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'Renegotiated identities': stories of women who are initiated traditional healers and work in a hospital environment in a different capacity

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Chapter 3

Methods

3.1. Methodological Approach

3.1.1. Qualitative Research

A qualitative interpretive research approach has been adopted for this study. The qualitative approach breaks with traditional research methodology in that it does not focus on the production of objective and reproducible data but is concerned with meaning, and how it informs subjective understanding (Hollway and Jefferson, 2000; Banister, 1995). Where quantitative research primarily concerns itself with techniques and instruments of obtaining data in hypothesis testing, qualitative research is concerned with the meaning of experience, language and symbol (Berg, 1995; Welman and Kruger, 2001). Qualitative approaches aim at enriching our understanding of human experience (De Koning, Ashworth and Giorgi, 1986; Elliot, Fischer and Rennie, 1999).

Qualitative analysis emphasises the importance of the context of behaviour as it is influenced by historical, ecological, socio-economic, political, cultural and temporal conditions, and subsequent interpretation of the meaning thereof (Burhman and Parker, 1993; Patton, 1990; Seedat, 1997; Terre-Blanche and Kelly, 1999). Psychological phenomena cannot be understood as independent of context. Human behaviour is rendered more meaningful when experience is understood within a framework of culture and connectedness of being in the world and part thereof (Giorgi, Fisher and Murray, 1979; Henning, van Rensburg and Smit, 2004; Kvale, 1973 Romanyshyn, 1971). A qualitative approach recognises that human experience has meaning in terms of involvement and values and does not start from an absolute origin or certain unquestionable 'observations', but from a perspective of an everyday understanding of people and events (De Koning, et al. 1986; Kvale, 1992, 1996). Human behaviour does not exist independently from human interest and activity (Romanyshyn, 1971). One has to take into account the context and temporal aspects of an action if one is to gain a meaningful and comprehensive understanding. Behaviour is thus viewed in the context of narrative, history, text and story (Sarbin, 1986; Sarbin & Kitsuse, 1994).

Qualitative interpretation appropriates sense in human behaviour through meaning of experience and is not purely based on objective observation and description. Rather, description in this sense is part of the construction and reconstruction of meaningful experience in human activity (Kvale, 1992; McLeod, 1997). The process of initiation and practice of indigenous forms of healing exists in a context of underlying values and customs that cannot be comprehensively understood through pure description and numerical categorisation of data (Giorgi, et al., 1979; Hollway and Jefferson, 2000; Henning, et al., 2004).

Qualitative approaches identify the role of the researcher as actively engaged in the making of meaning from the text or with the ´subject´ under study (Berg, 1995; Henning, et al.; 2004; Gergen, 1982). A qualitative approach is theoretically underpinned by the understanding of meaning as constantly constructed experience revealed through the lens of a particular interpretive framework (Romanyshyn, 1971; Packer and Addison, 1989). Thus, the researcher's own subjectivity is considered to inform interpretation of data and consequent findings, challenging the natural scientific claim to value-free objectivity as an imperative condition for causality (Packer and Addison, 1989; Titscher, Meyer, Wodak & Vetter, 2000).

Elliot, Fischer and Rennie (1999) provide evolving methodological guidelines for the evaluation of qualitative research. In doing so, they attempt to reassure researchers of rigour in qualitative research. Their guidelines may serve to evaluate this study according to principles suited to qualitative research methodology instead of imposing unsuitable quantitative standards in measuring reliability and validity. These guidelines were developed in accordance with principles of good research practice that may be applied to qualitative approaches. As with quantitative approaches, these guidelines emphasise the grounding of results in concrete and relevant examples. For this reason extensive reference is made to participants' own words in both the presentation and discussion of results for this study.

Elliot, et al. (1999) also advocate researcher ownership of theoretical perspectives and personal anticipation in addition to situating the sample as illustrated through rich description of daily circumstance. On commencing this study, the researcher anticipated a clear distinction, even split between what she perceived to be radically different roles

of traditional and modern health care provider whereas data collection and analysis indicated the need for question reformulation due to a growing awareness of the congruence and fluidity between these roles as reflected in participant's own accounts. In providing detailed descriptions of participants' accounts the researcher has attempted to illustrate the lived meaning of their experiences. This study has attempted to explicitly adopt a qualitative approach to research methodology.

3.1.2. Interpretive Approaches to Research

Interpretive research methods are based on an assumption of subjective human experience as ontologically real and accessible through dialogue within a qualitative framework (Terre-Blanche and Kelly, 1999). An interpretive approach emphasises the value of detailed or 'thick' description of first hand accounts collected in context which attempts to recreate the meaning of narrated experience (Terre-blanche and Kelly, 1999). Meaningful understanding of human behaviour entails a contextual approach which allows re-contextualisation of a text to its original context during the reconstructive process of analysis and interpretation. A qualitative interpretive approach attempts to tell the story from the participant's perspective (Elliot, et al., 1999). In its emphasis on contextual relatedness, an interpretive approach reflects some aspects of a phenomenological approach but attempts to elucidate underlying contradictions and the meaning of human experience (Packer and Addison, 1989, Terre-Blanche and Kelly, 1999).

With the researcher as instrument, an interpretive approach integrates the processes of data collection and analysis in an ongoing manner which at times requires the reformulation of research questions (Terre-Blanche and Kelly, 1999); as was the case in this present study where the researcher has had to adapt the second interview guide and to reformulate research questions in response to data collected. Through this process, a stronger emphasis emerged regarding the interface between traditional healing and western medicine in the hospital context instead of purely focusing on issues relating to the initiation and practice of traditional healing.

Data collection needs to be conducted in a culturally sensitive manner based on empathic and open communication (Fetterman, 1993; Hammersley, 1990; Terre-Blance and Kelly, 1999). In obtaining richer and more in-depth personal accounts, it was

important that the researcher showed invested interest in the topic by attending traditional celebratory and initiatory ceremonies prior to identifying and selecting potential participants. Recent socio-political transitions in South Africa lent significance to the fact that the researcher as a white woman was invited into a close knit and protected, even exclusive, social group in the historically black residential South Western Townships of Johannesburg. This was an unusual experience which allowed the researcher to gain a sense of the meaning and roles of traditional healing and healers in the South African community and re-contextualise data to a greater extent than usually afforded by 'cultural unfamiliarity' and the ambiguous role of a researcher (Elliot, et al., 1999; Smythe and Murray, 2000; Terre-Blanche and Kelly, 1999;).

Interpretive analysis requires the researcher to immerse herself in the data and thus enter into a dialogue with the text and the primary questions or their 'fore-structures' of understanding the topic (Packer and Addison, 1989). Interpretive analysis recognises the reconstructive process of retelling a participant's story and attempts to render daily behaviour meaningful within a particular context and is "engaged in a process of trying to make the strange familiar" (Terre-Blanche and Kelly, 1999, p.139). Interpretive approaches see human understanding as a circular process in which analysis attempts to uncover and recreate meaning (Packer and Addison, 1989; Gioirgi, et al., 1979). This involves more than summarising the content of human behaviour but also considers the complexities of human understanding in terms of processes, functions, tensions and contradictions (Terre-Blanche and Kelly, 1999).

3.2. SAMPLING

The sample size for this research project comprised of five traditional healers. All participants are South African women who have completed initiation into African traditional healing including the final initiatory rites, and have worked in a western hospital environment for at least one year. As this is a qualitative research project with the aim to gather detailed narratives from participants, the sample size may be limited but may produce rich data due to intensive engagement between researcher and participants (Berg, 1995; Banister, Burman, Parker, Taylor and Tindal, 1994).

As this is a small sample, some limitations on generalisability from this sampling method exist (De Koning, et al., 1986; Berg, 1995). The use of small samples, however, is typical

to qualitative research (Lincoln, 1981; Henning, et al., 2004). Qualitative inquiry is suited to smaller samples and allow for more rigorous accounts in its attempt to widen our understanding on a particular subject (Elliot, et al., 1999). Fenyves (1994), Fipaza (2003) and Hewson (1998), who have also conducted qualitative research on traditional healers, used six participants each with only one interview per participant. In the present study, five participants were interviewed twice within four weeks; providing ten interviews of approximately one hour per interview. The second interview was motivated by a desire to gain a more extensive narrative account than is normally obtained in a singular interview (Hollway and Jefferson, 2000). This approach emphasises depth of understanding instead of breadth of data; detailed research on a small sample potentially offers valuable insight into the ways in which individuals perceive the meaning of their experiences of working in a hospital environment (Mattingly and Garro, 2000; Neumann, 2006; Van Zyl, 1991). Oakley (1993; in Roberts, 1993) cautions that although repeated interviewing may allow the researcher to collect more information in greater depth, partly due to interactive researcher responsiveness, the quality of information obtained depends on the nature of the interviewee and interviewer relationship. In recognising that the responsibility for determining suitability of participants rests with the researcher, Smythe and Murray (2000) note three areas of concern of which the researcher must be aware: potential vulnerabilities of participants, participants' ability to understand the idea of multiple narrative meaning and the researcher's power and influence in relation to participants. In this sense, researchers are encouraged to be vigilant in obtaining informed consent throughout the process, specifically informing participants that their interviews may be subjected to re-narration by the researcher during analysis.

Because of limited availability of suitable participants for this research, the sampling strategy used was a snowball sampling procedure; participants were selected through referral, word of mouth, suitability and willingness to participate. Five participants were each interviewed twice. As the researcher is unable to speak an indigenous language, English was used for interviews. All participants were South African born women who have experienced ancestral calling and completed initiation into African traditional healing, are considered diviners (*Inyanga/ Sangoma)*, and are presently working in hospital environment in Gauteng. No other sampling criteria were employed.

As participants did not have personal transport and in some cases, limited access to public transport, the researcher conducted interviews at the participant's place of work or home. As the researcher is a white woman who went into obviously disadvantaged communities to interview black women, it was important to maintain a strong sense of cultural sensitivity through appropriate conduct and acknowledgement of teachers, initiates and other community members (Welman and Kruger, 2001). Here it was necessary for the researcher to be aware of the emic and etic influences on data collection which allowed her to gain more of an insider's perspective as a woman, albeit white, yet familiar to some aspects of traditional initiation and healing practices in a South African context (Fetterman, 1993; Vaz, 1997; Ware, 1992).

3.3. METHOD OF DATA COLLECTION

3.3.1. Interviews as method of data collection

Personal interviews were used as the method of data collection for this study. Welman and Kruger (2001) identify the personal interview as the interviewer visiting the respondent's home or workplace. For this research project, semi-interviews were conducted at participants' residence and place of work. An interview guide for the first interview was developed in accordance with principles outlined by Hollway and Jefferson (2001). The second interview guide aimed at exploring issues raised in the first interview and also focused on participants' experiences of working in a hospital environment.

In order to minimise the effects of bias and false information of self-report data, some guidelines provided by Welman and Kruger (2001) were adopted for the process of data collection. They recommend that the researcher should dress in more or less the same way as participants. In relevance to this research project, they point out that there may be resistance if the interviewer arrives 'all dressed up' for an interview in a squatter camp. Affiliation with a particular social group or organisation is not advised as this may adversely affect participants' responses. As aspects such as gender, race, physical appearance and background are factors out of the researcher's control, which do affect response; researchers should take care not to engender resistance against this (Vaz, 1997; Ware, 1992). Welman and Kruger (2001) further note that in the South African context, a researcher should constantly remain aware of the possibility of being viewed as an intruder, particularly if there is a racial difference between researcher and researched.

While flexibility and adaptability are great advantages of personal interviews, they are costly and time consuming (Welman and Kruger, 2001). Personal interviews can also not be conducted anonymously and interviewers must thus take care not to say anything that may be construed as a desired response but use open ended questions instead. Some advantages of personal interviewing identified by Welman and Kruger (2001) include control over participants' responses and response rate. They emphasise the control of the researcher in the interview situation through personal interaction; whereby they may gain the confidence of evasive respondents and record respondents' answers, and follow up on incomplete or vague responses and so obtain rich data. The researcher's physical presence may reduce elusive responses during a direct encounter and participants who may be unwilling or unable to complete a questionnaire may be more willing to talk about their experiences in an interview.

Semi-structured interviews were used as certain aspects of the topic may be sensitive and the participants come from divergent backgrounds (Welman and Kruger, 2001). A basic interview guide was used with open-ended questions which focus on traditional initiation and the experiences of the traditional healer working in a hospital environment. All respondents were asked the same questions where order and some prompting were determined by the flow of the interviewee's story.

3.3.2. The Qualitative Research Interview

Following is a brief discussion of some aspects involved in the qualitative research interview in psychology. Qualitative interviews differ from other interviews in that they aim to be more flexible in a lack of prior assumptions whilst elucidating the meaning of *lived* experience (Berg, 1995). The interview is one of the most used methods in social research, with a history of extensive application in selection, counselling and therapy (Labov, 1972; Kvale, 1992; McLeod, 1997; Rose, 2001).

The systematic application of qualitative principles to research methodology is a more recent development in social research (Elliot, et al., 1999). General interview presentations usually focus on issues of interview technique (Kahn and Cannell, 1957, as cited in Kvale, 1992). Rather than technique, Kvale emphasises the need to address a subject's common understanding of their life world as revealed by the interview. Despite lacking the formal requirements of a quantitative dimension, however, Kvale

(1992) cautions against the effects of *'methodological straightjacketing'* in abiding by such formal requirements as it contributes in reducing the meaning of human experience to arbitrary subjectivity. Kvale (1992) emphasises that in the qualitative interview binding rules of method hardly exist and presents possible reasons for this: human discourse is complex and varied, rendering it impossible to develop a general theory for the interview; as such the interview is seen as an art rather than a science where personal sensitivity and creativity cannot be formalised. The aim of the interview is not to produce objective data but rather implies an implicit phenomenological-hermeneutic mode of understanding where people use their own words in describing their own experiences (Kvale, 1992; Miles and Huberman, 1984; Packer and Addison, 1989).

A qualitative interview places emphasis on the interviewee's account and feelings in allowing groups and individuals, who seldom participate in public debate, to share their experiences. In relation to interpretive approaches, a qualitative interview may also explore meaning that reaches beyond the direct world of the interviewee to include the social or even ideological dimension (Kvale, 1992; Seedat, 1997; Terre-Blanche and Kelly, 1999; Vaz, 1997). Terre-Blanche and Kelly (1999) consider the interview a process of co-constructed meaning in a research relationship which reflects dialogues of a wider socially constructed discourse around the aims or topic of discussion. This is supported by Kvale (1996) who emphasised a circular mode of human understanding and the cooperative enterprise of knowledge creation. The qualitative research interview aims at gathering descriptions of the life-world of the interviewee with respect to interpretation of the meaning of the story told (Kvale, 1996; Blunt and Rose, 1994).

Some specific aspects presented by the interview situation centres on the interviewee, thus permitting understanding of the interviewee's life world in a qualitative, descriptive and specific manner (Hollway and Jefferson, 2000). Although thematically focused, the interview remains open to ambiguity and changes, guided by the sensitivity of the interviewer (Kvale, 1996). The researcher's responsibility is to be a good listener and the interviewee is viewed as story teller rather than respondent (Hollway and Jefferson, 2001). During the interview stage, the researcher is required to bracket her interpretations of the material and place the participant's personal narrative as the central focus (Smythe and Murray, 2000). Participants should be encouraged to relate their story in their own words whilst the researcher is required to take responsibility for

monitoring participant vulnerability and her development of trust. In reliance on intuition and judgement, an awareness and respect of the participant's willingness to share information should be maintained (Guba and Lincoln, 1994; Smythe and Murray, 2000).

A semi-structured interview is "neither a free conversation nor a highly structured questionnaire" (Kvale, 1996, p.174), but is characterised by a methodological awareness of question forms and dialogical dynamics between interviewer and interviewee within a context of critical interpretation. Rather than containing exact questions, the focus should be on themes. Hollway and Jefferson (2000) recommend the use of open ended questions to allow the tracking of the interviewee's meaning frames to the real meaning of an experience for the interviewee. Another principle of their interpretive method is the role of the researcher to elicit stories instead of a one word response. The manner in which a participant chooses to tell their story reflects the meaning in a context of personal values, detail and aspects emphasised, not intended by the teller. 'How' instead of 'why' questions are encouraged in order to minimise intellectualisation and disconnectedness from the substance of experience sought in the qualitative research interview (Hollway and Jefferson, 2000). In addition it is important to refer to an interviewee's own words in order to respect their meaning frames in a way that encourages emerging narratives without interpretive impositions based on the researcher's own concerns.

3.3.3. Reflexivity in Research

Reflexivity refers to the researcher's ability to critically engage and reflect on the manner in which their own values impact upon aspects of the research process (Banister, 1995; Elliot, 2005; Lather, 1991). Walkerdine (1988) stresses the value of researcher reflexivity: "the information of our feelings in and around the interview are of value for understanding the dynamics of the research relationship" (as cited in Hollway and Jefferson, 2000, p. 45). Assuming the role of co-narrator (Elliot, 2005), the researcher has to remain aware of the dynamic dependent nature of data production in exploring strong feelings of atypical experiences in the interview context.

Shefer (2004; as cited in Hook, 2004) points out that although the use of 'participant' denotes a co-production of knowledge it does not necessarily unravel inherent power embedded in research interactions. Reflexivity shifts the focus from political

accountability to personal and emotional investment, but may also attribute fictitious status to the researcher (Parker, 1992) as knowledge production in the research process largely remains with the researcher despite continued dialogue with the community (Shefer, 2004).

Several different issues affect researcher and participant positioning, which include racial, gender, class, ability and age (Eagle, Hayes and Sibanda, 1999; Vaz, 1997). Participant's voices are read through a particular ideological perspective from a particular social location which has effects on results (Freedman and Combs, 1996; Sarbin and Kitsuse, 1994; Toolan, 1988). As the researcher is a white female who collected the stories of black women from a disadvantaged socio-economic background, it was important to take cognisance of the fact that South Africa has seen a difficult socio-political transition, strongly marked by racialised history where race continues to serve as an important signifier in the research relationship, and how this may impact upon the type of data gathered and interpretations drawn (Personal Narratives Group, 1989). Shefer (2004) points out that the positioning of 'Whiteness' carries with it powerful cultural and historical associations from competence and education to colonial imperialism. Participant's reflexive positioning is not unitary and may give rise to contradictory effects on research relationships. In similarity to the researcher, Shefer (2004) clarifies her own positioning as a white, middle class, English-speaking, urban woman in her mid 30's, representing the experiences of black, predominantly young women or working class, rural backgrounds with English as their second language; a lecturer, in a positioning of power, or as in the case of this project, the researcher is also a student, in a position of co-learning with the 'thwasa' student who has become a traditional healer.

In minimising defensiveness brought on by sex differences, a female researcher is able to talk to female participants in a less defended way (Hollway and Jefferson, 2001). Ann Oakley (1993, as cited in Roberts, 1993) points out that women's material disadvantage is shared by those of ethnic minority groups. As such, the goal of widened understanding through interviewing is best achieved when the relationship of interviewer and interviewee is non-hierarchical and when the interviewee is prepared to invent her own personal identity in the relationship through a process of co-constructed meaning (Eagle, et al., 1999; Oakley, 1993). This can be compared with aspects of an ethnographic

approach in saying that a woman interviewing women is by definition both 'inside' the culture as well as participating in that which she is observing (Chodorow, 1989; Roberts, 1993).

3.3.4. Procedure

Semi-structured interviews were used to collect accounts from participants who lived in different suburbs of Soweto, and Alexandra Township in Johannesburg. An interview guide for the first interview focused around the primary aims and questions of this research project. The first interview guide was constructed in accordance with the guidelines provided by Hollway and Jefferson (2000) as well as examples of qualitative interviewing by Henning, et al. (2004). The research supervisor assisted in the design of the second interview guide constructed from data obtained in the first interview, with a focus on areas that lack clarity or require further exploration. Feedback integrated into data obtained from the second interview provided a more comprehensive understanding of the participant's experience (Hollway and Jefferson, 2001; Welman and Kruger, 2001).

Participants were asked questions about their experiences of traditional initiation and current vocational practices (*see Appendices).* Open-ended questions were used which allows for richer individual narration of experience, whilst the researcher primarily clarifies their understanding of the narrative account as it unfolds (Kvale, 1996). Primary questions guiding the interview were supplemented with additional sub-questions that served as prompts in order to allow participants to relate their experiences in their own words. Demographic details such as age, occupation, residence, personal and medical history were integrated as part of the initial interview.

In order to obtain access and to establish rapport, the researcher contacted and arranged to meet with each participant prior to data collection. During the first meeting, the researcher explained the purpose of the research project as per the participant information letter *(See Appendix A),* and arranged a time and place for the first interview. Interviews started subsequent to researcher introductions and provision of participant information. Each participant received at least three visits. Interview time schedules were arranged according to availability of each participant. Each interview lasted approximately one and a half hours.

3.4. METHOD OF DATA ANALYSIS

3.4.1. Introduction

For this study, data analysed consisted of two primary phases. For the first phase of data analysis some principles of narrative analysis were adopted. Results are therefore presented in storied accounts so as to remain true to participants' experiences as reflected in their own words. For the purposes of greater coherence the second stage of data analysis involved some aspects of thematic content analysis. The four primary research questions for this inquiry provided a basis from which themes were generated. In keeping with the principles of narrative analysis discussion of results is also presented in a storied form as this allows a more meaningful description of data gathered. The following part of this discussion will provide a brief overview of some principles of narrative analysis followed by a discussion of content analytical theory as applied to this study.

Following the first interview, an initial level of analysis involved transcription and summary interview material in order to identify themes and narratives which emerged from the written data. Individual accounts were presented in a storied form and thematically arranged in relevance to the primary research questions. Individual accounts were then combined and thematically arranged in relevance to the primary research questions. Combined stories were presented in such a way as to reflect the meaning of participants' experiences and perceptions grounded in their own words. Discussion of results focuses on participants' perceptions of their work in the hospital and how this informs the negotiation of their traditional identity in the workplace. Presentation of results also includes some discussion of how participants' experience of working in a modern health care context may influence their traditional healing practices.

3.4.2. Narrative Analysis

A narrative approach presents a ´storied´ account of experience and recognises the value of stories in the construction of meaning (Labov, 1972; Mcleod, 1997; Sarbin and Kitsuse, 1994). Narrative analysis is concerned with investigating the means by which experience is represented and interpreted. Experience is represented in the form of the written and spoken word. Narratives are stories which people tell in order to make sense of their lived experience (Genette, 1988).

Stories provide a window to understanding the cultural organisation of human experience (Rose, 2001), and reciprocally allow us to ´rewrite´ it (Sarbin, 1986; Parker, 1992; Shotter and Gergen, 1994). Narrative inquiry refers to the activities involved in working with various kinds of stories of life experiences found in texts of life histories, long interviews, journals, diaries, memoirs and autobiographies. It is concerned with the means of generating data in the form of stories, means of interpreting that data, and means of representing it in a narrative or storied form. A narrative may be defined as a story with a beginning, middle and end told in different ways to reveal someone's experiences (Mcleod, 1997). A narrative is a story-based account of happenings, but contains within it other forms of communication in addition to stories. A narrator tells a story, but in doing so offers something over and above the bare story (Mcleod, 1997). The word '*story'* is much more widely employed in common usage than the word '*narrative'*, because a story is a more accessible and immediately graspable entity that people deal with at an everyday level. The idea of narrative is more often found in academic discourse (Denzin and Lincoln, 1994; Genette, 1988; Schwandt, 2001). However, the ordinary language notion of *'narrator'* captures some of the meaning of narrative (Cortazzi, 1993; Coste, 1989; Currie, 1990).

As story, narratives offer an in-depth account of the individual's experience. The narrative text provides access to meaning which is both personally and socially relevant (Freedman and Combs, 1996; Terre Blanche and Kelly, 1999). In keeping with the purposes of this study, a narrative approach to data analysis provides a basis from which to identify the uniqueness of individual narratives, whilst also elucidating shared aspects of relevance to the presence of traditional healers in hospitals in South Africa. When working with data, narrative analysis involves identifying repeated events as ´voices´ in the narrative account and a view of past events that have become thematically or chronologically linked (Riessman, 1993).

The process of narrative research is highly time-consuming as no two interviews are alike. Narrative analysis is an interpretive process which is always personal, partial and dynamic; requiring the researcher to become comfortable with ambiguity (Mcleod, 1997). Working with narrative material requires dialogical listening to three voices: the voice of the narrator (tape/text), the theoretical framework which provides the concepts and tools for interpretation, and a reflexive monitoring of the act of reading and interpretation; the

voice of the researcher (Lieblich, Tuval-Masiach and Zilber, 1998; Riessman, 1993). The listener or reader of a life-story enters an interactive process with the narrative and becomes sensitive to the narrator's voice and meanings (Abbot, 2002). Interpretations are grounded in data and informed by theoretical dialogue with the research focus. Narrative work requires self-awareness and self-discipline in the ongoing examination of text against interpretation, and vice-versa (Lieblich et al., 1998). Watson (1996) approaches narratives as personal accounts which involve people accounting for their choices *retrospectively*. "People do not necessarily know and reveal the real reasons for their choices and actions, but they construct justifications and explanations as to why they come to be how they are" (Watson, 1996, p.260). Through narrating their story, individuals become aware of themselves and connect their own understanding to the social context which constitutes what they are. These stories emerge out of culturally constructed meanings but they can also help us to reconstruct and change these meanings (Mcleod, 1997; Labov, 1972; Sarbin, 1994; Terre Blanche and Kelly, 1999).

3.4.3. Thematic Content Analysis

In order to obtain a more integrated yet coherent understanding of combined narrative results, a secondary phase of data analysis involved the application of some aspects of thematic content analysis. Although results are presented in storied accounts, these accounts were rearranged under thematic headings identified by the four research questions for this project. Subsequent discussion of results extends the use of these same themes in providing a more comprehensive discussion and overview of results.

Thematic approaches to data analysis developed from traditions in Content Analysis which originated in the early 1920's and was used to evaluate media texts (Eagle, 1998). Content analysis is generally agreed to follow a precept of rules that conform to a systematic process of analysis (Guba and Lincoln, 1994). It is a systematic process which seeks to produce specific contextual insights and focuses on the manifest content of the data (Eagle, 1998). In adopting this systematic approach to data analysis in this project, an initial phase of analysis focused on the written interview transcripts and summarised stories produced from the raw data. In remaining true to the manifest content of the data, results are supported by participants' own words and, where relevant, further discussed in relation to prior research findings.

Banister, et al. (1994) define thematic content analysis as a “coherent way of organizing or reading interview material in relation to specific research questions…under thematic headings in ways that attempt to do justice both to elements of the research question and to the pre-occupations of the interviewees” (p. 57). Thematic content analysis usually begins with an identification of research questions and then choosing a sample, from which the text is drawn. Once transcribed, the text is broken down for phrases and/or sentences which can be regarded as descriptive of the research question (Eagle, 1998). In applying some of the basic principles of thematic content analysis, thematic identification was guided by the research questions and important aspects emerging from the data. Participants' words, sentences or statements about these themes were then rearranged in thematic categories and their stories retold within the scope of this study (Eagle, 1998).

Van Maanen (1982) outlines some major characteristics of thematic analysis. Thematic identification is guided by a focus on rendering the central area of interest meaningful through a point in the text. Themes are recurring or dominant meanings which permeate a text in conveying a particular understanding about the particular phenomenon and can only ever be accessed or approximated through description of certain aspects of lived experience (Van Maanen, 1982). Regardless of the ability of a theme to convey an in-depth meaning of a concept or notion, there are always other multiple and varied understandings regarding the same phenomenon. In this sense the research supervisor contributed to widening the perspective on certain topics and themes within data through reflective feedback. Themes serve as tools for exploring and interpreting. This provides a 'categorised shape' and guides the retelling of each story through identification of thematic units. Such a process lends coherence to the construction of a wide variety of multiple, sometimes unclear, and often ambiguous articulations of meaning as it relates to the topic of interest (Coste, 1989; Currie, 1990).

In relevance to Van Maanen's guidelines, the researcher attempted to draw meaning from the transcribed texts of raw data by returning her focus to the four primary research questions for this study. Data was coherently arranged so as to tell each participants' story as reflected by the questions. Data was read for recurring and dominant meanings as conveyed by certain words, phrases or sentences which were highlighted. These words, phrases and sentences formed what could be referred to as 'thematic units'

(Eagle, 1998). Initial 'thematic units' were identified in aspects of data as it related to the research question under consideration. Following this, further thematic categories arose from the data itself and stimulated reformulation of the original research questions to include dimensions of participants' experiences. Summarised stories were then written and the data thematically rearranged for the presentation and discussion of results.

In addition to creating some sense of meaning out of different accounts, the development of a theme can also serve to facilitate more in-depth understanding and exploration due to its ability to describe clearly the constructions of the topic under study (Van Maanen, 1982). No single account can ever truly be described as the most accurate and legitimate account. Lived experience can never fully be described or accounted for (Brookes, 1994). Thus the function of a theme may have diminishing effects on conveying the intended meaning of the narrator's words in that it fails to fully capture the *essence* of an experience (Van Maanen, 1982). In this regard the researcher attempted to keep in mind the subjective meaning of participants' experiences by rendering storied accounts grounded in their own words. In answering the research questions, these accounts aim at exploring the meaning of their perceptions and experiences as presented through thematic categorisation.

Eagle (1998) emphasises that thematic categories must be as inclusive and exhaustive as possible as a way of achieving rigour in analysis. At the same time, it is crucial to ensure reliability of identification and explanation or interpretation of themes. As a partial function of research-supervision (Elliot, et al., 1999) this is best achieved by implementing a triangulation check, in which more than one person is involved in the process of exploring connotations, allusions and implications evoked by the text. Thematic meanings are differentially constructed along a myriad of interpretive dimensions and play a significant role in description. In achieving rigour all interpretive avenues were explored to provide a comprehensive account of the meaning of participants' experiences.

The first step taken was to accurately transcribe all interviews which enabled exploration of thematic identification, categorisation and relatedness through a process of “free association” (Hollway and Jefferson, 2000; Parker, 1992). This was followed by providing summarised accounts which retold participants' stories as reflected in their

own words, at times making direct reference to relevant words or phrases used by them. In addition to correlating all findings with raw data, each stage of description and analysis was examined in detail by the research supervisor who provided triangulation checks (Elliot, et al., 1999). This process serves to strengthen reliability of interpretation by taking into consideration differences in understanding of the text by readers other than the researcher, such as the research supervisor who provided continual and extensive feedback on results and interpretations (Parker, 1994). In thematic categorisation, the researcher attempted to identify contrasts and overlaps between participants' ways of speaking about more clearly defined topics such as perceptions of becoming and being a traditional healer, the traditional healer's experience of working in a hospital environment, perceptions on the interface between modern and traditional healing and how social interaction informs these perceptions.

The steps for making inferences and analysis as discussed by Van Manen (1990) have been applied to this study. Firstly transcriptions were read through several times, until a strong sense of each participant's storied account was grasped. This was followed by carefully going through the text again, underlining and highlighting words, phrases or sentences in relevance to the research questions. These words, phrases and sentences were then assigned under different headings determined by content relevance to each research question (Eagle, 1998). Individual stories were then rewritten in terms of these thematic headings and illustrated by reference to participants' own words. This was followed by rewriting a combined account based on individual stories. For the purposes of greater coherence the discussion of results has also been presented following these same thematic categories. Discussion of results focuses more closely on the questions which guide this inquiry and highlight the relationships and contradictions between themes in the data and its meaning for related studies (Eagle, 1998). As co-narrator, the researcher attempted to retell participants' stories through thematic discussion of the research questions.

3.5. ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Smythe and Murray (2000) describe qualities characteristic of the qualitative researcher as an ability to listen attentively and empathically, whilst displaying intuition and self-awareness. Standard ethical principles that govern treatment of human participants served as the basis for the methodological approach in this study: free and informed

consent, privacy and confidentiality, protection from harm, avoidance of conflict of interest, lack of deception, providing information and debriefing (Berg, 1995; Henning, et al., 2004). Smythe and Murray (2000) emphasise the need to pay attention to people's own words about what is important in their lives. They also show how qualitative researchers may be ethically conflicted as qualitative research involves some degree of personal involvement of researchers in the lives of participants. The researcher engages in constructing meaning based on participants' accounts which may result in contradictions between participants' own interpretations and the interpretive understanding of the researcher (Smythe and Murray, 2000).

Guba and Lincoln (1994) perceive the qualitative interview as an unfolding process which depends on the rapport established between researcher and participant and the individuality of the participant. Given the nature of this relationship and the highly personal data revealed in an 'intimate' context, the meaning and purpose of informed consent may be jeopardised. The idea of *'process consent'* where informed consent is an ongoing and mutually negotiated process in research served to counter deception or misinformation presented by the researcher in this study (Smythe and Murray, 2000). This also allows participants to withdraw their data at any time during the research, which is increased by making detailed transcripts available to all participants prior to commencing the second interview as was done in this research project.

Lieblich et al. (1998) argue that despite use of pseudonyms, individuals are still able to identify themselves and others who participated in the research. In keeping with the storied nature of results discussed in the following section, the researcher chose to protect participant identity and privacy by use of pseudonyms and removal of any information which may serve in identification. Knowledge of each participant's corresponding pseudonym and identity is limited to each particular participant respectively, the researcher and the research supervisor.

Protecting participants from harm is not limited to obvious potentialities within sensitive domains such as research on victims of physical abuse or even rape (Riessman, 1994), but it also includes the fact that the nature of a qualitative research interview allows participants to reveal their identity in a less defended manner. The researcher may therefore inadvertently elicit deeper emotional issues with vulnerable groups or

participants (Lieblich et al., 1998). As a white woman, the researcher had to remain aware of the effects of perceptions of difference and difference in perception on not only the issue of traditional healing but also the daily life of the participant at home in the township and at work in the hospital.

Role conflict may occur as the researcher is required to assume diverse roles within multiple relationships particularly that of being a confidante to the participant, while publicising her personal story in a written report (Smythe and Murray, 2000). In considering deception and debriefing, Smythe and Murray (2002) state that qualitative researchers are generally explicit about their purposes for conducting research at the outset. In consideration of these issues, the researcher attempted to clarify and inform participants of the reasons and aims of the study. Prior to data collection, an introductory meeting allowed the researcher to provide an information letter and inform each participant of the purpose and aims of the study. Following this, informed consent for participation, interview and tape recording of interviews, were obtained from each participant prior to data collection. All participants were informed of their right to withdraw from the process at any time. Confidentiality of transcribed data and taped recordings was ensured as integral to the data collection procedure. During the process of data collection and analysis, access to the data was limited to the researcher and research supervisor. In addition, all transcribed data will be destroyed on completion of this research project.

As a measure of reliability and validity in this study the researcher has adopted some of the methodological guidelines as outlined by Elliot, et al., (1999). Elliot et al (1999) adapt the earlier use of triangulation of data (Packer and Addison, 1989) to that of providing credibility checks which includes confirmation of findings with participants or similar individuals, comparison between two or more qualitative perspectives and appropriate 'triangulation' with external data which is clearly related, even if quantitative. In relevance to this the research supervisor provided extensive feedback and guidance at each stage of data collection, analysis and interpretation. Results were also compared to other studies as found in literature and linked to the results in discussion. In providing an integrated summary of research, they underline the need for coherent clarification of data in a language and style which remains true to experiential nuances in ensuring reader accessibility (Elliot, Fischer and Rennie, 1999). As such, results are presented in

detailed storied accounts which are thematically arranged in representing each participant's own experience as vivid illustrations of real life circumstance.