

# Bubble Three

## Journey of the Inquiry

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## Bubble Three

### Journey of the Inquiry

*And so, on my journey of inquiry, I met people who, for a brief moment in time, shared moments of their lives and welcomed me into their space. They allowed me to share their joy, their pain and their sorrow. Above all, they told me their stories. This then is what happened on that part of my journey...*



## THE FIRST LINK IN A STRING OF RIBBONS THAT REFLECTS BUBBLE THREE

*Go forth now. Go forth and question. Ask and listen. The world is just beginning to open up to you. Each person you question can take you into a new part of the world. For the person who is willing to ask and listen, the world will always be new. The skilled questioner and the attentive listener know how to enter into another's experience (Patton, 1990:278).*

Queen Academia: How did you find these people? Perhaps you could clarify this for the audience and tell us more about your “sampling” process because that is the word that most of the audience are familiar with! And while you are at it, please explain the “methodological aspects” of your writing-up journey so that I will not need to interrupt you with unnecessary questions.

Carien: Let me answer your question by telling you who my research partners<sup>1</sup> are, and **how I found them, contacted them and met them**. That is where I will begin.

After I had read literature on purposive sampling (Gubrium & Holstein, 2002; Morse & Richards, 2002; TerreBlanche & Durrheim, 1999; Sherman & Reid, 1994), I initially thought that the process of selecting my research partners would be fairly straightforward. Even though I knew from the outset that this particular sampling technique might be more complex than other sampling strategies used, I had not expected to encounter so many uncertainties and imponderables in my selection process. Not even excellent advice from seasoned researchers on how to generate a sampling grid seemed to make the process any easier for me. In fact, it seemed to exert the opposite effect.

But, then, perhaps because the process *is* actually so easy, I merely *felt* that it was difficult because I was looking for difficulties where none existed. I might also have

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<sup>1</sup> I view the research participants as partners in this research because they emphasise through language the collaborative quality of my inquiry. I will at times use the terms participants and research partners interchangeably.

been expecting the process to be difficult because it is merely different from the other selection processes with which I am more familiar. In the initial stages of conceptualising this inquiry, I considered several criteria for selecting my research partners. I shall now describe them below.

One of my most important criteria for the selection of participant(s) was *accessibility*. This meant that I would prefer a participant who was more accessible over one who was less accessible. Accessibility was from the beginning one of my most decisive criteria for selecting research partners. Accessibility for me meant that I was being introduced to a family by someone who was known to and trusted by them. This turned out to be enormously helpful and important to the families as well (network sampling).

Accessibility for me also meant that I could be assured of predetermined levels of reliability and convenience when it came to coordinating times and places for meetings with my research families. This was necessary for maintaining the momentum of the research relationship. In practice it meant that the families concerned all lived within a reasonable distance from where I worked and/or lived and that they were able and willing to make time available for regular meetings.

Another selection criterion that I applied was what I have called the *quality* of the participants' experiences. "Quality" in this context included the ability of research partners to reflect and report on their experiences. This enabled me to obtain information that was sufficiently layered and detailed to build an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon under study. My purpose was to assemble a certain number of information-rich case studies.

For logistical reasons and for a desirable quality of the data creation, I gave preference to the Pretoria region (Gauteng, South Africa) and its immediate environment when searching for suitable research partners. This had the effect of narrowing the geographical and demographical variables to an urban context. In

addition, research partners could be either Afrikaans- or English-speaking<sup>2</sup> because these are the two languages in which I am fluent.

I preferred to work with parents of female gender, therefore all of my research partners were lesbian mothers. While I could just as well have based my research on male couples living as same-gender parents, I intentionally chose female couples for the purpose of this inquiry. The basis for this decision was mainly personal preference.

The decisions I took were also influenced by the increasing openness and visibility of same-gender relationships and families in South Africa in the fairly short historical period prior to and contemporary with my research. Gay couples started to adopt children in openly gay relationships in the decade of the 1990s (Jordaan, 1998; Singh, 1995), while the Human Tissue Act that made donor-insemination for lesbians legally possible was amended in 2000 (Underhill, 2003:75). Before this amendment, donor-insemination was not legally possible for any unmarried women.<sup>3</sup> Under these circumstances, I made the assumption that same-gendered families who were open and “out” about their situation were a relatively new phenomenon. I therefore focused mainly on same-gender couples that included previously married mothers who had older children from heterosexual marriages or same-gender couples that had adopted older children because such families would be in possession of the kind of information that I was seeking for my research.

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<sup>2</sup> My research partners were Afrikaans\* and/ or English speaking. Three of them spoke English as their mother tongue (although their father was Afrikaans), and we therefore conducted the interviews in English. With another research partner, I conducted the interviews in both Afrikaans and English because this gave the participant the opportunity to speak in either or both languages (whichever he preferred might prefer). I decided on this because he attends an English-medium school, both his mothers are Afrikaans, and their home language is mostly Afrikaans. The remaining four research partners' interviews were conducted in Afrikaans.

\*Afrikaans is a native language that is spoken in South Africa. It originated in part from the Dutch spoken by travellers and Settlers from the Netherlands from the 1600s. It has been transformed and affected by other European and Oriental languages.

<sup>3</sup> See Underhill, 2003.

I initially chose to work with adolescents because, firstly, they have reached that developmental stage in which the capacity for abstract thought is better developed and because they have the language skills to describe their experiences and the capacity to reflect on their experiences. I also realised that I would be able to engage with adolescents more easily and directly, in contrast to younger children who require a more circuitous and indirect approach. Secondly, I chose to work with adolescents because adolescence is as a developmental phase that is characterised by a heightened awareness of social relationships with friends and peers. This means that pressures to conform to their peers are far stronger among adolescents than they are among pre-adolescent children, and that acceptance by their peers and by society at large is also more important to adolescents (Levine & Moreland, 1995; Ray & Gregory, 2001; Wind, 1999).

But when I connected with my first family, I was immediately confronted by a dilemma that was occasioned by the selection criterion that I have just described above (the preference for adolescent research partners). The children in the family were a girl of 15 years and a boy of 11. My question was simply, "Should I include the boy of 11 years or not?" As I contemplated the boundaries of adolescence, I became aware of how enriching it might be to understand my projected research questions from the point of view of siblings – and how such an understanding might add colour, depth and a degree of illuminating complexity to my data. To my surprise I found that the younger child concerned was in fact just as capable of sharing and articulating his experiences as the older child. I therefore decided to include both children as research partners.

As mentioned earlier that I thought that the process of finding families would be uncomplicated. Almost every person I spoke to during the research proposal phase made careful inquiries as to how I proposed to find families of the kind that I needed to interview – and then told me that they personally knew same-gendered families. In spite of this encouraging information, I quickly learned that even though I might be introduced in a friendly way to a same-gendered family, I should not assume that they would be willing to cooperate as research partners in my

research. What happened was that some same-gender couples had children who were far too young even to be considered while others preferred to remain silent about their status. These difficulties made my search for cooperative willing research partners more arduous than I thought it would be. My situation finds a parallel in the research conducted by Warren (2002:87) who claims that one of the greatest problems is to identify *willing* participants.

I attempted to get into touch with families in various ways. I telephoned the minister of the Reformed Church in Pretoria, as well as a few psychologists that some of my colleagues or I knew. I also talked to friends and colleagues. While networking with various experts in the field of LGBT<sup>4</sup> studies I was invited to become part of a study group at OUT LGBT Wellbeing, the LGBT organisation of Pretoria. While part of that group, I was introduced to a family by one of the group. In addition, each family I worked with was able to give me at least one reference to another family. In the end, some of these families consented to participate. In this way, my network sampling became a reality.

This kind of network sampling (sometimes called “snowball sampling”) worked exceptionally well for me if one considers that this sampling technique is often used where access to persons is difficult or problematic because of the sensitivity of the topic or because potential participants are stigmatised (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2000:104). I also pursued a method of opportunistic sampling – sometimes called coincidental or emergent sampling (Patton, 2002:240) because the researcher follows up on leads obtained during fieldwork or takes advantage of the unexpected. Thus, for example, a friend whom I had not seen for years became one of my research partners.

Snowballing and opportunistic sampling are types of purposeful sampling that are widely used in qualitative research in full knowledge of the fact that the participant sample thereby obtained does not represent the wider population, but that it simply

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<sup>4</sup> LGBT: the acronym for **L**esbian, **G**ay, **B**isexual and **T**ransgender people and studies.

represents itself (Cohen et al., 2000:102). Merriam (1998:61) explains that purposeful sampling is based on the assumption that because the investigator wants to discover, understand and gain insight, he or she must select a sample from which the most can be learned. Because I wanted to collect rich, in-depth field texts so that I could gain insight into the participant children and how they function in their families and in the larger society in which they move, richness of data were also taken into consideration. Researchers do this so that they can increase the range of their data and so maximise the identification of patterns and themes that occur in the particular context under study (Erlandson, Harris, Skipper & Allen, 1993:82). In narrative research, participants are chosen, not because they are representative of a population, but because of their distinctive characteristics. This approach is, of course, congruent with the aims of qualitative research which does not attempt the kind of generalisation of findings that one strives to obtain in quantitative research.

My initial purpose was to find one or possibly two families to whom I would have easy access, and with whom I would be able to spend some time. As it turned out, the first family with whom I made contact was on the brink of moving to a town in another province, and we only had four weeks in which to complete the interviews. The parental couple participated in the interviews in spite of their imminent move and shared some of the experiences of their children. I decided then to use this data as pilot data, to utilise the opportunity that it gave me to refine my interviewing schedule, and to experiment with different forms of data creation. The two children of the family also shared some fascinating stories with me. And so I was most grateful to all of them that – despite their need to prepare themselves for their departure – they made time to see me. This gave me an opportunity to gather enough data to use in this initial stage, and I subsequently included their data in full in my research.

Extract from my research diary

20 Jan 2004

How did you make contact with K and E?

A friend of mine was studying with a friend who was involved romantically with the brother of one of the mom's. They made contact for me and the two moms agreed that I could phone them. I phoned the one mom (Z) and she said I must phone the other one (A) as her schedule is the busiest and Z's is very flexible. So I phoned the other mom (A) and I caught her in traffic whilst driving - but she agreed wholeheartedly (so it sounded) and gave me directions to their home. I was a bit anxious going to their home for the first time. I was early so I drove around the neighbourhood. It was a neighbourhood I was not familiar with and it surprised me to see how the beautiful old homes that had been restored, how well kept the beautiful gardens were, and even the odd neglected houses in between. As I approached their house that was built high up on a hill, I could hear laughter and talk from inside but there was no doorbell. I looked through the open door into an empty space, which I now know was their sitting room. There were boxes lying all around because they were packing (although I did not realise that then). All I saw were these high beautiful ceilings and a fireplace and some interesting paintings, and a piano - and then I wondered if they had remembered.

My partner had asked me before I went if I had confirmed and I had said that it was not necessary. But was this assumption a mistake? I knocked on the open door and one of the moms entered frowning. She had beautiful black hair, cut short in a bob. "You must be the researcher," she said. She then invited me in, but immediately turned and retreated back into the kitchen. I followed her and was met there by a woman with short hair and lots of energy. The family were all having dinner. She introduced Z and the kids. They were a beautiful young girl (definitely a teenager), and a young boy who was a bit shy, but who had the most beautiful hazel-brown eyes.

Mom A apologised to me, and Z immediately asked if I wanted to join them for dinner. Although I had already eaten, the food smelled divine. So after a few moments of coaxing from their side, I agreed. The girl then stood up and fetched me a plate and I was invited to help myself. I remember Z suggesting that I use some ginger for the small bout of flu that I said I was experiencing. The food was delicious. But what struck me most was the *hospitality* of the family. There they all were. The children were sitting happily around the table and there was such visible respect and openness among all of them. I was introduced as a woman who is studying children who have gay parents - "You know, it means that they have two lesbian mummies as parents."

What a wonderful evening it was! Our time was filled with conversation and wine. I spent two hours there. At 22:15 I had to excuse myself because I was really becoming tired and overwhelmed with all the info they were giving me. How I regret that "early" departure now because the next time the parents and I met again, that indefinable

"magic" was lost and I have not since been able to regain it. Hopefully I *will* regain it. Perhaps a short while from now because I have made plans to meet them all again.

But that is how I met them. I was irritated with myself for not having contacting them earlier because now they were moving in four weeks' time. But I consoled myself with the fact that there was a reason for that... I managed to see them three times before they left!

They referred me to another family. I have already spoken to and even met one of the moms, but she seems a bit defensive. Perhaps she is unwilling to involve her children? I do not know. It will be sad if I were to lose them. But maybe I can incorporate them as a referral group and then include that piece of the story...

**26 Jan 2004**

Today I learned one of my most important life lessons from Irma. It makes such enormous sense to me and I have incorporated it as a part of my life. She said: "Whoever will be there will be the right person. Whoever will cross your path will cross it at the right time and the right place - and they will present you with an opportunity. Whether the opportunity is the one that you had hoped for, or whether it will turn out the way you wanted it to turn out, that remains to be seen, and will depend on how you will deal with and handle the situation. But it will be a God-sent event. It will be the Universe calling you into action."

And so it has turned out. From the cancellation on Saturday - with my gut feeling telling me that that the mother wasn't ready and not interested in opening up her private space to a stranger - until today (Monday's) sudden and unexpected e-mail from T.\*

(\* This e-mail led me to my third family.)

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The first family's departure compelled me to contact my second family who were known to close friends of mine. I consider this family a "negative case" because it presented me with a challenging situation. What I mean by this is that my research partner talked little about her experiences of having two mothers, always answering my probes with a "I don't think about that", or "My friends and I don't talk about our parents", or "I can't remember". I struggled to get clarity on whether this was *really* how she felt, or whether it was just too early in the process for her to share deeper personal information. I sense now that I did not trust her and she did

not trust me at that stage. Because our relationship developed rather slowly, I felt motivated at that time to begin to look for more research partners.

Unfortunately, my contacts and resources at this time yielded no positive results because some families that I phoned cancelled their appointments while others postponed their decision on whether they would cooperate or not until some later time. The South African holiday season certainly did not help matters, and my anxiety increased as I was left hanging with a research project with too few partners.

But nothing happens without a reason. This holiday period gave me time for concentrated reading and for looking at my first interviews with the benefit of distance in time and therefore to confront some of my own assumptions, fears and challenges more reflectively. In the following year, I was ready to continue with the data collection process with renewed energy and passion during the months of February, March and April (2004). By April, I began to get a sense that I was approaching a data saturation point even though I felt that it was imperative that I should continue to follow up various leads with certain families in case I should need this additional data later in the study. I therefore interviewed another three families after I had completed my series of interviews with the first two families. It was a decided advantage that there were *three* children in one of these last three families.

So, my dear Queen Academia, I found eight children in five families with which to illustrate and explore the experiences of children growing up in same-gendered families. Here are some demographic details for those who are interested in some of the specifics: the ages of the children ranged from 9 to 18 years; two children belong to the racial group referred to as “Coloureds” (in South Africa), and the other six would be regarded as belonging to the racial group identifiable as “white”. Although I used no formal instrument to measure their socio-economic status, one family belonged to a low-income group, another (one) belonged to a high-income group, and the remaining three families lived in neighbourhoods that one would

associate with middle-income families. Two children had been adopted. All the others had been born in the context of heterosexual relationships (marriage) from which all the mothers in this sample had removed themselves by means of divorce prior to my contact with them and their families. Two couples had been together for 15 years; one couple for 12 years, and another couple for one year. One mother has recently met her new partner, and although they were not then living together, they are beginning to share their lives in various ways. Thus, for example, the second mother is taking on some of the “family tasks” such as driving the child to various appointments in the city. I decided to include this child’s story as she had grown up since a relatively young age with same-gender parents (two mothers in one household).

I contacted each family in turn by telephoning them and introducing myself. I informed the research partners how I had obtained their names and how I had introduced my research project to them. I conveyed to each of the families that I was aware that it might be difficult to talk about this topic because of its sensitive nature, and that cooperation in the research would require a commitment by each family member to attend a number of scheduled meetings. I invited them for coffee or arranged a first meeting to give them more information that would help them to decide whether they wanted to participate or not. Most families were keen and enthusiastic and quickly set an appointment to meet me. My own disclosure about my personal orientation and domestic situation to the families facilitated openness and eagerness to engage in discussions of the topic under investigation. One mother for example said, *It was reassuring because I did not want someone coming in here telling me again that we are wrong.* Others were put at ease when I mentioned someone familiar to the family (*When I heard you mentioned X’s (friend’s) name, I really felt more comfortable*), while others asked more questions over the phone before agreeing to a meeting. One parent cancelled the first contact session. When I telephoned her again, she had moved to another city. She did however bring me into contact with another family who did eventually participate.

My goal for the first session with each family was just an initial discussion about the rationale and methodology for the research and some of the key ethical considerations such as confidentiality, issues that I considered to be fundamentally important to all concerned. Without fail, the parents started sharing their stories spontaneously and these stories (recollections of experiences, explanations of various kinds, anecdotes and opinions) were extremely rich in circumstantial detail. I did not capture these first contacts on audio tape because I had not expected that these initial conversations would be so rich and valuable and so I did not have any equipment with me. In addition, some of the parents did not want to be tape-recorded.

So I used these first sessions to present a brief summary of my research proposal and explained my assumptions and ethical concerns. I quickly realised that my research partners were far more interested in sharing their stories and opinions than in the “mechanics” of research. Even so, I was amazed at the trust the parents showed in me. Consent forms were signed by the parents and the children (an example of the form I used is included as Addendum A). Warren (2002:87) makes an important statement when he says that the researcher’s understanding of what “consent” means and the understanding of the participant may not be congruent from the beginning, or that it may shift or change over time. This insight proved helpful at various times, especially when the children asked repetitive questions such as Ryland’s “Will mom also get a different name?” or Kim’s “What are you going to do with this?”. These kind of events also occurred at various times *after* all the interviews had been concluded and therefore reinforced in my own mind the need for the researcher to remain open and aware of the process and to understand the ways in which it may develop. It also made me realise the importance of providing continuous reassurance.

At one stage in my research I wondered what motivated these families to participate. The parents usually said that they had decided to become involved in order to help other gay families and to advance research in this area. They also cited (in some cases) the need for personal fulfilment that would arise out of the process

and some asserted that friends or family were not usually interested in the deeper emotional processes that are implicated in establishing a same-gendered family. It might be assumed that the children were decisively influenced by their parents' motivation. I sensed the difficulty that some of them had in trying to understand why the process was so intense. I assume that they had initially imagined that the study would be of the magnitude and intensity of a long homework assignment or perhaps the writing of a book. It also became evident to me that the children found the writing of recollections in diary form rather arduous and irksome. They did however respond eagerly to verbal prompts and they cooperated with enthusiasm. The ability to share and reflect on personal experiences varied from one child to another. It is interesting to note, in the context of relationship building, that some of the participant children needed more time to develop their trust in me before they were willing to share their more intimate experiences. Other participant children, in contrast, were more ready to share emotional issues from the beginning of our meetings.

Warren (2002:90) also notes the eagerness that research partners usually demonstrate, and my personal experiences resonated with those of Vijay Reddy (2000:336) when she wrote: "The participants also seemed pleased to tell their stories. Many saw in me an attentive and interested listener, even if it was for research purposes".

However constructive the process outcomes, I admit that the willingness of families to participate creates a certain degree of bias in the research because the question of why some families are not willing to participate remains unanswered. The importance of willingness was also brought home to me during the process of member checking when I found that I needed to delete certain information that were so personal for the children that I would therefore not be able to include them in the final text. I wish therefore to make it absolutely clear that I can only present the reported experiences of these children – but that these reported experiences also serve to enhance our understanding of what it means to grow up in a same-gendered family.

Queen Academia, I would like to share with you what happened during my process of data creation. I encountered quite a difference between my initial ideas about **data creation** until the stage where I engaged in real interaction with the **research partners**. At the beginning of my research I thought of using different strategies such as diaries,<sup>5</sup> personal letters<sup>6</sup> and family stories,<sup>7</sup> but I came to realise that the successful implementation of these strategies was vastly dependant on the individual child involved. Instead, my participation in face-to-face conversations allowed for spaces and times in which my research partners and I could relate to one another as individuals who were equally responsible for the co-creation of a “reality”.

I attempted to incorporate some of the methods mentioned in the paragraph above. I explained to the children how one could keep a diary by demonstrating diary techniques to them. I did the same with regard to the writing of letters. After three months of pursuing these methods unsuccessfully, I decided that I would not push or pursue these methods any further. The boys especially resisted any form of writing from the outset. While some enjoyed drawing pictures and seemed very comfortable with that, they preferred that I should ask the questions and suggest topics for discussion. One girl wrote a small part of her life story and in that way shared with me what she experienced when her biological parents divorced. While I sometimes specifically asked for family traditions or family stories in interviews, this information was often spontaneously shared by the research partners.

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<sup>5</sup> The writing of journals and diaries.

Since some of the journal content will be made available to the researcher, this knowledge influences the participants' way of sharing. The content that is to be made public for purposes of research should only be used with the participant's consent (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000:102-103).

<sup>6</sup> Letters as field texts

In the times between the visits (shadowing) or interview times, the researcher and participant might use “letters” as another way of generating field texts (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000:106).

<sup>7</sup> Family stories and stories of families

These may be stories that are handed down through the generations. They often contain inspirational accounts of how we occupy an honourable part in the lineage of our blood family from ancient times. In these stories we emphasise the “myths” that have sustained us and our people. As Stone (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000:113) note: “The family's first concern is itself, but its second realm of concern is its relation to the world.”

Some research partners showed me treasured family artefacts.<sup>8</sup> After a few initial interviews, I made the decision to stop trying to control the natural flow of research relationship building and instead merely to immerse myself in the unique dynamics that presented themselves whenever I met each family or one particular research partner in that family. I must confess that I felt enormously relieved when I went over some of the notes that I had made during the Banff workshop in May 2003<sup>9</sup> and re-read Jean Clandinin's words which explain that the process of testing and deciding among the different processes of data creation is "not as clean as it looks".

The data that I have collected has been drawn mainly from in-depth interviews<sup>10</sup> because this is one of the most powerful ways of capturing the voices<sup>11</sup> of research partners in a detail-rich format. In addition, I have also selectively incorporated the following elements into the fabric of the interviews:

- Time lines.<sup>12</sup> These might include when and where research partners were born; some details about the family background of research partners, such as brothers or sisters; information about extended family members or other significant others, including (where relevant) their place and date of birth;

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<sup>8</sup> Photographs and other persona and family and social artefacts

Many of us collect a variety of materials as we compose our lives. We may collect and save photographs or other artefacts that are significant reminders of people and events which have represent the "great moments" in our lives – or of special places or events. Each photograph marks a special memory around which we construct stories (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000:114).

<sup>9</sup> Clandinin, D.J. Workshop notes: Experience and story. *The fourth conference on advances in qualitative methodology*. Banff, Canada, 4 May 2003.

<sup>10</sup> Unstructured, interactive interviews (in-depth interviews)

This type of interview offers the participant an opportunity to tell his or her story with minimal interruption by the researcher. Unstructured interviews are most appropriately used in studies where the researcher seeks to learn primarily from participants what matters (Morse & Richards, 2002:91,93). The role of the researcher is to listen and let the participant tell her/his story. The researcher can ask questions about whatever is not clear, preferably during a second interview. Unplanned unanticipated questions may be used, as well as probes for clarification.

<sup>11</sup> Voice is an acknowledgement that you have something to say. It conveys the meaning that resides in an individual and it enables that individual to participate in research. "Finding your voice" relates to something else: who will be heard and who will be silenced (Clandinin & Connelly, 1994:423-424). It is no longer only "a voice from nowhere" – a purely academic voice, even though researchers have become more aware of how they express themselves and their participants (Lincoln & Guba, 2000:183).

<sup>12</sup> Time lines as part of "annals and chronicles"

Annals are like chronicles but their focus is more on stories (the root of "annal" comes from the Latin word for year, i.e. annum. They may contain memories, events, and stories. These memories and stories can serve to provoke discussion between the participant and the researcher. "Chronicles" are regarded as the story of a sequence of events that occurs in serial time (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000:112).

significant “highs and lows” in their educational milieus, and data about their sporting, recreational, social and other activities.

- Collages. These are pictures that they drew to express their interests, aspirations and dreams.
- Personal artefacts. These were often spontaneously shared. Examples are the research partner’s name as it would appear in Chinese characters, and photograph albums.
- Other personal writings such as a life story.

My research diary, in both hand-written and electronic form, became a valuable source and resource since it contains my field notes about occurrences in the interviews that were not recorded on audio tape, and my observations about the interviews that took place. From April 2004 onwards, I began to structure my notes in terms of my daily schedule and other logistical considerations and methodological requirements. I also began to include a personal section about my growing insights and reflections (Lincoln & Guba, 1985:327). While I mostly wrote rapidly and intuitively, the above considerations helped me to keep me attentive to methodological requirements and the significance of whatever interpretations occurred to me during the process.

As I have mentioned before, the meetings with my research partners usually started out as casual conversations<sup>13</sup> and evolved into in-depth interviews as I asked more questions on progressively deeper personal levels or as the children began to share more intimate and personal experiences. Even with parents, what sometimes started out as simple conversations over dinner or coffee sometimes evolved into

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<sup>13</sup> Informal conversations

Although conventionally used for discourse and conversation analysis, I made use of informal conversations as a data-generating strategy to enhance the development of the various relationships. In addition, I used this technique to elicit deeper meanings and noteworthy experiences apart from those that had been presented in an interview. Morse and Richards (2002:95) have indicated that the spontaneity and informal atmosphere might bring new information to light. These authors state that informal conversations mean a face-to-face encounter that is characterised by equality among participants and the flexibility to allow participants to choose their own formats and topics. They are conducted in a situation of mutual trust, and in an atmosphere of listening and caring for the experience described by the other. The informal conversations were taped and transcribed. I reflected upon issues of memory and perception of these conversations in my research diary.

the sharing of the intensely personal meanings that they ascribe to their daily lives or conversations about the construction of gayness and coming out, and other intensely relevant topics. I treated the interviews ultimately as “interactive conversations” (Ellis & Bochner, 2000; Fontana & Frey, 2000; Olesen, 2000).

I have also interwoven some of these conversations with the parents into the experiences that the children reported wherever I felt that by doing so I could enrich the stories and make them more representative of the family’s experience as a whole. This raises what might be an ethical dilemma which I need to report here. Some elements of these stories do not reflect exactly what the children spontaneously shared with me and are therefore used sparingly as a literary device, the intention of which is to report and convey the child’s story indirectly. These expressions therefore occur in the text as the parents’ words. I have incorporated these “interviews” or meetings with the parents as data-creation strategies because although they are artificial in one sense, they authentically support the children’s experiences as they were reported to me. I therefore regard this strategy as a creative “artifice” that reflects the truth of events as I encountered them or as they were reported to me.

I do not regard this strategy as embodying any kind of “artistic” truth (although I respect that kind of truth for what it is in its own context). My purpose was not therefore to create fiction (as commonly understood), but merely to use what I *already* knew to be true from numerous contacts with my research partners to create a more coherent and condensed form of their truth in another more refined and polished format. I am certain that I have accurately and carefully re-told their stories from all the disparate elements that inevitably accumulate over many contact sessions, occasions and interviews. To me the difference between exact reportage or even selective reportage in an academic narrative and what I have produced here is the difference between showing someone all the loose pieces of a jigsaw puzzle and showing them the whole picture that is made when all the pieces are assembled. Such a strategy does involve a process of selection and interpretation, and one might therefore say that there were many bits of another

jigsaw puzzle that I discarded as I assembled the final picture that I have presented in this research.

My purpose in co-creating or retelling the stories of my research partners was to make their stories more vivid, immediate and comprehensible while eliminating the interference caused by the inadequacies of human communication. I also utilised this method of co-creating supportive data to show how the viewpoints of the parents could clarify the children's viewpoints by expanding on them, confirming them, differing from them and adding to them. By omitting events and details which were superfluous because they had already been reported (repetition) or because they were incoherently expressed (incompleteness), I have attempted to present a readily comprehensible picture. In doing so, I claim that I have added nothing new or untrue to the intention of what my research partners were reporting, but only that I have eliminated those elements that would have rendered the text unreadable or unbalanced.

This kind of co-creation of a product that reflects the truth that the researcher perceives is a variant form of normal academic reportage from research data in qualitative research. The difference is that whereas I have used one kind of semi-literary method to report my narratives and their meaning, other qualitative researchers (in my opinion) report just as selectively by using another kind of semi-literary method (the literary "persona" of a ponderous and weighty academic who writes in the style that has been hallowed by countless tomes of quantitative truth). While my reportage and construction may appear to be more "literary" in style and theirs may appear to be more "objective" and "scientific", my contention is that both styles are useful vehicles for reporting the truth as the researcher has understood it. Their differences are, in my opinion, merely stylistic because both techniques of qualitative research involve fundamental procedures of ethical data collection, organisation of data, analysis of data and, finally, a considered reportage of data and conclusions. The form that the final reportage takes requires the researcher to make a considered choice about the style and manner in which he or she will present the data and conclusions. All qualitative research needs to be

presented in the format of a certain style. Although my style is a metaphor of a literary product (often associated with art), I have taken great care to ensure that the truth, opinions and conclusions that it conveys are no less reliable and dependable than qualitative research that is written up in the style that is a metaphor of “scientific” or “objective” quantitative research. Both may be said to be styles although the latter is a widely accepted convention in qualitative research, and both are useful as vehicles for conveying truth and advancing knowledge. I agree that the extent to which each particular style is more dependable in terms of the trustworthiness, confirmability and dependability of the research is a debatable issue and could become a topic for a great deal of research. But my opinion is that the conscious and careful use of this method of qualitative research definitely opens up the possibility of richer and more detailed descriptions of the lives of individuals, which in turn can help us to achieve a clearer understanding of our research partners and thus accomplish the aims of our research.

**Queen Academia, in reflecting on the process of interviewing** I came to realise that the most significant organising principle for me in this research is the recurrent theme of *relationships*. This may sound simple, but my experience has been that relationships is a theme or topic that is inexhaustible because it remains a topic of perennial human interest throughout all ages and phases of collective and personal human culture and civilisation and because it contains countless layers of significance, meaning and emotion and so reveals to us innumerable valuable human possibilities and potential.

In the relationships that I was building with the children and families who became my research partners, what made an enormous impact on me and decisively affected the process were factors such as the extent to which I got along with them, the extent to which the child trusted or began to trust me, whether or not I missed cues, and the extent to which the child would speak by becoming silent, talkative or voluble. As Brigitte Smit (2004:1) notes: “Who interviews, matters!” The researcher critically influences the quality of the knowledge that is constructed because the interviewer remains the main instrument for creating and generating knowledge

(Kvale, 1996:117). Interviews are a form of jointly produced discourse in which the interviewer is always implicated in the construction of the phenomena analysed: her mode of interviewing, her relationship to her participants, her method of transcription and her analysis and interpretation are all crucial. The inquiry also elicits much more of a person's life than the narrowly specific and particular situations experienced by the participants (Mishler, 1986:99). Janice Morse (1994:225-226) is of the opinion that qualitative research is only as good as the researcher who, through skills, patience and wisdom, obtains whatever information is necessary to produce a qualitative study that is rich in detail during data creation and fieldwork.

I really had to work to acquire the skill of "not-knowing" in order to truly understand the depth of what is meant and *implied* by socially constructed meanings; to understand that I construct knowledge through my questions and the manner in which I listen to answers and how I react to these, and how the children react to my questions or comments. In spite of my curiosity and attempts to be somewhat self-effacing and non-dogmatic, I observed myself being too controlling on some occasions and rather too accommodating at other times. I realised that I would have to reinforce my professional skill of interacting patiently and with great circumspection in order to establish relationships, to trust and to allow the children and their parents to trust me, to simply *be there with them* – while never forcing my own topics, agendas or the mechanics of the interviewing process onto them.

I need to admit here that in the beginning I probably exerted too much pressure (however benign it may have been) in my quest to obtain results and to extract extensive and "deep" answers, and in so doing I probably did not give myself or my research partners enough time to become thoroughly comfortable in the research process. As I listened to my first interviews and reflected on them with experienced researchers, friends and colleagues, I came to realise how my accustomed *therapeutic* style of interviewing also played an enormous role in the research interviews. Some of my colleagues advised me to probe more deeply and to take the words of the children and reflect these back to them. They also showed

me where my probing had not been effective and those occasions when the children had ignored me and gone on with their own stories. Other colleagues advised me that as mistakes are inevitable, I should try to relax more and focus on the children or else I would become too self-conscious and that this would be unhelpful. In addition, I took refuge in the opinions of Ellis and Berger (2002) on how interview styles differ. Carolyn Ellis writes about the differences between their (Leigh Berger and her) styles and says:

*I am reminded that we all have to find a comfortable interactive style in interviews that emphasises relationship and communication (Ellis & Berger, 2002:867).*

I have a very empathetic way of interviewing in the research situation because I prefer to reflect on what is happening during a conversation and empathise with the people that I interview. Because I respect children as human beings, I want to create a space in which they can feel safe to disclose themselves to me, especially in matters that might be shame-provoking, troubling or controversial. I thus practised many of the skills that I learned as a therapist in the research situation by allowing people to give me information to which I listened in a reflective mode without too much probing, without taking on the persona of an investigator, and without searching for deeper layers from which to extract the information that I might have needed. I believe that I am skilful in using this kind of unthreatening and gentle approach as I reflect on words and accommodate the client's or interviewee's pain, embarrassment and anxiety. I also believe that one needs to have a vision of what it is that one is investigating so that deeper layers of meaning will eventually become accessible to all involved. It seems that my accustomed empathetic style (so effective in the therapeutic situation) at times blocked my need to be decisively interrogative in interviews because I found that it was not always easy for me to elicit the data that I needed from my research partners.

My professionally therapeutic style thus sometimes prevented me from obtaining optimal results as quickly as I might have. I realised that empathy had become such a part of my personal therapeutic manner that I was inevitably perhaps *too* empathetic on many occasions, too "there" for the interviewees and for what they

were saying to elicit their frame of reference as clearly as I would have liked to have done in the time available. This “being there for another” thus sometimes proved to be an obstacle because I found that I sometimes wanted to intervene and take on the role of a teacher or guide in the research situation by proving an alternative point of view, especially when confronted by religious beliefs. Sometimes I felt a need to provide them with easily readable literature on religious questions (especially), and a need to share some of the other children’s stories, and even to use examples from literature so that they would come to realise that they were not alone.

However, I felt intuitively that I should not actively interfere or intervene too much, that it was often not the “right time” and “right place” for doing so, and that it would possibly jeopardise the trust and openness that I was trying to build up with the various children. I found it extremely challenging in my persona as a researcher to endure and accept in silence the homophobic responses that arose in the interviews and not take them personally. It was simply not permissible for me as a researcher to allow my own assumptions and self-talk to interfere with trying to capture the authentic viewpoints of the children. These problems and difficulties are often present in the interviewing process and in the underlying stream of non-behavioural and even unconscious manifestations that occur in relationships.

“Consistently admitting ambiguity, this is what gives social science its distinctive hallmark” (Alvesson & Skoldberg, 2000:288). This is exactly how I felt. Were my unwittingly therapeutic attitudes and habits in the beginning necessarily a hindrance to the data-creation process? My answer would be: Yes and no. There were times when I was quite aware that I was not probing the children’s responses in an attempt to elicit their hidden messages. But I was doing it because I was engaged in a process of allowing them to establish their trust in me and let them find their own way of presenting whatever information they wished to disclose. In addition, I was aware of my own unique style, my own humanity (my “Dasein”). I felt that my manner of proceeding was consonant with who I was and I could not disown it without being false to myself and whatever good I hoped to achieve by

doing this research. This reflection process also revealed to me some of my own insecurities about the interviewing process.

Through self-reflection, constant conversations with myself in my diary (“memos”), my partner, with friends, and with close colleagues who are experts in research methodology, I tried to explore my own story, my biases and assumptions, and my beliefs and viewpoints because these were making an impact on my interviewing technique: on how I framed the questions, how I was listening, on how I interpreted their answers, and consequently how I would analyse and interpret the data. The phrase used by Patti Lather’s (in Lather & Smithies, 1997:xiv), namely “getting out of the way and getting in the way”, took on a deeply personal meaning for me because I could see that my subjectivity could become an obstacle – especially in the earliest interviews. I therefore continued to explore my own story and assumptions without ever forgetting the cautionary advice of Alvesson and Sköldberg (2000:291) that “freeing oneself from [one’s own] preconceptions is, of course, a pious hope rather than an achievable goal”.

At other stages of the process, I felt that my literature readings were clouding my openness, my questions and my listening. I would sometimes catch myself during an interview trying to confirm or disconfirm some of the previous research outcomes. I also realised that it is a part of the iterative process of interviewing to analyse, read and integrate disparate aspects of the research process and to make sense of what is happening. There were times when I decided to stop reading for a while on a specific topic, and other times when I would immerse myself in that very same topic, whether it was LGTB psychology and parenting, heteronormativity and queer theory, or research methodology.

The research process is a learning process and I have learned along the way to start the interviews by engaging in “small talk” and to listen to what is most interesting to the research partners at that moment, and not by going in too deep, too quickly. I prefer to stay focused on whatever input the research partner may offer. While this is happening, I restrain myself from interrupting their train of thoughts and merely

reflect their words back to them. Even though this restraint requires me to suspend the introduction or discussion of any of my own research programme at those times, my own research questions and interests always remain clearly focused (but unarticulated) in my thoughts. And even though I am totally involved in reflecting back to them their own concerns, worries, hopes, doubts, anticipation and fears, my ultimate purpose (the research programme) remains clear in my mind. I thus provide whatever feedback or information they might need to answer their questions and reassure them about the research, and together we explore whatever feelings the prospect of becoming involved in and cooperating with my research programme arouses in their minds.

As the process developed I sometimes wrote down a few pertinent questions that I could use for probing. These questions did not constitute an interview schedule but were more in the nature of questions that I could use (when the appropriate moment should arise) to help my research partners to open up and disclose the information that I was seeking. Eventually, after later interviews, I began to summarise themes or record questions that I felt needed further probing or exploration. Throughout this process I had to discipline myself not to worry about obtaining the information that I knew was right there and focus instead on listening with full attention to the child. Part of the discipline of interviewing requires the interviewer not to force the pace and so cause a research partner to clam up or take fright. In addition, one of the advantages of my situation was that my research partners were committed to a series of interviews. Because of this advantage, I did not need to worry if I suddenly remembered or thought of an important question that I felt I should have asked but had not because I always knew that there would in all probability be another occasion on which to pursue the question. As Plummer (1983:97) states: "Never worry about getting it all at that moment" – although one is always aware that the moment, the "vibe" and the atmosphere are never quite the same from one encounter to the next (even though all encounters may be helpful and productive in their own way). Another factor that I had to bear in mind is that I might induce some lack of trust and confidence in the child if I should miss an important cue. Even so, one should not become obsessive about such possibilities

because one's silences sometimes serve the purpose of the research in the sense that they often reduce the degree of pressure on the child. One thus needs to balance all the positives and negatives of each situation and trust in the basic viability of the professional interviewing process – and also trust one's instincts and common sense. I presume that that is part of what we mean when we talk about the "art" of interviewing.

I believe I had established an effective rapport with my research partners because the repeated contacts I had with my research partners enabled me to establish a sound basis for deeper levels of intimacy and trust so that the research partner and I could discuss various sensitive issues that he or she would never normally discuss with an outsider – or even perhaps (in some cases) with his or her close friends. Adler and Adler (2002:523) mention two different approaches to follow when interviewing sensitive topics. One is *the one-off relationship*. This is well suited to sensitive topics because participants will have less fear and therefore presumably be more forthcoming if they believe that they will never cross paths with the researcher again. The other is that of *the prolonged engagement*. My personal preference is for the latter because I believe that trust develops over time and that one should give oneself enough time to get to know the research partners as people and human beings in unique situations, to empathise with them, to reflect their feelings, and to demonstrate an authentic care and interest in them before probing for the research information that one is seeking. The practice of postmodern and feminist ethnographers suggests that when participants and researchers *share* information, the interview context is more relaxed and comfortable and the hierarchical gap between researchers and participants is diminished (Adler & Adler, 2002:528). An example from my study is the rapport that built up between me and Luanne. This happened because as we played guitar together, listened to music together and watched extracts from videos and DVDs together on a number of different occasions, communication between us started to become more and more relaxed and opened up. Adler and Adler (2002:528) also state that *a less structured atmosphere* enhances rapport with the research partners.

In order therefore to create an authentic research relationship, I consciously cultivated towards my research partners an attitude of authentic respect for them as individuals as well as sensitivity to whatever might be important to them – whether what was important to them was something pleasant or unpleasant or whether it was grounded in fantasy or illusion. By this I mean that I simply accepted them (in each case) as they were, without any desire to impose my own agenda on them. If I managed to obtain useful information and disclosures from them later in the process, it was, I believe, because I had deliberately invested so much time and effort in getting to know and appreciate the realities of their unique situations *before* I ever reached a point where I felt that I could probe for the information that I needed in a way that would not diminish their trust and faith in me. Because I had an ever-present desire not to harm my young research partners in any way at all, I prepared their parents by making it plain to them that negative thoughts and feelings might be awakened and aroused by the research process. In anticipation that this might happen (although I was doing everything to minimise such possibilities), I continually checked with each set of parents whether they were able to detect or discern any signs of negativity or adverse reaction in my research partners. I also asked each set of parents to advise me right in the beginning about how I should approach their children. I especially sought the parent's advice about family-appropriate vocabulary. I asked them whether I should refer to them as "gay moms", "a mom that loves another mom", "a mom that loves a woman" or whether I should use the circumlocution: "having two moms".

The realities of the balance of power in the research situation were also somewhat novel to me. I remembered how strange it was in the beginning for me to have to telephone various families with requests because I was used to families or parents telephoning *me* since that is the normal procedure in my practice as an educational psychologist. Since I was acutely aware that my gayness could be a factor that would crucially affect their response one way or another, I considered anew on each occasion how I should introduce this crucial information. As it turned out, I became well aware of how they perceived me through their comments and questions about my own relationship and my personal feelings towards having children. Some

parents asked for advice about discipline and parenting (these questions were more impersonal in tone), and others inquired about how their children were coping and whether they should be concerned about anything (these questions were more personal). I asked some of the children directly what they had thought when they heard that I was coming, and some of the children asked me questions about the research process. Some of the children did not want the meetings to end; others wondered whether their mother and I would become friends. But, as more and more telephone calls and text messages passed to and fro, I could sense that a trusting relationship was being established between them and me.

Relationships are at the heart of this kind of research, and it is during the research process that we begin to experience those flashes of subtle and intuitive awareness and sudden (or gradual) realisations that constitute the raw data for both research partners and researcher. Over a period of time we also begin to experience confidence in the authenticity and benignity of the research process. There is a kind of solidity that develops in relationships because we construct our research from the very beginning on sound ethical foundations and because we remain loyal to a higher morality than that which is reflected in the slick clichés and platitudes of conventional morality and religion. It is never easy to achieve this or maintain this. Sometimes our research calls us to confront, defy and transcend the instincts that control the mass of humanity or the well-established prejudices of our society. Our experience of moral reality should be deepened by the power and demands of the relationships that we form, and these cannot but influence the course of our research. As researchers we have a certain responsibility, and a need to cultivate response-ability in what we do. As researchers, “we leave footprints” (Cox, 2003<sup>14</sup>). As Jean Clandinin said (2003<sup>15</sup>), we become friends with our participants, and, when it’s all over, we cannot simply say “It’s done, I’m leaving.” We must face the fact that our engagement with others (and their kindness and generosity to us in

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<sup>14</sup> Cox, S.M. 2003. Walking the talk: researcher responsibilities and response-ability in community-based research. *Paper delivered at the fourth Advances in Qualitative Methods Conference*. Banff, Canada, 3 May 2003.

<sup>15</sup> Clandinin, D.J. Workshop notes: Experience and story. *Workshop presented at the fourth Advances in Qualitative Methods Conference*. Banff, Canada, 4 May 2003.

permitting us to interact with them) continually creates the possibility of long-term relationships that require an ethics of care, of ongoing negotiation and, above all, a need and sincere desire to honour the lives of the research partners.

Perhaps now is the appropriate time to share the details of how I implemented **ethical care** and some of the **technical aspects** involved...

I selected pseudonyms for each of my research partners in consultation with them in order to protect their identity and privacy. Although two of the children were not particularly bothered by this, I nevertheless urged them to provide me with alternative names. Furthermore, wherever a specific statement might indicate a unique context that could reveal the identity of the research partner or the parents, indications are given in footnotes that alert the reader to any changes that have been made, or the original text has been “blocked out” in black. I also considered fictionalising details about the composition of each family and the precise relationships of siblings to each other because I thought that such details might also provide clues to family and personal identities. But this proved to be too difficult because the individuals in each family are so inseparably and meaningfully intertwined in their constructions of reality that it would have been impossible to convey the unique experiences of each individual and family if I had separated the research partners from one another.

I do think that the actual process of recording of the interviews affected the quality of the interview. It certainly did at times affect my comfort level during the interviews. Thus, for example, I decided not to record the session of one meeting and I found that it actually worked out well, and both the child and I had a very good session. Even after I thought that I had basically completed her story for the purposes of my research, I visited her again to help her tune her newly purchased guitar, and in that meeting spontaneous disclosure and conversation began to flow once again. I also noticed that some of the other children would stare with wide-open eyes at the tape recorder until I concealed it with (say) a book, whereupon they became more relaxed after a while. Sometimes during an interview I would

wonder whether I was getting a good quality recording or not. When I later listened to the tapes, I wished that I had been more attentive. An advantage of having a series of research engagements is that they gave me the opportunity to rewind and pick up on nuances that I had missed in an earlier listening. On the basis of these new insights, I was able to go back to the research participant and probe him or her more deeply on whatever point or particular topic I had missed earlier on in the process.

Most of the interviews were conducted in the evenings. We usually commenced at 19h00, but I occasionally visited the families in the mornings or afternoons when that was more convenient for all concerned. All of the interviews were conducted at the children's homes. The shortest meeting was approximately 45 minutes long, and the longest went on for three hours. I did not keep meticulous notes of the amount of time that I spent with each family, but the average interview lasted from between 45 minutes and an hour. Sometimes I interviewed the parents and children simultaneously, but at other times I spoke to the parents alone first before speaking to the child. With one particular family, I spoke to the parents at the first interview although I was only briefly introduced to the children. After that initial interview, I used to meet the children alone. At the end of every final meeting with a family, I gave each family and child or children something appropriate as a token of my appreciation. Such tokens included books and files, biltong baskets, chocolates, flowers or wine.

I realised later that having the parents present in the interviews (on those occasions when they were) influenced the data I had created from my interviews with them to a greater or lesser extent. Even though, in each case, I sensed that an open relationship existed between the parents and their children, I only realised this after I had analysed the data and encountered an incongruity between what the child (Kim) had said when the parents were present and what Kim had said when they were absent. I then reread the transcripts of my interviews with all the other children in those cases where the parents had been present, but could find nothing as explicit as I found in the case of Kim. I then realised that the influence of the

parents might not have been limited only to *what* the children said (content), but that it might also have influenced the *manner* in which the children had said things (their self-presentation), or what they were willing to share in front of their parents (sensitive disclosures). In spite of this, I did see every child alone on at least one occasion, and that these “private” interviews would have provided each of them with opportunities to say whatever they would have said if the parents had not been present (as in the case of Kim).

This remains an important consideration because I had assumed in the beginning that the children would be as willing to disclose events and experiences in front of their parents as they might with me alone because in all cases a good relationship existed between the parents and their children. What I had left out of consideration is that no matter how good the relationship between parents and children, a child will always present a certain persona to the parents that is based on parental expectations and on unique family assumptions, and that each developmental stage requires its own kind of privacy if the child is to develop fully. This does not mean that the child is necessarily hiding important information from the parents, but merely that – even from a very young age – every child engages in various modes of self-presentation in order to harmonise with parental expectations and assumptions.

The time schedule of my actual contact with the families is presented in the following table (Table 3.1).

**Table 3.1: Time schedule of contact sessions**

<i>Date</i>	<i>Meeting with...</i>
10 November 2003	Family 1, parents (& Kashni & Erid), session 1, introduction
15 November 2003	Family 2, parents (& Luanne), session 1, introduction
18 November 2003	Family 1, Kashni session 1; Erid session 1
25 November 2003	Family 2, Luanne, session 1
27 November 2003	Family 1, Kashni, session 2
2 December 2003	Family 2, Luanne, session 2
3 December 2003	Family 1, Kashni, session 3; Erid session 2
7 January 2004	Family 2, Luanne, session 3
4 February 2004	Family 3, Carl and parents, session 1
9 February 2004	Family 2, Luanne, session 4
16 February 2004	Family 3, Carl alone, session 2
8 March 2004	Family 3, Carl & parents, session 3
9 March 2004	Family 4, parents, session 1
11 March 2004	Family 4, Tom, Danielle & Ryland, session 1
17 March 2004	Family 4, Danielle, session 2; Ryland, session 2
23 March 2004	Family 2, parents, session 2
24 March 2004	Family 5, Kim & mother, session 1
25 March 2004	Family 2, Luanne, session 5
25 March 2004	Family 4, Danielle, session 3; Ryland, session 3; Tom, session 2
29 March 2004	Family 3, parents of Carl, session 4
1 April 2004	Family 2, Luanne, session 6
1 April 2004	Family 5, Kim, session 2
2 April 2004	Family 4, parents, session 2
7 April 2004	Family 2, Luanne, session 7
December 2004 – January 2005	Member validation (member checking)

Some contact sessions were taped and transcribed, whilst others are field texts written from my recollections of what happened (I call these latter “memory sessions”). In some of the sessions we engaged in very little verbal exchanges because we were busy with other tasks such as, for example, drawing time lines or making collages. As indicated in Table 3.2, I have 16 transcribed interviews and one memory session with the children alone. With regard to my contact sessions with the parents: I have one transcription (in which only relevant pieces of conversation have been transcribed) and six memory sessions. There are another three sessions that comprise recordings and transcriptions of sessions when both parents and children were present, as well as one transcribed session and one memory session of various siblings together.

**Table 3.2: Outline of contact sessions with the families**

	<i>Interviews with children</i>			<i>Interviews with parents</i>		<i>Combined (parent &amp; child)</i>	<i>Combined (siblings)</i>
Family 1	Child 1	Kashni	2t	Parents 1	1m & 1t		
	Child 2	Erid	2t				
Family 2	Child 3	Luanne	5t & 1m	Parents 2	2m		
Family 3*	Child 4	Carl	1t	Parents 3	1m	2t	
Family 4	Child 5	Tom	1t	Parents 4	2m		1t**
	Child 6	Danielle	2t				1t, 1m **
	Child 7	Ryland	2t				1t, 1m **
Family 5	Child 8	Kim	1t	Parent 5		1t	
	Total		16t, 1		6m, 1t	3t	1t, 1m **

t = transcribed

m = memory

\*Carl and his parents were always together, except for one meeting in which I talked to him alone.

\*\* Although this is indicated separately, I regard it as one session because all the children were present at the same meeting.

Some further technicalities: the **management of the data created** (methodological aspects of transcription)

Some of the recorded interviews or sessions were transcribed in detail and some were only selectively transcribed. Thus, for example, the sessions that were devoted to making collages or time lines related to the tasks in hand, and therefore did not follow any narrative line. In those sessions we spoke about what we were doing in a rather general way and was transcribed in terms of themes such as *Talk about subject choices, Talk about marks, Talk about the dog*. Goodson and Sikes (2001:34) refer to these as “summary transcripts”. All discussions that related to the theme of my research or that pertained to the research question were transcribed. All the original tapes were safely and securely stored and they could easily be accessed by me at any stage of the research. Thus if I found that I wanted to listen to an audio recording because I wanted to focus on one particular child, I could easily do so. I used a different procedure with regard to the sessions that were not taped. These I typed up afterwards or wrote into my diary before typing them on my computer because such a format makes the information more manageable as data sets. Throughout the process, I made personal notes in my diary, after which I transferred all the relevant sections and pieces from these primary diary notes into my standardised electronic format.

I noticed during these processes that making my own transcriptions helped me to become familiar with the data. This was especially helpful when I was preparing myself for a subsequent interview because the notes helped me to recall the atmosphere and events of previous contact sessions as well as the communication style and personality of the child I had been interviewing. A research assistant helped me to transcribe some of the interviews. I carefully and thoroughly reviewed each of these transcriptions and made whatever alterations were necessary. Occasional inaccuracies crept into the transcriptions made by the research assistant because some parts of the recordings were of a poor quality. This poor quality could be attributed (in part at least) to the fact that people engaging in ordinary conversation often do not speak clearly or slowly enough to produce high-

quality recordings. Fortunately I could remember what had been said and could correct the transcriptions. My research assistant saved me a lot of time and tedium by helping me with the transcriptions. In addition, she also benefited from the process because the transcribing process helped her to get to know the children. This proved to be an advantage for both of us because we could then reflect together on various issues that arose when I needed another point of view.<sup>16</sup> We spent a lot of time in transcription and correction. It took me between seven and eight hours to transcribe a one-hour interview, depending on the quality of the recording, and between four and five hours to thoroughly revise my assistant's transcriptions.

I regard transcripts essentially as recorded conversations. They served as an aid to capture the details of what was being said and they provided me with cues for remembering significant moments of interpersonal communication and emotion-laden exchanges or revelations. I am aware of the limitations of a verbatim transcript as data because data become (re)constructed in the process of transcription. A recording obviously captures only what is *said* – and none of the nuances of body language, the visible dynamics between the interlocutors, any kind of emotional charge, or the actual atmosphere. It obviously therefore cannot be a perfect, total and faithful representation of an interview (Goodson & Sikes, 2001:33). It is especially important to remember that the *emotional* content of the interview is rarely evident in a transcript (unless specific indications are included), and the researcher must be clear about what he or she understands a transcript to be. Is it viewed as “a recorded conversation, a phenomenological experience, a literary text, a dialogue or a narrative?” (Poland, 2002:636).

Wherever I thought it appropriate, I made notes on body language and other non-verbal communication. Even so, I was amazed at how much I could recall of the atmosphere, the non-verbal language, facial expressions and so forth whenever I subsequently studied the data (transcripts). Because nonverbal and interpersonal

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<sup>16</sup> The assistant signed a confidentiality agreement.

forms of communication (such as nods, smiles, frowns, styles of dress, physical setting and other factors that affect the tone and atmosphere of the interview such as pauses, sighs, laughter, tone of voice) cannot be accurately conveyed by a transcript, there is always so much more in a live session than can ever be recorded. I also paid attention to whatever experiences were conveyed by words during the discussions – but not to the language per se because I was not attempting any kind of linguistic analyses of the conversations themselves (conversational analysis). Occasionally I did include purely linguistic indicators in cases where they indicated the presence of a message underlying the literal spoken words. Thus, for example, where the research partners were speaking about how difficult it was to disclose their situation to their peers, I included their “ums” and the “ahs” because the frequency of such hesitations indicate levels of uncertainty and emotional discomfort. Otherwise I omitted indications of the kind of silences, tones and stammering that are a “normal” feature of daily speech.

Poland (2002:633) notes that verbal interactions are based on a kind of logic that is different from the logic of prose because verbal interactions are supported by all kinds of supporting circumstances that are absent in pure stylistic prose. A transcription of a quite coherent conversation might therefore look remarkably disjointed and even incoherent when the words of such a conversation are committed to the printed page. Since satisfactory and rational conversations can appear to be startlingly incoherent and inarticulate when they have been transcribed, one needs at least to warn the research partners about this oddity before they examine any transcription in which they have taken part. I remember how inarticulate the “talk” seemed when I examined for the first time the transcripts of my first research project. Poland (2002:634) argues that when participants are made to appear less articulate than they really are when quotations are extensively used in the final report also raises certain ethical implications – even though there might never been any intention of undermining research participants in any way. Poland suggests that the “tidying up” of quotations might be important and desirable when the researcher is writing material up for publication. He is of the opinion that this should preferably be done after analysis and only by the

researcher. This should ensure that what is removed or even slightly altered does not appreciably alter the meaning of what the person said.

An added complication with which I had to work is that many of the conversations were not conducted in English. Thus in many cases what I present as verbatim quotations are often in fact translations. Although translation places us at yet one more remove from the original live interview, I took the translated versions to my research partners and to critical readers for verification as part of my effort to be as faithful as possible to the original meanings. I feel confident in the trustworthiness of what I have been doing because the accuracy of what I have reported in this research has been confirmed by the duration and thoroughness of my prolonged engagement and interactions with my research partners.

However desirable prolonged engagement may be, one has to stop at a certain point and consider whether or not one has had conducted a sufficient number of interviews. I would like to answer this question by mentioning some **preliminary thoughts on the nature of the iterative process of data creation, analysis and interpretation** because they constitute the underlying methodological assumptions of this inquiry. Ongoing inductive analysis is the most prominent feature of qualitative methodology. Analysis begins when one has accumulated a subset of the data that allows the salient aspects of the phenomenon under study to begin to emerge. Pursuing relevant persons, settings or documents that will further help to illuminate the phenomenon that is being studied will follow this initial step (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994:46). As I conducted the interviews, I started to construct an initial analysis and to complete the transcripts simultaneously. I read the new transcripts with the preliminary themes in mind while simultaneously reflecting on the literature that I was concurrently reading. After I had completed most of the sessions, I felt that I was ready to start constructing a more in-depth analysis and I therefore concluded the contact sessions. When I was doing that, I had a feeling that I might have to go back to the same families for further data or that I would link up with new families in the future for the same purpose. Even so, I was aware that the process of data *creation* had to end at some specified point so

that time and energy could be devoted solely to data *analysis*. My feelings however remained ambivalent until I had written parts of the following section in my research diary and allowed some time to elapse:

The number of participants is usually small to allow for and enhance “depth” of understanding into one individual’s perception and experience. Qualitative and especially narrative research values the subjective, emic and idiographic (Goodson & Sikes, 2001:23). The question of when sufficient data has been collected has been widely debated and becomes clearer when one contemplates the following extracts:

- *when saturation occurs and variation is both accounted for and understood* (Morse, 1994:230)
- *one samples until data is redundant to that which has already been collected (data saturation) and saturation is for the context and time of the specific inquiry* (Smit, 2004:2)
- *based on expected reasonable coverage of the phenomenon* (Patton, 1990:186)
- *unfortunately for those with a low tolerance for ambiguity, there is no answer* (Merriam, 1998:64)

I contemplated this issue of how many people I should interview and when enough would be enough. Terre Blanche and Durrheim (1999:381) gave a rough estimate of six to eight data sources when they are based on several hours of interviewing (this suggestion satisfied the residual quantitative positivist part of me). I also came to rely strongly what Alvesson and Sköldberg (2000:292) recommend: one should focus on *complementary* data, and not necessarily on more data to provide better arguments. I then felt satisfied with my decision to remain with my selected research partners and interview them extensively. As mentioned, I could sense that fewer sessions were needed with the older children, especially those who were verbally more fluent (such as Kim in Family 5).

Queen Academia: What was your plan of inquiry...? How did you find out about the experiences of children growing up in same-gendered families?

## THE SECOND LINK IN A STRING OF RIBBONS THAT REFLECTS BUBBLE THREE

Carien: My plan of inquiry (the research design) cannot be isolated from my **paradigmatic perspective** on the world of research. Jennifer Mason (2002:59) indicates that when one defines ones paradigmatic perspective as a researcher, the interplay between ontological and epistemological assumptions, metatheoretical underpinnings, the research question and methodology becomes of crucial importance. How we think the social world is constituted, or what we think it is (our ontology), shapes how we think what we can know about it. Conversely, how we look (our epistemology and the methods we use) shapes what we can see. Our thought process about epistemological and ontological concerns has to be combined with a grounded, strategic and practical consideration of the methods we choose and use. Because this research is a part of me and has emanated from me, I cannot somehow be removed from it. Everything I write and research is coloured by my personal epistemology and ontology, and this in turn influences my methodology.

In this research, because I am exploring the experiences of children growing up in same-gendered families, I found myself immediately identifying with the *qualitative interpretivist paradigm*. I wanted to explore and understand the experiences of the children so that I could record and interpret their voices. From an interpretive view I could present and represent the children's narratives in such a way that the reader would obtain some slight degree of insight into the lives of these children. I felt an urge not to touch the stories, to let the raw details (as they have revealed themselves to me and in the words that the research partners reported their experiences to me) to stand alone so that any reader would be in a position to make his or her own interpretations and sense of what he or she read.

After reflection, I felt that utilising only an interpretivist perspective could introduce a one-sided view because I also wanted to know what the children's stories might tell us about the discourses that are constructed in society, and

whether or not they are aware of and frame their families as being the “same” as, or “different” from, or “other” than other families. I realised that the social constructionist view could also provide valuable insights because interpretations cannot be disentangled from the social context in which they arise. Constructionists assume that individuals actively construe their own social realities and that the researcher is able to understand these by interacting with the interviewee. I believe that the experiences of children growing up in same-gendered families can be regarded as a co-construction that reveals their interpretation of a social reality that (in turn) is socially constructed and situated within and against the backdrop of a social and political context (Bevan & Bevan, 1999; Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 1999).

As I explored my own assumption of perceiving same-gendered families as *different only because of oppression* (Clarke, 2002b:212), I appropriated the insights of queer theory, which examines whether or not history has deliberately silenced and/or misrepresented people who have a gay sexual orientation/ preference. Queer theory, together with a lesbian feminist approach, emphasises the inequalities of past constructions of gender and sexuality, and postulates the inability of mere academic research to represent the world of lived experiences fully. Queer theory also critically deconstructs the concept of a homosexual “minority” (Butler, 1990; Gamson, 2000; Olesen, 2000). The proponents of queer theory, as with critical theory, devoted their efforts to designing a pedagogy of resistance within communities of difference so that gays could take back their “voice” and reclaim their own narratives (Lincoln & Denzin, 2000:1056). This however could not be the main focus of my study because I was not seeking to implement emancipatory changes that would remedy the inequalities in society.

From the beginning I had no intention of incorporating what I considered to be a “political perspective” in my representation of the children’s voices because I did not want their voices to be part of the power equations of society. But as I contemplated various postmodern positions, I realised that a negation of power is almost impossible. My very commitment to be aware of my own power, my own voice and the voices of the children, my commitment to how I could and would

represent the stories of children growing up in same-gendered families, and my commitment to my ownership and my role as a researcher, automatically propelled me into a postmodern, feminist and poststructuralist domain (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2000; Evans, 2002; Lather & Smithies, 1997; Olesen, 2000).

I became interested in what one *needs* – in terms of competencies, attitudes, skills, and so on – if one wishes to be in a position to be able to narrate the lives of others, and I thought long and hard about how to present the voices of others in a more or less unmediated way (Lather & Smithies, 1997:126,127). I wanted it to be plainly evident that I respected the people involved by finding a less intrusive way of doing research. I wanted to find a method that would make me aware of how I would interpret, select and narrate. I then considered the role of the researcher and authorship and of how I look at the evaluations, thoughts and feelings that I have as a researcher. I realised that research is a cautious and slow process of working with inclusions and exclusions of representations and readings, of being aware of whose voices are privileged and whose are silenced (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2000:168, 185,189), of working with pluralism and polyvocality (Gergen & Davis, 2003:247). I wanted to provide a space in which I would emerge as a palpable presence who encourages dialogue with the reader by indicating pertinent problems and imperfections in the text, thereby creating an open text.

I came to realise that I was drawing on the poststructuralist paradigm by focusing on multiple voices and pluralism, by contemplating multiple realities and by engaging with the ambiguity of research, recognising the effects of the ambiguities of research and taking them into account as I write up my research (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2000:171). Poststructuralism asks questions about language, power and meaning (Lather & Smithies, 1997:126). While I have not focused primarily on language as the central activity of my study, I am aware of my responsibility in creating text and realise that even *transcriptions* of interviews are already interpretations, that “we can speak only what we have language for” (Lye, 1997:¶2), and that “text structures our interpretation of the world” (Jones, 2005:¶2). My careful consideration of the local, fragmented and ambivalent as opposed to “grand

narratives” (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2000:196), and my deconstruction of heterosexuality and homosexuality in Bubble Two served to affirm my affiliation to certain poststructuralist themes. I realise that I have attempted to deal with power issues by collaborating with my research partners, by calling them “partners”, by working to build up good and lasting relationships with them, by establishing and maintaining trust in those relationships, and by treating the interviews as “interactive conversations” (Ellis & Bochner, 2000; Fontana & Frey, 2000; Olesen, 2000). While I have kept the issues relating to power in mind as I have created my data, I also bear it in mind in all areas of my research such as in the analysis, interpretation, presentation and representation of each of the children whom I interviewed. The existence of a multiplicity of “truths” (Daiute & Fine, 2003:64) implies that I make no claim that my text represents some privileged truth that is beyond critical scrutiny. I do suggest that there are no authoritative discourse to which all other knowledge must be subordinated exists, that because all perceptions are provisional, all texts are therefore provisional. In my view, the knowledge and meaning that we derive from what we engage is more like construction than finding or discovering (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2000; Schwandt, 2000).

I soon realised that I was constructing a complex hybrid between seemingly different paradigms and approaches as I continued to incorporate aspects of postmodernism, feminism and post-structuralism into my operative paradigm and approach. This led to question what my central focus would be. Trying to make sense of my ontological and epistemological premises confronted me with the challenges of the “messy, uncertain age” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000:23) that qualitative research is entering in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Lincoln and Guba (2000:167) comforted me by saying that “there is great potential for interweaving of viewpoints, for the incorporation of multiple perspectives and for borrowing in bricolage, where it is useful or richness enhancing or theoretically heuristic.” After months of reflection and contemplation, I positioned myself mainly in the social constructionist paradigm while acknowledging the strong influence of post-structuralism on my thinking. In addition, I am incorporating perspectives from other non-positivist paradigms because these viewpoints are valuable for the way

in which I conduct critical analysis, for the position from which I analyse current literature, and for aiding my reflection on the conduct of my research. This is part of the complexity on which my study and research is based.

I have therefore come to the conclusion that the fundamental purpose of my study is to describe the children's experiences as an aid to understanding (*verstehen*). The social constructionist paradigm is concerned with discovering and understanding meanings as they are experienced by those who are the subjects of research, and with comprehending *their* views and constructions of the world rather than those of the researcher. Participants' experiences are explored in terms of their subjective experiences (their perceptions, views and feelings) as these are mediated by their continuous interaction with the "reality" of their everyday lives – the context in which they operate, their relationships, and their frames of reference. While the interpretive nature of qualitative research attempts to make sense of or interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings that people bring to them, the way in which people experience the world is a product of both the world-as-it-is and by the unique manner in which people process their own experiences (Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 1999:124,157).

From an ontological point of view, there are multiple realities, and this multiplicity makes each individual's perceptions of reality valid. Because human reality is mutually and socially constructed and presented, we always encounter a diversity of interpretations in the world. Because each human being processes reality from a constellation of different viewpoints, it is inevitable that no two people will experience the world in the same way (Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 1999:124). In my attempt to understand and interpret the experiences of these children, I am assuming that each human being experiences the world through the prism of multiple realities, and that no two realities can ever be exactly similar or even equivalent. A relativist ontology denies that the world "out there" is fixed in terms of human experience, although it may assume a complexity of causality of a world made up of structures and objects that have a causal relationship with one another (Willig, 2001:13). For practical purposes, we assume the existence of a "fixed"

empirical or physical universe and reality, even though such a stance has long since been undermined in the field of quantum physics. But since we *need* to make assumptions that will allow us to function in the “real” world, we give our consent to various ad hoc assumptions about the macro-physical world in which we experience our outer reality. We do this because we need to understand timetables, catch trains, flick switches, and perform that multitude of tasks that comprise our consensual “outer” reality.

But the social and inner personal worlds that human beings create for themselves do not function quite so simplistically and smoothly precisely because human beings *do* create multiple realities which they experience as perfectly “real” and valid. This is what makes human beings so interesting and so complex, because we all generate our own reality, we live in a “world” that is constantly changing and in which meanings are always being negotiated. Our social world and our inner personal reality is always being interpreted and re-interpreted. It cannot be otherwise because our social and personal reality is constructed by us (whether consciously or unconsciously) by the multiplicity of shifting meanings that make up our different realities (Mason, 2002; Schwandt, 2000). I have therefore adopted an approach that enables me to produce (in cooperation with my research partners, supervisor and critical readers) reconstructed understandings of the experiences of children who are growing up in same-gendered families.

My epistemological view is that knowledge (in the sense of an *understanding* of one’s reality) is relative, plural and subjective and that the researcher and the research partners co-create this understanding. This does not imply that the researcher is the one who “knows”. I see quite clearly that the individual who has permitted me the privilege of conducting research into her or his private reality is the “knower” and (quite obviously) the expert on her or his life. It is possible to obtain knowledge of another person’s inner reality by carefully and systematically examining the views, meanings, experiences, accounts, actions and events that occur in that person’s life. Such understandings are co-created by both the researcher and the participant. Both their voices will be discernible in the

conclusions because there is no single interpretive truth that is entirely valid (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000:23). As I said above, the “truth” is always subjective and personal. What is crucial therefore is to find one’s voice because one can be blinded by one’s advocacy. The converse of this is that one should not be so self-conscious or critical of oneself and others that there is no space for other voices to be heard and incorporated.

I have attempted to be reflexive<sup>17</sup> about my process, my views, about the data and my interpretation, because everything that we communicate is an interpreted representation of a perceived world. These notions of the presence of multiple voices, the plural nature of reality and the multiplicity of human views, are also informed and influenced by postmodern thought.

Plummer (2001:12) states that we are experiencing the gradual birth of a more provisional world in which there is an increased sensitivity to diversities, differences and differentiations. In contrast to Plummer’s optimistic point of view, we could point out recent socio-political movements throughout the world, such as the changes in the United States of America, that indicate that the opposite may well be happening (Lather, 2003:¶2). In spite of this, I find myself espousing a definitively postmodern worldview because I find myself in agreement with many of the arguments and methods that are proposed by some postmodernist thinkers. The first of these views is that they respect the existence of a plurality of perspectives as against the dogmatic assumption that there is one single truth that emanates from a single privileged discourse or authority. The second of these views is that they focus on what is local and the contextualised rather than on grand narratives. The third view is that they emphasise flux and openness, as opposed to continuity and restraint.

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<sup>17</sup> It is through reflexivity that the researcher’s construction of what is explored becomes more visible (Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 2000:2,4,150). Being reflexive is a specific part of reflective research. It indicates reflection on different levels, and the consideration of more than one theme simultaneously. I am using the two concepts of reflective/reflexive together whilst Alvesson and Sköldbberg (2000:4-7) distinguish between the two.

The guiding methodological strategies that correlate with the above ontological and epistemological frameworks are interactional, interpretive and qualitative in nature. The ontology of constructionism supports this point of view in that it regards people's *subjective* experiences as being real, valid and therefore unconditionally important. I believe that people's experiences can best be understood by interacting with them and by listening to them. These activities comprise the nucleus of my methodological assumptions as I have sought answers to my research questions.

Qualitative methods aim to discover and understand how people construct meaning out of the way in which they perceive their lives. Qualitative methods are sensitive to the diversity that forms of expression take because they incorporate ways of listening to and considering "exceptions". Qualitative methods allow meanings to be heard without interference or coercion. Because they are also open-ended and flexible, they facilitate the emergence of new and unanticipated categories of meaning and experience. The particular methodology that allowed me to discover and do justice to the perceptions and complexity of my research partners' understandings has been the narrative research design. In essence, I attempted to answer my intellectual questions in terms of the perspectives of my research partners. Inevitably, I filtered what they had perceived and conveyed to me through the prism of my own intellectual understanding and perceptual apparatus. My "answers" to my own intellectual questions are therefore framed both in terms of the perspectives and experiences of my research partners and narrators, and in terms of my own understanding and willingness to be open to the private world of my research partners.

What do I understand by **narrative research/ narrative inquiry**?<sup>18</sup> A large number of definitions of narrative research and narrative methodologies exist. After studying all these definitions, I realised that there was no single *correct* way of doing narrative inquiry. What I therefore present here is an overview of those definitions that I found answered best to my needs. I have used these approaches to

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<sup>18</sup> I use the terms "narrative research" and "narrative inquiry" interchangeably.

frame my own approach to narrative inquiry because they reflect the ontological and epistemological assumptions that I have made my own.

To a large extent, people make sense of their experience and communicate their experience to others in the form of *stories* (McLeod, 2001:104). *Narrative* is the human activity of making our varied experiences meaningful and coherent to ourselves or another in terms of our personal assumptions and beliefs by relating our perceptions to ourselves or to another person (Polkinghorne, 1988:1). Whether this other “person” is an actual person, a diary, an audio tape, or some other object or being (seen or unseen), narration – on whatever level – helps us to *objectify* our experiences which, until we articulate or narrate them, remain purely personal or interiorised. Narration helps to give definition and clarity to thoughts that – until they are articulated – often remain inchoate, vague or nebulous. This is especially true of thoughts that unduly disturb or excite us or thoughts that remain partially defined (but emotionally charged) on the periphery of our consciousness. Narrative inquiry thus attempts to understand and represent experiences through the stories that individuals live and tell (Creswell, 2002:525). The narrative inquirer tells and retells, lives and relives, presents and re-presents the stories that make up people’s lives, individually and socially, in order to answer questions of meaning, experience and social significance (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000:71,187).

The narrative approach implies an acceptance of pluralism, relativism, and the validity of individual subjectivity (Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach & Zilber, 1998:2). All these factors are themes and motifs in postmodern and poststructuralist thought. Lieblich and Josselson (1994:xii) also maintain that the subjective-reflective nature of the narrative coincides with the feminist ideology that advocates a compassionate and non-authoritarian understanding of “the other”, although they contest the simplistic notion that narrative is a purely feminist domain. Feminist interpretation has shown how the “stories women tell about their lives may be constrained by the narrative forms – and the forms of living – that our culture currently legitimates” (Ochberg, 1994:116). Narratives always and inevitably exist within a circumscribed discursive space, constituted by the social world. The way

we understand, talk and write about the world is socially constructed (Freeman, 1993:198). I have used this mode of understanding to inform my selection of research partners, my data creation process, and the processes through which I went to establish a relationship with my research partners. It also helped me to act in a way that enabled me to build trust in my research partners as I made a safe and containing space in which these children of same-gender parents – my research partners – could share their day-to-day stories and experiences. Cortazzi remarks:

*“it is not the unmediated world of the others but the world between ourselves and the others. Our results are deeply marked by this betweenness and there is no way, epistemologically, to overcome its implications (Cortazzi, 1993:21).*

I have therefore utilised my own generic qualitative study with a narrative research design. In my study I aim to understand the experiences of children growing up in families with same-gender parents: how they think and feel about their lives in relation to the heteronormative image of family life that society constantly projects. I have accessed and explored the *reported* experiences of the children of same-gender parents. These reported experiences include first-person accounts, interpretations, memories, thoughts, ideas, opinions, understandings, emotions, feelings, perceptions, behaviour, practices, actions, activities, conversations, interactions, secrets, inner-self monologues, and so on (Mason, 2002:53). I have used these narratives that reveal their everyday interpretations to present a reflexive and interpretive understanding of their experiences. While I have focused on their personal experiences, I have borne in mind the caveat of Josselson, Lieblich and McAdams (2003:8). They say that people’s narratives reflect not only their *own* meaning-making, but also the themes of the society or culture in which they live. All my research partners’ personal narratives must therefore be understood against the backdrop of society’s construction of lesbian and gay families.

The goals of narrative inquiry, according to Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach and Zilber (1998:72), are: (1) to assist us to understand the inner or subjective world of people and how they think about their own experience, situation, problems and life in general, (2) to provide “insight” into the individual that clarifies what has previously been meaningless or incomprehensible and that suggests previously

unseen connections, (3) to convey to a reader the feeling of what it must be like to meet the person concerned, (4) to effectively portray the social and historical world in which the person is living, and (5) to illuminate the causes and meanings of the events, experiences and conditions of the person's life.

Another reason why I selected a narrative research design is that it captures the kind of everyday, ordinary data that is familiar to the narrator (Riessman, 1993:2). One of the "clearest channels" for learning about the inner world of individuals is through verbal accounts and stories that individuals narrate about their lives and their experienced reality (Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach & Zilber, 1998:8). Additional data-creation techniques are therefore intended to enhance the verbal accounts and to produce stories about the experiences of children in same-gendered families.

Narrative research is full of loose ends and seeming contradictions (Riessman, 2002a:697). It also lacks the relatively fixed and traditional interpretative framework that a researcher uses to analyse and interpret findings. Another compromise that I made in choosing a narrative design is that I had to accept the process of working in an *emergent* design. Unlike research methodologies that begin with well-defined hypotheses and are then tested by fairly rigid research designs, qualitative narrative research is always leading one in new directions as it continually changes and unfolds. In qualitative research, one cannot reason one's way towards a causal hypothesis that will serve the experimental design. Instead, one aims to come to arrive at a provisional interpretation through exploration and description. It is also open-ended in the sense that traditional notions of distance and objectivity become distorted. I continuously reminded myself that I should strive for coherence, consistency, comprehensiveness and simplicity (Rosenwald, 2003:140,141).

Discontinuous and fragmentary texts are a typical feature of narrative research. These texts need to be read and reread as one strives towards coherent and consistent interpretation. Even after one has captured the research partners' stories in writing, the texts one is left with are never comprehensive enough to represent the research partner's whole life. Throughout the process of refining, creating and

co-creating these texts, I had to give careful consideration to questions of power and authority as I accepted my own contribution towards the construction (i.e. the co-creation) of the narratives (Daiute & Fine, 2003:68). I had to constantly guard against falling into what Daiute and Fine (2003), and Silverman (1993:6), call the trap of “romanticism”.<sup>19</sup> The relativity, subjectivity and multiple levels of meaning that qualitative research texts contain also present one with challenges that are unique to qualitative research.

To emphasise but one aspect of qualitative research: participants’ stories do not mirror a world “out there”. They do not aspire the empirical certainties of quantitative research. Instead they are constructed, provisional, creatively authored, often frankly rhetorical, and replete with assumptions and interpretations. Just as quantitative research has its own characteristic advantages *and* disadvantages, the advantages of qualitative research reside precisely in its subjectivity – its rootedness in time, place and personal experience – that stories are both encouraged and valued for their descriptive and interpretative potential (Riessman, 1993:5). Narrative construction uses experience as data and its utility and effectiveness is dependent on the quality of the interactions between the research participants and the researcher. Robinson and Hawpe (1986:111) claim that “it is in reflecting on experience that we construct stories; experience does not automatically assume narrative form”. Creswell (2002:528) points out that since we cannot directly convey experiences, no matter how well they are narrated, the researcher has to interpret the constructions wherewith research partners make sense of their world. My research partners’ experiences are shaped by my (the researcher’s) construction of the narrated events. One of my ontological assumptions in this research is that children have to be given appropriate opportunities to relate the events that they have experienced, and that they will construct the reality behind these stories.

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<sup>19</sup> “Romanticism” (Daiute & Fine, 2003; Silverman, 1993): This is where the researcher sets out faithfully to record the “experiences” of (usually) a disadvantaged group. This record may become distorted if it is not contextualised with a cultural sensitivity that reveals how such experiences can be shaped by given forms of representation.

The researcher as author also assumes the power of the researcher as the constructor. In the end, it is I who decide what to tell and how to tell it, and what stories I wish to relate about my research partners, about myself as the researcher, and as a methodologist writing for other researchers. Narrative research is inevitably therefore a highly selective *constructive* act on my part. Jacques Derrida argues (in a somewhat extreme formulation) that all is text – all is construction. Our conceptions have no points of contact with the world. What the speaker intends to say is already inscribed in the structure of language (Valdés, 1991:23). Although these poststructural notions have been criticised, both favourably and negatively, I will, for the purpose of this thesis, not elaborate on these critiques. I do however see myself identifying and acknowledging a poststructural, postmodern and social constructionist view of experience as a cultural construction. This does not imply that I deny the value of people's accounts of their everyday experiences around a certain topic, accounts through which they make sense of themselves and the social world in which they are thus revealed. For Blumer (in Plummer, 1991:237), individual experience reveals the individual's actions as a human agent and as a participant in social life. And this is precisely what I mean by framing experience as a cultural construction: the individual's experience should be framed or located within a historically specific social and cultural context.

This suggests to me that my exploration of the personal experience narratives of these children in a heteronormative society can indeed be illuminated by an exploration of their personal stories in a social world. A sociological approach would imply that narratives are constructed to illuminate the dynamic interaction between an individual agency and the social structure (Reddy, 2000:52). The personal story that is set in a social matrix is regarded as plausible and valid by Clandinin and Connelly's who cite the work of Dewey (Clandinin & Connelly, 1994; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). They adduce Dewey's notion of interaction which suggests that to experience an experience is to experience it simultaneously in four ways: *inward* and *outward*, and *backward* and *forward*. The first mode (inward) implies the internal conditions of feelings, hopes, aesthetic reactions, moral

dispositions and so forth, while the existential conditions and the environment indicate the outward mode.

Because participants' stories are situated not only in particular interactions but also in social, cultural and institutional discourses, they need to be taken into account when we interpret them and unravel the multiple meanings that are facilitated by narrative analysis. Some institutional and cultural narratives are so powerful and dominant that they cannot be side-stepped. As far as May (2003:23) is concerned, the narratives of motherhood, marriage and family are just such narratives. She maintains that counter-narratives can be constructed by means of dialogue with and negotiation between different cultural narratives of family. For her, these narratives can be challenged, but never entirely ignored (May, 2003:2).

The interpretive function of narratives is used in the construction of individual stories. These individual stories can simultaneously be subjected to a social constructionist process and this will help us to appreciate the social role that stories perform. The interpretive function of a narrative (Josselson & Lieblich, 2003:260) entails a focus on the meaning that people attribute to their day-to-day lives. It is by means of this meaning-making process that people make sense of their personal and social worlds – and (in the case of qualitative research) the particular experiences, events and states that are of interest to the researcher. The researcher utilises this interpretive function intensively to make sense of another person's world. This results in a double hermeneutic as "the participants are trying to make sense of their world; ... and the researcher is trying to make sense of the participants trying to make sense of their world" (Smith & Osborn, 2003:51).

The constructed nature of narratives actively entails constructing the world through narratives and through being open, sensitive and receptive to the stories told by others and by ourselves. Narratives are social constructions developed in everyday social interactions; they are shared meanings that make sense in the world as we experience it. Narratives allow us to construct meaningful connections between our actions. We create narratives which then become central to our personal

understanding of ourselves (Murray, 2003:112). This ties up with Plummer's suggestions about the social conditions that facilitate the emergence of new stories. He suggests that stories "can be told when they can be heard" (Plummer, 1995:119, 120). Plummer is concerned with the social (and political) role that stories play, and he has investigated the kind of stories that are told, how they are told, and why they are told. This is also echoed by the Personal Narratives Group (Riessman, 2002b:235), which investigated power relations in the production of personal narratives. They investigate the reasons why a narrative has been written and told, and they assert that the context in which the story is told is always multi-layered because it represents the historical moment of the telling.

Individual stories may thus influence collective understanding. Stories provide a means of bringing other voices to the centre stage of the public discourse, a process that can imbue narratives with political meanings. The stories related in this thesis could, for example, be used as a tool to illuminate the experiences of children growing up in families whose very existence resonates with highly controversial social, political and religious meanings, even in a country (such as South Africa) whose Constitution and Bill of Rights explicitly defends the rights of gay people to lead normal lives and to enjoy the advantages of ordinary social and family life. Stories provide us with an effective (alternative) way of making connections between the lives and stories of individuals and a wider understanding of human and social phenomena (Reddy, 2000:51).

In this research I use the interpretive function of narratives to explore how the children of same-gender parents make sense of their experiences and how they construct their subjective experiences in the world in which they live. But as the social world is "always already interpreted" and constructed in a particular social setting (Mason, 2003:192), the constructed nature of narratives is already embedded in the perceptions of and interpretations formed by the children. This is inevitable because the meaning of their family structure and interactions are constructed in a specific social context that propagates the dominant narrative of the "ideal" family in so many different ways and contexts.

Clandinin and Connelly (1994:425) postulate that our responsibility as researchers extends beyond those with whom we work into a larger context that includes the research community. They also contend that just as we serve the self by serving the community, we also serve the community by constructing research texts that serve the self. This has indeed been my experience and privilege. I have found that by serving these parents and the community of families with whom I am involved, I also serve myself by developing personally, socially and spiritually as a result of my work with them. Donawa (1998:¶4) elaborates on this by saying: “I become the person I am in action with specific others. We know ourselves as separate only insofar as we live in connection with others. To understand an idea means understanding a person in his/her social circumstances.” This simply emphasises the importance of social context and the fact that interpretation needs to be performed with reference to social discourses.

Collaboration is central to narrative research because of the emphasis that is placed on listening and attending to the participant’s point of view. I have drawn extensively on postmodernist and feminist theory to make sense of my own and of other people’s daily lived experiences (Evans, 2002; Josselson, 1992; Reinhard & Chase, 2002). For Kelly (1999:398) experience can only be understood within the context of the social, linguistic and historical features that give it shape. On the other hand, we have a great deal to learn from other people’s subjective interpretations or accounts. What I want to emphasise is that the personal and social cannot be divided. Donawa (1998:¶5) remarks that narrative is always a process that connects the individual to the environment that he or she shapes and by which he or she is shaped. In the words of Mills (in Plummer, 2001:6): “A life is lived in a particular time, place and under particular circumstances, an individual live within a context.”

In my analysis of the relatedness of personal stories embedded in social stories, I have relied to some extent on the work of Kenyon and Randall (1997:15-17;28-30). They state that we not only have a life story, but that we *are* stories. Experience may thus be mediated by means of stories. Stories are cognitive because they contain

ideas. They are affective because they involve emotions. And they are volitional because they involve activity or behaviour. Our thoughts, feelings and actions, and even our personal identity, can be understood as a story. And because these elements are fundamental basic to whom we are as human beings, a story may be viewed as an ontological metaphor.

Kenyon and Randall distinguish among four interrelated dimensions of life stories. In the first place, a *structural* story incorporates social policy and power relations in society. These cultural constraints can effectively silence personal stories or voices. In the second place, there is the *social* story which incorporates the social meanings that are associated with storytelling. In the third place, we have the *interpersonal* story. This deals with relationships of intimacy, family and love. Lastly, there is the dimension of personal meaning that generates the *personal* story. I define the personal story as what happens in the daily lives of people. My research presents a structural story in Bubble Two that highlights the main structural processes that inform and structure the binaries that exist between homo- and heterosexuality. In Bubble Four, I present a combination of interpersonal and personal stories in order to illuminate the experiences of children growing up in same-gendered families, even though the personal stories take place within the context of relationships.

Stories ultimately deal with what is personal and what is meaningful. But what is meant by “personal” and “meaningful”? Kenyon and Randall adduce the existentialist axiom that human beings live in situations or contexts – and that human beings are always going beyond themselves by attempting to attribute significance to those situations. From this point of view, the challenge for ourselves, both personally, as researchers and as practitioners, is to guide people to find their own direction. Personal storytelling can make it possible for people to make sense of their experience and therefore to accept and own their lives at a very fundamental level. We *become* the stories that we tell ourselves. Thus say Kenyon and Randall (Kenyon & Randall, 1997:17).

What I have come to realise is that there exists a distinctive relationship between experience and narrative. “Experience is the stories people live” sums up this position in a few eloquent words (Clandinin & Connelly, 1994:414). These two authors have explored the possibility of studying – and not only using – experience only as a contextual given. They assume that experience is both temporal and storied, that people convey something of their experience, either to themselves or to others, in storied form. Stories therefore are the vehicles that allow us to come closest to the experience of others as they relate their experiences. We should not forget that stories arise out of a matrix of personal and social history. People *live* their stories. It is in the telling of them that they reaffirm them, modify them, and create new ones. Rapmund and Moore (2002:22,23) also hold the view that human beings are interpreting beings who make sense of experiences through narrative or stories that are socially constructed by means of language. The function of narratives is to order experience, to give coherence and meaning to events, and to provide a sense of history and of the future. They explain people to themselves and to others, and they create identities and influence how people manage their lives.

Queen Academia: But what does this study mean by *experience*?

Carien: This is an important question which I found extraordinarily hard to answer and write about. Of course, I knew intuitively exactly what it meant and what I was looking for as I tried to define “experience”. I even relied on my knowledge of German to help me to clarify my understanding.

As mentioned earlier, The Concise Oxford Dictionary (Thompson, 1995:474) describes experience as “an event regarded as affecting one, the fact or process of being so affected”. This is similar to what is understood by the German word *Erlebnis*, which refers to experience as something one has: an event or adventure connected with an individual. *Erfahrung*, on the other hand, denotes experience as something that one undergoes so that subjectivity is drawn into an “event” of meaning. Experience so understood is integrative, unfolding, dynamic and hence singular (Schwandt, 2001:86). In the Concise Oxford Dictionary it is also explained

as a verb, namely “to have experience of, to undergo, to feel or be affected by”. It is the latter part in which I am interested: the *subjectivity* and process of being *affected* by what the children of same-gender parents *undergo*. In the end, it is experience that makes up our life-worlds because “in each experience there is something there, but there is also something which is only potential. And all potentialities of all our experience constitute, so to say, a world” (Valdés, 1991:453).

Gadamer (in Schwandt, 2001:85) argues that experience also has a “processual, historical and dynamic character”, and that it is anticipatory and open. Experience is not an object that one can eventually validate as knowledge of the kind that one encounters in the empirical sciences. For Gadamer and other researchers in philosophical hermeneutics and deconstructionism, we can talk about knowing *within* experience because of the historicity of experience. The discourse established through historical processes positions participants and in turn produces experiences. In terms of this approach, individuals are not regarded as *having* experiences, but as “subjects” who are constituted *through* experience (Scott, 1998:60). Scott quotes the redefinition, as he calls it, of Teres de Lauretis, namely that

*experience is the process by which, for all social beings, subjectivity is constructed. Through that process one places oneself or is placed in social reality and so perceives and comprehends as subjective (referring to, originating in oneself) those relations – material, economic and interpersonal – which are in fact social, and, in a larger perspective, historical (Scott, 1998:61).*

I take cognisance of social and historical factors by accepting that research partners’ experiences are all situated in significant moments in time that they recall and reconstruct. Once I have assembled a sufficient number of these pieces to obtain a coherent picture of their personal reality – a reality that I have co-constructed with them even by just being a sympathetic and containing listener and recorder, I may inquire after pertinent features of the larger picture (the material, economic, interpersonal, social and historical) which, as De Lauretis notes, is as much mediated through subjective construction as is our personal reality. Plummer also observes that stories that are told and heard when the time is right (Plummer,

1995:120). But this research is not directed at elucidating the historical and wider social dimensions of my research partners, except where such constructions may be pertinent to the personal and interpersonal dimensions of the children's experiences which anyway occur in a historical dimension (particular times, particular places). While I acknowledge that all these realities are constructed, my training as a therapist and psychologist has led me to focus more intensely on personal and family dimensions.

Another important emphasis that one finds in postmodernism and post-structuralism is that experience cannot be represented as it is actually lived. Because language and speech create experience, experience is discursively determined. Inquirers add another layer to this discursiveness through the very act of researching and writing about what they have researched because these activities continuously create and transform the experience they seek to describe and map. If one accepts these premises of postmodernism and post-structuralism, as I do, what we are left with in the last analysis are only *inscriptions* or *retellings* of experience (Schwandt, 2001:85).

Queen Academia: But Carien, this is all very well. But tell us more about the narratives. I have heard everything that you have heard about plot, character, temporality and so on. What are your views about this? What other approaches to narrative could you have followed if you had not accepted the interpretive and constructive function that narratives play?

Carien: Rather than identifying a set of distinctive features that always characterise narrative, I prefer to talk about **dimensions** because these are always relevant to a narrative and because many such dimensions are listed in the literature (Cortazzi, 1993; Mishler, 1986; Ochs & Capps, 2001; Plummer, 2001; Riessman, 1993; Roberts, 2002; Robinson & Hawpe, 1986). These different elements or dimensions of narrative are best evaluated and described by analysing the different styles or approaches to narrative, even though there are considerable variations in how researchers use the concept *personal narrative* and therefore in the methodological

assumptions that are present in the analysis. Despite these differences, there are interchangeable and overlapping features in all approaches that evoke the role of the researcher as a *bricoleur*. Authors such as Cortazzi (1993), Riessman (1993), Roberts (2002) and Smith (2003), broadly distinguish narrative styles in terms of a linguistic/sociolinguistic/structural tradition, a psychological, a literary, and an anthropological tradition.

The *sociological and sociolinguistic (structural) approach* to narrative focuses in essence on the sequence of events and always identifies a beginning, middle and end. Stemming from conversational analysis, proponents of this school have proposed that human beings possess an intuitive awareness of certain rules that govern participation in any conversation. Although *literary analysis* has focused primarily on novels and short stories, the dynamic and sequential element of “plot” are central to this narrative tradition, but are these days basic to most narrative styles. The *psychological tradition* emphasises the constructive nature of memory processes and argues that most tellers are largely unaware of the crucial role that their own interpretation plays in their narratives. The *anthropological tradition* studies narratives in terms of the cultural patterning that customs, beliefs, values, performance and social contexts exert on narration. I have touched on some aspects of these approaches in my construction of the narratives,<sup>20</sup> but, as I have noted above, this is because of the overlapping and interchangeable features that are common to all of the approaches.

But, my dear Queen Academia, another crucial dimension of working in a narrative design is to consider how **critical methodological issues** influence how the narrative is constructed, written, read, interpreted and understood. Therefore, critical issues that need to be considered and reflected on are:

- truths
- memory
- representation and voice

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<sup>20</sup> See p. 180 of this Bubble.

- the research relationship and
- being a reflective researcher.

Narrative research aims to understand how individuals experience their social circumstances, and does not aim to present “the facts” or to provide explanations or “the **truth**”. Riessman (2002b:235) quotes the Personal Narratives Group:

*When talking about their lives, people sometimes forget a lot, exaggerate, become confused, and get things wrong. Yet they are revealing truths. These truths don't reveal the past “as it actually was”, aspiring to a standard of objectivity. They give us instead the truths of our experiences... Unlike the Truth of the scientific ideal, the truths of personal narratives are neither open to proof nor self-evident. We come to understand them only through interpretation, paying careful attention to the contexts that shape their creation and the world views that inform them.*

A personal narrative is not meant to be read as an exact and quantitatively precise record of what happened, nor is it a mirror of any world “out there”. The reading *itself* is located in discourses because narratives are “laced with social discourses and power relations” (Riessman, 1993:65). People interpret the past in stories rather than produce the past as it was (Riessman, 2002b:256,257). A rethinking of the relationship between past and present is therefore necessary: past events are constantly being selectively edited and re-focused in terms of the current world view of the narrator. This implies that the chronological, linear and sequential modes of narrative time can be challenged in a way that results in a pluralistic unity of future, past and present. This conclusion is similar to those of those post-structuralists who regard time as a cultural and social construction, and who believe that “human time exists only through narrative expression” (Valdés, 1991:19). In their view, the kind of exact and precise recall that reveals a neutral, fixed and absolutely truthful (“objectively scientific”) past simply does not exist.

People's narratives and their efforts to make sense of their experiences are inextricably implicated in time because everyone states their views, perceptions, thoughts and feelings in terms of particular moments of time and in terms of representations of space. This obviously raises the question of how accurately we, as human beings, are able to represent our experiences and our interpretations of

those experiences – given the highly subjective nature of time and space perceptions. We might thus ask whether such experiences are actually “true” in the traditional logical-positivistic sense of the word, or whether they approximate in some way to “truth” in terms of an evaluator’s paradigms – bearing in mind that there are many different philosophical understandings of what “truth” is.

Polkinghorn (1988:158) makes it clear that a narrative approach assumes a particular understanding of what knowledge and truth mean. The narrative approach does not aim to arrive at the kind of truth or certainty that would be the goal of (say) the chemist or the botanist. Instead it seeks to create narratives that manifest all the signs and appearance of being true, real, authentic, convincing and coherent in the context in which they exist. Unlike the laws of the hard macro sciences or the axiomatically derived truths of mathematics, a story is open-ended and subject to interpretation, and the reader can take from (or “read into it”) whatever strikes her or him at the moment(s) of engagement with the story. Thus the *same* story can be used differently in various situations because different elements from it can be applied and emphasised in different contexts. Narratives do not produce the kind of knowledge that can serve to predict future outcomes (as do some kinds of knowledge in the sciences). Neither can they be used to control human experience because they are never normative in intention. Instead, they produce knowledge that deepens, enlarges, enriches and illuminates our understanding of human existence. A narrative is a subjective account from a perspective that is influenced by the passage of time and the flux of human emotions and intentions (Polkinghorne, 1988:159). Narratives create knowledge as a consequence of the interactions that take place between researcher and research partners. Such knowledge is also exploratory and tentative because it describes the lives of individuals and leads to a thorough understanding of the experiences and the meanings that people ascribe to these experiences.

If we question the basis upon which we decide that some of our perceptions are real and others are not, we come to realise that we regard “facts” as those perceptions that we can verify by a process of consensual validation. This is reflected in the

different kinds of truth that Samuel (2003:3) lists. Thus, for example, factual or forensic truth is observable and can be corroborated through reliable, objective, impartial and replicable processes. A healing or restorative truth (such as that of the narratives that were heard by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission) acknowledges the context and experience of human beings and their contribution to their cause by means of narrative, and it aims to restore the dignity of the victims concerned. In this study I utilise a *personal or narrative truth* by means of which meaning is given to multi-layered life experiences. Such truth gives us insights into the past and present through the filter of the participants' and researcher's perceptions. Reddy (2000:43) asserts that one needs to consider the conditions in which a narrative were created and the relationships that produced it in order to understand what is communicates. The researcher should identify biases, silences and exaggerations and suggest ways of understanding what these may mean. In addition, I also utilise a *dialogue or social truth* by means of which I arrive at "truth" through interaction and discussion in the data analysis phase of this research.

Truth is also arrived at by means of **memory**. Epistemological claims are based solely on how situations were experienced or remembered by the participants and in the manner in which things and events presented themselves to those who experienced them. I make no claim that these narratives represent "the objective reality" (Smith, 2003:47). Memory entails the primary experience of the world out there, or pathic sensing, and not the rational and empirical realities are the goal of the "hard" sciences. Kruger calls this "gnostic sensing" (Kruger, 1988:33). Because each human life comprises a unique and forever unrepeatable series of experiences, events can never repeat themselves in exactly the very same way – either to oneself or to anyone else. No matter how precious or important a situation, once it has happened, it has utterly gone. While some form of abstract representation may remain, and some sequence or random memory of details of the experience, the concreteness of the situation in all its continuity and its actual *presence* is lost forever (Ochs & Capps, 2001:41). People can construct events by engaging in a dialogue in which they relive the past and reconstruct it in the present. Sometimes people may selectively cover up personal failures and embarrassments in their telling of the

narrative. The teller in a conversation takes a listener into a past time or “world” and recapitulates what happened to her or him in order to make a point. We may therefore conclude that memory is constructed, and that part of the aim of qualitative research is to understand how people view their lives and how researchers engage with people’s perceptions of particular moments in time and space. It is the children’s memory of their experiences and my memory of what they said that I am working with in this research. Because it is their recollections of what happened, what they felt and what they thought that I have taken into account, I will talk about *reported* experiences.

Other critical issues that I as a narrative inquirer need to consider are the **relationship** between my research partners and me, and the elements of **representation** and **voice**. These elements are vital to an understanding of what being a **reflective researcher** means and they are related to the tentativeness of epistemological issues that I have already discussed. Riessman (2002b:220) proclaims that “we cannot give voice, but we hear voices that we record and interpret”. I have reflected deeply on the process of the representation of hearing, recording and interpreting voice and the positioning of the researcher (Ely, Vinz, Downing & Anzul, 1997; Denzin & Lincoln, 2002; Kong, Mahoney & Plummer, 2002; Lather & Smithies, 1997; Mason, 2002; Riessman, 2002a & b; Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 1999).

As the researcher, I am in a position of power and privilege because I can record, document and interpret. Knowledge grounded in experience, in dialogue, is always relative to a specific standpoint or perspective that causes the knowledge to be invested with power (Donawa, 1998:¶4). I continuously consider my own positional stance and role in the production of the narrative in a careful and reflective manner because an unconscious or deliberate personal agenda can negatively influence the research. Clandinin and Connelly (2000:149) remind us that we need to imagine ourselves in conversation with an audience as we create research texts. Writing is inescapably bound up with the self, with power and with values. In qualitative research, writing displays a certain kind of “reality” at the same time that it

constructs reality. Questions such as “Whose voice is represented in the final product?”, “How open is the text to other readings?”, “How are we situated in the personal narratives we collect and analyse?” and “What multiple interpretations would it be open to?” are essential if we are to clarify these interpretive issues for readers (Kong, Mahoney & Plummer, 2002; Riessman, 1993, 2002). Real lives are reconciled with representation. A life *as told*, as opposed to a life that is *lived*, may be different at different times for different audiences or when it is told with a different purpose.

As one writes the research text, one needs to “consider the voice that is heard and the voice that is not heard” (Clandinin & Connelly, 1994:424). Poststructuralist theory and feminist theories are also concerned with the issue of voice and author, as this brings authority and subject into a text (Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 2000; Lincoln & Denzin, 2000; Olesen, 2000; Tierney, 2000). The problems of authors, voices and selves are complex. Plummer (2001:182) indicates the possibility of creating relatively open and democratic texts provided that they contain a degree of fluidity between participants, researchers and selves. He urges researchers to recognise different voices and to reject the temptation to present the text as a smooth, seamless flow, as a product of a unified, consistent, single voice, since this is impossible. Voices are deliberately chosen to be different at different places in the text. Clandinin and Connelly (1994:423-424) comment that the presence of voice is an acknowledgement that you have something to say. Clandinin and Connelly (1994:423) comment that the struggle for a research voice is the struggle to express one’s own voice “in the midst of an inquiry designed to capture the participants’ experience and represent their voices, while simultaneously attempting to create a research text that will speak to, and reflect upon the audience’s voices”. For them voice and signature are closely connected. A research signature is the special mode that indicates our presence as writers being in the text (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000:148). The signature and its expression in discourse create an author identity. Voice and signature together make conversations among participants, researchers and audiences possible in the texts.

Participants are co-constructors of the research because they are creating their own history in the text. Narrative inquiry brings about a fundamental reconstruction of the relationship between the researcher and the participants (Casey, 1994:231). Clandinin and Connelly (2000:63-65) also elaborate on the necessity to establish a collaborative relationship between researcher and participant because narrative inquiry implies the sharing and interpenetration of two or more person's spheres of experience. Narrative research has brought the individual back into the social sciences so that she or he can provide the world of research with insights into how people make meaning (Becker, 1999:73).

I myself experienced Plummer's observation (2001:171) that I would become more and more self-conscious and reflective in the writing process. There is no longer any one straightforward description of reality "out there". I find that the personal merges with the academic in writing as I write simply as a human being "making sense of the daily ebb and flow" (Plummer, 2001:198). The emotional and ethical relationship to the participants and the inquiry makes a difference to how my research text is shaped (Clandinin & Connelly, 1994:423). They emphasise that the ethical dimensions of researcher-participant relationships are extremely important in personal experience methods. The ethical care that we demonstrate towards our research partners goes beyond the relationships that we form and establish with them because it also enters into the shaping of the research text:

*When we enter into a research relationship with participants and ask them to share their stories with us, there is the potential to shape their lived, told, relived and retold stories as well as our own. These intensive relationships require serious consideration of who we are as researchers in the stories of participants, for when we become characters in their stories, we change their stories... We owe our care, our responsibility, to the participants and how our research texts shape their lives...issues of ethical responsibility are always foregrounded as we construct research texts... We all can find ourselves in the eventually constructed research texts... (Clandinin & Connelly, 1994:422).*

Ely et al. (1997:376) state that "writing can affect the writer and the readers in personal and professional ways". Tellers have their own purpose in telling the story and receivers have their own agendas and priorities in leading them to unconsciously or consciously select events to observe, record and report. Therefore

researchers need to monitor and acknowledge participation in the construction of the storied lives of the participants (Reddy, 2000:35,36).

Donawa (2003:¶5-6) draws attention to attentiveness, experience, understanding and reflection. She states that a prolonged, mindful attentiveness to experience is productive of understanding and insight. The practice of empathy and trust assists us to make recursive explorations to the experience itself so that the nature and significance of our reflections and the knowledge forms that we use can be better understood. For Donawa, to attend is to be present, to court, to serve, to accompany and to pay heed. She quotes Mary C. Bateson as saying that there is a “spiritual basis to attention, a humility in waiting upon the emergence of patterns from experience” (Donawa, 2003:¶5).

Because research may be regarded as the joint product of researcher and researched, each person is influenced by the other and this enriches the process (Lobovits & Seidel, 2003:¶18). My own research involved asking children about their experiences of having two lesbian women (mothers) as primary parental figures. I wanted to explore their subjective experiences in terms of how they interpreted, understood and defined same-gendered families within the dominant narrative of society in their lives. I also asked these children how this influenced their peer relationships, their openness to other people, and their engagement with their friends. As these children are still living in these stories and are still in the process of experiencing and *creating* experiences, I am only telling unfinished stories.

When I insert myself into my research partners’ narratives as a way of coming to understand their stories, Donawa (2003:¶3-5) reminds me that I am still in the midst of my own story, and that we both remain embedded in our own respective cultural contextual narratives. For her, these “small” stories of the relation between our (singular and shared) experience and its social and ideological landscape has the potential to “write back against the Grand Narrative of the dominant culture” (Donawa, 2003:¶5). In reflecting on my own inquiry as narrative text, framed as it is

by feminist, postmodern, social constructionist and post-structuralist perspectives, I became to understand how my academic interests enhanced my ability to understand the processes of my own life. I therefore continuously analysed my own feelings, thoughts and experiences in my research diaries as a presentation or representation of my research journey. The children's accounts are a result of their interaction with me: I am part of the research. Rather than attempt to ignore my presence, I use it to understand a necessary part of the research process. "We work within the space (narrative inquiry) not only with our participants but also with ourselves" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000:61).

Queen Academia, in my conversation with you, I have located myself in the field of narrative methodologies. I will now move on to elaborate on the journey that I have taken in analysing and interpreting the created data.

## THE THIRD LINK IN A STRING OF RIBBONS THAT REFLECTS BUBBLE THREE

### **What is my approach to data analysis and interpretation?**

The *data analysis process* is an iterative process in which I continually moved backwards and forwards between the research text, the data creation, data analysis and interpretation.

During the initial stages of data creation, I read through my first few interviews and looked for whatever themes might emerge from the data/field texts. I simply read through the stories and underlined whatever phrases caught my attention. I then engaged with a few colleagues and asked them to do the same. After that, we compared our analytical notes. I used the feedback from my colleagues in an exploratory way in order to sharpen my interviewing skills, to assist me in reflecting on my own assumptions when I entered the interviews and to make myself conscious of the initial themes that were emerging from the already created field texts. This made me sensitive to whatever concepts were emerging, and that sensitivity provided me with points of departure that I used to frame more interview questions, to listen to my research partners in a more open way, and to think analytically about my data (Charmaz, 2003:81). Thus, for example, I was trying to expand my exploration of the experiences of children of same-gender parents by not only listening for incidents of prejudice, or evidence that they feel different from other families, but also for their bases of support, for how the strengths of the families showed itself, for how they understood the role of their mothers, and so on. I wanted to remain as open as possible to new views during my research. As I have noted in *The First Link*,<sup>21</sup> there were times during the data creation process when I stopped my readings of the literature and my development of analytical categories because I felt that my spontaneous conversations with the

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<sup>21</sup> See this Bubble, page 130.

children had become blurred by insights or hunches that I had formed during this process. I did not want analytical background information to influence my engagement with the children. During the latter part of data creation this became more and more complex as I realised that I was sometimes comparing the children's experiences with each other and (inevitably) with those that I had encountered in the literature. When I reflected on how difficult it was to refrain from analysis, I realised that I could not escape from the iterative and emerging process of data creation and analysis.

Ely et al. (1997:160) reminded me that qualitative research is a deeply interpretive endeavour and analytical processes are at work in every stage of crafting the research. In spite of this, one reaches a stage in the research process when one begins to work quite specifically and deliberately at analysis. This happened to me once my engagement with my research partners had ended and I began to analyse the data in more depth. I was confronted with questions like: "After collecting a stack of transcripts and field notes, what do I do with them? How can I make sense of them? How can I give my data a fair reading, without selecting only what interests me? How can I identify significant findings and communicate them in a written document? What kind of explanations can I build from my data?" (Charmaz, 2003; Mason, 2002; Reddy, 2003).

In trying to find answers and searching for clear guidelines, I went back to the literature and read about different ways of doing qualitative analysis. I soon realised that there were no clear-cut guidelines. I started off with the idea of utilising the categorical-content approach of Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach and Zilber (1998:16), which basically entailed a thematic analysis of the content. As I read through the field texts and searched for tentative themes, I could code each child's separate story with relative ease, but it seemed futile to me to perform a cross-case analysis in which I would look for themes across cases (Patton, 1990:376). I found that the necessity of having to downplay the specific case dynamics of each individual case bothered me because the uniqueness and individuality of each story got lost in the process. Although I could see similarities between cases and strong

similarities across two or three stories, there were also distinct differences or nuances that I needed to include. I wanted to capture the uniqueness of the experiences of the children growing up in same-gendered families' lives and a search for common cross-sectional themes did not provide me with this. I realised that the imposition of a consistent coding scheme onto in-depth interviews might even render my research invalid (Richards & Morse, 2002:175) because it would not facilitate the answering of my research question. Clandinin and Connelly's (2000:141) statement, "When participants are known intimately as people, not merely as categorical representatives, categories fragment", made me realise that I had to use a different approach for my analysis.

I once more revisited the literature and found an answer in Jennifer Mason's words. Mason (2002:165) helped me to realise that at this stage I was searching for the "*particular* in a context, rather than the common or consistent and for the *holistic* rather than the cross-sectional" (author's emphasis). Explanatory or analytical logic supported by a holistic organisation of data can illuminate the experiences of children growing up in same-gendered families and can provide an explanation of the ways in which the children of same-gender parents engage with their world. I decided to go back to my field texts and immerse myself in my data.

In order to organise my data holistically, I reread the raw transcripts and field notes on the collages and time lines without highlighting themes. I simply read through the material several times to form an overall impression of what each specific child's story was about. My earnest desire was to understand the intricately interwoven parts of each unique story. It was from this emergent *overall* impression that general patterns in each individual story began to emerge in my mind. I then used coloured markers and coloured pens and started to work through the field texts again. I then identified narrative threads, tensions and patterns within the field texts of each story. I grouped, labelled, organised and sorted the data that was

necessary to understand each individual child and then only wrote a narrative version of each child's story.<sup>22</sup>

In this way, I inductively analysed the created data to obtain a rich and descriptive account of those subjective experiences that my research partners were willing to share with me. These narratives were written to present and represent a descriptive, as well as an explanatory account of the experiences of children with same-gender parents. These narratives capture the subjective "feel" of their particular experiences and enhance the understanding of the social world in which these children live (Willig, 2001:12). This embodies one of the dominant themes in qualitative research, namely, to display an integrated, meaningful and contextual nature of a social phenomenon (Mouton, 2001:168). Writing the narratives became my analysis as I made sense of their worlds in a storied way. Daiute and Fine (2003:63) also mentions that writing is often a phase of data analysis. This is confirmed by Laurel Richardson (1994:517): "I write because I want to find something out. I write in order to learn something that I did not know before I wrote it."

In reading through the work of narrative writers and studying how they came to represent their interviewees (Ely et al., 1997; Mahoney, 2002; Reddy, 2000), I became aware of the complex process of choosing voice and signature. I started off by writing four narratives in order to explore different styles or formats.

With one story, for example, I derived four major categories from the field texts and discussed these categories by intertwining analytical comments and direct quotations. The analytical commentary gave me the opportunity to share some of my reflections and to make references to the literature. I felt, however, that I was not giving the child enough space to be known, and I also felt that my signature and that of the literature were becoming too strong. I also felt uncomfortable with the

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<sup>22</sup> See terminology in Bubble One for an explanation of the difference and similarity between narrative and story.

analytical discussion because it disrupted the flow of the reading. An example of the writing can be visited in Addendum B.

In another instance I categorised the interviews once again, shuffled the sequence to form a more coherent story line, and presented the interview followed by an analytical commentary. What bothered me with this presentation was that the child's voice became lost, and it felt as though the analytical discussions had not integrated well with the first section where the categories were outlined. An example of the writing can be visited in Addendum C.

I then reworked this particular narrative and wrote it in first person. This definitely made the text more readable and gave this particular child, Ryland, a definite voice. My supervisor and I were concerned about member validation. In addition, I heeded the warning of Reddy (2000:72) that writing in the first person might not be the way in which that person would have written it themselves since there is a difference between how a person talks about their lives and how they write about their lives. I did however decide to proceed to present his story in the first person because that style portrayed his story for me in the most convincing way. Ryland was satisfied with my account of his experiences and one of his mothers confirmed that it gave her great insight into his world and was most convincing.

With another story, that of Kim, I used the style in which I became the narrator. While I primarily used her experiences, I also inserted myself into the context. My thoughts, feelings, perceptions and views of what was happening were now presented in order to contextualise the interview process. I really enjoyed writing in this way because I could use what happened during the data creation process more comprehensively. An example of how I rewrote the transcripts into a narrative is given in Addendum D.

Reflecting on this process of how to capture each child's story with my supervisor lead me to pursue the style of researcher narrator. I continued with Kim's narrative and reworked another five in terms of the style of researcher narrator. I kept

Ryland's account in the first person, for reasons already mentioned. With Carl I used a different format because most of his interviews were carried out in the presence of his parents. I therefore included their voices and decided to present it differently. I wanted all four voices to be alive and to interact with one another. Although I was also part of this particular narrative, I did not include non-textual cues and moods in that account. I felt that there were enough cues in the story itself to present their views adequately, and that my absence as researcher narrator might enable a reader to insert his or her own commentary.

*When I "speak for" (these children), I cannot avoid telling my story about their lives. I can use the voices of Others from my understanding of their positions, but I can never write from their positions. I cannot become them, I can only pass on selected aspects of what they have shown me about their lives... (Griffin, in Roberts, 2002:127).*

The puzzle of knowing what to do had now been resolved, but how to write the narratives raised a different issue. How could I frame their lives and their experiences in a responsible and ethical way? How could I ensure that I would do them justice and not exploit them or some of the other voices that they shared with me? I took notice of Charmaz's words (2000:527) about how writers or "authors place their stories" and how their framing of them "can bring experience to life or wholly obscure it". I also carefully heeded the words of Huber and Clandinin (2002:800-801), and realised that I needed to ensure that my attempt to create a "good" plotline would not betray my research partners.

Contemplating and reflecting on how to present the experiences of the children that I had interviewed made me realise that writing the narratives was for me the most valid, honest, thorough and careful presentation that I could engage in. In being open with my readers about my own thoughts and feelings during my conversations, I was also letting readers know what I thought, how I reacted emotionally, and what my preliminary interpretations of the context were. This enabled them to "enter into the interview context with me, allowing them to watch and to imagine how they might have responded in a similar situation. Some readers

might draw conclusions that are different from mine, or interpret their words in a different light” (Ellis & Berger, 2002:862). This would enhance multiple readings and interpretations of the experiences of children growing up in same-gendered families (Ely et al., 1998; Mason, 2002). Mason’s words (2002:168) that “every narration or representation is a version rather than an objective and neutral description” resonated with my epistemological view of multiple realities because a social world is also an interpreted world.

Writing the narratives over and over again led me to discover new ways of seeing, saying and thinking about what the children had shared with me. Creating different versions allowed me to test my assumptions and to gain insight into their reported experiences (Ely et al., 1997:20). I also saw that the narratives were becoming an interpreted text, an interpretive document that represented my own way of making sense of their experiences. It was not simply the telling and re-telling of events, but also my interpretations that symbolically recreated these events.

Apart from focusing on the content of the narratives, I also realised that the form of the stories communicated to the audience. The following elements<sup>23</sup> of narrative approaches were utilised in my narratives (Riessman, 2002b:230). Firstly, the narratives have a beginning, middle and an end; secondly, I included part of Labov’s elements of a narrative in terms of an orientation (participants, time and place or situation), a sequence of events (although not always strictly linear); thirdly and specifically with regard to the disclosure processes: I included act (what was done), scene (when and where it was done), agent (who did it) and agency (how she or he did it) as I based parts of my writing on Burke’s classic method.

In constructing the narratives, I followed Dan Mahoney (2002:325) in inserting different voices throughout the narratives. Thus we find my *interviewee voice*, that is the narrative construction that draws on the direct transcripts, my *reflexive journal voice*, which indicates what I was thinking about and feeling while I was listening

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<sup>23</sup> See page 164-165 for a theoretical discussion of narrative elements/ dimensions.

and probing, and the my *writing up voice*, that gives preliminary interpretations, although I have tried not to bring that voice (my writing up voice) out too much because there is ample space in a subsequent Bubble for interpretation. “In vivo-coding” was mainly used where direct quotations aided in letting each child’s story speak for itself. These selected phrases described particular aspects of the children’s reported experiences to capture the uniqueness of each child’s story. I have thus used the raw transcripts and made them into a readable narrative by describing and exploring the experiences of the children growing up in same-gendered families (See Addendum E<sup>24</sup>).

I have not merely made the translations more fluent, but have also inverted the order in which the information was presented so as to combine the different interviews and other field texts into a single narrative. This means that I did not literally record everything that the child said and that I omitted bits of minor information in some cases (such as general talk about school subjects) in order to make the narrative more readable and to illuminate the experiences that I was focusing on. As no two languages work identically, some alterations were made in the transformation of the raw Afrikaans transcripts into the colloquial speech of young and/or teenager children, as well as in the English because of the differences between how various things are said and written. This links up with the comment that I made in The First Link of this Bubble,<sup>25</sup> where I said that I had tidied up some of the quotations to make the words of the children clearer and more understandable. I agree with Popadiuk (2004:408) that the use of the exact wording of my research partners may make them appear at times to be inarticulate. Since I have spent many hours polishing the academic text, it may stand in strong contrast

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<sup>24</sup> The reader can find the narratives where the selected parts from the original texts appear as footnote references, as well as the alterations requested by the children, on the accompanying CD-Rom. An example is provided in paper format in Addendum E, and all the narratives are included in the CD-Rom. The original transcripts are also included on the CD-Rom. These two Addenda are in PDF format. (Addendum E: This addendum carries the narratives with reference to the original transcripts in the footnote section. This shows what aspects of the original transcripts were used, and how it was applied in forming the narratives for each individual child. Addendum F: Original transcripts).

<sup>25</sup> See page 142.

to the text of the narratives. I did however scrutinise the changes meticulously and ensured that the key expressions used by the children were not altered.

What helped me to write the narratives thoughtfully was the knowledge that my research partners would have an opportunity to scrutinise my account of their experiences. The narratives were given to the children that I interviewed for research partner validation/member checking. I asked them to ensure that all the information was accurate and truthful so that it could be presented to a wider audience. I also gave them the opportunity to add any additional information that they consider worthwhile and to indicate whether some aspects needed more or less emphasis. After that, I also gave the narratives to the parents, who were primary representatives of the first community of readers, so that they could discuss the texts with the children and make whatever suggestions for alterations they wished. I then reworked the narratives according to what the children and I had agreed upon.

With one participant I had to omit one crucial aspect of her story because she did not want a specific section of her narrative to be published. This omission did not influence the overall impression of her story. Even so, I made an ethical decision not to include it because of her status as a partner in the research process. As Clandinin and Connelly (2000:135) assert: "One of the poignant moments in narrative inquiry is always the moment when research texts are shared with participants. The concern is for the relationship between researcher and participant – as thoughts or words spoken and written on paper are always at a distance."

The re-worked narratives were then given to critical readers, some of them, but not all of them, familiar with the academic world because I wanted to obtain diverse critiques of the stories. Some of the comments I received were related to the content (suggestions affecting the translations, for example); others were related to the form of the stories (the footnoting, for example), while other comments were merely about the overall impression made by the narratives. Once again I made slight

changes and in some cases I once again contacted my research partners so as to ensure that they would approve of the changes.

Narrative inquiry begins with experience as lived and told in stories (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000:414). Terre Blanche and Durrheim (1999:381) mention that interpretive research always involves a circular movement between the general and specific. While the outcome is usually presented in general and theoretical terms, it remains at the same time an account of particular experiences. Clandinin and Connelly (2000:141-143) hold a completely different view. They say that that one must decide whether or not you want to present more general findings or whether you want to focus on and present the participants' stories. This is what I established in writing the narratives. I set out to understand particular stories and present them in a way that people would be able to relate to, even if their circumstances were relatively different.

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Having written the narratives, I proceeded with the interpretative phase. The focus here was on making sense of these narratives and I asked myself: "What does this mean? What can be extracted from these narratives?" In gaining a better perspective on what I was doing, I sensed that I was touching on a combination of different theoretical approaches that none of the "traditional" philosophical frames such as grounded analysis, or symbolic interactionism or phenomenology seemed to account for. While a great deal of overlapping occurs among social theory, lesbian and gay psychology, queer theory, positive psychology and theories on disclosure, none of these addressed the specific individuality and uniqueness of what I found in each story. My methodology is nevertheless highly compatible with the processes of narrative inquiries.

I remained with my decision not to impose any preconceived ideas and/or theories directly onto my data, and decided to see what would emerge from the narratives. I

asked myself the following question in order to frame and focus the experiences of children in same-gendered families: *“What do I know now that I did not know before about the experiences of children growing up in same-gendered families?”*

Interpretations generated while reading and analysing the narratives reminded me of grounded theory analysis, which generates categories that emerge from the data. I however started by viewing the experiences of children growing up in same-gendered families from their perspectives since the experiences are grounded in the children’s words. The narratives are the mould into which I have poured their experiences. Interpretations would then emerge from these narratives. And so I stumbled upon the idea of calling this process “a grounded narrative”.<sup>26</sup> The narrative is grounded in the data, and using the specificity, individuality and uniqueness of the experiences to frame the emerging story.

I could find only a few references to “grounded narrative” with regard to methodology (PsycINFO & Internet Search, 12-21 February 2005: see Addendum G). The most comprehensive information came from an article by Béatrice Boufoy-Bastick (2003), which I will discuss shortly. Four articles use the word “grounded” merely as part of an adjective to describe the narrative. They used it in the form of foregrounded and backgrounded narrative (Tickoo, 2003), or reality grounded narrative (Franklin, 2000), or well-grounded narrative (Lius, 2003:¶9). In another article, Smith (2004:36) refers to “a ‘sociologically grounded narrative’ that can alter the shape and content of civic discourse by biographically, collectively and politically enfranchising the previously disenfranchised”. I assume that this refers to a narrative grounded in a sociological context, and in a lesser sense to the methodology applied.

But Boufoy-Bastick (2003:177) uses the term “grounded composite narrative”, which she derives from Weber’s Ideal Type and Grounded Theory methodology. She sees the grounded narrative as an interpretive tool to describe a particular

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<sup>26</sup> This happened during a telephone conversation with a colleague, Prof. Brigitte Smit during December 2004.

context. For her, this “richly vivid descriptive narrative allows the reader to vicariously and emphatically experience the anthropological research context by reorganising and reconstructing its context to create personally relevant meaning”. She used it to describe a particular educational setting by blending it into a fictional school. I however did not blend all of their stories into a fictional narrative, but presented the narratives of each individual child even though the boundaries between fiction and fact have been blurred by a post-structuralist perspective (Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 2000:153). I then proceeded to the interpretive phase so that I could revisit the narratives as grounded narratives because the interpretive accounts are grounded in the narratives. The interpretations emerged from reading and analysing the narratives against a backdrop of the field texts as background data. The supporting evidence to develop explanations of these “interpretive themes” was selected from the narratives.

Available literature on the experiences of children with same-gender parents was consulted and woven into the interpretations. This was primarily literature that referred specifically to the perspectives of children. This literature had to be supported by broader perspectives on same-gender parenting and families because literature about the experiences of children growing up in same-gendered families is extremely limited.

I will present these interpretative themes in Bubble Five after which I will again reflect on the iterative and emerging process of analysis and interpretation relevant to this particular Bubble.

*Therefore, Queen Academia, I think that the time has arrived for us to gather once more in the King's Great Hall so that I can share all of the stories of the children growing up in same-gendered families with you...*

