

**THE WAY IT WAS, THE WAY IT IS: REMINISCENCE AS
INTERGENERATIONAL CONSTRUCTION OF IDENTITY**

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ABSTRACT

Social constructionism offers a framework that acknowledges the predominance of language in the construction of meaning. Society at large has begun to question the assumptions that are made by empirical paradigms of science. Rather than looking for so-called “truth” social constructionism is interested in the values that underlie specific constructions of meaning.

In this dissertation, reminiscence in older individuals is studied from the perspective of social constructionism. In social constructionism the unheard voices and the hidden subtexts are revealed. Most research up to now focuses on the meaning that reminiscence has for the teller of personal stories. Very little emphasis is placed in the current literature on the listener and even less acknowledgement is given to reminiscence as an activity that takes place *in relationship*. The emphasis in this study is therefore to include the listener in the ongoing conversation about reminiscence. Different voices are juxtaposed, with three participants writing about their experiences as listeners. The question of how reminiscence contributes to both meaning and identity is posed. A holistic content analysis conducted from a narrative perspective follows.

To conclude, the author not only makes her own values explicit throughout the study, but invites the reader to become a participant and to add another voice to those voices included in the study. The reading of the study thus becomes an interactive process.

KEY TERMS

Social constructionism, reminiscence, narrative research, post-modernism, conversation, intergenerational, listener, language, meaning construction, identity.

OPSOMMING

Sosiale konstruktiewisme bied 'n raamwerk wat erkenning gee and die belangrikheid van taal in die konstruksie van betekenis. Die samelewing het tot 'n groot mate begin om die aannames wat gemaak word deur empiriese wetenskap te bevraagteken. Eerder as om te soek vir sogenaamde "waarheid" is sosiale konstruktiewisme geïnteresseerd in die waardes wat onderliggend is aan spesifieke konstruksies van betekenis.

In hierdie skripsie word reminiesie by ouer individue bestudeer vanuit die perspektief van sosiale konstruktivisme. Binne die paradigma word die ongehoorde stemme en die verborge betekenis onthul. Die meeste navorsing het tot nou toe die klem geplaas op die betekenis wat die aktiwiteit vir die verteller. Baie min navorsing fokus op die moontlike betekenis vir die luisteraar en nog minder word daar aandag gegee aan die verhoudings aspek. In hierdie studie word die luisteraar toegelaat om deel te neem and die gesprek rondom reminiesie. Die idee van 'n voortdurende gesprek laat verskillende stemme toe om gekustaponeer te word teenoor mekaar.

Drie deelnemers skryf oor hulle ervarings as luisteraars. Die vraag oor hoe reminiesie bydrae tot die skepping van betekenis en identiteit word gevra. 'n Holistiese inhouds analiese vanuit 'n narratiewe perspektief volg op die bespreking.

Om af te sluit, die skrywer maak nie net haar eie waardes eksplisiet nie, maar nooi die leser uit om ook deel te neem aan die studie en om nog 'n stem by te dra tot die ander stemme in die studie. Die lees van die studie word dus 'n interaktiewe proses.

SLEUTELWOORDE

sosiale konstruktiewisme, reminiesie, narratiewe navorsing, postmodernisme, gesprekvoering, oor generasies, luisteraar, taal, betekenis konstruksie, identiteit.

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Ma en Pa

Dankie dat julle my nooit beperk het in julle idees oor wie ek mag wees nie en vir al die omgee elke dag.

Deon en Emmie

Dankie- julle weet waarvoor alles.

Bridget

For saying that you miss me and that you wish I was finished with this so that we can spend more time together.

Ouma Ida

Vir die stories en die saamlag.

Johanna

Oor jy die stories almal ken.

D

Vir die walks en talks.

And also to Koshca, the Praying Mantis who was my muse and Duck-a-Doodle whom I miss.

PROLOGUE

Autobiography, if there really is such a thing, is like asking a rabbit to tell us what he looks like hopping through the grasses of the field. How would he know? If we want to hear about the field, on the other hand, no one is in a better circumstance to tell us - so long as we keep in mind that we are missing all those things the rabbit was in no position to observe (Golden, 1997, p.1-2).

CHAPTER 1

BEGINNING: A LETTER TO THE READER

Thus, by the end of our story we shall find that the individual self has all but vanished into the world of relationship (Gergen & Gergen, 1988, p.18).

Dear reader

This is a story about the stories people tend to tell about themselves when they grow older. The story includes personal stories that one could call self-narratives and it includes parts of the story that science tells about reminiscence. Like all stories it has a beginning, middle and an end. Similar to other narrative accounts this one also uses words as its tools. Like others it too functions as a linguistic tool that serves a specific social function (Gergen & Gergen, 1988). According to Gergen and Gergen (1988) there is a need for stability in our stories and then also a contrasting need for change. Stability allows for communication that is mutually understood. The language that is used, both academic and personal, is an organising and stabilising factor in this story. On the other hand this story also functions as what Gergen and Gergen (1988) call a "progressive narrative" (p.36) where change becomes possible. This story is thus nested within an existing story, which is the academic conversation around reminiscence and is also progressive in as far as its motivation is to bring about change in a positive direction. At first glance this might seem to be an ambitious and even arrogant statement, yet within the context of a conversation all utterances make an impact, no matter how soft or silent! the voice. The "change" that I am speaking of is a subtle one - a matter of placing the emphasis elsewhere in the study of reminiscence. It will therefore continue a current conversation *and* include or make stronger other voices that have thus far been under emphasised or not been included in the formal story about reminiscence in later life. What makes it possible to tell this story is that we are imbedded in shared socio-historical contexts. The specific context from within which this study is conducted is a Western, academic, South-African context. "[T]he telling of the story is not so much the act of an independent individual as the result of a mutually coordinated and supportive relationship" (Gergen & Gergen, 1988, p.40) between all the participants (which include the writer, the

writer as researcher, the writer as granddaughter, the readers, the participants) and the academic conversation that already exists. The story about reminiscence has heretofore been told within academic circles. This is not a new story, but a re-telling in such a way that the emphasis shifts.

What follows is first of all a contextualisation of reminiscence within the language of psychological research and specifically within the social constructionist paradigm. There are a wide variety of forms available within the current culture of research from which I could choose to tell this tale. I choose to describe it from the perspective of social constructionism where all accounts, including those of science and everyday life, are acknowledged as providing us with windows on the truth rather than claiming to be *the* truth. Gergen and Gergen, (1988) describe how the writer Joyce Carol Oates was confronted with a multiplicity of possible life accounts rather than one. Like her, I feel that I do not have one story to tell, but that the possible angles from which I could approach this story are legion. What then will make this story intelligible is that the goal of the narrative will be clearly defined, the events will be clearly ordered and the story will have a point to make. It is important to define at this juncture the point that the story wants to make by discussing the purpose of the study. Whatever is included in the study will be relevant with regard to the goal of the study.

You will soon notice that within the text I often make use of italics. This indicates most clearly my personal voice while the upright, more formal script is used to demarcate a more academic voice. This division is however not clear-cut and the reader that reads between the lines will also constantly hear my voice within the academic text and will notice how academia has become part of my voice.

For the sake of the reader it is necessary to place this story within the context of psychology even before the goal is stated. The context and setting of this particular narrative is sketched through reflecting on some of the ideas that led to an interest in reminiscence. These reflections focus on both a personal and professional interest in the subject.

Professional Reflections

Psychology as a discipline has become increasingly concerned with how we become who we are within the context of relationships. One only needs to think of object relations with its emphasis on the relationship between the mother and child (Gomez, 1997). Family therapy looks at patterns in the family in the here and now, yet some writers also focus on the patterns in families that repeat themselves from generation to generation (Freeman, 1992). Social constructionism deconstructs the very notion of a separate self. Gergen and Gergen (1988), for example, state that memory is not so much a personal process as it is a social process. Though reminiscence, which entails remembering oneself and sharing this remembrance through telling stories, has been studied from the perspective of the teller and as a possible important way in which people come to terms with their own life, not much has been said about the role of the listener with whom the stories are shared. The question that I ask here is how do these stories that we often have to listen to influence, often over and over again, the way we see ourselves? What is the impact of reminiscence on the listener?

In this dissertation I am interested in listener's experiences of reminiscence: how it comes to have personal meaning and how reminiscence contributes to the formation of identity in the listeners. Coming from a social constructionist framework, the telling of a story, which includes self narratives - such as reminiscence - can be seen as "not so much the act of an independent individual as the result of a mutually co-ordinated and supportive relationship" (Gergen & Gergen, 1988, p.41). According to Gergen and Gergen (1988) it is important to see all actions of individuals, including the stories that they tell about themselves, as constructed within the context of relationship. It is this challenge that we are confronted with as researchers: "...the discourse of relationship represents a vastly unarticulated subtext upon which rests the text of individual selves. The pragmatic question is whether we can articulate this subtext. Can we bring into the foreground that which has remained obscured?" (Gergen & Gergen, 1988, p. 41).

In the case of formal studies on reminiscence it is in my opinion the very notion of reminiscence as an activity that takes place *in relationship* that has remained obscured. I found only a few references to reminiscence as constituted within a relationship (Adelman, 1995; Haight, 2001; Lubarsky, 1997; Wallace, 1992). Adelman (1995) and Lubarsky (1997) include the listeners in their studies while there are hundreds of articles and books about reminiscence and life review with their main focus on the tellers (Butler, 1963; Sherman, 1991; Wong & Watt, 1991).

The Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study is therefore to investigate qualitatively how reminiscence contributes to the formation of meaning and identity in families across generations. This study will aim to be progressive in as far as it brings into articulation the relational aspect of reminiscence by asking listeners to tell their side of the story. The purpose is furthermore to investigate personal experiences of reminiscence and to relate this to the current literature on reminiscence. Work with older people and reminiscence has focused mostly on whether it is good for the teller or not. This study gives a voice to listeners to comment on their experience of reminiscence. More specifically it facilitates a discussion around how being in the position of the listener has helped to shape the listener's identity and whether or not the story has had meaning in his or her life. The study is thus aimed at eliciting a conversation with the participants about their experience of the relationship that comes into existence when grandparents and -children gather around stories. I wanted stories about reminiscence that would bring the subtexts, the hidden text more into the open.

A Map for the Story

I hoped that by creating a context of transparency in my own writing I would create a culture in this story of honesty and openness. Furthermore it is important, after having conversed about the topic, to make some suggestions of how one could possibly create interventions as psychologists that make use of reminiscence in ways that include both the listener and the teller. Thus, the "point" of this story is to find out

about the quality of the experience of the listener as active participant in the relationship.

The "events" in this story about reminiscence, include the introduction and context within which the rest of the story is embedded. It also provides the epistemological background to the study as well as the methodology that is used. This is followed by the stories told by professionals as well as a thematic analysis of the personal accounts of participants. Integration between the themes that have been identified from the participants' narratives and the literature as well as how my epistemological stance relates to the analysis ensues in the research chapter. Lastly, there follow recommendations for future research and interventions. The story is organised in such a way that it emphasises relationship rather than linear causality, thus the readers are invited to participate through being addressed directly in the form of letters. The story told here in the form of letters is organised in such a way that the voices of professionals, participants and the researcher are juxtaposed so that the complexity and multiplicity of the relationships come to the surface. This organisation emphasises and illustrates the relational nature of the story that is being told. The structure of the narrative, which includes the establishment of the goal of the story, the selection of events that are relevant to the goal, the ordering of the events and the demarcation signs are derived from what Gergen and Gergen (1988) propose as being "important to the construction of intelligible narrative in contemporary western culture" (p.22).

The End of the Beginning

You have now been introduced to why I have chosen to write about reminiscence and also to what the goal of the study is. To summarise: first of all the context of reminiscence study has been introduced. The aim of this study is to look at reminiscence as a two-way, circular, rather than a one-way process. So far most studies have focused on the teller. In this study placing the emphasis on the experience of the listener restores the balance. In the next part of this letter to you, the reader, the question of epistemology and methodology is discussed. Please bear with me as I take you through my own process of finding a suitable paradigm and methodology for this research. I shall explain to you how I went about placing

the research within the boundaries set within the academic research world without destroying the quality of real, human interaction through academic jargon. My approach is thus both-and rather than either academic or personal. You are invited to participate actively in the process of meaning making by referring to your own experiences with reminiscence while reading through the pages that follow. The study aims at collecting rich, in depth information through conversation rather than to generalize and quantify. Later on you will hear the voices of the participants. Through presenting the formal discussion around reminiscence in the form of conversation with people who experience being listeners, the story deconstructs the ivory tower existence of the current academic opinion on the topic. To complete the beginning, my personal motivation for choosing to write about reminiscence is explored briefly. These personal reflections make conscious the process that I go through as researcher and as a listener to reminiscence. I am therefore not an "objective" researcher, but I participate actively in the research. Gergen (1978, p.1355-1356) challenges scientists:

[T]o throw off the mask of neutrality and to confront more directly and honestly the moral implication of his or her work. It would appear far more desirable for the theorist to give self-conscious consideration to matters of value in the development of theory than to stumble upon them some time after dissemination.

In this way the researcher becomes a participant, his/her subjectivity is made explicit and enters the struggle of "competing values so central to the human venture" (Gergen, 1978, p.1356).

Personal Reflections

Let me then tell you something about my experience with reminiscence. My maternal grandmother was born in 1904. Last year we celebrated her hundredth birthday. A month and a week later she passed away as the sun was setting over Pretoria. There was a sickle moon and a star on the Western horizon. I chose to do my research on reminiscence partly because of it being part of my own process of coming to terms with her death. She was a remarkable woman, a woman of many stories and much of what she told me feels as if I exist within the context of these stories. To me, my grandmother and her stories are reference points that I either confirm or deconstruct through my own way of being. My grandmother was a lady. Her stories were mostly success stories: stories of heroes and good

living. One of the sad aspects of her life was that she was an only child and then went on to have only one child. My grandmother lived in her stories and she even lived through her parents' stories. In the last few years she sometimes told her stories in the first person as if she were her mother or her daughter or even later on as if she were me. She told stories of wars and of building blocks and of a farm girl and of treading grapes in the Boland. Some of her stories had a political air about them. Her family played a public role and often the stories were about the public sphere rather than only private stories. My grandmother's stories were about community involvement and active participation in the world at large. This grandmother's stories were stories to be proud of and told of people who were both influential and who were in control. They were stories about an establishment with much power. Her narrative was mostly one of power and dominance. Her stories spoke of personal achievements and were set within a specific belief system that was accepted as the truth. I liked my grandmother a lot even though some of her stories gave me cold shivers because they were so much in service of a way of thinking that did not fit the liberal end of the century paradigm that I had been born into. She had absolute convictions of what the right and proper thing was to do.

My grandmother was very charming and the way she told her stories reflected her charm. She was our favourite, because of her natural ability to attract people, because of her stories and also because of her knowledge of right and wrong. It is difficult to describe in words how her constant reminiscing influenced my identity and gave meaning to my life, but I do feel that as a listener I have been profoundly touched and at least part of what I would describe as "my identity" has been created through these stories. The notion of a separate identity is anyhow questionable, as we have already noted.

There are also the stories that my paternal grandmother told. I experienced her as being very different from my maternal grandmother. I only knew her for twelve years, yet she made a huge impact on me with her tales of magic and foreboding. Her stories were utterly personal, nevertheless what made them universal were their undertones of human suffering and joy. Though so very much focused on "personal" suffering they are embedded in a specific socio-political climate. This is what Gergen and Gergen (1988, p.34) refer to as "nested narratives" where the personal story is set within a given broader story that is consistent throughout different personal accounts. Unlike this grandmother of mine I would not describe myself as superstitious. Yet, even if I consciously try to ignore the

'signs' of good or bad coming, I think she gave me an unconscious structure to expect good or bad when an owl hoots or a black cat crosses the road. My experience of her stories was that instead of listening to constant reminiscing for over thirty years, as I did with my other grandmother, I heard her story, from herself, perhaps only once. This once-off telling made a huge impression on me. I can remember the sweet smell of her eau de cologne, the light changing from daylight to night outside the room, the curtains still open and the only light being that of the streetlight siphoning through the exposed panes. I can remember exactly where we sat and how I felt: sad and perhaps also burdened by the weight of what she had to tell. While the darkness enfolded us like a cloak, her words echoed pain and suffering deep into my young soul. She had lost five children and a husband. Who could she in the last years of her life share with and transfer to something of her feelings of having had a life of suffering, but her only granddaughter?

I felt honoured and though I did not want her story as much as I maybe thought I ought to, I understood through her stories, why she was the way she was. My grandmother sighed with every step she gave. Her stories were mostly told with this same burdened feeling with which she walked, yet she had a sense of humour that focused on other people's peculiarities in a vernacular that was only akin to her side of my family. To me she was an epic; she was the hero and the victim of her own story. When, as a ten-year-old child I got into the habit of complaining a lot, my father said that I would become just like my grandmother. I was shocked to my bones. I never wanted to be like her. I did not want a life as severe as hers. I did not want to suffer as much, I did not want to sigh with every step, but most of all I did not want her stories to be mine for they were too painful, too fateful. Yet, at the same time I feel honoured to have heard these narratives and perhaps sitting there and listening to her tales of loss has influenced my decision to become a psychologist. It was round about the time of hearing her story that I began to say "This is what I would like to do." I do not want to make a linear connection between my choice of career and my grandmother's stories, but thinking about this makes me wonder about the patterns that connect.

Though much of what my grandmothers accepted as truths I later on questioned, I feel a kind of safety in their stories and the lineage they represent in my psyche. They create a sort of unquestionable acceptance of who I am. Those stories that I have heard over and over again are a bit like mantras. They give me something to refer back to. When I struggle

with existential questions such as "Who am I and what do I want and what must I do?" I do think of my grandmothers' lives, the sameness and the differences. Without the stories they gave me, this process would have been more difficult, I believe. The reminiscences of my grandmothers are thus not mere reflections of the past but became in the telling and retelling important stories to which my own life is juxtaposed. Sometimes I consciously refer back to my grandmothers' lives and compare them with my own, but I think perhaps more important are the unknown influences that these stories have on who I choose to become.

This dissertation is not a dissection of personal stories or an attempt to find linear cause and effect when it comes to the impact of reminiscence on identity and meaning in the listeners. It is a conversation around reminiscence and its impact on the listener. I have been profoundly touched by my grandmothers' stories. I feel my life to be a kind of tapestry that includes not only my own stories but also other people's stories. Of these stories my grandmothers' definitely form an important part. I leave my personal stories to stand on their own. The reader will see the connections.

After having written this whole story on reminiscence, in one of my own last readings, I am surprised about how much of my own story can also be found in that of the listener participants. I leave it up to you as readers to make these connections as you read along. The participants did not read what I have written in this first chapter, yet there are echoes in our stories. Is it because of the way I posed the question to them in Chapter 4, is it our common Afrikaans heritage or patterns that connect or perhaps all of these?

CHAPTER 2

EPISTEMOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS: SECOND LETTER

Zooming in...zooming out...The first move is from space to place: from describing a large context (a country, an industry, a global economy) to the concrete field under study, or even a site (a 'school in a suburb of a big city). The second move performs an opposite operation: from a detailed description of a concrete place, it telescopes (again selectively) to the whole world if the need be (Czarniawska, 2004, p.120).

Dear reader

In the previous chapter you have already come to know much of my values and motivations as a researcher. The story has been introduced, moving through much of what is to follow, a kind of overview without giving away the intrigue that will reach its climax in Chapter 4. I hope that as the story develops it will serve as both a "Bildungsroman" and that you will hear "polyphonically" as you read along. A "Bindungsroman", according to Czarniawska (2004, p.138) is "a novel describing the protagonist's formative years, spiritual education, or quest for knowledge. It is about education but its intention is to educate the reader." Perhaps the last part is less prominent in this study as I do not consciously go out to educate you, but rather to involve you in my journey and the journeys of the participants. Yet, we cannot help but to learn as we experience. This story could then also be read as a "travelogue" which is a "text, film, or illustrated lecture about places and people encountered in the course of travel." Then, I hope that you will hear the different voices that speak in the text, that your experience will be not only hearing the voice of the narrator (Czarniawska, 2004) and that you will hear "in stereo" and "sing along". According to Iser's (in Czarniawska, 2004, p.140) "Reader-response theory" interpretation of "meaning is the product of an interaction between a text and a reader..." (Czarniawska, 2004, p.140). Thus the text and the author do not determine the text's interpretation, but neither are readers free to interpret as they wish. It is hence an invitation once again to interaction.

But perhaps I am casting my net too wide, so let us zoom in onto the question of epistemology. In this chapter I would like to make even more explicit the socio-historical assumptions that I treasure and believe in. I shall take you through some of the major values that social constructionism rests upon. But before I formally discuss the agreed upon assumptions I would like to present you with an idea of my own process and why the social constructionist approach fits with my own way of languaging. Gergen (1978, p.1356) says that to include one's own values is not only desirable, but it is essential "to avoid expressions

of value that, upon reflection, are disagreeable to the theorist". So it is basically about integrity and honesty. To me it has been quite a relief to stumble upon an epistemology where it is not only allowed to include "my truth" and other people's truths instead of claiming to know "the truth", but where it is desirable to become conscious of one's own standpoint.

There was hardly space for alternative stories and voices while I grew up in South Africa as a white Afrikaans girl in the seventies and eighties. The world as we knew it was one organised around race and hierarchies of power. Questioning was not allowed and the National Party, The Volk and the superiority of the white race were givens. Ironically it is this very notion of one truth that made it crumble so easily. There were cracks in the system. Other worldviews and other paradigms could not be kept away completely. There were sanctions that polarised the rest of the world into the "baddies" while only those in favour of apartheid were "right". For me personally, my brother first made me question the status quo with his refusal to join the army. A new world opened up when I got to university and not only were we encouraged to think for ourselves - at least to an extent - but on the political front I met a paradigm that did not accept the power structure of the ruling party. So right and wrong began to have more to do with real people and how power structures translate in their daily lives than with superimposed ideas that pose as "morally right" in order to keep certain people in power. But it started even earlier for me. I could not understand how a good God could only let people who called themselves by a certain name go to heaven. I thought that a "good God" would love his children no matter what they named Him, (or Her! or Them for that matter) So I think that I have been interested in multiple realities created through language for a long time. Perhaps it started with liking pink while my brother liked blue better. Maybe I started to become conscious of multiple realities when I heard my two grandmothers' stories that were so different, one coming from a place of power, the other from a place of struggle and poverty. What has become increasingly important to me is not so much to know all the different languages of the world, but to become aware of how my own assumptions and values impact on the development of consciousness.

I cannot and do not want to support theory that consciously or unconsciously supports the suppression of one group by another. We do not exist, nor take part in scientific activities in a vacuum. I cannot write without values. The best I can do is to begin to become attentive to my own process and assumptions. Social constructionism offers a paradigm that

I feel supports and reflects my own window onto the world. I choose this paradigm because I feel that instead of remaining in the realm of the intellect, social constructionism makes space for a human lexicon that allows diversity to come into existence. What follows is a more formal, broader discussion of some of the assumptions made by social constructionism about the world.

Social Constructionism

You could tell them that people's ideas of "right" and "wrong" change- and have changed-over and over again from culture, time period, religion to religion, place to place ...even from family to family and person to person ..."right" and "wrong" is a definition established not only by time, but also by simple geography (Walsch, 1997, p.35).

According to Freedman and Combs (1996, p.16), the main premise of social constructionism is

that the beliefs, values, institutions, customs, labels, laws, divisions of labor, and the like that make up our social realities are constructed by the members of a culture as they interact with one another from generation to generation and day to day.

People interpret the world through the perceptions with which societies provide them. What we take for granted as "reality is not the world as it is, but the world as we perceive it." We are provided with specific "lenses" by the culture that we enter at birth (Gergen 1994). (*Just look at a cat's eyes and think how different the same world must look to her*). Social constructionism offers useful ideas about how power, knowledge and "truths" are negotiated (Gergen, 1994). Social constructionism moves away from a positivistic stance that postulates that we can know the world. From a social constructionist vantagepoint the researcher becomes more interested in exceptions than in rules (Gergen, 1994). Social constructionists choose to study specific details rather than to work towards generalisations. Differences, not only similarities are studied (Burr, 1995; Freedman & Combs, 1996; Gergen 1985; Gergen, 1994). The notions of expert knowledge and objectivity are rejected. This does not mean that modernist scientific knowledge has no value, but the authority

and claim of it being "the truth" are questioned. All realities, including scientific realities are socially constructed through language and maintained through narrative and we keep realities alive by the stories that we tell. According to Anderson (1990, p.102) we are "creating ever-new and more complex stories about stories" – and this story making is not just about human life, but *is* human life. Narrative psychology lets us think of life as story while social constructionism makes us look at how people's social realities create the meaning of people's lives (Freedman & Combs, 1996). These social realities are closer to fiction than to fact. In this study, looking at reminiscence and its meaning to the listener, I intend to investigate how meaning and identity come into existence through the stories that are told in social settings such as families. These stories are seen here as processes within which meaning becomes constructed. The way our grandparents choose to relate stories about the past and the stories they choose to tell have an impact on us as listeners and it is of interest how we relate to this activity as listeners. The stories are told from within a specific value base and as listeners we meet the stories from our own value system.

Social constructs, including language, are not a map of the world according to social constructionism but are instead artefacts that makes interaction possible (Anderson & Goolishian, 1992; Gergen, 1985). Communication becomes possible because of mutually agreed upon meaning systems. Social constructionism questions the assumptions made by positivistic science that the world can be described accurately. All language is socially constructed. These social constructions are the result of and agreed upon within historically situated relationships amongst people.

Gergen (1985) refers to the ongoing swing between the concern with pure forms of knowledge and the importance of sensory experiences. This polarisation has been in existence since the beginnings of philosophical thought. Plato and Aristotle already began to express the split between mind and matter. This argument continued throughout the history of Western philosophy. Now Gergen (1985) claims that, for the first time, Western thought is taking a quantum leap that does not stop the pendulum from swinging, but allows for the Cartesian dualism to be overcome by looking at all language constructs as something that people do together. The

emphasis thus shifts from an either/or approach to science to an inclusive, contextualised activity. As Gergen (1985, p.272) puts it: "What is confronted, then, is the traditional, Western conception of objective, individualistic ahistoric knowledge". Its aim is to take the knowledge from empirical scientific ways of enquiry and place it into the hands of "people in relationship" (Gergen, 1985, p.272). In this study I choose to reflect on how stories of a very personal nature, reminiscences of the past, are embedded within certain value systems, how they cannot be viewed without taking into account the larger social narrative of which they form a part and therefore cannot be ahistorical. It is thus important in this study that the focus falls on the relationship through emphasising the impact that the reminiscences have on the listener. So, the idea that meaning is created in relationship is further reflected in this study by emphasising the importance on contextualising stories.

In psychological enquiry, traditional knowledge claims are also challenged by social constructionism. As Gergen (1985) puts it: "The explanatory locus of human action shifts from the interior region of the mind to the processes and structure of human interaction". Here people are viewed in relationship. All categories, including diagnostic categories and concepts are viewed as being socially constructed within a given historical and cultural context, rather than to be accepted as the truth or rejected as untrue. This poses a challenge for both the researcher and the practitioner to dislocate all accepted assumptions, to allow for psychological research and practice to be challenged and to become a research object. It is hence neither direct experience nor empirical knowledge that social constructionism is interested in. Consequently, reminiscence is viewed here as taking place in relationship.

The emphasis in this study is not placed so much on the experience of the listener or of the teller as on the relationship within which meaning is constructed. The data on the experiences of the listeners are not viewed as "truths" in the sense of it being objective, but are seen as ways in which people language their role as listener. Social constructionism offers no truth through a specific method, but rather becomes conscious of the assumptions that the method rests upon. Gergen (1985) emphasises that almost any methodology can be employed. "However, this does not mean that 'anything goes' " (Gergen, 1985, p.273); it places research again inside the

realm of morality. It calls upon us as researchers to take a stance in terms of right and wrong. It brings into place a responsibility for co-creating realities by which people live their lives. “To the extent that psychological theory (and related practices) enter into the life of the culture, sustaining certain patterns of conduct and destroying others, such work must be evaluated in terms of good and ill” (Gergen, 1985, p.273).

To sum up: social constructionism concerns itself with values, power structures and consciousness. The research will focus on how the listeners’ experiences reflect their values, power structures and the way in which they find meaning in this activity. The values portrayed in the stories of the older generation and in those of the younger generation will be looked at.

Narrative inquiry offers a method in which research can be approached in such a way that the values of social constructionism are supported in the research. The aim of social constructionism is to facilitate a process of discovering the grand narratives of society which oppress people (Doan, 1997). Narrative inquiry supports the values of social constructionism and postmodernism in that complexity and multiplicity, rather than singular accounts of the self are accepted (Dickerson & Zimmerman, 1996). The purpose of narrative inquiry is to deconstruct the stories that dominate others. What social constructionism does within the socio-political context, narrative inquiry does on the level of stories (Doan, 1997; Dickerson & Zimmerman, 1996). Like social constructionism, narrative researchers accept the idea that one story is not more valid than the next and as social constructionism is interested in discovering subtexts, so narrative inquiry asks questions that allows for alternative stories to be created. Narrative inquiry is aimed at externalising the problem rather than to locate it inside the person. In the next section narrative inquiry is described in more detail.

Narrative Inquiry

Carson and Fairbairn (2002) argue that story telling is central to all research and that narrative inquiry provides us with a model that allows ordinary people to participate in the research. Doan (1997) argues that narrative methods as they stand in relation to postmodernism can be compared with psychoanalysis as it stood in

relation to modernism. Instead of being interested in a unified self as modernists would pose is possible, narrative inquiry does not accept the idea of a singular self. From the narrative viewpoint one story is as valid as another is. Stories are ways in which people define themselves. They are dynamic processes that form a whole within which meaning is constantly constructed and reconstructed both from the viewpoint of the listener and the teller (Rappaport, 1993). When people talk to each other new meanings come into existence (Anderson & Goolishian, 1992).

What I will do in this research is to add voices to the discussion. Though methodology will be discussed in the next chapter I would like to reflect here on my own process of meaning making. It was difficult to find a method that fitted the aims of social constructionism in such a way that it does not once again dissect into pieces that which is whole. An organic whole is more than the sum of the parts and studying the parts does not give one a picture of how they hang together. In this study the letters of the participants form an integrated whole and methods of analysis, even some qualitative methods can easily make it become too much like the dead frog that is dissected into its parts. The dead frog then loses its "frogness": it is not a frog any more but is now only bone and blood and muscle. Therefore it was difficult to find a formal, well worked out method that would not kill off the voices of the participants in the analyses. After much chaos, searching and literature surveys I decided that the way in which I could keep the participants' voices whole and alive would be to follow the method that has developed through this conversation: conversation in the form of letter writing. What I am doing here in a form that happens quite spontaneously, that has been learned at the knees of my grandmothers and in my first years at university, namely to read with awareness and perhaps even analytically, is formally referred to as "narrative inquiry". Here the inquiry is structured as a letter. I also borrow freely from literary theory to give different readings of the narrative. A bit of looking forward. This text is becoming more multi-layered, a kind of palimpsest of past, present and future. The way it comes into existence is through reading and re-reading and adding into the text.

It is against the background of social constructionism and narrative inquiry that the question of about the contribution to the advancement of science and why research in this field is needed, is addressed.

Contribution to the Advancement of Science

Within the modernist framework the question of how the research will contribute to the advancement of science is answerable, because of the belief within this worldview that the world is knowable. From a social constructionist stance the very notion of “scientific progress” is questioned. The concept of truth and the notion that it can add to the field of knowledge is seen as part of the “grand narratives of the scientific Western culture. The very idea of scientific progress is therefore seen as a literary achievement (Gergen, 1985). Science is seen as one of the prevailing dominant narratives whose authority rests in the way it has been socially constructed. Therefore this study will not “advance” science in any grand manner, but it will enter the narrative around growing old and about being rooted in stories from the past. It will at best re-direct the conversation around reminiscence to bring it into the realm of relationship.

This narrative will be as relevant as other stories about reminiscence. It will question the roots of the current assumptions and the culture that sustains it. According to Gergen (1985) it is the action of the postmodernist professional that de-objectifies reality. In this way this dissertation could potentially give a voice to the listeners and therefore also empower the tellers in reminiscence as it acknowledges that this activity does not take place in isolation, that the stories are told mostly to be heard by someone, often also to someone specific. Perhaps reminiscence in later life could then be viewed more as part of the web of life than as a stereotyped activity that old people do because they have nothing else to do. This study could therefore possibly contribute to a different understanding of reminiscence in later life without claiming to be some major or even minor scientific “discovery”.

The conversation around how reminiscence impacts on the construction of meaning and identity can open up conversations around how psychologists can structure reminiscence interventions in families and communities. In this way the research can make a contribution in that it enters the conversation around reminiscence and later life.

The very way in which we conduct our research contributes to the attitudes that people have towards themselves, their identity and their perceptions. Muller, Van Deventer and Human (2001, p.4) say that to allow the stories of people to unfold in their own way the researchers need to be in the “not knowing” position. The researcher takes a stance of being tentative and interested rather than to take an expert, all knowing position. In this way a new narrative can come into existence through a dialogical process (Anderson & Goolishian, 1992; Freedman & Combs, 1996). Thus researchers need to take a self-reflective stance and must become conscious of their own meaning-making processes and socially constructed ideas about the phenomena that they study (Gergen, 1994). The researcher needs to develop the ability to adjust and readjust, to assess what is helping the flow of communication in the specific interaction, rather than to stick to set agendas.

In this study self-reflection forms an integral part of the writing and of the process of research. Not only do I constantly reflect on my own experiences with reminiscence, but also on the underlying assumptions from within which this research is conducted. The research is not seen as value-free, but is context specific.

I am a white, middle class, Afrikaans female in my mid-thirties. I like stories and they have great meaning to me. This research is a personal endeavour as much as it is a public document. I do not intend to come to great discoveries, but hope to create more of a balance in the formal conversation on reminiscence. The fact that I write in post-apartheid South Africa, that I live in an age where the world has become small through technology and where I am exposed to different cultures and value systems on a daily basis, influences the way in which I write this research. Instead of pretending that these biases do not exist or to try to nullify them, they become the very lenses through which I look at the stories given to me in writing by the participants.

When we conduct research about an activity such as reminiscence we need to take into account that the story that is told is an interactional process (Gergen, 1994). If we enter the field as experts who only focus on the teller, our message is: reminiscence has meaning for you, perhaps, but to whom and why you are telling the story is irrelevant to us. We are only interested in whether it is good for you. This stance needs to be deconstructed through exploring alternative ways of

researching reminiscence that acknowledges the need for a story told to be heard by someone and for the sake of exploring intergenerational meaning, rather than to focus on the activity in isolation. The focus of this study on identity and meaning, within relationship across generations, takes reminiscence research out of the realm of isolation into the sphere of relationship where the activity takes place in everyday life.

Conclusive Statement

This chapter gave a brief overview of my own epistemological stance and the assumptions underlying social constructionism as well as the stance taken about the question of the advancement of science. In this study both narrative and social constructionist metaphors will guide me through the stories about reminiscence that the research will focus on. What follows is a more detailed description of the methodological narratives that will be employed in this study. First of all qualitative research will be described, then post-modern qualitative research and then the method of narrative research that will be employed. I then tell you about the method that I intend to apply.

As I write this most of Chapter 3 has already been written. The details about the method need to be added. In re-reading this chapter and adding and changing as I go along as well as in reading again about narrative inquiry, I feel a bit more equipped to venture off into the unknown territory of other people's voices. I feel more confident that I will, through reading and re-reading with different lenses, be able to come to an analysis that will reach conclusions, without fixing these conclusions. As Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach and Zilber (1998, p. 10) put it: "narrative research is suitable for scholars who are, to a certain degree, comfortable with ambiguity. They should be able to reach interpretative conclusions - and change and rechange them, when necessary, with further readings."

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY: A THIRD LETTER TO THE READER

Dear reader

By now you have most likely positioned yourself in relation to this story, consciously or, if not, unconsciously. Your own values have probably come into play. Perhaps the ambiguity of narrative therapy does not suit your belief in or perhaps your hope for clear-cut scientific knowledge. Or maybe like me, you have had to learn to live with the question rather than to need cut and dry definitions. A third possibility is that you are riding on the metaphors and enjoying the journey for the journey's sake. Of course there are many other possible readings. Some, such as boredom, I would prefer to not think of now. So this story continues, moving from a general overview of the landscape in the previous letter to a clearer description of the plot. In this chapter the question of methodology provides us with ideas of how the story will unfold. As I am interested in the quality of experiences and interactions, the methodology had to fall within the broad range of qualitative research. I felt myself attracted to qualitative rather than quantitative research because I wanted to know about the complexity of the relationship that comes into existence when people gather around stories about the one person's past as the person gets older. After deciding that my epistemological framework is best described by social constructionism, I decided on post-modern qualitative research specifically because social constructionism has come into existence against the background of post-modern thought. I think it has to do with my affinity for words. I find myself at home in the world of ideas and words and find it harder to connect with numbers when they are used to translate social realities. I adopt here what Libiech, Tuval-Mashiach and Zilber (1998, p.167) have to say about the choice between qualitative and quantitative methods of inquiry: "Our basic position is, however, that there is ample place for all of these approaches and methods, and that our understanding of a question, a person, a culture is enriched by this pluralism".

To choose qualitative research was not difficult. What was more of a struggle was to find a specific method that could be employed to investigate the role of the listener in reminiscence activities. As I have already mentioned in Chapter 2, I eventually decided on narrative research. Its concern with multiple perspectives and the implicit focus on relationship and on stories provided me with a broad method that I felt comfortable with and

that would complement this study. Yet, even after choosing the broad methodological framework it became increasingly more difficult to find a specific method that I could apply to the stories that I received from the listeners, which would take into account the richness of the stories. For me it had to be kept in the realm of the aesthetic rather than to destroy the meaning through an overkill of analysis, and it had to be satisfying, at least within the context of academic enquiry. Though I had gone through the exercise of asking traditional scientific questions such as the question of validity and the question of reliability, which are included in this chapter, I felt a kind of “a-ha” when I read what Czarniawska (2004, p.136) bravely wrote:

And the questions – from inside and outside - such as; 'is it valid?' 'is it reliable', 'is it Science' should be replaced by such questions as: is it interesting? Is it relevant? Is it beautiful? In other words, I suggest that social scientists enter into a double contract with their readers, fictional and referential: suspend disbelief, as I intend to please you, but also activate disbelief, as I intend to instruct you.

And narrative analysis “provides the ideal mechanism to inquire, reflect, examine, and interpret our memories both from our personal experiences and from multiple perspectives shared by the other” (Gallavan & Whitmore, 2003, p.19).

I felt that I had come closer to what I wanted to communicate about the listener's experience. I wanted continuation, wholeness, and above all to keep the conversation going, especially in the research chapter as this after-all had to be the climax of my story. When the actual protagonists, the listeners, are introduced in the first person, I wanted them to be heard as whole, rich characters rather than to be simplified into stereotypes through my analyses (I would suggest you have a sneak preview at their letters in the appendix to counteract the academic discussion that is to follow). I know that the research chapter will come together even though I am still uncertain about the specific method. As I plough again through this chapter, constantly reflecting on how I can represent the material, on how I can find a way to bring you more than a common sense reading, without killing off the subjects, I realise that this has so far been the most difficult part of this dissertation.

I now describe qualitative research. With the fourth reading I am flying, rather than ploughing. I am emotionally involved. I become passionate and feel enjoyment in the reading and the writing.

Qualitative Research

Qualitative research is concerned with the quality and texture of experiences. Qualitative researchers “tend to be concerned with meaning. That is, they are interested in how people make sense of the world and how they experience events” (Willig, 2001, p.9). Predictions and cause and effect relationships are not seen as meaningful in this kind of research. Qualitative researchers usually use natural settings and contexts when studying people, rather than artificially created settings. Banister, Burman, Parker, Taylor and Tindall (1994, p.2) define qualitative research as “the interpretative study of a specified issue or problem in which the researcher is central to the sense that is made”. This type of research therefore supports a post-modern worldview where researcher involvement, exceptions and difference are important aspects of the research. Interpretation always involves a

process, a process that continues as our relation to the world keeps changing ...there will always be a gap between the things we want to understand and our accounts or what they are like if we are to do qualitative research properly (Banister et al, 1994, p.3).

Reflexivity plays an important role in qualitative research, as it requires from the researcher also to be aware of his/her contribution to how meanings are constructed. This implies that the research is influenced by the researcher’s attitude to science and by the researcher’s approach to psychology as a discipline. It acknowledges the impossibility of remaining “objective” in, and outside of the process of research. In this study, the way in which questions are posed, the interaction between the people and the researcher, and the choice of where to place the emphasis, are acknowledged as ways in which the researcher becomes more than an observer. This also fits with the epistemological stance of social constructionism to research where the researcher has to take cognisance of his/her own assumptions

and values. The researcher is acknowledged as an active participant in the research process (Dahlberg & Haaling in Moore, 2002).

Post-modern Qualitative Research

Post-modern qualitative research rejects the idea that the world can be 'known' and that 'the truth' can be discovered. Whereas modernistic research would go out from the assumption that the world can be controlled and is predictable, postmodernism does not support the notion of objective and universal knowledge. Rather, all knowledge is seen as situated within language and is value based (Doan, 1997; Lynch, 1997). The researcher who conducts research from the post-modern stance is, as has already been mentioned, not interested in discovering objective facts, but rather in the socially useful knowledge. The context is always taken into account in qualitative research. The emphasis falls on narrative, on conversation and the quality thereof (Doan, 1997; Lynch, 1997).

Validity and Reliability in Qualitative Research

In qualitative research validity and reliability cannot be judged according to the same set of rules, as is the case with quantitative methods. In this regard Banister *et al.* (1994) say that "it is not necessary to set quantitative and qualitative traditions in diametric opposition to one another, and we would lose sight of the value of much of qualitative research if we were to do so."

A qualitative researcher focuses on the context and the integrity of the material that he/she has studied. Validity in qualitative research is largely a "quality of the knower, in relation to her/his data and enhanced by different vantage points and forms of knowing - it is, then, personal, relational and contextual" (Marshall, 1986, p. 197).

I want to remind my academic and other readers that when you read these letters your own process will create another vantage point, equally, but not more valid than the vantage points that are portrayed here, not only by me, but also by my participants and the academic opinions to which I am referring. Your vantagepoint might be very similar to the others because language is socially constructed and shared by people of the same culture.

The emphasis is on creating a conversation that includes you. You are allowed and invited to interact with the text. Let us return to why qualitative research has come to be accepted within the academic world. Within academic circles one of the important questions that we must be able to answer is the question about whether we can trust the conclusions that we draw.

Reliability has to do with consistency. In qualitative research replication is not so much to come to exactly the same results, but rather to reinterpret the findings from other perspectives and in other, rather than replicated contexts. Validity in qualitative research is focused more on personal and interpersonal qualities than on method. Marshall (1986) proposes the following list as a useful way of working with the notion of validity within the context of qualitative research.

For some of these I leave it up to you to form an opinion as you read. For me, this list is a way in which I gauge myself and see whether I meet the criteria set within the language within which I choose to work. Through reflecting in a structured way I become conscious of the process of research and aware of where I can ask more questions or place the emphasis differently.

Were the researcher(s) aware of their own perspective and its influence? *My own perspective is the place from where my research is conducted. I acknowledge my subjectivity and my bias in thinking that reminiscence is important in the relationship between children and grandchildren because of my own interaction with my grannies and their stories. I also believe that younger people, including myself, do not always find reminiscence meaningful and that old people sometimes irritate us telling and retelling the same old stories. I know that my own experiences with my own grandmother and my melancholic predisposition make this topic interesting to me. I prefer qualitative studies and I like stories. I also like old people a lot. All these and many more of my own personal preferences will become apparent as you continue to read these letters.*

Were they aware of their own process? *Painfully so as you can see how I struggled with the process of finding a method that would fit, that would neither be sentimental and unscientific, nor destroy the essence of my own and my participant's experiences.*

How did they handle themselves? *For you to decide and dare I say opinions will differ.*

Were they open in their encounters? *Openness is a prerequisite when one works from a social constructionist view. I have tried to be transparent in describing my own process as I went along and to allow the participants to speak for themselves. I was also open in allowing the participants into the academic fraternity by including my own reading of the current literature on reminiscence into the research question.*

Did they tolerate and work on the chaos and confusion? *I certainly recognise this as a very valid way of describing the process that I went through and am still going through at this point. The chaos at times became so much that I could not imagine how this could ever become a meaningful whole, how any order could ever come from the confusion of which method to use, who to include, who to exclude, how to ask the questions and how to start writing!*

Relationship to the data. In this study the "data" is not seen as something external from the process. Unlike in cases where "empiricism holds experience to be the touchstone of objectivity; hypotheses are said to be confirmed or challenged by virtue of sense data" (Gergen, 1985, p.272). From the social constructionist standpoint both the notion of 'empiricism' and "sense data" is questioned. Reports of one's own experiences are seen as linguistic constructions that are embedded in a specific culture rather than objective "facts". Therefore, what traditionally would be viewed as verifiable "data" is here not judged as "true" or "not true", but alternative criteria are applied that take into account "political, moral, aesthetic, and practical considerations" (Gergen, 1985, p.272) and the need for shared understanding. Besides the above there are additional criteria.

Is the level of theorising appropriate to the study and its data? *This is a difficult one on which to reflect. I am fairly new in the more formal language of social constructionism, though I have intuitively shared many of the thoughts behind it for a long time. As a researcher at Master's level one becomes concerned at times whether you have enough of a grasp on the material. There is certainly more about social constructionism that can be explored in more depth and the same can be said*

about reminiscence. Yet, what has been a challenge to me in writing this was to illustrate the theory that this conversation is based on through the way in which the material is represented. This removes the theory from the intellectual sphere into the sphere of relationship and co-creation of meaning.

Is the theorising of appropriate complexity to portray the phenomena studied? *Can theory ever portray the phenomena in all its complexity? I think that no theory can ever be complex enough to portray the whole complex experience of what happens between generations when stories are told. At the most I hope that the theory is adequate in the sense that it adds to an ongoing conversation, that it contributes by giving a different vantage point and that it incorporates at least some of the existing ideas to allow for the story to make sense. I can compare it with taking a photograph or drawing a picture of a well known feature in a way that shows an angle that is different from the stereotypic way of looking at, say, the Eiffel tower. So it makes us see well-known phenomena in a different light, a kind of shifting of vantagepoints. I could certainly have drawn on Carlos Castaneda, quantum theory, aesthetic theory and semiotics. I choose not to go into this, as this is a mini dissertation and not a doctorate in philosophy and even more so because I want to open a conversation, not dominate it.*

Are alternative interpretations explored? *This is what this dissertation is all about, about seeking alternative views, not to be oppositional but to enrich the conversation and continue the conversation.*

Is the process of sense-making sufficiently supported? The formal ideas of social constructionism and of narrative research support the theory.

Contextual validity. *Most of us have grandmothers, South Africans find themselves in many different socio-cultural settings and in post-apartheid South Africa we have probably heard different stories that have influenced our identity and have given meaning. Though this is not the focus of this study, beginning to ask questions in one cultural group opens the pathway to ask about others.*

How do the conclusions relate to other work in the area? The work done in this study serves as a balancing act, beginning to explore the mostly

untold stories of those who have to listen to reminiscence and thus placing the emphasis on the relationship.

Are the researcher(s) aware of relevant contexts for the phenomena studied? *I leave this one up to you.*

Is the research account recognisable - particularly by people within the area studied? The language that is used, the format and the academic grounds of the study should provide the reader with stability within the changes that are explored. *I hope that the language used here is accessible, not only to researchers in the field of reminiscence, but also in the field of psychology as a whole.*

Is the material useful? *The material is hopefully useful in that it opens up ideas for interventions and further explorations in research for example in other minority groups and in other settings. At its most ambitious it also opens up ideas about communication and research methodology.*

Added to this list is the statement that ‘good’ research addresses **most, not all** of these aspects. No research is perfect. The purpose of the research is also for the researcher to develop his/her capacity for knowing. *This is quite a relief as my research is then recognised as part of a process of learning and sense making rather than to pose as a perfect, complete study without any room for further conversation.*

Rigor is, however, necessary in qualitative research and needs to be employed in order to maintain trustworthiness and authenticity in the research method applied. The following discussion focuses on more specific criteria in qualitative research such as the trustworthiness of the research. The research does not claim to be “true” in any “objective” way, but should be trustworthy in as far as it applies to the specific perspective of the research.

Trustworthiness of the Research

Lincoln and Guba (in Moore, 2002) state that trustworthiness in qualitative research lies in the researcher’s skill and sensitivity rather than in finding validity, as is the case in quantitative methods. In quantitative methods the criteria include authenticity, rigor and the trustworthiness of phenomenological inquiry. In qualitative

research “[T]he criteria of trustworthiness are: credibility, applicability, dependability and confirmability” (Moore, 2002). Following Moore’s (2002) discussion these criteria will be discussed as they apply to this specific research.

Credibility of the Research

Credibility can be described as the confidence that the researcher has in the trustworthiness of the research findings. “Credibility is obtained through exploration of lived human experience, perceptions and descriptions” (Moore, 2002, p. 75). Openness is one method that helps to increase credibility. “Openness” has already been discussed and is expanded upon here for the sake of a fuller picture. It means that the researcher has to approach the research phenomena as they present themselves rather than to superimpose the researcher's own hypotheses onto the research. *The reader can see how I circle time and time again back to the idea that the researcher has to become conscious of his/her own assumptions.* This attitude includes the desire to learn and a humility that fits with the attitude that postmodernism adopts. In this study the literature review suggests that certain aspects of reminiscence are under- or unexplored or even overlooked and therefore need unimposing, exploratory studies to open up new possibilities in interventions that include reminiscence. Openness also includes the researcher’s self-reflective stance.

Applicability of the Research

Applicability refers to the transferability of findings to other research. As discussed in Chapter 2 within the modernist framework the question of how the research will contribute to the advancement of science is answerable because of the belief within this worldview that the world is knowable. From a post-modern stance the very notion of “scientific progress” is questioned. The concept of truth and the idea that it can add to the field of knowledge is seen as part of the grand narratives of the scientific Western culture. The very idea of scientific progress is therefore seen as a literary achievement (Gergen, 1985). Science is seen as one of the prevailing dominant narratives whose authority rests in the way it has been socially constructed. Therefore this study will not “advance” science in any great manner, but it will enter

the narrative around being old and about being rooted in stories from the past. This narrative is as relevant as other stories. It will question the roots of the current assumptions and the culture that sustains it. According to Gergen (1985) it is the action of the postmodernist professional that de-objectifies reality. In this way this study can give a voice to the later phases of life as a valuable aspect of human cultural life by bringing one cultural activity back into the sphere of life and relationship through choosing to zoom in on the listener.

Each individual is acknowledged as unique. The question of applicability is therefore a valid one. The conversation that is allowed to develop in this research can open up the narrative around reminiscence in such a way that new questions can be asked and intervention programs can be organised in such a way as to allow for other questions and meanings to arise. Research and interventions cannot be repeated blindly in other settings. Cultural sensitivity in different communities is of utmost importance and the expert stance is abandoned for a more respectful attitude. The question of applicability is answered not in a simplistic way but challenges other researchers to enter the complexity of reminiscence and its cultural value in ways that do not merely superimpose this or other research onto other communities and individuals.

Consistency of the Research

The consistency of the research helps to create a focused conversation around the theme. The following contributed to creating consistency in the research:

Descriptions of the methodology and method: Through describing the methodology, method and research design and by keeping to this design during the research it becomes focused. The investigation, instead of being limitless is concentrated on the research topic and insures that the research aim is kept in mind.

Peer evaluation: By subjecting the research to other people's views, the consistency in the research is addressed. Other people, including the researcher's partner and colleagues trained in psychology, were asked to comment on the logic and the consistency of the statements.

Following the conventions of narratives: As mentioned in Chapter 1 what makes this narrative intelligible and also provides consistency is that the goal of the narrative has been clearly defined, the events are clearly ordered and the story has a point to make. This is stated in Chapter 1. All accounts are included because of their relevance in reaching this goal. Furthermore the tale is demarcated by indicating beginnings and endings (Gergen & Gergen, 1988).

Narrative Research

Narratives are stories. In the next chapter the idea of stories are expanded upon in more detail. Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach and Zilber (1998, p.7) state: “We know or discover ourselves, and reveal ourselves to others, by the stories we tell.” That narratives are closely linked to people’s identities and even more precisely that stories *are* people’s identities is an idea that is at the forefront of the social studies today (Gergen & Gergen, 1988; Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach & Zilber, 1998). People create their identities through stories. The stories we tell about ourselves are not accurate representations of reality, but they are constituted around life events. In the telling they serve more in the creation of how the teller sees himself or herself than in the objective reflection of reality. Stories are “real” in as far as they reflect an inner reality, a “narrative truth” (Spence in Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach & Zilber, 1998). The central question in narrative research is: “why was the story told *that way?*” (Riessman, 1993, p.2). The focus is thus on the story itself. Narratives are linguistic constructions that organise experiences, make sense from the perspective of the narrator and construct reality. Through the narratives we have access to not only the “individual’s identity and its systems of meaning but also the teller’s culture and social world” (Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach & Zilber, 1998). According to McAdams, Josselen and Lieblich (2001) the narrative researcher has to look at the meaning that the participant makes by linking different aspects of his or her story as well as how he or she understands the story. Furthermore “[t]he role of the researcher is then to connect this understanding with some form of conceptual interpretation, which is meaning constructed at another level of analysis” (McAdams, Josselen & Lieblich, 2001, p.xii).

Narrative research employs different methods to access or rather to “read” stories. Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach and Zilber (1998) define “narrative research” as “any study that uses narrative material” (p.2) with “narrative material” being any written or oral or other wise communicated texts that relate an interconnected “succession of happenings” (Webster in Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach & Zilber, 1998, p.2). Thus, narrative research includes a very broad spectrum of research that concerns itself with the meaning of narratives.

Hollway and Jefferson (2000) emphasise that in narrative research the whole is regarded as important for the understanding of the parts. This is what Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach and Zilber (1998) call a *holistic* approach to narrative research. At the other end of the spectrum lies what they describe *categorical* approaches. In the holistic approach the narrative is treated as a whole and parts of the narrative are interpreted in relation to the whole story. In the categorical approaches the emphasis falls more on the analysis of the content. The story or stories are analysed through extraction, classification and grouping. This method of analysis can lean itself to both quantitative and qualitative methods whereas the holistic approach in general falls within the broad range of qualitative methods. The same text or narrative can thus be approached in many different ways that could still be described as a narrative analysis.

Thus I came to a place in the research where I have to commit myself to a specific method of analysis. Though you will read “method” next, I first explored the narratives alongside different methods of narrative analysis. I first got a feeling for the whole by reading and re-reading the participant narratives. In this way I approached the narratives from a holistic standpoint. Even before I read them the second time I started to form links with some of the methods that I came across in my reading. I made tentative notes of these. What follows is a description of the method that Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach and Zilber (1998) call Holistic-Content Reading. I have chosen this method as it does not dissect the narrative until all life is sucked out of it and it allows for the conversational tone of this narrative to be continued.

Methods

The method that will be applied in this study is the Holistic-Content Analysis as described and illustrated by Lieblich, Mashiach and Zilber (1998). In reading the text the “entire story” (p.15) is taken into account and the content and meaning is the focus. Often the analysis emphasises one major theme or a few themes. When for example using the beginning or last sentence of the story the “researcher analyzes the meaning of the part in light of content that emerges from the rest of the narrative or in the context of the story in its entirety” (p.13). This type of analysis can be compared to the kind of reading one would do for a case study. In the reading of the narratives the researcher tries to form a holistic picture of the content. Lieblich, Mashiach and Zilber (1998, p.62) suggest the following steps for holistic-content analysis.

Step 1

Read the material several times until a pattern emerges, usually in the form of foci of the entire story. Read or listen carefully, empathetically, and with an open mind. Believe in your ability to detect the meaning of the text, and it will “speak” to you. There are no clear directions for this stage. There are aspects of the [narrative] to which you might wish to pay special attention, but their significance depends on the entire story and its context. Such aspects are, for example, the opening of the story (Lieblich, Mashiach and Zilber, 1998, p.62).

Step 2

Write down your initial and global impressions of the narrative: Note exceptions to the general impression as well as unusual features of the story such as contradictions or unfinished descriptions. Episodes or issues that seem to disturb the teller, or produce disharmony in his or her story, may be no less instructive than clearly displayed contents (Lieblich, Mashiach and Zilber, 1998, p.63).

Step 3

This step involves the identification of themes. These then need to be followed through the text. “A special focus is frequently distinguished by the space devoted to the theme in the text, its repetitive nature, and the number of details the teller provides about it” (Lieblich, Mashiach & Zilber, 1998, p.63). Special attention needs to be paid to omissions; very brief interludes can be very significant within the whole focus of the content.

Step 4

Brown *et al.* (cited in Lieblich, Mashiach & Zilber, 1998) suggest that one uses coloured markers to indicate the different themes throughout the text. For each theme the narrative is read separately.

Step 5

Follow each theme throughout the text, making sure you know where each appears for the first and the last time. Look out for transitions between themes, the context each theme appears within and their importance in the text as a whole. Take special note of contradictions and disharmony.

Introducing the Participants

The participants were recruited through identifying specific members in my direct community to participate in the study. A short individual discussion to introduce the topic to the potential participant was initiated after which they were invited to participate in the study. After this the three participants were verbally asked whether they would be willing to participate in the study. The participants were thus recruited on a personal basis, rather than a random selection.

The participants are all female grandchildren who are between twenty and thirty-five years old. The research is conducted in English as all the participants expressed their preference to write in English. Chapter 4, in its entirety was given to them to read. Chapter 4 is written in the form of a letter to the participants. By sending them the letter, they are let into the academic discussion on reminiscence and are

invited to join the larger discussion on reminiscence through replying in writing. The privileged position of the researcher is thus deconstructed and the participants, instead of staying outside the study, become true participants in that they are let into the discussion at the level of theory. It is also in this letter that the researcher has the opportunity to make her stance explicit to the participants. The participants are not asked to enter an existing conversation without being privy to this conversation. It would have been unfair to ask them to participate without allowing them access to at least aspects of the already existing discourse. The participants gave written consent for their writing to be published and to be used in this study. The participants wrote their replies in any form that they wished. Their replies are published in full in the Appendix.

One of the participants specifically indicated that she wanted her real name used in the study. The other participants' names have been changed for the sake of confidentiality. The original records of their writing will be destroyed after the study is completed.

Conclusion

The methodological framework is clear and I have found a method that I feel comfortable with and that supports the premises of social constructionism. The rules are laid down for the rest of the study. A value system and a language have been made explicit. Most of, if not all of the criteria for qualitative research have been met and the study should therefore be acceptable within the academic fraternity. I also think that in dealing with reflectivity in the way that I do in this study, the criteria of openness and transparency are met.

Now that the methodological context of the study has been clearly defined we are ready to move on to the literature on reminiscence, listeners and other related topics. The next chapter is addressed to the participants. I let them into the formal narrative as well as my personal perceptions and experiences before I asked them to write their own narratives. By allowing them access to the formal context of literature on reminiscence, they participate in the research (hopefully) from an empowered

rather than disadvantaged position. They join the conversation rather than to be placed in the spotlight without knowing who is watching them.

The story still follows the structure decided on at the beginning. The participants are asked in the next chapter to present me with the stories about being a listener in the activity of reminiscence after which the stories will be analysed in Chapter 6. What I mean here by a “listener”, is the person or people at whom the reminiscence is directed. In the case of this study the “listener” is the grandchild to whom the reminiscences were told. All my participants, like me, found themselves in the position of listener in the activity of reminiscence on many occasions and it is on these experiences that the research focuses. Chapter 5 will, I hope, be the most exciting and interesting. For it is there that the idea that the listener has something to contribute to the conversation on reminiscence will be put to the test.

CHAPTER 4

LITERATURE OVERVIEW: A LETTER TO THE PARTICIPANTS

Dear Participant

Amongst other things, I have in common with you that I am a granddaughter. I have been fortunate enough to meet both my grandmothers. Now, they have both passed away, yet they are still very much a part of me. Perhaps, like me you also spent many hours of your life listening to your grandmother or father reminiscing about his/her past. Some of the stories I had to listen to many times, others I heard only once. Perhaps the more intimate personal ones, the ones that were more complex, deeper and closer to the heart, came only in moments where we really met. My perception is that your grandparent possibly told you stories about his/her past and that this was one of the ways in which you got to know, not only about his/her life, but also about yourself, your sameness and your difference, your strengths and your weaknesses. I go out from the assumption that these stories possibly have meaning to you and that they are part of you - but I might be wrong.

Before I ask of you to write a reply to these questions, I would like to take you through some of the literature on reminiscence. It seems that some researchers and writers are fascinated by the phenomena of older people reflecting on the past. There are all kinds of theories that developed around reminiscence. These languages have mostly existed within academic circles. Researchers question this habit of reminiscing, asking whether it is psychologically a "good" or not so healthy activity. They also ask why some people choose not to tell stories and whether this is the more healthy way of life, to live only in the present.

In this study I am mostly interested not so much in whether reminiscence is "good" or "bad" for older people, but rather on how the telling of these stories impact on those who have to listen to the stories. In the research that has been conducted thus far there is not much emphasis on the relational aspect of reminiscence. The relational aspect of reminiscence is that which happens between people rather than intra-psychically. The emphasis falls not on the individual but on the conversation that takes place. This is the reason why I am interested in hearing about your experiences. You have perhaps never consciously thought about this or maybe you have considered writing your grandparents' memoirs because of the value that you attach to their stories. My own two grandmothers' stories have had an enormous impact on me. I will tell you more about this in the rest of this

chapter as I will continuously reflect on how my own experience confirms or differs from the opinions of the people who describe themselves as “experts” on this topic. I invite you to tell me about your unique experience as listener. It is not important to agree or disagree. What is important is your description. The aim of this research is not to prove any one ‘right’ or ‘wrong’, but to elicit a conversation around what it means to be a listener in the process of reminiscence. Please answer to this letter at the end of this chapter, or if you want to add, like me, your thoughts into the text, you are welcome to do so. Please choose a different font so that I can clearly see when you write. I shall publish your answer in its complete form at the end of the study and will also identify themes from your writing and the writings of the other three participants. I will change your name and the names of others to protect your privacy.

When you read what professionals have to say, please keep your own experience with your own grandparent/s in mind. Some professionals come from a one-up position or forget to take their own experiences into account and how this impacts on what they believe or don't believe about a given topic. I write from a post-modern perspective, which means that I do not go out from the assumption that researchers necessarily know more about reminiscence than the people who participate in the activity. What is important for me, as the researcher, is that I become aware of my own assumptions and that I make them explicit. Without self-reflection and acknowledgement of our own specific stance researchers can fall into the trap of making generalised statements about other people's lives that are valid only because of their own assumptions. Researchers also look through specific lenses, possibly the lenses they were given through the stories that they grew up with! or the ones they reacted to. All of this influences the way they see reality and the way in which they do research. In the type of research that I conduct here I am interested, not in making sweeping statements about “reminiscence” as an abstract concept, but rather, what I am interested in, is the way in which you describe your experiences. Rather than to come to conclusions, I would like to delve into the richness of the conversations. By including my own reflections, I hope to make my own stance clearer to you. I am more specifically interested to know how your grandparents' stories have impacted on you and on how this interaction has informed your identity and given meaning - or not - to your life. As you will see from what follows, there is very little written about the listener's role in the relationship that is constructed through reminiscence. What follows is the one side of the equation. Much has been said about its

value to the teller, but the listener has almost been null and void in these discussions. As a participant in this research you are adding your voice to the literature on reminiscence. Your own assumptions about what it means to be a listener and what reminiscence means will become visible in the process of research. I invite you to co-creating a story about reminiscence that includes the listener.

My grandmothers' stories have touched me and formed me in ways that are hard to define and my purpose with this research is to give us, the listeners a voice. The method of research that I employ, namely "narrative research", allows for individual differences. Thus, what follows is, first of all, a journey into the phenomena of stories and storytelling and then into what the literature says about reminiscence specifically. This is hardly a complete picture of all the research and all the writing that has been done on the topic. The idea is not to give a complete literature overview, but rather to elicit a conversation around the topic. To do this I have included statements by other researchers that either came very close to my own experience or that oppose my own experience. I acknowledge that my own opinions and ideas do not stand loose from the choices I make as a researcher and writer. It is therefore necessary to point out to you that I do come from a specific angle and that what follows is influenced by the stories in which I believe. I have included some writers while others were left out, not because their opinions don't count, but because the writers included here have made an impact on my own thought processes. This subjectivity, however, is according to social constructionism, always part of research. It is my story about the stories, and what I am interested in is your personal story about hearing stories from your grandparents. I include one telling of my personal story here and invite you to enter a conversation both with me and with the literature. Like me, you could have told your story in a great many different ways. You are invited to tell your story. Thank you for your willingness to become involved in this process.

Stories and Story Telling

"Most of us begin our encounters with stories in childhood. Through fairy tales, folktales, and family stories we receive our first organized accounts of human action" (Gergen, 1994, p.186). We live our lives by stories. Not only do we dream, hope, remember, love and hate through stories (Hardy, cited in Gergen, 1994), but we also create ourselves according to the stories that we tell. Thus we are the stories that we

tell. White and Epsom (cited in Gergen, 1994) together with Gergen (1994) emphasise the relational aspect of stories. Untold, told and re-told stories are a domain where meanings can emerge in the context of personal history, community and culture. These stories come into being through the social reality of the person's own experience in relation to others. Our stories are intimately connected to the way in which we perceive ourselves and how we stand in relation to others. Our identity is therefore not separate from our told and untold stories. Social constructionist theory constitutes that the very notion of "identity" is a socially constructed idea. As Gergen (1988, p.35) says about the stories that we tell about ourselves: "the individual harbors the capacity for a multiplicity of narrative forms". We can thus story ourselves in many different ways.

Narrative therapists work with changing stories and therefore with identities and meanings that have become stuck. "Human problems occur when the way in which people's lives are storied by themselves and others does not significantly fit with their life experience" (Carr, 1998, p.486). New stories are told that replace or weave into the old ones. Thus telling stories can in itself become what White (cited in Carr, 1998) refers to as a re-authoring process where identity can be shaped and changed. This not only brings new meaning to the stories, but also fundamentally constructs different ways of being in relationship with oneself and with other people. Stories can free us from old definitions of ourselves and/or could confirm our identity. It is also through stories that we create coherence and continuity. Our stories *are* our identities (Gergen, 1994; Weingarten cited in Gergen, 1994). Stories can thus be perceived as being central to the creation of meaning and of identity in life in general.

Talking about stories in general is like creating a broad setting. In the broadest sense the stories we tell through our conversations, art and technology form and reform our ways of being together and apart and therefore also shape the community and culture at large (Carter & Everitt, 1998). This creates the scenario within which the more specific events of the story, in this case reminiscence in later life, can be placed. In the most intimate sphere there are those stories, which can include reminiscence stories, which are utterly personal and intimate aspects of ourselves

(Gergen, 1994). However, most stories, even these intimate ones are nested within larger social narratives that determine how we see and story ourselves.

I think here of how my grandmother always said that she would have been two years older had it not been for the Anglo-Boer War. Her mother and father could not get married because her father had to go to war for two years.

Through telling a story the web of interaction changes and we discover new ways of being together and separate. Stories about the past are not stagnant realities, but they change as they are told and listened to. In the experience of telling a story the teller weaves a web that touches the listener in a way that also forms and transforms his/her own network of meaning (Lifschitz & Oosthuizen, 2001; Muller, Van Deventer & Human, 2001).

As a little girl I listened to stories of struggle, death and the depression years from my paternal grandmother. My sympathies were stirred. I sometimes wonder how this impacted on my choice of career in the helping professions. Perhaps the teaching stories from both my grandmother and my mother awoke in me the longing to do the same, though consciously I tried my best not to follow this route. I did become a teacher, I sometimes think not by choice but by compulsion and loved it as much as my ouma loved to tell her stories about her teaching career. There were stories of “therapeutic interventions” with specific children and stories of the occasional chance meeting with a student many years later. I find myself in a position where I am daily living the story of my own life, but I can never sever it from the stories of other people. Whether I feel myself opposing or in line with the stories of others, especially those of my parents and grandparents, I am forever creating my own identity within a dialectic that includes the meanings and identities which I encountered intimately through the stories with which I grew. These stories have in them messages about what it means to be a woman, what is expected of a member of this specific race and family, how we eat and encounter others, how we love and how we hate. I have chosen to question and transform many of the underlying assumptions of the given stories of my family, but I do not think I could have done this had I not encountered a larger story that allows for transformation and individuality. This new story, coming from post-modern thought, interacted with my dominant stories and allowed for me to question the identities given through these stories. Yet, my family stories gave me reference points from where I could begin to choose to incorporate or change what I believed.

I am surprised at how much of the way I perceive life has been given to me through personal stories and how my feelings are attached to these stories. Perhaps one of the most important aspects of stories is their ability to make us “feel at one” with the characters, and when that character is your grandparent, how much more do they not touch us.

This brings me to a topic that is broader than the family stories that I am specifically interested in here. I include this discussion on stories in a much broader, collective sense in order to place the discussion within a larger context. I feel that my family's stories for example cannot be seen as existing on their own. Rather, they are part of collective stories that also impact on the individual stories. My granny's stories about how her grandmother had to wait for two years for the war to be over before she could get married, is an example of how collective experiences inform individual experiences. But on another level it also speaks of a value system where personal life was only secondary to public and political life. Through this next conversation we explore the complex web of stories in a broader sense.

Collective Storytellers and Listeners

In the social constructionist view, the experience of self exists in the ongoing interchange with others ... the self continually creates itself through narratives that include other people who are reciprocally woven into these narratives (Weingarten cited in Freedman & Combs, 1996, p.17).

Through people telling their story the collective story is tapped into. If for example this story comes from a place of disempowerment, the telling of the hidden story can have a liberating, healing quality not only for the individual but also for the community and the culture. When a previously hidden, disempowered voice enters the conversation it starts to take part in constructing and reconstructing social reality (Gergen, 1994). Through this, alternative definitions of self and other can emerge for the teller and listener. Personal stories from the past, present and future link up with other people's stories to form a network of meaning. Through telling the stories the stories change *and* become stable.

I have already illustrated how for me the larger stories of society impact on individual stories. Perhaps the clearest example of how personal stories that became public impacts on how we perceive ourselves and how we hear other stories, is that of the TRC (Truth and

Reconciliation Committee) that gave people the opportunity to tell in public their stories about their experiences during the apartheid years. Voices that had been hidden, stories barely told even in private became public and brought about change on many levels. These stories impacted on how I heard some of the stories told by my family about the Apartheid years. Some of the assumptions made in these stories about South Africa as a country were completely deconstructed. I do not look at South Africa before 1994 only as the land of milk-and-honey as it had been in my maternal grandmother's stories. Yet her stories do not disappear or become invalid just because there are other stories. They now begin to stand in dynamic tension with these other stories. I find myself as a South-African not in one position, but somewhere within this dynamic tension between the different stories that I hear and ultimately I decide on my own story. I become the question rather than the answer. As a result, I choose to do qualitative research that allows for different voices and do my utmost best not to tell only one story. My dominant story allows for individual differences and complexity. My patriotism is less than my grandmother's, because I find myself within a larger context of change. It is therefore also necessary for me, when working with the theme of reminiscence to ask questions about our current perspectives on what it means to grow older. The way in which we view older people will impact on the way we listen and the way in which we conduct research with older people.

Current Cultural Perceptions of Becoming Older

“The universal preoccupation with youth ... creates a callous society in which women diminish in status as they age...I think it is my job... to redefine the notion of beauty and to legitimise the ageing process” (Roddick, 2000, p.98-99). Western culture is focused on youth and youthfulness. There is a power dynamic at work in a culture where youthfulness is valued over being old. One only need watch advertisements on television to see how embedded our culture is in its idealisation of youth. Advertisers capitalise on the myth that youth is the preferred age: youthful appearances, youthful success, the strength and speed that are the domains only of those under a certain age (Roddick, 2000). When older people are included they are often portrayed in a humorous way; or as being able to outsmart age by “looking younger than they should” because of some miracle cream, or at its worst they are portrayed as redundant or decrepit (Roddick, 2000). Sometimes a romanticised

version of the wise old crone or the wise old man is capitalised on by advertisers, yet it is not very often that old age is portrayed as a developmental stage that makes a valuable contribution to society. Books advertise cures for old age (Keeton cited in Santrock, 1995). Yet, it is not only older people who suffer from this power dynamic within a youth dominated society, but younger people also lose something through not being connected to their past (Gergen, 1994; Schindler, 1999). Someone once said that the level of a society's civilisation is reflected in the way in which they treat their old people and children.

The questions can be posited: why does this tyranny of youth over age exist in our current culture. What is it about our cultural context that makes it so hard to allow for connectedness with older people? Why has "being old" become synonymous with being redundant (Schindler, 1999)? And how can the power relationship be restored? By investigating how stories from the past change our perceptions of others and ourselves we facilitate a process where older people can find meaning in their own stories from the past and how those who listen to their stories are transformed. At the same time these reminiscences could connect us to our roots and prepare us, as younger people for what is to come. Thus, the question is not whether the psychologist should facilitate connectedness or disengagement, but rather what the meaning is of being in later life and more specifically what the role of reminiscence is in families and in society at large.

Psychology and Older People

In psychology, when attention is given to older people it is often done in a way that places the psychologist in a one-up position (Cummings & Henry cited in Schaefer & Lamm, 1992). The questions that are asked more often revolve around how we (as psychologists) can do better for them (older people) rather than what they (older people) contribute to society (Carter & Everitt, 1998). Most often, case studies and research are covertly formulated in such a way as to look at getting older as an unwanted stage of life that is in need of intervention from the expert therapist. The consequences of this power dynamic are far reaching especially for those who are in this phase of life. Instead of being valued as active, contributing members of society,

older people are also be given, through the way in which their cultural activities are perceived and investigated by “experts” such as psychologists, the subtle message that they have become redundant. Fortunately within the discipline of psychology there are also those who know the value of getting old. Psychologists such as Cohen (1991), who work with the life cycle, reflect this attitude: “A human being certainly would not grow to be seventy or eighty years old if his longevity had no meaning to the species (Cohen, 1991, p.184). Erikson (1982) saw the task of getting older as a time that involves for individuals to move closer to integrity, wisdom and peace. Tornstam (1992) made a point of moving the focus away from the problems of ageing and instead said that healthy adaptation in older people should also be studied.

Often my grandmother's stories came as beautiful pearls and at other times after having heard the same story about how her cousin pushed over her blocks for the four-hundred and fiftieth time, I did not see pearls or even plastic beads any more. I simply became bored and thought that Ouma was really very forgetful these days. Sometimes I am not politically correct ("PC") and wished that my grandmother would forget the story and thought that she was really losing it. At other times I listened to the same story as the "psychologist" and wondered what question I had to ask to help her get over this story. And then I listened as the granddaughter. I now wish I could just hear the block story one more time. It gave me quite a comfortable feeling hearing that story about two people I dearly loved who were children at the beginning of the century. As listeners, we also change. We do not always listen in the same way. We are not always PC or horrible to old people. Sometimes, if we are honest enough the stories become too much and at other times we can't get enough of them and their stories. I do agree with Cohen (1991), when I take in a meta-position, that old people have a lot to give; otherwise they would not be part of our lives. I am of the opinion that we need to find again the gifts that older people bring to society, even when the dominant discourse of society prescribes a different attitude and places us, as young people in the more privileged position. My way of doing this is to acknowledge that their stories are important to me and that not only do these stories impact on them as the tellers, but they also change me, the listener. I want to acknowledge the active role older people play within society through their participation in the process of meaning making. The way we view older people in society at large has also impacted on how psychologists work with older people and with the activity of reminiscence specifically.

Reminiscence: A Process of Meaning Making

What follows is an overview of the literature on “reminiscence”. I had to write about “reminiscence” in late adulthood in one of my post-graduate papers. I started off by reading whatever I could find on the topic and slowly it dawned on me that the process that had been so important for me since childhood, (that is, listening to my grandmother’s stories) was hardly acknowledged in the literature at the time. I looked for writers who spoke of the impact that their grandparent’s stories had made on them, but hardly found any in the formal psychological work on reminiscence. Most studies focused on what it meant for the older people. This literature is important as it gave me an idea of how psychologists had been working with reminiscence and how different authors had different opinions about what it meant for older people to participate in reminiscence.

Thus it is that I have undertaken in my eighty-third year to tell my personal myth. I can only make direct statements, only “tell stories”. Whether or not the stories are “true” is not the problem. The only question is whether what I tell is **my** fable, **my** truth (Jung in Bond, 1993, p. 58).

When studying reminiscence in later life we enter a realm where many socially constructed ideas already exist. Butler (1963) observed that as people grow older they more frequently tend to tell stories about the past. Many other writers (Haight, 2001; Sherman, 1991; Tornstam, 1992; Wong & Watt, 1991) have since followed suit. Reminiscence study is embedded within the larger conversation about older people. How theorists view older people creates the setting for how reminiscence studies are to be conducted. The functionalist approach of Cummings and Henry (in Schaefer & Lamm, 1992) is one voice within psychology that formalises a specific way of viewing older people. Older people, so this story goes, are forced to disengage from most of their social roles. These functions are then undertaken by the younger generation and society’s task is to assist older people to withdraw from their accustomed roles as death approaches. Activity theorists tell another tale. They criticise disengagement theory for not allowing older people to remain active participants in society. They argue that even though the needs and desires of people in later life might differ from

that of younger people, they have the same need for social interaction as other people (Schaefer & Lamm, 1992).

Both these stories told by theorists carry their own truth, yet they do not tell *the truth* of all individuals that are in this developmental phase. These stories both choose a voice that makes absolute some aspect of what it means for some people in some families and communities to be older, or for an individual at a certain point of punctuating his or her world. Whereas disengagement theory acknowledges the need for introversion in late life, activity theory wants the older people to be active participants. A more balanced approach would be not to take in a stance of “either withdrawal or participation” towards the older people, but to allow for both these possibilities to exist. Older people know best whether they want to withdraw or participate, or both, at different times. They would tell you in their own words whether this is problematic to them or not. From a social constructionist perspective we try not to superimpose our ideas of what we think the conversation with older people should be like. We allow the people who have entered this phase of life to tell us about themselves. In post-modern research and practice we are not interested in generalisations, but rather in that which is unique and that which has specific rather than generalised meaning (Levine & Perkins, 1997).

All these theories look at getting older from the perspective of individual experiences, rather than focusing on the relationship that is implied in the telling of a story about the past. Examples of studies on reminiscence show the same tendency. These studies focus on the way in which reminiscence has impacted on the teller and does not focus on the relational aspect. Butler (1963) distinguishes between pathological, adaptive and constructive manifestations of telling stories when you are getting older. Other theorists have followed to identify different types of stories and specifically reminiscence that vary from positive to negative manifestations. Coleman (1986, p. 155) heard that reminiscence varies from “a creative reintegration of the past to a negative brooding on the past”, while Wong and Watt (1991, p. 273) tells a story of six types of reminiscence: integrative, instrumental, transmissive, narrative, escapist, and obsessive. Coleman (1986) also saw that not all people who are in the process of becoming older have taken part in reminiscence spontaneously. When this

happens he observed that for some older people not telling stories from the past was good because they were too busy living positively in the present, while others found the past so painful that they found it hard to speak about it. All older people therefore do not necessarily have a need to partake in telling their stories, nor is it necessary for all people to express their thoughts and feelings about the past in the same way. Also, one individual can utilise different types of narrating at different times.

The question that remains is thus not whether reminiscence and life review is *good* or *bad*, but rather how facilitating story telling can be a way of allowing the voices of the older and younger people to be heard in a way that can bring about healing, formation and transformation for them, for us and for the community. For this voice to be heard it is necessary to acknowledge that the teller implies an audience, that the telling of stories is not just an activity that takes place in a vacuum, but that telling a story implies the intention to be heard. Muller *et al.* (2001, p. 4) say that to allow the stories of people to unfold in their own way the researchers need to be in the “not knowing” position. This requires the ability to adjust and readjust, to assess what is helping the flow of communication in the specific interaction as the process continues, rather than to stick to set agendas. Story telling can then become part of providing in both the need for introverted self-analysis and the need to partake actively in society. It opens up possibilities: one story can come to tell the collective story of disempowerment of the older people. Through the telling and listening and interpretation the story and the teller (and the listener) can potentially be transformed.

About Intergenerational Transmission: Roots and Change

The old carry within their minds, hearts and bones the stories of a lifetime. They have seen generations come and go. They have listened to the tales told by their grandmothers and grandfathers who themselves had been children more than a century ago. They have been breathed upon by life and death. They are the guardians of history and myth. Their stories “reflect our deepest hopes and fears” (Moody, 1988, p. 8).

Moody (1988, p.9) states that an important function of life review and reminiscence is that of “cultural transmission.” By acknowledging the need to find out

about one's heritage from older people the tellers of the tales are acknowledged to fulfil an eminent function. Instead of being marginalised, the older person is acknowledged as an integral part of the family and community. Though myths, stories and histories cannot be used by the younger generation as exact "road maps" because they live in a very different environment from the one the older generation grew up in, the need for knowing from whom and from where we come is an important part of the process of both individual and collective identity formation.

About the Experience of Listening

"We do not believe until someone reveals what is deep inside of as valuable, worth listening to" (Cummings in Gallavan & Whitmore, 2003, p. 19). Narratives are essentially a product of relationship. When we tell a story we like to be heard. About the meaning of listening Hones (1998, p.20) says:

In understanding another person and juxtaposed culture, one must simultaneously understand oneself. The process is ongoing, and endeavour aimed not at a final and transparent understanding of the other or of the self, but at continued communication, at an ever-widening understanding of both.

Being in the position of the listener places one thus in a position where similarities and differences enter into a conversation with each other. Listening is thus not a passive process, but is an active participatory process (Freedman & Combs, 1996). We do not listen to stories without having our own preconceived ideas influence what we hear. "When we listen we *interpret*, whether we want to or not" (Freedman & Combs, 1996, p.45). We cannot listen from a place that is value free and "the meaning a listener makes is, more often than not, different from the meaning that the speaker has intended ... Our very presence makes their world a new and different reality" (Freedman & Combs, 1996, p. 47). When older people speak about the past and we listen to their stories they and their stories change. As listeners we not only bring our own values into the conversation, be they expressed or covert, but we are also changed by what we hear. The activity of listening or reading rather than only the content changes the meaning of what is said (Newman & Holzman, 1999).

I remember hearing stories about how my grandmother ate leaves to stay alive during the depression. I felt ashamed of my own spoilt middle class existence and the demands I make of life. My judgement of her and of other poor people became much more sympathetic after hearing these stories. I feel very sad when I think of her suffering; it touches me more as I get older. I re-listen to her stories as I write this dissertation and once again do not remain untouched. My own values are questioned and readjusted in the process. Is it really going so badly if I can go on holiday and eat olives and cheese?

Thomas (1981) expresses a feeling of being deprived while researching the life history of women all over America. She did not have the opportunity to hear the stories of her own family and expresses her loss:

It came to me over and over again how deprived I had been despite sixteen years of excellent schooling, deprived as we all are when we are without history, when we aren't rooted in an understanding of ordinary people such as ourselves (Thomas, 1981, p.xiv).

Most life review and reminiscence activities up to this stage focus on the needs of the older people and therefore the disempowered position that they find themselves in, rather than on the meaningful social function that they can fulfil through sharing their stories. Habegger and Blieszner (1990, p.35) for example suggest that relatives or special friends can act as “useful additions to reminiscence groups, to act as catalysts and trusted listeners”. The notion of a catalyst implies that the listener serves a function but is there for the sake of the older people person and not as an active participant that is there for him/herself. It is a miserable situation where tellers of reminiscence are valued so little that listeners have to be imported and perhaps even paid to act as listeners, as if the stories have nothing to do with them. If reminiscence and life review activities are limited to institutions with only other older people and caregivers to talk to about the past, the cultural transmission of personal myth and the potential empowerment through story telling becomes limited. In this process, story telling when you are entering late life can become a symptom and a symbol of disconnectedness. What can then happen is that an activity with potential cultural and personal meaning becomes part of a social construct of redundancy and dysfunction. If the stories of old people are perceived as

a dynamic interactive process, it can help the older people to “truly become actors who can help shape the future” (Moody, 1988, p.17). The storyteller passes the story on and after death his/her story lives on, albeit in a different form. Carter and Everitt (1998) reflect on how the discourse operates through various activities of naming and categorising processes within bodies of knowledge and social practices and on how dichotomies are created. Instead of being stereotyped as old and dichotomised as not young, the person in his or her narration becomes to the other a whole multiplicity of identities and possibilities as he/she describes him/herself in the ever-changing context of his/her life. Datan, Greene and Reese (cited in Santrock, 1995) state that when one generation becomes old and dies, the next generation becomes the oldest generation. The continuity over generations is something we usually take for granted, yet it is within intergenerational relationships, be it between parents and children, or as in the case of this study over generations, that "personality characteristics, attitudes, and values are replicated and changed" (Santrock, 1995, p.488).

I want to close with the only piece of writing that I could find in my extensive search that directly supports my view of the importance of the listener in reminiscence. It is a letter published in the February 2004 issue of USA today (p. 18a):

It's good to see an article that stresses the joy – as well as the pain and exhaustion – involved in caring for aging parents (“Sons, daughters and caregivers,” Cover story, Life, Tuesday).

But one of the simplest ways to help aging parents is simply to listen. As a personal historian, I know that most elderly folks positively bloom when they're asked to recount stories from their pasts.

Studies show that structured reminiscence can help alleviate age-related depression and provide a host of other psychological and physical benefits. Some researchers believe it even extends longevity. It's important to note there can be a downside if the elder become fixated on a past traumatic event, which is why many people work with a professional interviewer.

Of course, we are benefiting our children our parents as well as ourselves when we ask for stories about the past. Their stories are our stories, and knowing our roots helps us to know ourselves better.

Andrea Gross

About Reminiscence and Identity: Maybe when we are Old we Also Need to Make a Story

For Jung (in Bond, 1993) the writing of his autobiography formed part of his own individuation process. Through this he reconstructed his life, integrating seemingly ambiguous aspects. Lee (1994, p. 276) echoes this by what he calls “circular narrative” that can contain tragedy, comedy and romance simultaneously. The story is never completed but becomes part of an ever-changing web of meaning. The idea of an absolute, all encompassing, stagnant story becomes inappropriate. Identity is not a fixed entity but a dynamic ever-changing process. Life review and reminiscence, though perhaps more pronounced in the older people, is a lifelong process. We are constantly busy living our stories and re-adjusting our roles and identities as we journey through life. By telling stories we take part in the process of myth making, or in other words, of the social construction of meanings about others and ourselves (Gergen, 1994). The stories people tell are told with the listener in mind, sometimes almost as if the teller listens to himself with the ears of the one he tells the story to.

Looking back at one’s life in later life cannot be detached from the present situation in the same way that it cannot be detached from the future. The past is looked at through the lens of the present. It can be retold but never regained, and in the very telling it changes. Muller *et al.* (2001) emphasise that what is important in narrative research is the *now* of the story. The past might be discussed but it is done in the here and now and tells us more about the present than about the past. The future is that which we cannot know in the present. Death is the only certainty we have about the future, yet when and how still remains to be seen. Work with older people focuses much on past reminiscence and empowerment in the present but there is a question on how they would story the future in the here and now. Perhaps the most hidden of stories are those about the future. How do they feel about nearing their own death, or is this topic avoided?

At times in our telling, we move away from identifying with ourselves and see our story play in front of us as if we are outside of it. One could say that by observing the self in the past a movement takes place from complete participation to a *symbolic*

awareness that lies between the subjective and objective, for when one reflects on your own life history, you become both the “narrated and the narrator” (Bond, 1993, p.17). This is, in Bond’s (1993) experience when personal myth comes into being. Through this myth making process the person addresses the question: “Who am I? Who are we?”

Reminiscence: A Special Kind of Story

The idea that story telling is a creative myth making process becomes increasingly important within our current cultural context where the individual cannot rely as much on the broader cultural context to sustain the myth he/she lived by. According to Bond (1993, p. 25) “the need for myth is the need for meaning.” If our culture does not provide us with myths by which we can find meaning we have to create our own myths, that is, find our own identity *and* our collective identity. Life review can fulfil an almost ritualistic function. Herein the re-enacting of the past can be seen as a way through which the individual parts from his/her old self through a process of integration. This may seem paradoxical, but brings into being a process of finding oneself by losing oneself.

One way of looking at reminiscence is: in life we can observe several crucial moments when we pass from one state of existence to another. In this regard getting older constitutes a time of change and the entering of a place that forms the boundary between life and death. When Pollack and Castel (cited in Molinari & Reichlin, 1985, p.89) view reminiscence as analogous to the mourning process it is not strange, as a reorganisation of one’s relationship with the ‘lost other’ is necessary. This ‘lost other’ in late life is not only other people or external losses, but also specifically the loss of the self as it used to be. Reminiscence can become mourning for the old identity that is irretrievable in its former state. Unlike other life transitions that which is moved towards can at most be unknown and the anxiety therewith could become recognisable.

In telling the story to *someone* this process of finding and losing oneself takes place within the context of a relationship. What if this 'lost other' and the 'lost self' that Pollack and Castel (in Molinari & Reichlin, 1985) speak of is also recreated by giving

the stories to someone else? Through telling the story the lost self becomes visible in the eyes of the other person, but possibly more than this, the teller's story also shifts the identity of the listener especially when that person is a close family member. Social constructionism involves deconstructing much of what is taken for granted in our lives including the idea of a central "self" or unified identity and of "objective meaning" (Burr, 1995). Our ideas about others and ourselves are not viewed as intrinsic or essential (Carr, 1998), but as meanings that are constituted within a specific social discourse and that shifts as we live.

When I think of myself in the position of the listener, I feel that I often identified with the tellers in their stories. I for example, in hearing my paternal grandmother's stories of suffering, felt "lucky" not to have lived during the depression. I also experienced sadness and loss in her telling me about the death of her children. My maternal grandmother's stories of her family heritage - an important farming family from Paarl gave me a sense of rootedness and a feeling that I must have "good genes". Whereas my maternal grandmother's stories of glory give me a sense of being blessed with good fortune, my other grandmother's stories of suffering have made me feel that I can survive difficulties - that "we survive". This identity is thus more than an individual identity, but includes me in the "clan". Another message that came through quite strongly in both of my grandmothers' stories was one of being protected by God. So through their stories I received central ideas about myself, about my worth as a human being. Had I never heard stories of how God helped them through difficult times I might not have had the same faith in my own survival. As an only granddaughter on both sides I also feel like a guardian of their stories. I feel honoured and I feel burdened. Their stories also give me a sense of responsibility to change that which I perceive as wrongs. It is difficult to say how the stories about slaves and apartheid impacted on my view of myself. I consciously refuse to carry their guilt. I write and delete what I write. It is difficult to describe the impact in words: all I'll say is that I think that I think, feel and act differently because I have heard their stories. To conclude I would like to invite you too, if you have not yet entered the conversation, to do so. The central question is: What impact did/does reminiscence have on you as the listener. How did or didn't these stories heard at the knee of your grandparents impact on you? What kind of meaning do (or don't) they have for you and how do you view yourself in the light of the stories that you heard? By this time I would have asked you if you would need a translated version of this chapter, if you have changed

your mind by now please let me know and I can let you have it. Feel free to answer in Afrikaans or English.

CHAPTER 5

SPEAK TO ME AND I SHALL ANSWER

“The world is created anew, you see, every time a child comes into the world”

(Angel Ariel in Gaarder, 1996, p.27)

My experience cannot directly become your experience ... Yet, nevertheless, something passes from me to you ... This something is not the experience as experienced, but its meaning (Ricoeur in Gergen & Gergen, 1997).

Dear readers and participants

Now we come to, for me, the most exciting and most anxiety provoking part of this story. I often forget the punch line of jokes and have been worried that it all will ‘not work’ here or fall flat. I know that within narrative inquiry there is no right or wrong interpretation. There is also no final conclusion, yet it is also necessary to come to conclusions that are then left as tentative statements, ready to be further explored and developed. It should therefore not be too difficult to analyse the stories. No one can really say that what I say is wrong. Yet, I would like this to be an in depth, meaningful conversation, so that what I say about what the participants wrote will add to the conversation. I know that an in depth meaningful conversation can, like all statements, be deconstructed. One of the criticisms against social constructionism is that it “sounds as if people could tell stories as they please and, in doing this, shape their lives as they see fit” (Czarniawska, 2004, p.5). But these statements do not hold water as they do not take into account that: “in every conversation a positioning takes place which is accepted, rejected, or improved upon by the partners in the conversation” (Czarniawska, 2004, p.5). It is when conversations are conducted in such a way that they do not include other voices that they become power based, when they assume that their way is the only way. All narratives are socially embedded and when this conversation about conversations begins, I will comment on the way in which each one of the listeners position themselves at the start of the conversation and how this positioning changes or remains the same in the conversation as a whole. This is a tentative starting point from which each of the conversations with the individual participants will take on its own direction. As I have more formally stated in Chapter 3 I shall make use of a Holistic-Content Analysis. The themes will be chosen in such a way as to emphasise the experience of the participants in their roles as listeners.

After the first writing of the Holistic-Content Analysis of the first participant’s letter, I constantly found myself reflecting on how the participant would read this letter that is addressed to “all”. I was in a way already writing with the listener as my audience. I have

decided that it would be more respectful and congruent to address the letters to each of the participants. The content will be analysed, still according from the holistic-content perspective, but it will be done in the form of an individually addressed letter. After this I will return to all of you and reflect on general themes that were found in the letters. These themes I shall specifically choose in the light of the “point of the story” as decided on in Chapter 1, which is the role of the listener in the participation in reminiscence. The participant’s letters are published in full as appendixes and I suggest that you first read through these, if you have not already done so, before reading through my analysis.

Participants, I shall now venture into discussing what stood out for me as I read through your respective narratives. This is only one reading of your letter. I am sure that I will possibly place the emphasis in places that you do not expect, or perhaps you will even feel misunderstood by what I write. This is part of the nature of reading, of conversation and of being in the role of listener. We are read in ways that we did not intend to be read. As soon as we have written something or said something from our own frame of reference we let it loose to be interpreted from a myriad other frameworks. I think that what we hear and how we comment when we listen often says more about us than about the teller or writer. This is the irony of communication that whatever we offer in the form of words is out of our hands (lips) as soon as it is created. We give others carte blanche to take our words and interpret them. That we communicate “diagonally” (or miscommunicate!) and interpret (or miss interpret!) is a given, that we then are not understood in the way that we intended to be understood. That others hear what we did not want to say is unavoidable. Yet, it is also the beauty of conversation, that others who participate in a conversation with us reflect our words back to us in ways that we did not hear them ourselves, that they can become clearer, more meaningful when someone else answers. Some of you also touch upon these ideas in your narrative. Participant 2 for example said that stories about travel became a need to explore further, not only in travelling the world, but in inner journeys of discovery. Thus stories from one person become a transformed and have a great impact on other people.

In this conversation, coming from a social constructionist view, I know that my own values and ideas will bias my interpretation of your writing. Before I discuss my overall impressions of your letters I first briefly summarise the content and structure of your narrative. As I have mentioned before, even though I write about you, my conversation is with you. I write in a more formal style because it allows for more space between us than

when I speak to you like directly. The language is different, more formal, creating a conversation that also fits with the academic conversation within which this one is nested. So in a way I copy Participant 1's paternal grandmother's style. It worked for Participant 1 to be spoken of then, she felt noticed. I hope this will have the same effect here.

Participant 1: Holistic Analysis

Dear Participant 1

As I read through your letter I was touched by your openness and honesty in reflecting on yourself in the position of listener. You write as someone who has had much experience with being in this role and I can hear that this is not the first time that you reflect on the stories that your grandparents told. My overall impression was that you move between being an insider and being an observer, that you have a "knowing" about both sides of the family and that the stories are more to you than mere retellings of the past.

Brief Summary of the Content of the Letter

The participant started her reply with a dictionary definition of reminiscence. She also refers to the Latin roots of the word. There are no other references to the dictionary definition and Latin roots of reminiscence. After the dictionary description she moves on to describe the two chairs which she has in her house, one from each grandmother. She introduces her grandparents and states that she will mainly focus on her maternal grandmother's stories. She begins by telling about her paternal grandfather, then her paternal grandmother and writes about their characteristics, their roots and their stories. She highlights her relationship with each one of them. After this she moves on to her maternal grandmother, describing the context within which she lives, her values and her stories. In each case she reflects on the meaning of the reminiscences for her as a listener. The participant again writes about her relationship with her grandmother and reflects on both the positive and negative aspects of being in the role of listener. She briefly mentions her paternal grandfather. She ends her narrative with a wish to "do something", a wish to take action.

Brief Summary of the Structure of the Letter

After a formal introduction into the theme of reminiscence through the dictionary definition the formal style is abandoned for a narrative that is written in a personalised style. Participant 1 writes in the first person. Her writing is descriptive and she uses symbolic language “I have two chairs in my house...”. Her narrative about her experiences in the role of listener has elements of a tragedy “the memories of their suffering was too much to bear”; and of comedy: “There was always an empty can of condensed milk under her bed.” In her narrative her tone is personal, she writes from experience. She for example says: “I have been lucky enough to know four grandparents very well...”. She creates an intimate setting that is permeated by feeling: “I smile and feel frustrated at the same time”. Her style is inclusive, rather than exclusive in as far as she writes about *all* the grandparents and includes both positive and negative experiences of being a listener. Though the tone is personal she also takes in the role of observer when she reflects on her experiences in her relationships with her grandparents: “She never connected with reality and lived in dramas of her own”. She here enters the kind of *symbolic awareness* that lies between the subjective and objective, that Bond (1993) describes, addressing the questions “Who am I? Who are we?” and enters the realm of myth making, of creating herself in the context of her relationships.

Global Impressions

When I read your story, I felt quite touched by the openness and honesty that your writing portrayed. My first impression was that you wanted to be sure of what you had to write about by “rooting” your writing in a dictionary definition of reminiscence. I felt that what you said about the two chairs gave a very vivid picture of your two grandmothers, the one more down to earth and the other more sophisticated and worldly. What also caught my attention was the way in which you juxtaposed your grandparents and how their different modes of being are reflected in the way in which you write your narrative. At times you consciously reflect on their differences, like with the two chairs and at other times I felt that I could almost detect which grandparent’s voice you are adopting at a specific point in your narrative. This does not mean that I could not also hear a distinct voice that is yours. My impression was that you have integrated their voices and their mode of story telling and that

you are able to use their voices in a way that reminds me of a piece of music that forms an integrated whole, but that portrays different moods and emphases in different parts. I felt that more than just reading about their influence that I could feel your grandparents in your writing and feel you through your description of them. I think it is also because you weren't scared to share ambivalent feelings that your narrative about being a listener brought depth to the conversation. I felt that you were profoundly touched by your grandparent's stories and that they form an integral (and integrated) part of your identity. I also noticed that much of your intuitive "knowing" comes from these relationships and your conscious reflection on the values that are portrayed in the stories that you had to digest with your "putu pap". What follows here is a more formal discussion of the overall impressions that your writing made on me.

Including a dictionary definition as the first words of this conversation, or even before she enters the conversation gives the impression that this participant has to first "listen" to what others have to say about the topic. She anchors her narrative in a formal description, an academic approach. This beginning implies that she is in a "not knowing position" that she had to look up the definition in a dictionary. At first glance this utterance stands quite separate from the rest. Yet, the tension and interplay between a more objective, distant, onlooker's perspective as listener and the experience of being inside the stories given by the grandparents, remain throughout the narrative. She for example feels herself at one with the stories when she says: "On the positive side my grandmother's stories gave me a love of cultural history especially that of my own family...". She looks at the stories from a more distant perspective when she reflects: "Her weight and value stories are rather funny and can give birth to wonderful characters in new stories". This dynamic tension between an almost academic interest in the stories and being part of the stories is also reflected by her experiences with her different grandparents. Here we see her struggle with Plato's mind and matter split, Foucault's pendulum that swings between pure forms of knowledge and the importance of sensory experiences (Gergen, 1985). Her paternal grandmother represents the more objective intellectual stance. She does not engage so much in personal reminiscences. She is not a "typical granny" but her stories are "more analysis of specific historical time", while her maternal grandmother "is not an intellectual person and lives in historical and practical details, she does not think on a

macro level". Her maternal grandmother represents a culture of being immersed within her community and her own value system: "She shuts out any ideology that doesn't fit into her value context". She doesn't reflect and she doesn't think about her values, she participates fully without ever moving to the other pole, that of self-reflection.

It seems that the whole narrative can be described in terms of the dynamic tension between melancholic reflection and active participation in the community, between distance and closeness, between the past and the present and between two families, both to which the participant belongs. The participant thus positions herself in an in-between-place as if she sits on two chairs: the one an earthy Voortrekker chair, the symbol of her maternal grandmother's approach to life, the other an elegant chair, a symbol of her paternal grandmother's cool head. But these become more than symbols, they represent two very different stances in life and the participant clearly favours the one: "One of the big differences in our stories is that I tend to do the opposite". Here she refers to her grandmother's blind acceptance of her own value system as the only value system. In contrast with her granny she reflects, she questions and first listens before she answers. She says: "I try to fit in as much as possible". She chooses not to simplify the complexity of her experiences with reminiscence by allowing for the relationships to exist.

The participant uses the symbolic language of poets and artists, a quality that she later on also ascribes to her paternal grandparents. She favours this more sophisticated, more reflective stance, yet my overall impression is that the participant as listener moves between these two positions, that she participates *and* reflects. In the last paragraph she ends with a wish to participate: "I want to do something with the stories given to me." Here she places herself in the position of getting involved with the stories. Perhaps it will take on a reflective mode and this "doing something" will also give form to that which is still unconscious and will help to digest the question of where "biological genetics and psychological patterns of behaviour got mixed up."

The participant's story about being in the position of listener is thus a narrative that is filled with contrasting feelings and complexity. There is besides the juxtaposing of the different approaches to life as represented by the two grandmothers also a

constant interplay between past and present and between people of different generations This happens for example when she says that her grandmother losing her mother not only “defined her life”, but also “influenced my mother and myself”. My overall impression is thus that we have to do with a dialectic approach to life, a life where the number two plays a significant role and where the participant allows for a dynamic tension to exist.

Besides finding herself in this position where more than one perspective is allowed the participant portrays a tendency to describe complex relationships, rather than stereotypical ones. Her maternal grandmother is described with great empathy, but the participant also allows herself to express feelings of frustration and anger. She expresses the ambivalent feelings and tries to come to terms with feelings that are not all good and nice. Her own narrative is an attempt to integrate and to balance both the good and bad experiences of being a listener: “I smile and feel frustrated at the same time”. This narrative speaks of being touched “a sad and beautiful picture...”, of being changed, “she became entirely selfish which has a large influence on the stories of both my mother and myself”, and of being stuck, “I have no idea...”. She then also takes cognisance of what has been given through the stories: “Bad body image was ingested with our putu pap and braaivleis”. Being in the role of the listener is reflected upon, not so much through retelling the stories, but through detecting underlying value systems and modes of being: “There is no space in her story for anyone outside the three Afrikaans churches within my circle of friends”. The participant describes her role as listener in such a way that her own values are reflected, yet these values are described in relation to the values within which her grandparent’s narratives are embedded: “I dislike the fact that she accepts my participation in her value context without question”. She implies here that her own values are tolerant to difference while her grandmother accepts as fact the superiority of her own value system to the exclusion of all others. In the letter she engages inwardly in a conversation that she cannot have with her grandmother: “She talks incessantly and never asks questions if I volunteer information, she simply ignores it and continues with yet another story.” This participant as listener is both actively involved in the stories, she owns the two chairs, they are hers, but she also reflects

and thinks that she could write stories about her grandmother. Just as in the literature on reminiscence as a whole there are positive and negative reflections on being in the role of teller, so, for this participant to be a listener is not always the same, but comes into existence in a specific relationship.

Participant 2: Holistic Analysis

Dear Erika (Participant 2)

Thank you for your letter and your willingness to engage in the process of speaking about your grandparents and your experiences with reminiscence. Your letter touched upon many aspects of what it means to be a listener. Like the previous participant I got the idea that reminiscence is an important part of your life and that you have given attention to its impact on you. To me what stood out in your letter was the different effect of each grandparent on you as listener and the importance of being told about yourself to become part of the family story in this way. You write with clarity about the influence that the different stories have had on you as listener. I do not get the impression that this is a completely new topic to you nor that you have never given it any thought.

Brief Summary of the Content of the Letter

The participant places her letter in the context of the researcher's letter. She says that she will not write academically, but because her relationship with her grandparents is of such a personal nature, she will write from a personal perspective. She goes on to describe the different languages that were used to tell the stories, placing her grandparents and their stories within the context of the world at large. She then goes on to speak about the "different functions and roles" that stories and reminiscence had in her life and reflects on how her grandparents' stories rooted her in the family. The stories include stories about strong women, stories about perseverance. There are absent stories and stories about victories and struggles as well as stories about travel. She describes how each specific type of story, mostly linked to a specific grandparent has had an impact on either the family at large or, more often on her individually. The participant links each type of story to a quality that she recognises in herself.

Brief Summary of the Structure of the Letter

This participant writes her narrative in the form of a letter that is the same format in which the research question has been asked. She addresses the letter directly to the researcher and writes in the first person. Her tone is personal and informal, yet systematic. She works through each topic in a new paragraph and mostly completes speaking of that specific topic before moving on to the next. She does not retell many of the stories, but only does so when she wants to illustrate what she says about being in the position of the listener with an example. Her narrative is marked by happy endings which gives it a quality not unlike that of fairy tales. Besides the first paragraphs each begins with a reference to a specific grandparent or type of story and moves on to the personal impact and meaning that the type of story has had on her.

Global Impressions

The participant chooses to respond in the form of a letter. This immediately places her response within the realm of the personal, the conversational rather than objective, academic language. Her first comment confirms this statement as it states her preference for keeping it personal and to write “from the heart”. Her narrative is thus not so much a looking from afar, but rather an experiencing from near. She experiences her grandparents as representing different languages and different traditions, yet throughout her narrative these languages exist next to each other and are never experienced as coming into conflict with each other. Throughout the letter her tone remains intimate, thus showing her personal rather than academic involvement with the topic and with her parents. She focuses not so much on the relationship that she has with each of the grandparents, but rather places the emphasis on the impact that their stories had on her personally. She indicates her embeddedness in the family by saying that her grandparent’s stories connected her to the family: “my grandparents related extensively how I was very similar to this uncle or that great aunt, and they rooted me very firmly within my family identity”. In her relationships with her grandparents she stays connected, describing throughout how she identifies with her grandparents, for example:

... her later successes being *Mevrou Dominee* (the Pastor's wife) made me dream of also being a leader in my community. Both my grandmothers worked very actively with the "needy", although in very different ways, and this might have kindled my interest in a mental health care profession.

Her tone is appreciative and she transforms even that which could be experienced as "negative" into a positive quality in herself. She for example sees her own sense of responsibility as directly related to her grandmother's hardships during the war:

My maternal grandmother use to tell stories of perseverance, such as how she, aged eight, had to walk through the snow carrying the sewing machine she used when tailoring other people's clothing. I believed this story made me want to be more responsible when I was eight, and probably burdened me with a sense of responsibility beyond my years.

The letter is written to emphasise that which is positive in her experience of being a listener to reminiscences of her grandparents. She does not criticise or oppose the values that her grandparent's stories portray, but accepts them and integrates them into her own identity and own value system. She "translates" the reminiscences into her own idiom, indicating how they impact directly on her identity and how they have meaning in her life.

Like the first participant she ends her letter through expressing her gratitude for having been a listener to reminiscence. It seems that her experiences of being in this position have been overwhelmingly positive and that her identity is intimately connected to her grandparents' reminiscences. She is "grateful" for the impact that the stories have made on her and the impression that she creates of herself as listener is of someone who merged with the stories and found herself nestled inside the stories, rather than looking at them from a distance. When she does reflect, as she is asked to do here it is to find similarities, not differences: "Stories of travel and foreign countries inspired me to travel beyond my boundaries and perhaps also beyond the boundaries inside myself". The values of her grandparents are thus accepted rather than questioned and she creates meaning through drawing parallels between her own life and that of a grandparent. She pinpoints specific characteristics

that her grandparents portrayed in their stories that became part of her identity. This theme and the way in which she experienced different stories will be discussed in more detail in the section on listener themes. From a social constructionist point of view, she accepts the value system in which she finds herself. Her stories strengthen and confirm the language of her grandparents. Intergenerational transference is a clear process to this participant.

My supervisor commented that this section is much shorter than in the case of participant 1. I read through her letter a few more times, added some comments, but did not find anything significant to add to the global impressions. Participant 2's letter is much shorter than that of the first participant. Her narrative is also more systematic and her descriptions are cryptic. What is perhaps important here is to allow for these two very different narratives to be answered differently. It must be emphasised that this is not a value judgement, but rather should be seen as a qualitative difference that asks for a different response from the listener, whom in this case is the researcher. Their very different narratives emphasise that listening to reminiscence is not a homogeneous experience. Participant 3's response is then also completely different. For me her narrative was the most difficult to answer, perhaps because her descriptions focus less on reminiscence per se and more on the stories themselves. I wrote back to her (see Appendix 3), in order to gain more descriptions of her relationship with her grandparents through reminiscence. What I do include here is once again my global impressions after reading and re-reading. Perhaps each text, like each teller, asks for a different response also in research. I am conscious of the fact that the sections on global impressions of the three participants' narratives become progressively shorter. This is not because I did not have time, or got lazy, or not tried to look at the letters from different angles, but because this is what I heard even after several readings and re-readings. It is so that participant 1's narrative yielded for me the richest data, not because she is a better listener, but because of the nature of her specific relationships. Surely in any normal conversation some participants speak more than others and some themes lead into richer conversations while others remain on the surface. Qualitative research allows, fortunately, for difference to exist, also in the analysis.

Participant 3: Holistic Analysis

Dear Participant 3

Thank you for your willingness to engage in the process and for your two narratives (see Appendix 3). In your first narrative you write many of the stories that have had an impact on you and a bit about how you experienced being in the position of listener. I might be wrong, but I got the impression that you more heard stories about your grandparents rather than being told the stories directly by them. There were many hidden stories that you heard second-hand. It seemed that the question about how the stories impacted on your identity therefore was quite difficult to address directly. You do, however mention that your own values are very much tied into the value system of your grandmother and that even her current stories have an impact on you now.

Summary of Content of the Narrative

The respondent begins her first letter by writing about her relationship with her grandmothers and writes about how she identifies with the grandmother whose name she carries. She chooses to respond to the question by telling stories about each of her grandmothers. These stories take up most of her writing. She tells the stories not so much as reminiscences of the grandparents about their life, but more as the participant's own reminiscences of stories she heard about her grandmother, for example: "She would look at you with a straight face...". She continues with the stories and memories of her grandparents and then returns to the research question and answers with a story about how she became conscious that her grandmothers were "strong women". She does not make it explicit whether she also feels like a strong woman. Her next story is of an Indian guru who was asked the question whether God existed. He was instructed to find the name of his great grandfather and couldn't. The guru then asked if he believed that this grandfather existed. The participant returns to her own reminiscing of her grandmothers. Her stories revolve around her own experiences and the stories that her grandmothers told and did not tell.

In her second narrative she speaks more specifically about her one grandmother, "Ouma J" and how her stories impacted on her own value system. She

includes recent events to illustrate these values. Here the emphasis is on family and on taking care of each other. She writes about her grandmother's current situation and writes about what she learned from her grandmother and which qualities she recognises as coming from listening to her grandmother. She continues to tell about how her grandmother can "make something out of nothing" and refers to her stories about her own creations. The participant then tells how she made something for her grandmother. She says that it has not only to do with the way she spoke, but also with the way she lived her life and tells of how she has incorporated some of her grandmother's values into her life and into her own hopes for the future.

Summary of the Structure of the Narrative

The first narrative is structured by writing about each of her grandmothers, separately. The tone is personal and anecdotal, She describes both stories and incidents of each grandmother by telling specific stories and by referring to specific incidents. This tone continues but changes in one paragraph when she writes about her own experience during her Master's course and the story of the guru, giving it more of a philosophical tone. In the next paragraph she reverts to her previous way of narrating.

She structures her second narrative in a different way from the previous narrative. Whereas in the previous writing she wrote about all the different grandmothers she now only writes about one grandmother and focuses more on her relationship with this grandmother. The second narrative is similar to the previous in as far as the tone remains personal and anecdotal. The narrative takes on more of a moral tone. She for example says: "The way I think about family values and the specialness of creating something out of nothing ... have been part of who I am today". She ends the letter with a wish to incorporate more of her grandmother's identity into her own, giving her narrative an idealistic tone.

Global Impressions

Dear Participant 3

I must be honest and say that I struggled to get to know about your experience as a listener to reminiscence through your narratives. I could see that you in a way had the same difficulty in trying to stick to the research topic. You reminded yourself twice in the first letter what it was what you had to write. After your first paragraph you repeat the research question and later on you say: "You asked how did or didn't the stories I heard at the knee of my grandparents impact on me and you are interested in the meaning it has for me if any...". I think you lived so much into these stories, that you viewed them not as something separate from your grandparents and yourself. The distinctions are difficult to draw between your own reminiscences of them and the stories that they told as well as your own role. You weave all the different aspects of your relationship and identification with your grandmothers together. I got the impression that you wanted to portray your connection with your grandmothers and that you found it hard to distinguish their stories from them. I felt that you listened into their lives as a whole, more than to be aware of listening to reminiscences. Their reminiscences became part of your own reminiscing about them, an interwoven tapestry of life stories, themes and events that are not easily distinguishable. I now engage in a more formal discussion of the global impressions that your writing made on me.

The participant tells stories of each of her grandmothers in such a way that it creates the impression that she is "inside" these stories, that there is little distinction between her, her mother and her two grandmothers in these stories. She is "just like my mother" an only granddaughter on each side. She tells stories freely across generations: "There is a story about my mother "sneaking" from home normally on Sunday afternoons to go for a swim... Still preferred swimming place of my brothers and I and their children". She speaks about this grandmother first and feels connected to her. She knows her through the anecdotes told by her mother: "I was hardly two years old when she died interesting I feel like I have always known her". So reminiscence here, though not strictly speaking coming from the grandmother herself gives the granddaughter a feeling that she knew this person. There is a seemingly unconscious bond between her and this grandmother and the participant acknowledges this when she says: "This I learned from my mother that could not believe that I was using the same base just like my grand mother. Call it a coincidence if you like!"

Once again in the description of Ouma Hartenbos' family of origin there is a "knowing": "I have visited this homestead once or twice in my lifetime but feels like I have known it all my life". She proceeds to reflect on how her paternal and maternal grandparents' stories are very different: "Interesting how my mother and father's stories of their childhood share history in Mosselbay and how very different their memories are." She tells the stories of stepparents in the families on her father's side. She tells the stories, almost factually and chooses not to reflect on the impact these stories had on her. Though the stories are told in a matter of fact sort of way, it seems that there is something that one could call a wounded feeling around these stories: "L M became her husband and our step grandfather – and yes he was exactly that – step. He like L never accepted my father, his wife and his children". She does not spell out what the impact of this was on her personally and immediately after this returns to the more neutral theme of the grandparents' respective names. She does however return to the theme of "step" grandparents when she writes about how L did not like them. Only at L's funeral did she understand why her step grandmother did not like her: "she...looks just like J and even though I was only a teenager I understood." Again she does not make explicit how she felt about this, but comes to a point of understanding that she was rejected by the step grandmother because she reminded her of her husband's first wife, her grandmother.

The stories and the experiences are interwoven, all part of the relationship that she has with each person. She attempts to focus on the research question as if to bring her attention back to the topic. She reflects on the strong women in her family and again does not make her own identification with this quality explicit, nor does she explore the theme of specifically being in the position of listener. Her focus remains on the grandparents and on the stories themselves more than on their meaning for her. Even though she says that her grandmother "represents- 'Home to all of us, and to me a future!'" at the end of her first narrative, it is not clear how the stories reflect on her identity and what meaning they have to her. Only in the second narrative does she say: "When I listen to her I get this sense of strengths, independence, belief in God and forgiveness. All qualities that I value today and recognize in myself", thus

stating unequivocally what it means to her to be in the role of listener in the activity of reminiscence.

The overall impression is that the participant gets lost in the stories, that she identifies so strongly with what is told that she dreams into them, so to speak, and forgets to focus on the question at hand. In the second letter she reflects on her grandmother's handwork and then tells of how she sends her grandmother the tablecloth she painted. Here she identifies with her grandmother, but feels that she "has never been good with crouching work". The need to be like her grandmother is again expressed at the end of the second narration: "the sister, friend, partner, mother and grandmother I hope to be one day". It is as if she feels that she has much to learn from her grandmother and much to strive for if she wants to become as good a person as her grandmother.

Discussion of Themes

In the following section themes derived from the respective narratives of participants are integrated and discussed in more detail. The themes are chosen to stress the role of the listener in reminiscence. These include discussions on the listener as participant, on how reminiscence impacts on the identity of the listener and how meaning is created within this interaction. Other themes could have been chosen, but in the light of the research topic these themes seem to be relevant. This section functions as an overview of the role of the listener in reminiscence as the three participants describe it.

Participation as Listener

Participant 1 explores the way in which the listener participates in the activity of reminiscence in the most detail. The other two participants seem to be content with their role as listeners, they do not describe reminiscence as much as an interactive process, but rather a giving from the grandparents' side and a receiving from the listener's side. Participant 2 says: "the stories they have told had made a great impact on my life, and I am grateful for being a grandchild that could listen". Participant 3 also speaks of how she incorporated qualities from her grandmother into her life:

"The way I think about family values and the specialness of creating something out of nothing and ultimately an ability to make space for others in my life have been made part of who I am today...". Participant 1 also describes reminiscence as a positive experience: "On the positive side my grandmother's stories gave me a love of cultural history", but in addition she also expresses a need to be noticed, to have a two-way conversation: "My grandmother engages in a monologue..." Thus in contrast with the accepting attitude portrayed in the other two participant narratives Participant 1 moves between the positions of being rooted in the stories to being at more of a distance, taking in a more critical, intellectual stance or listening *into* the story. She engages actively in the process of reminiscence even though her participation has to remain outside the relationship with her grandmother.

The participation of listeners in reminiscence can thus be divided broadly into active and passive listening. Active participation does not necessarily mean an outward process, but implies that the listener engages actively with the reminiscences instead of being a listener that absorbs (rather than reflecting on) the stories. Even though this subject has been touched on in the previous paragraph in the next two sub-sections the question of the function of active and passive listening is addressed more specifically through reflecting on the participants' narratives. It should be noted that passive and active listening should be seen more as a continuum than as two completely separate categories. Extreme passive listening could be the kind of listening where the sounds are heard but no meaning penetrates the listener's consciousness and active listening in its most extreme form could be where the listener becomes so involved in the stories, their underlying values and their meaning that the listener becomes as much a teller as a listener in the reminiscences. Listening can thus have the function of a more passive acceptance of that which is said or an active function where the reminiscence is actively engaged with in order to integrate, accept or reject the underlying value systems and meanings that the reminiscences portray. The discussion that follows focuses on the theme of participating as listener in the light of all three participants' narratives. Here specific "leit motifs" as my supervisor suggested I call them, can be identified. These include active and passive listening, the active role that silence plays in reminiscence and the

tension between the past and the present in the narratives of the listeners. Because Participant 1's narrative renders such rich data on the participant as listener a separate section is included to explore her participation as listener in more depth.

Passive listening

Participant 2 offers an example from the participant's narratives of a more passive style of listening when she describes how her grandparents' stories were told in different languages. She does not reflect on the meaning of these different meanings for her personally, but merely states that this was how the stories were told. Here she portrays an accepting, passive style of listening. A passive attitude in listening is also portrayed quite strongly in Participant 3's retelling of some of the reminiscences of her grandparents. She simply recalls some of the stories without reflecting on them, without trying to analyse their meaning or without making any statements of how they influenced her as listener. Of the three participants this passive listening is most pronounced in Participant 3. Her narrative creates a feeling of sympathy with her grandmother, of oneness with the teller. Her identification with her grandmother is exceptionally strong. She accepts the stories and her grandmother as a person, as an idealised picture that she would like to become in future. Participant 1 also at times reverts to passive listening though much less so than is the case with the other two participants'. She accepts her paternal grandmother's reflection in the form of a story. She absorbs this story passively, feels that she has been noticed and understood. She experiences herself as outwardly passive in listening to her maternal grandmother as "if I volunteer information-she simply ignores it and continues with yet another story", but this is a forced passivity and she becomes very active inwardly.

Active listening

All the participants listen actively at times. Most of the active listening seems to take on the form of inner conversations that is portrayed in their narratives rather than in conversations with the grandparents. Participant 2's active listening takes on the form of drawing parallels between her grandparent's stories and her own life. These

connections are quite clear. She listens, absorbs and then incorporates. She for example says:

My maternal grandmother use to tell stories of perseverance, such as how she, aged eight, had to walk through the snow carrying the sewing machine she used when tailoring other people's clothing. I believed this story made me want to be more responsible when I was eight, and probably burdened me with a sense of responsibility beyond my years.

Participant 3 at times listens in the same way. She takes the story, engages actively with it and then links the content of the story with her own identity e.g.: "When I listen to her I get this sense of strengths, independence, belief in God and forgiveness. All qualities that I value today and recognize in myself". Participant 1 listens very actively. She engages in questioning the value systems portrayed by her grandmother's stories, she asks questions about how her own identity is influenced by what she heard as a child, she gets involved not only on an intellectual level but listens to her grandparent's stories with feeling. She feels frustrated for not being allowed to be more visible and active in her relationship with her grandmother. She is forced into passivity in the conversation, but does not accept this non-activity. She participates actively through reflecting on her grandmother's values and the passive role that she is forced into. She uses active listening as a tool to ensure her separate identity, to allow for difference to exist even though it is forced to go underground.

For Participant 1 trying to digest the underlying meaning of her grandparents' reminiscences becomes a conscious process especially in her participation with her maternal grandmother and *her* stories. At times she rises above the maze and finds a kind of bird's eye view: "She has always been a powerful woman who did not tolerate resistance and never accepted the fact that her children were adults". At other times she feels herself to be on the inside, participating in the rituals that the stories prescribe: "Cleansing diets and stories about weight, racks and racks of books on the subject were with me since I was very young." It is thus not simply a matter of being free and choosing to be near or cut off from a story or to be active or passive, but it seems to be a constant process of readjusting her own position in relation with these stories from her grandmother's past. There is a need for the listener to integrate and

to process actively much of what has been given to her in the form of stories, both in taking responsibility and in doing something. As a listener she is an active participant who identifies with, reflects on and questions her relationship to the stories.

All three participants thus engage in both active and passive listening to a lesser or greater degree. Self-talk and integration in a reflective rather than interactional space forms part of their listening.

Digesting the Silence

Participating in reminiscence as a listener should not be viewed as a crude two-way conversation that exists only in a kind of question and answer format but should rather be viewed as a subtle, multi-layered process. An example of the complexity of participating in reminiscence as a listener is the relationship that Participant 1 appears to have with her paternal grandfather. This relationship stands in sharp contrast with the relationship she has with her maternal grandmother. He did not tell all his stories, his “silence instilled a longing for Eastern European culture and Catholicism which I equated with mysticism” and with whom she could make contact “should I ever choose to do so”. He can listen to her, hear her even though he is dead. This contact outside words reminds me of both the other participants’ experiences. Participant 2 also speaks of her grandfather’s stories about the war that were never told directly by him: “Other sorts of stories that had a profound impact on me were the absent ones”. Participant 3 says that “[n]ot only the way she spoke but also the way she lived her life” has influenced her. All three participants here have a similar type of experience where silence draws them into the conversation, albeit an inner conversation. These absent stories speak louder than words. Participant 2 describes her experience of hearing the silence and the strong impression it left: “Having spent a large part of my childhood with them, I am sure the unsaid stories that were told with emotion and action, spoke loudly to form my more liberal viewpoints in politics”. Both participant 1 and 2’s grandfathers do not speak about the war. The war has silenced them, the stories are absent, but the grandchildren both speak of a kind of “knowing” in the family about these stories that were rather not shared. In both cases these absent stories are mentioned early on in their narratives

thus giving the impression that they are prominent aspects of their experiences as listeners.

Silence thus becomes an active ingredient in the conversation that follows. The participants' reminiscences of their experiences of listening to reminiscence include the non-verbal, unspoken actions of their grandparents and not just their verbal accounts. On this level of participation the grandchildren listeners become conscious of the memories that they have of these non-verbal conversations, that their own participation include the filling in of the gaps. The participants inwardly create meaning beyond the explicit words that their grandparents speak. They "hear" not only the underlying subtext, do not only become conscious of the values that are portrayed by the spoken words, but also participate actively in a process of making sense of these non-verbal communications.

I would like to go as far as to pose the question whether grandchildren as listeners do not often take the undigested stories, the pre-verbalised content of their grandparent's fears, anxieties and traumas and process and digest it or carry it for them. I am of the opinion that both the closeness of family ties and the distance that time creates over generations makes this transference very possible. Besides the completely silent stories there are also those that are "hidden", that do not quite say what they relate verbally.

On Hidden Messages

In some cases the verbal is but a smokescreen for the underlying subtext, for the hidden dynamics that persists in the family. The listener participates actively, but her participation is inward, only brought into her reminiscence about reminiscence. Both Participants 1 and 2 read into their grandparents' stories messages about strength. The stories portray strong women and the listeners identify with this underlying theme.

The impact of hidden meanings in reminiscence is very clearly illustrated in the narrative of Participant 1. In her narrative she becomes conscious of the underlying texts in the stories that she hears. She feels the impact of her grandmother's weight stories, that they are more than stories about weight, but she can only reflect on this away from her grandmother. There is no place for this hidden

story in relationship with her grandmother: “I believe that a need for attention and self nurturing originated in this story”. The granddaughter is conscious of this hidden story that it might have some “psychological” origin and that she has to change something in this story. Her grandmother’s past impacts on her in such a way that her grandmother’s need for nurturance is translated into a weight problem that the granddaughter has also “ingested”. The granddaughter makes sense of her own situation by referring it back over generations. Past and present co-exist not in the patterns that connect them. The next paragraph focuses on how the stories make the past ever so present.

A Palimpsest of Present and Past

The past and the present come to co-exist in the narratives of the participants. The past that is described in the reminiscences are viewed from the present. It is seen as impacting directly or less directly on the participant’s life in the present. There exists a dynamic tension between the different times, as if the present exists only in relation to the past, as if the past shines through into the present and colours the meaning of the present and even of the future. When Participant 3 says that she “hope[s] to be” all the things that her grandmother is and that have been portrayed in her stories, she superimpose the past onto the present and projects it into her own future. Participant 1 speaks about how the past is catching up with the present when she says that her “mother is now doing the same”.

The listeners are inseparable from the past experiences of their grandparents and from their own reminiscences about the stories that their grandparents told. Just how interwoven past and present is in the listener’s experience is clearly illustrated in the following sentences of Participant 3’s narrative: she says in one sentence “There is a story about my mother ‘sneaking’ from home normally ... - the Bakke.” She then inserts a comment on the present “Still preferred swimming place of my brothers and I and their children” and then returns to the past: “... my mother got caught out eventually and were grounded”. The past is not a singular time, it continues like ripples on a lake into generations that even came before the grandparents’ time. The grandparents’ reminiscences also bring into the present the remote past, keep alive people and values that are in chronological time very far removed from the present: “I

can still remember her parents' house and the beauty of an Eastern Free State farm is a part of my soul". The listener thus comes to participate in the past even in the remote past. The listener participates through listening to the narrative and through also reminiscing about the past. Participant 2 feels herself to be rooted in the past of the family when she relates how her grandmother struggled as a young woman, how both grandmothers' became involved in community work and how this influenced her choice of career and her hopes for the future. Chronological time is replaced by an experience of time that is more circular, where present and past become layers of experience that are so intertwined that it is not possible any more to find linear cause and effect. Did her grandmothers' community involvement cause her choice of career or does she root herself in these specific stories because they make her feel at home? The present and future seems to be found in the past as much as the other way round.

The theme of rootedness will be explored from a different angle in the section on identity when cultural, family and personal identity will be discussed in more detail. But before we move away from the listener as participant I would like to include a section that focuses on reminiscence where the power relationship between the listener and teller are in imbalance. This topic will be explored through the narrative of Participant 1 only as she is the only one who really touches upon the less favourable experience of being in the position of listener. As I have already mentioned I felt that her exploration of this relationship was in depth enough to warrant this as a separate theme.

When the scales of power do not balance

Like in all relationships it seems that in the relationship between listener and teller in reminiscence there can also be an imbalance of power. Participant 1 explores this imbalance in some depth when she describes her frustration with being in the role of listener without being given the opportunity to participate in the conversation: "She talks incessantly and never asks questions: if I volunteer information-she simply ignores it and continues with yet another story." She is forced into the role of listener and is never seen, never noticed. Her grandmother overpowers her and she is forced

to take herself and her opinions to a place outside this relationship. In this relationship only one set of values are allowed. She expressed her frustration at “never having a real conversation with a person who has such an influence on me”.

Her grandmother lives in the past and assumes that her granddaughter will not have a voice of her own. Though as a listener the granddaughter does not negate the value and meaning of her grandmother’s stories: “On the positive side my grandmother’s stories gave me a love of cultural history..”, she feels unnoticed and consumed by these one-sided conversations. As listener she becomes the knower but is not known. There is a strong consciousness of a generational chasm, of different cultures meeting in a place where both cannot exist, for the one is imbued with power over the other: “I am realistic about our generational differences but must admit that it frustrates me...”.

The power relationship also relates to an earlier theme namely the way in which the past and the present co-exist. The past and the teller seem to dominate the present and the listener. The teller takes over. Her utterances dominate the conversational space where both people are present. There is only space for her perspective, which she experiences as “ultimate” reality and truth.

Only in the private domain of the listener’s own consciousness is another conversation allowed to take place as there is no space in the conversation with her grandmother for an alternative viewpoint. Only in her inner world and away from her grandmother and maybe with friends that do not necessarily belong to one of the three Afrikaans churches, can she allow herself to explore an identity that does not fit the stories that her grandmother creates for her. Her relationship with this grandmother is thus experienced as frustrating as her reminiscences do not allow for the listener to be seen as a separate person. Perhaps this all-consuming tendency of her grandmother has something to do with the grandmother’s need for attention. The granddaughter sees her as a powerful person who does “not tolerate resistance”. As she did not ever accept “the fact that her children were adults” she also does not allow for her granddaughter to have a different identity from her own. Her grandmother’s need to remain in a state of being merged with her children and her grandchildren is experienced as overwhelming. The grandmother consumes not only

food, but her tendency is also to be one with her family. Without negating the value of her grandmother's stories: "Her stories are very vivid and full of interesting details about her life", the participant is able to also speak of the negative feelings that she experiences in this reminiscence relationship.

From this exploration of the balance of power in the reminiscence relationship it can be inferred that the way in which the reminiscence relationship is structured cannot be isolated from the person as a whole. The reminiscence relationship reflects and forms part of the relationship between the listener and the teller as a whole and the past of the teller impacts over many generations on the listener.

To End

From the above descriptions of the listener's participation in reminiscence it would be possible to reason that the role of being in the position of listener in reminiscence, is mostly an active one, that activity does not necessarily entail outward conversation with the teller and that experiences can be as diverse as hoping to become like the grandmother in future (Participant 3) to critically assessing the teller's values and her way of telling stories (Participant 1). It can also be said that one listener's experiences can be dissimilar with different tellers and even with the same teller at different times and when different stories are being told (Participant 1). The active role of silence, how the stories do not always tell verbally what they actually say and how the past is made present through reminiscence, has been explored in the light of listener participation. Other than this, the participants all indicated that being in the role of listener has had a great, if not profound influence on their lives. Participant 1's experience was discussed in more detail as her narrative provided rich and more detailed information that highlights the power relationship that can exist between listener as participant. The participants did not experience their role as neutral but all indicated in a greater or lesser degree that their grandparent's reminiscences impacted on their identity. In the next section the theme of identity will be explored.

Identity

The impact of reminiscence on the perceived identity of the listener is included in some way in the narratives of all three the participants. The way in which they address this theme differs, yet there are also similarities. In this section the way in which each participant describes her identity as it is influenced by her experiences of being a listener when grandparents engage in reminiscence is explored in some detail. Both the differences and similarities between participants' experiences are looked at. After this, broader themes are integrated into sub-themes in order to highlight the impact of reminiscence on identity.

Participant 1

Participant 1 addresses the question of identity consciously. She defines her own identity quite clearly in relation to that of her grandparents. For example, she states that her value system is quite different from that of her maternal grandmother's, that she is more "open" and that when she was going through a particularly difficult time her paternal grandmother could sense her desolation and reflected this back through her story. She does not experience identity as stagnant as she referred to this "very unhappy time", rather than to call herself an unhappy person. She identifies strongly with her paternal grandmother's artistic and intellectual outlook: "I felt very comfortable with her intellectual outlook and witty sense of humour", thus claiming this way of being also for herself. It seems that she invites aspects of their narrative to be part of her while other of their ideas about her she places herself in opposition against: "She is not an intellectual person and lives in historical and practical details, she does not think on a macro level. One of the big *differences* in our stories is that I tend to do the opposite" (my italics). She distances herself from her maternal grandmother's value system and does not accept the identity that this grandmother projects onto her. She nevertheless acknowledges that she carries some of her grandmother's burdens and identity when she speaks of the huge impact that her grandmother's selfishness and her manipulative tendencies have had on both herself and her mother as well as when she identifies with her grandmother's "weight story". Though she does not make it explicit how exactly her

grandmother's need for attention and self-nurturing has become part of her identity, she says that "this story that defined her life and influenced my mother and myself was the loss of her mother at age four and a half."

Participant 1's identity is not seen as something separate or stagnant, but exists within the matrix of relationships. She, for example, says that her maternal grandfather acted as a "superego". Thus she incorporates him on an intra-psychic level rather than to see him as someone completely separate from herself. As a listener she is an active participant rather than a passive onlooker for she takes the stories, think about them and then either incorporate them into her own identity or choose to relate to them differently. For example, she feels responsibility to "give the weight story a happy ending." Her identity is, however not something separate from her relationships. She describes her own identity in relation to others, she thinks on a "macro level" while her grandmother prefers to do the opposite. Her identity is thus influenced, but not fixed by the stories that she grew up with. On a much more subtle level one observes how she incorporates the style of for example her paternal grandfather into her own identity. Her descriptions are often poetic: "I have two chairs in my house..." – her paternal grandfather is a poet and one can hear the artistic voice from her paternal grandmother in her descriptions throughout the text.

Thus as listener Participant 1's experiences of herself in relation to her grandparent's reminiscence are complex and varied. Sometimes her story about their stories speaks of being noticed, as when she tells of how her paternal grandmother told "a story". This story was neither reminiscence, nor a direct comment. "I was going through a very unhappy time and I think that she sensed it and had to turn it into a story". Here she feels seen by a grandparent, noticed for who she is. At other times she feels lost in personal stories and values from the past that do not at all acknowledge her separateness from this past and from these stories "I dislike the fact that she accepts my participation in her value system without question". There is a theme of struggling to find herself through these stories, as if she sees herself as being in a kind of maze of meanings and as though she is trying to find a path through it to herself.

Participant 2

Participant 2 even more clearly than Participant 1 finds her own identity through the stories that her grandparents told. Whereas Participant 1 takes in a more critical stance towards the value system and identity that the stories prescribe, Participant 2's narrative is, as mentioned, mostly a description of how her grandparents' stories have impacted on who she is in a positive way. She says that some stories were "almost too good to be true" while others focused on "hardship", but even the stories of hardship are transformed into a positive quality. She writes about her grandfather's untold Nazi stories. She ascribes her more liberal political views to these stories of oppression. The hardships of her grandmother have a different effect on the listener "I believed this story made me want to be more responsible when I was eight, and probably burdened me with a sense of responsibility beyond my years". Thus stories of hardship made her both more liberal and more responsible. Clear identity statements are thus made in relation to the stories that she received from her grandparents. The theme of strong women is addressed twice. The first time it is just mentioned as a recurring motif in the stories. When she speaks of it again she speaks about the stories of her grandmother's struggles as a young bride and her successes as "mevrouw dominee" and then says that her grandmother's stories made her want to be a community leader. Here is a story of hardships being overcome and of the focus taken to other people's hardships something the participant quite clearly takes into her own identity. She identifies strongly with her grandmothers' charitable sides and indicates that these stories have influenced her choice of career in mental health.

Participant 2 is then also described as "being a caring person", her grandparents' identities have been incorporated into her own and stories of her being similar to them are told back to her. Her narrative portrays a process of how the listener finds meaning in the stories, how these stories are incorporated into her identity and then how she is brought into the family "legend" when they tell stories *about* her that emphasises the same qualities and values (such as that of caring) that were portrayed in the first reminiscences. They also root her in the family through

stories about how she is similar to others in the family, thus placing her identity within the context of the family.

Though not as prominent and not in the same way as in participant 1's case, there are also stories that emphasise her difference from the original stories. These stories reflect on her individuality within the family, on her difference and it is these stories that mean most on a *personal* level. This places her in a unique and special position, gives to her, within the context of the family, a specific identity. The family reflects on her differences, focuses on her individuality by telling stories about her that focus not only on her sameness ("caring") but also on her differences: she is the one that makes people laugh, a positive quality not found in any of the other stories. These qualities are accepted and seen as positive stories about her. Yet, there are also stories of difference that are less pleasant: she breaks the clock, a story of irresponsibility so different from the family stories of responsibility and then she lies about the clock. She is also "the messy one". She calls these stories "less pleasant". I assume that these stories, though focused on her weaker qualities, were also accepting, were allowing her mistakes and all, to be part of the family. These stories about her so-called "bad" qualities are allowed into the family legend and though she feels that they are not necessarily part of a positive identity, they are given back to her in a form that makes her acceptable, if not to herself, at least within the family.

Participant 3

Whereas Participant 1 questions the identity that is given to her through the stories coming from her grandmothers, both Participants 2 and 3 identify strongly with the values in their grandparents' narratives. Participant 3 states at the end of her second letter quite clearly that she has "incorporated some of her beliefs and what she values into [her] life" and that her future vision of herself is also closely connected to the identity that her grandmother portrayed. Though not as clearly connected to specific stories as Participant 2, her identity and idea of who she would like to be is very much the same as that which she perceives her grandmother to be. She would like to be "the sister, friend, partner, mother and grandmother" in the way that her grandmother has manifested these roles. She does not give much attention to her

own identity in the first narrative though she already indicates that she identifies with her paternal grandmother when she says that others commented that she “looks just like J”. There is an indication that she must have incorporated at least some of her maternal grandmother’s qualities into her own identity: they “use the same base”. The step grandmother remains “step” and here she does not indicate any identification, but distance and difference.

Integration of the theme of identity

The participants all spoke of how their identity is influenced by reminiscence. From this it would be possible to infer that reminiscence has an impact on identity formation in listeners and that it is a complex process that cannot be isolated from other relationships and that listeners sometimes take in a critical stance towards the identities that are given to them by their grandparents through reminiscence. In addition to this, reminiscence activities could influence identity in subtle ways not always recognised as such by listeners. Sub-themes emerged from the general discussion on identity. *My supervisor suggested the following sub-themes: personal identity, family identity and cultural identity. Surely many other sub-themes could be identified, but I feel that for the sake of this discussion these themes, when explored in more detail will give us a good enough picture of how the listener’s identity is influenced on different levels by reminiscence. I choose to start with the widest identity, that of cultural identity, which is a conversation within which the more personal identities are nested.* The discussion that follows summarises more formally the way in which identity is influenced by reminiscence. This is done through drawing conclusions (however tentative!) and through making general statements rather than concentrating on specific examples as this is an integration of the examples explored in the above discussions.

Cultural identity

The cultural identity of all three participants becomes in a greater or lesser degree a theme in their discussions on reminiscence. Consciously or unconsciously they accept or reject the cultural identity within which their grandparents’

reminiscences are grounded. The cultural identity includes generational, religious, socio-political, and language differences and similarities. The cultural identity and the values embedded in these that are reflected in the reminiscences are either accepted or rejected by the participants. To make a general statement one could say that all reminiscences have a cultural background to them. No story is told without being nested within a broader framework of culture. It can also be said that the listener's own culture is not necessarily the same as that which is portrayed by grandparent reminiscences. The younger listener's cultural identity can differ and this can influence the way in which he or she hears the stories that are told. From at least one of the participant's (Participant 1) narrative it became clear that the teller does not always acknowledge generational and cultural differences and that the difference in cultural identity between teller and participant can create distance rather than closeness. Differences in cultural identity that have to do with geographical and historical facts such as language, country of origin and world wars can lead to listeners feeling rooted in these cultures without participating directly in them (Participant 1 & 2). These cultural identities that are portrayed in the reminiscences are often incorporated into the identity of the listener in new ways by for example incorporating their values into the family and personal identity. Underlying ideas within the culture (about for example gender, race and religious identity) are portrayed in the reminiscences and find their way into the value systems of listener's and becomes integrated in the way in which they view themselves and describe their identity.

Family identity

Family identity cannot be separated from the broader cultural identity within which the family exists. Yet, the family also has its own identity that, though embedded within the larger culture, has its own unique way of being. Grandparents' reminiscences seem to be a way in which not only the broader cultural values are transferred from one generation to the next, but also include the transference of family identity. The participants all acknowledged their identification with the family identity. Places such as family farms, towns and houses seem to often give a location

to family identity and root the stories and the family identity within a specific geographical setting. Family identity has a personal tone and the reminiscences of listeners are often filled with nostalgia when they speak of this aspect of the family's past. Both their own experiences of grandparents and the setting of the grandparent's reminiscences anchor the family within a specific landscape or in more than one landscape.

Family identity can, however, also be in conflict with the listener's cultural identity and or personal identity. In at least one instance (Participant 1) the family identity of the paternal and maternal families differed to such a degree that the participant found herself positioned between these two families with their very different modes of being. Cultural and generational identity can also come into conflict with the values that the existing family identity keeps intact. It seems that reminiscence could be a way in which older people attempt to keep the family identity stagnant within a changing socio-political milieu (Participant 1). On the other hand, family identity can change as new members enter the family (Participant 2) and as the broader cultural framework changes.

In the reminiscences of the listeners about their experience of reminiscences they discuss both their personal identity and how this is imbedded within the family's identity. Individual members such as listeners can also change the family identity through their participation in reminiscence. Should they not be allowed to participate from their own position it seems that the family does not allow for change in its identity (Participant 1). Reminiscence in this instance can alienate listeners from the family identity as it does not create space for the personal identity to be incorporated into the broader family identity. In other families or parts of the family younger members are incorporated into the family. Their unique personal identity is accepted and included through reminiscences about them (Participant 2). They are thus canonised into the family and become part of the family myth. Reminiscences can thus incorporate listeners into the family identity, partly include them or alienate them from the family identity as it stands. Personal identity though often also different from the family identity as a whole is not completely separate from the cultural and family identity, but seems to be embedded in this larger discourse.

Personal identity

All three participants focused on how their personal identity is embedded in the reminiscences of their grandparents. It seems that all the participants identified, at least to an extent, with the values that were portrayed by the reminiscences. All of them identified with their grandmothers. Their identity *as women* seems to be intimately connected to the identity of their grandmothers as women. Gender identity is perhaps more a part of cultural identity, but seems to have a great impact on personal identity. Each of the participants defined herself as a woman in relation to her grandmother or grandmothers. They saw themselves as a woman concerned about body image (Participant 1), just like grandmother portrayed herself in her reminiscences or as strong woman like the woman in the family stories (Participant 2) or as intellectual (Participant 1), or perhaps as unconventional. This was either the same or in contrast with the grandmother's identity.

Reflecting on ones own identity in the light of grandparents' reminiscences is not limited to same sex grandparents. It seems that the participants' personal identities are also influenced by the stories they hear from the opposite sex grandparent. In this study all the participants identified positively with the opposite sex grandparent. One participant (Participant 1) saw her grandfather as being part of her own intra-psychic world, as her superego. Thus his reminiscences, or perhaps more accurately, his presence, was so powerful that he became an integral part of her.

Listeners to reminiscence consider and reconsider their own identity in the light of the stories that they hear from grandparents about their identity. Personal identity included their values, their relationship to their bodies and also referred to their relationships with others. Part of their personal identities, which they said were influenced by the reminiscence, was the roles that they choose to play such as mother, sister and their professional roles. The identification or reaction against the personal identity of the grandparent as it was portrayed through the reminiscences seems to be both a conscious or unconscious identification with the teller.

To conclude: the distinction between different members and their separate identities became blurred in the discussion, it seems that personal identity can only

be described in relationship. The next theme that will be discussed is that of meaning. The question of how reminiscence creates meaning for listeners is addressed.

Meaning

All three the participants when asked the question of whether being in the position of listeners in the activity of reminiscence has been meaningful in their lives answered in the affirmative. Participant 1 and 2 both speak of being rooted in the stories of their grandparents while Participant 3 says that she feels that the fact that her grandmother and her sisters are still together even though they are in their eighties has had great meaning for her as this has instilled in her the importance of being a family. Meaning is thus woven into each of the narratives.

For Participant 1 it is meaningful to have not heard all the stories from her paternal grandfather, but still to feel a longing for the Eastern European culture and to have a grandmother who could sense her mood. She also finds meaning in her maternal grandmother's stories: "I felt happy that I spent time in the contexts that she refers to". The stories have such meaning to her that she feels she has to work with them, that she has to transform them, such as the story about her grandmother's weight problem.

For Participant 2 the meaning of each type of story is quite clear. Each type of story brings about not only identity, but also meaningful values and qualities. The stories of travel for example, not only have meaning in that they tell of other places, but they spark off an inner journey. Participant 2 describes the type of stories that were to her personally the most meaningful: "If I have to be honest some of the stories that meant most to me was not necessarily the ones told to me, but the stories I overheard being told about me, or a story that I told that was retold by them". For her the other stories created identity, but what was most meaningful on a personal level were those stories about herself.

For Participant 3 meaning is perhaps more important than identity. Her narratives revolve around the meaning that the stories have, that to have heard her grandmother's stories means that she can "know her". It has great significance and brings understanding and meaning to her relationship with her step grandmother

when she is told that she looks like her biological grandmother. Though not strictly speaking a reminiscence, this utterance about the past connects her in a meaningful way with an experience she did not understand before. She also infers that her belief in the meaning and influence of reminiscence on her life is a bit like the guru that is asked about whether God exists. To ask about reminiscence and its meaning is to state the obvious. To answer a question about how reminiscence impacts on you and what meaning their stories have is a bit like trying to detect the names of your ancestors: you know that they are there, that one come from them, but you may not know their names nor can you see them. To try to detect how reminiscence has meaning is as difficult or perhaps impossible, as the influence and the meanings are so woven into who you are that you cannot detect where you start and where the stories end. They have meaning, but I think that she implies here that this meaning is so intrinsic that it is difficult to speak of it as something separate. Perhaps this is the reason why she prefers to retell the stories rather than to reflect. In all the narratives the meaning is implied rather than spelled out.

All the participants thus found the activity of reminiscence meaningful for them as listeners. They describe how their grandparents' stories impacted on them and how these stories were important. Two of them (Participants 1 and 3) specifically felt that the stories had meaning in as far as they rooted them in the family or the larger cultural context. What can thus be inferred is that reminiscences can be meaningful interactions not only for tellers but also for listeners.

Conclusion

Dear readers

I hope that you read the narratives of the participants and as you read got a feeling for the quality of the relationships that they engage/d in with their grandparents around stories about the personal past. What struck me was that reminiscence could not be severed from the relationship that each one of them had with the grandparent as a whole. Reminiscence seems to be one activity that is part of a complex network of relating between grandparents and grandchildren. It does seem that in Participant 1's case at least, the listener less favourably receives an over engagement in reminiscence. Two listeners

expressed a need for active participation in the process of reminiscence, not so much to remain in the role of listener, but to also become noticed and seen in the interaction instead of only having to listen. I heard a request for a two-way process. Like in the literature this listener was mostly ignored so at least one of the listener's in one relationship felt completely unseen in the reminiscence relationship. This was a surprising twist in the tale, not what I expected to hear, but confirming the importance of allowing listeners to tell their stories. Why would one even bother with reminiscence, is it really important? From what I read here in the words of the listeners and from how I also experienced myself in my relationship with my grandmothers, I want to go as far as to say that reminiscence plays more than a peripheral role in my own life and it seems that at least in two of the listeners in this study's lives. I saw a client last year whose only positive relationship with an adult when she was a child was with a grandmother. One of the important aspects of this relationship was that this grandmother let her into her own stories and also told her positive stories about herself. Older individuals have an active role to play in society, their stories are our reference points, we might react to them, but we can't get away from them, they root us in our collective past. In the next chapter I shall reflect on how the findings in this chapter form links with the literature as discussed in Chapter 4 as well as how my epistemological framework determined the way in which I conducted the research. This brings this conversation full circle, yet as in all circles any point could have been both a beginning and an end.

CHAPTER 6

SWALLOWING THE TALE

Man is always a storyteller! He lives surrounded by his and other's myths. With them he sees everything in his life, not matter what befalls him. And he seeks to live his life as though he were telling it (Sartre in Gergen & Gergen, 1997).

Dear reader

After and even while you were reading the discussion of the themes in the previous chapter some of the ideas that I have put forward in previous chapters and perhaps more so your own ideas and experiences, must have interacted with what I wrote. You might have agreed, disagreed or added to what I have had to say. You were busy making sense, entering the conversation from your own point of view. This process of integration constantly takes place in conversation and you might have noticed how the participants also engaged in this process as they were writing, how they made sense or tried to make sense of their experiences as they wrote and how I did the same in my discussion of themes. Though one loses oneself, so to speak, in the conversation, you do at times take a bird's eye view on what you write or read and critically assess and compare what you write or read with your previous experiences and what you know about the topic. We saw how frustrating it can be for a participant (Participant 1) when this integration of different voices is not allowed to enter a conversation because it does not fit the current paradigm.

I hope that, at least to an extent, in this entire narrative, we have broken through the set paradigms of what this conversation about reminiscence should have looked like had we not entered a process of redefining meaning. We were allowed to do this within the academic fraternity because of the conversations that social constructionism and narrative psychology have already established. So, the larger socially constructed idea that it is acceptable to talk in this way, to look at alternative meanings and to focus on the relationship, was needed in order for this conversation to be accepted as a Master's study. But as is often the case in conversations, I am moving away from the discussion of this chapter – so let us focus on the task at hand which is to bring into writing the underlying conversation between the literature chapter and the other chapters.

What follows is a discussion that aims to interweave the perception postulated in Chapter 6 on the narratives of the participants and the discussions in the previous

chapters. Not only will I look at the links that the narratives have with the current literature as discussed in Chapter 4, but I shall reflect on how my reading of the themes cannot be separated from my own epistemological stance. Once again this discussion will emphasise the conversational nature of the interpretation of the narratives, rather than to propose that my reading and interpretation is the correct, best or only possible reading.

Tying Knots: Literature and Research

The link between the literature and the participants' narratives is not so much a confirmation or rejection of current theoretical findings but rather an exploration of the conversation between the literature and my reading of the participants' narratives. The links are drawn in order to create the possibility to refine and deepen the conversation about reminiscence as a conversational, interactional act that includes the listener.

Each of the participants chose to enter the conversation by stating that she was not so much interested to enter into a theoretical conversation. As listeners their experiences were personal and they preferred to keep it as such. My own letter to them (Chapter 4) starts with some of my personal experiences of reminiscence and they link with the conversational tone that narrative theory encourages. The participants take note of the literature, but enter the conversation subjectively as they are asked to do. In Chapter 5 I place myself in the role of listener and reflect on what stood out for me from their narratives. Though the discussion is more formal than the personal reflections that are spread throughout this narrative, this narrative analysis is acknowledged as being coloured by the researcher's lenses (Anderson & Golishian, 1988; Czarniawska, 2004; Gergen, 1978). As researchers we always stand within the system that we observe (Hoffman, 1995; Keeney, 1983). In the discussion that follows my findings are linked to the literature as it has been discussed in Chapter 5. I reflect on topics such as reminiscence, stories, myth making and listeners in order to integrate the research findings with the theory.

About Stories and Story Telling

The stories that the participants tell are their own reminiscences of listening to their grandparents' stories about the past. These stories are utterly personal and intimate recollections of the relationships that come into existence when people gather around reminiscences (Haight, 2001). Yet, as we have seen in the participants' stories, personal stories cannot be separated from the larger social, political and religious contexts within which they exist (Haight, 2001). All the stories of the grandparents and the participants were embedded in a specific cultural, generational, geographical and political narrative. In the literature this cultural embeddedness of all conversations is emphasised by social constructionists such as Gergen (1985), Freedman and Combs (1996) and Wallace, J.B. (1992). The stories that people tell about the past are about relationships, they emphasise, confirm and re-assess connections. In this regard Haight (2001, p.90) writes:

The connections formed in memory are the discovery of patterns and meaning in the past that may have been neglected or gone unrecognized. Connections with others enable individuals to feel alive, loved, cared for and listened to. Through such exchanges individuals can reclaim their past, while simultaneously shaping and interpreting it in new ways.

As the participants told their stories they reflected on the experience of listening to reminiscence, evaluating its meaning in their lives. The stories that their grandparents told them were hardly retold in their original form. They were not left untouched. Not only did the tellers change the listeners as Haight (2001), Lifschitz and Oosthuizen (2001), Lubarsky (1997) and Muller, Van Deventer and Human (2001) propose, but the listeners actively engaged with the stories. In the hands of the listeners the stories were moulded, interpreted and integrated into their own stories and cultural settings. Reminiscence is clearly a process that involves intergenerational transmission (Adelman, 1997; Lubarsky, 1997). In her investigations on how reminiscences of Holocaust survivors were reflected on by their daughters Adelman (1997) emphasise the way in which narratives are organised in relationships. In both this study and Adelman's study (1997) the listeners were no

tabula rasa, but participated actively from their own perspective. The stories evolve as they are told and listened to and the themes are dynamic rather than static. Haight (1997) says that this sharing of stories can be an “act of intimacy for both the listener and the teller” (p.90).

We saw how in at least one case in this study (Participant 1) the stories told had become stuck (Carr, 1998) and how the participant engaged and expressed the need to re-author the stories in such a way that definitions of self could be re-shaped (Gergen, 1978). In the discussion of Narrative therapy it is mentioned that the Narrative therapist’s work is to facilitate the creation of new stories where stories have become stuck. We see here that listeners sometimes do these things themselves. They take the old stories from their grandparents and fit them into new contexts and transform their meaning (Hoffman, 1995; Keeney, 1983).

About Collective Storytellers and Listeners

The listeners could only speak of themselves in relation to others. The notion of a separate “self” that exists outside of relationship seems to be a theoretical concept. As Weingarten (in Freedman & Combs, 1996) makes it clear: we include other people constantly in our description of self, we create ourselves through our relationships. Even when the participants spoke of being different from their grandparents they were still defining themselves within the relationship. We saw how the telling of this story empowered the listener that did not have a voice in the conversation with her grandparent (Participant 1) and how the collective stories - cultural, socio-political - could not be separated from the individual narratives (Haight, 2001).

About Current Cultural Perceptions of Becoming Older

It seemed that each of the participants came from a position of honouring and respecting their grandparents, even to the extent of idealising perhaps not so much old age, but the values and lifestyle of the past (Participant 3). Not one of the participants reacted or reflected directly on the section included in Chapter 4 on the current cultural perception of older people. They did not focus on the negative

qualities of getting older and each in her own way felt connected to her grandparents and felt rooted in her past. Though Participant 1 took in a more critical stance towards her grandmother's narrative, it was not getting older *per se* that hampered the relationship, but rather the way in which the grandmother communicated. In this case the power dynamic was reversed - the values of the past made no space for new values. The listeners seem to view getting older in a positive rather than negative light in these narratives and thus echoes the attitudes of theorists who focus on the positive aspects of getting older (Erikson, 1982; Sherman, E. 1991; Tornstam, 1992)

At least in these three participants' experiences getting older and telling stories about the past had great meaning for them as listeners. It also seemed that these participants did not perceive being older as a negative condition, but the older family members connected these participants to their roots. The older individuals were perceived by their younger grandchildren as participating in a meaningful way in cultural and family life. It is, however, important to note that a general statement about current cultural perceptions on being older cannot be made simply from three participant's narrative. All that we can infer here is that in the case of these participants the older people were described with respect and were seen as meaningful contributors to society. The question can be asked whether it is not perhaps more the secular conversations (Roddick, 2000), rather than the more intimate conversations that disregard older people or if there is perhaps a social taboo on speaking our truth about how we really perceive older people.

Reminiscence and Meaning

Meaning, we have seen in both the literature chapter and the discussion in Chapter 5, "is not inherent in an act or experience, but is constructed through social discourse" (McAdams, Josselson & Lieblich, 2001, p.xii). None of the participants questioned the importance of their own role and its meaning in reminiscence. Unlike the current literature that basically ignores the role of the listener, or should I rather say has not yet noticed the listener much, the participants all recognised themselves as listeners and were able to explore this role. They could each hold a conversation about their experience as listener in the activity of reminiscences where their

grandparents told stories about their personal pasts. The participants experienced themselves in the role of listeners as important and reflected on how their grandparents' reminiscences had meaning for *them*. Like Adelman (1995) and Lubarsky's (1997) younger participants, the three participants in this study experience their encounters with the reminiscences of older people as meaningful and even life changing.

Allowing the listeners to speak for themselves about reminiscence brought some expected and unexpected links with the current literature. Participant 1's narrative about her role as listener could confirm some of the current theories on reminiscence, for example that sometimes reminiscence can be a way of remaining in the past and not engaging in the present. This reminds me of Butler's (1963) distinction between pathological, adaptive and constructive manifestations of telling stories when you are getting older. In Participant 1's narrative one could say that all these different types of reminiscence are experienced by the same person, with different people, but also in different situations with the same person. Both the other participants describe reminiscence in such a positive light that they could confirm the idea that reminiscence is a constructive activity, but in this case from the perspective of the listener. Haight (2001) says that sharing stories about one's life can have a cathartic effect bringing "enlightenment or a new resolution-and a freeing of the self" (p.90). Perhaps this also sometimes happens to the listener. Did the Greeks not perform plays so that the audience could experience catharsis as they *watched* the play? Coleman's (1986, p.155) idea that reminiscence could vary from "a creative integration of the past to a negative brooding on the past" can perhaps be rephrased from the perspective of these listener participants as varying from a negative self-absorbed activity that leaves little space for conversation, to silent conversations that have great meaning.

Furthermore the reminiscence relationship was described in the research chapter in terms of listener participation, with some reminiscence relationships being inclusive of the listener while other reminiscences ask of the listener to be a passive recipient. It might be possible that listeners give preference to taking in a more active role in reminiscence. Two of the participants emphasised that they preferred for their

separate identity to be acknowledged and integrated by the teller. As has been emphasised in the discussion on reminiscence in the literature chapter each experience of reminiscence is unique and the quality of the experiences are different. Though there were some similarities in the discussions of each of the listeners participants, the experiences were varied. As Levine and Perkins (1997) it is the specific meaning and the quality of the particular experience that we are interested in rather than in generalisations. What stood out is that the relationships that exist through reminiscence are human relationships with many dimensions that cannot be isolated from the larger cultural context and the broader frame of the whole relationship (Wallace, 1992). That reminiscence is a complex and varied activity has been confirmed by the narratives of these listeners. Post-modern research and practice emphasise the importance of focussing on that which is unique and specific (Levine & Perkins, 1997; Wallace, 1992). In the thematic analysis of these listener's narratives what became conspicuous was the complexity rather than uniformity of reminiscence experience of listeners.

About Intergenerational Transmission: Roots and Change

In all the participant's narratives there is an acknowledgement of the importance of hearing stories about the past in order to feel rooted within the family and its values. Even though the family also changes as new members enter the participants as newer members felt that through hearing the stories about the past they become part of the family and were rooted in the past. The stories they heard had a huge impact on how they viewed themselves and the choices that they made. Participant 2 for example attributes her choice of career to her grandmothers' stories. Thus from these narratives it is clear that the past cannot be severed from the present and that one of the important functions of reminiscence *is*, as Moody (1988, p.9) calls it, "cultural transmission". The reminiscences of grandparents are not "road maps" but are reference points as can be seen in each of the participants' narratives in a different way (Gergen, 1988). The listeners do not repeat the stories exactly, but find common themes (Participant 2) and differences (Participant 1), thus bringing both continuity and transformation in the collective identity of families and cultures. The

importance of reminiscence as and intergenerational activity is underlined by the studies of Adelman (1995) and Lubarsky (1997). Both these writers look at how narratives are transformed over generations in families and concludes, like me, that listeners are active participants. Reminiscence, in relationship, brings about both stability and change, stability in as far as common themes and histories are shared and change in as far as the stories change as they are told. The communications over generations allow for both stability and change. The stories are understood over generations and thus creates stability in families, yet change also become apparent in these narratives as we observed how stories change and are interpreted in new ways as they are told and as they are listened to (Gergen & Gergen, 1988).

About the Experience of Listening

In the discussion of listening in Chapter 4 I have placed great emphasis on why being in the role of listener could be important. The largest part of the discussion of themes in Chapter 5 also focuses on what it means to be a listener. Listening is an ongoing process says Hones (1998). The participants all listened to reminiscences and in their reflective narratives listened again. At least one participant (Participant 1) expressed the need to continue to listen actively, to re-listen, to digest the reminiscences given to her. Freedman & Comb's (1996, p.47) statement that we "interpret" as we listen can be seen very clearly in the description of all the participants in this study. They listened to the stories, reflected on them and commented on them. They chose to focus on specific stories or parts of stories that were relevant to *them*. The participants from their own position interpret the stories. The grandparent speaker tells the story, but in the narratives of our participants it is their stories of these stories that we hear. This is hardly the "objective" story that tells exactly what happened many years ago. Thus, as was suggested in the literature chapter listening is not about absorbing, but rather about a process of digesting and integrating (Gergen & Kaye, 1992; Newman & Holzman, 1999).

In the discussion of the participants as listeners I distinguished between more passive and more active listening. It seems that though one could say that stories change as they are listened to (Gergen, 1985), the degree to which this happens

differs from listener to listener and within different relationships. Two of the participants experienced themselves as less active (participants 2 & 3) in the process of listening and were happy with this while one of the participants wanted to be more actively involved. Active and passive listening were not preconceived ideas derived from the literature overview but evolved out of the participant narratives.

To a lesser or greater degree the value system of each of the participants confirmed or juxtaposed that of their grandparents and influenced the way in which they constructed their own narratives about the stories that they listened to. The literature discussed in Chapter 4 emphasises the way in which as tellers and listeners we are active in creating meaning as we listen to stories. How these comparisons of ourselves to the other lead to an understanding of oneself and your position in relation to that of the teller (Hones, 1998) can be seen in each of the three participant's narratives and has been looked at in detail in the discussion of themes from the participants' narratives. By allowing the listeners to become tellers in this research a yet "under-heard" voice in the formal conversation of reminiscence has been given the opportunity to speak. Through allowing this to happen the conversation is redirected to place the emphasis on the relational aspect, as Gergen (1985) suggests, rather than on the teller in a vacuum. We saw that listeners do have much to say about their role in this relationship.

About Identity

Both the thematic analysis and the literature emphasise that personal identity can only be described within relationship (Gergen, 1985, Hinchman & Hinchman, 1997). Gergen & Gergen (1997) says that one's identity is an ongoing evolving process. According to the literature that I chose to focus on in Chapter 4 identity and self are not stagnant realities (Carr, 1998; Gergen, 1988). Added to this Hinchman & Hinchman (1997, p.119) says about identity that "[w]ho one is, from the perspective of narrative theory, is inseparable from the way one's personal history unfolds". Coherence and stability comes about through the stories that we live and tell.

In the discussion on identity in Chapter 5 identity is described in such a way that the relational rather than the changing, dynamic aspect of identity is emphasised.

This could be a self-fulfilling prophesy. I prefer to see it as a confirmation that identity cannot be talked about without placing it within the context of our relationships (McAdams, Josselson & Lieblich, 2001). Each of the participants described herself as if she had some form of identity that either was the same as that of her grandparent or different. Though this does not say that identity is stagnant and unchangeable it is important to note here that these participants were creating meaning within their relationships by speaking as if their identities were something quite concrete and clear. They unify and organise their stories in such a way that they make sense of themselves through language (McAdams, Josselen & Lieblich, 2001). What stood out in the case of Participant 1 was that her experience of herself changed in different relationships. In the case of Participant 3 her grandmother represented an ideal identity.

The participants' descriptions of their own identity and meaning are offered within the context of the intricate web of relationships and it can be seen how the idea of a self outside relationship can hardly be imagined. Each of the listeners exists within a matrix of relationships and experiences herself not in isolation from others but as coming in existence through the narratives. They compare, includes, exclude, absorb others into narratives about themselves, thus reminding me of the social constructionist idea that there is not such a thing as a separate, autonomous self (Carr, 1998; Gergen, 1988; Hinchman & Hinchman, 1997) but that the self exists and finds meaning in relationship.

Towards Symbolic Awareness

Novitz (in Hinchman & Hinchman, 1997, p.143) says that “[w]henver we speak about ourselves, of the sort of people that we and others are, we lapse almost inadvertently into the idiom of both the visual and the literary arts”. These stories “shape and convey our sense of self” (p.143). We portray ourselves symbolically, as if we create our identity as the characters of a play would be created. In the discussion of the literature I refer to Bond’s (1993) opinion that it is when we find the third position or rather when we move away from ourselves and see ourselves as if on a stage where we become one of the actors and we move into a mythical space. When

we observe ourselves in the past we move away from complete participation to a *symbolic awareness* of who we are. We find ourselves in an in between position where we become the teller and the listener. Reminiscence places us in this position. It is when we move into this realm where myths come into existence that we question both our personal and collective identity. When Participant 2 reflects on how reminiscence made her part of the family myth when stories were told about her, she became both the participant and the observed. When Participant 1 reflects on how her grandmothers' chairs are a representation of the grandmothers. She sees herself reflected in, but not equal to these two women who had a great influence on whom she is. The process of reflecting on reminiscence thus brought the participants into this realm where they observe themselves in the role of listeners and placed them in a position where they addressed the questions: "Who am I? Who are we?" (Bond 1993, p.17). Reminiscence of participating in reminiscence as listener can thus become part of creating a personal myth. We saw how each of our participants found meaning in their participation as listeners even though these experiences were varied. Each of their experiences became part of their unique personal and family myth. In the case of Participant 1's maternal grandmother there is a desperate need to keep the old identity intact and this can only be done by not making space for a transformed identity. Through not allowing the granddaughter to enter into the conversation as herself the grandmother tries to prevent the self from losing its boundaries as these seem to be very fragile. The granddaughter's myth is different, but has to remain underground in this reminiscence relationship.

Conclusive Remark

The literature on reminiscence and the experiences of listeners are both similar and different. Some of the themes that were discussed in the literature chapter also surfaced in the conversations of the participants while other themes emerged that had not been discussed before. The notion that the researcher needs to be open to what the process presents rather than to have pre-conceived ideas of the results that the data should yield cannot be emphasised enough. On the other hand it is just as important to acknowledge that no reading is value free and that this specific

reading is directly linked to the epistemological stance of the researcher. It is therefore necessary to reflect here on how the epistemological stance of the researcher has coloured the specific way in which the participants' narratives were not only constructed, but also storied through the discussion of the data.

Full Circle: Epistemological reflections

I hope that by now you would have become used to tuning "in stereo" as I suggested you do at the beginning of Chapter 2. Here almost at the end of our story I want to reflect on how my own stance has determined to a great degree what I wrote, but how in conversation with the participants my own voice also changed as I could not but help to be changed by what I heard. As you know by now Gergen (1978) suggested that it is essential for the researcher who comes from the stance of social constructionism to become conscious of his/her own value system and to include it in the reflections.

First of all the interpretations of the listeners' narratives have been acknowledged as *my responses*. Throughout this narrative I have attempted to be transparent about how I view the world and about what my relationship is with reminiscence. I have placed the emphasis on the interactional aspect of communication throughout this narrative because I believe in the social constructionist view that states that meaning comes into existence within social relationships. When I read and reflected on the participant's narratives, I focused on their experience of the relationship as from my epistemological stance this is where the questions should be asked. I placed the emphasis here because it is important from this perception to make value judgements about power structures and about underlying texts that are not conscious, but that influence the way we interpret. I tried to do what Gergen (1985) suggests, namely to look at culture and at the assumptions that certain discourses are more relevant than others. I consciously turned around the current emphasis in order to balance the equation. As the more active participant in reminiscence have received preference over the more passive participant namely the listener in the conversation on reminiscence, I decided to focus on the listener. By allowing the listener to have a say in a formal conversation on reminiscence the power relationship is hopefully brought a bit more into balance. This has implications

for the teller as a teller without an acknowledged audience is a sad and useless teller. As in the formal conversation of reminiscence, it seems that in personal reminiscence relationships the listener can be dominated by the teller, leaving the silent voice of the listener to be a potentially unheard voice. I took on the challenge that Gergen and Gergen (1988) posed when they asked researchers to focus on relationship, to “articulate this subtext” and to “bring into the foreground that which has remained obscured?” (Gergen & Gergen, 1988, p. 41). What has remained obscure in formal discussions on reminiscence *is* that reminiscence is relational, that the listener is a powerful participant. From the participants’ narratives and from social constructionist theory it can be seen that silent voices can be very powerful and significant participants in conversation. I am of the opinion that the theory on reminiscence has been created from the perceptions of listeners without acknowledgement on the side of the theorists that their experience of reminiscence is mostly from this position. Who experiences the reminiscence as pathological or functional and makes this value judgement? Was Butler (1963), when he distinguished between pathological and adaptive and constructive manifestations of telling stories when you are older, more akin to the position of teller or listener? From which position did he formulate his theory? Coleman (1986) observed *most likely from the position of listener* that some people do and some people do not take part in reminiscence. Listener theorists as experts on reminiscence took in a very powerful position in the formal theory on reminiscence as they told their stories most probably from the perception of listeners as if they were truths for the teller too. Without making their own position visible or conscious they (not deliberately) kept a power relationship intact.

In this research, by becoming conscious of the position of teller, listener, researcher, reader, theoretical and personal stance on different levels of this conversation I have attempted to bring the conversation on reminiscence into the realm of relationship. It must be stated that this is only a beginning in researching reminiscence from a narrative perspective where ordinary people are allowed to participate fully in research and where dominant stories are deconstructed in order to allow for alternative stories to be heard (Doan, 1997).

As the knots are tied and as the story has come full circle the last chapter is more of a beginning than an end as it looks back in order to look forward to possible other beginnings.

CHAPTER 7

SUGGESTING NEW BEGINNINGS FOR OLD STORIES: A LAST LETTER

Stories are medicine (Estès, 1992, p.15).

Dear colleagues

I have in this story about the stories that we tell about ourselves as we grow older explored the experience of the listener in the activity of reminiscence. The focus on the listener in the relationship is not a completely new idea, but as I have pointed out, has not been explored much in the literature on reminiscence. From the previous two chapters it looks as if, at least for these participants, that being in the position of the listener has had an impact on their ideas about whom they are and has had some meaning to them in the relationships with their grandparents. What I became most conscious of in the exploration of the themes was the diversity of experiences that the participants described. I was surprised at the strength of the connections that they had with their grandparents. What also stood out for me was the importance of the relationships with grandparents in the participant's lives and how they tried to make sense of these stories from which they come. I also noticed in linking narratives with the literature the multiplicity of meanings, connections and interpretations that become possible in conversation.

What follows here is a brief exploration of possibilities for further psychological research and also interventions that make use of reminiscence as a focal point. I have come to think that the emphasis on the relationship points us in the direction of exploring ideas that would include both the listener and the teller in research. I do however think that it was valuable to have explored the other side of the conversation on its own and it does not mean that this is now enough. Rather, I would like to suggest that this is just a beginning. Focusing on the relationship does not necessarily mean that both people need to be present, as often the disempowered voice is better first heard on its own. .

What I would like to explore here are a few ideas. Rather than to pose as complete research projects or intervention programmes, these suggestions at best could open up possibilities for researchers and psychologists who want to work with reminiscence. Each situation where we work is unique and as psychologists, especially in a country as diverse as South Africa, we need flexibility and creativity. I therefore aim to explore with you overall pictures rather than detailed projects or programmes. Or to put it differently I would explore a few plots and characters as well as one or two stories that can open up ideas for creating stories with clients that do not repeat the past, but which bring new dimensions. I worked in a Waldorf Kindergarten for three months and one of the guiding principles here is to allow the children to project into unstructured toys instead of prescribing the outcome by giving

them prearranged goals to work towards. As a teacher you do not give them complete pictures or games, no colouring in books with bad art and clear outlines. You allow for their imagination to work actively so that they become self-motivated and inspired from within. Something of this spirit is carried into this last chapter. You are once again invited to participate in this process of meaning making.

Lifschitz and Oosthuizen (2001) say that when we work in communities we must be prepared to be “profoundly touched” by our encounters with clients. There is nothing like a passive onlooker or listener. Stories change us as tellers and as listeners and they not only impact on our relationships with each other, they *are* our relationships. What food is to the digestive system, so stories are to the soul. This story now ends with possibilities for new beginnings. First of all we will explore a few suggestions for further research, then ideas around how interventions can be structured in such a way that the relationship, rather than the intra-psychic process can be the focus. I too now and again at the end of this new beginning reflect on this story, and on how it has been in the telling.

Reflections

In narrative psychology the idea of goals and outcomes becomes something different from the usual Occidental idea of goal and outcome. Instead of practising to acquire a skill that we can use, the process itself is the goal. It is through the doing that we change. In this study the aim was to include the listener in the conversation. What I wanted was not knowledge of reminiscence, but respect for the process that unfolds when people gather around this topic and through including the listener to have created a more holistic and respectful picture of this relational activity. At the beginning of the conversation I spoke of stability and change. Stability came through the structure, the chapter, the language, the epistemology that I used. The change came about through the process of allowing more voices to enter the conversation. I changed my ideas around reminiscence, deepened it and reflected upon it as I wrote, read, reflected and analysed. As researcher, writer and reader I perceive myself as part of the process and I know this: that my awareness is but one perspective. I invited the reader to participate. I need not have made this so explicit, because like

listening, reading entails participation. I chose to reflect on reader participation because I wanted to focus my readers' attention on how they make meaning as they read, on how the text becomes more dimensional, on how it enters the realm of relationship. This hopefully brought awareness on an experiential level of the participatory nature of listening. Thus content and form in this story complimented each other. This approach deconstructed the idea of the researcher being the expert on the topic or even becoming the expert.

From the social constructionist view we cannot enter therapy or research with neatly packaged frameworks and programmes, but we need to be willing to live with the uncertainty of not knowing what is going to come about. It is in the coming together of people that the potential for transformation and healing begins to emerge and that as so-called professionals "we allow for the possibility to be profoundly, not seemingly transformed in this process" (Lifschitz & Oosthuizen, 2001, p.124). Or in the language of social constructionism: transformation of the way in which we perceive can take place through allowing different voices to speak.

In this research the process of reflection has evoked many thoughts and possibilities for both research and intervention. In reflecting on my own process, I not only became aware of what I do and how I think, but I also became conscious of at least some of the questions that this research does not address and of other subtexts that I do not make explicit.

A Few Suggestions for Future Research

This research conversation has opened up many possibilities for future research on the topic. For me this is partly so because in the process I became conscious of the gaps. One way to explore the theme of the listener further would be to ask listeners more specific questions about their experiences in the relationships. One of the themes that needs more detailed inquiry is the question of how listeners make sense of opposing value systems and more specifically how their own value systems differ or are the same as the value systems that are portrayed in the reminiscences. It seems that reminiscence research could benefit from moving away from focussing only on the teller. Though this study asked only the listener to speak,

the focus was on the relationship rather than on one of the participants and the same could be done from the perspective of the teller. The question of asking tellers to reflect on why they tell stories and specifically why they tell stories to specific people can be asked to explore the relationship from the other side. Another conversation that could follow from the current conversation is how the relationship between the teller and listener can be investigated qualitatively by focussing on real life interactions.

My supervisor suggested at the beginning of this study that I go to retirement homes and try to experience real life reminiscence. I chose to do it differently, but this does not mean that this would not be a very valuable way of inquiry. There are many possibilities and I think that each researcher's own value system and experiences could contribute to studies that can make this conversation richer. Or one could take this same or similar narratives of listeners and explore the narratives of the listeners using different methods. In narrative inquiry alone I could have chosen to use various methods of inquiry (Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach & Zilber, 1998) some more formed than others. The conversation would have been different, but not more "true" than the current conversation. It is like choosing a path, one takes you up hill, one down. You look at the landscape differently, but the one way is only better or worse depending on what you subjectively want from the journey. Participant 1's conversation can for example be read as a comedy, or a tragedy or both. It all depends on where one chooses to place the focus and on how one "reads" the story. I chose the holistic-content analysis because it first of all matched my style of inquiry Secondly because it was possible to reach the point of the research in a way that did not contradict my epistemology and because I wanted a holistic approach rather than a dissection of the narratives. This inquiry is not better than any other was and the possibilities for further research are infinite. At its best the culture of silence around the listener is broken and the listener becomes part of the empowering act of co-creating reality. Through one, or as in this case three people, telling their story, the collective story was tapped into. Through alternative definitions of self and other can emerge for the teller and the listener. I now explore ideas around psychological reminiscence interventions that focus on some of the themes that have been touched upon in this study.

Reminiscence: On Different Ways to Story the Past

As a psychologist it would be necessary, when working with people in the

exploration of their lives in the past, present and future, to find ways of interacting that can include the listener, be it in person or in imagination. From this conversation it seems that reminiscences of older family members also form part of the life narratives of younger people and can also be included in work with younger people who have listened to reminiscence. Lifschitz and Oosthuizen (2001, p.112) describe how an idea emerged out of collective talking to connect older men who had been “forgotten” in a home for the older people with a local youth drama group that was searching to find life stories that they could turn into plays. So through the “forming and re-forming webs, discarded people could become valuable again as they transform from being ‘patients’ to emerge as the storytellers and the keepers of wisdom” (Lifschitz. & Oosthuizen 2001, p.112).

I know of an older woman who made an embroidered wall hanging that tells the history of her family. Her listeners were not present but will receive these reminiscences as an heirloom. Another was asked to write her memoirs for a family newspaper, taking her stories to an audience that was bigger than her direct family. One of my friends is writing her memoirs. Two of her children and her daughter-in-law died in car accidents. She writes with her grandchildren in mind, recreating the parents through telling them stories about the parents they never knew. Another example of an older person who engaged in reminiscence in a unique way is the artist Gauguin who as an older man painted a canvas that bears the title: “Who are we? Where did we come from? Where are we going?” (Moody, 1988, p.18-19). Here personal experience is transcended. The “I” becomes a “we”, and the individual reminiscence makes place for what he experiences as part of humanity, rather than his own, isolated experience. His listeners? The whole of humanity? Many others formalised their reminiscences through writing a biography. In Jung’s case (Bond, 1993) he describes an inner rather than outer journey. One could say that a person who has read Jung’s biography is a different person from someone whom has not. We do not remain untouched by the narratives that we hear. One older woman that I know likes to speak about her life while showing her photographs. She has about forty photo albums, all kept next to each other - a treasury of a lifetime. Yet, this also reminds of Koos du Plessis’s song “maar die gate tussen kiekies maak my bang” –

but the gaps between photographs scare me. The questions for psychologists are how do we contain these gaps, how do we facilitate experiences around reminiscence so that they become bearable for both teller and listener?

The means of expression mentioned above vary in sophistication and extent, but what they have in common is that all of these people have found legitimate ways in which to express and to *communicate* something of their personal myth and history. In at least some cases the personal was communicated in such a way that it became a shared narrative. Through these activities they shaped not so much themselves and their listeners but their relationships, be it with their idea of who they were, are or who others are, or both. For some of them reminiscence became a conscious task through which these people reintegrated and re-evaluated their past, present and future. Art became the “place” where symbolic expression is given to the ever present questions, “ Who am I? Who are you? Who are we?” For others, perhaps the task was less conscious. It is not important to me to make reminiscence into something that is “good” or “bad”, but to emphasise its importance as a cultural activity that stretches over generations.

And listeners also seem to need to integrate the stories for themselves. One participant wanted to do something with the stories that her grandparents gave her. Another discovered something about the woman in her family when someone else reflected on her being in a family of “strong women”.

For Future Reference: Exploring the Relationship through Art

As I read and wrote about reminiscence a few ideas around psychological interventions began to take shape in my mind. I call them ideas, tentative statements for reasons the reader is familiar with by now. The psychologist who wants to work with reminiscence needs to dance (or stand still) with the individual, pair or group that he/she wants to work with, adjusting his/her pace and type of dance to that which is created within the interaction (Keeney, 1983). The goal is not something that can be measured. Artistic expressions like drama, dance and writing can be utilised by the psychologist who wants to create interventions that gives new form to an old activity. Interventions and theories are constructed and de-constructed as we go along. When

an intervention is planned the principle of conversation can be implemented. Through this approach the programme is never fixed but constantly changes as the conversation develops. The idea of a conversation ensures that the new questions are constantly asked and that the wholeness of the system is not annihilated. The needs of the individual, pair or community must be assessed and the narrative psychologist needs to reflect constantly on his/her own stance in order to accommodate the changing needs of the people he/she works with. The very nature of stories is that they are changing as we live. The kind of interventions I suggest are then intended to tell the same stories in a new language, the language of art, and thus facilitate both new and old meanings and identities and to give both listener and teller a voice and to facilitate alternative story telling where needed.

A Last Glance: Looking Back on this Story About Stories

What emerged in the process of writing this story is that researchers and psychologists who want to work from a post modern perspective must show a willingness to be with the uncertainty of not knowing what will unfold in the process of engaging in research and with people in relationship. We have to be open to observe and listen and to allow stories to unfold in patterns that cannot be predicted. As psychologist one cannot expect to remain untouched by the stories that are told. Stories are not fixed realities. As they are told they become something else. It is not only the identity of the teller that forms and reforms as he/she tells the story but also that of the listener. Young people might have the need to hear the narratives of older people in order for the new generation to feel rooted in the past without fully identifying with it or they might want to free themselves from the values that have been fed with the mother's milk. Some surprisingly to me want to identify fully. Some older people would want to tell their stories while others might prefer not to engage in the past and at different times one individual might want different things. The possibility of creating a personal and communal mythology through storytelling and other cultural activities such as painting and writing has brought under my attention the vastness of possible human expression. Being involved with the past in a creative way means to transform the present. This process could be painful when

dealing with losses and could be a celebration of a new identity. We do not want to prescribe, but we can listen, re-define and co-create. Like with any other story looking back on this story/journey/conversation leaves me feeling that this story took its own path. The story could have been told in many different ways, but this now is this story, written told and reflected. The context of this dissertation provided me with a vessel in which my own epistemology could unfold, be explored and changed in the process of the telling.

Thus, by the end of our story we have found that “the individual self has all but vanished into the world of relationship” (Gergen & Gergen, 1988, p.18).

Epilogue

When I die a silver thread of smooth pearls will break, and the pearls will roll across the country and run home to their oyster mothers at the bottom of the sea. Who will dive for my pearls when I have gone? Who will know that they were mine? Who can guess that once the whole world was hanging around my neck? (Cecilia in Gaarder, 1996, p.91)

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APPENDIX 1

RAW DATA: PARTICIPANT 1

Reminiscence- 1. Apprehension of a Platonic idea as if it had been known in a previous existence 2.a. recall to mind of a long forgotten experience or fact b. the process or practice of thinking or telling about past experiences 3a a remembered experience b. an account of a memorable experience-often used in plural 4. Something so like another as to be regarded as an unconscious repetition, imitation, or survival (Webster's Collegiate Dictionary 10th Ed. 1993 Merriam Webster, Inc Springfield Massachusetts, USA)

reminiscor-I to call to mind, recollect, remember

remigro -are to wander back, to come back

remisceo -miscere -mixtum to mix up or mingle

(Cassells Latin Dictionary 1968 MacMillan Publishing Company New York)

I have two chairs in my house-one from my maternal grandparents who voted for Hertzog and a chair from my paternal grandparents who voted for Smuts. The first chair has riempies and looks like a museum piece from the Groot trek. The other chair has elegant lines and is made of Zimbabwean teak. Both chairs remind me of the colourful stories given to me by my very different grandparents.

I have been lucky enough to know my four grandparents very well and to have met 5 of my great-grandparents as a young child. My maternal grandmother was only forty seven when I was born and had a great influence on my life both positive and negative. She is currently a vibrant eighty three year old who dyes her eye-brows regularly and is proud of losing 13 kilo's. I will focus mainly on her stories.

My paternal grandfather came from a Catholic Lithuanian background and chose not to tell us a lot of stories about his youth since the memories of their suffering was too

much to bear. His only stories were about eventual accomplishments in a new country and his relationships with Afrikaans poets and writers. He wrote poems and translated Lithuanian texts when he was old but did not share it with us. I was very embarrassed when I came upon a personal poem and read it. His silence probably instilled a longing for Eastern European culture and Catholicism which I equated with mysticism. I feel deeply connected to him on a subconscious level. He wanted me to write stories instead of doing postgraduate work. He had a dry sense of humour and a soft expression when he looked at me. I know that he will be present should I ever choose to do so. His wife, my paternal grandmother was never a typical "granny", her stories were more an analysis of a specific historical time. She never connected with reality and lived in dramas of her own. This increased after the loss of a son and granddaughter. She was very artistic but found it very stressful to express herself. She wrote a few dramas for school plays, painted and sang beautifully. It was difficult to reach her on a verbal level but I felt very comfortable with her intellectual outlook and witty sense of humour. I visited her when she was terminally ill: she did not talk to me but turned me into some character- "the woman sits on the bed with her cell phone. She speaks. She stares outside". She created an image of someone who was quite desolate. I was going through a very unhappy time and I think that she sensed it and had to turn it into a story.

My maternal grandmother tells stories incessantly and has been doing so since I can remember. When I reflect on this habit I smile and feel frustrated at the same time. Three major themes appear in her stories namely family and cultural history, weight loss and values around the NG kerk and Afrikanerdom. A story that defined her life and influenced my mother and myself was the loss of her mother at age four and a half. She sketches a sad and beautiful picture of a bereaved man, walking with his little girl in his hand behind a casket on a wagon drawn by sixteen black oxen towards the family's grave yard. I believe that a need for attention and self-nurturing originated in this story. She learnt to manipulate people and became entirely selfish which has a large impact on the stories of both my mother and myself. She has always been a powerful woman who did not tolerate resistance and never accepted the fact that her children were adults.

On the positive side my grandmother's stories gave me a love of cultural history specially that of my own family and my Afrikaner roots. Her stories are very vivid and full of interesting details about her life. I feel happy that I spent time in the contexts that she refers to. I can still remember her parents' house and the beauty of an Eastern Free State

farm is a part of my soul. Her weight-and value stories are rather funny and can give birth to wonderful characters in new stories. When she was eighty she said that she had four children in four years and has yet to regain her figure: she was not ready to give up! I truly admire her story about growing old and would like to be as actively involved in my community at her age.

On the negative side is my frustration at never having a real conversation with a person who has such an influence on me. My grandmother engages in a monologue and has never showed an interest in my story. She talks incessantly and never asks questions if I volunteer information-she simply ignores it and continues with yet another story. She is not an intellectual person and lives in historical and practical details, she does not think on a macro level. One of the big differences in our stories is that I tend to do the opposite. She shuts out any ideology that doesn't fit into her value context whilst I try to fit in as much as possible. I dislike the fact that she accepts my participation in her value context without question. If I mention a close friend she will ask first to which congregation they belong. There is no space in her story for anyone outside the three Afrikaans churches within my circle of friends. I am realistic about our generational differences but must admit that it frustrates me especially since my mother is now doing the same.

The weight story though comical is, excuse the pun, large, in my life. I have no idea where biological genetics and psychological patterns of behaviour got mixed up! I know that her need for self-nurturing caused chaos and emptiness. Cleansing diets and stories about weight, racks and racks of books on the subject were with me since I was very young. There was always an empty can of condensed milk under her bed. Her larder burst at the seams and the kitchen was a scary minefield where food was filled with dollops of stress. Bad body image was ingested with our putu pap and braaivleis. She never ate too much in front of people and was an absolute perfectionist when it came to grooming-the little things that she could control. I feel that I have the responsibility to give the weight story a happy ending. My maternal grandfather was a perfect gentleman with a rich background I have a need to acknowledge him but will not discuss his story except to say that he did act as a superego at times.

I want to do something with the stories given to me and despite my frustration I also treasure the fact that they surrounded me with love.

APPENDIX 2

RAW DATA: PARTICIPANT 2

Dear Michelle,

I have decided to reply in a letter to you, personal and not give my opinions on the academic text, since this might remove me from writing from my heart about my grandparents, and allow me to dwell in theoretical mumble-jumble. academic The topic of reminiscence and my grandparents are very dear to me, since I have been fortunate to know all four of my grandparents rather intimately in different stages of my life. These stories also came in different languages, difference since my maternal grandparents immigrated to South Africa only after my mother was born, and they spoke either Freesian (a Celtic language) or Dutch (a Germanic language) in the house, and Afrikaans to me. Later on my grandmother also retold her stories in English to my wedded-on Scottish cousins. My paternal grandparents are very proud identity Afrikaners coming from long histories of Afrikaans families in South Africa.

Stories and reminiscence had different functions and places in my life. Most stories portrayed women as equal to men theme, or even stronger. Some stories were almost too good to be true, others were told of hardships, often stories were told with an inherent lesson in them, and there were even stories that were told about me and things I did when I was little. In doing this, my grandparents related extensively how I was very similar to this uncle or that great aunt, and they rooted me very firmly within my family. identity

Other sorts of stories that had a profound impact on me were the absent ones absent stories. My paternal grandfather is a second world war Nazi working-camp survivor, and this was rarely spoken about, certainly by him. Only recently he reveals glimpses of those days. The stories of what happened there were told when he was not around, and these stories were used in the family to justify some actions of his children, for instance, a rebelliousness towards injustice in a system, such as racism in South Africa. Having spent a large part of my childhood with them, I am sure the unsaid stories that were told with emotion and action, spoke loudly to form my more liberal viewpoints in politics.

My maternal grandmother use to tell stories of perseverance, such as how she, aged eight, had to walk through the snow carrying the sewing machine she used when tailoring other people's clothing. I believed this story made me want to be more responsible when I was eight, and probably burdened me with a sense of responsibility beyond my years.

My paternal grandmother told grandiose stories of victorious woman in the Anglo Boer War. Her reminiscence of her struggles as a young bride (always told very glamorised) and her later successes being *Mevrou Dominee* (the Pastor's wife) made me dream of also being a leader in my community. Both my grandmothers worked very actively with the "needy", although in very different ways, and this might have kindled my interest in a mental health care profession.

If I have to be honest some of the stories that meant most to me was not necessarily the ones told to me, but the stories I overheard being told about me, or a story that I told that was retold by them. In retrospect, I feel very honoured becoming part of the "legend" that my grandparents have told and some of them are still telling. These stories specifically formed my story of myself, that of being a caring person, being able to make others laugh, as well as the less pleasant stories of being the messy one in the family, and lying to my grandpa when I broke his coo-coo clock.

Stories of travel and foreign countries inspired me to travel beyond my boundaries, and perhaps also beyond the boundaries inside myself. To answer your question, the stories they have told had made a great impact on my life, and I am grateful for being a grandchild that could listen.

APPENDIX 3

RAW DATA: PARTICIPANT 3

First Narrative

Sharing in your experience of being a grand daughter is special, I am not only a grand daughter but also the only one both on my mother and father side - just like my mother. I have reminiscence of three grand mothers. Ouma Hartenbos that later become Ouma Bossie, Ouma Mosselbay (I have her names) and then there was L.

I would like to respond to this question: "What impact did/does reminiscence have on you as the listener" by telling you more the three grand mothers. It is quite complex and needs to be placed in context.

Ouma Mosselbay: I know very little about her, I was only two years old when she died interesting I feel like I have always know her. She is said to have been a gentle but firm lady who owned a small general dealer store in Montague Street in Mosselbay down stairs from the home my mother lived in most of her life. A home I have fond memories of visits over December holidays as a child. I know from listening to my mother's stories about her that she was a great seamstress and that she was known as the "best tailor" in town and had an affinity for hat making. There is a story about my mother "sneaking" from home normally on Sunday afternoons to go for a swim at the beach down the road - the Bakke. Still preferred swimming place of my brothers and I and their children. Needles to say my mother got caught out eventually and were grounded. She (my mother) had long curly hair and were unsuccessful in her efforts to not get it wet. And so it was then that Ouma Mosselbay was waiting for her on the stoep, folded arms (a posture she is remembered by). She would look at you with a straight face, apparently this look would confirm your suspicion of being in trouble but her body language would give her away. She is said to have been very bad at hiding that she was laughing judging not from her face but from her tummy. These muscles would move and what you would see is her arms bouncing with her laugh. I know that she loved Elisabeth Arden cosmetics and only used these products. This I learned from my mother that could not believe that I was using the same base just like my grand mother. Call it a coincidence if you like!

Ouma Hartenbos: She is from a big family of mostly daughters and two sons. They all lived in the Mosselbay / Hartenbos area and fondly refer to this home as "Goedemoed". My grandmother (on my father side) is the oldest daughter of six children, J (my grandmother), M, Ma, A, K and P. Her parents the sisters lovingly referrer to as "pappie" and "mammie" I know them as Ouma and Oupa L. I have visited this homestead once or twice in my lifetime but feels like I have known it all my life. Ouma J married N (N G) K and moved to the Suid West today

know as Namibia. Their marriage did not last very long and when my father was six years old she was asked for a divorce. The children and she came for a visit to "Goedemoed" during this time. Although my father came with he had to live with his father (N and Ouma L – my step grandmother in a farm called Homedene in the old Transvaal today known as Gauteng. The story goes that one winter's evening Ouma J was "asked" to leave the house by N, he is said to have been a difficult man. She went to the neighbours dressed only in a petticoat and had to ask for help. My father was the eldest, his sister Mi lived with her mother after the divorce. My father often tells his story of this time as a boy who did not understand and while he was waiting to return to his father he lived as a "boarder" under guidance of the owner in Mosselbay close to the community park. He would visit a gardener there everyday, would share his sandwiches and we fascinated by this man's strong arms and was especially impressed with the way his veins would puff on the black man's arms when he would cut the lawn. Interesting how my mother and father's stories of their childhood share history in Mosselbay and how very different their memories are. My mother of a loving stable home and my father – well the total opposite. The story goes that while N was visiting Transvaal today known as Gauteng for the purpose of buying a farm he met "L". He bought her father's farm and left my grandmother and his children to live with L, her boy called K J named after his father whom had died. My father left by train to live with his father, J and L. She never accepted my father nor as a child or a grown man, his wife or his children and N disinherited my father. J became his only son and his family till today lives on a wealthy dairy farm in Rodesia now known as Zimbabwe. My grandmother was not allowed to see my father and many of the stories she would tell would be about her efforts to be with him. She once was successful and for a while worked as matron in the boarding school where my father was. "N" shortly thereafter moved my father to another boarding school once successful. Ouma J remarried years later, L M became our husband and our step grandfather and yes he was exactly that – step. He like L never excepted my father, his wife and his children. He had only patience for his own children and their children. They moved to Hartenbos and lived there until his death in 2000. Our grand parents were referred to in terms of the town they stayed. Ouma Hartenbos stayed in Hartenbos and Ouma Mosselbay. If you are familiar to this area you would know that these two towns are very close to one another and for all practical reasoning (especially when you are a child) felt very much like the same place. December holidays in Hartenbos / Mosselbay is very much part of growing up for me, meeting the same friends every year – same place same time!

L: The preverbal stepmother and step grandmother. My brother and I have many stories of her accompanied by long lists of what we were not aloud to do when visiting. I am not going to tell them all I know is that we were all very aware of the fact that we were not wanted. Never understood it and then on her funeral I met some of her family and they would say – she (me) looks just like J and even though I was only a teenager I understood!

You asked how did or didn't the stories I heard at the knee of my grandparents impact on me and you are interested in the meaning it has for me if any. You also asked about how I view myself in light of the stories I heard, well:

I remember in Masters training one day we had to present our family tree, one of the supervisors commented on mine by saying – “Strong independent woman” in your family. In a way I knew that but for the first time became proud of this realisation. Your questions also remind me of a story told by a visiting guru from India who trained our yoga class in meditation techniques. He said a student once asked him to prove that God exists. The guru said to him: “Go to your room and in two hours come back to me with a piece of paper and on this piece of paper with the name and address of your great-, great-, great- grandfather”. Needless to say the student was unsuccessful. The guru asked: “do you believe that he existed”? The student could not his existence, as he is the proof that this man once existed.

I have reminiscence of three grand mothers but knows Ouma Hartenbos the best. She has always been the first person that phones me on my birthday, for years she would be the one that wakes the whole household with her call. And year after year she would say: “Mag al jou hartewense waar word”. Her stories of her mother being a maiden V and the many laughs we would have about falling in love with a pharmacist with the same name – refusing to become “Maria V”. Ouma Hartenbos does not speak much about her first marriage, being divorced or about her life with L M but she always speaks about my father and how difficult it was for them and mostly how God kept them all safe. She does not judge and I have never heard her saying a word about or against the men in her life that have wronged her. The four sisters all live in the Hartenbos / Mosselbay area, now as people in their eighties and fondly speaks about visiting “the old people”. “Goedemoed” is still home to them and their stories about “Goedemoed”, “mammie” and “pappie” are very much part of my life. There is a very distinct smell in this area a mixture of the sea, the mountains and akasia, and the voices of the people of “Die Kolonie”. My brothers and I share in this much-loved place on both my mother and my father side of the family. Ouma Hartenbos is grand mother to my brothers, their children and I as well as to my father and my mother, Hartembos / Mosselbay is Ouma Hartenbos and she represents – “Home” to all of us, and to me a future!

Letter to Participant 3

Dear ...

Thank you for your letter. I would like to know more about the personal meaning that listening to your grandmothers' stories had for you. Perhaps you can

say more about how your identity has been influenced by that of your grandmothers. Do you accept the values that are portrayed through their stories? You said for example that your family stories are stories of strong women. Which other qualities that you have come from your grandmothers. Please let me know as I would like to include this in my research.

Michelle Beneke

Second Narrative

The stories Ouma J told about how close her family stayed during all these years had a strong influence on my value system of what it means to be a family. The 4 sisters today are still together, they stay in the same area and look after one another. Recently one of the sisters Aunt M broke her leg and Ouma J went to take care of her. This made such an impression on me. Her strong family value system is something I truly appreciate about her and would like to instill in my family one day.

Ouma J accepted the family system she married into later in her life she did not discriminate I would say that she worked so hard at making them part of her family that I sometimes felt that they were more important to her. Today, she has more grandchildren and grand-grandchildren than any of the “grannies” in the retirement village she stays at. Acceptance for others and forgiveness is I think I learned from her. When I listen to her I get this sense of strengths, independence, belief in God and forgiveness. All qualities that I value today and recognize in myself.

Ouma J can make something out of nothing, she has the ability to create colourful patterned scatter cushions out of bits and pieces of cloth. She will remember the person she received the cloth from and on completion of her creation she would be able to tell you the history of her latest creation. She will return your gift to you later in some form of stitching. This ability to give back such a special gift has always made an impression on me and I am trying in my own life to achieve. Unlike Ouma J I have never been good with stitching work. In January this year I made a tablecloth at a retreat. The cloth was sun dyed and hand painted. I

gave it to her as a gift and it represented the richness of the Knysna sun, something special that I created and gave to her. Making something out of nothing like Ouma J would do.

All qualities I can identify that have been incorporated into who I am today. The way I think about family values and the specialness of creating something out of nothing and ultimately an ability to make space for others in my life; have been made part of who I am today, the way I think and ultimately have been instilled in me by the life Ouma J lived. Not only by the way she spoke but also by the way she lived her life – I have incorporated some of her beliefs and what she values into my life and this forms part of who I am today; the sister, friend, partner, mother and grandmother I hope to be one day.

APPENDIX 4

INFORMED CONSENT



University of Pretoria

Faculty of Humanities
Department of Psychology

University of Pretoria Department of Psychology

Informed Consent Form

Title: This is the way it was then, this is the way it is now: reminiscence as transgenerational transference of “knowing”

Principal Investigator: Michelle Beneke

Introduction

You are being invited to participate in a research study conducted by the University of Pretoria. The purpose of this project is to investigate how reminiscence is a cultural activity that has value in as far as it provides transgenerational continuity and a sense of rootedness. The focus falls on the listener.

The information you provide us will be used to identify themes around reminiscence and its transgenerational value.

Procedures, risks and benefits

If you decide to participate in this study, you will be asked to write about your experience as a listener to reminiscence. With your permission, we will publish your writing and extract themes from your writing.

Confidentiality

Your name and other information about your identity will not appear when we present this study or publish its results. The original documents will be destroyed when the study is finished.

Contact Information

If you have any questions or concerns about this study, please contact the University of Pretoria, Department of Psychology at (012) 420-2329.

Signature and Date

For the participant:

I hereby confirm that the researcher has informed me about the nature, conduct, risks and benefits of the study. I have read (or have had someone read to me) the above information regarding this study, and have had enough opportunity to ask questions. I declare myself willing to participate in the study.

Name of participant: _____

Participant's signature: _____

Date: _____

For the researcher:

I hereby confirm that I have informed the above participant about the nature, conduct, and risks of this study.

Researcher's name: _____

Researcher's signature: _____

Date: _____