriot nation. It is to be expected that the establishment of the Republic, which attempted to consolidate the population to a great extent without respect to ethnic origin, language, or religion-primordial sentiments – would threaten the continuation of psychological distancing and, by causing widespread anxiety on both sides, initiate renewed efforts to re-establish distancing. Everything we know about the psychological make-up of each group suggests that the establishment of the Republic paradoxically heightened the aggressive feelings each group held toward the other”. (Volkan 1979, pp73-74)

**Reflection....`Hitting the pipe`.**

One of my favourite Eric Berne stories is what I call the story of `Hitting the Pipe`. The story tells of an engineer who was called to a building to repair a boiler. “He found a stuck valve, rapped it sharply (with a hammer, JB) and restored service. He submitted a bill for $100 (a lot of money in 1966, JB). The owner said that was a lot for a single hammer blow; he requested an itemized statement. The engineer wrote back: “Hitting the boiler with hammer, $1.00. Knowing where to hit, $99!” Berne uses the story as a metaphor to illustrate the intention of his book “The Structure and Dynamics of Organisations and Groups” (Berne, 1966 republished in 2001) which is to provide “… a practical understanding of how real organisations work…”.(Berne, p1). I use the story as a metaphor to remind myself that an important aspect of my job as a counsellor is to know how and when to make an appropriate and effective
intervention; an intervention that addresses the presenting issue which is usually what is going wrong in the couple’s relationship; what is not working. For couples caught up in an impasse it is often not possible for them to work out what is going wrong with their relationship. They are too involved; they are too close to the action. They benefit from having someone outside the relationship to help them see into and subsequently help them break out of the destructive cycle of interactions they every now and then create together. My contribution to their development is to provide a ‘third eye’ so that they can view what they do in a new light. They want to know what is wrong and above all they want to know what to do about it so they can avoid the harshness they mete out to each other. I can help by making a diagnosis. I can identify aspects of their functioning which contribute to the dynamic from which they find it difficult to disentangle. I can make a formulation which explains how and why they become stuck and I can co-create with them a plan which will enable them to be more resourceful. Along with the client’s contract we have all we need to guide our work together. I know where to hit the pipe!

Levels of impasse applied to Cyprus

In order to make an analysis I will use the Hemlin notion of interpersonal impasse explained above. I will follow this by framing four questions that indicate important features of the relationship that require attention.
First layer of impasse

The first layer of the impasse applied to the population on Cyprus focuses on the most recent events. As a general rule people are unwilling and unable to listen to each other if they have deeply felt emotional wounds resulting from the violence of others. People who have been brutalized are unable or unwilling to be compassionate and empathic with those by whom they have been brutalized. Their trauma will leave deeply felt hurt, resentment and fear of the others who have been the perpetrators of their abuse. They will take a while, if it is ever possible, before they can benefit from having their fear and their outrage heard and acknowledged and accepted as valid by others. This is true whether people are directly subjected to violence or if they are witness to violence which is inflicted on others, especially loved ones. Victims may also feel betrayed by the perpetrators, especially when the perpetrators were at one time friends and neighbours. This is likely in inter-ethnic hostilities where it is likely that people lived alongside each other. Inevitably, people were frightened and will want to express their fear and outrage. They may feel ashamed at how they behaved when frightened. Eventually, they will want to find self-acceptance and be reassured. They will want reassurance from the perpetrators that they will not act violently in the future. They may want to make clear what defensive action they will take if the other person acts violently again. Eventually, they may benefit from knowing that the perpetrator has sorrow and regret for what they did. Perpetrators of violence may disclose guilt, and regrets about their actions. They will feel remorse and it is helpful to victims to know of this remorsefulness. They may want forgiveness from the victim as absolution for their guilt and regret. They may find self-acceptance and forgiveness for what they have done. Protagonists enmeshed
in a level one impasse may become embroiled in blame and counter-blame; each holding the other responsible for the hurt they each feel. The impasse at this level has to be ‘worked through’ before impasses at other levels can be addressed. The autobiography of Eric Lomax and the subsequent film called ‘The Railway Man’ (Lomax, 1996 and film starring Colin Firth and Nicole Kidman) illustrates the long-lasting impact of war time brutality. It also illustrates something of what is required of both people to find mutual acceptance and forgiveness.

Second layer of impasse

The second layer of the Cyprus impasse hinges around mutual mistrust. Who actually mistrusts who is difficult to identify. Suffice it to say that generally speaking Greek Cypriots mistrust Turkish Cypriots and vice-versa. There are two sources of mistrust in the relationship and each needs attention if this level of impasse is to be successfully addressed. Firstly, Turkish Cypriots and Greek Cypriots have and continue to triangulate their relationships by involving their parent nations. This has at times had the effect of undermining developments in the inter-communal relationships on Cyprus. In addition tensions in the relationship between the parent nations, Greece and Turkey have been acted out through the relationships comprising the Cypriot communities. The Treaty of Guarantee (Ker-Lindsay, 2011) agreed to by Britain, Greece and Turkey as part of the 1960 constitution gave to these three countries the right to intervene in Cypriot affairs in order to preserve the status quo on Cyprus should they consider it to be threatened. This treaty provided the guarantor nations the right to directly interfere with Cypriot
affairs and gave legitimacy to triangulated relationships. For example, Turkey exercised its right to intervene in Cypriot affairs with its military invasion in 1974. In order to enhance security and trust in the Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot relationship it will be important to clarify and to impose constraints on the relationship each Cypriot community has with its parent nation and to make this known to the other community. This will acknowledge and give primacy to the relationship of the island based autonomous communities. Secondly, there is a history of mutual mistrust because members of both communities suspect that the other has an ulterior motive. Greek Cypriots mistrust Turkish Cypriots because they fear that Turkish Cypriots are motivated by the ideas of separation and partition including closer relationship with their parent nation, Turkey. This is manifested in taksim and is to all intents and purposes the status quo. On the other hand; Turkish Cypriots mistrust Greek Cypriots because they fear that the Greek Cypriots want to exterminate them, physically or culturally. This is the interpretation Turkish Cypriots give to enosis. Each community fears what they perceive as the under-lying motivation of the other. They are both frightened of the unstated motivation of the other. Neither group can rely on the ‘encapsulated interest’ (Hardin, 1992) of the other and hence experience trust in the other.

Using Hemlin’s (Hemlin, 2012) model the level two impasse is displayed in the following form. For Greek Cypriots there is anxiety about feeling culturally, socially and politically isolated. This is experienced in C₁ in the diagram. Reassurance comes from P₁ and takes the form of a move towards Hellenism and is manifested in a desire to be ‘more Greek’. The internalised and imaginary dialogue for Greek Cypriots is, “I am nervous and frightened because I do not know where I belong.” (C₁) and this elicits the P₁ response, “You will
feel better if you join our ancestors in Greece.” For Turkish Cypriots when anxiety and fear is experienced in C₁ then the reassurance comes from P₁ and manifests in moves towards separatism and closer liaison with mainland Turkey. The internalized and imaginary dialogue is; “I am scared of the Greeks; they want to kill me.” (C₁) which elicits the P₁ response, “Don’t worry you will be safe. Turkey will look after you.” P₁ in both protagonists is projected into P₁ in the other protagonist in the relationship. This leaves C₁ in each protagonist feeling fearful and anxious. Greek Cypriots fear abandonment and Turkish Cypriots fear being consumed and lost.

The Scheinkman and Fishbane (Scheinkman and Fishbane, 2004) analysis of ‘core impasses’, described above, focuses on the way in which couples feel threatened at a point of vulnerability and as a response to this threat act out a ‘survival strategy’. This sets up a closed system in which the threat at a point of vulnerability is followed, ‘as if automatically’ by the acting out of a survival strategy. This acting out threatens the other person in the relationship at a point of vulnerability which evokes ‘as if automatically’ an acting out of a related survival strategy. The dynamic which is created is intense and characterized by behaviour which generates distance between people rather than harmony. Put into the Cypriot context Greek Cypriots struggle to accommodate their Turkish Cypriot neighbours. As a consequence they feel isolated and intolerant and disregarding of Turkish Cypriots. To alleviate their frustration, anxiety and fear they move towards Greek Cypriot dominance in Cypriot affairs. In the past this was manifested in enosis a desire for union with Greece and a means of generating and maintaining cultural and political self-assurance. An extreme version of enosis included elimination of anything and anyone Turkish. Turkish Cypriots in response to this real or perceived threat become self-protective and seek protection and security in partition and in a closer alliance with mainland Turkey. This real or perceived move is a demonstration to Greek Cypriots that their Turkish Cypriot compatriots do not want a closer relationship and hence gives justification to Greek Cypriots that the best policy for their well-being Greek Cypriot dominance and ‘enosis’.
Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots are linked together in a counter-dependent relationship in which each is unable to trust the other. They are bound together in a pattern of interactions characterised by mutual mistrust. Each displays a predictable pattern of interactions which is designed to overcome their mistrust but which serves to stimulate a self-defensive response in the other. This self-defensive response triggers fear and anxiety in the other. Members of both communities are locked into a closed system of interactions which include defensiveness against vulnerability and self-protective acting out.

Third layer of impasse

The third layer of impasse is the most difficult to address. It involves attitudes, prejudices and distorted perceptions that are unconscious and which are considered by those who hold them as being ‘the truth’. Such attitudes seem to be built into the fabric of the relationship and as a consequence they stimulate and perpetuate interpersonal dynamics which confirm images of self and images of the other. They are the substance upon which ethnic, religious and racial prejudices are sustained; they help sustain perceptions of right and wrong and good and bad. They colour perceptions and determine attitudes.
Cyprus children learn about what it means to be Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot from their earliest interactions with their nurturing adults. The perception that ‘we’ are good and that they are ‘bad’ is passed on from generation to generation through the transfer of myths and legends, by responses to in-group and out-group images, by jokes, and by innuendo. As the psychological process of splitting is unconscious it is hard to confront. It is important, however, that the distorted perceptions which it generates are aired and responded to. Greek Cypriots will be encouraged to say what they really think about Turkish Cypriots and vice-versa. This requires a high level of trust. These perceptions do not convey the reality of the experience of the other person and inevitably they are limiting are hurtful. This is an impasse at the third level.
Chapter five: Expanding the analysis

Four key questions

The second source of information for making an analysis of the impasse emerges from an attempt to identify four key aspects of the functioning of the protagonists involved. Identifying these aspects indicates specific points for attention, if not for the protagonists then for whoever is facilitating the process. These aspects are important dynamics that give the relationship shape and form regardless of whether or not the protagonists are conscious of them. For example, two people may mistrust each other without being conscious of their mistrust. Their mistrust helps shape their relationship. As a consequence of their mutual mistrust they fear being open and honest with each other and may hold back significant opinions and views. Their relationship lacks intimacy and they may feel like they are not going anywhere. The relationship is limited and each person feels constrained without knowing why. In the long term, it will be helpful for the protagonists to bring these constraints out into the open. They can become more consciously aware of what is going on below the surface. For the people involved it is frightening and yet refreshing to put words to these unconscious dynamics. It provides them with a different view of their relationship. They know more about what it is they are dealing with. If there is an art in counselling couples it is knowing when the couple are ready to face their reality and become aware of the dynamics that lie below the surface of their interactions. If the timing is wrong one of the couple or both, are likely to find such revelations intrusive and
unhelpful. They may be shocked and fearful of being exposed. To help identify these dynamics I have formed them into questions.

1. **Mistrust:** In an impasse there is usually mutual mistrust. Mistrust generates fear and a reluctance to be open and honest. Mistrust may be unearthed by asking a question such as, “What do you fear the other person will do too much of, or not enough of?”

2. **Incongruence:** In an impasse incongruence is a protective mechanism which means that there is a discrepancy between what is displayed and what is authentic. Incongruence prevents a `proper’ connection between the people involved. Incongruence can be unearthed by asking a question such as, “What is it that does not ring true in what the other person says or does?” Alternatively the question might be; “If you were to be truly honest and without fear of a reaction from the other person, what would you tell them about you?’

3. **Protection against vulnerability:** In an impasse each protagonist fears being `exposed’ because they mistrust the other person. Each person has a way of protecting themselves from being `taken advantage of’. Protection against vulnerability can be unearthed by asking a question such as, “What is it about you that you are most frightened the other person will find out about?”

4. **Distorted perception:** In an impasse each protagonist’s distorted perception of the other helps perpetuate the pattern of interactions including defensive strategies. Distorted perceptions may be unearthed by asking questions such as’ “What do you think or imagine is motivating the other person and that they are unable or unwilling to own up to it?”
Other information for making an assessment

In addition to the information that is helpful in making an analysis of the nature of the impasse it is also important to make an assessment of each person’s capacity for participating in the process. This assessment provides information about firstly, the points at which progress may be stalled and secondly, the limitations each person will unknowingly impose on the work and on what might be achieved. This assessment comprises eight points.

1. Valuing the relationship: Protagonists think the relationship is worth developing and want to invest time and energy to its preservation and development. They may value the relationship differently but they each value it sufficiently to devote time and energy to putting it right. Differing values in regard to the relationship may be one of the underlying factors contributing to the impasse. On Cyprus, Greek Cypriots have most to gain from change in the relationship with Turkish Cypriots. Turkish Cypriots have formed a closer relationship with Turkey and seem to be satisfied with this arrangement. Considering the history of their relationship Turkish Cypriots may be fearful of returning to the ‘bad old days’.

2. Motivation for moving out of the impasse: Protagonists are motivated to continue with the process until it is completed. This may involve a commitment to remain engaged with each other regardless of the
difficulty and the chaos which may be felt along the way. Protagonists may contract with each other to stay involved and not to ‘bail out’ when the conversation becomes heated and hurtful. Disengaging from proceedings is manipulative and controlling. An urge to leave may be an indication that something important is being raised in the conversation and as a consequence will require attention. Sometimes it is the person who is ‘most desperate’ who is most committed to seeing through the process. It is sometimes the person who has most to gain who initiates the proceedings. Lingering resentments may influence a person’s commitment to the process, in which case they need to be attended to. Contracts indicating the scope of the work to be done and the outcome sought by both protagonists will benefit both protagonists.

3. **Understanding the process and what is required:** At the start the protagonists will not know what the process requires of them individually or collectively. Thus it is hard for them to commit to seeing the process through. For a while they may be making a commitment in blind faith. An experienced facilitator will know the whole process. They will be able to track and monitor progress and may give reports to the protagonists from time to time. The protagonists will benefit from knowing about the sequence of the process and will be able to adjust their commitment depending on what they hear. Protagonists may contract for aspects of the work as they learn more about the process.

4. **Focussing on the relationship:** Protagonists are urged to give their primary attention to their relationship. They are then able to consider
what happens to their relationship when the behaviour, wishes and desires of others impacts on one or both of them. For couples, their relationship is often impacted by children or by members of an extended family. It may also be influenced by others who are perceived or are in fact a threat. It is not unusual for couples to be affected by the relationship one of them has with another person; in extreme cases this is a lover. Historically on Cyprus there have been numerous ‘others’ who have been influential in interrupting or intruding on the primary relationship of the two main ethnic groups. These include the USA, Great Britain, Russia and Greece and Turkey. When a protagonist moves to bring the interests of another party into the work of the primary relationship this ‘triangulation’ is usually destructive to the relationship. Generally, triangulation feels like ‘ganging up’ by one protagonist in regard to the other. In order to break out of a triangulated relationship clear limits and expectations will have to be imposed affecting their relationship between the third party and the protagonist.

5. **Willing to be vulnerable:** At various points in the process the protagonists will experience pressure to disclose personal material. They will feel pressure to acknowledge and then perhaps to reveal their own needs, desires, wishes, regrets, fears, disappointments and resentments. They may also come to accept and subsequently disclose their fantasies and beliefs about self and about the other person which underpin their prejudices and distorted perceptions. They may also become aware of ways in which they are incongruent and they may come to accept that in some circumstances they do not display authentically what they feel or think internally. They will increasingly understand that they contribute
to the impasse by being incongruent. They may come to accept that incongruence is the outcome of trying to satisfy normal and natural needs to feel connected in the relationship. This requires a high level of trust. Initially this trust may rest in the relationship between each of the protagonists and the third person. Eventually trust builds between the protagonists. This is a long process and may continue throughout the process to move out of an impasse. For some the challenge is acknowledging that they have needs and wishes. For some it is in disclosing what their needs and wishes are to others. For some, there is fear if that personal disclosure will be used against them. They may have been brought up in a culture in which personal disclosure was regarded as a weakness. An experienced facilitator can display acceptance of incongruence and the normal and natural need of which it is an expression.

6. **Ability to be empathic:** Central to moving out of an impasse is the capacity of the protagonists to be empathic. Congruent disclosure in an increasingly trusting relationship generates empathy that is, being able to see the world through the eyes of the other. Most people are able to resonate with the authentic experiences of other people. Some alas cannot. When a person is not able to be empathic it may be because they still have resentments which have not yet been expressed and addressed. Conflict is resolved to the degree that people are able to know and understand the experiences of the other. In this way they are able to understand and to accept the behaviour of the other even when it has had a personal impact. Empathic understanding helps each protagonist resonate with thoughts, feelings, contradictions and
impasses experienced by the other. Often in an impasse a couple will come to know that they experience the same dilemmas and feels as the other. This is reassuring. Empathy helps reduce and/or eliminate blame and defensiveness and assists each person to form a more cooperative relationship with the other. [http://www.buildingbridgesforpeace.org]

7. **Building trust:** An underlying element in an impasse is mutual mistrust. This emerges from and is maintained by acts of betrayal and by repeated incongruent interactions. Mistrust is a natural accompaniment to incongruence. The presence of mutual mistrust in an impasse is sometimes not evident and is implied in the careful and defensive behaviour and responses of one to the other. Sometimes mistrust is very evident when there have been acts of betrayal and infidelity. Other acts of betrayal include abusive and controlling behaviour, inconsistency, unreliability and dishonesty. It may be necessary for the protagonists to negotiate for trustworthiness. Equal relationships are based upon mutual trust. Building or re-building trust and trustworthiness are relational activities. Building trust is a cooperative enterprise. As the protagonists move out of an impasse they are developing new areas of trust. Trust builds as each person acts and responds with greater congruence.

8. **Restructuring the relationship:** Peace and harmony are generated as protagonists move out of an impasse and they are able and willing to restructure their relationship (Curle, 1971). In other words the relationship at the end of the process is qualitatively different compared with the relationship when the protagonists were first caught up in the
impasse. The relationship is characterized by greater equality and equity. This sometimes requires an exposure of deeply held prejudices and values which influence the protagonists.

Adding further value

`The proof of the pudding will be in the eating.’ This old proverb suggests that the validity of what is proposed will be evident when the final test is completed. In the context of this thesis the validity of impasse as described will be evident when applied to a real life peace-making activity. In these circumstances I will be able to gauge the extent to which a counselling perspective is helpful to those who are involved in peace-making? This has required some imagination as I have tried to grasp what it would be like for someone like me to be involved in the processes about which I have read. I have imagined how my interventions might be helpful; how they might add value to what others are doing and to that which is emerging in those who are involved in the process.

There are a number of descriptions of peace-making. Some like those outlined by Adam Curle (Curle, 1971) and Jay Rothman (Rothman, 1997) are models synthesized from their respective involvement in inter-community conflict and wars or civil wars. Their models are both descriptive and prescriptive each providing a check-list of stages or phases which comprise the peace-making process. Curle’s model comprises six elements. It culminates with a restructuring of a relationship. There are four main elements; (1) Research; (2) Conciliation; (3) Bargaining and (4) Development. To these he added firstly, education by which he meant ‘developing awareness’; and secondly,
confrontation being “...all the techniques by means of which the weaker groups in unbalanced relationships attempt to change the character of those relationships, specifically to make them more balanced.” (Curle, p176). From my perspective I can see a number of places where I can usefully make a contribution, but I will suffice with commenting on one. Curle describes the process of `Conciliation’ which he states is concerned with the mask that each of the conflicting parties use and the resulting distorted self-image and images of the other. Curle states; “If peace is to be brought to an unpeaceful relationship, both participants must see themselves and each other for what they are as human beings.” (Curle, p 215). As mentioned above, an impasse in a couple relationship, is partly maintained by mutual distorted perceptions of self and other. The work to change these perceptions requires attention to the transference and projection that each person uses to support and maintain their restrictive position in the impasse. The objective of the work with couples is to enable the couple to see each other as they really are rather than as they each imagines the other to be.

Jay Rothman (Rothman, 1997) describes a process for dealing with identity based conflicts. He suggests a four part framework as a structure for working with and through the entangled emotional and relational difficulties of this kind of intransigent conflict. He uses the acronym ARIA to identify the framework and its constituent parts. His framework provides for an identification and expression of deep and long felt feelings each party holds in regard to the other and it leads to a growing capacity for mutual resonance and empathy. Adversaries move in this process from being on opposite sides of the dispute to being on the same side, or at least sharing common reactions to
the problem. With this base they are then able to find new and creative solutions to the problem and then proceed to compile plans for action.

The process Rothman describes fits well with a process suitable for work with couples. Antagonism refers to a process for making explicit that which is implicit. It is a necessary if unpleasant part of the process. It includes people declaring how they perceive the other. It is characterized by blaming, polarizing, attributing and projecting defence mechanisms designed to support an OK view of self while maintaining a ‘Not OK’ view of the other. Resonance is the heart of the process in which the parties let each other know about their essential concerns. It involves reflecting and reframing so that disputants can move from blaming and victim-hood to responsibility and volition. In this phase, people start looking at themselves and the part they play in proceedings and as a consequence they can develop ‘analytic empathy’ which enables them to start to observe similarities in their positions and in the position of the protagonist. Invention is the part of the process which focuses on, “…inventing solutions that go beyond the normal concepts of domination and compromise” (p53). It involves the protagonists creating something new together so that what emerges is for the benefit for everyone involved rather than simply for those who hold power. Solutions to problems sought are ‘positive-sum’ rather than ‘zero sum’. In other words they seek solutions which maximize the gains for all those concerned. Action is the phase when protagonists seek to build on their newly established cooperation by formulating and deciding on action which may comprise some or all of the following; project building and planning, developing institutions and by joining in negotiations and problem solving. It should be intensively collaborative.
Closer to home, or rather closer to Cyprus are peace-making attempts which have involved Cypriot officials and community leaders (Doob, 1974; Broome, 1997, 2004). Doob’s careful preparation for a peace-making activity had to be aborted when in July 1974 there was a threat of a Greek invasion of Cyprus and there was the subsequent Turkish invasion. Doob’s care in choosing the personnel for the workshop is worth noting. Broome’s problem-solving and design workshops came some 20 years later comprising a core group of equal numbers of Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots. Initially this group met for a period of nine months and subsequently continued to meet for a decade afterwards. The later work of the group focused on building relational empathy Broome states; “In practical terms, relational empathy suggests the application of methodologies that can place participants in a position where they can gain a greater appreciation and respect for the perspective of the other (through de-centering and role-taking) and simultaneously create together an understanding of the future to which they can all agree to direct their peace building efforts...” (p193). Developing mutual empathy is central to the effort to assist couples in moving out of their impasse.

In general terms the counselling perspective will help with identifying individual displays of the restrictive behaviour which comprise an impasse. I have identified and described these above. A counselling ‘value added’ contribution could be valuable in (1) identifying manifestations of this behaviour in relationships and in groups; and (2) working empathically with individuals to develop in their relationships greater trust, greater congruence, less fear of being vulnerable and more realistic perceptions of themselves and others. This work will enable people to be self-accepting and confident in creating and maintaining harmonious relationships with others.
Chapter 6: The journey is over

Reflection: Tail piece

Writing this thesis has been a personal experience; personal in the sense that its composition has been intellectually demanding, emotionally evocative and has brought me face to face with some of my limitations and mirrored some strengths. Over the time I have been researching and writing I have been preoccupied, tense, despairing, ashamed, hopeful, exhilarated, relieved and at times even self-assured. Mostly, I have felt frightened. I have woken in the middle of the night to lie wide awake and my mind active. I have sometimes sat at my computer from the early hours and I have neglected my garden, my house, my exercise routine and sometimes even my wife and children. I am looking forward to completing my last task so that, as I have said to some of my friends, “I can get on with my life.” Though I have only ever been enrolled part-time at the university, my undertaking has felt full-time. If I have not been sitting at my computer then my thesis has been there in my mind as I have puzzled, clarified and sometimes mentally pushed through to some kind of new awareness and understanding. I have sometimes been amazed when I have seen things in a way I had not seen them before. It has been as if I have walked through a door into a new room and I am looking around taking in the ambiance for the first time. I have often heard myself say, in my head, “How come I haven’t seen this before?” The question is rhetorical! It is a symptom of my relief and amazement.
However, if I think of the question as a real question I can answer, “Because I have not been here before.” In this realization there is even more amazement and I feel satisfied that after a lot of effort I have got to wherever it is; a new idea or a new perspective on something I already know. At the time, it seems small reward for such an effort. It is very personal and remains unseen and unheard by the rest of humankind until I can articulate what I have learned in my observation of what I am doing or in what others tell me they are doing. As I use what I have learned for the benefit of better mutual understanding and clarity then I know that my reward is abundant indeed. I know I have benefitted personally; I have benefitted professionally and I know that the people I work with, supervisees and clients have also benefitted from my being able to use my expanded understanding and experience on their behalf.

At some point in the composition process I decided on an autoethnographic approach to this thesis. It was such a relief to think and write in this way. It is so much more how I like to think about and then to write about my thoughts and experiences. It suits my perspective as a counsellor. It helps me link my task with my inner experience. Once I had decided to use this approach I was able to make sense of how the `what’, the content, mixed with the `how’, my imaginings, my thoughts, my feelings and my hopes and dreams. Having permission to be aware of and then to describe my inner experience gave me plenty to write about and also at the same time helped me move forward with the task. As I addressed each challenge in what felt like a more multi-dimensional way I was able to move forward and achieve the next part of the task. Thinking and writing in this way was therapeutic in that it helped me towards better self-understanding and helped me to become personally more resourceful. I had permission to make links between contemporary and
historical events in my life in such a way that my awareness was wholesome, non-threatening and integrating. I often found myself going around my own version of Michael Jacobs’ (Jacobs, 1988) ‘triangle of insight’ as I rounded out my developing awareness and understanding. The triangle of insight provides a basis for formulating transference interpretations. It helps link the here and now relationship of the client and the counsellor with the ‘out there with others’ and the ‘back there with others’ relationships of the client. My only regret is that I did not listen to my supervisor’s urging to adopt this approach sooner. As is sometimes the case I was pre-occupied with something else at the time and could do no more than, hear, note and plan to pick it up at some later date.

When I started thinking about my own experience I saw the impasse within which I was entangled. It was like the impasses about which I was writing. It had all the ingredients that comprised impasses as I was getting to know them. My impasse was intrapsychic, I had battles with various introjects and self-perceptions, their origins blurred in the mists of my past and experienced as naive fantasies and self-imposed limitations. When I started to think of my experience in this way I could turn the intrapsychic into an interpersonal engagement. In this context, I became aware of my shame around presenting myself to the university as I had done and my uncertainty about whether or not I could produce what I had undertaken to produce. I feared being ridiculed; I felt vulnerable and for a while I did only what I knew I could do even if it meant bluffing my way forward! Accepting that I was in an impasse and subsequently writing about it was very freeing. My learning was at last happening from the inside out rather than as I had been trying to do it, from the outside in. What a
relief. At last I was on familiar ground. I could face up to reality and take steps to move forward.

As I have contemplated all that I have learned and experienced since starting this project there is much I could describe. I have frequently experienced what I often think is happening in the therapeutic process; my mole hills have been made into mountains and then reshaped as mole hills again. There have been many mole hills enlarged and reshaped. There is however, one experience I want especially to reflect on. I think it illustrates the complex nature of an impasse and the anxiety that comes to bear when attempts are made to move from it into something new. It happened some weeks ago. I was anticipating a conversation with Kevin, my supervisor. It had been a while since we had spoken and in the intervening time I had done a lot of writing or rather re-writing as I edited some of the piece I had sent to him for him comments. As I waited for our up-coming meeting I was unaware of the tension I was feeling. It was only when I received an email from Kevin as a prelude to our meeting that the tension I felt became evident. His comments were positive and encouraging and I cried a little as I found expression for my relief. Then, later, when we talked, face to face, I was able to enjoy our interaction. I was relaxed and I was able to absorb what he said and I could confidently contribute to our conversation. It felt like it was a conversation between equals. When afterwards, I thought about what I had experienced I became aware of the dependency I had manifested in waiting for Kevin’s response. I also remembered how in the period prior to the Kevin’s email arriving I had often felt lost, lacked motivation, and felt like I was going through the motions without having a clear purpose. Sitting at my computer to write or re-write a piece of my thesis was a chore. I struggled to find a spark in what I wrote and I
I dreaded the moment when I would sit at my computer on yet another occasion in order to grind out another few hundred words. I had my daily word target and yet I was scarcely motivated to achieve it. I was going through the motions! I just wanted the process to come to an end and yet the end seemed so far away. I thought about abandoning my writing but this seemed an unrealistic option after having come so far. Going forward was hard and joyless and going back seemed equally unsatisfying. In some ways I felt trapped.

When I thought about my experience as being a part of my attempt to move out of an impasse, it all started to make some sense. I was caught `twixt and between’. I was between the `old’ which I was leaving behind and the `new’ which was not able to enjoy. I was caught between the old which was familiar and limiting and the new which was exciting and yet only known through my imagination. I was in a hiatus and I had not prepared myself for the lack of certainty I felt. I had lost touch with the old and yet the new seemed outside of my grasp. I could only keep going in the direction I thought I should go without the conviction I was on the right track. My purpose was sustained by a faith and belief that what I sought was worthwhile even though my belief was flimsy and diminishing. I was in danger of becoming disenchanted and every now and then I considered the rationale I could use as I anticipated explaining to others why I had given up. I was at a low ebb. I was introspective and withdrawn. Keeping going as I was taking a lot out of me. I had to be disciplined and yet I hardly had energy for what keeping going demanded of me. I thought of my dependence on Kevin’s feedback. It meant a lot to me. He gave me positive feedback about the worth of my project and he also gave me the impression that the end was within my grasp. Within my grasp! I interpreted his comments to mean that he was satisfied with what I had written so far and that any
amendments to what I had written was my choice. I had already done enough and I could stop at any time. He provided me with a yard-stick from outside of my own awareness. He provided a perspective I could not provide for myself. He was optimistic when I was gloom filled. He was also very matter of fact about it all. In his encouragement he laughed and in so doing made my struggle ordinary and mundane. Suddenly what I was doing became manageable. I became energised and I found a new and clearer focus. I knew what I wanted to do and I had the energy for doing it.

This experience helped me to clarify a significant aspect of the impasse experience. It illustrates the moment when both the old and the new are within consciousness. It indicates not only the likely experience felt by the protagonists in an impasse but it also gives some indication of the role of a third party. My own experience attested to a likely depressive episode. There is a period of ‘seemingly not getting anywhere’. There is a sensation of losing direction and losing purpose and motivation. It is an awful time and yet it has to be endured. I now know it is the prelude leading to the emergence of new energy and confidence, new awareness, new perspectives and a display of new skills. It is helpful at this time to feel the presence of another person. It is important to be mirrored by another; to have one’s experience validated, even its awfulness. In a relationship this mirroring may come from the other person. Failing this, such mirroring can be available from a third person; someone who is not only able to empathize but who because of their greater experience can hold onto hope; the hope that was once held by the protagonists; the hope that invited them into this process in the beginning. As this hope seems to diminish as the protagonists face reality it is carried in the meanwhile, by the third person. They can reassure. They can describe what has happened as well as describe
what lies ahead. They know because they have seen it all before. As protagonists move forward they can be attentive to and acknowledge signs of disappointment and disillusionment. It is certain that the new will be underwhelming before it can be enjoyed.
“Now stop!” Max said and sent the wild things off to bed without their supper. And Max the king of all wild things was lonely and wanted to be where someone loved him best of all. Then all around from far away across the world he smelled good things to eat so he gave up being king of where the wild things are.” “…Max stepped into his private boat and waved good-bye and sailed back over a year and in and out of weeks and through a day and into the night of his very own room where he found his supper waiting for him... and it was still hot.” (Sendak, 1963).
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