

# **WOMEN'S PERCEPTIONS OF AGEING**

by

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submitted in part fulfilment of the requirements for  
the degree of

**MASTER OF ARTS**

in the subject

**CLINICAL PSYCHOLOGY**

at the

**UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH AFRICA**

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**JUNE 2007**

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I declare that **WOMEN'S PERCEPTIONS OF AGEING** is my own work and that all the sources that I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.

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## **ABSTRACT**

The aim of this study was to explore women's perceptions of ageing in order to shed light on how individual women feel about getting older.

The qualitative interpretive research paradigm was chosen for the purposes of this study. In-depth interviews were held with three women who gave their accounts of their perceptions of ageing. The data was analysed using hermeneutic thematic analysis.

The accounts of the participants were reconstructed in terms of themes which emerged. Recurring themes in the accounts of all three participants were linked with the literature.

This study provided rich descriptions of women's perceptions of ageing and helped to create new insights and meanings both for the participants and the readers.

The information gained could serve as guidelines for clinical practice and future research.

Key words: Women, ageing, perception, meanings, experience, qualitative research, interpretive paradigm, hermeneutics.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My grateful thanks to:

*Dr. Val Rapmund*, my supervisor. Thank you for your guidance, encouragement, and patience and for helping me to "tighten my loose knitting." Without you my dissertation would be full of holes! I was so fortunate to have you as my supervisor. Your faith in me, and your expert advice, helped me to complete this project.

*Gina, Marie and Catherine*, the three participants in this study. Thank you for allowing me into your lives and for sharing your thoughts and feelings with me. Your whole-hearted participation made this study possible.

*James Kitching*, for your helpfulness and efficiency in providing the information I needed from the library.

*David*, my very special husband, for your unconditional love and support throughout the years, and for always believing in me. You have helped to make all my dreams come true. Thank you!

*Abigail and Max*, my darling children, I love you both so much. I know that the time I spent working on this dissertation was difficult for you. Thank you for letting me work even though it took me away from you.

*My mother, Adele Asher*, thank you for always being there for me, for your love and support, and for being so proud of me.

*My friends and other family members* thank you for never getting bored with the subject of 'women and ageing', and for your encouragement.

***This dissertation is dedicated to the memory of my late grandmother,  
Geraldine Ornstien, "Higran"***

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

**A lifetime is the material that each of us has to work with. Until this span is over, we are still in process, in the midst of an unfinished story. What we do with our lives is our magnum opus, or great work of personal creativity ... Ageing well is a goal worth wanting (Bolen, 2003, p. 7).**

#### Introduction

In the above quote, Bolen views the lifespan of an individual as a process. She emphasises that each person is the author of his or her life story implying that every individual plays a proactive role, throughout his or her lifetime determining the kind of life he or she will fashion for him or herself. The uniqueness of each person's life journey is also highlighted.

Ageing has often been thought of primarily in terms of chronology, rather than as a multi-dimensional process that includes biological, physiological, cognitive, sociological, economic, cultural and psychological factors (Hildebrand, 1995). In this study, participants are viewed as individuals with their own unique perceptions of ageing. The concept of ageing as a process, within the context of the meaning it has for each individual, is the focus of this dissertation.

#### The Aim and Rationale of the Study

This study aims to explore women's perceptions and experiences of ageing in order to shed light on how individual women feel about getting older. Its purpose is to give voice to three individual women about their personal experiences of growing older. It is hoped that this study will provide a rich description of these experiences and thereby help to create new insights and new understandings both for the participants and the readers. It may also

benefit those who work in the helping professions. Coleman, Bond and Peace (1993, p. 14) believe that "understanding the everyday experience of ageing can do much to change attitudes and increase awareness." They add that if we listen to older people "we can begin to learn something of the heterogeneity of older people and the lives of those whose voices often go unheard, especially older women" (Coleman et al., 1993, p. 14).

Although the study aims to give voice to the participants in a non-judgemental way, I recognise that, as the researcher, my participation has impacted on the process, from the conversations, through the analyses of the stories, to the final outcome. I, therefore, acknowledge that the conversations with each participant as well as the final written product are a co-construction of meaning between myself, the participants and the various theoretical and literary voices included in this study.

### **The Design of the Study**

Based on the literature surveyed, it seemed that much research about women and ageing was done from a positivistic and empirical point of view, although more recent research has been done from a qualitative angle. Quantitative studies view reality as stable and unchanging (Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 1999), and aspects of ageing are often objectively observed, measured and described. An example of this quantitative approach is the study done by Hillerås, Jorm, Herlitz & Winblad (2001) who measured life satisfaction in elderly people, aged 90 and above. Important statistical information is often provided by these studies. However, they fail to acknowledge the individual experiences of the participants.

Rather than provide 'objective measurement', this study hopes to provide rich and detailed descriptions of individual women's subjective perceptions and experiences of ageing and add to the body of research which has been done from this perspective. The results of this study are also not intended for generalisation to larger populations. A qualitative research approach, which encourages description and understanding of human behaviour rather than

measurement and prediction (Babbie & Mouton, 2001), was therefore, selected as being the most suitable for achieving the aims of the current study.

Postmodernism was chosen as the most fitting ontological approach for this study as it allows for multiple voices to be heard, rather than only relying on the expert voice (Hoffman, 1992).

### Sampling and Selection

Since the goal of the current study is for an in-depth understanding of the perceptions of women towards ageing, the sampling strategy used was that of purposive and convenience selection, whereby a small sample of “information-rich cases” (Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 1999, p. 45) was selected.

### Data Collection

The method used to obtain information was the unstructured interview which encouraged the participants to talk freely about their perceptions and experiences of ageing. A relationship was formed with each of the participants, and the interview was adapted to each individual.

### Data Analysis

The data was analysed using hermeneutic thematic analysis, an approach which emphasises interpretation and the discovery of meaning.

The steps below were followed in the practical execution of the study:

- The purpose and procedures of the study were explained to each participant. Written consent was obtained from the participants prior to tape recording the interviews

- The tape recorded interviews were then transcribed. These transcribed interviews are included under Appendices B , C, D and E
- Based on her personal interpretation, the interviewer identified themes highlighted from each transcribed interview.
- Finally a comparative analysis was undertaken between the themes associated with the participants' perceptions of ageing and the literature. Similarities and differences between the themes and previous research were discussed.

### **The Format of the Study**

This study contains both a theoretical component and a practical component.

The theoretical component comprises a literature review, as well as a discussion of the epistemological stance and the research methodology used in this study. The literature survey provides the reader with a background of research which has been conducted in the field of women and ageing. This will allow for a comparison between the emerging themes and alternative theories and voices. The purpose of the literature survey is not to validate the themes highlighted, but to incorporate many viewpoints about ageing. The methodological approach used will also be described fully.

The practical component has enabled the participants to give their own accounts about their personal perceptions and experiences of ageing. This perspective provides an alternative reality from that provided by the literature survey. In this way meanings around ageing are be co-created based on the many viewpoints considered.

This study comprises the following chapters:

**Chapter 2** comprises an overview of the literature surveyed regarding women's perceptions and experiences of the ageing process, in order to provide background for this study. After a general discussion about ageing,

theories of ageing are discussed, including a review of Erikson's theory of development. This is followed by an exploration of some of the more contemporary theories of ageing. Thereafter certain recurring themes in the literature pertaining to ageing are highlighted. Finally recent studies regarding women's perceptions of ageing are considered.

**Chapter 3** focuses on the research approach used in this study. Since this study hopes to provide rich and detailed descriptions of the participants' worlds, a qualitative approach was selected as being the most suitable for achieving the current aims. The underlying ontology of the study, namely postmodernism, is described and thereafter the interpretive research paradigm is explained. The role of the researcher is set out, and the sampling, data collection, and the data analysis processes used in this study are described.

**Chapters 4, 5 and 6** comprise the participants' accounts that I have reconstructed following careful analysis of the transcribed conversations (Appendices B, C, D and E), which took place between us. Each of these chapters is concluded with my personal reflections.

**Chapter 7** consists of a comparative analysis between the recurring themes found in the participants' accounts of their perceptions of ageing and the literature. Similarities and differences between the themes and previous research are discussed.

**Chapter 8** is the concluding chapter of this study. A brief overview and evaluation of the study is given along with recommendations for application in practice and future research.

## **Conclusion**

Little attention has been paid to the individual women's perceptions and experiences of ageing. This study, therefore, aims to shed light on how individual women feel about getting older.

## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### Introduction

This chapter will comprise an overview of the literature surveyed regarding ageing as well as women's perceptions and experiences of this process, in order to provide a backdrop for this study. After a general discussion about ageing, theories of ageing will be discussed, including a review of Erikson's theory of development. This will be followed by an exploration of some of the more contemporary theories of ageing. Thereafter certain recurring themes in the literature pertaining to ageing will be highlighted. Finally recent studies regarding women's perceptions of ageing will be considered. It should be noted that there is a great deal of overlap amongst the various themes so that at times certain aspects may appear to be repetitive.

#### The Meaning of Ageing

Hildebrand (1995) believes that the way in which we think about ageing has changed from a focus on mere chronology. "It has become clear that we must also think about ageing in biological, physiological, cognitive, socio-economic, cultural and psychological terms" (Hildebrand, 1995, p. 4). He adds,

ageing is an intricate, delicate and on-going process, in which we and others constantly interact with and confront our solutions from the past, our prejudices from the present and the pressures from inside and outside (Hildebrand, 1995, p. 7).

Gilleard and Higgs (cited in Ballard, Elston & Gabe, 2005, p. 170) concur that the meaning of ageing is no longer 'fixed'. Instead, they suggest that:

(w)e are beginning to see a variety of 'cultures of ageing' where the meaning of ageing relates to the identity that individuals construct to

express and interpret their own ageing ... providing a new cultural space for the expression of individualized versions of ageing identity.

However, as Turner (1994, p. 15) reminds us, “we inevitably grow up, grow older, and die; thus no one can argue that aging is wholly a social construction.”

### **Why study ageing?**

Judging from the material which has been written about the subject, there seems to be a growing interest in developing a greater understanding of ageing (Coleman, Bond & Peace, 1993). According to these authors, the many books that have been written are a reflection of the need for reassurance regarding the confusion and uncertainty about growing old. They feel that a long life should be enjoyed, rather than feared. (Coleman et al., 1993). In addition, they believe that society has a “problem-oriented approach to ageing” and that understanding the basis of our attitudes towards ageing would enable us to gain “greater awareness” about the future, if not a greater sense of optimism (Coleman et al., 1993, p. 10).

In addition, many authors (e.g. Coleman, Bond & Peace, 1993; Fisher, 1992; Fodor & Franks, 1990, Hildebrand 1995) refer to the growth of the ageing population and to “increased longevity” (Norman, McCluskey-Fawcett & Ashcraft, 2002) as reasons to increase our knowledge and awareness about later life. Hildebrand (1995, p. 2) agrees that we need to learn more about the “psychological variables” involved in ageing as we are “enjoying and living through a period for which there are no precedents” (Hildebrand, 1995, p. 5).

### **Theories of Ageing**

#### The role of theory

One of the ways in which we can learn more about ageing is by studying theories of ageing. According to Coleman (1993, p. 100) theories,

provide a way of thinking about the world and about human behaviour and society which satisfy the need for a model which fits our experience of reality.

In other words, theories help to provide a framework in which people can understand their experiences. Coleman (1993, p. 101) also believes that lack of theory and lack of norms can be detrimental when interpreting older people's behaviour, as it leads to "stereotypes and prejudices about the deterioration, self-absorption and rigidity of old age". On the other hand, however, unyielding adherence to a theory does not allow for individual differences and may lead to generalisations about how people 'should' behave.

Bond, Briggs & Coleman (1993) believe that regarding theories as right or wrong is a mistake. They say:

No one theory is a completely accurate representation of reality but some provide better insight into a phenomenon than do others. The usefulness of any theory depends on how it functions: first, to explain past events; second to predict future events, and, third, to generate new theory (Bond et al., 1993, p. 20).

The study of ageing is a "multidisciplinary enterprise" (Bond et al., 1993, p. 19) that includes biological, psychological and sociological theories. Each of these disciplines focuses on different aspects of the ageing process and each has its own theoretical perspective, makes its own assumptions and uses its own methods. Although the approaches are different, they often complement each other (Bond et al., 1993).

Even though certain of these approaches are included in the present study, the main focus is on psychological perspectives of ageing.

## Erik Erikson's Model

According to Bee (1996) Erikson's (1959/1980) theory of psychosocial development has been the most influential view of adult development so far. Its influence was evident in the current literature survey, where the majority of the literary sources consulted referred to this theory (Coleman et al., 1993; Cross & Markus, 1991; Field, 1997; Gergen, 1990; Holahan, Holahan & Wonacott, 1999; Leonard & Burns, 1999; Ranzijn et al., 1999). Coleman (1993) believes that Erikson's theory is so influential because he saw ageing as an integral part of the lifespan.

Erikson powerfully conveyed the idea that in order to understand a person in old age it is necessary to see him or her in the context of a whole life history with the problems both successfully and unsuccessfully resolved from earlier periods of life (Coleman, 1993, p. 102).

According to Erikson, psychosocial development occurs across the entire lifespan. The individual has to move through and successfully resolve eight "crises" or "dilemmas" over his or her lifetime, in order to develop a complete and stable identity (Bee, 1996, p. 55). Erikson's theory is known as a "stage theory" of development (Weiten, 1995, p. 432). Stage theories assume that people go through the various stages in a specific order and that each stage builds on the previous stage. Each stage is also strongly related to age (Weiten, 1995). Erikson described the stages in terms of a positive or negative outcome based on the successful or unsuccessful resolution of the "crisis".

<b>ERIKSON'S STAGES OF PSYCHOSOCIAL DEVELOPMENT</b>		
<b>Approximate Age</b>	<b>Stage</b>	<b>Potential strength gained</b>
0 – 1 years	1. Basic trust versus mistrust	Hope
2 – 3 years	2. Autonomy versus shame and doubt	Will
4 – 5 years	3. Initiative versus guilt	Purpose
6 – 12 years	4. Industry versus inferiority	Competence
13 – 18	5. Identity versus role confusion	Fidelity
19 – 25	6. Intimacy versus isolation	Love
25 – 65	7. Generativity versus self-absorption and stagnation	Care
65 +	8. Ego integrity versus despair	Wisdom

*Source:* Bee, 1996 p. 56

Erikson's final two stages are the most relevant for the purposes of this study. These are "generativity versus self-absorption" (occurring between the ages of 25-65) and "integrity versus despair" (occurring from the age of 65 onwards) (Bee, 1995). Features such as, "acceptance of the past, the role of reminiscence, adaptation to social change, transcendence of self-preoccupation, and loss of fear of death" are incorporated into the final two stages (Coleman, 1992, p. 68). Dilemmas, or tasks, which have not been

dealt with by the final stage of life, remain unresolved and these interfere with the person's ability to find integrity (Bee, 1996).

According to Erikson (1959/1980, p. 103) "generativity is primarily the interest in establishing and guiding the next generation." This includes one's own family as well as concern for the society in which one lives and it may take the form of mentoring younger people, teaching, or doing charitable work (Bee, 1995). Erikson believes that generativity "encompasses procreativity, productivity and creativity" (Erikson in Bee, 1996, p. 57). The challenge during this stage, therefore, is for the healthy adult to "acquire a genuine concern for the welfare of future generations, which results in providing unselfish guidance to younger people" (Weiten, 1995, p. 452).

The opposite of generativity is "stagnation" and "personal impoverishment", and should a person not be able to resolve the "crisis" of this stage, he or she may become self absorbed.

According to Bee (1996) Erikson's final stage of ego integrity versus despair has undergone some changes in his own lifetime. He first described integrity, when he was in his middle years, as "the fruit of the seven stages" (Erikson in Bee, 1996, p. 59). However, when he was in his 70s, he saw this stage more negatively. He described it as follows:

Burdened by physical limitations and confronting a personal future that may seem more inescapably finite than ever before, those nearing the end of the life cycle find themselves struggling to accept the inalterability of the past and the unknowability of the future, to acknowledge possible mistakes and omissions, and to balance consequent despair with the sense of overall integrity that is essential to carrying on (Erikson, in Bee, 1996, p. 59).

Weiten (1995, p. 452) describes the challenge of this final stage in a more positive way and believes that "people need to find meaning and satisfaction

in their lives, rather than wallow in bitterness and resentment.” In order to do this, they need to be able to forgive themselves for past mistakes.

According to Bond et al. (1993, p. 29), the focus on “the integrity of the lifespan is Erikson’s lasting contribution and one that is vital to an understanding of old age.” Like Erikson, they stress the importance of looking at the context of a person’s whole life, in order to understand him or her better in ‘old age’.

Studies, such as that of Ranzijn et al. (1999) also support the notion of integrity and agree that it is important that people accept the way they have lived their lives in order to achieve integrity. If they are unable to do this, they may give way to despair. Acceptance is, thus, seen as a “significant predictor of wellbeing in older adults” (Ranzjin et al., 1999, p. 95).

As influential as Erikson’s theory is, it seems to offer a very limited view of the ageing process, and this is clearly evident in his allocation of only 2 of the 8 stages to the years from 25 until death. It assumes that adult development is both linear and cumulative (Bee, 1996). A further criticism of Erikson’s theory is that it was based on studies of men. Norman, McCluskey-Fawcett and Ashcraft (2002, p. 32) believe “theoretical models of development based on studies of men, such as Erikson’s model, may need to be modified to fit the experience of older women.” Similarly, Fodor and Franks (1990, p. 446) say “most research on midlife and beyond has been focused on men by male researchers.”

It is Gergen’s (1990) view that most psychological theories of adult women’s development, including Erikson’s, focus mainly on biological development, especially on reproductive roles, and that a woman’s life is seen as going into decline after midlife. She believes that there “is little focus on the particular character of women’s life narratives ” (Gergen, 1990, p. 471). She feels that treating women in such a way benefits a patriarchal system.

In terms of Erikson's theory, Gergen (1990, p. 473) says,

Erikson views a woman's capacity to reproduce and mother as the single most important determinant of her adult identity. Men, however, can achieve generativity through intellectual, occupational, and other public endeavours.

In addition, Gergen (in Coleman, 1993, p. 101), reminds us that there is,

a continual need for new theories to counter the myopia induced by established accounts of reality. A theory can outlive its usefulness and instead of drawing our attention to phenomena we had not noticed before, become a hindrance to developing new insight.

Coleman (1992) suggests that by abandoning the assumptions of lifespan theories such as Erikson's, the researcher may choose to focus on the course of human lives instead. With this in mind, the focus will now turn away from the more established theories of ageing to newer alternatives which have been proposed.

### Alternative theories

Fodor and Franks (1990) believe there is no integrated theory of ageing which is of benefit to women who are middle-aged and older. They suggest:

We need to ask whether midlife and beyond is to be feared as a loss of youth and opportunity, a time for closing down and drying up; or is it a new prime of life, a time for renewal, getting rid of youthful preoccupations with appearance and body, a time to seek out new challenges, valuing wisdom, maturity, and new possibilities for growth and change? (Fodor et al., 1990, p. 447).

Among the researchers who have suggested an alternative to the established theories of lifespan development are Mitchell and Helson (1990). They have

focused on the concept of women's prime of life, which they believe occurs in the 50s. They define this prime of life as "a time of fruition, fulfilment, and high quality of life" (Mitchell et al., 1990, p. 451). According to these researchers, women have traditionally been regarded as being at their peak when they are their most fertile, and most attractive to men (Mitchell et al., 1990). However, they suggest that this period of "late adolescence" may be regarded as the "flower of youth, not the prime of life" (Mitchell et al., 1990, p. 452).

In their study, they expected to find that women would nominate their 50s as being the age at which they feel they have reached their prime of life. Mitchell et al. (1990) felt that by their 50s many women would experience increased freedom when their children became adults and left home. They also believed that their life at home would become simpler and that this would leave them with time to redirect their energies towards their partners, work and personal development (Mitchell et al., 1990). In terms of the results of their study, however, they found "no time of life is best in all respects" (Mitchell et al., 1990, p. 468). This finding seems to reflect individual differences as well as variations of timing in women's life experiences. But while the timing of 'prime of life' seemed to differ for individual women, a "substantial proportion of women described their lives very positively" (Mitchell et al., 1990, p. 452). The authors concluded their study saying, "the concept of the prime of life offers a linguistic umbrella" (Mitchell et al., p. 468) under which researchers can look at the achievements of older women in all spheres of life. They hope that this research would help to counter negative stereotypes of ageing.

Another approach towards ageing is that of researchers Leonard and Burns (1999) who have explored the idea of turning points as shaping the lives of midlife and older women. According to Leonard et al. (1999, p. 87), the turning point approach "allows respondents to select and prioritise their own significant life events" which are often not those that are highlighted in the literature on ageing. These turning points involved role transitions, times of adversity, or times of personal growth.

In their study, they asked: “How does age affect the way that people perceive their lives?” (Leonard et al., 1999, p. 87). The idea of examining “self-perceived turning points” as part of a person’s life experiences, is attributed to Clausen, a proponent of narrative theory. (Leonard et al., 1999, p. 87)

Narrative theory proposes that,

people tend to formulate their lives into a coherent and meaningful story ... A person’s life story then reflects his or her sense of who they are (Leonard et al., 1999, p. 87).

McAdams, cited in Leonard et al. (1999, p. 87) concurs that identity comprises, “an internalised narrative integration of past, present and anticipated future which provides life with a sense of unity and purpose.” People rewrite their life stories at times, and this story “directs future choices and goals and makes sense of past experiences” (Leonard et al., 1999, p. 87). In addition to the individual life story, there are also “dominant gender story-lines to which most people will approximate” (Leonard et al., 1999, p. 87). The authors add that, in the past two decades, there has been a shift from a “traditional story-line” (Leonard et al., 1999, p. 87) which defined women in biological terms to a “neo-traditional story-line” (Leonard et al., 1999, p. 87) which added the role of paid worker to a woman’s traditional roles of wife and mother. It is against this backdrop that Clausen (in Leonard et al., 1999, p. 87) “sees self-perceived turning points as the means by which individuals incorporate important changes – for better or worse – into their life story or “self-narrative”.”

The results of the Leonard et al. (1999) study indicated that while women may experience few role transitions after 40, “experiences of personal growth continue and increase through later life” (Leonard et al., 1999, p. 93).

Leonard et al. (1999) believe that by using the turning point approach, researchers can gain insight into how people’s lives are shaped. They add,

it is the subjective importance of experiences that counts with the individual, and those experiences that act as subjectively important turning points are not necessarily those that have been paid most attention by researchers (Leonard et al., 1999, p. 92).

Many of these 'alternative' theories of ageing (e.g. Ballard, Elston & Gabe, 2005; Gergen, 1990; Leonard et al., 1999; Mitchell et al, 1990) seem to have been influenced by social constructionist ideas as they highlight the importance of the individual's subjective perception and experience of ageing. They also consider the social context within which these experiences take place.

According to McQuaide (1998, p. 39):

One approach to midlife studies is to assume that the dominant discourse regarding midlife women is socially constructed and that there are alternative stories to uncover. These alternative or preferred narratives provide new lenses through which to view a woman's midlife experience ... Through performing and circulating the alternative, preferred narrative, new images are constructed for the culture.

Similarly, Öberg (2003, p. 127) reminds us that there is risk of that "dominant social values are possibly considered as synonymous with subjective experiences of aging." He, therefore, urges us to differentiate between "images of the aging body in popular and consumer culture and individuals' subjective experiences of their own bodies and their own aging" (Öberg, 2003, p. 127).

Gergen (1990, p. 471) believes that not enough attention is given to "the particular character of women's life narratives". She also feels that there are "gaps and silences ... in these renditions of women's lives" (Gergen, 1990, p. 472). In order to address these shortcomings, she believes that a "social construction metatheory" (Gergen, 1990, p. 487) is needed in order to describe women's lives in greater detail.

There seems to be a shift amongst the more contemporary theories of ageing (e.g. Ballard, Elston & Gabe, 2005; Gergen, 1990; Leonard et al., 1999; McQuaide 1998; Mitchell et al, 1990) from accounts of 'normative developmental stages' towards a focus on the individual's subjective perceptions and experiences of ageing.

### **Stereotypes of Ageing**

Ageing is, unfortunately, often viewed in a negative way. McHugh (2000, p. 103) says that,

ageing has been viewed largely as a problem, defined in terms of decline in both physical and social competencies. The old person is defined by what she or he is no longer: a mature productive adult.

A number of stereotypes also exist, which often portray older adults as "uncertain, infirm, cranky, childlike, senile, useless, 'out to pasture', 'over the hill' and 'washed up'" (Bee, 1996, p. 6). Bond, Briggs and Coleman (1993, p. 21) point out that even "the terms 'ageing' or 'senescence', which are used interchangeably, imply decline and deterioration", whereas in children, age related changes are seen as 'development' because these changes are beneficial rather than deleterious. According to Öberg (2003, p. 122) "resisting not just old age, but ageing itself, is becoming an integral part of many adult lifestyles."

Coleman (1993, p. 100) believes that our knowledge about ageing is based on "certain 'pictures' or 'images', positive and negative, about how people cope with problems in this period." He asserts that these "stereotyped views" (Coleman, 1993, p. 100) have a greater impact on our attitudes towards ageing than we may realise and he recommends making them public in order to examine them more closely.

Featherstone and Hepworth (1993, p. 308) agree saying:

Many of the images we use to describe ageing and elderly people are in fact negative stereotypes ... (which) are damaging to our relationships with older people. They represent a form of symbolic stigmatisation which finds its way through to practical everyday action, thereby giving meaning (in this example a negative meaning) to the experience of growing old.

Research by Coupland et al. (cited in Featherstone et al., 1993) based on conversations between younger and older women showed that the choice of topics as well as the vocabulary used in these interactions “actually reinforce ageist stereotypes” (Featherstone et al., 1993, p. 308). The young women apparently “access as well as construct ... negative identities for the old” (Featherstone et al., 1993, p. 308). Talking to these older women was perceived as being a waste of time and a duty rather than as worthwhile or interesting. Ironically, the research found:

Older people themselves adopt an elderly vocabulary which focuses on the relative frailty of the body, the changing social scene and the passing of time because they feel that these are the topics of conversation which younger people expect them to choose (Featherstone et al., 1993, p. 308).

The Coupland study (cited in Featherstone et al., 1993) illustrates how ageing is not just a biological process which takes place in a vacuum isolated from social life. It seems that it is both influenced by and in turn influences the social context in which it occurs.

Lippman, cited in Featherstone et al. (1993, p. 309) believes:

We are highly dependent on stereotypes as a means of communication ... We do not, said Lippman, see first and then define but *define first and then see*. Stereotypes precede and shape our perceptions and are

an inescapable consequence of living in a complex world in which a bewildering profusion of messages is generated. For Lippman, stereotypes are not inevitably negative ...They are simply a basic means of communication which help us to order potentially confusing experiences and impose some descriptive unity on them.

Stereotypes are regarded as having “enormous convenience value since they help to simplify what is otherwise complex and often confusing” (Featherstone et al., 1993, p. 309). The problem is that stereotypes generalise the experience of ageing, in an often negative way, and they do not recognise the diversity of actual personal experiences (Featherstone et al., 1993). As a result, it seems as though these stereotypes interfere with the construction of a more positive image of old age (Featherstone et al, 1993).

McQuaide (1998, p. 52) believes that in order to “prevent negative images of midlife from becoming a self-fulfilling prophecy, deconstruction of the discourse on aging is essential.”

### **Gendered Ageism**

While gendered ageism may be considered a further example of negative stereotyping, the phenomenon seems to be so central to the research on ageing (e.g. Ballard et al., 2005; Featherstone & Hepworth, 1993; Fodor & Franks, 1990; Gergen, 1990; Hurd, 2000; Öberg, 2003) that it is considered separately here.

According to “the double standard of ageing-dissertation” (Sontag in Öberg, 2003, p.116) physical signs of ageing are judged more harshly in women than in men. For Susan Sontag (cited in Öberg, 2003, p.116),

women’s power is embedded in perishable values of beauty and sexual allure, while men’s power is embedded in more enduring values of status and wealth.

Society, therefore, places a premium on women's attractiveness. Öberg (2003, p.116) believes that "bodily aging confronts women with the failure to maintain the standard of idealised feminine images." According to Hurd (2000, P. 85):

In the 'natural order', woman is valued in terms of her physical appearance relative to man's appreciation of beauty ... Existing cultural ideals of beauty and womanhood therefore lead many women to fear aging itself as a loss of attractiveness and femininity.

Öberg (2003, p.117) adds that "the cultural elevation of youth and youthful ideals of attractiveness serve as the norm against which all women are evaluated, both by themselves and by others."

In addition, Rodin (in Hurd, 2000, p. 84) suggests that women are continuously exposed to the message which says that, "beauty and physical perfection are merely a matter of personal effort and that failure to attain those goals is the result of not doing enough." As a result, a woman may begin to doubt her 'value'.

Healey (cited in Hurd, 2000, p. 84) agrees that ageist assumptions equate youth with "goodness, beauty and desirability", while old age is judged as being "bad, repulsive and ugly." Featherstone and Hepworth (1993, p. 311) refer to these assumptions as "core concept(s) of western culture." Women may, therefore, be unable to maintain a positive body image and self-esteem because they have internalised these social beliefs (Hurd, 2000).

Fodor and Franks (1990, p. 445) refer to the "long legacy of ageism" of Western culture in which negative stereotypes of ageing are reflected around us in art, literature and the media. They also refer to Sontag's 'double standard' in the ageist culture and believe that, as a result, women are afraid of ageing and of "being devalued and lonely in old age" (Fodor et al., 1990, p. 445). Women are, thus, encouraged to find new ways to cope with getting older. In addition, Fodor et al. (1990, p. 447) ask whether midlife is not a time

for “getting rid of youthful preoccupations with appearance and body.” Ironically, this question itself seems to be a further example of ageism since it implies that midlife and older women are ‘too old’ to be “preoccupied” with their appearances.

In conclusion, Hurd Clarke (2002, p. 440) says,

an older woman’s experience of ageing and her aged body is shaped and constrained by social values concerning physical attractiveness and by ageist norms that denigrate older women and older women’s bodies.

She adds that older women’s perceptions of their physical appearance has largely been ignored but that “the centrality of physical attractiveness to women’s sense of identity cannot be ignored in later life” (Hurd Clarke, 2002, p. 440).

### **Physical appearance: public image versus personal perception**

Physical appearance, youth and beauty are mentioned in most of the literature reviewed on ageing (e.g. Ballard et al., 2005; Featherstone et al., 1993; Hurd, 2000; Hurd Clarke, 2002; Öberg, 2003; Sherman, 1994). A pessimistic view exists in relation to ageing women’s supposed decline in physical attractiveness as discussed in the previous section. Yet, with so many positive aspects of ageing, such as greater life satisfaction (e.g. Field, 1997), enhanced resilience and fortitude (e.g. Hamarat, Thompson, Steele, Matheny & Simons, 2002), and an increase in personal growth experiences (e.g. Leonard & Burns, 1999), the preoccupation with outward physical appearance seems to be out of proportion. However, if we examine the phenomenon of ageing within the context of Western culture, we see that contemporary Western society is characterised by an obsession with youth and a fear of ageing. Within this “youth culture” (Hildebrand, 1995, p. 4) people who are not young are psychologically disadvantaged.

Ballard, Elston and Gabe (2005) distinguish between public ageing, or the physical changes in the body's appearance, and private ageing, which is based on less visible physiological changes in the body. Signs of public ageing can often be concealed, for example, by using cosmetics or hair dyes. Physiological changes, which comprise private ageing, on the other hand, are seen by women as "irreversible indicators of ageing" (Ballard et al., 2005, p. 169).

According to Featherstone & Hepworth (1993), physical appearance is so important in terms of the ageing process, because physical signs of ageing, such as wrinkles, make it difficult for people to hide that they have lived for a long time. As a result, they suggest,

the wrinkling of the face may come to be seen as a gradual masking of the individual's sense of 'true' personal identity which is increasingly concealed and more difficult to express as time passes (Featherstone et al., 1993 p. 310).

On the other hand, studies such as that conducted by Ballard et al. (2005) found that women perceived the private, physiological, changes to be an inevitable part of getting older. These private changes appeared to confirm their subjective sense that they were actually getting older. (Ballard et al., 2005). Rather than use "age-resisting practices" (Ballard et al., 2005, p. 173), which they felt created a "false image" (Ballard et al., 2005, p. 180), the women in the study wanted to "age gracefully" (Ballard et al., 2005, p. 180). They felt that this was,

not only to provide a socially acceptable image, but also a personal identity that was congruent with their inner sense of ageing. The positive route to ageing ... was by means of avoiding looking like 'mutton dressed as lamb (Ballard et al., 2005, p. 180).

Hurd Clark (2002) believes that appearance is of concern to most women and that they want to look attractive to others. She also agrees that,

aging and the perceived loss of beauty (in light of the existing beauty ideal) constitute a threat to an older woman's sense of social currency, self-esteem, and identity (Hurd Clark, 2002, p. 430).

On the other hand, however, Hurd Clark (2002, p. 436) found that half of the women in her study believed "they had 'earned' their wrinkles through their life struggles and experiences and thus they were a badge of honour."

Like Ballard et al. (2005), Featherstone et al. (1993) also distinguish between public images (of ageing) on the one hand, and personal perceptions on the other. They suggest that instead of merely accepting images of old age as "accurate descriptions" (Featherstone et al., 1993, p. 304), we should find out how these perceptions influence people's lives. Rather than make generalisations about ageing, they stress the need to focus on individual personal experience.

### **Successful ageing and life satisfaction**

A central concept that has been highlighted in the literature is whether the process of ageing is "successful". In addition, successful ageing is often equated with life satisfaction (Fisher, 1992). According to Fisher (1992, p. 191) life satisfaction is often described in terms of "past expectations and present circumstances" while successful ageing often refers to "strategies for coping in later life and maintaining a positive outlook" (Fisher, 1992, p. 191). For the purposes of the present study, the two concepts are regarded as having a reciprocal influence on each other.

Ranzijn and Luszcz (1999, p. 94) define ageing as "a process of adaptation to age-related changes" and successful ageing, as "successful adaptation, the measure of success being the maintenance of wellbeing." Based on their research, these authors found that acceptance of how one has lived one's life, was an important predictor of wellbeing, or successful ageing, in older adults. In terms of Erikson's theory of psychosocial development, if individuals are

unable to accept the way they have lived their lives, they may find themselves in a position of despair.

According to Havighurst (cited in Fisher, 1992, p. 191), “successful aging involved conditions under which a person gets a ‘maximum of satisfaction and happiness’”. It seems that consensus has not been reached about which “conditions” are required for successful ageing (Fisher, 1992). Fisher (1992, p. 194) is of the opinion that we need to understand successful ageing in terms of the “relational world” of the elderly person. Fisher (1992, p. 194) believes:

(o)lder people hold the key to a richer understanding of the subjective meanings of concepts such as successful aging and life satisfaction, the relevance of such concepts to their lives and their particular age cohort, and the standards they use to determine life satisfaction and successful aging in later life.

Fisher (1992) adds that:

In one sense, the “healthy” or “optimal” self in later life is related to what one has been (through positive interpretations), and is also flexible and responsive to the challenges and changing circumstances during which new aspects of self may emerge.

Successful ageing, therefore, seems to be a life-long process based on a person’s outlook. A flexible attitude and an ability to adapt to change are seen to be a valuable tools for further adaptation in the future (Fisher, 1992).

Hilleras et al. (2001) discovered that the majority of studies carried out with elderly people focused on negative aspects of ageing such as physical and cognitive decline. They wanted to find out more about life satisfaction in people aged 90 years and older for a number of reasons. They believed that since this age group had probably outlived many of their friends and family members, and were themselves close to dying, that these factors could

impact negatively on their life satisfaction (Hilleras et al., 2001). According to these researchers, results of earlier studies were inconsistent. Certain studies showed that life satisfaction was not strongly correlated with age, indicating that life satisfaction remains stable over time (Hilleras et al., 2001). Other studies showed that levels of life satisfaction actually increase with age, while there were still others which showed a decline in life satisfaction in the very old (Hilleras et al., 2001). Context is important in this regard, as decline in life satisfaction could perhaps be associated with poor health.

In their own study, Hilleras et al. (2001), examined the contributions of various factors such as personality, health status, life events, social contacts, activities and religious beliefs towards life satisfaction. Their results showed that “health and an emotionally stable personality were, independent of other factors, the most important factors for life satisfaction among the very old” (Hilleras et al., 2001, p. 72). They conclude their study by saying that even though certain researchers do not believe that older people actually enjoy their lives, their study confirms that “even a very old age group” (Hilleras et al., 2001, p. 87) can have high levels of life satisfaction. It is hoped that findings such as these may help to counter the negative stereotypes of ageing.

A different perspective of successful ageing is that of McHugh (2000), who brings the concept of the ageless self into the discussion. He contends that the ageless self fits well with consumer and popular culture images of successful ageing. According to him, advertising commonly shows older people,

in a blissful and perpetual state of mature adulthood ... the implicit message is that one keeps old age (and decline) at bay through the indefinite prolongation of midlife (McHugh, 2000, p. 106).

As a result, there should be no anxiety about getting older, since the middle years are now associated with ongoing health and vitality. McHugh (2000, p. 106) suggests that “the prolongation of midlife is rivalling the desire for perpetual youth as the leitmotif of contemporary society.” In future, perhaps

the definition of successful ageing will become the ability to halt the ageing process at midlife. It seems that the need to prolong midlife reflects the fear associated with growing older. This fear, in turn, may continue to entrench the negative stereotypes about ageing.

On the other hand, Field (1997, p. 190) believes that despite stereotyped views of ageing as a time of continuous decline, "each individual may have different ups and downs. And for a fortunate few, 'the best is yet to be'" (Field, 1997, p. 190).

Similarly, Hamarat, Thompson, Steele, Matheny and Simons (2002, p. 360) found that in terms of coping resources, "the oldest old" healthy adults cope as well as younger people do and that "psychologically, old age may be viewed as a time of resilience and fortitude" (Hamarat et al., 2002, p. 360).

In the conclusion to his study, Thomas (2003) calls for a new paradigm of research into successful ageing, which will incorporate social changes, the nature of continuity and individual differences. He believes that it is the task of proponents of successful ageing to counter the predominantly negative stereotypes of older people and, "to place the principles which promote healthy, successful positive ageing in a culturally diverse society ... in the foreground of community consciousness" (Thomas, 2003, p. 11).

Although Coleman's (1992) article predates Thomas's (2003) above, it seems that Coleman's approach could be included in this new paradigm of research which Thomas (2003) calls for. Coleman (1992, p. 72) believes that studying "the meaning that a person finds in life" is critical in terms of understanding successful ageing. This so-called 'life story' approach, in which individuals construct their own life stories, has led to "a renewed respect for people not only as subjects of research but as informants of their own lives" (Coleman, 1992, p. 74). The goal of this type of research is not to discover universal truths, make predictions, nor to control, but rather to "explicate contexts and thereby to achieve new insights and new understandings" (Coleman, 1992, p. 74).

## **Perceptions of Ageing – a growing field of interest**

According to O'Reilly, Thomlinson and Castrey (2004), to date, little research has been conducted about women's perceptions of ageing. They believe that further research is needed in this area because of women's increasing longevity, and also because "attitudes and perceptions are central to satisfaction, self-image, self-esteem, cognitive function, and emotional well-being" (O'Reilly et al., 2004, p. 3).

### Fears and concerns

Fear of ageing or "aging anxiety" (O'Reilly et al., 2004, p. 10) is a perception which has received little attention. It seems to be an important area to focus on, since previous research has shown that emotions, such as fear, influence neurotransmitters which in turn affect the body, behaviour and immune system response (O'Reilly et al., 2004).

O'Reilly et al. (2004, p. 3) looked at women's "dominant concerns about getting older". These concerns included health problems, not having enough money, being alone, loss of psychological or emotional well-being, loss of appearance, and concern about their ability to take care of themselves in the future. In addition, they explored whether women's perceptions and concerns about ageing differed according to factors such as age, marital status, employment status, education and fear of ageing (O'Reilly et al., 2004). According to their results, there was a significant difference regarding ageing concerns in terms of age and marital status, but not by occupation, education or fear of getting older. In other words, it seemed that factors such as whether a woman was employed or unemployed (or retired), for example, or how many years of education she had received, differed in terms of the effects these factors had on individual women's perceptions of ageing.

In terms of the age differences, younger women were found to be more fearful of ageing than older women. This may reflect the life stage of the women concerned. It seems possible that older women are less fearful of ageing

because they may have more self-acceptance which younger women may not yet have acquired. A variety of other contextual factors may also be involved.

With regards to marital status, women who had never married, or who had been separated seemed to fear getting older far more than women who were married, widowed or divorced (O'Reilly et al., 2004). The authors suggest that possibly never being married or being separated could be associated with more uncertainty and anxiety than widowhood or divorce which had more "finality" (O'Reilly et al., 2004, p. 11) and possibly greater financial certainty.

According to O'Reilly et al. (2004, p. 10) the most striking finding of their study was "the frequency and effect of the fear of getting older". Nearly half of the subjects reported that they were afraid of getting older. It was not surprising that health problems were mentioned by most of the women as a major concern in relation to ageing. The researchers believe that this finding could have serious implications in terms of physical health since they believe that this fear could actually lead to an increase in somatic complaints (O'Reilly et al., 2004). This corresponds with research which has shown that an attitude of optimism, on the other hand, can lead to positive health effects, including increased longevity (O'Reilly et al., 2004).

A further concern mentioned by certain of the participants, was appearance. However, many more women mentioned appearance, in general, as a major concern, than those who cited losing their youthful appearance (O'Reilly et al., 2004). According to this, O'Reilly et al. (2004, p. 12) suggest that women are more concerned with "wanting to look their best at any age" than with trying to look younger.

In the conclusion to their study, O'Reilly et al (2004) suggest that it may be a difficult task for caregivers to get women to voice their fears and concerns about ageing since they may fear social judgement. However according to the authors,

women's success in aging will directly affect the society in which they live, and this research is relevant to any health care provider who works with women. Caregivers who help older adults process their fears and develop positive self-perceptions of aging might also help them live longer, healthier lives (O'Reilly et al., 2004, p. 12)

### Age Identity

The concept of age identity seems to be a prominent feature in studies of perceptions of ageing (e.g. Kaufman & Elder, 2002; Russell et al., 2004; Sherman, 1994;). According to Kaufman et al. (2002, p. 169) "age identity refers to the subjective evaluation of a person's age which is subject to individual and historical experiences."

Sherman (1994, p. 397) reports that there has been a growing interest in the concept of age identity which has been examined from both a "role/social structural point of view and from a psychological/ life span development perspective." The first perspective has been used to explore individual's self-perceived identity as old or elderly whilst the second has been used to examine transitions in middle age. Sherman's research focused on participants' own interpretations of their ageing process based on the belief that "the individual takes an active role and interprets the messages on aging in his/her own way" (Sherman, 1994, p. 397).

According to Sherman (1994, p. 339), even though chronological age is an important factor in terms of age identity, their correspondence "is far from perfect." She adds that previous research has shown that many people over the ages of 65, and even 80 do not consider themselves to be old. She says "frequently we hear 'I know I'm older, but I don't feel older'" (Sherman, 1994, p. 398). Kaufman (cited in Sherman, 1994, p. 399) referred to the concept of the "ageless self" to illustrate the continuity of identity over time. She says:

I have heard many old people talk about themselves, their pasts and their concerns for the future. I have observed that when they talk about

who they are and how their lives have been, they do not speak of being old as meaningful in itself; that is, they do not relate to aging or chronological age as a category of experience or meaning. To the contrary, when old people talk about themselves, they express a sense of self that is ageless – an identity that maintains continuity despite the physical and social changes that come with old age ...Being old per se is not a central feature of the self, nor is it a source of meaning (Kaufman in McHugh, 2000, p. 104).

According to Furstenberg (In Sherman, 1994) people judge themselves as old when they believe that they fit certain criteria associated with old age. A change in health was found to be the most common reason for starting to feel old. It is interesting that “comparative health was as strongly related to health as was functional health” (Sherman, 1994, p. 400). Bultena and Powers (in Sherman, 1994, p399), offer an explanation for this. They believe that individuals who feel “better off” than others their age often consider themselves middle-aged, rather than old. Not only does our identity “depend(s) on how we compare ourselves with other persons ... but also on the views we believe others hold of us” (Sherman, 1994, p. 404). By comparing herself to how she was at an earlier age, a woman may also redefine herself in terms of her age identity. (Sherman, 1994).

A further factor that is often mentioned with regards to age identity, is physical appearance. As mentioned previously, many women feel that there is a contradiction between the age they feel and their physical appearance. Karp (cited in Sherman, 1994, p. 406) refers to this as, “a paradox about aging.” A further paradox, however, may also be based on other “outward signs, such as chronological age or retirement” (Sherman, 1994, p. 406). Here, a woman may feel, that at 65, for example, that she is “too young” to be retiring.

The concept of “being ‘off-time’” (Sherman, 1994, p. 405) was also connected with age identity. The idea of “being ‘off time’” is related to the impact that individual formative experiences have on a person’s life span (Bee, 1996). According to Neugarten (cited in Bee, 1996, p. 11) “events that are ‘on time’,

that follow a 'normal expectable life cycle,' are less disruptive or difficult than those that are 'off time'." A woman who gives birth to her first child when she is over forty years old, for example, will probably find her 50's to be a very demanding time. Her experiences will be very different from those of other women of her cohort whose children have already left home, and who may be experiencing greater personal freedom as a result. According to Sherman (1994, p. 405) for women who were 'off-time', "the fact that they did not follow the timetable expected by society" affected their age-identity. This is a further example of the way in which a woman's identity is affected by the society in which she lives.

The results of Sherman's study (1994, p. 409), however, indicated that "different persons were aware of feeling older at different times in the life course, not only when reaching the age that is defined by society as "old", and frequently, not even when reaching that age". Hurd Clarke (2002, p. 440) concurs with this view. She believes,

there is room to resist and challenge socially constructed meanings and interpretations of growing older and to develop and propose alternative and liberating understandings of later life.

### **Conclusion**

The literature review reveals a number of themes and questions regarding women's perceptions and experiences of ageing. Certain of these themes have been highlighted in this chapter. Where once these themes may have been regarded as reflecting the 'normal' ageing process of 'most' women, it seems that the focus has shifted to an examination of individual women's personal perceptions and interpretations of ageing within the context of their day-to-day lives. The present study aims to continue with the work of 'giving a voice' to individual women to tell their own stories.

## CHAPTER 3

### RESEARCH APPROACH

#### Introduction

A large body of research exists on factors associated with ageing (e.g. Ballard, Elston & Gabe, 2005; Cross & Markus, 1991; Field, 1997; Fisher, 1992; Hamarat, Thompson, Steele, Matheny & Simons, 2002; Hillerås, Jorm, Herlitz & Winblad, 2001; Hurd, 2000; Leonard & Burns, 1999; McHugh, 2000; Ranzijn & Luszcz, 1999). The majority of these studies are quantitative in nature, and are informed by positivist ideas which advocate “a stable and unchanging external reality” (Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 1999, p. 6) that can be objectively observed, measured and described. While these studies provide important statistical information, they fail to acknowledge the individual experiences of the participants. In the present study the aim is, therefore, to give voice to the women interviewed about their own personal perceptions and experiences of ageing. Rather than provide ‘objective measurement’, this study hopes to provide rich and detailed descriptions of their worlds. According to Schwandt (2000), qualitative inquiry is based on a desire to understand the speech and action of other human beings. A qualitative research approach was, therefore, selected as being the most suitable for achieving the aims of the current study.

This chapter will focus on the research approach used in this study. It will begin with a brief description of postmodernism, the underlying ontology of the study. The interpretive research paradigm will then be described, and this will be followed by a description of qualitative research. The role of the researcher will be set out, and the sampling, data collection, and the data analysis processes used in this study will then be described.

## **A brief word about postmodernism**

The preceding modern era assumed that the world was “understandable, controllable and predictable” (Rapmund, 2000, p.104). In other words, it was believed that “‘the truth’ existed ‘outside’ in the world awaiting our discovery” (Turner, 1994, p. 9). ‘Reality’ could, therefore, be discovered if the researcher used empirical or “traditional experimental methods” (Rapmund, 2000, p.125), which focused on the measurement of “objective facts” (Neuman, 1997, p. 14), which were “free of observer bias ... (and) devoid of the subjects’ larger context” (Rapmund, 1996, p. 102). In postmodernism, on the other hand,

there are no enduring, absolute, or universal truths; no stable autonomous knower; no logic, rationality, or reason independent of a social system endorsing these mental processes; and no objective language to describe reality (Turner, 1994, p. 9).

The world is seen as,

a multiperspectival, multiconstructed universe in which each viewer creates his or her own reality and for whom that reality is his or her own truth (Becvar & Becvar, 2000, p. 15).

Since the aim of the present study is to explore the way in which individual women subjectively perceive and experience ageing, postmodernism was selected as the most suitable ontological approach. This approach allows for “the expression of many voices, rather than a reliance on the voice of an expert” (Hoffman, 1992, p. 16). Postmodernism emphasises that meaning is created by people in their interaction with each other. At the same time, this does not mean that all accounts are equally valid, and we should “beware of any singular, totalizing account that claims to contain the whole truth and nothing but the truth” (Doan, 1997, p.129). Certain accounts may be disrespectful or prejudicial (Rapmund, 2000). Those who are in power are able to “define what counts as knowledge” (Hare-Mustin & Marecek cited in Turner, 1994, p. 9), and since language is the medium through which

knowledge is expressed, language and “legitimate ‘truth’” (Turner, 1994, p. 9) are also controlled by those in power. An example of one of these “prevailing social discourses” (Turner, 1994, p. 9) is the view that after the age of 40, a woman’s life goes into decline (Gergen, 1990, p. 471). Postmodernism, reminds us, therefore, of “the inherent danger of the *one* story that has no room for alternate accounts” (Doan, 1997, p. 129).

Having briefly described postmodernism as the ontology of the study, the interpretive research paradigm will now be discussed.

### **The Interpretive Research Paradigm**

In the present study, the interpretive research paradigm has been chosen as being the most suitable for the topic being researched. The aim of interpretive research, according to Terre Blanche and Kelly (1999, p. 123) is “to describe and interpret people’s feelings and experiences in human terms rather than through quantification and measurement.”

The interpretive approach is, therefore, concerned with the subjective meanings people attach to their experiences and it recognises the importance of the social context in which that meaning is created.

The structure of the following section, which highlights certain important features of interpretive research, is based on Terre Blanche and Kelly (1999).

#### Understanding in context

From an interpretive viewpoint, In order to understand what a particular action means, the researcher needs to interpret what the participants or actors are doing. This is the process of achieving *verstehen*, or understanding. (Schwandt, 2000). According to Bleicher (in Terre Blanche & Kelly, 1999, p. 125),

the meaning of human creations, words, actions and experiences can only be ascertained in relation to the contexts in which they occur. This includes both personal and societal contexts.

Through this process of “recontextualisation” (Terre Blanche & Kelly, 1999, p. 125) the meaning of the text or action is then understood from a more ‘empathic’ viewpoint. Verstehen is often translated as “empathy” (Terre Blanche & Kelly, 1999, p. 125) and by focusing on the context, interpretive research aims to give the reader an idea of how another person’s reality ‘feels’.

However, according to Ricoeur (cited in Kelly, 1999, p. 399) “there is more to understanding of an experience than can be ascertained from within the context of experience.” Therefore, he suggests,

that understanding of a situation needs to be developed both from the perspective of being in the context (empathy) and from the perspective of distanciation, using interpretation (cited in Kelly, 1999, p. 400).

In other words, the researcher should follow a *both/and* approach rather than an *either/or* approach (Rapmund, 2000). This ‘distanciated’ approach allows the researcher to draw on the dominant narratives, or other theories or stories from the wider social context.

The present study will offer an interpretive description of how the three participants feel about ageing. This will include both the “insider or ‘first-person’ empathic perspective, and context, as well as more ‘distanced sceptical understanding’ or ‘outsider’ or ‘third-person’ perspective” (Kelly cited in Rapmund, 2000 p. 126). The “insider perspective” will make sense of their experiences “from *within* the context and perspective of human experience” (Kelly, 1999, p. 398). The “distanciated” perspective will draw on social constructionist ideas and will include ‘grand narratives’ as well as theory relating to how ‘ageing’ women are viewed in society.

- Social constructionist ideas informing this study

In terms of the interpretive research paradigm's focus on the social context, it shares certain ideas with social constructionism. The notion of distancing, mentioned above, is also consistent with social constructionist ideas (Rapmund, 2000). Like the interpretive paradigm, social constructionism is concerned with interpretation and meaning. However, social constructionists "[locate] meaning in an understanding of how ideas and attitudes developed over time within a social community context" (Dickerson & Zimmerman, 1996, p. 80). They also concern themselves with grand narratives or "'discourses" that are formed by, and in turn influence, people and that take on normative views against which people measure themselves" (Dickerson & Zimmerman, 1996, p. 80). This focus on "discourses" highlights the importance of language in social constructionism. According to Berger and Luckman (cited in Rapmund, (1996, p. 92), "we socially construct reality by our use of shared and agreed meanings communicated via language; that is our beliefs about the world are *social* inventions". Thus, if language is social, it follows that the meanings of words fluctuate according to the context (Durrheim, 1997). In order to understand the meaning of a word, therefore, we need to compare it to other ways in which it is used. For example, the way in which we interpret the word 'ageing' is based on the way in which 'ageing' is constructed against a "background of socially shared understandings" (Durrheim, 1997, p. 181). In terms of the present study, social constructionist ideas fit with the researcher's postmodern, interpretive paradigm since social constructionism "privileges multiple selves, multiple meanings, multiple contexts" (Dickerson & Zimmerman, 1996, p. 81).

### The self as instrument

Positivist researchers, who believe in an 'objective reality', are able to utilise standardised measuring instruments to collect and analyse data. An interpretive researcher, on the other hand, is the "primary instrument" (Terre Blanche & Kelly, 1999, p. 126) in the research process. He or she, therefore, has to hone his or her listening and interpretive skills in order to produce research which is of good quality.

## Data collection

Terre Blanche and Kelly (1999) explain that the term 'data' is not entirely acceptable from an interpretive perspective. They describe 'data' as "bits of discrete information that can be extracted from their context" (Terre Blanche & Kelly, 1999, p. 127). However, interpretive researchers prefer to use material that is "not broken into discrete bits" (Terre Blanche & Kelly, 1999, p. 127) since they believe the meaning would be lost if the information was studied in isolation. In addition, interpretive researchers do not follow the same set of fixed procedures used in quantitative research. Different phases of the research may overlap and the researcher may reformulate the research question in light of new material that he or she may have found. The method of sampling may also be changed "in response to new findings" (Terre Blanche & Kelly, 1999, p. 127). With reference to the present study, the term 'data' will still be used to refer to the material collected and analysed, since it is a term that is generally understood.

## Collecting data in context

Interpretive research is "concerned with making sense of human experience from within the context and perspective of human experience" (Kelly, 1999, p. 398). As a result, interpretive researchers study "feelings, experiences, social situations or phenomena as they occur in the real world, and therefore want to study them in their natural setting" (Terre Blanche & Kelly, 1999, p. 127). In other words, interpretive research is concerned with studying data in context. Ironically, however, just by focusing on a particular topic, one already 'separates' it from its context (Terre Blanche & Kelly, 1999). The task of the interpretive researcher is, nonetheless, to try not to "disturb the context unduly, but (to) attempt to become a natural part of the context in which the phenomenon occurs" (Terre Blanche & Kelly, 1999, p. 128). One of the ways this can be done is by conducting interviews and by interacting with participants in an open and empathic way.

Having described the interpretive research paradigm, a general discussion of qualitative research will follow.

### **Qualitative Research**

A qualitative research approach has been used in this study because it is consistent with the interpretive paradigm (Terre Blanche & Kelly, 1999). Denzin and Lincoln (2000, p. 3) define qualitative research as,

a situated activity that locates the observer in the world. ... [Q]ualitative research involves an interpretive naturalistic approach to the world. This means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or to interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them.

“The goal of (qualitative) research is defined as describing and understanding (Verstehen) rather than the explanation and prediction of human behaviour” (Babbie & Mouton, 2001, p. 53) which is more consistent with quantitative, modernistic research. The former links with the interpretive approach previously described. The latter, on the other hand, is more consistent with a Cartesian-Newtonian philosophy which seeks “causal or mechanistic explanations of ‘observed behaviour’” (Coleman, 1993, p. 123).

According to Babbie et al. (2001), qualitative research has the following features which distinguish it from quantitative research:

- The research is carried out in the natural settings of the participants.
- The process of the research is emphasised, rather than the outcome.
- The focus is on the participant’s (or “insider’s”) view rather than on ‘outsider’s’ views.
- The aim is in-depth (“thick”) description.
- Social action is understood in terms of its specific context.

- An inductive approach is often used that results in new hypotheses and theories.
- The self of the qualitative researcher is regarded as the “main instrument” (Babbie et al, 2001, p. 270) in the research process.

Qualitative researchers use methods which allow for,

rich and detailed observations of a few cases and allow the researcher to build up an understanding of phenomena through observing particular instances of the phenomena as they emerge in specific contexts (Durrheim, 1999, p. 47).

Moon, Dillon & Sprenkle (cited in Rapmund, 1996) mention several characteristics of qualitative research designs which are applicable to the present study. These are:

- 1. Theory.** A particular theory or approach is selected which guides the researcher in the study. In the present study, an interpretive approach has been selected.
- 2. Purpose.** This is stated clearly at the outset. In terms of the present study, the purpose is to give voice to individual women about their perceptions of their ageing experience.
- 3. The role of the researcher.** As the “main instrument” (Babbie et al., 2001, p. 270) in the research process, the researcher becomes a participant in the research. Unlike the quantitative researcher who aims for ‘objective observation’, in qualitative research, the researcher’s presence is always explicit. A qualitative researcher uses his or her personal insight, feelings, and perspective to understand what he or she is studying, and is also aware of his or her values, assumptions and biases (Neuman, 1997). In the present study, the researcher formed a relationship with the participants. The researcher’s personal reflections are also included after each interview in order to make her participation explicit. This aspect will be dealt with in more detail later on in the chapter.

- 4. Sampling and selection.** According to Babbie et al. (2001, p. 288) sampling within the interpretive paradigm “is often purposeful and directed at certain inclusive criteria, rather than random”. According to Goetz and LeCompte (cited in Rapmund, 1996), many types of sampling are possible within the qualitative research paradigm. These include convenience selection, comprehensive selection, quota selection, extreme-case selection, typical-case selection, unique-case selection, and reputational-case selection. In this study, the sampling strategy used was purposive and convenience selection. Sampling and selection will be dealt with in more detail later on in the chapter.
- 5. Data collection.** Data is collected via interviews, observation or through document analysis. Neuman (1997, p. 328) points out that the qualitative data collection process involves “documenting real events, recording what people say (with words, gestures, and tone), observing specific behaviours, studying written documents, or examining visual images”. In this study, interviews, in the form of conversations were held with the participants. These interviews were tape-recorded and were then transcribed. The researcher added her personal observations to the ‘data’ collected. Data collection will be dealt with in more detail later on in the chapter.
- 6. Data analysis.** A cyclical rather than linear path is often used in the qualitative research analysis process. Unlike quantitative researchers who do not begin data analysis until they have collected all their data, qualitative researchers look for patterns and relationships, and they begin analysis while they are still collecting their data (Neuman, 1997). Qualitative data analysis usually involves coding and writing of analytic memos, which are both labour intensive for the researcher (Neuman, 1997). In this study, a hermeneutic thematic analysis was used to elicit themes from the data. Data analysis will be dealt with in more detail later on in the chapter.
- 7. Results.** These usually take the form of “assertions, discovered theory, or taxonomies (categorical systems)” (Rapmund, 1996, p. 104). In this study, it is hoped that the information elicited from the individual

participants about their perceptions of their ageing experience will help to shed light on how individual women think about and experience ageing.

**8. Reporting.** The researcher attempts to reconstruct the context studied. In this study, the researcher discussed the themes elicited from the material and she then conducted a comparative analysis between the themes that were common in all three stories and the literature.

**Reliability and validity.** These terms have different meanings in relation to quantitative and qualitative research. In terms of quantitative research, “reliability refers to the reliability of the measuring instrument and validity to measuring what it intends to measure” (Rapmund, 1996, p. 105). Qualitative researchers, on the other hand, reject such ‘objective’ measurement and argue that the meaning of phenomena or experience is context-dependent (Durrheim, 1999). Rather than use ‘reliable’ instruments for ‘reliable’ measurement, the qualitative researcher uses him- or herself as the instrument. Validity is still sought in qualitative research, but it is defined,

by the degree to which the researcher can produce observations that are believable for her- or himself, the subjects being studied and the eventual readers of the study (Durrheim, 1999, p. 46).

Validity is often referred to as *trustworthiness* in terms of qualitative research (Babbie et al, 2001).

The concepts of reliability (dependability) and validity (trustworthiness) will now be explained more fully.

### Reliability / Dependability

Durrheim and Wassenaar (1999) point out that since modernist/positivist researchers believe in the existence of a stable and unchanging reality, they value reliability highly as it indicates that their findings are accurate. On the other hand, interpretive or constructionist researchers have different assumptions about reality and do not regard it as unchanging. As a result, they do not expect to find their results duplicated over time, but rather that the

behaviour and opinions of individuals and groups will vary depending on the context. They recommend, therefore, that results be *dependable*, rather than *reliable*. “*Dependability* refers to the degree to which the reader can be convinced that the findings did indeed occur as the researcher says they did” (Durrheim & Wassenaar 1999, p. 64). Dependability results from descriptions which are rich and detailed and which show how the actions and opinions of the participants result from their interaction in context. In addition, the qualitative researcher “does not eliminate subjective views to get quality data; rather quality data include his or her subjective responses and experiences” (Neuman, 1997, p. 368). *Dependable* data, therefore, result from “detailed descriptions from the researcher’s immersion and authentic experiences in the social world of members” (Neuman, 1997, p. 368).

In this study, reliability/dependability will be achieved by adhering to the “elements of ‘good practice’” proposed by Stiles (cited in Merrick, 1999, p. 30). The researcher will begin by disclosing her orientation. She will explain that she does not regard herself as an ‘expert’ in this field but that she is interested in learning about how individual women perceive their ageing experiences. Secondly, she will engage in an in-depth and prolonged investigation with the material. This will include the establishment of a close relationship with the participants, as well as an intensive study of the material derived from the interviews. Thirdly, via a process of persistent observation, she will remain aware of the “internal processes of investigation” (Stiles cited in Rapmund, 1996, p. 107), how these will affect her, and how they might impact on the investigation. She will note how her own preconceptions about ageing may be challenged and broadened and how she may gain new insights about ageing, which she will share in her report. Fourthly, as part of the “iterative cycling between observation and interpretation” (Stiles, cited in Merrick, 1999, p. 30) the researcher will engage and re-engage with the data (including the audiotapes and transcripts). Her interpretations will then be “grounded” by using direct quotes drawn from the interviews. Finally, the researcher will ask the participants the type of questions that will lead them to give rich descriptions of their own experiences.

## Validity / Trustworthiness

Denzin et al. (2000, p. 158) suggest that “the traditional positivist criteria of internal and external validity are replaced by such terms as trustworthiness and authenticity”. According to Stiles (cited in Rapmund, 2000), validity/trustworthiness involves the following aspects:

“*Triangulation*” refers to “the use of multiple perspectives to check one’s own position against” (Kelly, 1999, p. 430). According to Rapmund (2000, p. 130), triangulation incorporates “information from multiple data sources ... multiple data collection ... and analysis methods ... multiple perspectives to interpret a single set of data, and/or multiple investigators.” In this study the researcher will use multiple perspectives such as the perspectives of the participants as well as various psychosocial theories of ageing, against which to ‘check her own position’. She will also discuss her findings with peers and her supervisor in an attempt to ensure accuracy and credibility.

“*Coherence*” which refers to the ‘fit’ or the agreement of the interpretation (Stiles cited in Merrick, 1999, p. 29). In this study, for example, the researcher working from a postmodern interpretive position needs to guard against writing in an objective, positivist manner. Interpretations will be offered about the experiences of the three women participants. It is hoped that the study will help to shed light on women’s perceptions of ageing for the readers of the research and help them to achieve greater understanding of this subject.

“*Uncovering and self evidence*” refers to “making sense of our experiences” (Rapmund, 2000, p. 130). The researcher will reflect on and acknowledge how the research process contributed to her personal growth.

“*Testimonial validity*” refers to the accuracy or validity of the interpretation as determined by the participants (Stiles cited in Merrick, 1999). In this study, the participants were not asked for their feedback on how their stories were interpreted by the researcher. The researcher felt that the participants might find it confusing to reread their stories, which had been newly constructed in an unfamiliar way. In addition, the researcher made it explicit that she was offering her own interpretation of the participants’ accounts.

*“Catalytic validity”* refers to the way in which the research process “reorients, focuses, and energizes participants” (Stiles cited in Merrick, 1999, p. 29). In this study the participants were not asked whether they had gained new insights during the research process, however they indicated that they had enjoyed talking to the researcher about their experiences.

*“Reflexive validity”* evaluates the impact of the data on the researcher’s way of thinking. (Stiles cited in Merrick, 1999, p. 29). In this study, the researcher’s preconceived ideas about ageing were challenged and she was able to form new insights, which she will share with readers.

Merrick (1999, p. 30) says,

reliability and validity, then, are not properties of the research tool as they are in quantitative research. Rather (they) depend on the relationship between the researcher and the research process, as well as between the researcher and the interpretive community.

### **Role of the Researcher**

As an instrument of the qualitative research paradigm, the researcher plays an active role in the research process. According to Sciarra (1999, p. 43),

the role behind interpretive understanding emerges from the researcher’s own prior knowledge, interests, values, emotions, and cultural affiliations, which are also subject for scrutiny and examination in the interaction with participants. Qualitative researchers allow themselves to be affected and challenged by the cultural meanings that participants give to their experience that may be different from the researchers’ own meanings.

From the previous extract, it is clear that there is a reciprocal relationship between the researcher and the participants where each party influences the other and where both impact on the research process and on the final product.

Interpretive research assumes that “all findings are constructions incorporating one’s personal view of reality and that these are open to change and reconstruction” (Merrick, 1999, p. 31). The qualitative researcher’s task, therefore, entails making explicit the processes through which her interpretations were formed. This implies that the research process contains reflexive elements. The researcher’s,

commitment to reflexivity suggests that the research topic, design and process, together with the personal experience of doing the research, are reflected on and critically evaluated throughout (Merrick, 1999, p. 31).

In keeping with the process of reflexivity, the purpose of the research needs to be stated clearly at the outset. In this study, the researcher informed the participants that she was conducting research on the perceptions of women about their ageing experiences. She told them that she would be interviewing three women of different ages and that her interest was in finding out about their subjective perceptions and experiences of growing older. She explained that it was not her intention to generalise these findings but that she was interested in hearing their unique accounts. During the research process, the researcher learnt about the participants’ thoughts and feelings about ageing, and at the same time, her personal perceptions of growing older were often challenged.

Ethical responsibility towards the participants is a crucial aspect of the researcher’s role. The researcher needs to take extreme care to protect the rights and welfare of the participants. “Ethical research depends on the integrity of the individual researcher and his or her values” (Neuman, 1997, p. 443). Durrheim and Wassenaar (1999) state that the three principles which guide ethical research are: autonomy, nonmaleficence and beneficence. In terms of the principle of autonomy, the researcher needs to “respect the autonomy” (Durrheim & Wassenaar, 1999, p. 68) of all the participants involved in the research process, which includes aspects such as voluntary participation and informed consent. In terms of the principle of

nonmaleficence, the researcher undertakes not to harm the participants in any way, and to try to conduct research that will benefit both the participants and the greater community. This is the principle of beneficence. These principles are incorporated in the following steps taken to ensure that the present study was ethical:

- Informed consent. The participants were asked if they would participate voluntarily in a study which was to be the basis of a Master's dissertation in Clinical Psychology. They were informed that they would be interviewed by the researcher and that these interviews would be tape-recorded. It was then explained that the recorded interviews would be transcribed by the researcher and that this information would be used in the study. It was explained that signing the informed consent agreement (see Appendix A) signified that they understood what their role in the research process would involve, and that they would permit the researcher to use their stories in her research. Finally they were given the option of withdrawing from the study at any time, for any reason.
- Privacy and confidentiality. According to Neuman (1997, p. 452), the ethical researcher,

violates privacy only to the minimum degree necessary and only for legitimate research purposes. In addition he or she protects the information on research subjects from public disclosure.

In the present study, the participants were assured that their rights to privacy and confidentiality would be respected. The researcher undertook to use pseudonyms in the study in order to protect their identities, and to change other personal details which could identify them.

- Nonmaleficence. In terms of the principle of not harming the research participants the researcher undertook not to use any form of deception. As a trainee therapist, she is also aware that caution needs to be

exercised when talking to individuals about intense personal experiences as this can leave people feeling particularly vulnerable. In order to avoid unnecessary discomfort for the participants, the researcher closely monitored the interview and she informed participants that they had a choice about whether or not to answer particular questions. During one of the interviews she switched off the tape recorder while one of the participants was sharing some particularly private personal information.

- **Beneficence.** The researcher hopes that the research will help to create new insights and new understandings about individual women's perceptions of ageing which will benefit the participants as well as the readers, and possibly those who work in the helping professions.

As an important instrument in the research process, the qualitative researcher needs to behave in an ethical and responsible manner towards her participants in order to produce research which is 'dependable and trustworthy'.

### **Sampling and Selection**

Since the goal of the current study is for an in-depth understanding of the perceptions of women towards ageing, a small sample of "information-rich cases" (Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 1999, p. 45) was selected. Unlike quantitative research, generalisability was not a goal in this study.

The sampling strategy used, therefore, was that of purposive and convenience selection. As the researcher wanted to interview women of different ages, she approached three women ranging in age from 48 to 91 years and invited them to participate in this study. Each of the women selected agreed to take part in the study. All of the women were white, and all spoke English fluently.

## Data Collection

The method used to obtain information was the interview. Interviews can be structured, semi-structured or unstructured. An unstructured interview was used in the present study as it “can provide a greater breadth of data than the other types” (Fontana & Frey, 2000, p. 652). Gubrium and Holstein (cited in Fontana & Frey, 2000, p. 647) note that “the interview has become a means of contemporary storytelling, where persons divulge life accounts in response to interview inquiries”. The interview in this sense is, therefore, regarded as a “more natural form of interacting with people” (Terre Blanche & Kelly, 1999, p. 126) than other data collection methods, and fits well with an interpretive approach. The researcher was interested in exploring what ageing meant to each participant, and using an unstructured interview allowed the participants to talk freely about their perceptions and experiences.

Fontana and Frey (2000, p. 663) believe “interviews are seen as negotiated accomplishments of both interviewers and respondents that are shaped by the contexts and situations in which they take place”. The interview is regarded as being a reciprocal interaction between the interviewer and the participant where,

whatever meanings are created in the interview are treated as co-constructed between the interviewer and the interviewee. These meanings are, moreover ...products of a larger social system (Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 1999, p. 153).

These ideas are coherent with social constructionist ideas.

The interview provided information about how the individual participants perceived their ageing experience. A relationship was formed with each of the participants, and the interview was adapted to each individual. The interviewer asked questions based on the information provided by the participant. After the interview was held, the conversation was transcribed by

the researcher who then identified themes based on her subjective interpretation of the material.

### **Data Analysis**

According to Neuman (1997, p. 426) data analysis involves a “search for patterns in data” which are then interpreted “in terms of a social theory or the setting in which it occurred”. This implies that the process of data analysis aims to order the data and to impose meaning onto it.

In keeping with the interpretive approach selected, data was analysed using hermeneutic thematic analysis.

Hermeneutics is the practice of interpreting the meaning of the text and it had its origins in the interpretation of ancient religious and judicial documents (Rennie, 1999). Woolfolk, Sass and Messer (1988, p. 8) describe human life as “inescapably enmeshed in a web of meaning”. They explain that the “hermeneutic circle describes the contextual nature of knowledge” (Woolfolk et al., 1988, p. 7). Interpretation is believed to occur,

within a circle in which parts are always interpreted within some understanding of the whole, which in turn is understood by coming to understand constituent parts (Woolfolk et al, 1988, p. 7).

This means that information can only be interpreted within a larger context of meaning. There is a constant circular movement between part and whole (Kelly, 1999).

Three processes associated with hermeneutic thematic analysis are the processes of immersing, unpacking and associating (Kelly, 1999). *Immersion* refers to the researcher familiarising herself with the material collected until she is aware of the “details and nuances” (Kelly, 1999, p. 409). *Unpacking* is described as a “stock-taking activity” (Kelly, 1999, p. 409) where the meanings of the text are unpacked in a way which is metaphorically

compared to unpacking a suitcase (Kelly, 1999). This process helps to generate meaning. *Associating* involves “interpreting material in relation to a broader theoretical, historical, cultural or political framework” (Kelly, 1999, p. 410).

Terre Blanche & Kelly (1999) identify the following steps in the data analysis process.

### 1. Familiarisation and immersion

The researcher begins to develop ideas and theories about the topic being studied from the beginning of the research process (Terre Blanche & Kelly, 1999). By the time the data analysis process begins, the researcher already has a precursory idea as to the data’s meaning (Terre Blanche & Kelly, 1999). She then familiarises herself with the text by reading and re-reading the text until she knows,

more or less what kind of things can be found where, as well as what sorts of interpretations are likely to be supported by the data and what not (Terre Blanche & Kelly, 1999, p141).

### 2. Inducing themes

Terre Blanche and Kelly (1999, p. 141) say “induction means to infer general rules or classes from specific instances”. This is a “bottom-up approach” (Terre Blanche & Kelly, 1999, p. 141) and it involves extracting or identifying underlying themes from the material. A “top-down approach” (Terre Blanche & Kelly, 1999, p. 141), on the other hand, tries to find examples in the material which fit under predefined categories. During the process of “inducing themes”, Terre Blanche and Kelly (1999, p. 141) suggest using the participants’ own language rather than more ‘scientific’ language, and they encourage the researcher to “think in terms of processes, functions, tensions and contradictions” rather than merely to paraphrase the content. The researcher is also advised to look for meta-themes in the material, under which sub-themes may be included, rather than to have too many themes.

This will help the researcher to achieve “an optimal level of complexity” (Terre Blanche & Kelly, 1999, p. 142).

### 3. Coding

The coding phase entails “breaking up the data in analytically relevant ways” (Terre Blanche & Kelly, 1999, p. 143). In other words, the researcher identifies ‘pieces’ of information, such as a phrase or a paragraph, which are relevant to one or more of the themes (Terre Blanche & Kelly, 1999). Terre Blanche & Kelly (1999) believe that the processes of inducing themes and coding overlap, and that both themes and codes facilitate a better understanding of the data.

### 4. Elaboration

The process of elaboration entails a closer examination of the themes in order “to capture the finer nuances of meaning not captured by (the) original” (Terre Blanche & Kelly, 1999, p. 144). During this phase, the researcher may amend her coding system, and the themes and material may be structured and restructured several times. Terre Blanche and Kelly (1999, p. 144) advise the researcher to “keep coding, elaborating and recoding until no further significant new insights appear to emerge.”

### 5. Interpretation and checking

During this final step, the researcher presents a written account of the topic she has studied, which she structures according to the themes which have been derived from the material (Terre Blanche & Kelly, 1999). During this time she also examines the work closely in order to deal with “contradictions” (Terre Blanche & Kelly, 1999, p. 144) and to minimize “over-interpretation” (Terre Blanche & Kelly, 1999, p. 144). In addition, the researcher should reflect on her role in the data collection and interpretation process, and explain how her personal perceptions “may have coloured the way (she) collected and analysed the data” (Terre Blanche & Kelly, 1999, p. 144).

In this study, the research process proceeded in the following way:

Step 1:

The participants were interviewed and the taped interviews were transcribed by the researcher.

Step 2:

In order to immerse herself in the data, and to familiarise herself with it, the researcher read the transcribed interviews whilst she carefully listened to the tape recordings

Step 3:

The researcher engaged in a process of carefully reading and rereading the original transcripts in order to identify patterns and themes which were relevant to the research context, namely, the way in which the participants perceived ageing. During this stage the researcher engaged in a hermeneutical process of moving back and forth between the parts of the story and the whole story and also between being involved and being distanced. This process allowed for the elaboration of themes (Terre Blanche & Kelly, 1999).

Step 4:

Having broken down the information into themes, the researcher was then required to “put it all together again” (Terre Blanche & Kelly, 1999, p. 415). The researcher achieved this by adding her interpretation to the themes which had emerged. An attempt was made to provide a “thick” description of each of the participant’s accounts in order to understand each person’s perceptions of ageing more fully. The researcher’s goal was to create an account which was both recognisable for the participants, but which may also have helped them to view ageing from a different perspective.

Step 5:

The researcher conducted a comparative analysis between the common themes which recurred in the accounts of the three participants, and these

were then linked to the literature on women's perceptions and experiences of ageing. It should be noted that although there were certain common themes, these themes were idiosyncratic to each particular woman's account. The aim of the comparative analysis was not to generalise the finding to a larger population, rather, it was hoped that the shared themes would allow for a greater understanding of women's perceptions of ageing by including multiple voices, even the 'expert' voices from literature.

#### Step 6:

The study was evaluated in the concluding chapter, and recommendations were proposed for future research.

### **Conclusion**

In this chapter the research approach used in the present study was discussed. It began with a description of the ontology of the study, namely postmodernism, which proposes that reality is multi-faceted and comprises multiple selves, multiple meanings and multiple contexts (Dickerson & Zimmerman, 1996). The interpretive approach was then described. The interpretive research approach is "concerned with making sense of human experience from within the context and perspective of human experience" (Kelly, 1999, p. 398). An interpretive research approach was, therefore, selected as being the most suitable for this study with the aim of shedding light on the perceptions of individual women towards ageing. The qualitative research process, which was also considered to be appropriate for the purpose of the current study, was then described in general. This purpose is to shed light on perceptions of individual women towards ageing. The study aims to provide rich descriptions of women's experiences and is not concerned with generalising the results to a larger population. The role of the researcher was then clarified, and the sampling, data collection and the hermeneutical data analysis processes used in the study were then described.

## CHAPTER 4

### GINA'S STORY OF HER PERCEPTIONS OF AGEING

#### Personal Data

Participant	:	Gina Black (pseudonym)
Age	:	91
Research setting	:	The interview was conducted at the participant's home

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#### Introduction

This chapter is based on two tape-recorded conversations that took place between the participant and I about the participant's perceptions of ageing. Following careful analysis of the transcribed conversations, certain themes were highlighted. The transcribed conversations may be found in Appendices B and C. It should be noted that the themes identified are not exhaustive, are based on my subjective viewpoint, and are not meant to represent the 'truth'. It is possible, therefore, that other readers might identify different themes. I might also identify different themes at another time.

A brief personal reflection follows the analysis.

#### Background

The participant, Gina Black, attended a series of lectures conducted by my mother. As my mother knew I was interested in interviewing a candidate of Gina's age, she gave me Gina's contact details and I contacted Gina to find out whether she would be interested in taking part in this research. Gina expressed her willingness to participate, and welcomed me into her home.

Gina's warmth and vivacity had an immediate impact on me. She shared her life story willingly and I found it very easy to connect with her.

Gina seems to have had an interesting and eventful life filled with diverse experiences. When she was asked about her perceptions of ageing, Gina told me her life story rather than simply focusing on her views on ageing. In some ways it was, therefore, difficult to ascertain how she felt about getting older. There may be many reasons for her having answered the question in the manner in which she did. Perhaps one of the reasons was because ageing does not occur within a vacuum but within the context of a person's life. For Gina the topic of ageing, therefore, appears to be integrally connected to her perceptions of how she has lived her life so far. It is possibly also a reflection of ageing, that at 91 she has gained a perspective that has helped her to focus on her life as an integrated whole, rather than to view the various aspects as disconnected.

### Gina's story

The following themes were identified from Gina's story.

#### **Viewing her life as an adventure throughout her lifespan**

Throughout her life Gina has chosen to view her life as an adventure. In her youth, she lived an exciting and eventful life. Now in her 90s her world has narrowed but she continues to rise to the challenges that come her way.

*When she was younger*, Gina lived during very troubled times. She faced danger as a young Jewess living in Nazi Germany and she subsequently fled with her husband to Spain, before returning to Germany, at a later stage just prior to World War II to nurse her ailing mother. The couple managed to escape from Germany a second time and returned to Spain where they remained until the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War. From Spain they fled to South Africa, and they subsequently moved to Lourenço Marques (present

day Maputo), before they returned to South Africa where she subsequently divorced her husband and where she is still living at present.

In spite of the danger she faced during her youth, it seemed that Gina viewed her life as a series of adventures. As a young Jewish woman living in Germany at the beginning of the Second World War, where many harsh restrictions were placed on Jews, she still chose to recall the pleasant times she experienced there as a teenager. She said:

... When we were teenagers we were also happy because although it was the beginning of the Hitler time, we had a little club and we went to theatres and we went to concerts and we had dances ...Ja, we had a nice time, we really did have a nice time. So of the bad times in Germany, I wasn't really there. I mean I was at the very beginning, but it didn't really affect you. It happened to other people ... when you're so young you don't take things so seriously.

(Interview 2, lines 204 – 211).

Gina's positive attitude seems to be apparent in her descriptions of so many of the events of her life. Instead of describing her life as having been a series of upheavals, it seemed as though she really regarded her life as an adventure. Once some of her family decided to leave Germany, she married her boyfriend, and she and her husband moved to Spain. Gina felt that she and her boyfriend had almost been 'forced' into marriage before they were ready for it, due to the war, as it would not have been considered appropriate for them to have travelled or to have lived together had they not been married. However, despite this, she seemed to enjoy the time they spent together living in Spain. She recalled:

And then before we knew it, we moved to Spain. Fascinating, very interesting, we didn't go backpacking, but to move suddenly to a different country in Spain, it is interesting and the Spanish language is beautiful, the Spanish music is beautiful. We didn't have a bean, but ja, it was all an adventure. Coming here, ja, the same way.

(Interview 1, lines 211-215).

Having left Germany for Spain at the end of 1934, Gina returned there in 1936, as her mother was ill. Despite the inherent danger of being there at

that time, she and her husband were not discovered, and they later managed to get out of Germany, and return to Spain. It sounds as though during this time she retained her trust in the German people she had known previously, and was also able to take risks. She recalled:

If anybody had reported us that we were staying with my mother ... but I was born in that flat and people knew my mother and knew the family and they were not all violent, virulent Nazis. So we stayed for a year until we managed to get out ... Getting out was also interesting because my passport, as I said, was ok, G's (*her husband*) wasn't ... If the guy there had spotted a possible red "J"... it was a very dicey situation. Very dicey. We were very much on tenterhooks. Thank G-d we were young. When you're very young things are not as traumatic, you do everything as an adventure. When I think back now, if that had happened to me nowadays, you know, at my age ... but in those days we just took a chance. You do take chances. But it worked. (Interview 1, lines 512-527).

It seems that Gina felt that as a young person she was able to live in the moment and face the dangers, almost without thinking about the consequences. In retrospect, however, she realised how lucky they were to have escaped undetected. Perhaps she believes that as one gets older, one becomes more aware of the possible consequences of one's actions, and reacts more cautiously. Despite this, she seemed to be quite philosophical about the 'daredevil' way in which she and her husband acted, because their efforts were successful. In some ways it seemed as though she missed the carefree abandonment of her youth, when life was exciting and when she was never sure what would happen next. This in contrast to the life she lives at present where her daily routine hardly changes although she is proactive in staying connected to life.

When Civil War broke out in Spain, Gina and her husband moved to South Africa. As a result of the War, many of their legal documents were lost, and they did not have the necessary papers to remain in South Africa, where they were living on a tourist visa. Once again they had to move, this time to Lourenço Marques. Having arrived there, she seemed determined to make the most of the opportunity she had to live in yet another foreign country.

Looking back she had fond memories of their life in Lourenço Marques. She recalled:

We loved Lourenço Marques, it was so out of the War. Of course we heard the news about the War, we were very worried about the War, but it didn't affect you personally. We had a ball. The foreign community was mainly English and South African. They had the British Club where we sort of fell in. My husband worked for a South African company, I worked for a South African company ... yes, we were very, very happy. (Interview 2, lines 234-240).

It seemed possible that Gina's rich memories of the past helped her to transcend the narrowed world of the present. When she recalled the events of her life, it seemed that she was also aware of the active role she had played in shaping both herself and her life. She explained:

It forms you, it does form you. Every phase adds to ... it is the experience, which is somewhere buried in your brain. And in the end that is what you are, what circumstances and life make you and then also what you helped to make yourself. (Interview 1, lines 115-118).

Her constant awareness of her role in shaping her life seems to be an integral part of how she has lived her life so far, and how she continues to live her life. She also acknowledged that she had a "capacity for enjoying things" which seems to have helped her to adapt to the 'narrowed' world in which she now lives.

*In terms of the present*, Gina lives in a residential hotel and she has outlived many of her friends, and family members. While she does have a son and grandchildren who live in the same city that she does, her other son lives overseas with his family. She no longer works having retired at the age of 64 after enjoying a career that spanned 22 years. Despite these changes in her life, it seems that she has continued to grow, largely as a result of the attempts she has made to make her life meaningful. She acknowledged her effort in this regard, saying:

I am interested and I keep interested in what goes on (Interview 1, lines 65-66).

Her continuous curiosity about life may have helped her to view ageing as a further adventure to be undertaken. Thus, while she has no 'choice' but to age, she has chosen to be positive about the manner in which she is ageing and this seems to have contributed to her appreciation of her life. She has also continued to take part in activities that she enjoys, such as yoga, as well as lectures given by the U3A (University of the Third Age). Her ability to focus on the positive aspects of her life, such as her continued independence and her relatively good health, seem to have allowed her to continue to "improve (her) life" as well as to experience it as meaningful and satisfying. Although her daily routine seems predictable, she takes pleasure in still being able to do things for herself. Her independence seems to be an important part of her wellbeing. She said:

On the days when I go to yoga then I usually combine it with a little bit of shops or repair places, or the bank or whatever. Then I come home and I take my white yoga stuff off, then I'm happy to sit here. (Interview 1, lines 649-652).

The answer she gave when she was asked about how it felt to be 91 seemed to reflect her satisfaction with her life. She said:

... I find in a way, I am happier now. I said to my son the other day, it took me 90 years to come out of my shell. (Interview 1, lines 7-8).

A further aspect that she felt had enhanced her enjoyment of her life was the freedom she now had from the worry she had experienced when her children were young. Instead of having to 'worry' about her children, she was now able to enjoy her relationships with them. She explained:

...I say I'm very happy now. I have no responsibility for my children. You know the daily worries. (Interview 1, lines 43-44).

Compared with the expansive adventurous world of her youth, the world she inhabited as an elderly person, seemed to have narrowed considerably. Despite this, however, Gina did not seem ready to 'give up'. Rather, she seemed determined to continue to grow and to enjoy the rest of her life-adventure. In the past she successfully rose to the challenges she faced, and it seems that ageing is a further challenge which she is determined to face in a successful manner.

### **Connection vs. Disconnection**

The sense of being either connected and/or disconnected, both emotionally and physically, seemed prominent in Gina's account. The boundary between connection and disconnection seems to be quite blurred in her story, as there often seemed to be instances of connection in the midst of disconnection, and disconnection in the midst of connection.

*In the past*, in terms of her relationships with others, Gina seemed to feel she had to make a concerted effort to connect with others, as this did not come naturally for her. On a personal level she presented herself as a very reserved and shy person, which often caused her to feel quite alienated. Although she often sought connection with others, even when she achieved it, it seemed as though she still felt disconnected at a certain level because of her shyness. "Coming out of (her) shell", therefore, seems to have taken enormous determination. Even as a teenager in Germany, she recalled that it had been difficult for her to make friends, although she wished to. She said:

I joined a little social club ... my mother heard about it and said if you don't go and talk to this girl and ask her to go with you she said, "then I will talk to her parents." You see the shyness, the basic shyness I inherited from my mother and she knew how she had actually suffered from it. (Interview 1, lines 167-171).

While she was struggling to make friends, Gina seems to have felt a strong connection towards her mother, who shared this trait of shyness with her. Her mother seems to have been able to help her daughter to connect with others

because she understood how isolated Gina felt. However, Gina still often felt disconnected from others, and her sense of disconnection may have intensified during her frequent moves to different countries.

In terms of her marriage, it seemed as though she experienced a sense of both connection and disconnection with her husband. Although they were “boyfriend and girlfriend”, they married because it was regarded, by their parents and the community, as being the ‘right’ thing to do under the circumstances. At times it seemed that she even regretted marrying him when she was so young. She explained:

I was very young when I got married. Both of us were very young. It was the emigration time under Hitler in Germany. So what did we know, nothing. But we got married because the family didn't think it was a good idea that we just went off as boyfriend and girlfriend to live in Spain. You know, the Hitler time in Germany threw people together in the most amazing way. Alright he was my boyfriend, but getting married ... (Interview 1, lines 31-37).

Despite having married under these circumstances, she focused on the ‘fact’ that they did love each other and in this way, she seemed to have approached her marriage in the pragmatic way in which she approached other things in her life. In other words, once she found herself in a particular situation, she was determined to make it work.

When she and her new husband left Germany for Spain, the first of many foreign countries they were to live in, she may have felt a sense of disconnection from her German-Jewish roots, her homeland, her culture and her language, as well as from her family. At the same time the connection she felt to her husband may have helped her to cope with her feelings of disconnection, and enabled her to connect to her new country. It seems possible, however, that although she had pleasant experiences in the various countries they lived in, it also deepened her sense of disconnection from others, possibly because they were always on the move.

After leaving Spain, Gina and her husband came to South Africa where they lived for two years before moving to Lourenço Marques. She described the first ten years of their marriage as happy, however, she then began to experience a growing sense of disconnection from her husband whom she felt had withdrawn from her and from their two sons. She described the situation:

... he in himself withdrew ... On the personal basis, he was hardly there ...he had withdrawn completely. He was hardly ever there for meals and anyway the boys ... he didn't know how to talk to the boys, he had no relationship with them. (Interview 1, 687-706).

The emotional disconnection between herself and her husband had become too great, and, after 25 years of marriage, Gina decided to divorce him. At this stage they had been living in South Africa for many years. It is possible that she was able to disconnect from him at this time as she now felt more 'at home' and connected to her new country. She recalled:

It was all on a very friendly basis. When I told him I wanted a divorce, he said, "are you sure, are you sure you know what you're doing?" "Yes, I think it is better." ... I thought if the children grow up not liking their father, because as they grow older they will watch that there is nothing between us, nothing that was there before. There is no love, no understanding, no confiding. If they grow up hating their father, that I didn't want, for the children's sake, you know, not for him or for me. So I said, "I think we'd better get divorced." He didn't really want a divorce but anyway that's what happened. (Interview 1, lines 710-719).

Although she did not emphasise this, it seems likely that this was a very difficult time for her. Gina often sounded quite bitter when she described her ex-husband, and it seems that this bitterness masked her disappointment in him. Having disconnected from each other through the divorce, however, their relationship improved and in the latter years of her ex-husband's life, they reconnected with each other as good friends. This seems to be an example of the connection Gina experienced in the midst of the disconnection. She recalled a conversation she had with her ex-husband a few years later, when they were older, and able to view their relationship from a different angle. She said:

So we spoke on the phone. He talked about us. He said, “we were very stupid”. I said, “yes, we were very young and stupid”. He built up a very good business in Hamburg and he said, “I wish I were 20 years younger. I wish I would have known 20 years ago what I do now”...But the older he got, the better he became. We were very good friends ... So ja, as we got old we got very friendly. (Interview 1, lines 775-785).

It seemed that in disconnecting from her husband, she was able to connect with her ‘self’ and as a result, she found a strength and independence she had not known before. At the same time, she also seemed to find a connection with her divorced friends and she commented on the way in which they discovered their identities after their divorces. She said:

... all three of us came into our own way, improved our personalities, developed, spread out our personalities after we got divorced ... yes, that opportunity came when you got rid of your husbands! (Interview 1, lines 797-813).

*Now that she is older*, Gina seems to feel strongly connected to her friends and family members. She described the relationship she now has with her sons as “very good”, and she described her granddaughters as her “very, very good friends”.

Despite the close relationships she has with family members, the hearing loss from which she now suffers seems to have had a significant impact on her relationships with both her family and with others, causing her to feel disconnected from them. She described an incident at a family wedding in Melbourne, Australia, where she could not join in the wedding festivities as a result of being unable to hear. She recalled:

When I realised that the first time I went, I don’t know maybe 3 years ago to Melbourne, and there was the wedding, first the one wedding, the next year the other wedding, the circle of children grew ... and then it really hit me. I never had the opportunity before to sit in a group where everybody knows each other and talks to each other, and I couldn’t participate. I could only talk to the person that sat next to me. And I remember that I hadn’t cried in ... I cry very rarely, I don’t even remember when I last cried, but when I said goodbye to my son at the airport, I was very sad. And as I sat in the plane, the tears just streamed down and I thought what am I crying

for. And I thought well maybe there's no point in going again and seeing them again. You know it really had hit me then because I didn't have any opportunity before then to try this out, to experience that. (Interview 1, lines 134-146).

She continues to feel disconnected and alienated when she is in a group of people and unable to hear what they are saying. She explained:

It is very uncomfortable. It is embarrassing, it makes me uncomfortable and it makes me angry, you know. That is the worst. That is really the handicap to a certain extent. I avoid groups and they know it now. (Interview 1, lines 298-300).

She added that it made her feel like "a decoration" because she was unable to contribute to the conversation and that it made her "unhappy too." Despite these difficulties, she has tried to come to terms with her diminished hearing. She said:

So ... but now I know, I accept it. I know my judgement on hearing-aids, they don't help. And everybody confirms that. Sitting in a group, you still can't make out what they say ...It does upset me. It does upset me. They know now. But on the other hand they can't scream around, they're talking to each other. And so, I do miss a lot there. But once you realise your condition, you have to accept it. There's no point in straining ... "what did you?" And no point in keep on asking, "sorry, sorry ...?" Some voices don't carry and that makes it very difficult. Some people talk by nature with a soft voice. Either I pretend, and I say, "really", and I smile, and they smile as well, but I haven't really caught on. And as I said, it doesn't really matter. (Interview 2, lines 146-165).

At times Gina seemed to express ambivalence about her need for relationships with others. On the one hand, she claimed that she was reserved and that she did not need company, yet on the other hand, she often seemed to go out of her way to connect with others. These contradictory ideas may be connected to her shyness and to the difficulty she felt she had in making friends. Her discomfort at not being able to hear in a group also seems to have resulted in her avoiding people at times. Despite this, her sense of detachment did not appear to upset her and, she seemed to value the time she spent alone. She explained:

I don't have to have people around me all the time. There are people who can't be alone ...It is not me. I watch a bit of television or listen to the radio and when I switch off aah it is so nice and quiet ... Yes, I can't have voices around me all the time. (Interview 1, lines 264-281).

However, although she is able to enjoy her solitude, she acknowledged her need for connection with others and this led her to join the U3A and to pursue other group activities. She said:

... it was mostly 'get out, go somewhere where there are people.' (Interview 1, lines 194-195).

In terms of connecting with other people her age, it seemed as though being with people who were a similar age, yet who were not as independent nor as positive as she was, was uncomfortable for her and seemed to increase her sense of disconnection from them. She said:

Some of them are too old and frail to make friends with. (Interview 1, line 152).

She then described a conversation she had with a fellow resident, and said:

... I was talking to one of the ladies ... she sat next to me and of course we talked about the weather and about how nice they do this ... She's got no front teeth and somehow I said, "you're happy? How long have you been here?" "5 years." And I said, "you're happy here, it is nice here?" and she said, "it's enough". She's had enough, she doesn't want to live anymore. Well what's the point? You know, very depressing and so do I need this? (Interview 1, lines 313-321).

Although she said that she did not think about deteriorating in this way, it seemed as though she needed to distance herself from such a negative way of thinking to prevent herself from becoming depressed.

While Gina often felt disconnected from people her own age as she felt they were not on "the same wavelength", and that they did not speak "the same language" she did feel that she had an affinity with younger people. She explained:

I have much more in common with the young people. I am interested and I keep interested in what goes on. And my granddaughters, my grandchildren also talk to me. ,, we talk about what goes on. I have more in common and I learn from them too ... we never have a dull moment, they are very, very good friends. (Interview 1, lines 64-71).

The theme of connection vs disconnection seems to recur throughout Gina's account of her life. In her youth, she found it difficult to connect with others because of her shyness. She was later able to connect with her husband and it seems that their connection helped her to cope with the sense of disconnection she is likely to have felt when she had to leave her family and her home during the war. When they divorced, Gina disconnected from her husband and, at the same time, she seemed to connect with herself and to develop her own identity. She was also able to connect with her 'new' country. Later, she reconnected with her ex-husband and they became good friends. Now that she is older, she often feels disconnected from others because of her hearing loss and because her relatively good health seems to make her feel guilty around others her own age who are often not as well as she is. However, this has helped her to connect with others who are younger than she is, and, this seems to have helped her to preserve her sense of youth and vitality.

### **Feeling out of synchronisation with the norm**

It seems as though Gina has often felt out of synchronisation with the norm. One of the reasons for this seems to be related to the diverse and unconventional experiences she had in her youth, including her 'refugee status' in various foreign countries, which often seemed to make her feel disconnected from others. In this way, the theme of feeling out of synchronisation seems to link with the previous theme of connection and disconnection. A further way in which she felt out of synchronisation, was in the timing of certain key events in her life, which she felt occurred 'off time' rather than on time. These events included the timing of her marriage, having her children and her career. Finally, the positive manner in which Gina has

aged appears to have rocked the conventional notions of ageing as 'decline', and has caused her to feel notably different from others.

Since Gina's early adventures were dealt with extensively in the previous theme, this discussion will focus on the timing of key events in her life, and on the positive manner in which she has aged, to illustrate her experience of feeling out of synchronisation with the norm.

In relation to the timing of events *in the past*, Gina felt that circumstances had dictated that she and her husband get married at a very young age before either of them was ready for marriage. As a result of having married so young, and because they moved so often during the early years of their marriage, Gina had her children later than other women she knew. This seemed to make her feel that she was 'out of step' with them. She said:

I had my children late. When I started thinking now is the time we can have a family, I was 10 years older than the others who were 21, 22. (Interview 1, lines 817-819).

However, despite having felt that she was out of synchronisation as an older mother, she managed to become part of a group of younger mothers, which she found was beneficial. It seemed as though 'motherhood' was, therefore, a more important membership criterion than age was. She explained:

... I suddenly became part of that group, of the young mothers, at the kindergarten and the early schooldays, so maybe that also kept me younger? (Interview 1, lines 819-820).

In terms of her work, Gina began her 22-year career in personnel when she was about 42. At this stage she had been married for almost 25 years, and her children were at primary school. She said:

At an age when people might already begin to think what they're going to do when they retire, that's when I started (to work). It was very unexpected as I say. (Interview 1, lines 19-21).

Going back to work and getting divorced seemed to have occurred within a few years of each other. It seems possible that returning to work helped Gina to gain the independence she needed to end her marriage. As a result of her involvement at work, however, she felt she had less time available to socialise and while she was connecting to her career she tended to disconnect from others. She explained:

I never had a very lively social life. You know. The time when other people began to take it easier, I was very, very involved in my job. (Interview 1, lines 95-96).

Gina's sense of being out of synchronisation increased because she was the only woman in the company in a middle management position. This seems to have made it very difficult for her to fit in. She explained:

I know I had the reputation of being very hard. Not hard, they were scared of me! I said me! Well I was more scared of them! I was very reserved and it didn't come easily to me. I forced myself of course. I thought I was very friendly. (Interview 1, lines 12-16).

Even her perception of herself as friendly was out of synchronisation with her subordinates' perception of her as someone they were afraid of. However, she managed to overcome her difficulties at work and went on to enjoy a fulfilling career which lasted for 22 years. She described it as a "career not just a job" and she seemed to feel that her career had played an important part in shaping her personal development. Perhaps having a career enabled her to feel in control of her life in a way she had not experienced before.

*In the present*, Gina often seems to feel out of synchronisation with others her age because of her relatively good health. She often seems to feel she is 'too well' in comparison to others her age and even felt she might be too far out of synchronisation to be a part of this dissertation. She said:

I may not be a very good example for you because I am so well. (Interview 1, line 1).

She believed that she had little in common with other elderly people whom she felt were on a different “wavelength” mentally as well as physically. In addition, because she is so healthy for her age, she has outlived many of her friends and family members. She spoke, with a great deal of pain, about having lost people who were close to her. It seemed especially difficult for to accept the deaths of friends and family who were younger than she is. She said:

I lost two friends because they aged much more than I did, much before me. They were 10 years younger than I. Most of the people that I say are my age group they are actually 10 years younger ... One of them became Alzheimer’s and is in a home somewhere in the Cape. The other one died. Another one died. And my sister, I had one sister who lived in the States, she died. My niece would be that age group of my present friends, 60 ish ...she died. I said she’s got no business of dying, she is also much younger than I am, but anyway. I was very upset. (Interview 1, lines 48-58).

In terms of other elderly people with different backgrounds from her own, Gina also seemed to feel that she did not fit in. She explained:

I don’t really need friends, you know, personal friends I don’t need because it’s very difficult. You don’t know the person’s background, they don’t know your background. They are interested when they ask me where do you come from, what’s your accent? Aha, German, So they want to know. But you know, to rattle off your background and then their background is so different, you know. They probably came here as children. Lots of them came from Lithuania or Russia or Poland. That’s very different, never mind that it’s part of Europe ... (Interview 1, lines 153-160).

It seemed that because she felt so out of synchronisation with others her age, she went out of her way to form friendships with younger people, with whom she felt she had more in common. At times, however, she was surprised when she discovered women of a similar age, at her hotel, who were ageing well, and who also seemed to be keeping ‘active’ and enjoying their lives. This seemed to make her feel more in synchronisation with them. She said:

Being my age makes me feel that everybody is younger than I am. There are some women here who I always thought ...why are they here, they’re really too young.

They do entertainment and took it on to organise the movies and the music evenings. We had coffee at the shopping centre the other day and we were talking about age and she said, "well how old do you think I am?" And I said, "well 60 up to 72, sort of". So she said, "I'm 80!" So I thought, what am I thinking about? So really, they're active, they're young, so I don't think there's anything very special about me. (Interview 2, lines 10-17).

Gina seems to have vacillated between feeling out of synchronisation with the norm because she felt she was so different from other people and yet wanting to connect with others. It seems ironic that the very qualities which have kept her 'young' and vibrant, such as her relatively good health, have also caused her to feel out of synchronisation with the norm.

### **Ageing body vs. ageless self**

Although, Gina looks much younger than she is, she has still experienced the effects of ageing. She has undergone a decline in her physical functioning, as well as changes in her appearance. The way she feels on the inside, however, does not seem to have changed to the same extent. In other words, she seems to feel that her 'self', or innermost being, has not aged. It seems, therefore, as though there is a 'mismatch' between her external body, which has aged, and her inner 'self', which has not. This links to the previous theme of feeling out of synchronisation, since her mind and body seem to be 'out of step'.

In this theme, certain visible signs of ageing, highlighted by Gina, will be discussed, and these will be contrasted with her 'ageless' attitude towards them. It is hoped that this will illustrate how, on the one hand, the 'outer' physical changes she has experienced appear to be 'reality checks' which remind her that she is ageing, but on the other hand, she does not identify with being 91, and she refuses to act old. She said:

It is just the last few years that I actually aged. When I was 80 I wasn't any way different from 70. I didn't look 80, I didn't feel 80, you know nothing in my body had

really changed. But, after that, when I look at that picture (at) 80 and that picture (at) 90 and I look at myself, then I, ja, then I realise ... (Interview 2, lines 20-24).

Although she noticed changes in her appearance, Gina knows that she looks much younger than 91. She said that she had never tried to conceal her age, but she admitted that she was proud of looking younger than her chronological age. Even though her health seemed more important to her than her appearance, Gina was still pleased that she appeared to be younger, and her 'vanity' seems to be part of her ageless femininity. She acknowledged, however, that looking young was not her doing, but that it was her good fortune. She said:

I never ever made a secret of my age. I couldn't understand people who didn't want you to know ... but maybe, maybe it is a certain conceit that you are actually proud of not looking your age. But this is something that's not your doing. (Interview 1, lines 417-420).

However, although she said she had accepted the changes in her appearance, she admitted that certain things did bother her. She said:

The only thing is I looked in the mirror at my face, and at my arms. I never had all these brown spots. I didn't realise what I had not seen until that ... I like beautiful hands. I've always looked at people's hands. I don't think my hands were beautiful but I had good hands ... that bothers me, but you know you've got to know your priorities. Sometimes when I be out with the children I put a bit of makeup on (*on her hands*) but it's not the same. So ja, that annoys me. But otherwise, it doesn't hurt. (Interview 1, lines 389-397).

She was upset when she noticed these age spots, which were 'inescapable' signs of ageing. However, she dealt with her discomfort by reminding herself that while they were unattractive to her, they were not harmful. She explained:

I always say, it's not fatal, it doesn't hurt and it isn't fatal ... I've come to accept it now so I use a bit more makeup on my face. I knew I had a few spots here and there and

there and there, but when I looked into the mirror and saw lots of spots, little brown spots, that annoyed me. (Interview 1, lines 403-406).

In terms of her relatively good health, it seems as though her experiences of ageing have not been in line with her expectations and that this has surprised her. She said:

I remember when I spoke to my friend in England on my 80<sup>th</sup> birthday. I thought it was a joke. I said nothing hurts me, nothing worries me – well the few problems come up but they're not really interfering with my nature and I find in a way I am happier now. (Interview 1, lines 4-8).

She explained that she often felt guilty about being so healthy, especially in relation to other people her age. She said:

Yes. Guilty towards the others. They say, "why do you walk so fast, why do you always walk so fast?" I say, "well, I don't make myself walk fast, that is my stride." If I walk slower, my balance is not so good. Ja, well, I'm so lucky ... This one can't walk because she really can't walk, and this one trembles, you know. They're in pain, they're uncomfortable, they can't wash themselves or bath themselves, they've got nurses who do that for them. (Interview 1, lines 594-602).

Although she feels younger than she is, she realised that other people often perceive her differently to the way that she perceives herself. She was often annoyed that people assumed that she needed assistance without asking her if that was the case. It seems important for her to be able to do things for herself, and her comment seems to highlight the importance of taking the lead from the elderly in terms of how to treat them, rather than presuming that they need help. It also seems to be a matter of pride that Gina does not want to be treated as incapable. She explained:

People try and hold you. They try and support you. And the Blacks call you, "hullo Goggo". With that you realise that the other people usually see you as older than you think you are, or you feel. I do need support, but I don't need support that somebody holds me ... I won't say it upsets me but when I don't need it, it bothers me. You don't want it. ... when I'm quite capable of doing it by myself then I think the others should accept that too. (Interview 2, lines 87-100).

One of the ways in which she tries to maintain her independence is by keeping herself physically active. She, therefore, attends yoga classes three times per week and uses the stairs rather than the lift. She said:

I walk the stairs all the time here. I never take the lift. So I think that it is very good exercise in any case ... Because walking stairs, if you can, is the best exercise. But I mean, I do my yoga. I go to yoga classes three times a week. I've been there for now, it must be, 20 years ... Also one of those things that I thought well, actually I should do something, you know physically. (Interview 1, lines 350-359).

Although Gina exercises regularly, she has experienced some decline in her physical functioning. She described how her body had become less flexible with age, however she seems to have adapted to these changes with her characteristic 'flexibile' attitude. She said:

There are certain things which your body doesn't want to do anymore. You know, at yoga certain exercises are a real problem. You realise no I can't do them anymore. I could never actually sit in the lotus position ... I can't do it. I can't bend my legs more than that, so that already spoils it a little bit. Also for my back, I can't sit upright like this for everything but that has always been from the beginning so that doesn't upset me anymore. But certain things ... I find I'm a bit stiffer than I used to be. But I can certainly carry on. (Interview 2, lines 31-39).

Although she does not always feel like making the effort to keep active, she forces herself to do so. This determination to remain independent, together with her positive attitude seem to be qualities which have not changed in spite of the outward signs that she has aged. She may look different on the outside, and she may have aches and pains which she did not have as a young woman, but she still seems to feel that she is the same person on the inside, and she seems to be contented. She said:

I find I'm a bit stiffer than I used to be. But I can certainly carry on. You know I've never said, "I don't really feel like it." Because that is what most people do ... "there is something today, do I have to go there?" There you've got to force yourself. I really sometimes don't feel like going there, and it is raining ... in the car. But once I'm off then it's ok. (Interview 2, lines 38-42).

The most difficult functional change for her to accept seems to have been the decline in her hearing. As described previously, it is particularly difficult for Gina to hear in a group of people, although she manages well in a one-to-one conversation. As a naturally shy person, not being able to hear what other people are saying, seems to make her feel even more isolated. She explained:

I keep very much to myself ... To go and sit in the lounge with the others and now what do we talk about? ... But I did on one occasion. They were sitting in a group like this ... And then the one from across asked me something and I couldn't hear. I said sorry and she repeated it and I still couldn't hear. (Interview 1, lines 282-295).

Despite her difficulty, however, she has not withdrawn from others and she continues to make the effort to be sociable.

The quality of her vision has also deteriorated with age, and she developed cataracts a few years ago. However, unlike her hearing loss which cannot be corrected, her vision was restored when her cataracts were removed. As a result she was able to continue to drive, and this helped her to retain her independence. She described being able to see clearly again as “a new lease of life”, which seems to be an indication of the ‘youthful’ enthusiasm she still has for life.

Despite being somewhat restricted by her ageing body, Gina seems to be determined to ‘keep going’. Her determination seems to be an ageless quality that she has always had. From Gina’s account, one can discern a pattern of her always doing whatever was required of her. This pattern has served her well and has probably contributed to her feeling good and not focussing on her aches and pains. Although she is getting older, she seems to have the same positive attitude she has always had, and this seems to support the idea that her soul has remained ageless. She said:

I don't believe in sitting back and saying, “no I can't do any of that, I can't do this and I can't do that. I should take a wheelchair, it would make travelling so much easier.” I

say, "I don't really want it easier ... for as long as I can." That is my basic attitude. As long as I can, I do just carry on. (Interview 2, lines 25-30).

### **Acceptance of the way she has lived her life**

A theme of acceptance of the way in which she has lived her life thus far seems to underlie Gina's perceptions of ageing. Satisfaction seems to be the fruit of her acceptance. Her decision to accept what comes her way, rather than passively 'giving in' to situational demands seems to have enabled Gina to see her life in this positive way.

In relation to age-related physical changes, Gina pointed out that she felt there was a difference between 'accepting' and 'giving in'. For Gina acceptance seemed to imply the acceptance of certain physical changes which she could not alter, such as age spots, whereas 'giving in' seemed to imply giving up making any effort in areas where the effort would still count, for example exercising to retain movement. She said:

I've come to accept it now so I use a bit more makeup on my face ... But in other ways, I don't accept, I try and ... I'm not clinging to looking young. Physical things you've got to fight that, you know, don't give in ... So there is a difference between accepting and giving in. (Interview 1, lines 403-413).

On the other hand, it seemed as if Gina felt that there was a difference between becoming accustomed to changes which had occurred, and 'accepting' them, which was more difficult.

I suppose you grow with it you know, after all, I wouldn't say accept it. (Interview 2, lines 24-25).

Despite Gina's general acceptance of the way she lived her life, she did express a few regrets. She said:

I wasn't really the kind of mom who spent a lot of time with her children ... there sometimes I think ... but you do as everyone else does. I don't feel like I missed out

anything. What I do regret is that when I came here I was so involved with my work ... I should have talked to my children more. I feel guilty sometimes, we didn't really talk. It's even more difficult with boys ... but they didn't know anything else. Now we talk. I think I have a very good relationship with my sons. (Interview 2, lines 246-252).

From the above excerpt, it seemed as though she regretted not having spent more time with her sons while they were growing up. Having so much time to herself now possibly reminds her of how busy she was when her sons were young, and she might wonder about her priorities then. However, rather than be weighed down with self-recrimination, it seems as though she has chosen to focus on the positive relationship that they currently share and to accept that she did her best.

Another area where she expressed regret, was in terms of her relationship with her ex-husband. With the wisdom and maturity she gained as she got older, Gina acknowledged she was able to see their relationship in greater perspective and she seemed to regret that they had not been able to make their marriage work. She said:

He talked about us. He said, "we were very stupid." I said, "yes, we were very young and stupid." (Interview 1, lines 776-777).

She added:

You know, it became ... if you look at it from high up you can see down what all these little ants are doing down there, stupid running around, not knowing what they're doing down there ... Ja, so in the end he found fulfilment in his life in the same way as I did. (Interview 1, lines 787-794).

Later Gina and her ex-husband became very good friends, and it seems that their friendship, which was an important and meaningful part of her life, helped her to cope with the regret she had felt over their failed marriage, and to view it in a different light.

At 91, Gina seems to be at the stage where she can reflect on how she has lived her life thus far, and see the different aspects of her life in perspective. Looking back, she seems to be satisfied with the life she has lived. The following quote seems to sum up Gina's perceptions of what ageing is all about. She said:

It forms you, it does form you. Every phase adds to ... it is the experience which is somewhere buried in your brain. And in the end that is what you are, what circumstances and life make you and then also what you helped to make yourself. (Interview 1, lines 115-118).

### **Personal Reflections**

I really enjoyed this conversation with Gina and found it very meaningful and interesting. I have always felt that I have a compatibility with older people, and this seemed to link with Gina's affinity with younger people. Gina seemed pleased she could share her life story, and I felt privileged to hear it. Gina's positive outlook seemed to be so life affirming and it countered many of the negative stereotypes of ageing which I had encountered, and was afraid of. By showing that she still lives a meaningful and enjoyable life, Gina provided an example of ageing which I found to be both positive and inspiring. I was left with the impression that Gina was ageing in such a 'successful' way because she has such a positive attitude towards life. She seems to be truly satisfied with the way she has lived her life. She left me feeling that it is so important to just 'get on with the business of living', and to stop worrying about the actual ageing process.

## Conclusion

During analysis of the conversations with Gina Black, the following themes were highlighted.

- Viewing her life as an adventure throughout her lifespan

In her youth, Gina lived an exciting and eventful life where she faced many challenges. This is in contrast to the narrowed world she now inhabits as an elderly woman. Despite this, however, Gina seems determined to continue to grow and to enjoy the rest of her life-adventure, and it seems that she sees ageing as another challenge to face.

- Connection vs. disconnection

The sense of being either connected and/or disconnected, both emotionally and physically, seemed prominent in Gina's account. The boundary between connection and disconnection seems to be quite blurred in her story, as there often seemed to be instances of connection in the midst of disconnection, and disconnection in the midst of connection. Despite her world having narrowed as she has aged, she has continued to try to expand her connection with others. At the same time, her disconnection from others has also enabled her to connect with herself and to grow and develop her own identity.

- Feeling out of synchronisation with the norm

Gina often seems to have felt out of synchronisation with the norm. One of the reasons for this seems to be because of the diverse and unconventional experiences she had in her youth, which often seemed to make her feel disconnected from others. She also felt out of synchronisation because of the timing of certain key events in her life, which she felt occurred 'off time' rather than on time. These events included the timing of her marriage, having her children and her career. Finally, the positive manner in which Gina has aged appears to have rocked the conventional notions of ageing as 'decline', and has caused her to feel notably different from others.

- Ageing body vs. ageless self

There seems to be a 'mismatch' between the visible, physical age related changes Gina has experienced, and the way she feels on the inside. On one level she seems to have accepted she has become old because of the changes she feels in her body, and those which she sees in the mirror, but on another level, she does not identify with being 91, and she refuses to act old.

- Acceptance of the way she has lived her life.

The theme of acceptance of the way in which she has lived her life thus far seems to be the culmination of Gina's perceptions of ageing. Satisfaction seems to be the fruit of her acceptance. Her decision to accept what comes her way, rather than passively 'giving in' to situational demands seems to have enabled her to see her life in this positive way.

## CHAPTER 5

### MARIE'S STORY OF HER PERCEPTIONS OF AGEING

#### Personal Data

Participant	:	Marie Stein
Age	:	65
Research setting	:	The interview was conducted at the gym Marie runs

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#### Introduction

In this chapter a transcribed conversation that took place between the participant, Marie, and myself, about the participant's perceptions of ageing, is carefully analysed. Emerging themes have been highlighted. The transcribed conversation may be found in Appendix D. The themes identified are based on my own subjective viewpoint, and are not meant to represent the truth. These themes are not necessarily mutually exclusive and they may, therefore, overlap. Other readers might identify different themes and I might also identify different themes at a different time.

The analysis is followed by my brief personal reflections.

#### Background

At 65 Marie Stein is dynamic, energetic and glamorous, and she exudes a positive attitude to life, which seems contagious. She runs the gym that I attend, at a local sports club, and she teaches exercise classes daily. Marie struck me as an example of someone who is ageing very well and I hoped

that she would allow me to interview her. I, therefore, asked her whether she would be interested in participating in this research, and was pleased when she enthusiastically agreed to do so. During the interview, Marie commented that she was “very comfortable in (her) own skin” and this comes across in the way she presents herself, as being content with her life and with the way in which she is ageing.

### Marie's story

The following themes emerged from Marie's story.

#### **The disappointment of the past vs. the satisfaction of the present**

From Marie's account, it appears that her life has become more satisfying as she has become older. Possibly, this is one of the reasons why she seems to be ageing in such a positive manner. In this section, events of Marie's past will be contrasted with her experiences in the present in order to illustrate the 'dramatic' way in which her life has improved.

In terms of her *family of origin*, Marie described her mother as an “alcoholic” and a “prescription addict” and her father as a “workaholic”. It seems that she learnt to rely on herself, from a young age, because she could not rely on her parents. She also tried to create a façade that things at home were more 'functional' than they actually were. She recalled:

My mother was an alcoholic and she was also a prescription addict as well and it was very tough growing up in an alcoholic and prescription drug home. You know especially when it is your mother because they should really be role models and my father managed to help himself by being absent. He became a total workaholic. So my sister and I were just stuck, for want of a better word, with my mother who spent 90% even 99% of her time in bed, you know. So it was difficult ... I was very good at covering all this up (Lines 68-75).

She added:

I never want to be the person I used to be because that was just a mask anyway, you know. I was very reliable, very dependent (*dependable?*), very much a workaholic. All those things happen to one child, I would say, in the family. (Lines 109-111).

It seems as though she had to “mask” her feelings and sacrifice her identity in order to be “the hero” in her family, “the one that looks after the others.” She said:

I didn’t know who I was anyway. And all I knew was that I was terrorised most of the time and really fearful. And that if anything nice happened to me, and nice things did happen to me in that period as well, and I always used to think, well (a) I don’t deserve them and (b) its going to be snatched away from me very quickly so don’t get too used to this and don’t think this is for you. (Lines 128-133)

In always trying to be what others wanted her to be, she seems to have been left feeling confused about who she really was. At the same time, she also seemed to feel that she was not entitled to “anything nice” in her life.

In terms of *the present*, having ‘absentee’ parents seems to have taught Marie to be resilient and it also instilled in her the determination to create a very different life for herself and her own family.

Although Marie reconciled her relationship with her mother before she died, her mother’s death seemed to leave Marie with a deep sense of regret and a feeling of having been let down. Marie, therefore, seems to have been determined to ‘right the wrongs’ of the past, by giving to her children what she had not received from her mother. She recalled:

It was wonderful because I was able to make friends with her before she died. Through the drugs, through the alcohol, her insides, her kidneys particularly through the prescription drugs had gone to hell. So she died when she was 51 and my younger son was only 4. And I mean she could basically still be around today if she was healthy. So we missed out on a great deal with her but as I say we righted that, ja. (Lines 142-148).

It seems as though Marie was able to forgive her parents for her “incredibly hard” upbringing, and she never seems to have used her past as an excuse not to succeed in her own life. Rather, it seems as though it encouraged her to strive for more. By doing this, she seems to have been able to transcend the difficulties of her past.

In relation *to her own family*, her husband and children have always occupied an important position in her life and unlike her own mother, she has been very involved in their lives. She also became the “role model” for her children that her mother never was.

Although her sons are now adults with families of their own, she remains connected to them, and they, in turn, remain connected to her. One of her sons lives in a house on his parents’ property and she describes the set up, fondly, saying:

We have a scenario like “My Big Fat Greek Wedding” where we have a very large place and we built a house at the bottom of the driveway ... eventually my son purchased that from his father and they live there. It’s marvellous because I’m able to see my grandchild everyday. And when we’re away, and we are away a lot these days, R (*her son*) looks after the house and our animals for us and the same when he’s away on business. So we can take care of each other that way. (Lines 56-62).

In terms of *her identity*, she no longer needs a “mask” to hide who she is, but she now feels “comfortable in (her) own skin”. She explained: “I hate confrontation but I have learnt to do confrontation.” She has gained self-confidence and does not appear to be afraid of rejection. She also feels deserving of her good fortune, although she does not take it for granted. She said:

I am so unbelievably blessed. (Line 115-116).

She added:

I am the most spoilt person I know! (*Referring to her many overseas trips*). Sometimes I think this is really too much I am far too spoilt. But we do, we are really so lucky to be so spoilt. (Lines 162-164).

Marie describes herself, currently, as being “hugely satisfied” with her life. Her satisfaction seems to be due to the effort she made to change the aspects of herself and of her life which disappointed her. One of the ways she did this, was by joining ALANON (the Alcoholics Anonymous programme for the families of Alcoholics), and the ALANON Adult Children of Alcoholics programmes, where it seems that she was able to confront the difficulty of her past and move on with her life. She said:

Doing those 12 steps of recovery, it’s hard. You have to be very honest with yourself and about yourself. (Lines 99-100).

Finding healing seems to have been her reward for adhering to the programme. She often stressed her belief in having freedom of choice and this seems to have been the path she followed in her own life, where she chose to take control of her life rather than be controlled by it. She said:

We do have a choice, don’t forget, especially if we’ve been shown or placed on the right path. (Lines 435-436).

She added:

A new life can start if you want it to. (Line 598).

She believed that her sister made ‘poor’ choices and that as a result she has landed “on the street”. She said:

I have a sister who doesn’t want to go to a programme of recovery and her life is totally unmanageable, totally. So there is the route of becoming manageable and the route of not. (Lines 106-108).

She also held her mother accountable for her (mother's) alcoholism and drug addiction, although she was able to forgive her. She said:

She had a choice but the choice that she made was not a good one for all of us, especially herself. (Lines 140-141).

Unlike her mother and her sister, Marie chose to make 'beneficial' changes in her life. It seems that the tremendous effort she made to come to terms with the disappointment of her past, and to create the kind of life for herself, and for her family, which she finds satisfying, has 'paid off'. She now describes herself as "hugely satisfied", as "very, very content" and as "having a great time".

### **Meaning in life**

The theme of having meaning in her life seemed to be central to Marie's perceptions and experiences of ageing. It seems to be linked to the previous theme as it seems that finding meaning in her life has contributed to the sense of satisfaction she feels. In this section, ideas will be discussed in terms of how important they are, for Marie, rather than chronologically.

At the beginning of the interview, Marie said that she felt she had reached her age, of 65, as a result of three things, which she felt were central to her wellbeing, and to her enjoyment of her life. It seems that these aspects can be regarded as being her sources of personal meaning. These are: her spiritual belief, doing physical exercise and her connection to her family. She rated them in order of importance and explained her choice saying:

My 12 step programme is number 1 in my life. Number 2 in my life has to be the exercising which also helps my mind and you know, makes me feel better about me and what I'm doing, and number 3 obviously is the family. But those first two things come before the family because I wouldn't really be the kind of mother or wife that I would like to be if I wasn't helped along by that. (Lines 88-93).

Marie's *spiritual belief* seems to be a source of great personal meaning in her life. She differentiated between having a spiritual belief and a religious belief and explained that she believed in a "higher power". She described the ALANON and ALANON Adult Child Programmes, with which she is involved, as "spiritual programmes" and it seems that her spiritual belief is linked to her participation in these programmes. She also explained how her adherence to their 12-step programme had influenced her life in both a practical and a spiritual way. She said:

I'm very grateful for that because they have kept me so centred and really ok about myself ... every week that I go I just see miracles happening. And it's happened for me because I really and truly would not have been able to do the job that I do anyway, today if it wasn't for being able to develop some self-esteem and some confidence and I've only done that as a result of the 12 step programme. That to me has been very important. (Lines 81-88).

Her faith in the programme seemed to stem from her own experience of being helped by it. She believed that the programme had helped her to come to terms with her mother's addiction and with the way the addiction had deprived her of a 'normal' childhood. She also felt that it had given her the self-esteem and confidence that she did not have while she was growing up.

In terms of her marriage, she and her husband's joint involvement in the ALANON programme seems to have provided meaning in both of their lives and has strengthened their relationship. Marie believed that meeting her husband and being introduced to ALANON were very influential in terms of her becoming the person she is today. She recalled:

Then I met the man I was to marry who was already just very newly sober in AA (Alcoholics Anonymous). And that was the beginning of my growth period because he said, "come on go to that fellowship (a) you'll learn more about what kind of person I am". And you know, I didn't realise that my mother had this problem until I actually went to the meeting. I just thought she was doing it specifically to get at me. And that she was just weak-willed, and you know, not up to much. And I learnt differently, that she also ...she had a choice ... So my change happened when I got married. (Lines 134-142).

During the interview, Marie stressed that while she had received help as a member of ALANON, she had also had the opportunity to help others. She felt that she had managed to heal herself by sharing her past experiences, and in turn, she seemed to derive a sense of purpose, and of satisfaction, from having helped others to heal themselves. She said:

You know, that's why it's very unique the 12 step programme. It is because you don't just take, take, take. You also give to others ... I mean I sponsor in the group quite a few people. So if they have anything that they particularly want to talk about that is very personal and private, they won't mention it in a meeting but they will speak to their sponsor. And that's given me great satisfaction, just to be a member, you know, of the group and to receive what we do. (Lines 410-416).

She added:

I do get a lot of phone calls from people in need and then I share what happened to me and then they tell me what happened to them. You know, they come to the meetings and a new life can start if you want it to, it is there. (Lines 595-598).

As a result of her involvement in the ALANON programme, she has also had the opportunity to travel to overseas conventions, to meet people, and to make friends, which are all activities that seem to have enriched her life. She explained:

And you know what, my bestest friends come from there as well, they really do. You know we've spoken about very personal and private things in those groups ... our friendships are terrific because we understand each other without having to know that much about each other. And I've been lucky enough to go overseas several times to the world conventions of both ALANON and AA ... And even though we speak different languages, the feelings are the same, the experiences the same ... That common thread ... So the friendships are also hugely important. (Lines 460-475).

Marie speaks in quite a 'zealous' way about AA and ALANON and it seems as though her involvement in these programmes, and especially the "fellowship", provides a great deal of meaning in her life, which contributes to her overall satisfaction with her life at present.

The second aspect that Marie felt had significantly contributed to the quality of her life and to the way she has aged, is *physical exercise*. She said:

Because of the exercising, truly, I have come as far as I have (Line 17).

Marie felt that exercise had played a very meaningful role in her life and that she had derived both mental and physical benefits from it. She explained:

I always used to say I exercise for my mind because I feel better. Then I don't feel down or anything because exercise is brilliant for your mind. (Lines 333-335).

From a physical point of view, being as fit and healthy as she is also saved her life. Last year she underwent surgery to replace a heart valve and there were complications during the surgery. She described the situation as "touch and go" and felt that she had survived as a result of having been so physically fit. She explained:

The fact is they said that they were dealing with a woman whose body was very, very much younger than her years, and that's what pulled me through. So there you are. So it was, thank G-d for the exercise ... It saved my life. It actually saved my life because the body was so much younger. So there you are. So it is all to do with ageing at the end of the day, it really is. (Lines 331-337).

Finally, *her marriage and her family* provide great meaning in Marie's life. She believed that meeting her husband and marrying him were major turning-points in her life. She recalled:

And then I met the man I was to marry ... And that was the beginning of my growth period ... So my change happened when I got married. (Lines 133-142).

Marie and her husband had been married for 39 years and they seem to have a very good relationship. In addition, she feels very close to her children. She said:

Yes it is 39 years and it will be 40 years next year. It is 39 years and you know, we get on terribly well because he is a very good friend. And I love seeing him because there's always something to tell him and to share with him. And that's also very

important and that's to have someone that you can share with. And the same with my children. In fact my children sometimes share more that I would like to hear! ... Ja, so we definitely are, I would say, a hands on family. and to me that's so important, having the right family. (Lines 36-43).

She added:

I have an incredible family ... the family, the husband that I have and my two sons are just amazing. And they just make us feel special and you know we never sort of feel like old people. So ageing isn't something to be afraid of. (Lines 22-25).

Marie's family seems to be the 'foundation' on which her life is built. It seems to give her strength to undertake any experience, including her experience of ageing. An example of this can be seen from the answer she gave when she was asked whether she felt there was pressure on her to look younger. She said:

You see I don't, I mean it would be nice ... Maybe because I'm secure in my relationships with the family. (Line 552).

Marie's close relationships with her husband and children seem to be even more precious and meaningful for her because they are so different from the relationships she had in her family of origin. The sense of security and support that her family provide for her, also seem to have enabled her to take ageing in her stride, as she knows that she is not alone.

Marie's positive attitude towards life, and towards ageing as a part of her life, seems to be strongly related to her sense of living a meaningful and purposeful life. This is centred on her spiritual convictions, her belief in the importance of physical exercise, and her devotion to her family.

## “Generativity vs self-absorption”

The title of this theme has been taken from the name of the seventh stage of Erikson's stages of psychosocial development. (Erikson *in* Bee, 1996). According to Erikson, successful resolution of this stage of life, or “generativity”, involves a turning outward from the self towards others. This seems to capture where Marie is in her life and it seems evident from her concern for others, and her lack of self-centredness, or “self absorption”. This theme links to the previous theme, of meaning in life, since it seems that Marie's concern for the welfare of others is a primary source of meaning in her life.

“Generativity” may be expressed in a variety of ways. In terms of *her family*, Marie's “generativity” is embodied in her having given birth to, and raised her children. Her continued ‘nurturance’ of her family is an extension of this. This “generativity” can also be seen from the way in which she and her husband have encouraged their sons to follow their own ‘philosophy’ of helping others. She said:

You know, for us as a family it is very important to try and help the people that you personally know ... I know my son has this brilliant attitude of ... ‘Pay it Forward’ (a film whose ‘message’ was that a person who had received help from another, had to do something good for someone else in return). ...He's setting up a foundation which R (*her husband*) and I are involved with as well ... (he) (*her son*) expects them to do something for somebody else, which is a good idea. (Lines 608-617).

When Marie speaks about her sons, there is a sense that she and her husband have guided them to take their place as the future generation.

In terms of *other people*, Marie shows a genuine concern for others and believes strongly in the idea of ‘giving something back’ of her own good fortune. It seems as though she never takes her success for granted and she appears to derive great satisfaction from “trying to help others in similar circumstances”. She said:

I have received in such abundance, really ... And that's important too, not just to talk about it, but to do something and to help where you can, really ... You can't help everybody in the world. But, if you come across somebody who does need help, I think that is vital, I really do. (Lines 604-610).

She added:

I think that's terrible when you turn your back where you could do something, however small, don't you think so? (Lines 625-626).

Helping others is an important part of her membership of the ALANON group, which she described as a "sharing programme." She said:

You know, that's why it's very unique the 12 step programme. It is because you don't just take, take, take. You also give to others, you know ... I mean I sponsor in the group quite a few people. So if they have anything that they particularly want to talk about that is very personal and private, they won't mention it in a meeting but they will speak to their sponsor. And that's given me great satisfaction, just to be a member, you know, of the group and to receive what we do. (Lines 410-417).

The concept of "generativity", illustrated in this excerpt, is linked to other themes mentioned in this dissertation. They are the "*great satisfaction*" she feels in relation to her life, and the *meaning* Marie derives from what she does, both of which seem to be related to her concern for the welfare of others. The way in which these concepts fit together seems to illustrate how Marie has achieved integration in her life.

Marie does not appear to worry about getting older because that would be too 'self-indulgent' and she seems to be 'too busy living her life.' Nonetheless, she faces the finiteness of her life in line 359. She even speaks about staying healthy as her 'responsibility' towards her children, rather than as a 'personal' concern. She said:

I say to my husband what we have to do is we have to take the very best care of ourselves that we can. You know, we owe it to our children to be well and healthy. (Lines 26-29).

From Marie's account, it seems as though she is at the stage of her life where she derives a sense of purpose from assisting others, and where she is able to be less 'self-involved' than she may have been in her youth. In this way, she seems to illustrate the successful resolution of Erikson's stage of "generativity vs. self-absorption".

### **The freedom of being older vs. the pressures of being younger**

Marie gave the impression that she is content with being her age. She seemed to feel that there is less pressure on her at 65 than there was when she was younger, and which she felt that younger women continue to experience. As a result of this 'freeing up', she felt she was able to focus more on her interests and on other people, rather than on herself. This links to the previous theme of "generativity vs. self-absorption". She said:

I think in a way it is nice getting older because that focus on yourself maybe is not so great anymore, you know what I mean? (Lines 639-640).

She also felt that there was a certain pressure on younger people to "compete" with each other, and she seemed grateful that she no longer needed to be part of that competition.

An important part of her process of getting older, seems to be that Marie has learned to live life on her own terms and according to her own rules, rather than according to the rules of others, and this seems to have taken a great deal of strength and courage. She frequently described herself as being "comfortable in my own skin" and this seems to be related to her acceptance of herself and the way in which she lives her life.

When she was younger, it seemed as though she had to live her life according to other people's rules. She said:

You don't like to rock the boat and you are certainly not into confrontation and that is how I used to be. If you wanted me to be one way I would be that. If so and so

wanted me to be another way, I would. But not anymore so I am able to confront.  
(Lines 12-195)

In contrast to the way she described herself in the past, as quite insecure, as an older woman she comes across as strong, independent, and assertive. She said that people sometimes described her as being 'too outspoken', and she regarded this as a compliment, as she had to learn to express her feelings. She added:

You can actually make more of a fool of yourself now! So what? People might not even notice, you know. If you and I went out together they'd look at you because you're young and gorgeous ...I just think that there are more things that you can do and get away with it! And if you make a fool of yourself, so what? (Lines 685-690).

She seemed to feel that as an older woman, she was less 'visible' than she had been when she was younger, but that this did have a positive side to it. She seemed to feel that she now enjoys a sense of freedom from public scrutiny, and possibly even from ridicule, which younger people seemed to fear.

In terms of her *physical appearance*, while Marie is still very glamorous and beautiful, she did not seem to feel that there is the same intense pressure on her, that there is on younger women, to look perfect. She felt that the focus had shifted away from her and she seemed to accept it. She said:

It's lovely to be this age. You can look at everything and you can say, 'that's beautiful, she's beautiful, he's beautiful.' It doesn't matter, you know, you're not in the same arena any longer, wouldn't you say? (Lines 667-669).

When asked whether she did not miss being "in the same arena any longer", she said that she did not, because she remembered the feelings of insecurity which had been part of that stage of her life. She said:

All I have to think about were all those feelings, those feelings of fear and not being good enough. (Lines 672-673).

She admitted, however, that she still “like(s) to look nice” and that “nobody likes to be invisible”. In addition, she said that she would even have plastic surgery if she felt the need for it. It seemed that taking care of her health was more important to her than worrying about her looks. However, it does seem that she at least needs to have the choice to have plastic surgery or not. She said:

Every age is special but we just have to accept it and accept it gracefully if you can. And, no, I really am happy with it. It doesn't mean I won't go and have a face lift one day, when I've got time, I probably will but ... frankly I'm terrified of it. I'd be so scared to have another op. (Lines 645-649).

She added:

You have to feel good about yourself ... and you've got to do the things to make yourself feel ok and make you feel younger, like the exercise. (Lines 707-709).

Experiencing ageing as a ‘freeing up’ process does not mean that Marie no longer has any responsibilities or concerns. Despite the ‘freedom’ she now enjoys, she still has responsibilities towards herself and others. She believes, for example, that she has a responsibility to her family to take care of herself. This involves exercising, eating healthily and not smoking or drinking. She hoped that by looking after herself she would be able to remain independent for as long as possible. She explained:

As long as I am well that is the main thing. I don't want to be a burden to myself, number 1 and especially not to the children ... I want to keep my independence. I like being independent and that way, you know, it does make you aware of the fact that you've got to remain well and focused on things ... I hope I'll be able to look after myself. (Lines 221-228).

She also mentioned that “freedom from financial insecurity” was an important concern for her in relation to getting older. At present she enjoys ‘financial freedom’ but she admits that if she had to worry about finances “that would age (her) to death and back.”

Contrary to the prevailing stereotype that 'life deteriorates after midlife', Marie's life seems to have improved as she has become older. One of the reasons for this seems to be her growing sense of freedom from the pressures she associates with youth.

### **Personal Reflections**

Of the three women interviewed, Marie seems to be the one who is the most satisfied with her life, and the least concerned about her age. Although specific themes were highlighted, a common thread that seems to underlie all of the themes in her account, is that of connection. Despite having experienced such disconnection in her family of origin, Marie connects very well to others. She also seems to be very connected to her life. I also had the impression that she is in control of her life and of the image she presents to others. It seems clear, therefore, that she was also very much in control of the way she presented herself in the interview. However, she came across as being congruent. It seems as if right from childhood she chose to create a positive world for herself. Although she "covered up" aspects of her life which were unsatisfying, she did not deny their existence, nor did she dwell on them. Instead, she chose to remain positive and this attitude seems to have contributed greatly towards her enjoyment of her life. It seems that in overcoming the difficulties of her youth, Marie gained strength as well as a fierce determination to live the life she wanted, on her own terms. At this stage of her life, she seems to be very content with the way things have turned out.

### **Conclusion**

During the analysis of the conversation with Marie Stein, the following themes were highlighted:

- The disappointment of the past vs. the satisfaction of the present

From Marie's account, it appears that her life has become more satisfying as she has become older. She grew up as the child of an alcoholic mother, and

a father, who was a “workaholic.” Having these ‘absentee’ parents seem to have taught her to rely on herself. It also instilled in her the determination to create a very different life for herself, for her husband and for her children. One of the ways she did this was by joining the ALANON and the ALANON Adult Children of Alcoholics programmes, where she was able to confront the difficulty of her past, and move on with her life. At present, Marie says that she is “hugely satisfied” with her life. Her satisfaction seems to be due to the effort she made to change the aspects of herself and of her life which disappointed her.

- Meaning in life

The theme of having meaning in her life seemed to be central to Marie’s perceptions and experiences of ageing. It seems to be linked to the previous theme as it seems that finding meaning in her life has contributed to the sense of satisfaction she feels. Marie attributed having reached the age of 65 to three things. These are: her spiritual belief, doing physical exercise, and her connection to her family. She seems to regard these aspects as being her sources of personal meaning.

- “Generativity vs self-absorption”

The title of this theme has been taken from the name of the seventh stage of Erikson’s stages of psychosocial development. (Erikson in Bee, 1996). According to Erikson successful resolution of this stage of life, or “generativity”, involves a turning outward from the self towards others. This seems to capture where Marie is in her life and it seems evident from her concern for others, and her lack of self-centredness, or “self absorption”. This theme links to the previous theme, of meaning in life, since Marie’s concern for the welfare of others seems to be a primary source of meaning in her life.

- The freedom of being older vs. the pressures of being younger

Marie gave the impression that she was content with being her age. She seemed to feel that there was less pressure on her at 65 than there had been when she was younger, and which she felt that younger women continue to

experience. As a result of this 'freeing up', she felt she was able to focus more on her interests and on other people, rather than on herself. This links to the previous theme of "generativity vs. self-absorption".

## CHAPTER 6

### CATHERINE'S STORY OF HER PERCEPTIONS OF AGEING

#### Personal Data

Participant	:	Catherine Smith (pseudonym)
Age	:	47
Research setting	:	The interview was conducted at the researcher's home

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#### Introduction

In this chapter a transcribed conversation that took place between the participant and myself, on the participant's perceptions of ageing, is carefully analysed and emerging themes are highlighted. The transcribed conversation may be found in Appendix E. It should be noted that the themes identified are based on my own subjective viewpoint, and are not meant to represent the 'truth'. These themes are not necessarily mutually exclusive, neither are they exhaustive. Other readers might identify different themes. I might also identify different themes at a different time.

The analysis is followed by a brief personal reflection.

#### Background

The participant, Catherine Smith, volunteered to participate in this research as she was interested in discussing her perceptions of ageing. She reported that she was feeling negative about ageing and she hoped that talking about her feelings would help her to come to terms with the changes she was

experiencing. Her account was filled with contradictions and she seemed to vacillate between a position of acceptance of the physical ageing process and a rejection of it. She seemed to lack clarity about how she felt about ageing although she denied this when this was pointed out to her. There seemed to be several contradictions in her account and this made the task of trying to tease out the various themes quite complex.

At 47, it seems that Catherine is facing the challenges of 'midlife', generally regarded as a time of 'transition', according to culturally defined 'norms'. She seems to be trying to reconcile the person she has become with the person she was in the past and at times this seems to be very difficult for her. She also seems to be quite uncertain about what the future will bring. At the same time, however, she also seems to be facing the challenges associated with an 'earlier' stage of adulthood, and that is as the mother of an 8-year old child. It seems possible that the 'tasks' demanded by each of these life stages clash to an extent, and that this may also have contributed to the difficulty which she seems to be experiencing in terms of how she perceives ageing.

### Catherine's story

The following themes were identified from Catherine's story.

#### **Body as a barometer**

When asked about her perceptions of ageing, Catherine's primary focus seemed to be on the way in which her body had changed over the past few years, particularly in terms of its appearance. She seems to regard her body as a barometer which has registered important life-changing events, including her marriage, motherhood, turning 40, a miscarriage, and returning to work. Her body seemed, therefore, to be a constant, visual reminder of her life experiences. She often expressed negative feelings about her body, and it seems as though it may have been easier for her to focus on the outward,

tangible signs of change, than on the impact which these events had on her.

She said:

Maybe the body reflects where you are at as well, for me, reflects where I am at.  
(Lines 313-314).

Catherine got married (for the second time) at the age of 38. She mentioned that she had been married previously but she chose not to focus on her first marriage during the discussion. She felt that her “body changed with the (second) marriage”, although she was uncertain about whether this was merely because she was getting older, or whether it was because of the marriage itself. While she did not explain how her body changed, it seems as though she regarded her marriage as having ‘left its mark’ on her. She said:

Yes my body changed with the marriage maybe because of the ageing thing as well. Whether it would have affected the body change, I think the life experiences and age sort of naturally came at that time. (Lines 210-213).

Shortly after her marriage, she gave birth to her daughter and she experienced further physical changes. With motherhood came a major shift in her identity along with emotional and physical change, and it seems as though she felt she literally had to transform herself into a “different shape” in order to adapt to her new role. She compared her experiences of motherhood with those of her friends in England (where she and her husband were now living) who she felt had undergone similar changes. She said:

... we've all had babies late and given up careers late and the bodies went so it could be a whole big identity change? Or maybe our bodies just changed because as a mother you've got to be larger, I don't know. Well, it could be that. As a mother there's one way of mothering and when you're back into the career world you are looking another way ... you know you're a mother and you're doing your mothering but maybe your body needs to know that you've got to be a different shape to do it.  
(Lines 214-217).

She described motherhood as being a “highlight” and, on the one hand, she reasoned that she ‘needed’ to have a “larger” body in order to nurture her

child. However, on the other hand, she felt that her 'new shape' impacted negatively on how she felt about her femininity and her sexuality. She said:

One thing that did affect me, as a woman, with this whole ageing thing is your sex life does change. With your body changing and having to marry the mind and body with that acceptance of your body. Not only your sex life but sex drive, well mine changed. I didn't even know if it was mothering that changed it. ... Everything changes how you feel about yourself as a woman. I breastfed for 17 months. You know suddenly your breasts are not there for pleasure they are there for feeding ...they are an instrument for bonding with your child ... So I think it all happened for me at about the same time. The body change maybe, the mothering because of my age maybe. (Lines 502-515).

It seemed that her self-consciousness and preoccupation with her body prevented Catherine from enjoying sex. She recalled:

You don't want that sexual bond ... you're worried about everything. Because I'm this, I'm this, I'm flopping, I'm not as supple ... your body image shifts, it's too cold, it's too, you know all these excuses? ... You actually don't concentrate on yourself. ... It's not special. It's not a time for making love ... (Lines 525-535).

Catherine began to feel as though she had lost her femininity, and this left her feeling 'incomplete'. It took a while before she was able to accept that she could still be a woman and enjoy her sexuality despite having a more 'maternal' body. She said:

You've got to come to this acceptance of I am still a woman. (Lines 597-598).

She added:

It's only in marrying this total acceptance that your sex life and sex drive has come back. This enjoyment of sex as being wonderful, amazing, long ... with joining the mind and the body and that whole acceptance suddenly the enjoyment comes back. (Lines 515-521).

Catherine felt that once she had integrated her mind and her body, she was able to reclaim her femininity and sexuality and to feel whole again. She said:

It's the whole thing of marrying where I'm at as an older woman with the mind and the body and the desires and all that ... the perception of the outside is different and because the perception of the outside is different, you have to come to terms, well I had to come to terms with it. And from that point of view, can I use the word 'allowed' myself what I would have allowed myself with a younger, more attractive body. (Lines 553-563).

A further aspect that seemed to influence Catherine's perception that she was 'still a woman' was that she had not yet reached Menopause, despite the 'fact' that she was an 'older' mother. It seemed as though knowing that she was still fertile was quite reassuring for Catherine as it seemed to confirm her femininity. She explained:

... the body is what the outside world can see as opposed to the inside which is still young and ageless ... the womb and the mind. (Lines 329-330).

In terms of her chronological age, Catherine seemed to feel that once she had turned 40, she lost control over what was happening to the body she had taken for granted up till then. She felt unprepared for the 'sudden' change which occurred and which she was required to adapt to. She said:

Your body goes and suddenly from being a size 10 you find you have grown and it's nothing that you do, it just happens and maybe it's just something that happens in your forties that suddenly your whole body changes and to me that was a very difficult matter. It's the body change, the image of the body changes, the way you dress had to change, all that had to change to stay with the ageing body. (Lines 9-14).

Catherine regarded the miscarriage she suffered a few years ago as the catalyst for the changes in her body's appearance, even though other changes had occurred previously. She said:

For me the very big thing when it actually started, I had a miscarriage when S (*her daughter*) was 2½ and my body never came back after that. (Lines 19-20).

When she spoke about her miscarriage, her feelings about the loss of her baby and her feelings about her body seemed to be closely intertwined. She

seemed to feel that she had unintentionally 'rejected' her unborn child as her body had "let (her) down", and, she also felt that the child had rejected her. It seems as though the miscarriage also tied in with her feelings of not being in control. She said:

It wasn't a planned pregnancy. I felt like I had let the child down, that my body couldn't carry it. It was very much that kind of feeling. My body's let me down I couldn't carry the child to full term. So it was a totally different feeling ... the child was around me, I saw him I knew him. It was a totally different relationship, I think, to if you're just carrying and you don't see the being you're carrying, you're not with the being. So I had to come to that kind of acceptance as well which was a totally different acceptance than to a body kind of acceptance, a spiritual acceptance. To me there was that rejection kind of feeling as opposed to my body's old, my body can't do it. Because I really believe your body can do it no matter what age ... For me it was that whole spiritual rejection kind of issue. I don't believe that your body can't ... for me it wasn't that, it was just an acceptance that body you took for granted and didn't have to work that much to keep suddenly just went. (Lines 47-63).

Catherine's description of the miscarriage, her feelings about her body, and her explanation of "spiritual rejection" seemed confusing, so the researcher telephoned Catherine after the interview to ask her whether she could clarify some of what she had said. Catherine explained that although her pregnancy had been unplanned, she had been very pleased when she discovered she was pregnant. She also described herself as having 'psychic' abilities, which had enabled her to connect with her unborn child. When the baby died, she felt that he had 'spiritually rejected' her, as they already 'knew' each other. Although she said that she did not feel that she was 'responsible' for the miscarriage in any way, she still seemed to feel that her body had "let (her) down". She may even have felt that her body had rejected 'her'. Even though she did not admit it, perhaps she felt that she could have looked after her body, and her pregnancy differently. She also found the child's rejection of her very difficult to accept, and she said that she had continued to hope, for several years, that he would 'come back' to her in another pregnancy.

After the miscarriage, Catherine explained that she continued to look pregnant until she would have been due to give birth. Perhaps in gaining weight she was symbolically holding onto her child. She recalled:

The baby was due September and a friend of mine said to me that the baby should have been born by now and that was when my weight went down and my body changed ... my body hadn't gone down until the 9 month period was up. (Lines 21-23).

As a result of the trauma of the miscarriage, she seems to have projected many of her unresolved negative feelings onto her body. Perhaps she rejected her 'self' as encapsulated in her body. Her body seemed to act as a barometer, which recorded and 'stored' her loss. She explained that she had only recently been able to come to terms with the idea that she would not have another child, and perhaps this acceptance has helped her to begin to adjust to her body.

In relation to her career, Catherine's identity seemed to be tied to how she looked, and she seemed to feel that she 'lost' her body at the same time that she 'lost' her career when her daughter was born. She said:

Maybe the body was ... I don't know, maybe the body was linked to the career but that kind of thing where the body went after, if you understand what I mean, that the body went after the career ... Maybe the body reflects where you are at as well, for me, reflects where I am at. (Lines 304-314)

It may have been easier for her to confront the visible changes in her body than to accept the unseen, but painful changes she perceived in her identity. Maybe she could also be more objective about her body than she could be about her identity.

When she later returned to work, she seemed to feel that, to an extent, both her identity and her body were restored. However, even though she was happier that her body had trimmed down, she still perceived it as being different from before. She said:

What was interesting was that in the job, my weight dropped. It was like regaining that old identity as a career woman ... Ja, the weight came down again, but the body was not the same body anyway. It was gone. (Lines 170-189).

In terms of Catherine's perceptions of ageing, she seemed to regard her body as a barometer that had reflected and recorded various events which had occurred in her life. Her body seemed, therefore, to be a constant, visual reminder of her life experiences. It seemed she used the explanations she gave to her body changes, to make sense of them and the other changes (roles etc.) she was experiencing.

### **Acceptance vs. ambivalence towards the ageing process**

The theme of acceptance of ageing seems to follow from the previous theme of body as a barometer since Catherine's feelings about her body were a significant part of how she felt about ageing. Catherine seemed to equate 'successful' ageing with an acceptance of the physical ageing process. However, a strong sense of ambivalence was noted because although she would like to 'accept' ageing, it seems as though her feelings are incongruent with her actual experience of the process. She appears to have an 'ideal' view of how she would like to age, and she feels disappointed that her experiences have not been as she 'imagined' they would be.

A further reason for her ambivalence may be because she feels that at 47 she 'should' already have accepted the ageing process, and she has not. She may compare herself with other women her age who seem to have come to terms with ageing. However, it seems as though she does not take into account that while they may share the same chronological age, they may be at different life stages from her own. They may, for example, have children who have already left home, leaving them without the responsibility that she has of still trying to raise a young child. Her experience of being out of synchronisation as an older mother, therefore, may contribute to her feelings of ambivalence towards the ageing process.

When she was asked what she felt was the most important aspect about ageing, she replied:

It's just an acceptance of ageing, an acceptance of your body changes more than anything else. It's not a mind thing. (Lines 8-9).

This seems to be a contradiction since 'acceptance' implies a state of mind. Catherine did, however, seem to feel that being unable to accept her body was a major obstacle in terms of her experience of the ageing process. She appeared to be battling to reconcile the way her body had changed, with the image she had of herself when she was younger. Her struggle seemed to distress her and it seemed as though she would like to accept the changes so that 'calm' could return to her life once again. Although she claimed that she had come to terms with these physical changes, the manner in which she spoke about her body seemed to contradict her words. She said:

Now I'm actually feeling ok, now I'm feeling like this is the body *you've* got, but it took a long time to get there. This is the body *you've* got, *you're* not going to have the body that *you* once had as a 20 year old. *You* don't want to have the body *you* had as a 20 year old. So there's a bit of fat on *your* arms, who cares ... I think just time and certain acceptance. Not fighting, learning to love *yourself* in a different body or love the new body as opposed to taking the other one for granted. (Lines 88-116).

She did not say: "this is the body *I've* got ... *I'm* not going to have the body *I* once had as a 20 year old," rather, she used the second person in her description. In this way, she seemed to reject her 'ageing' body, which she seemed to feel had been thrust at her. Speaking in this fragmented manner seemed to highlight the lack of integration she felt.

In addition, she seemed to be in the process of mourning the loss of her youthful body, which she regarded as "the other one", while at the same time she seemed to be trying to adapt to her "different" or "new" 'middle-aged' body. She also seemed to have taken her youthful body for granted, whereas her "new body" demanded attention and became something she had to focus on and deal with purposefully. She mentioned that she had decided to go to

gym, and this seemed to imply that she wanted to change her body and/or her (negative) feelings towards it. However, she then contradicted herself by saying, “it actually doesn’t matter”, when it seemed that it ‘really’ did matter. She said:

Then I went off to gym yesterday, and I suppose I’ll struggle with that again for a while, won’t I? But it’s that, that whole thing of it actually doesn’t matter. This is my age and this is my body and it’s ok let the age and the body be the same. (Lines 93-96).

Catherine claimed that part of the ageing process might involve ‘rethinking’ what certain concepts meant, for example being beautiful or ‘sexy’. However, although she felt that “being happy with yourself ... comes with age”, she is not yet at that stage, and she does not seem to have considered that she may never reach this ideal state. She still seems to ‘buy into’ socially sanctioned images of beauty and ‘sexiness’ even though she claims she does not. She said:

Sexiness doesn’t have to be, “I’m not sexy at this size ...” So I think it’s about being happy with yourself and projecting that out which I think comes with age. It doesn’t come with being young. Because then we haven’t really worked out who we are. As we accept that then maybe we rethink what sexy means, or rethink what beautiful means. (Lines 102-108).

Several contradictions also seem evident in the following extracts where she talks about how ‘comfortable’ she feels with her appearance and her body. She said:

The wrinkles come in and you can see that you’ve got more wrinkles and that’s a big thing in ageing, you look at your body and it changes. And suddenly from 40 I’ve got this grey hair. But who cares? It’s there, it’s me, it’s part of me. If I choose to dye it, I’ll dye it. If I choose to run around with grey hair for months, it’s also ok. It’s part of me. (Lines 278-282).

She added:

I'm still not comfortable enough to wear a swimsuit, the body's changed that much ... there I haven't come to terms with it. Even before when it was a younger body, I wasn't that comfortable so I've always had a big tummy. From that point of view I don't know if that has changed that much. But I'm comfortable enough to walk around without clothes on so maybe I'm going back to where I was. *So I flop here and I flop there but it's ok.* It's back to that me which is very much the old me. (Lines 285-293).

It seemed that in wanting to be “the old me”, she was still unable to accept the body she had. Her use of the word “flop” in relation to her body also seems to be quite negative and seems to reflect her feeling of ‘rejection’ towards this ‘new’ body. She seemed to feel that she became a ‘different’ person in a ‘new’ body, which she did not like, and she seemed to want to return to “the old me”. It seems as though she is unable to accept that she is still the ‘same’ person, but in ‘different packaging’ and so she splits the two. The way in which she talks about “that whole body issue” also seems to indicate that she locates her struggle ‘out there’, and has not yet been able to integrate it into her image of herself. Accepting the ageing process seems to imply an integrated view which she lacks and perhaps belongs to a much later stage in her life.

In terms of her perception of her mother's and her grandmother's ageing processes, she seems to be fairly critical about the way in which they have aged. It seems as though she rejects their experiences of ageing because they differed from the way in which she viewed her own.

Catherine seemed to feel that in order to age ‘successfully’, one should ‘age gracefully’. Her approach seemed to imply that one should accept age-related changes such as wrinkles and grey hair, without trying to disguise them. She believed that she and her mother differed significantly in this regard. She explained:

I'm saying I have more acceptance of myself as a woman than my mother did then. But then my mother and I are very different people. My mother is naturally thin, naturally beautifully turned out. She hasn't got this acceptance that I have and she

actually has less grey hairs than I do ... I've never known her natural colour hair because she's been dyeing and it's been a different approach to being a woman. Apparently she started dyeing her hair when she was 16 or something stupid. So it's a different acceptance of ageing. (Lines 372-380).

Catherine seemed critical of her mother's need to always look "beautifully turned out", which she felt was in sharp contrast to her own approach. She said:

Maybe it's never been an issue to me ... If my hair is dyed that's fine, if it's not that's also fine, it's not a reflection of me. If I go out without makeup it's ok. If I go out with makeup, it's ok. If I don't have time to put makeup on it's also ok. If my nails aren't polished it doesn't make me less of a woman ... I never blow dry my hair. I go out with wet hair and I always have ... So we've had very different approaches to the hairdos, the makeup. She goes out looking very well-groomed. But that's maybe her view of how she should look, she as a woman. (Lines 389-304).

From Catherine's account it seems as though she and her mother had often disagreed about how a woman 'should look'. At times it may have been difficult for her to have grown up with a mother who was always "very well-groomed". Catherine believed that many people, including her mother, were so worried about getting older, that they stopped enjoying their lives. She seemed to be determined not to let this happen to her. She explained:

So maybe its about acceptance that you can age as opposed to when you age this is what happens, and this is what you have to do to prevent it? And somewhere along the line you stop enjoying life, you're so busy preventing it. (Lines 408-411).

Perhaps this focus on external appearances provided a focus for the real issues which were not dealt with.

She seems to be saying that she has accepted ageing, but, once again, her words do not seem to match her 'actual' life. She seemed unaware that her own negative perceptions of the ageing process as such an issue and a struggle had already affected her.

A further example of her belief in the importance of 'accepting' ageing, seemed evident from the way in which she described her grandmother's ageing process. Catherine believed that her grandmother had not aged well because she 'rejected' the ageing process by withdrawing from social contact, fearing that people would see her as old. She said:

I have a granny who had Alzheimer's. Somewhere along the line she aged. When I say she aged, somewhere along the line she stopped going out. No one would see her in a wheelchair. Do you understand? She stopped living. She had gained so much from life and then somewhere, no one will see me looking like this, no one will see me looking like that. I think that's what stopped her. So I think it's very much your mind dictating ... she wasn't reading, she wasn't going to the library, she wasn't working and she wasn't going outside because she was in a wheelchair. (Lines 490-498).

In some ways, Catherine's view seems quite naïve as she seems to feel that Alzheimer's, a form of dementia, can be averted by 'ageing positively'. Possibly this view stems from her desire to have more control over her life and over the way in which she hopes she will age. She does seem to consider that certain aspects related to ageing and to life may be beyond her control.

Catherine seems not to have accepted ageing although she says she has, and her account is filled with examples of her ambivalence. She is still fairly judgmental of those who have dealt with ageing differently from her and has not yet reached a point where she has acknowledged and accepted her own struggles. This acceptance might give her the objectivity or 'distance' to feel compassion for her mother and her grandmother. Although it seems as though she would like to have a more integrated view of herself and of her life, it appears that at 'midlife' she has not yet reached that stage which she may, or may not, reach when she gets older.

### **Feeling out of synchronisation with the norm**

Catherine seems to feel that she is out of synchronisation in a number of areas in her life, and this seems to cause her discomfort. It was noted that

her feeling of 'being out of step' may also have contributed to her 'struggle' with the ageing process, which was discussed above.

The first area where it seems that she feels out of synchronisation is in relation to her mind and her body. Catherine seemed to feel that there was a significant difference between her body, which she felt was changing with age, and her mind, or self, which she seemed to regard as constant even though previously she said that she had changed with her changing body. She seems to feel very confused about who she is, and her confusion is reflected in her account. At times it seems as though she feels that her 'inner core' has stayed the same while other aspects of her personality seem to be evolving constantly. Perhaps she sometimes confuses the two ('self' and personality) and she may feel unable to recognise 'herself' in the midst of these changes. She may, therefore, feel the need to hold onto some aspect of herself that is unchanging.

She said:

That's how I view ageing. It affected the body for me but it didn't affect the mind.  
(Lines 481-482).

She explained this 'mismatch' between her mind and her body, saying:

It's the body change, the image of the body changes, the way you dress had to change, all that had to change to stay with the ageing body, but your mind was different. Your mind didn't match your ageing body ... (Lines 13 – 15).

She added:

I still walked into a shop and went to the size 10 rack and nothing fits and there's no point in going to that rack ... you know it seems your mental picture of your body hasn't changed. You're still picking up clothes that would have fitted that no longer do. (Lines 34-37).

Catherine seemed to believe that her mind was too young for her “ageing body”, and that her body, the visible representation of herself, did not reflect this younger woman whom she felt herself to be. She said:

So very much the body is what the outside world can see as opposed to the inside which is still young and ageless. (Lines 328-330).

And yet she felt that she had lost something of herself with her bodily changes. She did, however, seem to regain her sense of self when she realised there was ‘no going back’ and that she had perhaps moved into a different stage of her life.

She seemed to have certain perceptions of what a 47-year-old ‘should’ look like, and feel like, and she did not believe that she fitted this image. She said:

... I don't look my age ...I just feel like I'm me, do you understand what I'm saying? ... My body may look 47 ... but when you look at me you don't see someone who looks 47. (Lines 236-243)

In terms of her perceptions of ageing, she felt that it was important for her to be able to reconcile her mind with her body in order to feel more “comfortable” with herself. Ironically, it seems that she will not achieve the integration she seeks between her mind and her body until she feels more accepting of herself, and, therefore, more “comfortable” with herself. She said:

... maybe it is marrying the outward with the inward and being comfortable with it all. (Lines 283-284)

Catherine also seemed to feel out of synchronisation in terms of the timing of certain events in her life, such as her marriage and giving birth. In addition, she seemed to feel that the relationship she had before she met her husband, with a man who was 16 years older than she was, was also somewhat unconventional. In terms of being an older mother, she even felt ‘out of step’ because she fell pregnant more easily than she was ‘supposed to’ at her age. She said:

I married late ... I fell pregnant before we got married because I was already 38 and you know you're told your body is going to take a few years to fall pregnant, it didn't, it took 2 weeks. (Lines 197-205).

When her daughter was born, she seemed to struggle to come to terms with her "whole identity change". She recalled:

When we first moved there (the UK) and S was 6 months old I met a friend of mine ... she laughed at me at a shopping mall, I arrived there in a suit pushing a baby. That was the part of the identity I had left behind and I had to deal with the fact that it was no longer ... I've given that suit away now ... but then that was life, that was what it was. (Lines 150-157).

She was later able to form friendships with a group of mothers of a similar age to herself, and this enabled her to feel a connection with them and to feel in synchronisation with them. Seeking and having a support group helped her to accept the changes she was experiencing more easily. She explained:

I was lucky because I got friendly with older mothers and they were going through what I had gone through. So it helps, it does help. Because it's a whole identity crisis and their bodies changed. I don't think any of us have perfect bodies anymore so it was ok with it there was a familiarity with that. And the conversation never really revolved around bodies. It revolved around this whole identity change. (Lines 139-151).

She felt that her miscarriage, of her second child, caused her body to feel out of synchronisation, and that this could be seen in her continuing to look pregnant after she had lost the baby. She also felt that the whole "rhythm" of her body changed. She said:

My periods are still strange ... I never had period pain, I never had the backache or the stomach-ache, I never had anything. But from the time that I had that miscarriage I can get terrible migraines ... so maybe it was all part of that limitation whereas beforehand everything used to flow normally. (Lines 331-348).

In relation to her career, going back to work at the age of 44 made her feel out of synchronisation because she seemed to feel discriminated against because of her age, and because she had a young child at home. She explained:

It took me a while to get a job because of my age and apparently because when you're a mother you lose your brain ... Once I was in the job, of course the perceptions were different. (Lines 162-169).

Catherine also seemed to feel that her ideas were out of synchronisation with society's. She claimed that she rejected society's messages about how women 'should' look, saying:

I don't give a damn what society expects. It's the conforming versus the non-conforming. (Lines 406-407).

However, it appeared that she was still influenced by these messages, seen for example, in her belief that it was 'unacceptable to be fat'

I walked into a shop once with a friend of mine and they only stocked clothes up to a size 16 and suddenly you're taking a size 14! ... you have to go through this whole thing of 'I'm fat' and I think coming from a South African background which is very, very body conscious it took a while to get used to it. ... I had to move in that whole South African context of you've got to look just like this and to come to terms with that. So your body image, until you get used to it, it does restrict you ... then you don't fit in. (Lines 69-86).

Catherine also seemed to feel that she was out of synchronisation with her mother and that this manifested in the difficulties in their relationship. She may have felt that she had never lived up to her mother's ideals and this rejection has stayed with her and might even be connected to the rejection she felt when she miscarried. It seemed that she was unable to accept that her mother's views were different from her own and so she rejected them completely.

Catherine rejected the idea of 'forcing' her daughter to be a certain way, possibly because she felt her mother had tried to force her to be what she

wanted her to be. She was determined to “honour” her daughter, in terms of her upbringing, by allowing her to be herself. In this way she hoped her daughter would feel more in synchronisation than she had. She felt that the messages she had received from her mother about herself and her body had negatively affected her self-esteem, and had contributed towards her feeling out of synchronisation. This in turn had impacted on her struggle to accept the changes in her body. She said:

Being a mother is about total, unconditional love, total allowing the child to do it. For me the whole thrust is in honouring her, honouring what she has to do, and honouring her path, as opposed to you must put your hair like this, you must do this, you must do that ... Maybe that’s coming from age and from the wisdom to be what my child needs as opposed to this is what I need ... My big thing and what I pray all the time is to be the best mother I can so that she grows up with the best self-esteem she can because my own mother knocked mine all the time. (Lines 432-447).

Catherine hoped that by building up her daughter’s self-esteem and by supporting her, she would be able to spare her from the struggles she herself had experienced, and which she partially held her mother responsible for. She said:

I believe her body will stay with her forever because she won’t have these limitations thrust on her of this is how you’ve got to look and this is how you’ll be and her self-esteem will keep the body. (Lines 460-462).

Catherine seemed to feel that her body image, and possibly even her attitude to ageing, would have been very different if she had received the unconditional love that she needed from her mother.

Catherine seemed to experience a feeling of being out of synchronisation in a number of areas in her life. It seems as though this feeling of being ‘out of step’ may have contributed towards her ‘struggle’ with the ageing process. She felt that her mind and her body were out of step, and this caused her a great deal of discomfort. She also felt that the timing of certain key events in her life was different from that of others in her cohort and this may have made

her feel quite isolated. She also experienced a sense of being out of synchronisation in terms of her relationship with her mother and she even felt that her ideas were out of synchronisation with society's. There were times, however, when she did feel in synchronisation with others, for example when she became friendly with a group of older mothers who were at a similar life stage to her own. The sense of having something in common with these other mothers seemed to make her 'struggle' a little easier.

### **A Re-evaluation of identity**

Catherine's perceptions of ageing seem to be strongly linked to her sense of who she is, or her identity. For Catherine, turning 40 seemed to be a turning point in her life, and a time of questioning and, perhaps, of re-evaluating her identity. This theme, therefore, seemed to follow from the previous themes.

During the past number of years, Catherine experienced many changes in her life. She was married and divorced; she ran her own company; she became pregnant, married for the second time, and emigrated with her husband to England. She had a baby, and she gave up her career to stay at home and look after her child. She subsequently had a miscarriage and she later returned to work, before coming back to South Africa. These experiences, together with the developmental changes she has undergone, seem to have contributed to her feeling that her identity changed or evolved. At the same time, however, Catherine previously said she felt that her inner sense of self had remained the same. Therefore she does seem to differentiate between her identity and her 'self' although at times she seems to confuse them. This may be a further example of the ambivalence Catherine seems to feel about ageing.

One of the many changes Catherine experienced was a change in her environment when she and her husband moved to England. Catherine described the effect of the move, and how she coped with her new situation, saying:

I think that confidence thing is also related to image and achievement and for me when we moved to the UK and I stopped working and became a housewife and my whole mindset around that had to change. And my being a housewife as you know you do your housework, you do whatever chores have to be done or whatever as opposed to here. So it's not a meaningless existence, it's a different existence ... And you have to get out, and you have to do things, and you find things to do that you enjoy. Because your whole life changes and your whole focus has to change and maybe that contributed towards, well definitely contributed towards your whole state. (Lines 126-136).

Catherine also seemed to feel that she had lost some of her old identity as a successful career woman when she added the roles of mother and a homemaker to her repertoire, and that the process of coming to terms with these changes was difficult. Perhaps her new roles were not as satisfying as being a career woman had been, and she certainly did not hold the same status. This refers to a grand narrative that asserts that being a homemaker has no value, and in this way it oppresses women who fill this role. Catherine realised, however, that she needed to make an effort to make her life more meaningful, and she did so by trying to get out and expand her contact with others.

It felt, to Catherine, as though her life had changed completely. She described the shift from what she may have regarded as her 'previous life' as a career woman to being a fulltime mother. She recalled:

I was in recruitment. I've been in recruitment for years and years. I opened my own company and then we moved to the UK when I was pregnant. And then S was born and suddenly you're in this whole routine. You can't get another job because this is what it's going to pay you to find someone to look after your child and your whole salary is going to go because you're starting off again ... so you stay at home and you have to deal with that whole situation. (Lines 139-145).

From having had a successful career, it seemed as though Catherine felt quite trapped by the situation in which she found herself in England with a new baby. Although she described having a child as one of the "highlights" of her life, it was as though she had moved from a position of complete

independence to one where her freedom was largely curtailed. Later, becoming part of a group of other mothers, helped her to come to terms with her “identity crisis” and to cope with her circumstances.

Currently, Catherine seems to be at a point in her life where she is trying to re-evaluate her identity based on her own “reality” rather than on societal and familial expectations, which she claims she has rejected. She also seems to recognise the power she has to ‘reinvent’ her identity, rather than just passively accepting that she has no choice regarding the manner in which she will age. She said:

Not only do you not have to buy what’s out there, but it’s your own reality. Your body doesn’t have to buy into that reality ... it’s your emotions, your mind, which is part of your concept and your identity so you can keep it. You’ve got to reinvent your identity so that it serves you best and you can still enjoy life as opposed to becoming this old lady with grey hair and pink lipstick ... Even if you are this old lady with grey hair and pink lipstick you can still go out and enjoy your life, you don’t have to be limited in what you can do. (Lines 584-591)

In relation to this re-evaluation of her identity, Catherine seems to have experienced certain gains as she has become older. One of these gains was greater selflessness which she mentioned in terms of allowing her daughter to chose her own path. She said:

For me it is the honouring as opposed to the superficial. Maybe that’s coming from age and from the wisdom to be what my child needs as opposed to this is what I need. (Lines 436-438).

In contrast to some of the negative feelings she expressed about getting older, she seemed to feel that this “wisdom” was a more positive, and acceptable ‘side effect’ of ageing. She added:

From life, as such, you’ve got more wisdom and your view to life changes but you essentially do feel ageless. (Lines 251-252).

On a certain level it seems as though Catherine still measures herself according to society’s expectations which she ‘buys into’ to an extent. She

may be on the road to acceptance, but she needs to recognise that this is an ongoing process. In being more compassionate towards herself, she may also find the process easier.

### **Personal Reflections**

Of the three interviews conducted, I found the interview with Catherine to be the most complex to analyse. Upon reflection, I think that the difficulty I experienced in writing this chapter mirrored Catherine's confusion and lack of integration in terms of how she perceives ageing. This was further complicated by the intrusion of my own feelings of fear and uncertainty about getting older. Even after having redrafted this chapter several times, it seems to have retained an underlying feeling of uncertainty which, I think, reflects how Catherine and I feel about ageing.

Although Catherine is 8 years older than I am, she was the youngest of the participants and I found that certain of her feelings about ageing, especially in terms of re-evaluating her identity, resonated with my own. I also identified with Catherine because we are both at similar life stages in terms of being mothers of young children. Before the interview, I had certain assumptions about how middle-aged women felt about ageing. On the one hand Catherine's story confirmed some of my fears about turning 40. On the other hand, I realise that we are both individuals with very different lives and attitudes, and that I have my own life journey. Although I often found Catherine's views about ageing to be quite negative, it seemed as though she was beginning to come to terms with the age-related changes she was experiencing. I am grateful to Catherine for sharing her perceptions and experiences of ageing, which I believe shed light on how complicated the process of ageing is. If women can share their experiences in such an honest way, they may feel less isolated and better able to cope with the changes that occur as they age.

## Conclusion

Based on the analysis of a transcribed interview between the participant and myself, the following themes were highlighted.

- Body as a barometer

Catherine seemed to regard her body as a barometer that has reflected and recorded various events which have occurred in her life. These included her marriage, motherhood, turning 40, a miscarriage, and returning to a career. Her body seemed, therefore, to be a constant, visual reminder of her life experiences. She often expressed negative feelings about her body, and it seems as though it may have been easier for her to focus on the outward, tangible signs of change, than on the impact which these events had on her.

- Acceptance vs. ambivalence towards the ageing process

The theme of acceptance of ageing seems to follow from the previous theme of body as a barometer since Catherine's feelings about her body were a significant part of how she felt about ageing. Catherine seemed to equate 'successful' ageing with an acceptance of the physical ageing process. A strong sense of ambivalence, however, seemed to underlie her perceptions in this regard because although she would like to 'accept' ageing, it seems as though her feelings are incongruent with her actual experience of the process. She may compare herself with her other women her age who seem to have come to terms with ageing however, she does not seem to take into account that although they may share the same chronological age, they may be at different life stages from her own. Her experience of being out of synchronisation, therefore, may also contribute towards her feelings of ambivalence towards the ageing process.

- Feeling out of synchronisation with the norm

This theme links with the previous theme since Catherine's sense of 'being out of step' in several areas of her life seems to have contributed towards her struggle with the ageing process. She seems to feel that a number of

aspects in her life are out of synchronisation with the norm. These include her feelings about her mind and body being out of synchronisation; the timing of certain events in her life; her ideas in relation to those of society; and her relationship with her mother.

- A re-evaluation of identity

This theme seemed to follow from the previous themes, as Catherine's perceptions of ageing seem to be strongly linked to her sense of who she is, or her identity. For Catherine, turning 40 seemed to be a turning point in her life, and a time of questioning and, perhaps, of re-evaluating her identity.

## CHAPTER 7

### COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

#### INTRODUCTION

In this chapter a comparative analysis will be undertaken between the themes associated with the participants' perceptions of ageing and the literature. Similarities and differences between the themes and previous research will be discussed. This comparison is made not to substantiate the themes but to include the many voices on this topic.

The following themes seemed to recur in the three accounts and appear to have a bearing on participants' perceptions of their ageing process:

- Connection and disconnection
- Feeling out of synchronisation with the norm
- Public image versus personal perception
- Acceptance
- The positive aspects of being older

These themes that I, the researcher, have identified are not mutually exclusive and may overlap.

#### **The Theme of Connection and Disconnection**

The theme of connection and disconnection refers to the way in which the participants were connected and disconnected in various contexts.

In terms of Gina's account, her sense of being connected to her inner 'self', to others, and to her life seems to be a key component of the way in which she perceives and experiences her own ageing process as positive. At 91, she

seems to have gained a perspective that has enabled her to focus on her life as integrated, and on herself as an integral part of it.

When Gina was younger, she found it difficult to connect with others because of her shyness. She enjoyed a close connection with her mother, who was also shy and who understood how she felt. Despite her shyness, she made an effort to meet people and to make friends. According to Smith (1999, p. 295) "increased interpersonal contact can lead to a changing conception of self as related to others." Later, Gina was able to connect with her husband and their connection seems to have helped her to cope with the sense of disconnection she may have felt when she had to leave her family and her home during World War II. When Gina and her husband disconnected through their divorce, when they were living in South Africa, she seemed to connect with herself and developed her own identity. She was also able to connect with her 'new' country, South Africa. Several years later, she reconnected with her ex-husband and they became good friends until his death. Now that she is older, Gina has fewer connections than she had when she was younger. However, even at 91, she has continued to try to expand her connection with others, and she seems to feel strongly connected to her friends and family members. Social relationships and family involvement are regarded as important factors in terms of the emotional well-being of older people, and are important determinants of life satisfaction (Hillerås et al., 2001), which seems to be the case with Gina.

Unfortunately, however, despite wanting to maintain connection with others, at times, her hearing loss hampers her efforts and causes her to feel quite disconnected from them. According to Thompson (1993), hearing loss makes communication more difficult and it can limit activities which were previously enjoyed. Thompson (1993) adds that people who cannot hear well often withdraw socially rather than subject themselves to the embarrassment of misunderstanding what is said to them. This seemed to be the case with Gina in terms of how she related to the other elderly people at the residential hotel where she stays and on occasion with her family members.

Apart from her hearing difficulties, Gina still enjoys relatively good health. However, being 'so healthy' appears to make her feel guilty around the elderly who are often not as well as she is, and she feels increasingly disconnected from them. Two positive aspects, however, which seem to have resulted from her disconnection from people her age, are that she has been able to connect with herself and develop her own identity; and she has been encouraged to seek connections with younger people, for example, her granddaughters. In terms of her self-development, she has been able to undertake activities that are personally meaningful for her, such as attending lectures, while her friendships with younger people seem to have helped her to preserve her sense of youth and vitality. Finding meaning in life is highlighted by Frankl as being the key component of a purposeful existence (Frankl, 1946/2004).

The personal meaning that Gina seemed to derive from her daily activities throughout her life and even in her latter years also seems to play an important role in terms of the sense of connection she feels to her life. This is borne out by research which indicates that the "ordinary and familiar things people do every day" (Bonder & Martin, 2000, p. 178), contribute towards a sense of living a meaningful and purposeful life.

In relation to Marie (65), there seems to be an overarching theme of connection in her story. Like Gina, Marie seems to be very connected to her life and to the people in it, and this seems to have impacted positively on the way in which she perceives ageing. However, there are also differences in the way in which Gina and Marie experience connection in their lives. One of the ways in which their experiences of connection differ may be linked to the difference in their ages. While Gina's world has narrowed considerably, in her nineties, causing her to have fewer social connections with others, Marie, at 65, still experiences her world as 'wide', and as providing her with many opportunities for connection. This seems to have impacted positively on Marie who describes herself as being "hugely satisfied" with her life. She also seems to be content with her age.

A further way in which their experiences of connection differs, is, that unlike Gina, Marie did not have close relationships with her family of origin. As the eldest daughter of an alcoholic mother and a father who was a “workaholic”, Marie experienced a strong sense of disconnection from her ‘absentee’ parents. As a result, it seems that she connected with herself and learned to rely on herself early on in life. She also became determined to create a very different life for herself. Despite the disconnection she experienced in her past, she has since been able to connect well with others. According to Wiloxin, Walker, and Hovestadt (cited in Coombes & Anderson, 2000), the experiences which social workers from alcoholic families of origin had as children, often resulted in them developing good interpersonal relationships and coping skills as adults. Marie's experiences seem to have been similar. She was able to forgive her parents and to let go of the disappointments of her early years. In this way Marie seems to have transcended the difficulties of her past and she has created a satisfying life for herself and for her family in the present. As Frankl (1946/2004, p. 147) stressed,

even the helpless victim of a hopeless situation facing a fate he cannot change, may rise above himself, may grow beyond himself and by so doing change himself.

In other words, Marie seems to have found a sense of meaning in her life by “rising above” (Frankl, 1946/2004, p. 147) her own childhood experiences and by working towards the goal of having a happy family of her own. She now has a very strong connection to her husband, to whom she has been married for 39 years, and she is also very close to her children. Marie’s connection to her family seems to be the ‘foundation’ on which her life is built. It seems to give her the strength to undertake any task, including her experience of ageing.

Marie’s sense of connection to her ‘self’ also seems to be related to her sense of living a meaningful and positive life based on her spiritual beliefs, her belief in the importance of physical exercise, and her devotion to her family. She seems to have a holistic view of her life and her perceptions of ageing seem

to be an integral part of her outlook. Marie's sense of fulfilment in her life seems to connect with Frankl's (1946/2004, p. 8) view that people are motivated by a "will-to-meaning". Shantall (1997, p. 531) explains this as follows:

The human person needs to find a reason (purpose) to live; that true fulfillment is hardly possible without a sense of purpose (spiritual direction) in life ... the central issue for the human person is not the struggle to survive but the struggle to find and experience *meaning* in life.

Unlike Gina and Marie, Catherine (47) seems, at times, to feel very disconnected from her 'self' and, in particular, from her body. In addition she seems to feel she is undergoing a transition in relation to her identity. According to Levinson (cited in Holahan et al., 1999, p. 238) midlife is a "critical time for reassessment", where there may be "significant transition – in roles as well as in inner perspectives" (Bee, 1996, p. 396). The idea of a 'midlife crisis', a component of several developmental theories, is also hinted at (Bee, 1996). The age of 40 appears to have an "important symbolic meaning, marking the 'halfway' point after which one goes 'down the other side'" (Sherman, 1994, p. 405). Catherine seems to feel that she is in the midst of a transition and this seems to have resulted in her fairly negative perceptions of ageing. At 47, it seems that she is possibly not yet at the point where she is able to see her life as integrated, and this appears to be congruent with the life stage she is at. Her account was filled with ambivalence, which seems to be a further reflection of the sense of disconnection and fragmentation that she feels.

Many of Catherine's perceptions regarding ageing focus on her body, which she seems to experience as being disconnected from her mind. She often spoke about her body as "the body" and she seemed unable to incorporate her feelings about her body into her image of herself. Öberg (2003, p. 106), believes that the body is "central to self-identity", and a component of the "embodied self". This viewpoint seems to shed light on a possible link

between Catherine's struggle to accept, or connect with her body and her lack of a clear sense of self. According to Öberg (2003) bodily changes like puberty, pregnancy and menopause challenge self-identity. In Catherine's case, motherhood, with its accompanying body changes, seems to have led her to feel disconnected from her femininity and sexuality for a while, and this also impacted on her identity. The miscarriage she then suffered two years later seems to have contributed to a major sense of disconnection in her life; both in terms of the rejection she felt from her unborn child, and in terms of her body, which she seemed to feel had 'let her down.' Catherine regarded her miscarriage as being the catalyst for the physical changes she experienced, even though other changes had occurred previously. She seems to have projected many of her unresolved feelings about the trauma of the miscarriage onto her body. She also seemed to reject her 'self' as encapsulated in her body. At this stage it seems as though she is struggling to accept her body, and, therefore, to connect with it. Secord and Jourard (cited in Potts, 1993) offer an explanation which seems to support Catherine's feelings about her body. These authors coined the term "body cathexis ... defined as the feelings of satisfaction or dissatisfaction one has about one's body" (Secord et al., in Potts, 1993, p. 22). According to this view, feelings about the body are believed to correspond with feelings about the self. Therefore, "negative feelings about the body are associated with feelings of insecurity involving the self" (Secord et al., in Potts, 1993, p. 23). It seems as though body image, self-concept and self-esteem are closely linked and interact in various ways and impact on a woman's self-appraisal.

Although she seemed to long for connection between her 'self' and her body, which would signify an acceptance, for her, of the ageing process, she does not seem to have reached that 'stage'. Gina and Marie, on the other hand, do seem to be at stages of their lives where they are able to perceive a greater sense of connection in relation to themselves and to their lives. This does not mean that Catherine will necessarily reach this stage as her own ageing process may have a different outcome.

Catherine's account is filled with examples of her experiences of connection and disconnection in her social interactions. In relation to her mother, Catherine seemed to experience a sense of disconnection, and she may have felt that she was unable to live up to her mother's ideals. She also seemed to feel that her body image and possibly even her perceptions of ageing would have been very different if her relationship with her mother had been more positive. Here she seems to have an external locus of control believing that circumstances control her rather than believing that she can direct her own life (internal locus of control) (Rotter in Meyer, 1997). In this regard she is unlike Marie who, despite her poor relationship with her parents, managed to carve a different life for herself. According to Akiyama, Antonucci, Takahashi and Langfahl (2003, p. 2), research suggests that there is a "general tendency of increasing positivity and decreasing negativity in affect and social relations as people age." However relationships vary and are affected by many different factors that play out in unique ways in the context of each individual life (Akiyama et al., 2003). Possibly Catherine's relationship with her mother will improve as she gets older.

In terms of her other relationships, Catherine experienced both connection and then disconnection when she married, and subsequently divorced her first husband. She later remarried and connected with her second husband, and thereafter she connected with her baby daughter. Although she found motherhood to be a highlight, and seemed to connect with the 'mothering part' of herself, she also struggled with what she termed her "whole identity change". It seemed that this was partially because when she became a mother, she gave up her career to become a fulltime mother, disconnecting from the 'career woman' part of her identity. According to Bonder and Martin (2000) a person's occupation is a source of meaning and purpose in life. They believe that "much of one's expression of self and life-satisfaction comes from doing, from undertaking personally meaningful occupations" (Bonder et al., 2000, p. 177). In her research on identity development during the transition to motherhood, Smith (1999, p. 292) suggests that women may turn "away from the public world of work and towards the more domestic family world" during this time. According to this view, it seems that Catherine's

change in focus from working life to domestic life when she became a mother, was part of a 'normal' process of the transition to motherhood. On the other hand, however, it also seems that giving up work also affects a woman's identity, and that this is a further 'normal' transitional process. One of the participant's in Smith's (1999, p. 293) study expressed similar views to those of Catherine, even though she underwent her own unique experience of motherhood. She said,

I just feel less confident about who I am and what I have to offer than I did -say prior to giving up work ... it stopped providing that identity, I mean it took an identity away from me.

In terms of her relationship with her daughter, Catherine seems to feel very connected to her and she seems determined to give her daughter the support she felt she did not receive from her own mother. However, Catherine also seems to see the importance of being able to disconnect from her daughter, at times, in order to help her daughter to develop her own independence and build her sense of self-esteem. Smith (1999, p. 295) supports this view and emphasises the importance of "recognizing connection as well as separateness as important factors in self-development and self-definition."

Whilst the theme of connection and disconnection was relevant to each of the participant's stories, each of the women expressed it in a unique way based on her own perceptions and stage of life.

### **The Theme of Feeling out of Synchronisation with the norm**

According to Penguin Wordmaster Dictionary (Manser & Turton, 1987) "synchronisation" is defined as the occurrence of events or situations at the same time. A sense of harmony is often the outcome of synchronisation (Manser et al., 1987). This sense of harmony (and disharmony) often seemed to underlie the participant's experiences. The theme of feeling out of synchronisation with the norm also relates to the previous theme since feeling out of synchronisation seems to lead to a sense of disconnection. As a result,

there is a certain amount of overlap with the preceding theme. All three of the participants seemed to feel that they were out of synchronisation in terms of the ageing process.

For Gina, it seems that one of the main areas where she feels out of synchronisation, and therefore experiences 'disharmony', is in terms of the positive manner in which she is ageing. Her general attitude challenges the conventional notions of 'ageing as decline' despite her experiencing the results of her ageing such as her hearing loss and other physical signs. As a result, she seems to feel very different from others her age. She still drives, attends yoga classes, and travels overseas annually, among other activities. She also has a positive outlook on life. She often seems, therefore, to feel alienated from other elderly people whom she perceives as being on a different "wavelength" from herself, both mentally as well as physically.

In terms of the timing of certain key events in her life, such as her marriage, having children and her career, Gina seemed to feel that many of these occurred 'off time', rather than on time. Neugarten and Datan (cited in Goodhart & Zautra, 1984, p. 253) suggest that "the same event in a different context has very different psychological meanings and effects." In Gina's case, her experiences of marrying when she was very young, as well as becoming a mother when she was older than the other women she knew, seemed to make her feel out of synchronisation with other women and with society's expectations of 'normal developmental trajectories.' Sherman (1994) believes that the concept of being 'off-time' has a significant impact on age identity. Gina's 'off-time' experiences seem to have impacted on her feeling younger than other women of her cohort at certain times, and older than them at other times. Gina's awareness of her age under these circumstances, appears to have exacerbated her sense of feeling 'out of step' with 'the norm'. Neugarten (cited in Bee, 1996, p. 11) is of the opinion that events which are "off time" and follow a timetable which deviates from the "normal expectable life cycle" are more disruptive than events that are "on time". However, her feeling of being out of synchronisation as an older mother led Gina to join a group of younger mothers, which she found beneficial, and which she felt may

have 'kept her younger'. The timing of the abovementioned events in Gina's life, coupled with many of the 'unconventional' experiences of her youth caused Gina to feel notably out of synchronisation with the norm. However, although she felt out synchronisation with the norm, she did not seem to experience these events as disruptive because for her they occurred at the right time and impacted on her age identity in a positive way.

In terms of her work, Gina began her career at an age (42) when many of her cohort were already thinking of their retirement. She seemed to feel out of synchronisation as a result of being older, and also because she was the only woman in a middle management position. As a result of her involvement at work, she also had less time available to socialise and this left her feeling somewhat isolated from her social circle.

Being out of synchronisation in so many areas of her life seems to have led Gina to feel that she was quite 'different' from other people, and this seems to have caused her to feel quite alienated from them at times. However, it also seems to have encouraged her to make a greater effort to try and form relationships with others, and also to engage in activities that are personally meaningful for her. Rather than having the negative impact on her life predicted by the literature (e.g. Neugarten in Bee, 1996), it seems that feeling out of synchronisation with 'the norm', has enabled Gina to remain feeling 'young' and vibrant.

The strong feeling of connection which characterises Marie's account seems to be strongly correlated with a sense of her being in synchronisation (and in harmony) with the norm. However, there are still areas in Marie's life which seem to be out of synchronisation with the norm. Marie's early experiences in her family of origin seem to have left her feeling notably different from her peers. Marie's early life seems to have been coloured by a lack of congruence between her experiences and her expectations of family life (Goodhart et al, 1984). She seemed, therefore, to feel out of synchronisation with her own family and the families of her friends and this led her to create a façade that things at home were more 'functional' than they actually were.

This seems to have been her way of trying to feel more in synchronisation with the idea of what she felt a family 'should' be. Taylor and Brown (cited in Brown, 1998, p. 275), propose that there is a link between "positive illusions and psychological wellbeing." These authors believe that these "positive illusions" often help people to cope better in their environments. (Brown, 1998, p. 275) In Marie's case the "positive illusion" she created about her family seems to have helped her to cope with the challenges she faced while she was growing up and has also helped her to transform her life in the present. As an adult, she has created a more functional and normal family than she experienced in her family of origin. Coombes et al. (2000, p. 5) discuss the resilience of certain children from alcoholic families which might provide a further explanation for this. Many of these children developed a strong sense of responsibility for the other members of their families, and the researchers suggest that "responsibility for others may be linked with themes of feeling loved and gaining strength from overcoming adversity." In addition, they found that as adults, those from alcoholic families who received counselling were able to recognise the impact of their dysfunctional childhoods and subsequently often made decisions to parent their own children better, in order to break the cycle of their pasts (Coombes et al., 2000). Marie's own resilience and experience of counselling helped her to come to terms with her past and created in her a determination to create a different life for herself. Her experiences, therefore, seem to be similar to those of the resilient children from alcoholic families and helped her to be more in synchronisation with her own family, and with her ideal of what a family should be.

During the years of her adolescence and young adulthood, it seems that Marie's experiences may have contributed to her sense of being out of synchronisation with her identity. She felt that she had to "mask" her feelings and sacrifice her identity in order to be "the hero" in her family. It seems that in always trying to be what others wanted her to be, Marie was left feeling confused about who she really was. Once again, this is in opposition to the present where Marie seems to know exactly who she is, a feeling she describes as being "comfortable in (her) own skin." In addition, her

membership of AA and ALANON have allowed her to feel that she is in synchronisation with the other members of the organisation with whom she shares a “common thread”, of “fellowship”. Goodhart et al. (1984, p. 268) stress that “the degree of fit” between a person and the “reference group” which he or she selects, plays an important role in a person's quality of life. It is clear that Marie's membership of AA and ALANON enhances her satisfaction with her life.

In terms of her health, Marie, like Gina, seems to enjoy relatively good health for her age, and she also does not fit the dominant narrative of how she ‘should’ be. She seems to be aware that, as a 65-year-old gym teacher, she is somewhat out of the ordinary. She acknowledges that she feels “very lucky being this age and being this far along the line”. She also perceives that other people may feel that she is ‘too old’ to be teaching exercise, and as a result she does not discuss her age at the gym. Despite looking after her health, however, Marie had to undergo heart surgery last year for a collapsing heart valve. It seemed that her heart was out of synchronisation with her perception of herself as fit and healthy, and it seemed to ‘let her down’. However, on the other hand, she believed that having a body that “was very, very much younger than her years” saved her life.

In terms of Catherine, it seems that her sense of being ‘out of step’ in several areas of her life has, unlike Gina and Marie, contributed towards her struggle with the ageing process. She experiences a strong sense of being out of synchronisation in terms of her mind and her body, which she feels are ‘mismatched’. Like Gina, she has also experienced the timing of certain events of her life as being ‘off time’, and she often feels that her ideas are out of synchronisation with those of society.

With regards to her feelings about her mind and her body, Catherine seemed to feel that her body, which was changing with age, was out of synchronisation with her mind, or self, which she seemed to regard as constant. She had, however, previously said that she had changed with her changing body. This is a further example of the contradiction often found in

Catherine's account which seems to echo her feeling of confusion about her ageing process. Catherine's feelings about her body seem to be supported by the literature. According to Saucier (2004, p. 3):

Even women who have not been overly concerned with body image in their younger years will report an astonishment at their aging bodies ... Although a person might feel the same on the inside, the outer shell has changed, and identity confusion results. A feeling of losing control of their bodies is also reported by many women, particularly those in the midst of a midlife crisis.

Like Gina, the fact that Catherine did not follow the 'normal' timetable expected by society, seems to have affected her sense of feeling out of synchronisation with the norm. Goodhart et al. (1984, p. 258), suggest that in terms of the social context, "norms can be represented by high-probability events for the reference groups of which one is (or wishes to be) a member." A person, therefore, perceives and evaluates his or her situation on the basis of social comparisons (Goodhart et al., 1984). It seems that Catherine felt that she was 'out of step' on the basis of these social comparisons with those around her. However, like Gina, Catherine often tried to find a way of fitting in. Catherine, like Gina, gave birth to her child when she was older than the other women in her cohort. This led her to feel out of synchronisation with younger mothers and with other women her age. However, like Gina, she sought out and became part of a 'support' group of other mothers, and this helped her to accept the changes she was experiencing more easily.

In relation to her career, going back to work at the age of 44 made her feel out of synchronisation, at first, as she felt discriminated against because of her age. It seems that she may also have felt out of synchronisation at work as her roles as mother and homemaker had been more foreground than her role of worker, prior to her return to work. Roberts and Donahue (cited in Brown, 1998, p. 115) support this view and say, "how we think about ourselves depends largely on the social role we are playing." Shortly after her return to

work, she seemed to feel more in synchronisation both with in terms of her role as a 'worker' and in terms of her relationships with her co-workers.

Catherine also often seemed to feel that her ideas were out of synchronisation with society's, particularly with regards to society's messages about how women 'should' look. According to Saucier (2004, p. 1), "women seem to be more vulnerable than men to the pressure from society to conform to its expectations." As a result, they seem to struggle more with issues of self-worth, particularly during middle age. Although Catherine claimed not to "give a damn (about) what society expects", it appeared that she was still influenced by these messages, for example, in relation to her belief that it was 'unacceptable to be fat'. According to Potts (1993, p. 15), for women, thinness is not only equated with physical attractiveness, "pursuit of a thin body constitutes a pursuit of femininity." In her account, Marie spoke about the intense pressure there is for younger women to look perfect. Whereas Marie, at 65, now feels a freedom from the pressure of having to look a certain way, it seems that Catherine, at 47, still experiences it, along with the anxiety and insecurity which accompanies it. Ironically, it appears as though Catherine's 'internalised belief' about the 'social desirability' of being thin, has contributed to her feeling out of synchronisation with herself, yet in synchronisation with the norm.

Catherine also seemed to feel that she was out of synchronisation with her mother's expectations of what a daughter should be and that this manifested in the difficulties they had experienced in their relationship. She felt that the messages she had received from her mother about her herself and her body had negatively affected her self-esteem, and had contributed to her feeling out of synchronisation. According to Usmiani and Daniluk (1997), family relationships, particularly the mother-daughter relationship, plays an important role in identity development of adolescent girls. Mothers are regarded as being role models for their daughters, providing them with "information and guidance ... regarding who they are as women, how they should feel and behave, and how their bodies measure up" (Usmiani et al., 1997, p. 2). This means that a mother's negative attitude towards her daughter's appearance

can affect the daughter's body image and self-esteem. As a result, Catherine seemed determined not to repeat her mother's 'mistakes' with her own daughter, and she hoped that by allowing her daughter more freedom to be herself, her daughter would feel more positive about her body and feel more in synchronisation with herself.

Each of the participants felt out of synchronisation with the 'norm' in terms of their experience of the ageing process. Goodhart et al. (1984, p. 260), believe that the way in which "asynchronies are resolved has important consequences for the individual's continuing growth and development." Each of the participants seems to be trying to age as well as she can and to find congruence for herself within her own life. The participants' experiences of being out of synchronisation with the norm in terms of ageing also seems to highlight the rigidity of developmental theories which fail to take individual differences and experiences into account.

### **The Theme of Public Image vs. Personal Perception**

The theme of public image versus personal perception highlights the difference between what is seen on the outside (appearance), and what is felt on the inside ('actual' experience). Once again, this theme ties in with the previous theme. According to Featherstone et al. (1993), physical appearance plays a central role in the social construction of ageing.

A woman's sense of her own attractiveness 'figures prominently into a woman's feelings of self worth'... Thus, emphasis on the body and its appearance are central aspects and behaviours of the female identity and social experience (Rodin, cited in Hurd, 2000, p. 80),

The discrepancy between what Öberg (2003, p. 106) refers to as "look age" versus "feel age" is a recurring theme in the literature on ageing and also featured in the participants' stories. Featherstone and Hepworth (1993, p. 309) often describe the ageing process as a mask or disguise that "conceals ... the timeless human personality beneath." Their description of this process

seems to illustrate the participants' experiences of the "paradox about aging" (Karp cited in Sherman, 1994, p. 406). Featherstone et al. (1993, p. 310) say:

As a consequence the wrinkling of the face may come to be seen as a gradual masking of the individual's sense of 'true' personal identity which is increasingly concealed and more difficult to express as time passes. The physical transformation of the face may thus lead to an experience of dissociation between inner selfhood and outward physical appearance.

The discrepancy between the way she looks on the outside and the way she feels on the inside was noted in relation to Gina. Although she looks much younger than she is, Gina has still experienced the effects of ageing, both in terms of a decline in her physical functioning, as well as changes in her appearance. However, like Catherine, Gina perceives a 'mismatch' between her external body which has aged, and her inner 'self' which she seems to regard as 'ageless'. On the one hand, the external changes Gina has experienced seem to be "body reminders" (Karp cited in Sherman, 1994, p. 405) which highlight the fact that she is ageing, but on the other hand, she does not identify with being 91 and she refuses to act old. According to Baum (cited in Kaufman, 2002, p. 170),

age identification may best be conceptualized as a clinical continuum of subjective wellness.' ... since a decline in health is assumed to accompany aging, those who feel poorly will feel older while those who feel good will feel younger. Subjective age may be a more important factor for physical and psychological well-being than chronological age.

There were times when Gina did express her distress at certain age-related physical changes in her appearance, for example, when she spoke about having developed age spots on her hands. She admitted that these bothered her, but she also emphasised that her good health was more important to her than physical attractiveness. According to Hurd (2000, p. 88), Gina's attitude is in line with those of other women her age, who "reconcile their negative

feelings about their aging bodies by focusing on the importance of health.” They appear to feel very grateful for their health and independence. There seems to be a shift in their priorities as appearances are regarded as trivial and good health becomes more important (Hurd, 2000). However, with regards to Gina, while her good health is a priority, she still wishes to look physically attractive.

According to Sherman (1994, p. 404) “age self-definition” is influenced by the way in which people feel they are perceived by others. This seemed to be the case in relation to Gina, who felt that other people often perceived her differently from the way she perceived herself. She was often annoyed, for example, when people tried to hold her arm and support her, assuming that at her age she would require such assistance. Gina explained that this made her realise that other people perceive her as being older than she feels, however it does not seem to have changed her perception of herself.

Unlike Gina and Catherine, Marie was the only participant whose “feel age” seemed to correspond with her “look age” (Öberg, 2003, p. 106). In fact, rather than describe her body as ageing and her mind or soul as ‘ageless’, she referred to her body as being “very, very much younger” than her chronological age. Although she had undergone heart surgery, the previous year, she felt that she had survived the surgery as a result of having a fit and healthy body.

Marie did not seem to focus on her physical appearance, although she admitted that she still “like(s) to look nice” and that “nobody likes to be invisible”. She seems to have accepted the “‘naturalness’ of the ageing process” (Hurd, 2000, p. 88). For Marie, like Gina, taking care of her health seemed to have become more of a priority for her than worrying about her appearance. She also felt that there is not the same intense pressure on her, that there is on younger women, to look perfect. This is in contrast to Catherine who still seems to feel this pressure. Marie felt that the ‘focus’ had shifted away from her and she seemed to accept it. However, she seemed pleased that she had the option of considering plastic surgery in the future, if

she felt the need for it. Having this choice seems to be important to her in terms of her independence, and she may feel that being able to make such a choice would allow her to be in control of one aspect of the ageing process. Cutler (2002) adds that plastic surgery is about identity, not about beauty.

For a woman who feels trapped in a body which does not fit her sense of who she is, cosmetic surgery becomes a way to renegotiate identity through her body (Cutler, 2002, p. 2).

At present, Marie seems to feel that her appearance corresponds with her identity and she is satisfied with it. An area, however, where she does seem to have internalised certain cultural beliefs, is in terms of her weight. When asked about her appearance, Marie stressed that she would not like to “put on huge amounts of weight and let myself go ... I don't want to be fat. Definitely not.” (Lines 271-282). It seems that at some level Marie, like Catherine, has been influenced by the grand narrative which equates youthfulness with thinness, and weight gain and fatness with “moral failure or laxity” (Hurd, 2000, p. 91).

In relation to Catherine, she seems to feel that her identity has been “masked” or “concealed” (Featherstone et al., 1993, p. 310) by her outward appearance. Catherine, like Gina, seemed to feel that her mind was too young for her “ageing body” and that her body was not an accurate representation of the ‘youthful’ person she felt herself to be. Catherine even spoke about her body in the second person, which seemed to be an indication of the “dissociation” (Featherstone et al., 1993, p. 310) she was experiencing. Pearlman (cited in Russell et al., 2004, p. 4) refers to this “discontinuity between the internal image of oneself and the physical exterior as ‘late mid-life astonishment’.” Oberg (2003, p. 106), believes that, “the outer body can be interpreted as a betrayal of the youthfulness of the inner self”. It seems possible that Catherine sees her body as a “betrayal” of her ‘self’.

Catherine also expressed quite contradictory views regarding her appearance. On the one hand she claimed to reject society's messages about how a

woman 'should look', but on the other hand, she still seemed to 'buy into' socially sanctioned images of physical attractiveness. According to Hurd (2000, P. 85), "existing cultural ideals of beauty and womanhood ... lead many women to 'fear aging itself as a loss of attractiveness and femininity'." This was particularly evident in relation to Catherine's feelings about having gained weight in recent years. Weight appears to be a significant issue for women of all ages, and Rodin et al. (cited in Hurd, 2000, p 82), refer to women's concern and dissatisfaction with their weight as "normative discontent". Catherine, like many other women, seems to have internalised social and cultural beliefs which idealise youth and slimness, and this seems to have impacted negatively on her body image and self-worth (Hurd, 2000).

In conclusion, it seems that all the participants want to look attractive no matter what their age. They do not appear to want to look younger, and they accept that their physical appearance has changed, but they still wish to look good. O'Reilly et al. (2004, p. 12) concur saying, "losing the look of youth may be less of an issue for women than simply wanting to look their best at any age."

### **The Theme of Acceptance**

Each participant mentioned the concept of acceptance in relation to her perceptions of ageing.

Acceptance of the way in which she has lived her life thus far seems to be an important feature in terms of Gina's perceptions of ageing. Her proactive decision to accept whatever comes her way, rather than passively 'giving in' to situational demands seems to have enabled her to see her life in a positive way. She even pointed out the difference between 'accepting' and 'giving in' in relation to the age-related physical changes she has experienced. For Gina, acceptance implied an adaptation to the physical changes which she could not alter, whereas 'giving in' seemed to imply giving up making any effort in areas where effort would still count, for example, exercising to remain

healthy. Ranzijn and Luszcz, (1999, p. 97), concur with Gina's explanation, saying,

(a)ccceptance may be one of the ways in which older people adapt to some of the unavoidable and irreversible changes that accompany ageing – given that there are things that cannot be changed, it is better to accept them than to let them get one down – and therefore may be an important contributor to successful ageing.

Despite her general acceptance of the way she lived her life, Gina did express a few regrets. These included not having spent enough time with her sons when they were younger. However, rather than dwell on this, she seems to have chosen to focus on the positive relationship that they now share and to accept that she did her best. She also expressed regret in terms of her relationship with her ex-husband. She seemed to regret that they had not been able to make their marriage work. However, as they gained maturity, and a greater perspective with age, she and her husband became very good friends. According to Akiyama et al. (2003), relationships often improve as people get older and become mature. "They acquire social skills from experience, learn to control their emotions ... and improve their emotional understanding" (Akiyama et al., 2003, p. 2). This seems to have occurred in terms of Gina's relationship with her ex-husband. Their friendship seemed to help her to cope with the regret she had felt over their failed marriage, and to view it in a different light. Similarly Gina's relationship with her sons seems to have improved over the years. She has been able to overcome the guilt she felt at not having spent more time with them when they were younger. Brown (1998, p. 102) believes that people are able to perceive their lives in a positive manner because they "do not passively register the circumstances of their lives, they actively transform them ... they adjust their goals and adopt different targets ..." In contrast, Field (1997, p. 189) believes that "a part of coming to terms with one's life includes the acknowledgement and acceptance of past choices." Gina seems to have incorporated both of these approaches into her life. She has been very proactive in the way she has led her life, and it seems that at 91, Gina is able to see her life in perspective.

Rather than having regrets about not having lived a 'perfect' life without mistakes, she seems to have accepted the good and the bad, and to be satisfied with the life she has led. Erikson regarded acceptance as a vital element in terms of achieving integrity. He felt that people who do not accept the way they have lived their lives may give way to despair, while those who are accepting of their lives find meaning and satisfaction (Ranzijn & Luszcz, 1999). Gina seems to have satisfied all of Erikson's criteria for achieving integrity.

In relation to Marie, it seems as though her self-acceptance and acceptance of her life are major components of the satisfaction she feels at this stage. Like Gina, Marie, seems to have played a very proactive part in creating a satisfying life for herself. She seems to have made an effort to come to terms with her past and she was able to forgive her parents for her difficult upbringing. Marie had regrets about her relationship with her mother, however, giving her own children what she had not received from her mother, seemed to help her to 'right the wrongs of the past'. She was then able to enjoy, in adulthood, the happy family life she had not experienced as a child. Although she had no choice in terms of the way in which she was brought up, she chose to react to it in a positive way. In this way, Marie illustrates Frankl's view that a person has the freedom "to choose one's attitude in a given set of circumstances" (Frankl, 1946/2004, p. 9). According to Frankl (1946/2004, p. 116), "when we are no longer able to change a situation ... we are challenged to change ourselves." It seems as though, like Gina, Marie has always been aware that she has the freedom of choice in terms of how she chooses to react to circumstances. She emphasised this in her account and said, "we do have a choice, don't forget, especially if we've been shown or placed on the right path." This seems to have played a major role in terms of the way in which she perceives ageing. Although Marie has no choice but to age, she can still choose to react towards it in a positive way. Her comment that she now feels "comfortable in (her) own skin" and that she is "hugely satisfied" seems to illustrate her acceptance of herself, and of her life.

In terms of Catherine, the theme of acceptance of the ageing process was contrasted with that of ambivalence towards it. Catherine seems to equate 'successful' ageing with acceptance of the physical ageing process. However, although she wanted to 'accept' ageing, it seemed as though her feelings were incongruent with her actual experience of the process. As a result, a strong sense of ambivalence towards the ageing process was noted in her account. Catherine seems to have an 'ideal' view of how she would like to age, however, up until now, she has been disappointed as her experiences have not been as she imagined they would be. A possible reason for Catherine's sense of ambivalence may be that she is in the process of revising her self-concept (Holahan, Holahan & Wonacott, 1999), since midlife is often considered to be an important time for reassessment. Cross and Markus (1991), use the term "possible selves" as a way to describe adult development and ageing. They explain that the term is used,

to indicate those elements of the self-concept that represent what we could become, what we would like to become, and, very importantly what we are afraid to become (Cross & Markus, 1991, p. 231).

In other words, the self not only includes "current self-attitudes and perceptions, but expectations about the future self and representations of the past self as well" (Cross & Markus, 1991, p. 231). It seems as though Catherine may be in the process of trying to unify her perceptions of herself (Cross et al., 1991), and that this process may be contributing towards the ambivalence that she feels.

According to Ranzijn and Luszcz (1999) people who are able to accept age-related changes as part of the ageing process seem to maintain their wellbeing. Self-acceptance is also regarded as being "crucial for the establishment of integrity" (Ranzijn et al., 1999, p. 94). In addition, it seems as though acceptance does not have to be absolute, but that there are different 'levels' of acceptance. Gina, Catherine and Marie, therefore, all seem to be at different levels in terms of their self-acceptance and acceptance of their lives.

## **The Theme of the Positive Aspects of being older**

Based on the literature surveyed, there seems to be a move away from the problem-focused view of ageing (McHugh, 2000) towards more integrated, and more positive approaches (e.g. Bond et al., 1993; Fisher, 1992; Fodor et al., 1990; Gergen, 1990; Öberg, 2003; Thomas, 2003). The theme of the positive aspects of being older, noted in each of the participants' accounts, seems to reflect this trend towards a more balanced view of ageing.

In terms of Gina's story, she emphasised that she feels happier at her current age than she felt when she was younger. She explained that this was because she felt it had taken her 90 years to "come out of (her) shell" and to conquer her shyness. As a result she has managed to form connections with others at a time when she has lost many of her old friends and family members. She also has been able to pursue new activities, such as her membership of the U3A, an organisation for senior citizens who run courses for each other covering a wide range of subjects. Her involvement in these activities seems to have enhanced her enjoyment of being 91.

Gina seems to regard the present as a time of fruition based on the effort she has made throughout her life to connect with others and to develop herself. A further positive aspect which she mentioned in relation to being her current age, is the freedom she now has from the worry she experienced when her children were young. She regarded not having to worry about her children, but being able to enjoy her relationships with them, as a positive aspect of being older. Hamarat et al. (2002, p. 361) assert that despite prevailing stereotypes of age as a time of decline, many older adults experience it as a time of "elevated satisfaction", where they are "happier, experience fewer stressful events, and have fewer negative emotions" than younger people. This seems to apply in relation to Gina. It also seems important to mention that Gina's "capacity for enjoying things", as well as the effort she makes to live her life in a positive way, are important characteristics which seem to have helped her to adapt to her life as an older person, living in a 'narrowed' world. As she has aged, Gina also seems to have gained a perspective which has

helped her to focus on the different aspects of her life as part of an integrated whole. Looking back she seems to be satisfied with the life she has lived, and she seems determined to continue to enjoy it.

For Marie, it seems that the positives of being older almost outweigh the negatives as she feels her life has improved as she has aged. She stressed that there is less pressure on her at 65 to look a certain way, or to behave a certain way, than there was when she was younger, and which she feels younger women (like Catherine) continue to experience. As a result of feeling less pressurised, she feels that she is able to focus on her interests, and on other people, rather than on herself. She feels that as an older woman, she is less 'visible' than when she was younger, but rather than see this in a negative way, she experiences it as freedom from the public scrutiny and from the ridicule which younger people seem to fear. She did not seem to miss being "in the same arena anymore" as younger women, because she remembered the feelings of insecurity that were part of that stage of her life. Marie stressed that "every age is special but we just have to accept it and accept it gracefully if you can." Whereas certain individuals compare themselves to others or to their former selves, it seems that Marie is one of those people who does not "interpret themselves in the perceptions of others. Instead they look inside, and find an inner maturity" (Sherman, 1994, p. 408).

With regards to Catherine, it seemed that despite her 'struggle' with the ageing process, she has perceived that there are certain positive aspects that are associated with being older. She even felt she had experienced some of these gains as she has become older. One of these 'gifts' seems to be a greater sense of selflessness which she feels in relation to her daughter. Rather than 'force' her daughter into a certain mould, she wants to allow her daughter to be able to 'choose her own path'. Catherine links this selflessness to the increased wisdom she has gained as she has become older. In addition, Catherine seemed to feel that she had more freedom of choice in certain areas of her life, than she had experienced when she was younger. An example of this is the way in which she chooses to deal with the visible signs of ageing. She feels she has the choice to accept age-related

changes, such as grey hair, without trying to disguise them. In this way, she feels she has more freedom of choice than her mother had at the same age. In her study of the narratives of midlife women, McQuaide (1998, p. 43), says that despite midlife being viewed as a challenging time, many women reported that “their favorite thing about midlife was the increased freedom.” Physical changes and the resulting social devaluation were identified as being the most negative aspects of midlife. It seems that Catherine’s experiences of ageing are similar. She highlighted fewer positive aspects of ageing than Gina or Marie did, and this seems to fit with the stage she is at in her life, which seems to be less ‘settled’ than it is for Gina or Marie.

According to research conducted by Russell et al. (2004) on perceptions of ageing, the women participants in their study did not want to be younger, despite being afraid of losing their health, or becoming dependent in their old age. This may have been because of the positive aspects of ageing, which they identified, which included, “greater maturity, feeling more comfortable with themselves, and increased insight and tolerance with age” (Russell et al., 2004, p. 4).

### **Conclusion**

The focus of the present study was on the participant’s personal perceptions of ageing. Although I have extracted certain “common” themes from these accounts, another person might choose to highlight different themes. In addition, although the themes identified seemed to link, at times, with the literature regarding perceptions of ageing, this is not intended to imply that all women share the same experiences in the same way. Each of the highlighted aspects manifested themselves in a very unique way in each of the participant’s life stories. It seems important, therefore, that women’s perceptions of ageing be examined within the context of each individual’s life, and not in order to generalise their experiences to a wider group.

## CHAPTER 8

### CONCLUSION

#### Introduction

This concluding chapter will comprise an evaluation of the present study and implications for clinical practice. Recommendations for future research will also be given.

#### Evaluation of the Study

The aim of the research was to explore women's perceptions and experiences of ageing in order to shed light on how individual women feel about getting older. It is believed that this task was accomplished as participants gave detailed and rich accounts of their perceptions and experiences about ageing, highlighting those aspects that were personally meaningful for them. This research, therefore, attempted to provide valuable information which is often excluded in traditional research. This study provided a different approach to the study of women's perceptions of ageing, since it was concerned with the individual women's unique accounts. Readers were given the opportunity to see the world from each participant's point of view. In the analysis of the transcribed interviews an effort was made to focus on the themes elicited from the text rather than to 'force' the information into pre-existing categories. In this way, each woman's personal account was honoured.

In each story, I as researcher identified and discussed themes. This was then followed by a comparative analysis between the recurring themes in all three stories and the literature. The comparative analysis was done, not in order to substantiate the themes, but to include the many voices about the topic of women's perceptions of ageing. Common themes which emerged were the following:

- Connection and disconnection
- Feeling out of synchronisation with the norm
- Public image versus personal perception
- Acceptance
- The positive aspects of being older

Although these themes were common to all the stories, they played out in idiosyncratic ways in each of the participants' accounts. A very brief summary of each of the participant's accounts of her perceptions of ageing follows:

In terms of Gina, her perceptions of ageing seemed to be integrally connected to her perceptions of how she has lived her life so far. Her story illustrates how ageing does not occur within a vacuum but within the context of a person's life. It is possibly a reflection of ageing, that at 91 she has gained a perspective that has helped her to focus on her life as an integrated whole, rather than to view the various aspects as disconnected.

In terms of Marie's account, of the three women interviewed, she seemed to be the most satisfied with her life and the least concerned about her age. Connection seemed to be the common thread underlying all the themes in Marie's account. Marie connected very well to others, and she also seemed to be very connected to her life. This strong sense of connection seemed to make her life meaningful and enabled her to experience ageing in a way that did not disrupt her enjoyment of her life.

Catherine's account of her perceptions of ageing seemed to be focused on her body and in particular on the physical changes she experienced. She acknowledged, at the outset, that she felt negative about the ageing process and hoped, that by telling her story, she would be able to integrate her feelings about ageing. She seemed to regard ageing as a challenge and to feel that she was experiencing a "crisis" in terms of her identity. Her account was filled with contradictions and she seemed to vacillate between a position

of acceptance of the physical ageing process and a rejection of it, which seemed to mirror the lack of integration she felt.

### Strengths of this study

This study gave three women the opportunity to describe their unique experiences and perceptions of ageing in their own way. In this way, the participants were respected, "not only as subjects of research but as informants of their own lives" (Coleman, 1992, p. 74). Having only a few information-rich cases allowed for an in-depth exploration of the subject of women's perceptions of ageing. In addition, it was empowering for the participants to voice their thoughts about ageing.

In this study reliability and validity, referred to as dependability and trustworthiness in the qualitative research context, were achieved. In terms of reliability/dependability, I disclosed the purpose of the study, as well as my orientation, to the participants. I established a relationship with the participants while interviewing them, and then engaged in an in-depth and prolonged investigation with the material derived from the interviews. I remained aware of my internal processes (including my biases and preconceptions about ageing) and noted how they could impact on the investigation. Finally, as part of the "iterative cycling between observation and interpretation" (Stiles, cited in Merrick, 1999, p. 30) I engaged and re-engaged with the material (including the audiotapes and transcripts) in the hermeneutic cycle. I then "grounded" my interpretations by using direct quotes drawn from the interviews. Validity/trustworthiness was achieved in the following way: Triangulation was achieved through the use of multiple data sources including the participants' own perspectives as well as various literary sources and psychological theories of ageing. I also discussed my findings with my supervisor in order to ensure accuracy and credibility. In order to achieve coherence or "fit" regarding the interpretation (Stiles cited in Merrick, 1999, p. 29), I tried to avoid writing in an objective, positivist manner since I was working from a postmodern, interpretive position. Interpretations, rather than 'facts', were offered about the experiences of the three women

participants. Reflexive validity was achieved, as my preconceived ideas about ageing were challenged and I was able to form new insights about the subject. This study succeeded in shedding light on women's perceptions of ageing for the readers of the research and will help them to achieve greater understanding of this subject.

### Limitations of this study

According to Plummer (cited in Mouton, 2001), the main limitations of qualitative studies relate to a lack of generalisability, 'questionable' reliability and validity, and bias. However, while Plummer's limitations are considered crucial in terms of quantitative studies, qualitative studies such as the present one, have different aims and utilise different methodologies. These "limitations", therefore, are not regarded as central to the qualitative research process, since its aim is not objective measurement and subsequent generalisation of results to larger populations. In line with the postmodern ontology of this study, which proposes that reality is multi-faceted and comprises multiple selves, multiple meanings and multiple contexts (Dickerson & Zimmerman, 1996), this study offered *an* interpretation of how individual women perceive ageing, in order to shed light on the experience. 'Reliability' (dependability) and 'validity' (trustworthiness) were, nevertheless, achieved and were discussed in the previous section. Finally in terms of bias, as the researcher, my presence was made explicit from the beginning of the study. In the qualitative research process, the self of the researcher is regarded as the "main instrument" (Babbie et al, 1998, p. 270), and meaning is co-constructed in interaction with the research participants.

### **Implications for clinical practice**

This study is believed to be relevant for any practitioner who works with women. From the participants' accounts of their perceptions of ageing, the following general points were noted which may help those who work with women to understand their perceptions of ageing more clearly.

Women perceived ageing in unique ways based on their own experiences and subjective evaluations of those experiences. Although developmental theories provide a useful way of understanding ageing, it is important for clinicians to take individual differences as well as their similarities in ageing into account when working with individual women. Development does not only proceed in a linear way but tends rather to be a process comprising certain common patterns as well as individual variations.

Based on the information given by the participants, it seems as though a woman's attitude towards ageing is central to the way in which she experiences her own ageing process. A positive attitude towards ageing does not seem to be linked to one's past experiences in a direct, causal way. Whilst Gina and Marie experienced and overcame many difficulties when they were younger, they both chose to be positive about their lives and about the future. Catherine, on the other hand, who seemed to have had a more 'stable' background, had a more negative attitude towards ageing. In addition, it appears that people often become more satisfied with their lives as they get older (Hillerås et al., 2001). Clinicians, therefore, can help women to become more aware of the choice they have in how they respond to the challenges of getting older. Women can be helped to understand that they are not "passive witnesses" (Brown, 1998, p. 102) to their lives but that they can play an active role in determining the quality of life they will experience.

Stereotypes of ageing were also found to impact negatively on the way in which women perceived ageing. It is recommended that the clinician be aware of the stereotypes or 'grand narratives' on ageing, as well as his or her own preconceptions regarding ageing, and be aware of not "creating (his or her) own stereotypes" (Trang, 2003, p. 12). This will enable the clinician to challenge the 'grand narratives' or stereotypes, to bracket his or her own stereotypes and to facilitate the creation of alternative meanings about ageing. The 'validity' of stereotypes can be explored with the patient, in order to bring them out into the open and to demythologise them. An example of such a stereotype is the belief that a woman's life goes into decline after the age of 40 (Gergen, 1990). However, research has shown that individual women's

experiences deviate significantly from "culture's dominant discourse" (McQuaide, 1998, p. 47), and that women often experience high levels of life satisfaction at midlife and thereafter (e.g. Field, 1997; Hillerås et al., 2001; Mitchell et al., 1990; Ranzijn et al., 1999). A negative image of midlife need not, therefore, become "a self-fulfilling prophecy" (McQuaide, 1998, p. 52). During the current research process I was required to bracket my own stereotypes in order to be receptive to the alternative meanings which emerged from the participants' accounts. One of my preconceived ideas was a belief that an individual's life loses meaning in old age. This idea was challenged during the course of this study, and my perspective about ageing was expanded.

Social norms, particularly those regarding women's appearance, often appeared to have been internalised and impacted on the individual's sense of self-esteem and identity. Clinicians should be aware that a woman's appearance is very important to her, no matter what her age. Women do not necessarily wish to look younger, but they do wish to look as good as they can (Hurd, 2000; O'Reilly et al., 2004). Since ageing does not occur within a vacuum, women's perceptions of ageing are related to the social and cultural context in which they find themselves. Although clinicians may not be able to change social patterns, "they can affirm women's experience in society" (O'Reilly et al., 2004, p. 12).

Women's perceptions also have an influence on areas such as "satisfaction, self-image, self-esteem, cognitive function, and emotional well-being" (O'Reilly et al., 2004, p. 3), which in turn have an impact on the way in which they experience ageing. Caregivers who are able to help women express their feelings about ageing and possibly create alternative meanings about ageing, may help women to "develop positive self-perceptions of ageing (which) might also help them live longer, healthier lives" (Levy, Slade, Kunkel & Kasl cited in O'Reilly et al., 2004, p. 12). It is important to remember that women who experience good health perceive ageing in a more positive way than women who are in poor health. "Poor health reduces options" (Bee, 1996, p. 447), as it reduces a woman's connection to life and impacts on her perceived sense of

control of her life. The clinician should be empathic towards women who are not well, and not expect them to feel positive about ageing.

### **Recommendations for future research**

This section will make recommendations for future research. The previous suggestions for clinical practice are also areas which could be focused on in future research.

Interest in a greater understanding of ageing seems to be growing, and there is also a need for reassurance regarding the confusion and uncertainty about growing old (Coleman, Bond & Peace, 1993). It is, therefore, suggested that further qualitative studies be undertaken in order to achieve new understandings and insights regarding perceptions of ageing. The research will also help to counter negative stereotypes associated with ageing.

Further research is also recommended to explore factors believed to be associated with "successful ageing" (Ranzijn et al., 1999, p. 94).

The perceptions of women from different cultural groups as well as different social contexts should be studied to assess the impact of these contexts on perceptions of ageing.

The perceptions of ageing of a more diverse group of women of different ages, including women in their 20's, could be studied.

The impact of poor health on women's perceptions of ageing could be explored.

Men's perceptions of ageing could also be a focus of a study in the future.

## **Conclusion**

This study has provided valuable information regarding women's perceptions of ageing and it is hoped that it will encourage further studies in this area. Specific themes as well as recurring themes were highlighted. This information will be useful for all those working with women in a clinical context. The qualitative research method used proved to be a suitable method to gain the information-rich material which was sought. Areas for future research were addressed, including the need for a greater understanding of ageing from the point of view of the individual, in order to achieve new insights about how individuals perceive and experience ageing.

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## APPENDIX A: Consent Form

### PROPOSED MASTER'S THESIS IN CLINICAL PSYCHOLOGY: WOMEN'S PERCEPTIONS OF AGEING – DANIELLA BRENNER

#### INFORMED CONSENT

1. The purpose of this study as well as my role therein has been explained to me by the author, Daniella Brenner.
2. It is my own choice to participate in this study.
3. I understand that my identity will remain confidential.
4. I have the right to withdraw from this study at any time for any reason.

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Participant

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Daniella Brenner

## APPENDIX B: Interview 1 with Gina

- 1 GB: I may not be a very good example for you because I am so well.
- 2 DB: I think you're a wonderful example. Why should we only have examples of (I  
3 wanted to say of women who are not as well ...)
- 4 GB: Because I remember when I spoke to my friend in England on my 80<sup>th</sup>  
5 birthday. I thought it was a joke. I said nothing hurts me, nothing worries me  
6 - well the few problems come up but they're not really interfering with my  
7 nature and I find in a way, I am happier now. I said to my son the other day, it  
8 took me 90 years to come out of my shell
- 9 DB: Aha
- 10 GB: Because I was very reserved. I think that is the word ... and I had a career  
11 not just a job. It started off as a job it turned into a career of 22 years and I  
12 thought I just fell in for 2 weeks (laughs). And I dealt with people. But I  
13 know I had the reputation of being very hard. Not hard, they were scared of  
14 me! I said me! Well I was more scared of them! (laughs). I was very  
15 reserved and it didn't come easily to me. I forced myself of course. I thought  
16 I was very friendly. I was personnel you know, what is nowadays called  
17 Human Resources. I reject that. I would refuse to be a resource! It sounds  
18 like something that's in the ground and you pick up. Anyway, that became the  
19 second half of my life. At an age when people might already begin to think  
20 what they're going to do when they retire. That's when I started. It was very  
21 unexpected as I say. I thought ja ok I take the job for a fortnight but the boys  
22 are still small and I've got to help them with schoolwork ... anyway that's got  
23 nothing to do with age.
- 24 DB: No! It does have to do with it. What I was hoping is that we could just have a  
25 conversation. I am not going to ask you many questions. I am going to try  
26 and talk less, even though I love talking and you sound so interesting! But  
27 what I'd like to know is your perspective, and I think that ageing can  
28 incorporate so much (GB: Yes), so anything that you're telling me, telling me  
29 about your having had a career that lasted 22 years, that it was such an  
30 important part of your life is a very interesting thing for me to hear.
- 31 GB: Oh yes actually, it really changed me. Because, well I was very young when I  
32 got married. Both of us were very young. It was the emigration time under  
33 Hitler in Germany. So what did we know, nothing. But we got married  
34 because the family didn't think it was a good idea that we just went off as  
35 boyfriend and girlfriend to live in Spain. You know, the Hitler time in Germany  
36 threw people together the most amazing way. Alright, he was my boyfriend  
37 but getting married. He was nobody, he had no career no nothing yet he was  
38 20 and I was 19, something like that. So, the development then had less to  
39 do with actually family life. Marriage and children, children came 10 years  
40 later when everybody else had children on account of the immigration, and  
41 leaving Spain and coming here, and then we couldn't stay here and we lived  
42 15 years in Mozambique and you know there were quite a few things in my  
43 life which formed me. But then I say I'm very happy now. I have no  
44 responsibility for my children. You know the daily worries. You always worry,  
45 there are always things also which go wrong in your children's family and that  
46 is, you feel that as though it was your own, even more probably. But on the  
47 other hand, as I say, I come out of my shell. I suddenly have young friends,  
48 the children of my contemporaries. I lost two friends because they aged  
49 much more than I did, much before me. They were 10 years younger than I.  
50 Most of the people that I say are my age group they are actually 10 years  
51 younger. They were 70 when I was 80 that sort of thing. But anyway one of  
52 them became Alzheimer's and is in a home somewhere in the Cape. The

53 other one died. Another one died. And my sister, I had one sister who lived  
54 in the States, she died. My niece would be that age group of my present  
55 friends, 60 ish, so she isn't married but she is the daughter of my very best  
56 friend for 15 years in Mozambique. She died. I said she's got no business of  
57 dying, she is also much younger than I am, (laughs) but anyway. I was very,  
58 very upset. Then her children came here after that business in Mozambique,  
59 you know, the war. And then actually, she, her daughter, her daughter's  
60 children are practically almost like my family, but I've got my own family. But  
61 they are my very best friends. So is another one, a former colleague, there  
62 are a few. Even here I don't really feel of the same wavelength as the people  
63 of my age. I also think a few remarks of theirs, you know you chat a little bit  
64 here, a little bit there that we just don't talk the same language. But I have  
65 much more in common with the young people. I am interested and I keep  
66 interested in what goes on. And my granddaughters, my grandchildren also  
67 talk to me. I mean, not divulging heartbreaking problems, but we talk about  
68 what goes on. I have more in common and I learn from them too. They have  
69 problems, there is advice which I like to give, but every situation is different  
70 and circumstances are different, but I mean we never have a dull moment,  
71 they are very, very good friends. There are a few of those. I just acquired a  
72 few the other day (laughs), also things I would have never done, no I really  
73 told myself, no get out of the rut. You have got to do something, you've got to  
74 join people, that was even before I came here (*to the current residential hotel  
75 where she has been living for the past year and a half. Prior to that she lived  
76 in her own home. When her maid of 40 years retired, she did not feel like  
77 training someone new, so she decided to make a change in her life. She  
78 described this move as traumatic*). And I looked in the paper and there was  
79 an announcement for the Bel Canto Club. They have lecture evenings with D  
80 (hesitates) CDV projections and I thought well let's phone up and find out  
81 what are you and where are you and when is it. It was a little group of some  
82 very knowledgeable people as far as opera and classical music, not music as  
83 such, mostly opera. And they had little evenings, not really a soirée. It was in  
84 a flat and they had snacks afterwards. Of course I didn't know a soul. I was  
85 very proud of myself to actually take myself off and come in and say good  
86 evening, I'm GB (laughs). And eventually, that is now a few years ago, and  
87 also it took me a long time to actually take a glass of wine or a cup of tea or  
88 whatever they serve afterwards (laughs). I didn't know anyone. Whoever,  
89 who do I talk to? It didn't occur to me to just go up to talk to people and make  
90 a remark. It just wanted me. That came much later.

91 DB: What sparked that? At some stage you said you thought you should get out  
92 of that rut and do something. Can you tell me a little bit more about that?  
93 When was that?

94 GB: At that stage, the one friend died, the other one moved away. I never had a  
95 very lively social life. You know. The time when other people begin to take it  
96 easier, I was very, very involved in my job. And then there were the two boys  
97 growing up and there were the two mothers, my mother and my mother-in-law  
98 at the Parents Home (Old Age Home). They were friends from the time when  
99 we got engaged, when we left Germany, the two families got very friendly.  
100 My father-in-law died here and we ended up here after Spain. Spain was  
101 1934/1935 and then the war broke out, the Civil War in Spain that was the  
102 reason why we left Spain. Franco, fascists, it was a terrible war.

103 DB: My goodness, you've experienced so much.

104 GB: But we got out and spent another year in Berlin and we were not supposed to  
105 be there. My mother was still there at the time. And then we finally went to  
106 South Africa because in the meantime my in-laws were already here. They  
107 had a quite a number of family here. Their generation came here as

108 youngsters probably. So they were already well established here and it was  
109 the normal thing that you went where you had connections. That is why my  
110 sister ended up in New York because her husband had an uncle in America.  
111 So they had no connection to South Africa. They left Germany and were  
112 trying to get to the States and my mother went with them. So, ja, but that has  
113 got nothing to do with ageing.

114 DB: It's very interesting. I think I could sit and ask you questions all day.

115 GB: It forms you, it does form you. Every phase adds to ... it is the experience  
116 which is somewhere buried in your brain. And in the end that is what you are,  
117 what circumstances and life make you and then also what you helped to  
118 make yourself.

119 DB: Everything you say is very interesting because we are talking about things  
120 within a context of your entire life. (GB: Yes). I'm not just looking at  
121 something in isolation so what you are saying is giving an idea and obviously  
122 later when I think about it some more, is, I think, going to be very influential in  
123 why you have the outlook that you have.

124 GB: Yes. When I retired I was with Siemens for 22 years. I built up the personnel  
125 department. I was the only .. that doesn't seem to help you

126 DB: No, please tell me!

127 GB: I was the only woman of in those days they still had a ranking system – you  
128 know you were promoted to a higher rank and a higher rank with certain perks  
129 and things and I was the only woman of a sort of higher middle management.

130 DB: It sounds as though you have done very remarkable things.

131 GB: (laughs)

132 DB: How old were you when you retired?

133 GB: I retired in 1979. How old was I? I was born in 1915. 64, I was 64. And it  
134 was already 4 years longer than the normal. At that time they asked me, they  
135 didn't have anyone to step in. I thought well, I've got nothing else to do.  
136 Gradually they trained somebody else. So by the time I was 64 I said and  
137 now? Also my young friends who are now in Brisbane in Australia they had  
138 adopted me as a stand-in mother and mother-in-law. They both had family  
139 problems at home (laughs) and that friendship has lasted until now. They  
140 came here for my birthday. I always go to Brisbane at the end of my stay in  
141 Melbourne. We are very good friends and there they consider me – the  
142 children are now getting married – as a stand-in grandmother. So actually the  
143 affinity to younger people started very very early.

144 DB: I wonder if ... does that make you feel ... You were telling me a bit about  
145 feeling a bit different from the people here who are your age. It doesn't seem  
146 to make you feel isolated at all. It seems as though you find companionship  
147 with younger people.

148 GB: No I'm not isolated. It just takes me a while to make the effort, but you can't  
149 help it. You sit next to someone – they have music evenings and film  
150 evenings here – you sit next to someone and you make a remark. I'm on  
151 quite a friendly, loosely-friendly basis with quite a few. You can't know  
152 everyone. And some of them are too old and too frail to make friends with.  
153 And I don't really need friends, you know, personal friends I don't need.  
154 Because it's very difficult. You don't know the person's background, they  
155 don't know your background. They are interested when they ask me where  
156 do you come from, what's your accent? (*GB speaks with a heavy German  
157 accent*) Aha, German. So they want to know. But, you know, to rattle off  
158 your background and then their background is so different, you know. They  
159 probably came here as children. Lots of them came from Lithuania or Russia  
160 or Poland. That's very different, never mind that it's part of Europe, but their  
161 background, their culture, their upbringing is so different from German Jews  
162 because we are steeped in German culture. Ja, we were Jewish but that

163 sortof wasn't the real, major part of our life. Ja, we were conscious of being  
164 Jewish, we had Christian friends at school. I think we were 5 Jewish girls in a  
165 class, so we grew up with the Germans. But our family was Jewish and when  
166 it came to social life eventually we joined a little political group which my sister  
167 joined. I joined a little social club, which was run by a progressive rabbi  
168 maybe that's not very interesting ... my mother heard about it and said if you  
169 don't go and talk to this girl and ask her to go with you she said, "then I will  
170 talk to her parents." (Laughs). You see the shyness, the basic shyness I  
171 inherited from my mother and she knew how she had actually suffered from it.  
172 She didn't want me to be like that. I had a very lovely mother. Ja, so, when I  
173 retired, these young friends said to me. Oh yes, he helped me a little bit with  
174 the application for the membership of the Institute of Personnel Management.  
175 I said well what do I say. He said well didn't you do this and that. I had a  
176 whole string of things which I wasn't really conscious I had done because I  
177 had never studied for it, I had no formal knowledge of personnel  
178 management, not a clue. I started as a secretary of the commercial side  
179 financial manager and he said one day to me well you can actually do  
180 personnel. I said, me, I don't know anything and he said but that's what  
181 you've been doing already. Because I took work from him, you know  
182 interviewing and recruiting which I took in my stride, I didn't know I was doing  
183 anything special. Anyway, when I retired these friends said, "now what are  
184 you going to do." So I said, "I don't know, I relax." So he said, "but then why  
185 don't you take a course and do your BA?" You know I'd never been to  
186 university before. At the time when I said well school is finished, what am I  
187 going to do, we had a little family council. And I said there is no point in going  
188 to university because, first of all, Jewish people aren't even accepted  
189 anymore and then they were not allowed to exercise their professions which  
190 they'd trained for, so that was finished. But now what, there was either the  
191 domestic science side or the commercial side so I said well that's what I pick.  
192 And we had a very, very good sort of commercial high school with a two-year  
193 course. We learnt French and English with shorthand, French and English  
194 shorthand and correspondence part commercial correspondence, part  
195 literature and then there was added Spanish. So we had 3 foreign languages  
196 and Commercial law and typing and short hand in any case in all 3 languages  
197 so it meant a very good training.

198 DB: Was this part of your high school training?

199 GB: Yes it was a separate high school. It was called Commercial High School.  
200 But when you graduated from there it entitled you to go university and take a  
201 B.Comm of course. So it was comparable to an academic matric.

202 DB: I understand. You were saying many things that even at that stage, which  
203 was many years ago, about thinking about university but of course that wasn't  
204 an option that was open to Jewish people.

205 GB: That was at the time what you called the Standard 8 is that the JC? That was  
206 the time when I had to decide do I go into some future training or carry on with  
207 matric. And then we decided what's the point of doing the matric when you  
208 could use those 2 years in a direction where you want to go because after  
209 matric you cant go to university anyway, that was the time.

210 DB: When did you leave Germany?

211 GB: I left Germany at the end of 1934.

212 DB: It is chilling to think about 1933 to 1945. Thank G-d you left early and it  
213 sounds as though all your family left then"?

214 GB: Yes, well my sister, my mother of course, cousins and aunts and things. But  
215 then everybody left. All the young people left.

216 DB: You haven't mentioned your father? Was your father alive at that stage?

217 GB: Well my parents got divorced. I think I was 8 or 9, something like that. They  
218 were probably very ill matched from the beginning. In those days unless you  
219 had a social circle then marriages were arranged. Not against the will of  
220 children, but if the young daughter didn't have much opportunity to meet  
221 people ... My mother was born in Hanover in Germany, little Germany, and  
222 for some reason I don't quite know, they moved to Berlin. And there she  
223 didn't have much of a chance. At that time I think she was already 20 or  
224 something and being a very shy person and having very little chance of  
225 meeting people, coming new to a new place, a new city. I wasn't there, I don't  
226 know, I can only imagine ... and today I think why didn't I ask, why didn't I dig  
227 more and talk to my mother and ask her this, ask her that, but one didn't and  
228 now it is too late there's nobody to ask. Anyway, coming back to what my  
229 friend said, "do your BA." (Laughs) I said, I wouldn't even know how to start.  
230 Even schooling at that time didn't direct you into university studies you know.  
231 Here I think people get projects and they have to write essays, they've got to  
232 debate. Essays, yes, we had to write but there was no question of voicing  
233 your opinion on a certain subject, you know, debating or whatever. So, I  
234 wouldn't even have known how to listen and at the same time take notes, we  
235 didn't do that at school. But he said go to UNISA for correspondence, you've  
236 got all the time in the world. So the subjects that were open to me, and I  
237 wanted actually to do German as a subject because that would have been  
238 quite easy, but little did I know that that type of German started with medieval  
239 German. I said no thank you very much that is like taking on another  
240 language practically, and that is so boring, although I know people want to  
241 know about the culture and that, but it was not for me. We did a bit at school  
242 and who's interested? So the other subject that was open was Sociology. I  
243 said alright. I didn't know much about Sociology but I said let's try it. It's the  
244 most boring subject you could possibly do! Do you know anything about it? If  
245 you ask me, the first year of Sociology is just terrible. I suppose if I had  
246 persevered and second year might have been more alive. And I said, what  
247 am I doing? Because now that I should start making contact or something  
248 here I sit by myself, all alone at home with these bloody books, what am I  
249 doing? Nothing to talk about, I hate what I'm doing, it bores me. It really  
250 didn't catch my interest. I sent in my tut, the first tut, "excellent, carry on" was  
251 the result (laughs). But it really wasn't for me. That wasn't what I had  
252 bargained for. I missed my regular - obviously everybody does when you  
253 finish your job and you retire - you do miss your daily contact with people  
254 whether you like them or don't like them. But it's become part of your life,  
255 your duties, your responsibilities and your contacts, with the ups and with the  
256 downs, you know. What can I tell you about ageing?

257 DB: I'm interested in what you were saying about UNISA. Did you go on? Did  
258 you do any other courses?

259 GB: No, no.

260 DB: You just decided it wasn't for you.

261 GB: That's it. Thank you very much. First of all I was never trained to study. I  
262 didn't really know how to study. I read what I read and I thought about it, and  
263 I read it again. Still didn't make much sense and I thought well this isn't what I  
264 want to improve my life, now that I've got the time. And I didn't need, I don't  
265 have to have people around me all the time. There are people who can't be  
266 alone. That I know from my *Machatenista* (*Yiddish - my son's mother-in-law*).  
267 She is a lovely person also in Melbourne. The whole family of my daughter-  
268 in-law is also in Australia. I said to R, you don't know how lucky you are  
269 because some people have got children in Melbourne and children in  
270 Canada, you know. We all have children somewhere else. Anyway, she said

271 she knows how lucky she is. But she is the first person that I came across  
272 she walks into her flat and switches on the radio.

273 DB: Because she doesn't like to be alone?

274 GB: Can't be alone. She also, she has quite a lively ... she plays a lot of cards  
275 and goes for lunches and she has a lively social life for herself. Her son is  
276 very involved with one of the newer smaller shuls there and so she is very  
277 involved with her son, and with the community. Oh my G-d, this is all not for  
278 me! It is not me. I watch a bit of television or listen to the radio and when I  
279 switch off (loud sigh) aah it is so nice and quiet.

280 DB: Really?

281 GB: Yes, I can't have voices around me all the time. Maybe some people ... I  
282 think they're now used to it, they think that I keep very much to myself. But  
283 that has something to do already with here. First of all I don't like it. Specially  
284 if you're not used to it. To go and sit in the lounge with the others and now  
285 what do we talk about? I have no idea about what actually they talk about. I  
286 can't think of anything to say. But I did on one occasion. They were sitting in  
287 a group like this (*indicates sitting area in her room where we are sitting*) you  
288 know the way the lounges are organised because a person asked to show  
289 knitwear. They do that, they go through the various areas, Homes, and they  
290 sell quite nicely actually. They bring a range of their clothes or shoes so I  
291 went to have a look not that I really wanted to buy anything, but I thought let's  
292 have a look. And they weren't quite ready in their laying out, and I said "can I  
293 join you?". "Yes of course you must have a seat" and then I talked to one  
294 person next to me. And then the one from across asked me something and I  
295 couldn't hear. I said sorry and she repeated it and I still couldn't hear.

296 DB: From what you're saying it sounds like to be in a crowd of people is not very  
297 comfortable for you?

298 GB: It is *very* uncomfortable. It is embarrassing, it makes me uncomfortable and it  
299 makes me angry, you know. That is the worst. That is really the handicap to  
300 a certain extent. (*GB finds it difficult to hear when a group of people is talking*  
301 *although she manages very well on a one-on-one basis and claims that she*  
302 *has no problems hearing*) I avoid groups and they know it now.

303 DB: It sounds like, from what you're saying, on the one hand it has to do with  
304 having difficulty in hearing in a group when a lot of people are talking at once  
305 (GB: Yes) and on the other hand it sounds as though you are quite a shy  
306 person anyway (GB: Yes) and feel better with a few people or one-on-one.

307 GB: Yes. Absolutely. I said to a person, it must have been on one of the holidays  
308 and they gave the staff off and the carpet was supposed to be cleaned in the  
309 lounge-dining-room downstairs and they served lunch in the garden. It is a  
310 beautiful garden with huge big shady tree which covers a vast area and they  
311 served a finger-lunch, cold meats and little sandwiches. It was very, very  
312 nice. And they had garden chairs all over the place and you sat where you  
313 found a seat. And I was talking to one of the ladies. I had seen her, you do  
314 see people, but you know they do pass you in the dining room but it's not as  
315 though you actually talk to them. But she sat next to me and of course we  
316 talked about the weather and about how nice they do this, and they've never  
317 done this before and you know, chat, chat, chat. She's got no front teeth and  
318 somehow I said, "You're happy here? How long have you been here?" "5  
319 years." and I said, "you're happy here, it is nice here?" and she said, "it's  
320 enough," she's had enough, she doesn't want to live anymore. Well what's  
321 the point? You know, very depressing and so do I need this?

322 DB: What you're saying is very interesting. Do you find that a lot of people around  
323 you have that kind of attitude (GB: yes) and how does that make you feel?  
324 Does it make you feel depressed?

325 GB: Absolutely, very, very. Not that I relate it to myself and say, "ah this will  
326 happen to me." It doesn't occur to me. I still think thank G-d I don't know how  
327 the end will be. But one is a little apprehensive of now how long can this go  
328 on that I run around. Alright my lower back hurts me, not all the time when  
329 I'm standing or certain times when I'm walking. When I'm standing I push  
330 myself up to stretch the lower back release the pressure on the nerves or  
331 whatever it is. It is very common, the famous lower back! It is because the  
332 cartilage between the skeleton bones, that dissipates and then they rub on  
333 the nerves. But when I sit like this and I stretch myself, nothing hurts me.

334 DB: Good.

335 GB: Well occasionally. We went to a restaurant the other day. My  
336 granddaughters picked a restaurant, they know all the new places. It was  
337 somewhere in Bedfordview. They've got a huge, huge, centre there and they  
338 picked the restaurant. They booked upstairs because my daughter in law has  
339 got to smoke. I take 2 cigarettes when I'm with her because then it's social  
340 smoking but I don't need anymore. Last time I came home, I actually smoked  
341 the one. But for that we've got to have either an outside area but then you  
342 don't trust the weather or some places have an upstairs area for smoking.  
343 And they said their speciality is a very, very unusual buffet. Now where's the  
344 buffet, downstairs! (laughs). So we looked from the balustrade downstairs  
345 and I said "how do we get it?" "Well you go and pick what you like." I said,  
346 "go down the stairs and up the stairs with a plate of food?" I said, "I can't do  
347 that." "Well never mind we'll help you, but come down and have a look so we  
348 will know what you like." So down the steps we went, and we came up the  
349 steps and we went down the steps again (laughs) and I picked my own. So  
350 what was it? 3 times. Why do I think that I can't do it? I walk the stairs all the  
351 time here. (GB lives on the 2<sup>nd</sup> floor) I never take the lift. This is one of the  
352 things. If I've got to go down and up and even down and up again because  
353 I've forgotten something, I never ever take the lift. So I think that is very good  
354 exercise in any case. And I see one or two people are now copying it.  
355 They've got the idea. Because walking stairs, if you can, is the best exercise.  
356 But I mean, I do my yoga. I go to yoga classes three times a week. I've been  
357 there for now, it must be, 20 years. I started very late, because I only started  
358 after I had retired. Also one of those things that I thought well actually I  
359 should do something, you know physically. Someone recommended this  
360 woman and I've been with her forever.

361 DB: Oh so it's not here, you go to her.

362 GB: Yes, it's in Rosebank.

363 DB: I want to ask you a few things. So you are driving?

364 GB: Yes

365 DB: You drive and you go where you want to go? (GB: Yes). You know what I'm  
366 thinking now with us speaking, I'm hoping that we can meet again. I think that  
367 we'll need to meet again another once or twice possibly because you're giving  
368 me a lot of background and so we're not necessarily saying just ageing,  
369 ageing. (GB: Yes) It is very interesting and I think that I'm going to be able to  
370 weave it together, I hope, into something.

371 GB: Talking about driving, my driver's license expired last November and for the  
372 whole year I was on tenterhooks. What if I can't pass that vision test?  
373 Because 5 years ago when I took that test when the new licenses came out,  
374 and you had to read in the computer, and he said "can you read the lower  
375 line?" and I said, "you must be joking!" and he laughed. And he said the next  
376 line, "that's fine, that's good." But that was 5 years ago. And also, I've had no  
377 problem because my glasses were ages old and I read and I sewed and I had  
378 no problem but the oncoming light in the evening, then I got very nervous and  
379 I thought how do I know whether my vision is still the same as 5 years ago?

380 And then I decided maybe it is now time to have a cataract operation. So I  
381 took myself off to the doctor and he said "ja." So I had both eyes done.  
382 Wednesday I had one eye done, the next Wednesday, the other eye.

383 DB: And how was it?

384 GB: It was like a new lease of life! I can't tell you! I looked around and saw all little  
385 leaves on the trees, the thorns on the thorn trees, I couldn't believe it. All the  
386 colours looked much brighter than I remembered them. It was just so ... it still  
387 is.

388 DB: That is wonderful.

389 GB: The only thing is I looked in the mirror at my face, and at my arms. I never  
390 had all these brown spots. I didn't realise what I had not seen until that.

391 DB: And when you looked and you saw the brown spots, did that affect you?

392 GB: Oh yes. I like hands. I always like beautiful hands. I've always looked at  
393 people's hands. I don't think my hands were beautiful but I had good hands.  
394 I've got long fingers and long nails. That is ... that bothers me, but you know,  
395 you've got to know your priorities. Sometimes when I be out with the children  
396 I put a bit of makeup on (*her hands*) but it's not the same. So ja, that annoys  
397 me. But otherwise, it doesn't hurt.

398 DB: But it's something you bring up that's important because I think that there is a  
399 lot of pressure on women to look good.

400 GB: Yes absolutely. And for yourself, you know, it's for yourself. But I always say,  
401 it's not fatal, it doesn't hurt and it isn't fatal, so.

402 DB: And does that work for you? Do you believe it?

403 GB: Yes. Oh yes. I've come to accept it now so I use a bit more makeup on my  
404 face. I knew I had a few spots here and there and there and there, but when I  
405 looked into the mirror (laughs) and saw lots of spots, little brown spots, that  
406 annoyed me!

407 DB: It sounds like you would have almost liked to have had the cataracts back just  
408 to have not seen them.

409 GB: Yes (laughs). But as you just said, that I accept. But in other ways, I don't  
410 accept, I try and ... I'm not clinging to looking young. Physical things, you've  
411 got to fight that, you know, don't give in.

412 DB: Right.

413 GB: So there is a difference between accepting and giving in.

414 DB: And it seems as though the way you don't 'give in' has to do with your yoga,  
415 (GB:yes) and you wear makeup and as you were saying, you don't look your  
416 age. Was that always very important for you?

417 GB: I never ever made a secret of my age. I couldn't understand people who  
418 didn't want you to know ... but maybe, maybe it is a certain conceit that you  
419 are actually proud of not looking your age. But this is something that's not  
420 your doing. I was just blessed with a slim figure. I always have had a slim  
421 figure. Alright I'm a little bit rounder now. But I always had a weak back,  
422 even as a child. But lot's of people tell me that as a child they say "stand up  
423 straight, sit straight." I always collapsed. I had a weakness in the lower back.  
424 But that was probably also combined with a muscle weakness because as a  
425 child they don't have Osteoporosis or anything like that! (Laughs). But lots of  
426 children have a bad posture.

427 DB: Yes, they slouch.

428 GB: I know I'm much smaller than I used to be. When I go to the doctor for my  
429 Australian visa, I must bring x-rays and doctors reports, you know about that.  
430 And they say, "let's measure you," and of course then I stand as straight as I  
431 am, and then I 'collapse' again. It's only that you haven't got the strength to  
432 keep this position up, you know.

433 DB: There is another question that I'd like to ask you.

434 GB: Yes.

435 DB: You haven't mentioned your husband apart from telling me about your having  
436 got married early on ...

437 GB: Ach ja.

438 DB: Perhaps you could give me a little background?

439 GB: We were, as I said, actually boyfriend and girlfriend. But nobody ever thought  
440 of getting married! (laughs). I mean that would have been 10 or 15 years  
441 later. In those days people only got married when the young man could afford  
442 to, you know, they didn't just cohabit or anything and so that was the last  
443 thing! We had our little tiffs and none of us had really any experience. I don't  
444 think I had a boyfriend before. I had a few friends that took me to our dances  
445 or something but they were not my boyfriends. But because we were in the  
446 same group, that little club group at the Temple. So, alright, ja, but we loved  
447 each other. So we went to Barcelona, emigrated to Spain because my  
448 husband had a school friend, a very good school friend, a very nice boy. He  
449 was of the Sephardic Jewish ... I think at home they still spoke Ladino, which  
450 is the Spanish-Portuguese Yiddish. Anyway, Spain had invited former Jews  
451 which were expelled, either killed or expelled or burnt at the stake at the  
452 Inquisition, and they expected them, whoever wanted to return. But they  
453 probably needed, the economy needed the boost, I think that must have been  
454 the reason. Full citizenship with all that it entails. Well of course, G's friend  
455 took advantage of that because they lived in Germany. They went to school  
456 together, that's where the friendship started. And they were in contact, and  
457 wrote letters and "what's it like?" and "Spain is beautiful" and "Spain is lovely,  
458 why don't you come here." And it seemed, apart from South Africa, he didn't  
459 want to go to South Africa, he would have had to do what the uncles  
460 demanded of him and he always thought he knew everything better than  
461 anybody else. He was very spoiled by his mother who thought he was just  
462 the sun shone out of him. And that also formed his character. Anyway that's  
463 why we went to live in Spain. (*Small interruption follows where she coughs  
464 and tells me she has a post-nasal drip etc*). So then we came to South Africa  
465 and we were very happy with each other, for about 10 years. We couldn't  
466 stay here because from Spain we couldn't get the necessary papers required  
467 for immigration, police clearance, tax clearance. Everything was shot to bits.  
468 In a Civil War that's the worst. A Civil War is worse, I think, than an ordinary  
469 war, than international war.

470 DB: So you couldn't stay in Spain, because of that?

471 GB: Nobody could stay in Spain. So anyway we couldn't get the papers which you  
472 require to attach to your application for permanent residence somewhere  
473 else. So we came because family was already here, my in-laws. In Germany  
474 we stayed with my mother and we said, "you've got to go, you've got to get  
475 out." Because my husband he had a new ... that goes so much into detail. In  
476 those days, after Hitler came to power, Jewish passports were stamped with a  
477 Jewish first name – all the women's names were something "Sarah" and a red  
478 "J". And with this passport, if you got permission to leave, you left, but you  
479 could never come back. We got married, so G went through all that. He had  
480 to get a passport, which was already then under this system. I had a passport  
481 because when I was 14 my mother took my sister and myself to the Baltic  
482 coast and we took a little trip to Denmark across and probably that was the  
483 reason why I had a passport which I otherwise never used. We didn't travel ..  
484 the passport was under the old system, was perfectly valid. From the  
485 wedding we took the train and went via Switzerland to Spain. When I ... After  
486 the time in Spain, I got a telegram from Berlin my mother was very ill, I must  
487 please come. Help to look after her because my sister had her husband and  
488 ... so I packed a little suitcase and got a passport, from the German  
489 Consulate in Barcelona, because that old one had by that time expired, under

490 my married name. Now something must have been not quite as competent  
491 as the Germans were supposed to be, they might have never had the  
492 occasion to issue a Jewish passport, or a passport to Jewish people. They  
493 issued me with a passport, a normal passport, a normal German passport. I  
494 even got a financial advantage of German's living abroad got a better rate of  
495 Deutschmark.

496 DB: What year was that?

497 GB: That was 1936. So I went back to Germany ... that was very funny ... I don't  
498 want to go into it ...

499 DB: You know what I'd really like to know, not that I'm not interested, but what I'd  
500 really like to know was about how long you were married for.

501 GB: Yes. Well we went back to Berlin. I could happily arrive as a German. G at  
502 that time, when that war broke out, was at that time in Lisbon on business,  
503 Portugal, and came back into the war, managed then, like lots of foreigners,  
504 by hook or by crook, got onto an Italian troop ship because that was then also  
505 the time of soldiers, war in Eritrea, Abyssinia. So troop ships which came  
506 back empty took a few passengers. And then G came to Berlin via the back-  
507 streets because he couldn't use his normal passport. He found somebody  
508 who delivered milk because by that time he was in the north of Italy near the  
509 Austrian border and somebody who drove a truck backwards and forwards, a  
510 small border-post, you know not an official border-post. Anyway he had a  
511 chance and he took him and he came to Berlin. But of course he was not  
512 allowed to be in Berlin actually. If anybody had reported us that we were  
513 staying with my mother ... but I was born in that flat and people knew my  
514 mother and knew the family and they were not all violent, virulent Nazis. So  
515 we stayed for a year until we managed to get out. Getting out was also  
516 interesting because my passport, as I said, was ok, G's wasn't. Somebody  
517 gave him the tip, go down to Munich by train, in Munich you take a tourist bus  
518 to Bolzano, you know which is ... Munich, Austria and then Italy. I mean you  
519 can go through 3 countries in an afternoon. Take a tourist bus because what  
520 they normally do, the conductor collects all the passports, takes them into the  
521 little border post and they stamp them there and he brings them back and  
522 gives them to you. And of course there was no guarantee. If the guy there  
523 had spotted a possible red "J" ... it was a very dicey situation. Very dicey.  
524 We were very much on tenterhooks. Thank G-d we were young. When  
525 you're very young things are not as traumatic (laughs) you do everything as  
526 an adventure. When I think back now, if that had happened to me nowadays,  
527 you know, at my age ... but in those days we just took a chance. You do  
528 take chances. But it worked. It worked and then from Bolzano we took the  
529 train to Genoa. We weren't booked on any passage or anything. We got the  
530 last little cabin. I think it was just where the ship ends over the screw!  
531 (Laughs) It was a tiny little thing, noisy, but anyway that's why we came to  
532 South Africa, with £50 as a tourist, that was the only way we could come in,  
533 as a tourist. And the family here said, "don't worry we know everybody in  
534 Pretoria." Because they were very established. The one was X & X Timbers  
535 and the other one was the architect X. The one was friendly with Ghandi you  
536 might have heard of? Anyway, it worked 3 times. They always extended for  
537 3 months. After that, that's it, sorry, you've got to leave, we cannot extend a  
538 visitor's visa, a tourist visa indefinitely. It is against the law. In those days  
539 you could not apply locally for a residential visa, which you can do now. But  
540 in those days the application had to come from ... you had to be outside. You  
541 had a permit, come inside, be welcome. Anyway, that's when they said, "well  
542 where do you want to go?" And through African theatres my husband had a  
543 chance, either Bulawayo, or Nairobi or Lourenço Marques. Well we didn't  
544 know anything from LM (laughs). The parents said to him, "of course you go

545 to Lourenço Marques, you speak Spanish, you pick up Portuguese.” Which is  
546 true, especially when you’re young. It comes so easily and so quickly. And  
547 we loved it! It was so continental and beautiful! Eventually G came under a  
548 little contract as a manager of a theatre, there was a theatre in Lourenço  
549 Marques. I found a job very soon as a secretary. My English wasn’t all that  
550 wonderful, what I had picked up here. I had taken here a course I thought I  
551 got to freshen up my English shorthand because I never used it. I had it at  
552 school but I never used it. I went to one of the night schools here to freshen  
553 up my English shorthand, little did I know that the shorthand which we had  
554 learned which was based on the German shorthand, just adapted, for French  
555 or English was not difficult, but here they learned Pittmans, which was  
556 completely different! And my English, my speaking, wasn’t so fluent yet. I  
557 could just squiggle a little bit, it was a disaster, and absolute disaster!  
558 (laughs). Anyway I applied for a job there because I met a girl there, a South  
559 African who was secretary for one of the English companies there. All the  
560 shipping and import companies were usually South African and she said  
561 she’d love to go back to Johannesburg, she was there for a year. And I said,  
562 “well I’d love to have your job”. She said, “ok” and she arranged an interview  
563 and I went for the interview and I used my own shorthand, everything was  
564 fine. What I didn’t know was I had to work with a dictaphone which I knew  
565 nothing about, and the English language! (laughs). But it worked very well, he  
566 spoke beautifully, he was educated at Cambridge University, a lovely, lovely  
567 man. Occasionally I couldn’t understand, I didn’t know the word, I had my  
568 German-English dictionary and I looked up what I thought it sounded like and  
569 dinkum it fitted into the sense, so that’s how I really learnt! But on one  
570 occasion I couldn’t make it out I had to go back to him. And he said, “what  
571 does it sound like?” And I said, “it sounds something like a devil (laughs). It  
572 doesn’t belong in a business letter!” He laughed. The sentence was “so we  
573 found ourselves between the devil and the deep blue sea!” It was one of  
574 those situations! Now how was I expected to know (laughs). So, ja, I had  
575 certain difficulties, but I learned a helluva lot.

576 DB: Did you have your children (2 sons) there, while you were in Lourenço  
577 Marques?

578 GB: Yes. I came here for the confinement every time. With my big tummy I  
579 climbed onto the train, nobody flew in those days. Because they were born  
580 here, they were South Africans. There was no point ... I loved the  
581 Portuguese, I loved everything about it, I still adore everything about it, but I  
582 didn’t want my children to grow up under a Portuguese nationality which they  
583 would never really exercise. I just wanted them to be English speaking when  
584 it came to school, so they were born in South Africa. They got South African  
585 passports.

586 (END OF TAPE 1)

587 TAPE 2 – GB INTERVIEW 1 CONTINUED

588  
589 Just before the tape starts, GB tells me that she feels guilty about feeling so well for  
590 her age, and being so mobile.

591  
592 DB: So you feel guilty that maybe you should be acting or age, or perhaps be less  
593 mobile, or?

594 GB: Yes. Guilty towards the others. They say, “why do you walk so fast, why do  
595 you always walk so fast?” I say, “well I don’t make myself walk fast, that is my  
596 stride.” If I walk slower, my balance is not so good. Ja, well, I’m so lucky.

597 DB: It is almost like, from what you’re saying, that there is an idea of how you  
598 should be at 91. There is almost an idea that a 91 year old lady should be  
599 this, this and this?

600 GB: Yes. This one can't walk because she really can't walk, and this one  
601 trembles, you know. They're in pain, they're uncomfortable, they can't wash  
602 themselves or bath themselves, they've got nurses who do that for them.

603 DB: So you feel very relieved, I think, on the one hand, thank G-d (GB: JA) that  
604 you have your health (GB: Ja, exactly) and that you are as independent as  
605 you are ...

606 GB: Ja. I think getting in and out of the bath that is the first thing that you have to  
607 give up because you haven't got the strength in your arms. I saw one of the  
608 flats here ... not that was the Flower Foundation. They are also an  
609 organisation like the Rand Aid they've got various Homes, they're privately  
610 run. Anyway a friend of mine, ja , let's say a friend, an acquaintance, she had  
611 just moved ... there is one of their homes the other side of Louis Botha  
612 Avenue. It is a garden complex. This friend of mine moved into a little first  
613 floor flat, so gorgeous, I loved it, with a little balcony, with trees, absolutely  
614 lovely, but the only thing is it is only serviced once a week. You've got to  
615 have your own arrangements, but they have a proper kitchenette, like this,  
616 you open the door and ... I haven't got. I've got my own little kitchen there,  
617 not a sink, not a nothing. There she's got a washing machine, she's got  
618 shelves, she's got a range. But you can close it up. That was very  
619 impressive Not that I had any intention of cooking or keeping house but you  
620 can if you want to. But, the bathroom, there was a toilet and a shower and  
621 they usually put a chair in the shower room. And it's all very nice but I say,  
622 "it's not for me." At this stage, my bath in the morning wakes my body up. It  
623 relaxes me, I couldn't live without it. That's the one thing when I go on holiday  
624 to my children they've only got showers. So anyway, that I accept. To move  
625 into a place that either has a common bathroom on that floor, but I looked at  
626 that but it really was for people who needed help to get into a bath and there  
627 was a little cubicle with nothing personal, with a bathtub. But you couldn't put  
628 your own things there, there was no where to put your showergel or whatever.

629 DB: It sounds very institutionalised. You don't want to be in a dormitory?

630 GB: Absolutely. But they want people to have showers. Here too there are quite a  
631 few which haven't got a bath. They took the bath out and made it a shower  
632 cubicle and then the nurses can help them and sit them and whatever they  
633 do. But, my bath is, that's my holiday everyday! (laughs).

634 DB: I'm just checking my time because we have been speaking for almost an hour  
635 and a half, I'm wondering whether we should stop and carry on next time, or  
636 whether you want to tell me a little more? How are you feeling?

637 GB: Look if you have to go...

638 DB: I do have some more time, if you don't mind...

639 GB: Ja, so have I.

640 DB: Ok let's carry on a little.

641 GB: Because I never take part in the midday meal. Because I'm used to making  
642 my own little sandwiches. I buy my own salami or whatever and I sit  
643 comfortably here and I don't like to ... In the evening it's ok. One hot meal a  
644 day is enough for me.

645 DB: And there's a communal dining room downstairs?

646 GB: Yes. There is a lounge, which opens into the dining room. It is actually one  
647 location. No. I rather prefer my own and I'm used to it, not that I'm so  
648 regimented, I also don't like to eat so early. 1 o'clock is time enough. And it's  
649 not a real meal. But say I'm out, like on the days when I go to yoga, then I  
650 usually combine it with a little bit of shops or repair places, or the bank or  
651 whatever. Then I come home and I take my white yoga stuff off, then I'm  
652 happy to sit here, I don't want to be amongst people.

653 DB: We'll stop shortly, (GB: Ja) because this is also quite tiring and you are telling  
654 me a lot

655 GB: Did I? Maybe I talk too much?  
656 DB: No! It is very nice to talk to someone who is prepared to tell you all these  
657 things and I appreciate it because you don't know me very well and you are  
658 telling me a lot of things about your life and it sounds very interesting. And  
659 thank you.  
660 GB: Yes. And you wanted to know about my husband.  
661 DB: Also, nothing that you don't want to say. It's not about being nosy and  
662 wanting details, it was just in terms of background whether ...did you divorce,  
663 did you stay married (GB: it is part of my background, you are quite right), are  
664 you widowed? Also the reason I ask you about marriage is that in terms of  
665 your being single now, I am interested in whether that affects your outlook?  
666 Whether you ever feel lonely, whether you'd like to have a partner, previously  
667 you said to me, after your phone rang, "I have a boyfriend here!" So that's  
668 really what I wanted to ask you about.  
669 GB: Ja, no, funnily enough, well let me just close the subject of Lourenço  
670 Marques. We were really very happy. When he ... he was a person, he  
671 never took anybody's advice or really opened up. He was a person that  
672 thought he was the best, unfortunately. He was good-looking, but that wasn't  
673 so important. He was never really trained for any business but he thought he  
674 knew everything and he thought he was cleverer than everybody else.  
675 Anyway business wasn't all that good and the moment business wasn't good,  
676 he withdrew because he, whether it was a kind of guilt because he couldn't  
677 provide anymore in the way he, because of the lifestyle he was used to ...At  
678 that time also, he had quite a good business ...(seems as though she is  
679 battling to remember the details). That was the time of the Federation of  
680 Southern Rhodesia, Northern Rhodesia and Nyasaland. They formed a  
681 federation. And everyone said, "that's the future, that's fantastic. Business  
682 will be booming, economically now that they work together, economically it  
683 will be a fantastic improvement." Which in the end it wasn't. It didn't turn out  
684 that way. But then he went, he had some connection to Salisbury, a kind of  
685 an agency. In Africa that was the type of business, you acted as an agent, as  
686 a distributing agent. But it didn't work out so wonderful either. I think he got  
687 into debt. It wasn't anything personal, but he in himself withdrew. Then we  
688 finally, in a roundabout way came back to South Africa. We applied for  
689 permission and could live here in South Africa. He started a business, it didn't  
690 work. I think he got himself into debt. On the personal basis, he was hardly  
691 there. At that time we lived at the old Rosebank Hotel. That's before your  
692 time, you wouldn't know. They had a little cottage, a little witch's house, all by  
693 itself on the grounds there. Because the hotel itself was a smallish building, a  
694 family hotel sort of thing. And we were in that cottage, which was very nice.  
695 At least we had space. It had a living room and the kids had a small room,  
696 but they had two bunks not on top of each other, and we had a bedroom and  
697 our bathroom. So, it was very convenient, not luxurious, but very convenient.  
698 But he didn't want me ... I said, "let me take on a job, the kids are at school,  
699 maybe a part-time job?" "No, no, no out of the question!" And I was very  
700 obedient, very obliging. You know all my independence came much later.  
701 Anyway it ended in a divorce. It was very funny divorce because the lawyer,  
702 we took a lawyer, and he wanted to know "why, did he have affairs, did he do  
703 this, did he do that?" I said nothing like that, it was just not working. I didn't  
704 want any scandal (laughs), there wasn't any. But he had withdrawn  
705 completely. He was hardly ever there for meals and anyway the boys ... he  
706 didn't know how to talk to the boys, he had no relationship with them. He  
707 wasn't made to be a father, really, that came much, much later.  
708 DB: It sounds quite painful for you to talk about and I'm sorry if I have probed too  
709 much.

710 GB: No, no you don't because there is no scandal in it, there is no animosity. It  
711 was all on a very friendly basis. When I told him I wanted a divorce, he said,  
712 "are you sure, are you sure you know what you're doing?" "Yes, I think it's  
713 better." The children, one of them, L, probably, the older one said, "I don't like  
714 daddy." I thought if the children grow up not liking their father, because as  
715 they grow older they will watch that there is nothing between us, nothing that  
716 was there before. There is no love, no understanding, no confiding. If they  
717 grow up hating their father, that I didn't want, for the children's sake, you  
718 know, not for him or for me. So I said, "I think we'd better get divorced." He  
719 didn't really want a divorce (laughs) but anyway that's what happened.

720 DB: When was that?

721 GB: That was in 1959.

722 DB: So you were still married for a long time?

723 GB: We were married for 25 years.

724 DB: How old were your sons at the time?

725 GB: They must have been 13 and 12. We were already in the flat anyway.

726 DB: What are their names? This is just for my own interest.

727 GB: L and R. As a matter of fact, they were both in bed, because I see them  
728 separate and I think I sat on one of the beds and I said, "I must tell you  
729 something, daddy and I are getting divorced." "Oh, good," said one of them,  
730 and I can't remember which one it was, "can I tell my friends?" Because the  
731 children must have had problems because their father was never with them.  
732 Other people had fathers ... I mean they had a father and yet he was never  
733 there. So he wasn't very happy in himself, but he also couldn't pretend to be  
734 a happy family and he couldn't provide. Anyway. Then I took that job for a  
735 fortnight whilst the secretary of the director of Siemens was in hospital. And  
736 at the end of the fortnight I said to him it was my last day and he said, "why?"  
737 and I said because Miss X or whatever is sick. He said, "so, she can go into  
738 the typing pool." (laughs).

739 DB: And this landed up being your career?

740 GB: For 22 years.

741 DB: As I said, we are going to end, and I don't want to rush you at all. Did you  
742 remain a single mom, and bring them up alone?

743 GB: Yes. It was very peaceful at home, very friendly. Because there were already  
744 little incidents when he forbade this, or didn't allow that. It wasn't really a  
745 family group, you know, putting his weight down. It is very difficult with early  
746 teenagers. I thought what's going to happen when they are 15, 16, 17 and I  
747 have this relationship? No, no. So now like that I worked, the boys went to  
748 school. I moved from Rosebank to X Court because I couldn't take them to  
749 school by car. I worked down in the south of the city near Troye street. If  
750 they missed the school-bus ... there was only one bus because at that time  
751 they were in High School and it was in Hyde Park. So that tension in the  
752 morning, must they catch the bus or are they late, must I take them to school?  
753 It was terrible. I thought no, I can't carry on like this. I've got to live  
754 somewhere that is within walking distance of the school. Then it happened  
755 the flat was advertised, I knew the building. One of the people at Siemens  
756 lived there. So that is just opposite the high school. So how much closer can  
757 you be than just walking across the road! My job was very satisfying,  
758 personnel department. Then I became the personnel department That came  
759 later, that came after 2 years or 3 years.

760 DB: Let's stop. It has been most interesting and there are many questions I'd like  
761 to ask you having heard this, but I think we can leave it for another time if you  
762 have the time to see me again, which I'd so enjoy.

763 GB: Yes. But I can just close this section for you.

764 DB: Ok, I don't want to rush you. (It is clear that she wants to go on talking!)

765 GB: Yes. The divorce came through. We were on polite, friendly terms. G moved  
766 to London, got into the silver business. Went from London to Hamburg. The  
767 two boys then were starting to grow up. They talked to him, they visited him.  
768 I said to them, "if you go, please contact your father", which they did. L got on  
769 very well with him. R never forgave him. I think he didn't congratulate him on  
770 his matric, or something. Anyway children are different. But, in the end he  
771 went to live in Hamburg because that had to do with the silver business which  
772 he took over from the people he worked as agent for. He built up a beautiful  
773 business, came to his senses. I visited him. Siemens sent me to Germany,  
774 so I visited him there. And then later on I travelled overseas. The children  
775 then went overseas. So we spoke on the phone. He talked about us. He  
776 said, "we were very stupid." I said, "yes, we were very young and stupid." He  
777 built up a very good business in Hamburg and he said, "I wish I were 20 years  
778 younger. I wish I would have known 20 years ago what I do now." Because  
779 he also, he took chances, he took risks. But, the older he got, the better he  
780 became. We were very good friends. But of course ... he came here, he  
781 came and stayed with me. On 2 occasions he came to South Africa, he  
782 stayed with me. Then we met it was my sister-in-laws 75th birthday. We  
783 went to Mauritius and he came to Mauritius, we had a few days there. Then  
784 he came to Melbourne to visit the kids, on one occasion at the same time that  
785 I was there. So, ja, as we got old we got very friendly. Talked quite openly  
786 (laughs) we quite joked about it, said "we got (inaudible) well I couldn't afford  
787 you." (laughs) You know, it became ... if you look at it from high up you can  
788 see down what all these little ants are doing down there, stupid running  
789 around, not knowing what they're doing down there. (quite a wistful tone)  
790 DB: It sounds like almost a full circle (GB: Yes). That the relationship became  
791 better later.  
792 GB: Absolutely, absolutely! Then he became very ill. We went to Hamburg and ...  
793 he died. (Quite a long pause) Ja, so, in the end he found fulfilment in his life  
794 in the same way as I did. We often talk – my friend Elizabeth in England, my  
795 friend Edith here, the one who unfortunately now has got Alzheimer's, but I'm  
796 friendly with her daughter – we often got together because they were also  
797 getting friendly through me, and said all three of us came into our own way,  
798 improved our personalities, developed, spread out our personalities after we  
799 got divorced.  
800 DB: It is very interesting, in terms of what we learn.  
801 GB: It was. It applied to the three of us. Elizabeth came an MBE (Member of the  
802 British Empire) she worked for the ... after her husband died, the best thing  
803 he could do for her was when he died ... she travelled all over the place ...  
804 was a director of the ...and a few of the very top business people were the  
805 people she dealt with ... so she also, from nothing, from the wife of ... she  
806 became somebody.  
807 DB: All this has a bearing on what you're telling me because so often there seems  
808 to be a perception that you have to do everything when you are young and  
809 after that your life stops somehow, or maybe you play a few games of Bridge  
810 and what you're saying is throughout life there is opportunity for development  
811 and that you took those opportunities. And that at a time when fewer women  
812 worked, you had that opportunity, you had to bring up your sons ...  
813 GB: Yes, that opportunity came when you got rid of your husbands!  
814 DB: And that it didn't become a tragedy that you didn't have a husband ...  
815 GB: These ... both of them, Elizabeth and Edith they are about 9 or 10 years  
816 younger than me, but that didn't really matter on account of the  
817 circumstances. I had my children late. When I started thinking now is the  
818 time we can have a family, I was 10 years older than the others who were 21,

819 22. But I suddenly became part of that group, of the young mothers, at the  
820 kindergarten and the early schooldays, so maybe that also kept me younger?  
821 DB: This is so interesting. I'd like to stay and talk to you all day but I'm going to  
822 stop now. Thank you so much, it is so fascinating, I want to ask you all sorts  
823 of questions that have nothing to do with ageing!  
824 GB: It is strange that it should be interesting for anybody else. I mean it is my life  
825 ...

## APPENDIX C: Interview 2 with Gina

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DB: Maybe what we can talk about today, since we did so much of the background last time, is about any of your thoughts on ageing. I want it to be as open-ended as possible because if I start to ask you specific questions, it becomes what I think about ageing. So, I wondered if there was anything you thought about since we last spoke that you'd like to add, or anything that you can tell me about being your age.

GB: Being my age makes me feel that everybody is younger than I am. There are some women here who I always thought, well they are actually, why are they here, they're really too young. They do entertainment and took it on to organise the movies and the music evenings. We had coffee at the shopping centre the other day and we were talking about age and she said, "well how old do you think I am?" and I said, "well 60 up to 72, sort of." So she said, "I'm 80!" So I thought, what am I thinking about? (laughs). So really, they're active, they're young, so I don't think there's anything very special about me (laughs).

DB: I think there is!

GB: It is just the last few years that I actually aged. When I was 80 I wasn't any way different from 70. I didn't look 80, I didn't feel 80, you know nothing in my body had really changed. But, after that, when I look at that picture (*indicates 2 photographs of herself*) 80 and that picture 90 and I look at myself, then I, ja, then I realise... But I can't say that I'm terribly upset about it. I suppose you grow with it (laughs) you know, after all, I wouldn't say accept it. I don't believe in sitting back and saying, "no I can't do any of that, I can't do this and I can't do that. I should take a wheelchair, it would make travelling so much easier (*GB is going to Melbourne for 5 weeks, a trip she makes annually*). I say I don't really want it easier ... for as long as I can." That is my basic attitude. As long as I can, I do just carry on. (Laughs) What else can I say? There are certain things which your body doesn't want to do anymore. You know, at yoga certain exercises which are a real problem. You realise no I can't do them anymore. I could never actually sit in the lotus position

DB: That is so uncomfortable!

GB: I can't do it. I can't bend my legs more than that, so that already (laughs) spoils it a little bit. Also for my back, I can't sit upright like this for everything but that has always been from the beginning so that doesn't upset me anymore. But certain things ... I find I'm a bit stiffer than I used to be. But I can certainly carry on. You know I've never said, "I don't really feel like it." Because that is what most people do ... "there is something today, do I have to go there?" There you've got to force yourself. I really sometimes don't feel like going there, and it is raining ... in the car. But once I'm off then it's ok. But I don't think that is anything very special, it probably happens to other people. If I do get certain pains sometimes then I think "what's that?, Maybe it's starting now." But then I said no. Some certain movements I've got a pain in this leg, quite new, since yesterday or the day before. It can't be the bones, it's the muscle. Well a muscle you can treat, rub some Voltaren. But there is a little fright which you get with anything that wasn't there before. These things suddenly pop up, you know. And then of course there are certain things which are not painful, they are not dangerous, but they are socially unacceptable. What they call the post-nasal drip but it doesn't drip, don't ask me where it comes from (laughs) where does all this moisture come from? Out of the blue, suddenly before I can actually reach a tissue and it tastes salty like tears, ja, clear, clear liquid. My maid was so used to it, before I feel

55 it sometimes, she comes with a tissue, because she can see it. So, that is  
56 something that I've got, also apart from that to do with the nasal condition, I've  
57 got to blow my nose much more often. But it comes also suddenly and I find  
58 that very embarrassing. If you sit with other people and every 5 minutes  
59 you've got to take out a tissue.

60 DB: It sounds annoying as well.

61 GB: Ja

62 DB: I think in what you're saying, that interests me so much, is that the idea that  
63 you suddenly noticed. You know, up to about 80 you felt the same and then  
64 you suddenly noticed. Can you tell me at any other stage of your life did you  
65 ever worry about getting older?

66 GB: No, no. I always thought I wonder this person gets this, and the other person  
67 gets that and now she's getting old of course, I said I wonder where will it hit  
68 me. But I wasn't concerned about it, it was a sort of curiosity. Basically, I  
69 think, you think it can't happen to you. Even like accidents also, it always  
70 happens to other people. So I think that is part of it. It didn't bother me. I  
71 thought about it. Where will it hit me? Will I get a stroke or will I get ... But it  
72 didn't worry me, you know, curiosity. It did not worry me, I never made a  
73 secret of my age. You know, some people don't want to admit how old they  
74 are. I thought this is ridiculous (laughs). I was always quite ready to say  
75 when I was born and how old I was. And as I said, when I came to 90 then I  
76 was surprised at myself. I thought 90! Maybe they made a mistake on my  
77 birth certificate. But, you know, when I think, my mother was 93 when she  
78 unfortunately had the accident and broke her hip and the operation never  
79 helped. It was ... and from that for 3 years she was not herself, she couldn't  
80 walk, she couldn't stand and she was very, very unhappy. But I didn't really  
81 think that that would happen to me. Thank G-d I feel good. But some people  
82 ponder on it and it occupies them. Not with me, never.

83 DB: I wonder if you feel there's more emphasis nowadays – you've got  
84 daughters-in-law, granddaughters – I wonder if you feel there's more pressure  
85 now, or more awareness maybe – as we said last time, people have been  
86 ageing forever, but do you think there's more focus on ageing?

87 GB: Ja, there is something. People try and hold you. They try and support you.  
88 And the Blacks call you, "hullo Goggo". With that you realise that the other  
89 people usually see you as older than you think you are, or you feel. I do need  
90 support, but I don't need support that somebody holds me. I just need to  
91 touch something, I say my earth leakage! As long as I can touch somebody I  
92 say, "no, no you don't have to hold me", except down steps or on uneven  
93 ground. I need something to hold onto but I don't want to clutch ... to support  
94 myself. It's a kind of ... it's got to do with the balance

95 DB: Does it upset you that people react towards you like that. Do you ever want  
96 to say, "leave me alone, I'm perfectly capable"?

97 GB: Yes, you do say that. I won't say it upsets me but when I don't need it  
98 (laughs), it bothers me. You don't want it. But, it's not a deep anger or  
99 anything like this, not at all. But when I'm quite capable of doing it by myself  
100 then I think the others should accept that too. But it is difficult because when I  
101 am with somebody and they don't realise it that I need to touch somebody  
102 (laughs). But the girls know, my granddaughters, know. So when we go  
103 down a stair, which I don't know very well, in a restaurant, I say, "you go first,  
104 if I fall, I fall onto you." I'm not conscious of falling, but it's just that going  
105 down steps ... there was the escalator the other day. There is an escalator at  
106 Balfour, which doesn't have first a straight step. It comes out and goes  
107 straight down. And I stood there frozen. I just couldn't move. I had to walk  
108 down the stairs, or take the lift, or something. It doesn't often happen but  
109 depending on ... I have then a feeling with also steps, if I haven't got

110 something to hold on to I have a feeling of stepping into space ... I can't  
111 describe it any differently. It doesn't happen going up, but going down.

112 DB: It makes you feel a little insecure?

113 GB: Ja. But you don't just grab someone's arm and that person thinks that you  
114 really need support and before you reach for them, they want to help you.

115 DB: You know, in some way, that's a perception. That's someone looking at you  
116 and thinking because you are a certain age, you need help and so they'll hold  
117 your arm. Do you think that you are perceived in a certain way because you  
118 are older? Do people shout at you because they expect you not to be able to  
119 hear? Do people ever talk to you as though you are a child?

120 GB: No, no.

121 DB: I am trying to work out if you feel you are treated differently than you used to  
122 be treated?

123 GB: No. Because, how can I say. You see, as I say, I am very reserved. I don't  
124 go out and chat to other people. Unless it is gradually here. I say, I've seen  
125 these people for a year and a half now and they've seen me so if we stand  
126 together at the salad buffet, you know, you make a remark and say a few  
127 words. But I've never that situation where somebody didn't think I was worth  
128 talking to.

129 DB: I'm glad to hear that. It was just a question that I had.

130 GB: I feel lately that I find it easier actually to join people, but not for any length of  
131 time and not for sitting down as we talked the other day. If there is a group of  
132 people and they talk then I'm just a decoration (laughs) because I can't  
133 contribute and to avoid embarrassment, it makes you unhappy too, I really  
134 was. When I realised that the first time when I went, I don't know, maybe 3  
135 years ago to Melbourne, and there was the wedding, first the one wedding,  
136 the next year the other wedding, the circle of children grew. Grandchildren,  
137 all of a sudden I had 4 instead of 2, and then it really hit me. I never had the  
138 opportunity before to sit in a group where everybody knows each other and  
139 talks to each other, and I couldn't participate. I could only talk to the person  
140 that sat next to me. And I remember that I hadn't cried in ... I cry very rarely, I  
141 don't even remember when I last cried, but when I said goodbye to my son at  
142 the airport, I was very sad. And as I sat in the plane, the tears just streamed  
143 down and I thought what am I crying for. And I thought well maybe there's no  
144 point in going again and seeing them again. You know it really had hit me  
145 then because I didn't have any opportunity before then to try this out, to  
146 experience that. So ... but now I know, I accept it. I know my judgement on  
147 hearing-aids, they don't help. And everybody confirms that. Sitting in a  
148 group, you still can't make out what they say. Ja, so, alright, so it's the  
149 hearing, but I can't say it really bothers me because it is not as though I have  
150 to give up something which I was used to. I never belonged to a club, I didn't  
151 play sports, I was very much by myself or with my sister-in-law, or her brother-  
152 in-law, we got together every week and my children here, well they're all busy.  
153 So it's not as though I was actually used to being in a group of people and  
154 then suddenly dawned on me that I couldn't ...

155 DB: It seems as though that particular incident of being with your family, it  
156 suddenly hit you really hard what you were missing, because maybe there  
157 you would have liked to have contributed, and been part of it?

158 GB: Ja, absolutely. It does upset me, it does upset me. They know now. But on  
159 the other hand they can't scream around, they're talking to each other. And  
160 so, I do miss a lot there. But once you realise your condition, you have to  
161 accept it. There's no point in straining ...what did you? And no point in keep  
162 on asking, "sorry, sorry ...?" Some voices don't carry and that makes it very  
163 difficult. Some people talk by nature with a soft voice. Either I pretend, and I

164 say “really” and I smile, and they smile as well (laughs), but I haven’t really  
165 caught on. And as I said, it doesn’t really matter.

166 DB: I’d like to ask you about the U3A? (*University of the Third Age*) How long  
167 have you been going?

168 GB: Not terribly long, a few years, 3. Maybe by now 4, the years go so fast ...I  
169 saw in the North Eastern Tribune under the diary, I saw ach U3A which I had  
170 come across in Melbourne through my son’s mother-in-law. We are very  
171 friendly, we have not have too much in common apart from the children. We  
172 are good friends. She took me to some lectures on Jewish studies there  
173 which took place in the little auditorium of the shul and it was done by a lovely  
174 woman who comes from Rondebosch, very knowledgeable ...There were  
175 sometimes 9 or 10 women, depending. One or two were survivors. There  
176 was tea and coffee and biscuits after. I wasn’t ever interested in Jewish  
177 studies before, I knew very little about philosophy ... I found it all very  
178 interesting. I found it very congenial probably more than even the interest in  
179 the subject but it was done in a very admirable way. She copied out her  
180 lectures for everybody to take home, a very good idea. So that I enjoyed. I  
181 never heard of it before. There they did it at a venue with little rooms. Here  
182 they haven’t got a venue for their meetings, they use the hall at  
183 Randjeslaagte, otherwise it takes place at whoever likes to contribute, in their  
184 home. But I thought it was something very special about Australia, I had no  
185 idea they’ve got one in America and they’ve got one in Cape Town. I didn’t  
186 know it existed here in South Africa because I had never heard of it. So I  
187 think it must have been 3 or 4 years ago I went to a meeting which was  
188 advertised and that meeting had a lecturer. She was talking about the Role of  
189 the Women in Ancient Egypt. I thought that sounds very interesting. That  
190 was your mum!

191 DB: I was wondering about your interest in going to the lectures. Was that a  
192 specific attempt to keep your mind active or certain things that you were really  
193 interested in?

194 GB: I think both, but it was mostly “get out, go somewhere where there are  
195 people.” There was another one, which I had enrolled for, it was on a Tuesday  
196 it was in Linksfield, that was a very small group in the end they he stopped it.  
197 And he talked about Ancient Civilisations.

198 DB: One of the questions I’m very interested in finding out about is whether when  
199 you look at your life thus far, when you look at certain periods, is there a  
200 certain period that sticks out for you as being a time where you would say you  
201 were your happiest, or a time where you would say that you were your least  
202 happy? Or are they more or less the same?

203 GB: I was never actually unhappy. I cannot remember having been unhappy.  
204 Upset, yes, certainly, but, well ... and in Spain ... when we were teenagers  
205 we were also happy because although it was the beginning of the Hitler time,  
206 we had a little club and we went to theatres and we went to concerts and we  
207 had dances, called balls. On one occasion I won the Tango dancing  
208 champion. (Laughs) Ja, we had a nice time, we really did have a nice time.  
209 So, of the bad times in Germany, I wasn’t really there. I mean I was at the  
210 very beginning, but it didn’t really affect you. It happened to other people ...  
211 you know it’s ... when you’re so young you don’t take things so seriously.  
212 And then before we knew it, we moved to Spain. Fascinating, very  
213 interesting, we didn’t go backpacking (laughs) but to move suddenly to a  
214 different country in Spain, it is interesting and the Spanish language is  
215 beautiful, the Spanish music is beautiful. We didn’t have a bean, but, ja, it  
216 was all an adventure. Coming here, ja, the same way. My sister-in-law had  
217 organised – she had a little circle of friends that came out together on the boat  
218 from Germany, the famous, Stuttgart, which was one of the last ships which

219 allowed people to leave Germany and to take some of their household goods  
220 with them. Later on they weren't allowed to take anything ...The young  
221 people got together and carried on meeting here and going out together. And  
222 she had arranged for me, a job, in a cake shop. There was a girl who also  
223 worked there and it belonged to a Swiss man in those days in Raleigh street  
224 ...it wasn't anything what it became, Rocky street later on. Ja, so I got a job  
225 in a cake shop. All I remember is that the first cake which I sold was an apple  
226 tart that was the first price I can remember. The small one was "1 and 3"  
227 and the big one was "2 and 6" shillings. Pounds and shillings. So here we  
228 were very happy too. My husband also had a little job for 6 pounds a week or  
229 something like that. Maybe I have a capacity for enjoying things. I do usually  
230 find things that are amusing ... although nobody had any money in those  
231 days, nobody was anybody. But you were not the only ones, that's how it  
232 was. The young immigrants had to struggle and build up and before we knew  
233 it - we were only here for one year – we went to Lourenço Marques. Ach it  
234 was wonderful, I loved it! We loved Lourenço Marques, it was so out of the  
235 War. Of course we heard the news about the War, we were very worried  
236 about the War, but it didn't affect you personally. We had a ball. The foreign  
237 community was mostly English and South African. They had the British Club  
238 where we sort of fell in. My husband worked for a South African company, I  
239 worked for a South African company ...I learnt English because my boss was  
240 Cambridge educated, yes, we were very, very happy.

241 DB: You sound like a very positive person. You sound like whatever has come in  
242 your life, you've accepted, (GB: yes) that there have been some difficulties  
243 along the line, but you've managed to face it and move on (GB: absolutely),  
244 that you're quite stoic. I wonder where you feel you will go from here? Do  
245 you have any regrets?

246 GB: No regrets, not really ... I wasn't really the kind of mom who spent a lot of  
247 time with her children ... there sometimes I think ...but you do as everyone  
248 else does. I don't feel like I missed out anything. What I do regret is that  
249 when I came here I was so involved with my work ... I should have talked to  
250 my children more. I feel guilty sometimes, we didn't really talk. It's even more  
251 difficult with boys ... but they didn't know anything else. Now we talk. I think I  
252 have a very good relationship with my sons. The younger one is 57 and the  
253 older one, in Melbourne, is 58. END OF TAPE

254 DB: Just one last question. Do you think younger women are more vain?

255 GB: Neither of my granddaughters here are the type that make up. But when I  
256 look at the magazines they say you have to use this and that cream ... You  
257 can't cheat nature, look at the flowers, they also go. There is no cream that  
258 can replace it ... Maybe if you have nothing better to worry about. I never  
259 used base when I was younger, just lipstick. I only started using it when I  
260 noticed the spots. You can only make the best of what you've got, you can't  
261 suddenly make yourself beautiful. What I do notice is that people don't smile  
262 anymore ...

263 DB: Thank you so much for sharing so much with me. It has been very valuable  
264 and I have so enjoyed speaking to you.

265 GB: I also enjoyed myself. I think maybe I talk too much!

266 DB: Not at all, it is so nice that you were so forthcoming.

267 GB: It is very easy to speak to you. That is the thing about ageing, is that you  
268 remember things from way back, but don't ask me what the movie was  
269 yesterday!

## APPENDIX D: Interview with Marie

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DB: ( I tell MS about my research and about how I'm trying to find out how individual women feel about ageing and how I'd be grateful to have her thoughts on this) She tells me that she is 65 (which I didn't know)

DB: Thank you for telling me that. I didn't know how to say, 'could I ask you how old you are?' (MS: Sure) My mother hides her age.

MS: Oh, does she?

DB: She really does.

MS: I don't talk much about it (age) at the gym because I don't want some people to say, 'Oh my G-d I'm not getting the best because she's far older than me' or whatever. Maybe it does make a difference, it's just my perception at the moment.

DB: Well that is interesting to hear, that we have this idea ...

MS: But I mean, you know, I think I'm very lucky being this age and being this far along the line, really. Because of the exercising, truly, I have come as far as I have and I would also say having a spiritual belief, not a religious one. I'm definitely not a religious person, but I definitely do have a spiritual belief in a power greater than myself.

DB: So are you saying that these are things that give you meaning?

MS: Oh yes, definitely, definitely. And the fact that I have an incredible family. You know you can't always choose your genes as you well know, but the family, the husband that I have and my two sons are just amazing. And they just make us feel special and you know we never sort of feel like old people. So ageing isn't something to be afraid of. The only thing for me is that I say to my husband what we have to do is we have to take the very best care of ourselves that we can. You know, we owe it to our children to be well and healthy. I believe we do. And they take such great care of themselves and I think it would just be awful if we sat around and did nothing. So we both exercise and we have a shared thing that is lovely, which is we walk the dogs every day. And to me that's very important is having that family time and even that time with my husband on our own everyday. You know, just the two of us.

DB: Just by way of background, can you tell me how long you've been married?

MS: Yes, I think it is 39 years. Yes it is 39 years and it will be 40 years next year. It is 39 years and you know, we get on terribly well because he is a very good friend. And I love seeing him because there's always something to tell him and to share with him. And that's also very important and that's to have someone that you can share with. And the same with my children. In fact my children sometimes share much more than I would like to hear! (laughs) To tell you the truth. Ja, so we definitely are, I would say, a hands on family. And to me that's so important, having the right family. I don't know how you feel about that?

DB: Well, it's not about me! (MS laughs) But I think that what you're saying makes a lot of sense. I think that our perceptions and the way we feel about our world are shaped by where live and by the context we find ourselves in. (MS: Ja) So I think that what you're saying about family is very important. Your children, you said you've got two children? Both sons?

MS: Both sons.

DB: How old are they?

MS: The one is 36 and the other one is 35.

53 DB: Do they both live overseas? (MS has told me, prior to the interview, that her  
54 son in London has booked for herself and her husband to go to London on the  
55 weekend).

56 MS: One does. We have a scenario like “My Big Fat Greek Wedding” where we  
57 have a very large place and we built a house at the bottom of the driveway. It  
58 is beautiful. And eventually my son purchased that from his father and they  
59 live there. It’s marvellous because I’m able to see my grandchild everyday.  
60 And when we’re away, and we are away a lot these days, R looks after the  
61 house and our animals for us and the same when he’s away on business. So  
62 we can take care of each other that way. But you know just going back to  
63 family. I think that family truly is the most important thing and obviously one’s  
64 health which is why it is important also to take care of yourself, to be healthy  
65 in that respect. And to have a belief in something, in a G-d of your  
66 understanding. I call it my higher power. And I’m in a spiritual programme  
67 anyway because I attend something called ALANON and ALANON adult  
68 children of alcoholics because my mother was an alcoholic and she was also  
69 a prescription addict as well and it was very tough growing up in an alcoholic  
70 and prescription drug home. You know especially when it’s your mother  
71 because they should really be role models and my father managed to help  
72 himself by being absent. He became a total workaholic. So my sister and I  
73 were just stuck, for want of a better word, with my mother who spent 90%,  
74 even 99% of her time in bed, you know. So it was difficult. And then, once  
75 I’d left home and started working and I was very good at covering all this up.  
76 But you know, you take it in to all your relationships and to every part of your  
77 life that you live with and that you deal with and that you don’t deal with. And  
78 then I met my husband, who fortunately is a recovering alcoholic and I’ve  
79 never seen him drunk. He’s been sober for something like 42 years now,  
80 never had a drink. Ja, so that is great and he said to me, “listen there is a  
81 lovely programme for the family of alcoholics.” And I’m very grateful for that  
82 because they have kept me so centred and really ok about myself, has been  
83 the ALANON and ALANON adult child programme. And it’s, I don’t know,  
84 every week that I go I just see miracles happening. And its happened for me,  
85 because I really and truly would not have been able to do the job that I do  
86 anyway, today if it wasn’t for being able to develop some self-esteem and  
87 some confidence and I’ve only done that as a result of the 12 step  
88 programme. That to me has been very important. My 12 step programme is  
89 number 1 in my life. Number 2 in my life has to be the exercising, which also  
90 helps my mind and you know, makes me feel better about me and what I’m  
91 doing, and number 3 obviously is the family. But those first two things would  
92 come before the family because I wouldn’t really be the kind of mother or wife  
93 that I would like to be if I wasn’t helped along by that. And I think those  
94 things, you deal with people, or I do anyway who have great problems and  
95 they see that, you know, its worked for me and that it can work for them and  
96 that’s what it is all about. It’s a sharing programme. So I feel that has been  
97 great in my life, absolutely number 1. Number 1 has been the fellowship.

98 DB: It sounds fantastic.

99 MS: It really is. Doing those 12 steps of recovery, it’s hard. You have to be very  
100 honest with yourself and about yourself.

101 DB: They seem to have given you something that you didn’t have growing up, and  
102 maybe it put things into perspective and

103 MS: Absolutely it was incredibly hard

104 DB: And to have had an absentee father and

105 MS: and a mother who was not home, you know, literally not home. Ja, it is. And I  
106 see the difference because I have a sister who doesn’t want to go to a  
107 programme of recovery and her life is totally unmanageable, totally. So there

108 is the route of becoming manageable and the route of not. So there you are,  
109 and I never want to be the person I used to be because that was just a mask  
110 anyway, you know. I was very reliable, very dependent (*dependable?*), very  
111 much a workaholic. All those things happen to one child, I would say, in the  
112 family. They often refer to them as the hero, the one that looks after the  
113 others. And I'm still doing that with my sister and my programme says to me  
114 not to do that, but it, you know (sighs), its very difficult to see someone on the  
115 street, especially if you have so much yourself, and I do, I am so unbelievably  
116 blessed. Oh G-d, Daniella, I am so blessed, really.

117 DB: Thank you for sharing this. I just want to tell you thank you so much. You  
118 know it's so special, it really is special.

119 MS: That's good I'm glad but that's what up makes up the person, hey, that you  
120 want to interview anyway, don't you?

121 DB: That's it. As I've said to a few of the people, because a people have said to  
122 me well that has got nothing to do with ageing, and that hasn't. I think that it's  
123 so much one's outlook on life (MS: oh definitely), it is so related to your life  
124 experiences to everything, to how you experience the now, the future, the  
125 past ... (MS: definitely). So R when you say you don't want to be that person  
126 that you were. Round about when was that?

127 MS: When I was living at home with the problem and when I left home, you know,  
128 moved from Pretoria to Johannesburg because I wasn't me. I didn't know  
129 who I was anyway. And all I knew was that I was terrorised most of the time  
130 and really fearful. And that if anything nice happened to me, and nice things  
131 did happen to me in that period as well, and I always used to think, well (a) I  
132 don't deserve them and (b) its going to be snatched away from me very  
133 quickly so don't get too used to this and don't think this is for you. And then I  
134 met the man I was to marry who was already just very newly sober in AA.  
135 And that was the beginning of my growth period because he said, come on go  
136 to that fellowship (a) you'll learn more about what kind of person I am. And  
137 you know, I didn't realise that my mother had this problem until I actually went  
138 to the meeting. I just thought she was doing it specifically to get at me. And  
139 that she was just weak-willed, and you know, not up to much. And I learnt  
140 differently, that she also ... she had a choice but the choice that she made  
141 was not a good one for all of us, especially herself and she died very young.  
142 So my change happened when I got married and it was wonderful because I  
143 was able to make friends with her before she died. Through the drugs,  
144 through the alcohol, her insides, her kidneys particularly through the  
145 prescription drugs had gone to hell. So she died when she was 51 and my  
146 younger son was only 4. And, I mean she could basically still be around  
147 today if she was healthy. So we missed out on a great deal with her but as I  
148 say we righted that, ja.

149 DB: Within your own family (MS: ja) as well and that is also part of how important  
150 family is.

151 MS: Ja. Without a doubt. And truly, by the grace of G-d I really am married to an  
152 incredible man.

153 DB: Oh that is such a lovely thing to hear it really is a wonderful thing to hear. I  
154 think I chose you because you exude this confidence and happiness and  
155 togetherness and the way you care about people (MS: No I do, I do) it really  
156 comes out very strongly (MS: Ah thank you), and I just knew that I wanted you  
157 (laughs).

158 MS: Thank you.

159 DB: R, I'm thinking, you know, you talk about now about being healthy and about  
160 your family, about doing things, about travel (*it seems as though R travels*  
161 *overseas constantly!*) ... tell me something about that.

162 MS: Oh no I am the most spoilt person I know! Sometimes I think this is really too  
163 much (laughs) I am far too spoilt. But we do, we are really lucky to be so  
164 spoilt. My older boy is the source of all this spoiling for all the trips and so on,  
165 that I must tell you. And he's wonderful that way. I mean if I got onto a plane  
166 every second week he'd be fine, you know, if his father and I got onto a plane.  
167 And so we do, we love travelling, we like seeing new things. R (*husband*) is  
168 one of those people who can look at something ... I can look at something  
169 and ok I know that's a cup, but R will look at something and say yes it is a cup  
170 but this and this and this. So he sees things ... so it is wonderful to go  
171 travelling with him because he sees more than I do. So he's a good teacher  
172 in that respect. And we do, ja, we enjoy it. We have a very good life together.  
173 We travel, as I say, a lot. We go to the beach a lot as well because we have  
174 a very nice spot at the beach as well and we love to go there. And I love to  
175 be at the gym as well. I really enjoy the teaching very, very much. And it's  
176 nice to be able to run away when you can.

177 DB: How long have you been there at the gym?

178 MS: Oh, for about 25 years. And it was nice because when the children were  
179 small I also included a lot of fashion shows at shopping centres and so on. I  
180 did that which I liked a lot. I always did that in tandem, sort of with the  
181 exercising. And then the exercising I liked more than dealing, you know, with  
182 difficult people, shopping centre people are difficult. And so I went fulltime  
183 into the exercising and that has just been the best thing. I met a lot of  
184 wonderful people, and it is nice. It's nice when one has nice people who  
185 come to you and I think most of my nice people are here. I sometimes have  
186 had people who I haven't cared for that greatly but you know, some of them  
187 have gone, some of them have stayed.

188 DB: You sound very content.

189 MS: I am. You know, as long ... I'll tell you something, I like a shit-free life to tell  
190 you the truth! I hate drama and I hate confrontation but I have learnt to do  
191 confrontation and that is being the adult child of an alcoholic. It makes you,  
192 you know, you don't like to rock the boat and you are certainly not into  
193 confrontation and that is how I used to be. If you wanted me to be one way I  
194 would be that. If so and so wanted me to be another way, I would. But not  
195 anymore so I am able to confront. I think that we can basically say most  
196 things if we say it kindly and not in an abusive fashion even if others are  
197 abusive towards you. You know, so, but that is only for me because I feel  
198 better doing it that way. Sometimes I feel miserable.

199 DB: It sounds very special. It sounds like from your past you've learnt so much  
200 (MS: definitely) and from the programme. You seem to have so much insight  
201 into the fact that being the kind of person that other people want you to be is  
202 very much related to not being unconditionally accepted as a child and not  
203 having had someone there to help you with that self-esteem. You really  
204 seem to have found that.

205 MS: Ja and that truly is through the programme and through the husband.

206 DB: That is fantastic. It sounds like you've grown together (MS:yes). It sounds  
207 like it has been a partnership.

208 MS: Oh definitely, definitely. It is a very good partnership.

209 DB: That is an inspiration.

210 MS: How long have you been married?

211 DB: For 12 years and I adore my husband.

212 MS: Oh really so it's a good marriage?

213 DB: Yes it is a good marriage and I think he is the greatest human being and  
214 when I hear what you say I think "fantastic" that is what I want!

215 MS: And that's what I think about R too, he's the greatest human being, he's just  
216 so special.

217 DB: And R it's so funny because I've noticed that depending on who I am with, I  
218 either ask or I don't ask and I said to you I'm not asking and yet I am asking  
219 questions! (MS: ja). The questions are if you look at the future, if you think  
220 about the future in terms of getting older, how do you feel about that?

221 MS: You know, as long as I am well that is the main thing. I don't want to be a  
222 burden to myself, number 1 and especially not to the children. So I, as much  
223 as it would be nice to live with them later on and they keep saying, "well you'll  
224 stay with us" I hope I won't. Really, I sincerely hope I won't. I want to keep  
225 my independence. I like being independent and that way, you know, it does  
226 make you aware of the fact that you've got to remain well and focused on  
227 things and so I don't want to live with them, let's put it that way. So I hope  
228 that never happens. I hope I'll be able to look after myself. You know I joke  
229 sometimes and say, "oh my G-d what I burden I would be if I got Alzheimers  
230 but never mind I won't know about it! So that's ok, so whatever they do, that's  
231 all right." But as long as I can do for myself, oh yes. Because I enjoy being on  
232 my own, really I do. There are times when R does a show and he has to be  
233 away for a day or two, here or there, it doesn't bother me at all. Early on in  
234 the marriage also, you know, he had to be away a lot and I'm quite ok with  
235 that. I notice a lot of people aren't, but I like to have to time just for me. To  
236 me, that's important. So I would like to remain independent. That's how I see  
237 it as being independent, looking after myself, you know, not being a burden  
238 on the kids. I know also that I will never be on my own without them. They  
239 will always be there for me. They really are the most amazing children. They  
240 are very courageous, very courageous kids.

241 DB: To know that you would have them there, that's a very comforting thing from a  
242 support point of view. (MS: Oh yes, I know). You're not afraid that you'd ever  
243 be alone which is a terrifying thought. I think it is a terrifying thing.

244 MS: Oh no. And what about these poor people who are on their own? You know,  
245 and their children live overseas and they don't see them. That's awful, that's  
246 really awful. At least my son who does live overseas is here all the time,  
247 sometimes twice a month. So, you know, I never feel deprived of him either.  
248 But I do know I will be ok, ja, I do. I would like R around as long as possible.  
249 I really would. Because, you know, we really enjoy being with each other.

250 DB: How old is he now?

251 MS: He is 67.

252 DB: So there's just a slight age difference between you.

253 MS: Just a slight difference, yes, and he also takes care. He's got a bit of a  
254 tummy but it's still from the cortisone. And he does Pilates and he walks  
255 everyday and he's very responsible and as I say, he hasn't had a drink for 42  
256 years, and he doesn't smoke. So neither of us smoke or drink so I think that  
257 also is a help to ageing. Because I think smokers really look ... smokers,  
258 people who drink, people who drug, really look terrible after a while, don't  
259 they?

260 DB: Yes. And talking about that, because I was dying for you to get to that  
261 subject, in terms of the way you look, and in terms of appearance. You are  
262 someone who, firstly, always looks very glamorous (MS: oh thank you, you're  
263 very sweet). No you do, you always look lovely. And I think about the career  
264 that you're in, the gyming and the physical and the body and you said fashion  
265 earlier, I wonder about how you feel about the appearance side of things.

266 MS: Ja, I like to look nice but I have to tell you I hate, with a passion, shopping! I  
267 absolutely hate it. Yes, I like what you have in the shops but it's to go and  
268 fetch them that I don't like! So, you know, I would say that I would be more  
269 fashionable if I hit Sandton City and Hyde Park. Trust me, if I go to a  
270 shopping centre it's because I've got to go there for something. Ja, but it is  
271 important. I don't, I would really not like to put on huge amounts of weight

272 and let myself go and like some people I know say, “oh well so what, I’m in  
273 my 60’s so bugger it, I’m just going to relax.” But I am careful about what I eat.  
274 I am a vegetarian. Today it would be a choice I would make. When I first  
275 became a vegetarian about 30 something years ago I had no choice in the  
276 matter. Everytime I had anything like meat, fish, chicken to eat, I got violently  
277 ill. So I became, I won’t say allergic but I got sick, so that’s why I left it. But  
278 now today I would make the conscious choice. I think that’s important, you  
279 know, how much to eat and when to eat. And I also believe that what you eat  
280 at night and go to bed on is what you wake up with the next morning. So I like  
281 to do light at night. But eat healthily. Oh yes, definitely eat healthily. Ja, so I  
282 don’t want to be fat. Definitely not. I didn’t want to be as thin as I was last  
283 year, but that was unavoidable and so just to be comfortable, to be at the  
284 weight that I feel ok at, is for me.

285 DB: When you talk about last year, because I know that you weren’t well. You  
286 had a heart problem (MS: Ja). Did you have a heart attack?

287 MS: No. I didn’t. 7 years ago (very long pause)...

288 DB: And again, if you feel uncomfortable answering anything, just tell me. I don’t  
289 want to pry.

290 MS: No, I don’t mind. If you’d asked me maybe 25, 30 years ago I might have not  
291 answered everything, but no, no I’m fine about everything now, really and  
292 truly. 7 years ago I went for a check up. R insisted. He said, “look what  
293 happened to me.” He had a heart attack and he said you’ve got to go for a  
294 check up. So eventually I did. And I said to him, “you know you’re making a  
295 fool of yourself sending me to a specialist for an appointment because I’m so  
296 healthy and I exercise 6 days a week” and I was! I was fantastic. Anyway he  
297 said “please go” so I did, and everything was fine and then they discovered I  
298 had a fibrulating heart. And he said, “no you’re going to have to see a  
299 cardiologist.” And he said to me that 10 years before that, if I had presented  
300 myself with the condition I have, they would have written about me in the  
301 medical journal because it is amazing that I was fit the way I was. And that if I  
302 wasn’t fit I would have stood in line to have a stroke. So I was put onto  
303 medication and I had to go to see the cardiologist every 6 months. And he  
304 said, “you have a collapsing valve besides the inflammation and eventually  
305 we are going to have to either repair it or replace it.” So it didn’t seem quite  
306 as soon as it happened and I think maybe because I was so hugely stressed  
307 when R was ill for those 3 months (*R had another heart attack*). Maybe it  
308 speeded it up, I don’t know, I haven’t asked, you know, immaterial. So I went  
309 to him and he said, “I’m sorry the time has come and we have to do it now.”  
310 And I said to him, “I don’t have a single symptom.” And he said to me, “that’s  
311 why we have to do it now when you’re asymptomatic so you can get through it  
312 easily and comfortably.” So we did it. The surgeon came to see me and he  
313 said, “I have to just tell you one thing. No surgery is without risk.” So I said,  
314 “fine.” I went in for the op and they said to me first prize would be a repair. A  
315 replacement would definitely be a second prize. So the op went superbly. It  
316 was a repair. They thought it wouldn’t be. They said I was too far gone.  
317 They though it would be a replacement, but it wasn’t. It was a repair and that  
318 was wonderful. As they were beginning to sew me up, the cardiologist said,  
319 “look on the screen, the heart is bleeding.” So the heart perforated and bled  
320 and truly it was touch and go. And what was meant to be a three and a half  
321 hour op turned into a nine hour op. And they had phoned the family from the  
322 theatre and said, “good news, it’s a repair. She’s fantastic. Be here in an  
323 hour’s time, (which was half past four in the afternoon) and you’ll be able to  
324 see her as she goes into ICU.” And the poor family came and they sat there  
325 until after 9pm when the surgeon came in and said, “it’s touch and go. If she  
326 bleeds again, I’ll only have time to phone you. Go home. Please don’t stay

327 here. Go home." He stayed with me all night, which was wonderful. I know  
328 this has nothing to do with anything.

329 DB: It's fine.

330 MS: But the fact is, oh yes there is something because the fact is they said that  
331 they were dealing with a woman whose body was very, very much younger  
332 than her years, and that's what pulled me through. So there you are. So it  
333 was, thank G-d for the exercise. I always used to say I exercise for my mind  
334 because I feel better. Then I don't feel down or anything because exercise is  
335 brilliant for your mind. But, here it was. It saved my life. It actually saved my  
336 life because the body was so much younger. So there you are. So it is all to  
337 do with ageing at the end of the day, it really is.

338 DB: It is. And just the way, you know, just from your speaking, I am getting a lot of  
339 ideas about you as a person. So you really are filling in the gaps for me and I  
340 really do appreciate your sharing this. And from what you're talking about,  
341 you were in a situation where, as you say, it was touch and go (MS: Ja) and  
342 when you came out, how did that affect you, the idea that you might have  
343 died? This is a very personal question to ask anyone about death (MS: no,  
344 no, no). If you can, and if you're willing to tell me how you feel about that, in  
345 terms of fear, acceptance or ...

346 MS: Well first of all I was unconscious for 5 days and on the ventilator. Anyway so  
347 when I finally came around in ICU. I couldn't believe what they had said, you  
348 know, that I was out of it for all those days. And everything was fine. I was  
349 really upbeat and happy in the hospital and didn't think about it. And with the  
350 recovery, I must tell you that there were times, but they were so ... only from  
351 time to time, at least it wasn't that feeling everyday that I was going to die, but  
352 from time to time I thought, my G-d, maybe I am going to die. And then a  
353 girlfriend of mine brought me the most wonderful articles that Max Du Preez,  
354 you know the journalist, had written. And he had a triple bypass and he was,  
355 you know, in the same boat. He also nearly keeled over. And he described a  
356 lot of the symptoms saying that fear of dying, but he really had it badly. I must  
357 admit I didn't. I just had, you know, from time to time, the flashes.  
358 Sometimes now, if I have a dip in blood pressure or blood sugar and I'll think,  
359 "Oh my G-d, maybe I'm going to die." But it is not my constant companion by  
360 any means. I've had all the check-ups and I'm fine, I really and truly am fine.  
361 And I take my medication so that's ok. But I don't have those feelings  
362 anymore. The only feelings that I do have are I must be well for my family  
363 and for me. I don't want to put my boys through that again. I really don't.  
364 They've seen it twice now. Once with their father, 9 months before with their  
365 father, and here with their mother. I mean really, a bit hard on them, don't you  
366 think?

367 DB: On all of you.

368 MS: Ja, on all of us, but R saw it only once and I saw it only once. They had the  
369 both of us. So ja. What else did you ask me about that?

370 DB: I was asking you about, you know, I think it is hard to ask anyone about dying  
371 because I think it is deeply personal and often very difficult to talk about. If  
372 you do think about it, is it something that is something that is fearful, or is it  
373 something that you try not to think about?

374 MS: No way. I don't try not to think about it. If the thought comes then I'll deal  
375 with it. Ja, I just deal with it as is, but no I don't think I am going to die. I  
376 actually think I'm going to live too long!

377 DB: I think from what you're saying, about your outlook is that the idea of being  
378 healthy is the most important thing, and being healthy for yourself and for your  
379 children, to continue to do the things you do.

380 MS: Yes, definitely.

381 DB: If you think about ageing, very much what I'm interested in is the idea of  
382 satisfaction, life satisfaction. It seems that from everything you've said that  
383 you are satisfied with how things are

384 MS: Yes, I'm hugely satisfied.

385 DB: That's more than satisfied.

386 MS: Yes.

387 DB: Also you've answered some of my questions because some of my questions  
388 are about when did you feel more satisfied or less satisfied or was there a  
389 period in your life that you look at where you feel you were either happier or  
390 less happy?

391 MS: Well it's all to do with the family, you know when the husband was so ill for  
392 those three months, I definitely was not happy, that is for sure. And, you  
393 know, when the children, my younger son for example, had his eye problems  
394 – he had a stick poked into his eye on two occasions. And I want to tell you  
395 something, that was the worst. Anything that happens to your children ... no  
396 but he's fine, he is absolutely fine, thank G-d. So it's always been that sort of  
397 thing, but I can't remember feeling as sad ever as I did when R was so ill. Oh,  
398 that was awful. But he's recovered, you know. I am really, on the whole,  
399 very, very content. And if there's something that does make me unhappy, I  
400 do think about it, I really do, I've learnt to do that now. But that's only after a  
401 long time, you know you learn. So that's why you'll see a lot of people coming  
402 to you for that sort of thing and we see it a lot in the ALANON programme.  
403 We get quite a few psychologists who come to, particularly the adult child  
404 group, really and truly. Because we find that many people who have grown  
405 up in that kind of dysfunctional home go out and learn about it and want to  
406 help others in similar circumstances.

407 DB: It makes sense. And even in what you were saying earlier about being part of  
408 the group, it seemed to me that you also felt that you could help other people  
409 (MS: Oh I do) and that that was giving you a lot of meaning.

410 MS: You know, that's why it's very unique the 12 step programme. It is because  
411 you don't just take, take, take. You also give to others, you know. If we have  
412 new people coming, or people that have been around a long time, I mean I  
413 sponsor in the group quite a few people. So if they have anything that they  
414 particularly want to talk about that is very personal and private, they won't  
415 mention it in a meeting but they will speak to their sponsor. And that's given  
416 me great satisfaction, just to be a member, you know, of the group and to  
417 receive what we do. And I feel, always, much better about myself when I've  
418 been, you know. And, it's terrific. I've been to, for example, a friend of ours  
419 started in Brentwood in California the largest AA group in the world. And they  
420 have something like, they meet on Wednesday nights, and their membership  
421 is something like 1500 people who come every Wednesday night, every  
422 Wednesday. I mean they have people in the car park, you know, who tell you  
423 where to park and it is all run very smoothly. But can you imagine 1500? And  
424 I went to the AA meeting there which was unbelievable. And I had my  
425 youngest son with me because we know this man very well and when he  
426 comes to speak in South Africa he stays with us. And my youngest son said,  
427 "oh my G-d, if ever I wanted to meet people and meet the best looking birds, I  
428 must come here!" Because they do, they have a lot of the actors who go  
429 there and Academy Award winners that I've met there. And really it is very  
430 interesting, you know, alcoholism has no respect of age at all. And you know,  
431 we feel that it is 1 in 10 people who has a problem. So, there you are. So  
432 I've met some really exciting people there too.

433 DB: It tells you anyway about how difficult it is, in some ways, about all the  
434 pressure is on people, the lives we lead and ...

435 MS: Ja, but we do have a choice, don't forget, especially if we've been shown or  
436 placed on the right path.

437 DB: Hopefully you have been given the tools (MS: yes) by your family (MS: yes)  
438 and it sounds like what you've given to your sons, and that you have had to  
439 get for yourself later.

440 MS: Yes it's true.

441 DB: Did you ever drink?

442 MS: No, no.

443 DB: Did it turn you off totally having seen it?

444 MS: Ja, ja, I think it turned me off totally. But having said that. I like, if I go out for  
445 dinner, in Winter, I love a sherry. That's about the ... sometimes I'll maybe  
446 have 2 beer shandies in a year. But no, I just don't like the taste of it and I  
447 don't push it anyway. I think that the children of alcoholics maybe should stay  
448 away from it.

449 DB: I think you're very sensible because perhaps there is a genetic predisposition  
450 or ...

451 MS: Definitely, 55% of the children of alcoholics become alcoholics.

452 DB: You would know the stats more than me.

453 MS: Ja, so there's more than a half (sighs).

454 DB: Well done.

455 MS: Not at all, it is easy because of the programme, really it is easy.

456 DB: It sounds like there is a lot of meaning ...

457 MS: There is

458 DB: That's the main thing (MS: ja) that I think of when I listen to you, that there's  
459 so much in your life (MS: Ja) that seems to be meaningful.

460 MS: Right. And you know what, my bestest friends come from there as well, they  
461 really do. You know we've spoken about very personal and private things in  
462 those groups. Not all of us, I mean, you know, I won't share a lot of things in  
463 the group that I've kept personal, but I will speak to somebody else, you  
464 know, my sponsors. But our friendships are terrific because we understand  
465 each other without having to know that much about each other. And I've been  
466 lucky enough to go overseas several times to the world conventions of both  
467 ALANON and AA. And, you know, what's so amazing is that so many people  
468 that speak different languages ... I mean at the convention we went to last  
469 year which was in Toronto, they had Spanish speaking groups, Japanese,  
470 Chinese, I can't even remember, German, everything, even Icelandic. They  
471 even had a meeting in their language. And even though we speak different  
472 languages, the feelings are the same, the experience the same. I'm sure you  
473 know that. That common thread. It is like pregnant women, isn't it? You  
474 know, you also have that common thread with another pregnant woman, she  
475 knows really how you feel! Ja, so the friendships are also hugely important.  
476 And I feel you've got to also keep your mind active if you want to stay young.  
477 I don't play Bridge yet, but I suppose I'll have to learn one day! (laughs). But I  
478 really think that you do have to keep your mind, you know, busy. A bit of  
479 studying, which I don't know how you do it, I struggle, but anyway I do try.

480 DB: What do you study?

481 MS: Well you know I went overseas last year also for the World Exercise  
482 Convention and you come back with much to study, much.

483 DB: So it is constant.

484 MS: It is constant, ja, and it is good.

485 DB: Learning the newest techniques ...

486 MS: Ja, and it is important you know.

487 DB: I don't know when you'd have time to study. You seem like a very busy  
488 person.

489 MS: I am but I like it, it is nice. But I also like to be non-busy, as I say, and do my  
490 own thing. Sunday is my big day for the newspapers and speaking to  
491 nobody. Ja, really.

492 DB: Any other thoughts?

493 MS: I'll think of everything when I go home! (laughs) Ja.

494 DB: Well that's not going to help me. (laughs)

495 DB: In terms of how people relate to you ... I mean, from what you're saying, it  
496 almost seems like an idiotic question! Because, from what you're saying it is  
497 about sharing something in common rather than people relating to you in a  
498 different way because of your being a certain age?

499 MS: Ok, now R would answer that one. I haven't experienced that one. R says  
500 the minute you become grey, people treat you differently. And I think that is  
501 true, I really and truly do because what he believes, I haven't, you know, I  
502 haven't ...

503 DB: You haven't experienced that? Because you don't look like an "old" (MS: yes)  
504 (*I gesture inverted commas in the air*), not that I think you're old, by the way.

505 MS: No. I know what you mean. And to answer your question more about the  
506 way people relate to me, I know that some people think I'm too outspoken  
507 which I find, for myself, that's wonderful. I'm very glad I am able to do that. I  
508 had to speak to somebody yesterday. It was a very touchy subject. This  
509 person, I'm fond of her, in fact I'm very fond of her, but she really overstepped  
510 the line badly. So I had it out with her and the feedback I got from her was,  
511 'thank you very much for your honesty.' So I'm glad about that too. So maybe  
512 there are people that don't relate to me always that well because, you know,  
513 it's not that I go around saying, "well you know, really do this or do that." It's  
514 all to do really with either the business, with the fellowship and this was, it  
515 really affected me deep in my business, so this was, so if people think I'm not  
516 going to mind about that, they're wrong.

517 DB: Isn't this more about this is how I am, it has nothing to do with age?

518 MS: Ja

519 DB: But it also sounds like you've learnt some lessons along the way.

520 MS: Definitely, definitely. So I don't know. Maybe those are their perceptions. My  
521 perception is that I am having a great time! Oh am I having a good time,  
522 really.

523 DB: One thing that you said at the beginning was that you don't go around sortof  
524 talking about how old you are and I certainly won't say anything, this is private  
525 and confidential (MS: No, I know), but the idea that ... that you thought that it  
526 might make people feel ...

527 MS: No, not really in this (gym) group, but I have got very young ones sometimes  
528 who come at night, you know, and this is why I also like the younger  
529 instructors for them to go to. But anyway ...

530 DB: It does seem to be some kind an idea that we've got that maybe young  
531 people would come and think that maybe you're "too old" that you shouldn't  
532 be ... I mean I can't imagine anybody thinking that and boy, you nearly killed  
533 me this morning (*with the gym class*). (*MS laughs*). So in terms of fitness  
534 ... (MS: Thank you). Maybe it's about breaking stereotypes and challenging  
535 ideas ...

536 MS: Well I mean, you know, the boys and R are very proud of me. You know,  
537 being this age and doing what I do. You know, I'm not, since my operation, I  
538 am not water skiing anymore, because it would be too much ... so you know,  
539 you do, you just do things that push you a little bit, don't you think so? But  
540 that's scary stuff too, oof it's hard, but my darling R taught his mother to ski  
541 very well. But now I don't do it since the op, you know, I still can't do the  
542 push-ups. That will come, but at the moment it's not for me, not for today.  
543 Just for today I can't do it, but maybe tomorrow.

544 DB: Does it make you feel maybe somewhat limited?  
545 MS: No. You know what, that's just for today, but tomorrow is a brand new day,  
546 and I just have to be careful for today. I was going to tell you something  
547 about this ... ah it's gone out of my head.  
548 DB: You've told me some very interesting things, is there anything else that you  
549 would like to add ... do you feel very affected by the media for example, about  
550 looking young, about ...  
551 MS: You see I don't, I mean it would be nice, but it really doesn't ...maybe  
552 because I'm secure in my relationships with the family, that's probably it, so  
553 no, it doesn't. What it does affect, I think, are young people, so negatively  
554 some of the time, you know. No, I've got to the stage, truly, where I'm very  
555 comfortable with who I am, I truly am and it's taken a long time, but I'm  
556 comfortable in my own skin. There are times when I'm not comfortable in my  
557 own skin, if I, for example, don't get to my meetings and I'm overseas where  
558 they perhaps don't have an English language group. And most big cities do  
559 have ... I mean I've got a lovely group I attend in Zurich for example and there  
560 are a lot of Americans that go and people from England. So that's nice, but if  
561 I go somewhere where there aren't and I have to miss a couple of meetings, I  
562 am not always that comfortable in my own skin. I really am better off going to  
563 my meetings and well, that's my life really, you know, to do that, and to try  
564 and follow the 12 steps and to know, this is also a big one, to know that you're  
565 not responsible for somebody else's behaviour. We are all adults, we can all  
566 choose what we want and we do, don't we? But, I'm just lucky enough now to  
567 know that my choices are ok for me. But I can, you know, things can rattle  
568 me like they do for everybody, but it doesn't stay around, it doesn't last long.  
569 And as I say, I am very comfortable in my own skin. And a thing I wouldn't  
570 have liked, honestly, and I really still wouldn't like is to ever be a poor old lady.  
571 I would hate to go into my old age with no money. That I don't think I would  
572 enjoy very much. I really, don't. So freedom from financial insecurity, is for  
573 me, a big one. Because I think that would age me to death and back! Ja, if I  
574 had to worry about money. I remember I have a very close girlfriend, who is  
575 the most wonderful girl and she was a lecturer at university and she was  
576 married to a hugely rich man, truly they had millions. And then he drank and  
577 he used to hit her around a bit and I used to say to her, "come on, you've got  
578 to go for counselling. I know that you can't leave," I know that people find that  
579 hard to do and they become, some of them may even become addicted to  
580 that situation, in my experience. And I said to her, 'please get some  
581 counselling and professional help.' And she said, "oh well, it's nice to talk to  
582 you." And I said, "it is, but get some professional help because I'm not  
583 qualified to say do this and do that." And she said, "you know what, I'm ok  
584 with it just as long as I don't lose money because I never want to be poor."  
585 And do you know, that's exactly what happened to her. Ja, through no fault of  
586 his own, but his decisions were badly skewed because of the drinking and  
587 he placed money in the incorrect place and they lost absolutely everything.  
588 She lost him, she lost the money, she had to start from scratch. But I mustn't  
589 say too much about it, I don't want to be a poor old lady ... I hope I'm not  
590 going to attract that to myself the way she did!  
591 DB: It sounds like it has all been a process (MS: it is a process) an ongoing  
592 process of learning, from what you're saying ...  
593 MS: And trying to help others in similar circumstances. You know I get a lot of  
594 phonecalls from people who have maybe gone to Lifeline and Family Life  
595 Centre and then they've referred to us. And so I do get a lot of phonecalls  
596 from people in need and then I share what happened to me and then they tell  
597 me what happened to them. You know, they come to the meetings and a new  
598 life can start if you want it to, it is there.

599 DB: It sounds very much about giving.  
600 MS: Yes.  
601 DB: From what you're saying, it seems like a lot of the meaning in your life comes  
602 from helping other people (MS: yes). That it's about doing and it's about  
603 giving ...  
604 MS: Yes and about giving back what I have received. I have received in such  
605 abundance, really, Daniella, you can't believe. And that's important too, not  
606 just to talk about it, but to do something and to help where you can, really.  
607 Even if it's, well often it's financial also, the people that you know. You know,  
608 for us as a family it is very important to try and help the people that you  
609 personally know. You can't help everybody in the world. But, if you come  
610 across somebody who does need help, I think that is vital, I really do. I know  
611 my son has this brilliant attitude of ... I don't know if you ever saw that film, I  
612 can't remember if it was called "Pay it Forward"?  
613 DB: Yes, if you do something good for someone else ...  
614 MS: Yes but he does. He's setting up a foundation which R and I are involved with  
615 as well. If you know of any really deserving causes let me know, will you?  
616 But R (son) expects them to do something for somebody else, which is a  
617 good idea. I think it really is a good idea.  
618 DB: And this wonderful son of yours, and the other wonderful son of yours, it must  
619 have come from home, come from what they learnt from you and your  
620 husband.  
621 MS: I hope so. They've seen all the good things that their dad has done over the  
622 years.  
623 DB: And their mom ... their modest mom, I'm sure!  
624 MS: But as I say, we can't help everybody in the world but we certainly can help if  
625 we know about it. I think that's terrible when you turn your back where you  
626 could do something, however small, don't you think so?  
627 DB: Absolutely, but I also think it's very special because I think sometimes we get  
628 so caught up in our own lives and actually we live in a world where everybody  
629 is for themselves. And there are so many people asking for money, or  
630 whatever that it is quite easy to become hard about it and think it is enough.  
631 What you're also talking about, it seems, is that it feels in your case what has  
632 kept you young and given you this really positive outlook is this connection to  
633 other people (MS: mm). Not just to your family, but it seems you have spread  
634 your net and it has included so many ...  
635 MS: Yes. It is true. So what else did you want to ask?  
636 DB: Well, maybe we'll stop because to just do it artificially to fill up one hour ...If  
637 there is anything you can add, any words of wisdom, any last things that you  
638 think about ageing, getting older?  
639 MS: But you know what? I think in a way it is nice getting older because that focus  
640 on yourself maybe is not so great anymore, you know what I mean?  
641 Because the person I spoke to, as an example, yesterday and she said, "oh  
642 you know, I have been so terribly jealous of so and so." And I thought well  
643 they are of an age and they are competing maybe for the same thing. It is so  
644 nice when you're not having to do that anymore. I don't know, I think that.  
645 Every age is special but we just have to accept it and accept it gracefully if  
646 you can. And, no, I really am happy with it. It doesn't mean I won't go and  
647 have a face lift one day, when I've got time, I probably will. But I haven't got  
648 the time at the moment (laughs) and frankly I'm terrified of it. I'd be so scared  
649 to have another op. But, you know, I'm not against that sort of thing, anything  
650 to make you look younger. But it is from within, isn't it?  
651 DB: That is what I'm hearing you say. Maybe what you said ... you know, I'm 38  
652 and I'll be 39 in June and I think that when I talk to women my age where 40  
653 is kind of coming up, there's something about turning 40 that for a lot of

654 people is a little bit scary. (MS: A milestone). It is a milestone. And when I  
655 speak to people who are older, I spoke to a lady who is 47, it seems like you  
656 kind of get to there and then you get over it and then you accept it (MS:  
657 definitely). But at the moment it's about fighting, at the moment it is about oh  
658 my G-d I don't want to get old (MS: yes). I don't want to ... I'm prepared to  
659 get older, but I don't want to look older! (MS: Yes, true) And I wonder about  
660 that. I wonder whether that is what has drawn me to the subject that amongst  
661 the younger women that I know, it is so scary, you have to fight it. (MS: Yes)  
662 and you watch 'Extreme Makeover' and do Extreme Makeover! And what you  
663 are talking about is so much bigger, that is what I've found with my research.  
664 Where I thought people would be so focused on how they looked and the  
665 physical side. You are talking about lifelong processes that are unfolding that  
666 don't really matter what age you are.

667 MS: No. True. But it's lovely to be this age. You can look at everything and you  
668 can say, "that's beautiful, she's beautiful, he's beautiful. " It doesn't matter,  
669 you know, you're not in the same arena any longer, wouldn't you say?

670 DB: Maybe, and that doesn't make you feel some kind of longing or "I wish I  
671 was."?

672 MS: No. All I have to think about were all those feelings, those feelings of fear and  
673 not being good enough. Oh no, uh uh. No.

674 DB: So there is an acceptance (MS: Oh ja). And I think that in some ways, that's  
675 the media. Any article you pick up says "reverse the signs ... hide the visible  
676 signs of ageing ... fight them to death." That is what our adverts say. That's  
677 the message, "don't give in." (MS: I know). It's going to happen anyway.  
678 And it is lovely to talk to you and see that you're the same person, a wiser  
679 person who has learnt ... (MS: Ja, I hope). So, maybe it is not fair to say, "the  
680 same person?" maybe you are a "changed person", you, who you are inside.

681 MS: True. You know, my dear, I have got the most marvellous book at home  
682 which a friend gave me, a long time ago, when I was about 32 or something.  
683 And it's called ... oh what is it called? It's about growing old ... but it is great  
684 fun. I must try and find it for you (DB: I'd love to see it) because the things  
685 that you can now do, you can actually make more of a fool of yourself now!  
686 So what? People might not even notice, you know. If you and I went out  
687 together they'd look at you because you're young and gorgeous. (*I protest*)  
688 No you are, you are, you're lovely. And, so, I don't know, I just think that  
689 there are more things that you can do and get away with it! And if you make a  
690 fool of yourself, so what? Oh yes, I remember the name of it (*the book*), it is  
691 called "Old is great". Ja, and it is. It is just little quotes all along, but it's great.

692 DB: It is about pressure in a way. That there seems to be more pressure on you  
693 when you're younger, that you should look a certain way, that you should look  
694 like a model and be perfect. (MS: definitely) And you're saying, in some  
695 ways, that it seems like a bit of the pressure goes. I think I feel scared of  
696 being invisible. I think I get the idea that what happens when you get to 40 is  
697 that you are no longer visible. Which is not about feeling I am so beautiful but  
698 there is something about feeling noticed. (MS: Very good point, ja). And I  
699 think that the idea of not being noticed at all scares me and maybe that is  
700 vanity. Maybe it's just what I'm used to?

701 MS: No, nobody likes to be invisible.

702 DB: I don't think you could ever be invisible because I think that you are striking  
703 and I think that people look at you and think there's this slim lady with blond  
704 hair and blue eyes and you shine, you do. (MS: thank you) So, I don't believe  
705 you could be invisible, but I think that there are women who become invisible.  
706 (MS: Oh definitely.) I don't want to be invisible in any way.

707 MS: But then in a way you have to feel good about yourself, haven't you, and  
708 you've got to do things to make yourself feel ok and make you feel younger,  
709 like the exercise

710 DB: Well I'm going to gym forever! Thank you so much. (MS: pleasure). It has  
711 been so special (MS: pleasure, pleasure my darling). You know I thought  
712 about it afterwards, I think that the people that I chose to interview are people  
713 who I look at as ageing really well. So, that says something about me and my  
714 fears. But, I think that that's the thing about being healthy, being  
715 independent, so that really is what is important (MS: yes), not the few lines or  
716 the grey hairs or the whatever, it is about having independence and having an  
717 identity (MS: that's right), not being a burden and not feeling useless. (MS:  
718 Sure) Because there is an idea sometimes that some "old people", 90 year  
719 old, old people, are forgotten about in an old-age home, treated with  
720 disrespect, not having any value, and that terrifies me.

721 MS: No, I would really not like that. I wouldn't like that at all. Do you ever go to  
722 the Old Age Home.

723 DB: I do, my husband's granny used to be in an Old Age Home, which was so  
724 institutional and it was so desperately sad when we used to go and see her. I  
725 have a 94-year-old step-granny who I absolutely adore and she is at  
726 Randjeslaagte, which is rather a nice place.

727 MS: It is a very nice place.

728 DB: Originally I thought about talking to her, she really inspired me, but sadly this  
729 year, I have noticed a change in her (MS: really?) I've noticed that she ...

730 MS: But you know, it comes from being there ...

731 DB: I agree, maybe it is a different mindset, maybe people just give up and wait to  
732 die?

733 MS: Oh you do, which is why they refer to it as "G-d's Waiting Room" don't they? I  
734 was just thinking as well, every line that we have, has come there through our  
735 experiences.

736

## APPENDIX E: Interview with Catherine

1  
2  
3 CS arrives and can hardly walk because she had her first session with a personal  
4 trainer yesterday.

5  
6 DB: Where to start? Maybe, what is the most important thing that comes to mind  
7 when you think about ageing?

8 CS: It's just an acceptance of ageing, an acceptance of your body changes more  
9 than anything else. It's not a mind thing. Your body goes and suddenly from  
10 being a size 10 you find you have grown (laughs) and it's nothing that you do,  
11 it just happens and maybe it's just something that happens in your forties that  
12 suddenly your whole body changes and to me that was very difficult matter.  
13 It's the body change, the image of the body changes, the way you dress had  
14 to change, all that had to change to stay with the ageing body, but your mind  
15 was different. Your mind didn't match your ageing body (laughs) and that  
16 took a while, it took me a few years ...

17 DB: When do you think it happened?

18 CS: It definitely started in my forties. For me the very big thing when it actually  
19 started, I had a miscarriage when S was 2½ and my body never came back  
20 after that. What was interesting was that my body started looking pregnant.  
21 The baby was due September and a friend of mine said to me the baby  
22 should have been born by now and that was when my weight went down and  
23 my body changed. One of the teachers at S's nursery, whose class S had  
24 been in before said to me a few months before, "when is your baby due?" ..  
25 (inaudible) I was out to there (indicates) my whole body had changed and I  
26 said to her I had a miscarriage and you actually couldn't see because my  
27 body hadn't gone down until the 9 month period was up. I think it was through  
28 that I don't think my body had come back. So it was having to deal with that,  
29 having to deal with that age. That was hard, but being an older mother as  
30 such, I had to deal with. The body's not coming back ... not going back to  
31 work, so what you take for granted suddenly that was a big thing. I think I  
32 only really came to terms with it last year.

33 DB: With your body change?

34 CS: That's how long it took. I still walked into a shop and went to the size 10 rack  
35 and nothing fits and (laughs) there's no point in going to that rack. It was still,  
36 you know it seems your mental picture of your body hasn't changed. You're  
37 still picking up clothes that would have fitted that no longer do and no longer  
38 would look good on the body that you're carrying. So that was a big thing and  
39 only last year did I really become comfortable with the weight. It's not going  
40 to look that great but I'm hot, I'm not covering up these arms. You understand  
41 what I mean? I'm dressing for this me now as opposed to that me then and  
42 not apologising for it. That took a long while too.

43 DB: This also might be a little bit personal and you don't have to answer it if you  
44 don't want to. When you think about having had the miscarriage in the first  
45 place, that it was difficult and that our body was ... did it feel like your body  
46 was letting you down in a way, that you wanted to be having another child ...?

47 CS: It didn't feel that I had let my body down. It wasn't a planned pregnancy. I felt  
48 like I had let the child down, that my body couldn't carry it. It was very much  
49 that kind of feeling. My body's let me down I couldn't carry the child to full  
50 term. So it was a totally different feeling. (inaudible) the child was around  
51 me, I saw him I knew him. It was a totally different relationship, I think, to if  
52 you're just carrying and you don't see the being you're carrying, you're not  
53 with the being. So I had to come to that kind of acceptance as well which was  
54 a totally different acceptance than to a body kind of acceptance, a spiritual

55 acceptance. To me there was that rejection kind of feeling as opposed to my  
56 body's old, my body can't do it. Because I really believe your body can do it  
57 no matter what age. If you can fall pregnant you can carry. My one  
58 grandmother had her youngest at 45. Do you understand what I mean? To  
59 me it's not an issue whether the body can, it's not a body issue. For me it  
60 was that whole spiritual rejection kind of issue. I don't believe that your body  
61 can't (inaudible), for me it wasn't that, it was just an acceptance that body  
62 you took for granted and didn't have to work that much to keep suddenly just  
63 went.

64 DB: From what you're saying, it feels like where your mind is and your body is  
65 there is kind of a mismatch in a way, like how you feel about yourself?

66 CS: There was, there was in terms of which you can get up and just get dressed  
67 or walk into a shop and just buy the ten. You have to change, I had to change  
68 my whole style of dressing and concept of my body and change that to meet  
69 my mind. I walked into a shop once with a friend of mine and they only  
70 stocked clothes upto a size 16 and suddenly you're taking a size 14! You  
71 understand what I mean? Your whole concept of ... you have to go through  
72 this whole thing of 'I'm fat' and I think coming from a South African  
73 background which is very, very body conscious it took a while to get used to  
74 it. In England it's not that bad because everybody's different. There's no ... if  
75 you see someone who's anorexic, you look, but here unfortunately there are  
76 too many people who are anorexic. If you see someone who is skinny then  
77 you look. Most people there are ... they don't carry this concept of 'I have to  
78 be or look perfect.' To me it's weird when I see someone who's too thin, you  
79 understand what I mean, because of what I've seen and that kind of thing,  
80 you know. To me I look at someone and I can see that they've got problems  
81 and they're trying to control something and they're hiding behind it or they  
82 think that looking so unhealthy is attractive to them. But looking so  
83 unattractive to me shows the problem with that whole thing with image. So I  
84 mean I had to move in that whole South African context of you've got to look  
85 just like this and to come to terms with that. So your body image, until you get  
86 used to it, it does restrict you. (inaudible) then you don't fit it.

87 DB: So now how do you feel?

88 CS: Now I'm actually feeling ok, now I'm feeling like this is the body you've got,  
89 but it took a long time to get there. This is the body you've got, you're not  
90 going to have that body that you once had as a 20 year old. You don't want  
91 to have the body you had as a 20 year-old. So there's a bit of fat on your  
92 arms, who cares? Or there's a bit of ... you understand what I'm saying? It  
93 doesn't matter. Then I went off to gym yesterday, and I suppose I'll struggle  
94 with that again for a while, won't I? (laughs). But it's that, that whole thing of  
95 it actually doesn't matter. This is my age and this is my body and it's ok let  
96 the age and the body be the same.

97 DB: This is something which I find really interesting because 'being' for women -  
98 and I'm not saying anything really "wow" - but for us it is so much tied up with  
99 how we look that is so important about ageing, and weight issues (CS: yes)  
100 and looking young (CS: yes), and looking sexy (CS: yes) are what in our  
101 society are regarded as what give you value as a woman.

102 CS: Yes. But the sexiness doesn't have to be 'I'm not sexy at this size.' I don't  
103 even see it as looking sexy when I look at someone too thin. When I look at  
104 someone too thin I see this as what don't they have as opposed to what do  
105 they have. So I think it's about being happy with yourself and projecting that  
106 out which I think comes with age. It doesn't come with being young. Because  
107 then we haven't really worked out who we are. As we accept that then maybe  
108 we rethink what sexy means, or rethink what beautiful means.

109 DB: But it's very tied up with who we are.

110 CS: Ja so we've got to come to terms with who we are to understand and deal  
111 with the physical.

112 DB: Do you think anything helped or in terms of the process is there anything that  
113 comes up about this time?

114 CS: I think just time and certain acceptance. Not fighting, learning to love yourself  
115 in a different body or love the new body as opposed to taking the other one  
116 for granted. So it really is, it's an acceptance or maybe a maturity that comes  
117 in. I don't have to have this amazing body to be happy with who I am.

118 DB: If you think about the future and getting older?

119 CS: I don't mind getting older. You're getting older but with a lot more wisdom and  
120 hopefully you're getting older with more enjoyment. You do change, and the  
121 way you see life changes because I can go out there, and I can do, and I can  
122 enjoy. As opposed to I have the perfect this or that, or this is the image I have  
123 to portray in order to do that, which is nonsense. I don't need that I can go  
124 out and be who I want to be. The one thing that the whole body thing did was  
125 attack the self-confidence. It took a while for the whole confidence thing to  
126 come back but I think that confidence thing is also related to image and  
127 achievement and for me we moved to the UK and I stopped working and  
128 became a housewife and my whole mindset around that had to change. And  
129 my being a housewife as you know you do your housework, you do whatever  
130 chores have to be done or whatever as opposed to here. So it's not a  
131 meaningless existence, it's a different existence. I reached the stage where I  
132 thought bugger this, I don't care if my house is clean or dirty, it's enough, I've  
133 got to be me. And you have to get out, and you have to do things, and you  
134 find things to do that you enjoy. Because your whole life changes and your  
135 whole focus has to change and maybe that contributed towards, well definitely  
136 contributed towards your whole state. And I didn't mind if my house was clean  
137 or dirty as opposed to then trying to keep everything spotless and clean.

138 DB: What did you do before then?

139 CS: I was in recruitment. I've been in recruitment for years and years. I opened  
140 my own company and then we moved to the UK when I was pregnant. And  
141 then S was born and suddenly you're in this whole routine. You can't get  
142 another job because this is what it's going to pay you to find someone to look  
143 after your child and your whole salary is going to go because you're starting  
144 off again. So it's not like you're going in at a senior position so you stay home  
145 and you have to deal with that whole situation. And I was very lucky because  
146 I got friendly with older mothers and they were going through what I had gone  
147 through. So it helps, it does help. Because it's a whole identity crisis and  
148 their bodies changed. I don't think any of us have perfect bodies anymore  
149 (laughs) so it was ok with it there was a familiarity with that. And the  
150 conversation never really revolved around bodies. It revolved around this  
151 whole identity change. When we first moved there and S was 6 months old, I  
152 met a friend of mine who was South African. She laughed at me at a  
153 shopping mall, I arrived there in a suit (laughs) pushing a baby. That was the  
154 part of identity I had left behind and I had to deal with the fact that it was no  
155 longer you know ... you understand what I'm saying. I've given that suit away  
156 now because I don't think it can go over my one thigh but then that was life,  
157 that was what it was.

158 DB: And that's how you felt you needed to appear?

159 CS: Ja, that was what I was missing and that was what I needed that day. So it's  
160 very much changing identities and the body having changed with this whole  
161 process. That's maybe why it took so long. I only went back to work there  
162 just before we came back to South Africa. I went back into recruitment. It  
163 took me a while to get a job because of my age and apparently because when  
164 you're a mother you lose your brain.

165 DB: That was the perception of the employers or your perception?  
166 CS: Theirs, of the employers.  
167 DB: Then how old were you, you say 'because of your age'?  
168 CS: I'll try work it out. I was already, I must have been 44. That's because of their  
169 perception. Once I was in the job, of course the perceptions were different.  
170 What was interesting was that in the job, my weight dropped. It was like  
171 regaining that old identity as a career woman.  
172 DB: The whole idea of bodies and how we feel about ourselves, and as you say,  
173 confidence, that might change because if I think about comfort eating for  
174 example ...  
175 CS: It's not even comfort eating. You don't have time when you're working and  
176 you're busy and you're productive and you are doing. And you actually don't  
177 have the time. I mean it doesn't enter my head. I mean there are women  
178 there who work there, or here, or wherever in the world who get fat because  
179 they work and they eat at the same time. I don't.  
180 DB: I'm just thinking of what I said and looking at my own perception like I talked  
181 about comfort eating. You're talking about bodies changing naturally as you  
182 get older and it doesn't even have to do necessarily with eating more. It just  
183 has to do with whatever – hormonal changes, body changes etc. I'm  
184 immediately saying eating more (CS: ja), that's what I'm thinking (CS: ja) and  
185 I've just realised what I said.  
186 CS: But there are women in the workplace who can eat all day. There are some  
187 women who do and some women who don't. It's just a different approach.  
188 But for me, ja, the weight came down again, but the body was not the same  
189 body anyway. It was gone.  
190 DB: I want to ask you something, by way of background, and maybe it will fit in  
191 here  
192 CS: Ja  
193 DB: How long have you been married?  
194 CS: This time?  
195 DB: I didn't know you'd been married before. Not so much marriage, but how  
196 long have you been together.  
197 CS: This time 9 years. I married late. The first time I married I was 27 going on  
198 28. I was 30 when I asked for the divorce and 31 when the divorce came  
199 through. We still are very friendly. It was ... we took the good and discarded  
200 the bad and we still are very good friends. He lives in LA still. We were living  
201 there in LA and then I came back here and for a few years I had a very deep  
202 and intense relationship with someone a lot older than I was and then that  
203 ended and then over a year later I met Mark. I fell pregnant before we got  
204 married because I was already 38 and you know you're told your body is  
205 going to take a few years to fall pregnant, it didn't, it took 2 weeks from the  
206 time of trying. And that was the situation from someone much older than I  
207 was to someone younger.  
208 DB: How much younger?  
209 CS: Three and a half years. From someone who was 16 years older than me, but  
210 do you understand what I mean? And yes my body changed with the  
211 marriage maybe because of the ageing thing as well. Whether it would have  
212 affected the body change, I think the life experiences and age sort of naturally  
213 came at that time. Just thinking in terms of my friends in the UK who are the  
214 same age as me, we've all had babies late, and given up careers late and the  
215 bodies went so it could be a whole big identity change? Or maybe our bodies  
216 just changed because as a mother you've got to be larger, I don't know.  
217 (Long pause). Well, it could be that. As a mother there's one way of  
218 mothering and when you're back into the career world you are looking another  
219 way ...but it takes you a while because you don't know where you are. Yes

220 you know you're a mother and you're doing your mothering but maybe your  
221 body needs to know that you've got to be a different shape to do it.

222 DB: You know it's very difficult because I don't want to ask you any leading  
223 questions I want you to just carry on because things just come out when  
224 you're talking.

225 CS: No, you can, just ask

226 DB: I was thinking about whether you've ever felt that being married to a slightly  
227 younger man you have any idea of how ...

228 CS: Yes, I do mother him.

229 DB: Oh, I wasn't even thinking about mothering, I was thinking about whether you  
230 felt somehow that you should look a certain way because of his being slightly  
231 younger?

232 CS: No. Your body goes that way without your even going that route.

233 DB: No, I mean whether psychologically it causes ...

234 CS: No, no, not at all. But I do mother him, I try very hard not to. Whereas you  
235 don't mother someone who is older than you. And I certainly don't feel the  
236 need to look younger for him. Maybe also because I don't look my age so  
237 maybe that's got something to do with it.

238 DB: In saying that you don't look your age, do you feel as though you look  
239 younger?

240 CS: I just feel like I'm me, do you understand what I'm saying?

241 DB: I do understand what you're saying.

242 CS: My body may look 47, do you understand what I'm saying, but when you look  
243 at me you don't see someone who looks 47.

244 DB: OK. And that sounds as though there is an outward and an inward feeling that  
245 you're talking about.

246 CS: But that's the whole thing. The inward feeling is important to you as a person.

247 DB: So what you're saying is that the inward doesn't correspond to 47, your kind  
248 of "essence". I don't know, does it have an age? Does it feel ageless?

249 CS: It doesn't have an age. That doesn't.

250 DB: Does it feel the same as its always been?

251 CS: No, its got more wisdom. From life, as such, you've got more wisdom and  
252 your view to life changes but you essentially do feel ageless. Well that's me.  
253 I feel ageless. So yes, there are more wrinkles. Maybe that's part of your  
254 ageing but I don't think that affects you inside. So maybe it's about marrying  
255 the two to realise I am ageless anyway no matter what the body does.

256 DB: Obviously this is about you which is why I am trying not to talk too much, but it  
257 never works! A lot of this comes out with women that there's the outward  
258 physical signs of ageing and there's the inner feeling and I think that's  
259 something that everyone deals with or battles with or goes through. There  
260 seem to be two very different components. It is not just the one or the other.

261 CS: For the first time in many years I am comfortable enough that I am running  
262 around without a bra. But it took a long time to get here. You understand  
263 what I mean? (Laughs) You've got the droop, you can put the pencil under  
264 the bust.

265 DB: So that sounds like confidence again as well.

266 CS: That's it. Who cares as opposed to beforehand I could do it. Now, who  
267 cares? I'm more comfortable and this is life. From that point of view, that's  
268 where I've gone back to where I felt when I was younger.

269 DB: So there was a time in between, like a process (CS: yes), a time of difficulty, a  
270 of acceptance of this body, learning to live with it and now it doesn't seem that  
271 there's just an acceptance but like an embracing. This is kind of welcome  
272 now.

273 CS: Yes.

274 DB: I wonder whether ... If I speak to women who are turning 40, there's a lot of  
275 fear. I wonder whether ... I don't want to generalise but there seems to be  
276 more anxiety about it and it is almost like a milestone and a time in your life  
277 and then you get to a stage ...

278 CS: Ja, the wrinkles come in and you can see that you've got more wrinkles and  
279 that's a big thing in ageing, you look at your body and it changes. And  
280 suddenly from 40 I've got this grey hair. But who cares? It's there, it's me, it's  
281 part of me. If I choose to dye it, I'll dye it. If I choose to run around with grey  
282 hair for months, it's also ok. It's part of me. And that whole acceptance which  
283 maybe other women won't have ... maybe it is marrying the outward with the  
284 inward and being comfortable with it all. And you take a while perhaCS to get  
285 ... I'm still not comfortable enough to wear a swimsuit, the body's changed  
286 that much.

287 DB: What would make you more comfortable?

288 CS: I don't know. But there I haven't come to terms with it. Even before when it  
289 was a younger body, I wasn't that comfortable so I've always had a big  
290 tummy. From that point of view I don't know if that has changed that much.  
291 But I'm comfortable enough to walk around without clothes on so maybe I'm  
292 going back to where I was. So I flop here and I flop there but it's ok. It's back  
293 to that me which is very much the old me.

294 DB: I'm fascinated by the fact that the first thing we think about with ageing is the  
295 way we look, for women, and weight, (CS: yes) weight which is always an  
296 issue, I think, for most women. Again, I'm generalising, but whether you're  
297 too thin or you're too fat or you'd like to lose a few kilos or put on a few kilos, it  
298 feels as though it is always there for women. And it somehow is so tied in for  
299 you with what you're saying. There's much more about the body and the size  
300 of the body, for example, than wrinkles. You're not saying to me, I hate the  
301 lines around my eyes.

302 CS: No, the lines come and when the lines come I think I accepted the lines and I  
303 accepted the grey hair easier than I accepted the body. It was a problem for  
304 me in a way. Maybe the body was ... I don't know, maybe the body was  
305 linked to the career but that kind of thing where the body went after, if you  
306 understand what I mean, that the body went after the career? I don't know ...

307 DB: In some ways what we're talking about is identity. A lot of this is about  
308 identity.

309 CS: It is. I think it is identity and I think that is what changes.

310 DB: So that sounds as though the identity goes along with ageing and the identity  
311 changes with things like having babies, becoming a mother, leaving the work  
312 place, (CS: it does), going back into the work place and that it is so linked.

313 CS: Maybe the body reflects where you are at as well, for me, reflects where I am  
314 at. (Long pause). That was a big turning point for me. I'm trying to think  
315 what else. I got tested for Menopause. It came out that I'm not.

316 DB: You tested because you were worried or ?

317 CS: My periods had changed. But I also traced it back to my body coming out of  
318 the miscarriage, my periods had changed. So I don't know if it was the stress  
319 all related to that ... no go get tested, go get tested. So I got tested and my  
320 insides are young! (laughs)

321 DB: As are your outsides!

322 CS: You understand what I'm saying the insides are younger than I look. Because  
323 the first thing I got told was that you've got the insides of a whatever year old.  
324 And the blood tests and all the tests came back saying I had. So to me that  
325 wasn't an issue. But maybe with a lot of women maybe if they are going  
326 through pre-menopause ... so I don't know, maybe the body goes with the  
327 pre-menopause. They've got another word for it now, but maybe it's all part  
328 of that. And maybe for me because I had accepted it, it was ok. So very

329 much the body is what the outside world can see as opposed to the inside  
330 which is still young and ageless ...the womb and the mind (inaudible). My  
331 periods are still strange. I used to be able to ... I never had period pain, I  
332 never had the backache and the stomach-ache, I never had anything. But  
333 from the time that I had that miscarriage I can get terrible migraines the first  
334 two days which I never had before. My body came back I used to get pains  
335 ... Growing up people used to get all these pains and I never knew them. I  
336 used to just flow in and out and have a 2-3 day period and gone. And I knew  
337 instinctively when my period was coming. I never ever had to worry and I  
338 never had floods. And maybe with the miscarriage there was something in  
339 me ... some limitations. Now I still get ... the headaches aren't as bad, some  
340 months I won't get and the flow is getting better. Before I'd have for one or  
341 two days, for years after the miscarriage, it would stop for two or three days  
342 and the period would come back. (Pause) It's all interconnected with your  
343 view of who you are with the limitations of being a woman. Maybe from this  
344 whole rejection thing with the miscarriage I looked at it that I can't carry the  
345 baby through ... You know that whole rejection, the pain, the headaches.  
346 The body grew and the pains came and the periods were disrupted. So  
347 maybe it was all part of that limitation whereas beforehand everything used to  
348 flow normally. I'd get a period every 28 days, very, very regular and very  
349 instinctively... Then it was four and a half weeks and only now, as I'm  
350 accepting everything, is the rhythm coming back ...(inaudible) an important  
351 thing with women. I'm just thinking even with these younger women who  
352 have problems with periods and problems conceiving ...

353 DB: It sounds like a whole sync thing almost (CS: ja) like you're so in sync that  
354 what you're talking about now ...

355 CS: ... we break our trust in what we are as a woman. So it's a trust in the fact  
356 that we are even that goddess and when that comes back we get ourselves in  
357 sync (inaudible). So if you speak to younger women, from the point of view of  
358 fertility, they may not see their body as being an instrument of motherhood  
359 ...because it's a sexual thing as opposed to a nurturing thing. That's part of  
360 the whole thing of going from a more sexual image to a mothering image and  
361 narrowing that off.

362 DB: If you think about Menopause and if you think about that as another stage, I  
363 don't want to say as the next stage, but another stage, how do you feel about  
364 that?

365 CS: It's ok. I'm ok with that. But thinking back to something else because you'll  
366 be interviewing someone my mother's age, from the time my mother and her  
367 friends were about 44, Menopause was in full tilt and it was this patch and this  
368 medicine and all that and hysterectomies. Remember that stage when the  
369 doctors just went in ... the knife, the knife, the knife? And somewhere along  
370 the line it obviously limited their perceptions of themselves as women

371 DB: So in some ways you are saying you are able to make more sense of it now?

372 CS: I'm saying I have more acceptance of myself as a woman than my mother did  
373 then. But then my mother and I are very different people. My mother is  
374 naturally thin, naturally beautifully turned out. She hasn't got this acceptance  
375 that I have and she actually has less grey hairs than I do.

376 DB: Bigger!

377 CS: Not bigger! I've never known her natural colour hair because she's been  
378 dyeing and it's been a different approach to being a woman. Apparently she  
379 started dyeing her hair when she was 16 or something stupid. So it's a  
380 different acceptance of ageing.

381 DB: It is interesting that you bring up your mother because I'm wondering whether  
382 how she was about her own ageing whether you feel any of that influenced  
383 you?

384 CS: No, we're very different. I came back to this country with a pile of grey hairs  
385 and the first thing she did was make an appointment for me to go to the  
386 hairdresser. And I wrote to a friend of mine in England about it (laughs) and  
387 she wrote, "well you know you and your mother are different!" Maybe  
388 because of the country I lived in and the way the women are there, it wasn't  
389 an issue or maybe it's never been an issue to me so I maybe if I was in a  
390 busy place I'd have to deal with it. If my hair is dyed that's fine, if it's not  
391 that's also fine, it's not a reflection of me. If I go out without makeup it's ok. If  
392 I go out with makeup, it's ok. If I don't have time to put makeup on it's also  
393 ok. If my nails aren't polished it doesn't make me less of a woman.

394 DB: Do you think at any stage that it would have been more of an issue for you?

395 CS: When I was working, once a week I had a manicure. I had a different  
396 approach. I had a facial once a month. I loved it. The facials were for me.  
397 For me it was bliss, it wasn't to go out ... You understand?

398 DB: Yes, it was for yourself and about how you feel about yourself, not for  
399 anybody else?

400 CS: It's not for anybody else. I never blow dry my hair. I go out with wet hair and I  
401 always have. My hair gets blow-dried when I go to the hairdresser. So we've  
402 had very different approaches to the hairdos, the makeup. She goes out  
403 looking very well-groomed. But that's maybe her view of how she should  
404 look, she as a woman.

405 DB: Maybe for her it's also about what society expects?

406 CS: Maybe for her, what society expects of her whereas I don't give a damn what  
407 society expects. It's the conforming versus the non-conforming. That's her  
408 identity. So maybe it's about acceptance of willing your body to go one way,  
409 I don't know, or an acceptance that you can age as opposed to when you age  
410 this what happens, and this is what you have to do to prevent it? And  
411 somewhere along the line you stop enjoying life, you're so busy preventing it.  
412 No, so I'm not scared of ageing.

413 DB: When we talked about, you mentioned ageing, I am very interested in that. If  
414 you look at your life now, I'm not sure whether this has to do so much with  
415 wisdom or with satisfaction. Is there a time that you can say that you felt the  
416 most satisfied or happy, or is there a bad time?

417 CS: It's different levels depending on your priorities at that point in time. Having S  
418 is a highlight for me now and that whole becoming a mother from the point of  
419 view of unconditional love because I think that's one thing that motherhood  
420 teaches you. Being a mother should teach you total unconditional love and  
421 it's something you carry through. If you experience it, some people obviously  
422 don't. But for me that was a highlight. From a professional point of view,  
423 having my own business and knowing I was good at it. From the point of view  
424 that I never had to pick up the phone to look for business. People phoned me  
425 up and said, "please come and see me let's start up, this and this." That for  
426 me was a satisfaction. So job-wise, that giving of self that does it. From the  
427 point of view that when I went in England back to work as an older woman  
428 and when I left to come back here, I stood there and it was, "please don't  
429 leave, if you change your mind you've got a job and if you come back this to  
430 country, you've got a job." So maybe those are highlights. The ability to go  
431 out and open the doors and do it. But it is very different on a professional  
432 level than it is to being a mother. Because being a mother is about total,  
433 unconditional love, total allowing the child to do it. For me the whole thrust is  
434 in honouring her, honouring what she has to do, and honouring her path, as  
435 opposed to you must put your hair like this, you must do this, you must do  
436 that. For me it is the honouring, as opposed to the superficial. Maybe that's  
437 coming from age and from the wisdom to be what my child needs as opposed  
438 to this is what I need.

439 DB: As opposed to this is what I want her to be because that is my need?

440 CS: Yes because that is my need. I don't have any need for her to go out looking  
441 like a doll. I have a need for her to go out happy with how she is at that point  
442 in time. I don't have a need for her to be a concert pianist at the age of 3 ...  
443 you understand what I'm saying? Because she must be where she must be  
444 and deal with the experiences. Then again, that's a whole different story  
445 because that's not body, that's back to my upbringing. My big thing and what  
446 I pray all the time is to be the best mother I can so that she grows up with the  
447 best self-esteem she can because my own mother knocked mine all time.  
448 That's why body is a totally different life experience.

449 DB: But it's also part of it. I'm very interested in what you're saying because this is  
450 not just about body (CS: yes) , it is about ... I think the whole thing about  
451 ageing is within a context (CS: yes) and the context that it is within, is within  
452 our lives and our life experiences. So when you talk about self-esteem I am  
453 really interested in what you're saying.

454 CS: Your self esteem is something that comes in, it should be naturally there  
455 (inaudible) ...that's one of the things that uCsets me about that school.  
456 Sometimes from the point of view of the other kids and the mothers and the  
457 whole materialistic aspect of the school ...

458 DB: It's like forcing her into a part ...

459 CS: That I don't want her to be and I encourage her not to be. I let her experience  
460 ... I believe her body will stay with her forever because she won't have these  
461 limitations thrust on her of this is how you've got to look, and this is how you'll  
462 be and her self-esteem will keep the body, you know the body will be right for  
463 where she is at that point in time. Her self-esteem will be good. She won't  
464 have the issues and maybe she won't have the enormous weight gains or the  
465 body drop or whatever. The body change and the identity change  
466 (inaudible)... but that's also part of being a mother and that's the biggest gift  
467 you can give your child. That holding them and that belief in them being  
468 whole and that self-esteem and helping them through, as opposed to trying to  
469 change them to fit your image of society. Because there is a lot about society  
470 that is wrong and the moment that they stop believing in themselves ...

471 DB: It's all tied up. I don't believe that we're off the subject.

472 CS: Ja

473 DB: We've talked body and we've talked self-esteem. For me, what you're saying  
474 is that maybe where you are at the moment, your wisdom is in being a  
475 mother, in being not only for yourself but the selfless aspects, the trying to let  
476 your child be who she is, being a mother, being a woman of the age that you  
477 are in your life, and for me it all fits very nicely. One of the things that I've  
478 realised is that you can't look at any of these aspects in isolation. I say  
479 "ageing" to one person and they say such and such, we started with body but  
480 ...

481 CS: But that's how I view ageing. It affected the body for me but it didn't affect  
482 the mind. Maybe if I am 80 years I'd go, "what, what did you say two minutes  
483 before?" (laughs). But it hasn't affected me and I don't believe you have to go  
484 that way. You don't have to go the way of Alzheimer's, retirement homes,  
485 You can stay with yourself and enjoy. (Long pause). Maybe if you can carry  
486 that view and that happens to you in the future, you will enjoy your life. You  
487 will go out and do things you want.

488 DB: But just having mentioned Alzheimer's, retirement etc, in terms of a fear, is  
489 that something that ...

490 CS: It's not really a fear. I have a granny who had Alzheimer's. Somewhere  
491 along the line she aged. When I say she aged, somewhere along the line she  
492 stopped going out. No one would see her in a wheelchair. Do you  
493 understand? She stopped living. She had gained so much from life and then

494 somewhere, no one will see me looking like this, no one will see me looking  
495 like that. I think that's what stopped her. So I think it's very much your mind  
496 dictating ... she wasn't reading, she wasn't going to the library, she wasn't  
497 working and she wasn't going outside because she was in a wheelchair. I've  
498 stopped the whole academic thing at the moment ...  
499 (At this stage, I stop recording for a while during which time CS tells me some  
500 very personal information about her marital situation at present, we resume  
501 taping when it becomes comfortable for her).

502 CS: One thing that did affect me, as a woman, with this whole ageing thing is your  
503 sex life does change. With your body changing and having to marry the mind  
504 and body with that acceptance of your body. Not only your sex life but sex  
505 drive, well mine changed. I didn't even know if it was mothering that  
506 changed it.

507 DB: Because all of that changes how we feel about ourselves as women?

508 CS: Everything changes how you feel about yourself as a woman. I breastfed for  
509 17 months. You know suddenly your breasts are not there for pleasure they  
510 are there for feeding. And not only are they there for feeding, they are an  
511 instrument for bonding with your child. You know that feeling, you understand  
512 that.

513 DB: Sure and it's quite hard to be both.

514 CS: So I think it all happened for me at about the same time. The body change  
515 maybe, the mothering because of my age maybe. And it's only in marrying  
516 this total acceptance that your sex life and sex drive has come back. This  
517 enjoyment of sex as being wonderful, amazing, long ... you understand what I  
518 mean? But I also worked out that it's also part of the whole marriage thing  
519 where we're brought up to work at marriage, not enjoy marriage. But with  
520 joining the mind and the body and that whole acceptance suddenly that  
521 enjoyment comes back.

522 DB: Do you think it was a case of like in a way not accepting your body, maybe  
523 feeling less attractive (CS: yes) and then once a woman feels less attractive  
524 you don't even want to have sex

525 CS: You don't want that sexual bond

526 DB: You can't be relaxed about anything ...

527 CS: You're not because you're worried about everything. Because I'm this, I'm  
528 this, I'm flopping, I'm not as supple, I'm not as ... That's the one thing about  
529 gym that kept me going yesterday was for my sex life, which a few years ago  
530 was not an issue. It was wonderful, I enjoyed it and was loved, and it was  
531 great. Then as your body image shifts, it's too cold, it's too, you know all  
532 these excuses? Not a headache, that never happened (laughs) but it's cold  
533 or the child's crying. But you understand what I'm saying? You actually don't  
534 concentrate on yourself you're listening for something else. It's not special.  
535 It's not a time for making love and it's not a time for orgasms and orgasms  
536 and orgasms, just the way it was before. And I think until you marry them  
537 both you don't have any chance.

538 DB: So what you're really saying is it's the CSychological with the physical.  
539 Because it wasn't that your body changed to an extent that your response  
540 was anything different.

541 CS: You didn't allow the response

542 DB: Because of what was happening in your mind ...?

543 CS: Yes

544 DB: Related to how you were feeling about yourself through the body changes  
545 and getting older. And it sounds like now, on the other side of that, you can  
546 enjoy yourself again?

547 CS: Yes. As soon as you accept that whole body issue. So who cares if I flop all  
548 over? Who cares, It doesn't matter. Again but it's that whole society image

549 thing that to be sexual, remember we discussed it beforehand, you've got to  
550 be a certain image.

551 DB: Young and thin and fertile.

552 CS: I don't think fertile. Young, thin, attractive, and that does affect maybe your  
553 response. And again, it's the whole thing of marrying where I'm at as an older  
554 woman with the mind and the body and the desires and all that. And, maybe  
555 that's what it was, that the mind or the emotions had to understand that it  
556 didn't really matter if the body flopped, you could still go out there and enjoy.

557 DB: In some ways it sounds almost like what we were talking about before. The  
558 inside stays the same ...

559 CS: It does, but the perception of the outside is different and because the  
560 perception of the outside is different, you have to come to terms, well I had to  
561 come to terms with it. And from that point of view, can I use the word  
562 'allowed' myself what I would have allowed myself with a younger, more  
563 attractive body. So, ja.

564 DB: What you're saying is unbelievable and...

565 CS: Linked to that whole perception of body and ageing isn't it? Because when  
566 you get older you're not supposed to and you fall into this flipping trap where  
567 you don't have to.

568 DB: I almost feel like, I feel like we are also affected. I don't want to lead you, but I  
569 wonder do you ever think that we are affected also by what we read and what  
570 we see, things in the media, almost telling you that you should be scared of  
571 getting older?

572 CS: Not only that, it's things we feel growing up. A friend of mine had her  
573 youngest when her daughter was 15 and this child went through a revolt that  
574 'my parents are still having sex!' She is now 25. Ja, we were 21 when H was  
575 born. But you understand that whole perception not only of society, but that  
576 we give off that you don't do that. At this age you're getting ready to be a  
577 grandparent and you don't do this. And it's this whole thing of who cares? It's  
578 me and it's my body. I've still got the same emotions and desires. So if I do,  
579 why am I not honouring them? Why am I buying into the fact that I have to  
580 have this really great body in order to enjoy it?

581 DB: From what you're saying, it sounds like it's about questioning 'why am I  
582 buying into it?' because you don't have to. You don't have to buy what's out  
583 there.

584 CS: Not only do you not have to buy what's out there, but it's your own reality.  
585 Your body doesn't have to buy into that reality ... it's your emotions, your  
586 mind, which is part of your concept and your identity so you can keep it.  
587 You've got to reinvent your identity so that it serves you best and you can still  
588 enjoy life as opposed to becoming this old lady with grey hair and pink  
589 liCStick. You know what I mean, you understand what I'm saying? Even if  
590 you are this old lady with grey hair and pink liCStick you can still go out and  
591 enjoy your life, you don't have to be limited in what you can do. And that was  
592 also part of it. And I think last year was very much the year of that.

593 DB: Did anything happen last year? You keep mentioning last year?

594 CS: Last year for me was the point where everything changed.

595 DB: Did something specific happen, that you can think of, that led to that change?

596 CS: I don't know. Maybe you need a certain amount of time, or to go through  
597 certain experiences for it to gel. And you've got to come to this acceptance of  
598 I am still a woman.

599 DB: Do you think this might have had anything to do with what was happening last  
600 year? With the idea of your husband leaving to go overseas for work?

601 CS: No. I think it is something that's got to come from within. I don't think it  
602 happened from without. I think it was something from within, going within,  
603 working certain things out on different levels. Going back into a career,

604 retraining for a career. Maybe just around introspection and going in and  
605 working it all out on that level. For some people, it takes some of us longer to  
606 do and some of us never have to go through it. I just think it was a whole big  
607 new identity change and stuff I'd gone through with returning to this country  
608 and checking things out and maybe relaxing a bit. Maybe it was a bit of a  
609 breathing space that I could concentrate on and take that time to look in, be  
610 with me as opposed to constantly doing. This is interesting. From a  
611 numerological point of view 47 ... 4 and 7 is 11, which is a 2, which is sort of a  
612 together number. It is a totally different experience, or if you go to the 11 you  
613 go very deeply. It is about accomplishing your own contribution. I am not  
614 talking about going out there and earning a million rand, it is about reinventing  
615 your identity.

616 DB: I am wondering whether we should stop. It feels as though we have come to  
617 a natural stopping point. Unless there is something which you feel which you  
618 would like to add?

619 CS: No. Then it gives you time to go over it.

620 DB: I'll transcribe this. If you don't mind, if I need a little more would it be ok to  
621 meet again?

622 CS: Yes. If you don't mind could I have a copy of the transcript, because what's  
623 coming out, I can use for my Coaching?

624 DB: With pleasure, I'm happy to let you have a copy. Thank you very much for  
625 your time