

CHAPTER 3

METHOD - THE NATURAL HISTORY OF MY RESEARCH

3.1 INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this chapter is to enable the reader to understand how I gathered the data I chose to include in this dissertation, how I interpreted the collected data, and my underlying epistemological assumptions that give rise to my particular methodological choices.

Silverman (2000, p. 236) suggests renaming the 'methodology' chapter "the natural history of my research" and recommends that instead of a formal, impersonal chapter, one should offer the reader "fieldnotes about the development of one's thinking". The autoethnographic style of this dissertation seems to fit well with Silverman's proposal. Silverman (2000, p. 236) cautions against the assumption that an "informal natural history approach" means "anything goes", on the contrary he feels that by asking readers to engage with their thinking in process, they are enabled to assess their ability to be self-critical.

One of the advantages of drawing the reader's attention to the implicit processes of qualitative research is to enable the reader to explicitly access those implied procedures and practices and in so doing create opportunities for discussion and improvement (Huberman and Miles, 2002).

Silverman (2000) recommends raising the following aspects in a qualitative methodology chapter: how one went about one's research; the overall strategy adopted and the reasons for doing so; the design and technique used and the motivation for doing so.

I will start off by sketching my epistemological evolution relative to my upbringing and the circumstances that allowed my theory of knowledge to develop. Thereafter I will proceed to outline the natural history of my research, taking into account Silverman's afore-mentioned recommendations of what ought to be covered in a qualitative methodology chapter. In tracking my epistemological evolution and my methodological processes, I will intersperse my writings with excerpts from my daily diary in order to illustrate the natural history of my research. This is modeled on the approach that Silverman (2000) uses in tracking the methodological processes of three of his students.

3.2 LINEAR EPISTEMOLOGY

Reber (1995, p. 256) defines epistemology as “that branch of philosophy that is concerned with the origins, nature, methods and limits of human knowledge”.

Bateson (1979, p.242) defines epistemology as “the study of the necessary limits and other characteristics of the processes of, knowing, thinking and deciding”.

Auerswald (1985, p. 1) refers to epistemology as “a set of immanent rules used in thought by large groups of people to define reality”.

Keeney’s (1983, p. 17) definition of “*how* one thinks, perceives and decides and *what* one thinks, perceives and decides” best resonates with me for two reasons.

First of all, he illustrates his epistemological presuppositions in relation to practical psychotherapeutic experiences. Secondly, the style of his writing is clear and succinct, enabling me to access his thought processes in an uncomplicated manner.

My development will be traced by examining my family roots that are firmly established within, and formed by, the religious heritage and traditions of our local church. In the words of Auerswald (1985), my childhood was based upon linear/ Newtonian principles. I was reared in a strict, rule-bound (Becvar & Becvar, 1996) religious family where one was either right or wrong, good or bad. One could describe my upbringing as conservative and fundamentalist, with very clearly defined boundaries concerning morals, values and principles. Regular

church services and Sunday school activities served to reinforce the either/ or phenomena. One was either a child of the devil or a child of God.

As I grew older and started developing a socio-political awareness, I began challenging our church's conservative and fundamentalist principles and assumptions. Attending political rallies, and reading books, that at that time were banned, largely influenced my growing socio-political awareness. I struggled with the concept of God having created humankind equal and in God's own image, yet, in reality, life was very different depending upon one's racial and gender classification.

3.3 TOWARDS A NON-LINEAR EPISTEMOLOGY

I derive a lot of hope when I encounter my life and track my development from Christian fundamentalism to radical feminism to an integrated approach that attempts to affirm humanity...(my daily diary, 17 February 2003)

I had the opportunity of studying theology outside South Africa prior to its liberation in 1994. I found myself in a context that welcomed open debates and discussing contentious issues. I started grappling with issues such as racism, sexism, oppression and liberation theology. Slowly my worldview started expanding and I was able to include the idea of multiple realities, as Becvar & Becvar (1996) describe, within my repertoire of beliefs. I started entertaining alternative viewpoints and found this to be a very enriching and eye-opening experience. I started crystallizing views that seemed to conflict with the views

that had been ingrained in me in early childhood. My shifting from a linear to a non-linear perspective seemed to have been brought about by my openness to developing a sensitivity to not only theological issues but also socio-political and gender issues.

In retrospect, I realise that my initial and largely naïve confusion and inner questioning had marked the beginning of an “awakening” within me – an awakening to alternative realities. Studying at a ‘liberal’ Baptist theological college in Switzerland created a safe context for me to articulate the confusion and questioning, and in so doing, allow a more holistic approach to develop. Holism, according to Bopp and Weeks (1984, p. 51) implies that “when entities are brought into relationship, the result of their interaction is much more than the sum of the parts”. In other words, I needed to learn to live with complexity and deal with not only black, white and grey issues, but also different shades of grey. I needed to learn to hold competing and sometimes contradictory viewpoints simultaneously without feeling that this would give rise to personal disintegration.

On returning to South Africa in 1992, my conversations with my family members and church associates seemed to be marked by conflict. They were still operating from linear perspectives and I was trying to convince them to adopt a more inclusive perspective.

I think it was only when I started studying psychology full-time (beginning 2000) that I started learning how to fully embrace a both/and approach as described by Auerswald (1985). In other words, I now feel equipped to accept the co-existence of different worldviews alongside my own. I no longer feel as though I have to proselytise everybody to my way of thinking. I have also come to realize that a non-linear perspective includes linear aspects and that an adherence to a non-linear perspective doesn't necessarily negate linear principles.

I find that the holistic approach of Keeney's cybernetic epistemology best accommodates my current paradigm that is based on the assumption that all living and non-living components within the universe are interrelated and interconnected. A cybernetic epistemology as espoused by Keeney (1983), was previously referred to as an ecosystemic epistemology; Auerswald (1973) calls it an 'ecological' epistemology and Bloch (1980) a 'general systems paradigm'. Keeney's (1983, p. 95) cybernetic epistemology is principally concerned with "changing our conceptual lenses from material to *pattern*, rather than parts to *wholes*". In other words, a cybernetic epistemology emphasizes relationships, interconnectedness, patterns and a process-oriented and contextual approach. A cybernetic epistemology contrasts sharply with a Newtonian epistemology that is atomistic, reductionistic and anticontextual.

3.4 KEENEY'S TOOLS OF CONSTRUCTION

Keeney's (1983) epistemological tools of construction include drawing distinctions, indicating punctuations, marking orders of recursion and using double description.

3.4.1 Drawing distinctions and indicating punctuations

When I was growing up, you were either European or non-European – I could never understand this distinction! It confused me even more when I learnt that my dad's grandparents were German and British descendants (from my daily diary 28.1.2003).

One's epistemology is based on the distinctions one observes and experiences. For the greater part of my childhood I grappled with distinctions imposed upon me within the socio-political context of an Apartheid South Africa. Once I had created geographical distance between myself and the country of my birth, I was able to challenge these distinctions and think differently about myself from a socio-political perspective.

How one makes distinctions and thereby attributes meaning to events is what Keeney (1983) calls one's *punctuation*. Every decision one makes, every action taken and every word spoken (or unspoken) is based on the construction of boundaries (Brookbanks, 1999). To make a decision therefore means to draw a boundary line between what to choose and what not to choose.

At the time of writing this dissertation i.e. at this point in my journey towards becoming a clinical psychologist, I have chosen to punctuate certain experiences over and above others. These choices indicate my punctuation, i.e. my portrayal of how I *currently* understand and attach value to my realities. In future I may choose to punctuate the same events differently, in keeping with Keeney's (1983) philosophy of how we are constantly changing. However, for now, these are the punctuations I choose, with the full awareness that different punctuations of the same writings would be possible and equally valid.

Marking orders of recursion refers to drawing distinctions, distinctions upon distinctions, and distinctions upon distinctions upon distinctions. Keeney (1983) unpacks this concept by outlining the emergence of Bateson's three-phase 'clinical epistemology' upon which he heavily draws. First of all, primary distinctions are drawn in order to discern what can be called 'raw data'; secondly, one then jumps a level of abstraction and draws distinctions to organize the raw data; thirdly and finally one steps back to examine what one has done.

The process of writing my autoethnography initially could be considered raw data. Questions and feedback raised by my supervisor and myself enable me to visualise some of my blind spots that according to Maturana & Varela (1987) are apparent in all writings. A recursive process therefore takes place that allows fresh perspectives to occur enabling me to grow. Put differently, understanding is

achieved when one re-experiences previous events and occurrences and allows new and different meanings to emerge (Ellis and Flaherty, 1992).

3.4.2 Relationship or double description

Double description seeks to distinguish patterns of relationship (Brookbanks, 1990). When two people interact, each member punctuates the flow of interaction in his/ her own unique way (Keeney, 1983). Bateson (1979) asserts that relationship is always a product of double description. He illustrates this by using the imagery of vision where each eye provides one with monocular vision and the two eyes together giving a binocular view in depth – this double view is what Bateson (1979) feels constitutes relationship.

As you, the reader, engage in reading this dissertation, you are being provided with a monocular view, a subjective view of my life story. Those who live intimately with me, and those who have interacted with my stories, may well describe their view of my journey very differently. This doesn't mean that the one account negates the other but that they complement one another and add depth. I will therefore incorporate the feedback I have received from my husband as well as my previous supervisor and my current therapist since I feel this adds depth to the dissertation.

3.5 SUBJECTIVITY AND CONNECTIVITY

Cybernetic epistemology holds significant implications for the study of human interactions not only between individuals but also within groups and the environment itself (Brookbank, 1990).

In keeping with Keeney and Sprenkle's (1982, p. 9) assertion, all things "in nature are complexly, but systematically interrelated – morally, mentally and physically". I see myself as integrally connected with the universe and inextricably linked with other beings including plants, animals and other forms of living and non-living entities.

This dissertation focuses mainly on subjectivity, meaning human lived experiences and the physical, socio-political, cultural, and historical context of those experiences (Ellis & Flaherty, 1992). In other words, my inner voices, my bodily feelings, and my actions are linked to my socio-political, cultural and historical heritage. Moreover, as human beings we communicate and find meaning through our unique use of language that is informed by the societies within which we were formed and developed (Anderson & Goolishian, 1988).

Given my epistemological assumption that I am a product of my socio-political and cultural heritage, it therefore makes sense for me to utilize a methodological

approach such as autoethnography, as a means of exploring my journey towards becoming a clinical psychologist.

The process that led up to my embarking upon qualitative research - and more specifically, autoethnography - is best understood within the context of my diversified background.

3.6 QUANTITATIVE VERSUS QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

Any methodological standpoint is, by definition, partial, incomplete, and historically contingent (Riesmann, 1993, p. 70).

One of the important strengths of qualitative research, according to Gergen (1985), is that it is generative - in other words, it constructs new ways of understanding, or new intelligibilities.

Qualitative approaches to research arose in the early 1970's in response to quantitative approaches that favoured experimental, correlational and survey research strategies (Schwandt, 2000). In quantitative research, the emphasis is on linear causality, subject/ object dualism, reductionism and absolutism, amongst others. Qualitative inquiry encompasses a set of laudable virtues such as fidelity to phenomena, respect for the life world and attention to the fine-grained details of daily living (Schwandt, 2000). A qualitative approach is ideally suited for exploring meaning that one places on moments, events and life processes. Qualitative researchers want to make sense of feelings, experiences

and social situations as they occur in the real world (Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 1999). It focuses on providing insight into understanding people and the social and cultural contexts within which they live.

A qualitative approach is therefore well suited to the present exploration because it deals with details of daily living. Furthermore, a qualitative approach lends itself to uncovering the breadths and depths of experiences as captured within autoethnographic stories.

The sum total of my working career to date includes a multitude of environments namely private and public hospitals, community and clinic settings, nursing and private homes and pharmaceutical industries - essentially the medical field.

I have therefore been exposed to different operational models and epistemologies within the various settings. For example, within the public hospital environment I was largely exposed to the medical model – a model considered to be operating within the Newtonian paradigm. I have worked in environments, e.g. community settings, where health is viewed more holistically or ecosystemically (Keeney, 1983) and various contexts of the patient/ client are taken into account i.e. the family, societal, religious and political circumstances.

I have co-ordinated research trials within the pharmaceutical industry that are supportive of the medical model approach. Conversely, I have co-ordinated

research trials that seriously take into account the client's personal, socio-political, medical and gender background.

I have lived in different international contexts where I felt I needed to remain open to cross-cultural experiences, alternative living habits and different ways of understanding reality.

I have sometimes felt compelled to adapt, and at other times have chosen not to adapt to the various contexts I have been exposed to, and lived in. I consider myself to be open-minded, accommodating and welcoming of diversity and difference.

A series of events have unfolded from the time that I initially started exploring dissertation topics. Some of these events that I feel are pertinent to my methodological progression, will be highlighted.

In the beginning stages, I wanted to do a study that was related to health and more particularly HIV/AIDS since this had been my most recent area of expertise. At that time, mid-2001, however, the supervisors who specialized in health-related topics already had their full quota of students and were unable to accommodate me.

3.6.1 A quantitative attempt

Given my openness and my diverse exposure to various contexts and approaches, it should therefore come as no surprise that I then contemplated a quantitative study. This idea was sparked off by my growing interest in the field of neuropsychology and also by the admiration I had for my neuropsychology professor, Kate Grieve. Prof. Grieve is highly regarded and well-respected in her field of expertise. The approved topic of my dissertation was:

“Investigating the effects of depression versus traumatic brain injury on verbal memory with specific reference to the Rey Auditory Verbal Learning Test”.

At the beginning of 2002, and also at the start of my internship, I fervently began working on my neuropsychology dissertation. The Heads of Psychology and Psychiatry as well as the medical superintendent at Helen Joseph Hospital approved my proposal. Wits Ethics Committee, after a few minor changes, also approved the study. I worked extremely hard to get this study off the ground.

For various reasons, including bureaucratic-related problems, time pressure and logistical constraints, the study no longer seemed viable and feasible. I felt devastated after weighing up my options and finally realizing that my neuropsychology study had to be cancelled.

...time constraints and bureaucratic processes, I feel I need to discuss with you other options...it doesn't seem feasible at this stage to continue with the proposed study (excerpts from personal correspondence to Prof. K. Grieve, 12 January 2003).

3.6.2 Qualitative exploration

During my training, I had always resisted some of my fellow-trainee's and trainers' promptings to undertake a qualitative study focusing on my family history and more particularly, the impact of forced removals on our lives. One trainer had in fact spoken to me very seriously about pursuing a dissertation regarding forced removals. He had also written a letter to me in this regard:

...your struggle in this crisis of your living now is worthy of your full attention – for you and for the generations which follow you. You are re-writing history and in so doing insuring that the past shall never be repeated (personal correspondence from Prof. S. Lifschitz, October 2000).

After canceling my neuropsychology study, I decided to meet with Patricia Oosthuizen (my potential and future supervisor) and discuss the possibility of entering the domain of qualitative research that I felt is far less defined and unclear than quantitative research. I tried to convince myself that this was the route to follow, with the words of Mary and Kenneth Gergen (in Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, p.1025) ringing in my ears that “the domain of qualitative inquiry offers some of the richest and most rewarding explorations available”.

I discussed my reservations with Patricia in following the promptings of my trainers and fellow-trainees (UNISA master's clinical students) with regard to the topic of forced removals since this would entail interviewing my parents. I felt I had an *ethical* (Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 1999) responsibility with regard to undertaking a study that had the potential of opening up wounds, exposing my parents to 35 year old hurts, and then possibly not having adequate time and

space to begin to bring closure to something that was potentially painful. I had briefly entertained the idea of conducting a case study with my parents (now in their 70's) as the subjects and the topic would have entailed forced removals.

While contemplating forced removals as a topic, Patricia introduced me to the idea of autoethnography where the focus would be on the self i.e. *myself*, and additionally aspects like forced removals and how it impacted upon my life could be delved into. Patricia recommended that I read the writings of Ellis and Bochner (from 1991 onwards). Up until this time I had never encountered the concept of autoethnography. Somehow, this meeting with Patricia opened up possibilities that I'd never considered before. I developed a newfound enthusiasm for starting afresh, this time on a qualitative limb. I expressed this to Prof. Grieve.

I need to find a topic that resonates with me. I have spent a lot of time thinking about where my passion lies at the moment. It seems as though I'm being pulled towards qualitative research – either within the HIV/AIDS sphere or autoethnography (personal correspondence to Prof. K Grieve, 20 January 2003).

In shifting from quantitative to qualitative research, I read various authors' impressions regarding qualitative research. De Vos (1998) identifies qualitative research methodologies as dealing with data that are principally verbal and quantitative research methodologies as dealing with data that are principally numerical. Denzin and Lincoln (2000) define qualitative research as an interpretive multimethod, multi-perspectival approach to the study of human beings in their natural surroundings. According to Leong and Austin (1996)

qualitative research focuses on processes and meanings that are not rigorously measured in terms of intensity or quantity. Terre Blanche and Kelly (1999) highlight the tendency of qualitative researchers to focus on first-hand accounts, rich detail and evocative language.

After a cursory glance of the literature pertaining to qualitative research, I felt affirmed in my desire to write from an autoethnographic perspective. In keeping with the major proponents of the autoethnographic exploratory approach, namely Ellis and Bochner (2000) I felt it was necessary to demonstrate the importance of making my own experiences a topic of study in its own right.

A qualitative approach seemed to be ideally suited for exploring meaning that one places on moments, events and life processes. Qualitative researchers want to unpack and make sense of feelings, experiences and social situations as they occur in everyday life (Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 1999). It focuses on providing insight into relationships and deeper understanding into social phenomena.

Parker (1996) highlights potential qualitative methodological horrors and proposes ways of transforming them into methodological virtues. Firstly, he deals with **indexicality**. By this he means that all meaning is indexical and that it will change as the occasion changes and as it is used in different ways. Secondly, he raises the issue of **inconcludability**. Here, Parker (1996) contends that qualitative researchers who follow the changes in meaning in the course of

research will both understand and welcome the opportunity for others to supplement their account. Thirdly, he discusses **reflexivity**. Parker (1996) asserts that subjectivity is a resource and not a problem since research is always carried out from a particular standpoint and the pretence of neutrality is disingenuous.

After having explored various aspects of qualitative research, I felt comfortable in undertaking an autoethnographic exploration to enable me to find meaning within my collective experiences of living.

3.6.3 Autoethnography

The term 'autoethnography' is made up of three components: auto (self), ethnos (culture) and the research process (graphy). Ellis and Bochner (2000) define autoethnography as an autobiographical style of writing and doing research that displays numerous levels of consciousness, connecting the personal to the ethnic or cultural aspects. Ellis and Bochner (2000) outline the characteristics of autoethnographic writing as follows:

1. the author writes in the first person in an evocative manner, making herself/ himself the subject of research, thus breaching the conventional divide between researcher and research subject;

2. the narrative text focuses on a single case, thus breaching the traditional foci of research from generalizing across cases to generalizing within a case;
3. the writings are presented in story form, thus breaking boundaries that normally separate social science from literature;
4. the reader of the text is repositioned as an active participant in dialogue rather than as a passive recipient;
5. the writings disclose hidden details of private life, highlighting emotional experience.

The goal of autoethnography is to write evocatively and meaningfully about topics that matter and that may make a difference to both the writer and the reader, both on an emotional level and a cognitive level (Ellis & Bochner, 2000).

I started off my autoethnographic exploration by reading one or two articles written by Ellis and Bochner. This sparked off my desire to start writing from my heart and head (Ellis, 1998). From mid January until mid March 2003, I created the time and space to write evocatively in an uninterrupted manner. Eventually, when I started becoming repetitive and felt unable to generate any more stories, I moved to the next phase of my research i.e. exploring various options for the analytical phase.

Sometimes I wrote in a systematic and orderly manner or what Ellis & Bochner (2000) call systematic sociological introspection and emotional recall. Systematic introspection implies a process where one writes in a systematic manner, both thoroughly and chronologically, using the main events to structure and form the tale. The story is then reread, filling in new memories and details. Emotional recall is a process whereby the scene is revisited emotionally and in so doing the details are remembered.

At other times I wrote in a rather chaotic, disorderly and unsystematic manner, returning to it later to edit it. There were times when I felt completely dry and unable to generate any further stories. I would then turn to the writings of people like Bochner, Ellis & Tillmann-Healy (1997) as well as Spry (2001) and Ellis, Kiesinger & Tillmann-Healy (1997) and these readings stimulated ideas of how to proceed in my own writings.

I was stimulated to scratch and search through my personal records and boxes. I sometimes turned to various sources of inspiration like my personal diaries, letters and journals in order to further arouse the process of my autoethnographic exploration. At other times I played recordings of music that evoked memories in order to aid emotional recall as Ellis & Bochner (2000) suggest.

Throughout the process of writing my stories, I was aware that at some point in the future I would have to decide what to include and what to exclude in this

dissertation of limited scope. I created a total of thirty four stories. Of these, only thirteen are pertinent to the purpose of this dissertation, and they have been included in the Appendix, pp.150-252. I have decided to exclude some of the stories, because they are too personal and too revealing while other stories may offend some of the people in the stories. There are also some stories that are of such a sensitive nature that I would need to get special permission from all the implicated parties, before making them publicly available.

Bochner (1997, p.44) highlights the importance of “bridging the divide between the academic and the personal voice by utilizing storytelling”. He further posits that the split between theory and story is a false dichotomy and that there is nothing as theoretical as a well-written story. Ellis (1998) asserts that this type of research investigates the inner workings of the self in a concrete way. Furthermore, thoughts and feelings are developed and problematised in a dialogical manner through plots and scenes captured descriptively within their historical, socio-political and cultural context.

In short, autoethnographic writing can be described as attempts to capture the richness, complexity and diverse experiences of life in ways that hopefully speak to others and touch others. As Josellson (1995, p.32) aptly observes, “people’s personal narratives are efforts to grapple with the confusion and complexity of the human condition”.

3.6.4 Daily diary

I feel dried out and unable to create anything worth writing down. I wonder whether I should try drawing something representative of my life – maybe this will open up channels that may give rise to something of substance (my daily diary, 05 February 2003).

Patricia had urged me to keep a daily diary while simultaneously writing auto-ethnographically. The 'daily diary' concept can be equated with Terre Blanche and Durrheim's (1999) idea of fieldnotes. The daily diary served to track the development of my thinking and as Alasuutari (in Silverman, 2000, p. 236) argues, "false leads and dead-ends are just as worth reporting as the method eventually chosen".

Keeney (1983) emphasizes the importance of utilizing both the right and left brain as cybernetic complementarities. As I re-assess the moments where I recall feeling stuck, by rereading my daily diary and through the process of reflection, I realize how my openness to exploring alternative forms of creativity aided the research process. For example (as illustrated above), I sometimes resorted to drawing, and once I wrote a poem, something that I do not ordinarily do. This helped me to move beyond my stuckness.

I must also confess that when Patricia made this suggestion i.e. of keeping a daily diary, I could not fully appreciate the significance of doing so – now I do.

3.6.5 Critique of autoethnography

I do feel that since I embarked upon my autoethnographic exploration without having adequately surveyed the available literature earlier on, the sheer volume of writings I was producing grossly overwhelmed me. On the one hand, this approach lent itself to creativity. On the other hand, I felt the mass of my data at my disposal was unmanageable, confusing and directionless, and lacking in focus (Neuman, 2000). I felt quite disillusioned at this stage, and since this period of disillusionment coincided with my second supervisor's resignation, I felt the urge to either give up or change topics for a third time.

On reflection, I realized that had I consulted Silverman's (2000) and Terre Blanche and Kelly's (in Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 1999) works and ideas earlier, I might have done things differently, particularly with regard to data analysis. I think that attending to data analysis earlier on in the process might have served a two-fold purpose. First of all, as Silverman (2000) suggests, beginning as early as possible with data analysis, lends itself to opportunities for exploring different options and modifying one's analytic approaches simultaneously. Secondly, this might have served to focus my writings very early on in the process— alternatively it might have hampered the imaginative aspects of my writings.

I experienced a lot of anxiety in the days preceding my initial official meeting with my third supervisor. Beate had committed herself to reading my

autoethnographic writings and we would then proceed from there. In this time, I struggled with sticking to my original methodology and or modifying it and/or changing direction altogether. While Beate was reading my writings and I was impatiently waiting for feedback, I struggled with thoughts like ‘what if she doesn’t like what I’ve written’; ‘what if she judges my writings as self-indulgent, sentimental and non- academic’.

I also found myself rehearsing other critiques leveled against autoethnography. Writers like Mink & Shotter (in Ellis & Bochner, 2000, p. 745) pose questions like: “to what kind of truth do these stories aspire?” My response to these writers would be that autoethnographic stories primarily hope to achieve indexicality and reflexivity (Parker, 1996), as outlined earlier (see pp. 64-65), and that establishing veracity is of secondary importance. I have, as far as is possible, tried to accurately reflect events and have verified this with others. This, however, does not mean that this dissertation is free from inconsistencies. On the contrary, as indicated in the Appendix, I have deliberately not ‘edited out’ inconsistencies since I feel these are more in keeping with the nature of one’s memory.

Another critique highlighted by Ellis & Bochner (2000, p. 745), quoting Atkinson, that personal narrative reflects a “romantic construction of the self”. My findings do not corroborate with this view. On the contrary, I have experienced autoethnography as a process whereby candid accounts of my life have emerged

that are self-revelatory and are ultimately of therapeutic value, and not as a “romantic construction of the self”. In fact, my experience has been one of a ‘realistic construction of the self’ as opposed to a romanticized reconstruction of an idyllic past.

The positive feedback I received from Beate after her having read my autoethnographic writings, served to re-inject me with the fuel of enthusiasm and the impetus I so desperately needed at this stage. Beate’s telephonic response to my writings that went something like this: “I feel as though I’m reading my own life story, I can identify with so much...” echoed the sentiments of Ellis & Bochner (in Denzin & Lincoln, 2000) that autoethnography provides opportunities for doing something personally meaningful as well as something that others may find meaningful as well.

3.6.6 Study versus exploration

Up until then, my dissertation topic was rather broad and unfocused i.e. an autoethnographic *exploration*. Beate suggested that I modify the ‘exploration’ to a ‘study’. Secondly, she recommended that I needed to identify the focal point of my dissertation and the best way to do that would be to identify a dissertation title.

I found it most helpful at this stage to ask someone very close to me, i.e. my husband, to read through my mass of data. Banister (1996) & Neuman (2000) describe this process as 'triangulation' and highlight the importance of my husband's involvement and the inclusion of his feedback in this dissertation as adding depth, meaning and validation. I, in the meantime, reread my writings for the umpteenth time, trying to allow myself to remain open to aspects that would emerge as Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach and Zilber (1998) and Terre Blanche and Durrheim (1999) suggest. However, I desperately needed someone who was somewhat distanced to provide me with another perspective. My husband's previous academic background as well as his commitment and ability to be analytical as well as critical, proved to be extremely fruitful. After he had immersed himself in my writings and made notes as well as asked questions for clarification purposes, we discussed what had emerged for each of us. I also then consulted the written feedback I had received from Patricia in response to my autoethnographic writings. This added more depth and provided me with an additional perspective. Additionally, input from my current supervisor, Beate, aided me in the process of identifying a "thread" or what Smith, Harré & Van Langenhove (1996) call a major theme emerging from the multitude of writings as outline. The identifying of this 'thread' helped me to brainstorm with my husband, and in consultation with my supervisor I eventually decided on a proposed dissertation title that ultimately refocused and refined aspects of my dissertation muddle.

After a lengthy discussion with Beate, the following topic was decided upon: *My journey towards becoming a psychotherapist: an autoethnographic study.*

What had (broadly speaking) started off as an exploration had now (more specifically) developed into a study.

3.7 DATA COLLECTION

As indicated earlier, I utilized various means for collecting the data for my autoethnographic study, including systematic sociological introspection, and emotional recall as Ellis & Bochner (2000) suggest. I also delved into archival material such as personal diaries, letters and journals as sources of inspiration. From the initial onset of self-exploration, I have treated myself as the subject of my research, and the capturing of my life experiences as primary data as expounded by Ellis and Bochner (2000).

Other sources of data include: a family tree and heirloom book compiled by my parents at my request, personal correspondence, scrap books, university case notes and assignments, photographs and videos, tape recordings (sent to our family in S.A. while we were living abroad), cards (sent by me to my family and salvaged by me when my parents moved from our family home), gifts/ memoirs (received over the years from various people), tributes, funeral pamphlets, music boxes, tapes and CDs depicting various times in my life. My own experiences as

a client in therapy as well as conversations with family, friends and colleagues also served as useful sources of data. An acute self-awareness of everyday experiences that sparked off memories of days gone by; how I'd construct each day, and emerging differences/similarities arising within me as I encountered people within my ecology also aided my recall abilities. The deliberate reliving of experiences with my immediate family has served to be invaluable and helpful at various times.

3.8 METHOD OF DATA ANALYSIS

In consultation with my supervisor, I have chosen to utilize the content of my writings by employing narrative analysis as the analytical framework and method of data analysis for my study. I will frame my story as a narrative of my life, hence my preference for Lieblich et al's narrative analysis to extract and highlight initial and inferred themes, which is presented.

3.9 NARRATIVE ANALYSIS: HOLISTIC-CONTENT PERSPECTIVE

There are various ways of analyzing narratives. Riessman (1993) provides an overview of the approaches. These include Labov's six-step structural approach that consists of the following elements: an abstract, orientation, complicating action, evaluation, resolution and coda. Burke on the other hand uses the classic method of analyzing language contained in five questions – what was done,

when or where was it done, who did it, how s/he did it and why? Then there is Gee's text-based sociolinguistic tradition analyzing changes in pitch, pauses and other features.

In my opinion, these afore-mentioned approaches are better suited to texts that are not as voluminous and complex and varied as full life story texts. I have therefore opted for Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach and Zilber's (1998) holistic-content approach that makes provision for analysing full stories holistically and within their context.

Lieblich et al's (1998) four-dimensional model consists of the following aspects: holistic-form, holistic-content, categorical-form and categorical-content. The *holistic-content* mode of reading utilises the complete life story of an individual, focusing on the content presented by it. The *holistic-form* based approach examines the plots or structures of complete life stories. The *categorical-content* mode focuses on utterances and/or narrow or broad sections that can be classified within categories or groups. The *categorical-form* mode of analysis concentrates on stylistic or linguistic aspects of defined units of the narrative.

For the purposes of this dissertation, I have chosen to focus on one of the four aspects, namely the holistic-content analysis. This aspect is best suited to the kinds of primary writings found in the Appendix below and elicits the type of analysis that allows one to extract meaning from the texts.

Lieblich et al (1998) succinctly outline a five-step process of holistic-content analysis in the following way:

1. Read the material in an open manner several times until a pattern emerges, allowing the text to speak to you.
2. Write down initial and global impressions. Note exceptions to the global impression as well as unusual features such as contradictions, episodes producing disharmony or unfinished descriptions.
3. Decide on special foci of content or themes that you want to follow as they unfold. A special focus is usually identifiable by the amount of space allotted to it or by its repetition. However, also take note of omissions or fleeting references to a particular subject.
4. Mark the various themes using coloured markers, reading separately for each one.
5. Be aware of where a theme appears for the first and last times, the transition between themes, their contexts and salience. Also be alert to episodes that apparently contradict the theme in terms of content or mood.

Holistic-content analysis seems to lend itself to making sense of masses of data and in so doing allowing the writer to construct meaning and draw distinctions from the texts.

3.10 CONCLUSION

Given my epistemological assumptions that everything in life is inextricably connected and interrelated, and that one cannot have a *decontextualised* existence, it makes sense that I have adopted a general qualitative approach to my research and more specifically an autoethnographic methodological framework.

I feel that I have embarked on a study that does not only fulfil academic requirements but is also personally meaningful for me and the readers of this dissertation. I feel that a cognitive and emotional exploration, particularly with reference to my journey as a therapist, is best undertaken under the rubric of a qualitative autoethnographic study.

Throughout this chapter, I have attempted to weave what Silverman (2000) identifies as the basic elements that constitute a qualitative methodology approach. I have sought to describe how I went about my research; the overall strategy I adopted and the reasons for doing so as well as the design and technique used, and the motivation for doing so. Strauss & Corbin (1990, p. 246) provide one with a sobering reminder that part of the development of a mature student is to recognize and understand that “no manuscript is ever finished”.