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The life experiences of therapists who are mothers to children with developmental disability.

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2. METHODOLOGY

The methodology chapter entails setting out methods to be used in order to gain perspective of the research question. The aims, research design, participants, data collection and data analysis are discussed.

2.1. AIMS

2.1.1. Main aim

The purpose of the study was to explore the participants' unique life experiences in terms of their roles as therapists who work with people with disability and as mothers to children with developmental disability.

2.1.2. Sub-aims

There were three influential factors which determined the sub-aims of the study. The first was the four life domains which the participants occupied. These domains were used to structure the explorative nature of the study. Secondly, the phenomenological stance which the study adopted allowed the researcher to formulate the sub-aims in relation to the emerging data. Thirdly the semi-structured interview style and the imagery task allowed the participants to discuss their internal concerns. Cumulatively, the following sub-aims were devised,

2.1.1.1. To determine the extent to which engaging in multiple social roles is stressful;

2.1.1.2. To develop an understanding of the merging of professional and personal identities;

2.1.1.3. To gain insight into possible coping strategies that professional mothers employ;

2.1.1.4. To investigate the professional implications of the research outcomes.

2.2. RESEARCH DESIGN

The choice of design was guided by the notion that is espoused by life experience research, where participants' experiences are considered to be multi-faceted constructs which may display similar trends yet remained unique to each participant (Miller, 2000). The qualitative paradigm was chosen as it enhances our interpretation of such social realities (Silverman, 2000). In essence, qualitative research seeks to understand the identified phenomenon in relation to the context in which it occurs through processes such as exploration, elaboration and systematization (Banister, Burman, Parker, Taylor & Tindall, 2006). Qualitative data acknowledges the importance of immeasurable entities such as personal experience, field observation of phenomenon and the meaning of the raw data. Subsequently, the methodology reflects the interpretive nature of the paradigm. There are many different research designs within the qualitative paradigm, all of which reflect the different ways of interacting with social phenomenon in question. Specifically the proposed study was embedded within the phenomenological theoretical perspective (Henning, 2004).

2.2.1. The philosophy of phenomenology as a research design

Phenomenology emerged as a philosophy at the beginning of the twentieth century. Initiated by Edmund Husserl the aim of phenomenology to provide a framework in which knowledge claims could be grounded (Glendinnings, 2007; Giorgi & Giorgi, 2006). Knowledge claims referred to specific phenomenon which was being

investigated, mostly in a rudimentary scientific manner. At the time academic findings were subjected to skepticism, particularly as proper methods of investigation were not well established and consequently could not validate results obtained. Perhaps the greatest challenge lay in understanding or interpreting human consciousness and subjective experience, which became the key component of Phenomenology. Glendinnings, (2007) is quick to stress that Phenomenology is not a philosophy which is limited to subjective experience. In fact many Phenomenological theorists do not consider subjectivity to be an integral component of the philosophy. Rather, Phenomenology refers to a method of investigation which focuses on understanding the nature of phenomenon as it occurs (Glendinnings, 2007).

The researcher has chosen to embed this study within the Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). IPA is concerned with the manner in which individuals experience and represents reality as it occurs to them. IPA also focuses on human interaction amongst people and environmental stimuli (Eatough & Smith, 2008).

Operationalising IPA requires that participants are acknowledged as being the best possible informants of their personal experiences. Data elicitation techniques aim for in-depth, personal information. The researcher allows the participants to share information in a manner which best suits the individual. There is no prescription or structuring of the participants' worlds, which is reflected in the manner in which participants respond to the task. Except for the focus of the research question, the participants are free to create their own dimensions (Eatough & Smith, 2008; Giorgio & Giorgio, 2008; Smith & Osborn, 2006). IPA differs from the rest of Phenomenological thought in that the methodology is interpretative instead of

descriptive (Eatough & Smith, 2008). IPA also maintains that the research process is dynamic with the researcher taking an active role in understanding the participants' personal world (Smith & Osborn, 2006). Adopting an active stance allows the researcher to understand her own biases in relation to the participants, gain access to the participants internal worlds and understand the influences which determine internal constructs of the research issues. In IPA this approach adopted by the researcher is termed a 'double hermeneutic', which essentially refers to the two-stage interpretation process (Eatough & Smith, 2008; Smith & Osborn, 2006). This is the fundamental to the interpretative nature of IPA.

2.2.2. Participatory Action Research as a research design

To a lesser extent the researcher has included principles of Participatory Action Research (PAR). Action research is an enquiry which combines theory with action and change (Kagan, Burton, Siddiquee, 2008; Banister et al., 2006). Participation of individuals entails examining an issue from the perspective and lived experience of the people most affected by it (Savin-Baden & Wimpenny, 2007). Action Research embraces the viewpoint that the individuals should be addressed as equal participants in the research process (Savin-Baden & Wimpenny, 2007; Taylor, 2006). The idea of research being inflicted upon people is shunned. Instead, participants are invited to address issues which they want answers to. Subsequently, they contribute, analyze and evaluate the outcomes of the research which is the essential feature of PAR. What PAR signifies is a highly in-depth process of collaborative investigation which can transcend from the individual level to the organizational or even community levels (Kagan, et al., 2008). A central aspect to PAR is that it empowers the participants by treating them as equal partners in the research

process. This was of great importance in this study as the participants were colleagues to the researcher. Both researcher and participants were coming from similar professional backgrounds in terms of knowledge and experience notwithstanding the close link between the three differing occupations. In this instance, the participants were more than sufficiently equipped to understand the dynamics of the study and the manner in which they contributed to the study. Ethically, PAR enabled the researcher to maintain professional and research stipulated boundaries (Knapp & VandeCreek, 2006). Bearing this in mind the aim of the present study was not to bring about social change but rather investigate whether or not there is a need for change which is why principles of PAR were marginally incorporated into the study.

2.2.3. The source of data

A collective case study method was selected as the unit of analysis. The unit of analysis are central to the research design as it represents the source of information being studied (Patton, 2002). The collective case study method entails in-depth analysis of more than one participant (Stake, 2000). The rationale for choosing a multiple case study method was that the aims and sub-aims of the study required extensive exploration of personal experience. A single case study was not sufficient to draw reasonable conclusions about the phenomenon being researched.

2.3. PARTICIPANTS

In order to implement the research design discussed, the participants were considered in relation to sampling strategy and size, selection criteria as well as participant recruitment.

2.3.1. Sampling strategy and participant recruitment

In-depth exploration of personal experience calls for participants who possess specific criteria pertaining to the objectives of the study (Henning, 2004). The study employed purposive sampling as a strategy. This means that participants were selected on the basis of presenting with the necessary experiences (O'Leary, 2004). Purposive sampling is appropriate to research where the aim is investigate unique experiences (Smith & Osborn, 2006). The strategy chosen reflects the potential of the participants to guide the research and subsequent conclusions that are reached.

The difficulty with purposive sampling is that participants need to be sourced and screened to ensure that the selection criteria are met (Henning, 2004). Over and above these obstacles, the researcher found that issues of accessibility, time constraints and overall lifestyle demands particular to participants exacerbated the difficulties associated with purposive sampling. Furthermore participants' personal information, which formed part of the sampling criteria, was generally well concealed. In order to temper the pros and cons of purposive sampling, the researcher implemented a variety of recruitment strategies.

The first method of recruitment was attempted by approaching colleagues whose children were known to present with developmental disability. Secondly, the researcher asked colleagues to pass on details of the study to potential participants of which they knew. Thirdly, colleagues were also asked to provide the researcher with contact details of individuals whom they deemed eligible for participation. This is method known as snowball sampling (Warren, 2001). Fourthly speech therapists were randomly approached via email. Mailing lists were obtained from SASLHA.

OTASA and the Physiosa did not provide mailing lists due confidentiality clauses with its members, though the request for participation in the study was published in the respective newsletters.

In all cases letter/email was sent out which explained the aims and objectives of the study. The researcher's contact details (email and mobile contact number) were included. The participants were required to contact the researcher if they were willing to participate in the study.

The researcher acknowledged the possibility of personal acquaintances with participants and the potential bias that this may have had on the results of the study (Miller, 2000). Perhaps the greatest bias arose from the double hermeneutic perspective of IPA where the researcher could have merged her personal view of the participant with the perspective that the researcher was required to understand. In addition, there was also the possibility that acquaintances may have been reluctant to share information with a person within their social sphere. In an effort to promote the validity of the study, preference was given to participants who shared no relations with the researcher. Incidentally, two participants were familiar with the researcher but were not in any way acquainted. The imagery task and interview transcripts as reviewed by the researcher and the inter-raters concurred indicating no evidence of researcher bias. In addition, the thematic analysis of data obtained from these two participants also corresponded with findings from other participants. This suggests that the level of bias, if any, was minimal.

2.3.2. Selection criteria

The use of selection criteria determines the eligibility of participants to take part in the study. The following criteria were established to ensure that the objectives of the study could be achieved.

1. All participants were professionally qualified and working as speech therapists and or audiologists, occupational therapists or physiotherapists.
2. At least one of the participants' children had to present with a developmental disability. Developmental delay was considered as any factor which interferes with the child's ability to interact with the environment in normal manner (Rossetti, 2001).
3. The participants were required to be mothers. Fathers were excluded only because of the limitation imposed by the time frame and scope of the research report.
4. Participants were required to demonstrate proficiency in spoken and written English in order to prevent linguistic barriers between the researcher and themselves. This is very important when engaging in qualitative research, particularly **w**hen the subject matter is of a highly personal, sensitive nature (Miller, 2000). Communication barriers may impede the depth of probing with participants as well as the responses obtained. Miscommunications could affect the data collection process and affect the analysis and conclusions drawn. It is acknowledged that these criteria could have resulted in an unrepresentative sample of the South African population. However, a representative sample carried risks to the reliability and validity of the study, which were non-negotiable to compromise.

2.3.3. Sample size

A sample size is indicative of the amount of data needed in order to draw justifiable, accurate and objective conclusions. Payne and Payne, (2004) state that there are three factors to consider when determining the sample size. These are the sampling strategy chosen, the resources available to conduct data collection and the quality of information that is desired. The qualitative research paradigm and purposive sampling method were chosen for the exploratory and interpretative nature that facilitated the objectives of the study. From a resource perspective, the time constraints, potential size of the data corpus to be analyzed and the limited interviewers' available made it difficult to target a large sample size. In addition, Gaskell, (2003), states that the purpose of qualitative research is not to count opinions but rather to explore the range of opinions. Following on from this O'Leary, (2004) suggests that sample sizes in qualitative studies be based on the sample capturing all the elements being studied. This does not mean that more interviews equate more detailed understanding of the phenomenon being studied. Rather, the researcher should interview participants until a point of meaning saturation is reached which is the point at which no new themes emerge. Proponents of the IPA ideology advocate small sample sizes as the priority of interpretation is to do justice to each case by through detailed analysis (Eatough & Smith, 2008; Eatough & Smith, 2007; Smith & Osborn, 2006). Larger sample sizes tend to produce an exorbitant amount of data which subsequently results in a superficial qualitative analysis. In fact life experience researchers favour single case studies though the opinion is that multiple case studies should take on no more than 6-9 participants. (Eatough & Smith, 2008; Eatough & Smith, 2007; Gaskell, 2003). Bearing the literature suggestions in mind, the researcher recruited a total of eight participants.

Initially the researcher attempted to obtain proportionate numbers of physiotherapists, speech therapists and occupational therapists in order to evaluate whether or not there were any differences amongst the professions. This idea was abandoned during the initial stages of the data collection process as there was limited if no evidence of such a link.

2.3.4. Description of participants

The total sample comprised of two physiotherapists, three speech and hearing therapists and three occupational therapists. As a tribute to the resiliency and strength that these women displayed, and to protect their anonymity, the researcher chose to portray them as precious stones and metals. The names were allocated according to the researcher's impression of each participant. With this in mind, participants are introduced as Diamond, Crystal, Gold, Platinum, Tanzanite, Amethyst, Sapphire and Ruby.

The description of the participants will be limited to the professional and family information that was obtained through the biographical questionnaire. The small size of each fraternity as well as the degree of camaraderie amongst fraternity members, made it necessary to keep participant information to a minimum level in order to maintain anonymity.

2.3.4.1. Professional information

All participants (n=8) had remained active within their respective professions since graduation, even though this was partial in certain cases. The range of clinical experience ranged from 8-37 years (average=20 years). Some participants (n=3) had pursued postgraduate studies with success.

The type of work that participants engaged in was heavily dependent on the balancing of work and family. As a result, all participants worked part-time, especially when their children where young.

2.3.4.2. Personal information

All participants (n=8) were married. For all participants, the nucleus family consisted of themselves, their husbands and their children. Half the participants (n=4) had two children each while the rest of the participants (n=4) had three children each.

The developmental disorders included a variety of syndromes, sensory integration and learning difficulties, attention deficit disorder, gross motor difficulties, autism and congenital malformations. Their children with developmental disability ranged in age from 3-30 years. This meant that for most participants (n=6) they had lived with Disability for more than a decade. For more than half the participants (n=5), intervention measures for their children were still in place.

All participants had some form of support structure in place. More than half of the participants (n=6) received support from their husbands. All the participants (n=8) were part of a broader social network, which supported their issues. For many participants, family support was minimal with only three participants receiving regular support. Nearly all the participants (n=7) relied on their domestic workers to execute the physical care needs for their children.

2.3.5. Setting

Taking the highly personal and sensitive nature of the data into account it was important to ensure that the participants were as comfortable as possible within their environment (Zaltman, 2004). The interviews took place at a time and setting which

they deemed comfortable and convenient. It was important that there were no disturbances (such as environmental noise, additional people/children, personal or work commitments) which could have distracted participants and inevitably affected the quality of the data obtained. A time period of two hours was allocated to each interview. This allowed the researcher and the participants to engage in discussions as it related to the aims of the study.

2.4. PROCEDURE

This section of the methodology will focus on the manner in which the data were collected. Included here are the clearance procedures, the type and design of the research instrument, piloting of the instrument, methods of data collection as well as an evaluation of reliability and validity of the method.

2.4.1. Ethical considerations

2.4.1.1. University and professional organizations.

Permission to conduct the study was obtained from the University of the Witwatersrand Council for Research on Human Subjects. A copy of the clearance certificate is the appendix, marked as annexure 'A'. In addition the proposed study was approved by the Higher Degrees Committee of the Faculty of Humanities, University of the Witwatersrand.

SASLHA and Physiosa provided written consent to participation in the study. The consent letters have been included in the appendix and are marked as annexure 'B' and 'C' respectively.

2.4.1.2. Participant consent

Engaging in qualitative research can be a double edge sword (Waldrop, 2004). On one hand it affords the researcher the opportunity to delve into the life experience of participants which is unlikely with most quantitative research methods. On the other hand qualitative methods may increase the vulnerability of the participants. Research involving human subjects is regulated by strict professional and research ethical codes which ensure that participants are protected from potential physical and emotional harm during the research process (Warren, 2001). Knapp and VanderCreek, (2006) as well as Wassenaar, (2006) discussed four widely accepted principles in determining whether or not the research to be conducted meets ethical requirements. These principles are autonomy and respect for the individual, non-maleficence, beneficence and justice. In keeping with these principles the researcher firstly had to outline the aims of the study to the participant. Each participant was invited to participate in the study through a participant information letter (marked as annexure 'D' in the appendix). In the form of a précis participants were presented with the rationale for the study, the proposed outcomes of the study, requirements for the imagery task and an outline of the interview. Participants were also made aware of potential benefits and risks that they could face as well as the fact that they had the right to withdraw from the study at any point in time which would not jeopardize them in any way.

Participants had to provide written consent to being interviewed, audio-recorded during the interviews as well as transcriptions as per the audio data. The consent forms are marked as annexure 'E' in the appendix. All participants received a copy of the consent forms, which bore the date as well as the participants' and researcher's signature. The participants were informed that audio recordings were to be disposed

of on completion of the study although transcribed material would be archived at the Department of Speech Pathology and Audiology, School for Human and Community Development, Faculty of Humanities, University of the Witwatersrand. The researcher also undertook to maintain confidentiality and anonymity of responses at all times. No identifying information (such as their names, telephone numbers or addresses) was obtained. The researcher was the only person who had access to audio-tapes although transcripts were made available to inter-raters for purposes of reliability. All transcripts were numerically ordered. It is worth mentioning that the researcher obtained a brief history of the participants' professional and personal life by way of a biographical questionnaire (marked as annexure "O" in the appendix). The aim of this was to establish the participants' goodness of fit with the selection criteria. Subsequently the information obtained did not jeopardize the confidentiality undertakings that the researcher had pledged to the participants.

The subject matter was of a highly sensitive and confidential nature. The researcher anticipated the emotional impact that the task may have had for participants. In an attempt to counter these effects the researcher ensured that contact details of relevant support and counseling therapists were available to participants. This is also included in the appendix and marked annexure 'F'.

2.4.2. The data protocol

The data were obtained by means of an in-depth discursive interview complemented by the use of an imagery task. The section that follows provides a description of the methods used, justification for the use, as well as an evaluation of their usefulness for this type of research.

Using two methods of obtaining data ordered a logical procedure of data collection. As such there were three phases to the research enquiry. The first phase was the informative phase. Participants were introduced to the imagery task and familiarized with the task requirements which they had to carry out. The second phase was collection phase where the interviews were conducted. This occurred approximately a week after the informative phase. During this phase, the nature of the interview was guided by the imagery task. The final phase of data collection was the compilation phase during which the interview material and the images collected was merged. The compilation phase was partly conducted with the participants in order to clarify the information that had been obtained.

2.4.2.1. The discursive interview

The nature of the data required the researcher to be in direct contact with the participants. Interviews were chosen as it allowed the researcher access to the participants' inner world by gently manipulating the interactions to gain the information needed yet maintain the interpersonal boundaries that govern such interactions (Flick, 2003; Fontana & Frey, 2003). In this study, data was obtained by means of semi-structured interviews. Such interviews are guided by a subset of topics consisting of a small number of open-ended questions (Warren, 2001). The use of semi-structured interviews enabled the researcher to probe responses in order to collect data of great depth yet within the scope of the study.

The researcher had to balance three factors prior to deciding upon an interview style. These were the subjective nature of the data, the objectivity of the qualitative paradigm and the aims of the study (Fontana & Frey, 2003). Essentially the

researcher had to ensure that the participant was not subjected to vulnerability in any way, while achieving the objectives of the study. In addition, the researcher had to be cognizant of fundamental professional behaviours such as time constraints, punctuality, confidentiality and trust during the data collection (O'Leary, 2004).

Taking these factors into account, the in-depth, discursive interview was chosen as the style of interviewing to be conducted. It is used in research where deep, personal information is sought (Meyers, 2003; Johnson, 2001). The researcher implemented the discursive interview style by adopting a relaxed, semi-formal manner of interaction with the participants while constantly bearing the objectives of the study in mind. This facilitated good interpersonal rapport between the researcher and the participant. More importantly, the researcher and the participant were able to determine each other's overall perspective on Disability. The highly intimate, subjective nature of the discursive style permitted the researcher to "hear the data" and pick up on subtleties that may have ordinarily have been missed (Warren, 2001). However, the subjective nature of the interview is also a disadvantage in terms of reliability. This necessitated the use of additional research methods in order to authenticate the data obtained from the interviews (Johnson, 2001). The researcher chose to employ a metaphoric or image-related task.

2.4.2.2. The metaphoric task

Metaphors, imagery, photographs and dream-work are creative measures that are being used as qualitative tools in the fields of study such as anthropology, sociology, psychology and marketing (Edgar, 2006). The underlying premise of metaphorical research methods is that conscious experience is directed by unconscious mental

activity, memories and intentions (Zaltman, 2004). Metaphoric tasks permit the merging of cognitive, social and personal domains. Implementing creative research methods allows the researcher to tap into cognitive processes beyond literal language and experience. This leads to a deep understanding and awareness of the self which is in essence the root to understanding personal experiences (Edgar, 2006). Proponents of imagery tasks assert that introspective awareness increases understanding of the self and the individuals' relationship with the world as such (Serig, 2006). This enables the individual to assume more responsibility for thoughts and actions (Denton, 2003). Implementing the metaphoric task strengthened the interview style. Interestingly, it was the metaphoric task that defined the semi-structured nature of the interview as opposed to the initial schedule of questions which the researcher had developed. As a result, the interviews kept to the objectives of the study while allowing for digressions only as they related to the issues being researched.

The challenge however, pertained to the manner in which the imagery task was structured. The reason being that visual metaphor research is not well documented (Edgar, 2006; Banks, 2005). Consequently it is difficult to determine how to structure the task in order to tap into true cognitive resources (Serig, 2006). The researcher looked to the Zaltman Metaphor Elicitation Tool (Zaltman, 2004) for guidance in this respect. However, the task as implemented in this study was largely based on the researcher's interpretation of the literature.

2.4.2.3. The three-phase implementation of the research protocol

2.4.2.3.1. The informative phase

The informative phase was the first phase of the data collection. During this time the participants were briefed about the imagery process in writing as well as verbally. This was to ensure that the participants were fully aware of the task requirements as well as to enhance the quality of the information obtained. In addition the researcher supplied all material needed for the task except the images. A copy of the imagery protocol has been included in the appendix, marked as annexure 'G'.

Participants were instructed to collect their own imagery based on the four domains that therapists occupy, namely, mother, working woman, parent of a child with developmental disability and as a professional working with individuals presenting with disability. The task was limited to 7-10 images in order maximize the introspective process. Participants subsequently chose images which best described their experiences. The images were plotted on chart of paper (A2 size) which was divided into four quadrants with each quadrant depicting one of the four roles that the study had investigated (see annexure 'H' in the appendix). Visual depiction of the collective roles enabled a macro and micro level perspective of the objectives of the study. The aim was to encourage participants to consider all the areas being researched during the imagery task. The semi-division of the roles was purposeful as it represented possible overlap of roles. Participants were instructed to group the images onto the chart at their discretion.

Where possible the researcher attempted to deliver the 'information pack' to the participants in person. Not only was this an opportunity for formal introductions, it also enabled the researcher to clarify any misunderstandings as it pertained to the

research task and arrange dates and times for the interview. Failing personal delivery, the researcher posted the information to the participants and followed up with them telephonically.

2.4.2.3.2. The collection phase

The second phase of the study entailed actual collection of data. This took place in the form of the discursive interview. The imagery task guided the interviews by providing discussion material as well as structuring the manner in which objectives of the study were attained.

The participants were asked to complete the imagery task 7 – 10 days before the interview took place. The time period was deliberate as it encouraged the participant to reflect on conscious and unconscious beliefs and thoughts. This is beneficial to the depth of interviewing and subsequently the nature of the data collected (Zaltman, 2004).

There were two benefits observed from the onset of the task up until the time that the interview was conducted. Firstly it prompted participants to engage in deep introspection of the research issues as it related to them. Secondly, the emerging thought patterns were constantly revised and refined, to the point where participants developed personal theories which reflected how they understood themselves in relation to all four roles. One of the ways in which this was apparent was the manner in which they clustered the images, for instance they would include more pictures in one role compared to another. The choice of images revealed careful thought, for example some participants used a single picture to explain a myriad of emotions and experiences. Asking them about the choice of the images revealed that they had

deliberately omitted certain thoughts, experiences and emotions. Many participants stated that they changed the images that they had chosen, while some participants continued revising the images during the interview. Almost all the participants commented on the benefits of the task. It was the first time that some of them had considered their emotional and psychological issues. Interestingly, the layout of the images on a large piece of paper was a concrete representation of how they portrayed themselves. It was a compelling tool which allowed them to step out of their situation and observe their lives from an outsider perspective yet with insider knowledge.

2.4.2.3.3. The compilation phase

The aim of the interview was to facilitate movement from the literal image to the internal image that the participant held (Denton, 2003). According to Banks, (2005) the process of analyzing imagery in the social sciences begins with three questions. Firstly, the content of the image is assessed and labeled if necessary. Secondly, the researcher examines the source of the image and considers when and why it was created. Thirdly, the researcher questions the audience that the image draws in relation to audience perspectives and behaviours.

In addition, Cornelissen, (2003) states that there are two important concepts to consider in order to understand the participants' metaphorical depiction of the issues being researched. The first concept is the criterion of isomorphism which is the extent to which the metaphor and the research issue are related. The second concept is the hypothesis of comparison which builds on from the concept of isomorphism by allowing comparisons and further theoretical connections to be made. During the interview, the researcher aimed to understand the participants'

internal images by probing the literal image. The conceptual basis of the metaphors investigated was attempted through the process of laddering (Zaltman, 2004). Laddering entailed asking open-ended questions in a hierarchical manner which identifies the relation between the imagery and the research issue. Once established the researcher probes the participants' internal image as it relates to the research issue. Theoretical connections and comparisons are probed next. The researcher continues the process of building upon information in order to understand the participants' perspective as well as to gain insight into the research topic.

The researcher operationalised this process through a set of semi-structured questions (this is marked as annexure 'I' in the appendix). However, this did not work out as planned for two reasons. Firstly, the participants directed the interviews. Initially there was a lot of discussion primarily about the participants' background. This discussion proved invaluable in re-iterating focal topics that the participants deemed important to them. The discussion also provided a meaningful backdrop for understanding the images. It gave life to the images and allowed the participants to engage actively in the interview. The role of the researcher was to guide the interview. She was required to listen and occasionally ask a question though this was more out of clarification than deep probing. At times the metaphorical representation of the image preceded the actual image and it was necessary to ask very blunt questions such as: "Why did you choose this picture?". Part of the interview process entailed asking no questions at all. It seemed that allowing the participants to free talk enabled them to delve deeply into the richness of their own images as it related to their feelings and thoughts. This process of listening and interjecting with a question enabled the researcher to gain deep insight into the aims of the study. Often, instead of asking questions, the researcher summarized and

recapped what she had understood for the participants. This worked well as not only did it confirm the information but it also allowed for deeper probing and reflection on their part.

Secondly, the interview was dynamic with the nature of the interview being so sensitive could not impose her intentions onto the participants. As a result the researcher had to abandon the schedule of questions which she had devised.

In the reflexitivity process that she engaged in, the researcher wrote:

"I was forced to respond as a human being, reaching out to another human being in distress. I discarded the robe of the researcher and I participated in the interview. I shared my feelings when and where necessary, though I was always on guard to share as little as possible for fear of jeopardizing the results obtained. Was this the right thing to do? I don't know but I do know that participants were expecting a response from me, not as a researcher but as someone who understood what they were saying and where they were coming from."

Some participants included words into the task. This was perfectly acceptable in that words were seen to be their form of images. What is interesting is that they discussed the images more than the words, again highlighting the depth of probing that the images allowed. The words that participants included were emotive or character traits.

The researcher documented themes as it appeared during the interview as well as through the process of reading the imagery. This method reflects the initial stages of data analysis (Edgar, 2006). The researcher depicted the interview graphically on a large piece of paper using the imagery and written responses gathered during the interview so that a mind map could be created for the participant. It was beneficial to have illustrated the participants' views and thoughts graphically so that they could assess the accuracy of the data obtained and reflect on their personal accounts.

This method allowed the researcher to probe areas significant to the individual and to the study at that particular point in time (Zaltman, 2004).

2.4.3. Interviewer skills that were considered

Though the process of interviewing in qualitative research is highly suitable to the investigation of human experience, the main drawback is interviewer bias (Flick, 2004; Meyers, 2003). The researcher unwittingly brings about her experience, perception, knowledge and beliefs to the occasion which can have significant bearings on the accurateness of the data obtained (Banks, 2005). In contrast Johnson, (2001) maintains that the style of the interview demands that the researcher has some background knowledge or experience in the issues being researched. Failing this the researcher comes across as a novice having to be taught the relevance of the research question by the experienced participant. Consequently, the researcher does not read the data beyond the level of questions and answers.

The researcher was cautious that her manner of questioning did not reflect any internal bias. She attempted to maintain the boundary between true understanding of the participants' contributions and contributions which could have affected the participants' responses. This included deviating from the objectives of the study, incorrect recording of answers or indulging in personal narratives. The researcher was also cognizant of small nuances such as facial expression, tone and use of voice which could have diverted the objectives of the study.

Essentially, the researcher had to refine her interviewing skills prior to actual data collection. This could only be done with practice and experience which was why the piloting stage of the study was crucial.

2.4.4. The pilot study

Accurate data collection depended on the researcher's ability to implement the research protocol effectively and efficiently. This is done by administering the instrument to individuals who fit the participant selection criteria who will not form part of the sample (Payne & Payne, 2004).

Piloting enabled the researcher to familiarize herself with the technique of interviewing (Flick, 2004). During this process the researcher learnt what did and did not work and subsequently developed a unique approach to implementing the research tool. It was also important that the researcher understood how to implement the imagery process described above as well as how to use the imagery to understand the participants and the contributions that they make. The researcher's awareness of interviewer bias did not entirely safeguard the study. Piloting was a hands-on experience where the researcher was witness to potential scenarios which could have brought about such bias. This experience was important for the researcher to determine how to control such instances. Furthermore, piloting enabled the researcher to gauge the research tool in terms of content sensitivity, appropriateness to the participants and duration of the interview (O'Leary, 2004). Piloting also allowed the researcher to determine the validity of imagery as an elicitation technique and whether the protocol did justice to the issues being researched.

2.4.4.1. The process of engaging in a pilot study

The piloting process began with the researcher's introspection into central issues in her own life. Once familiar with what the imagery task entailed, the researcher then

proceeded to ask friends and family members to visually depict their understanding of specific topics. For example, the question posed was: “What does mental health mean to you?”. A striking response was a white paint blob on a white piece of paper. The individual explained that white on white represented absolute clarity. So for this individual, mental health meant always being alert and conscience of thoughts and actions so that a mental response would be clear, accurate and concise.

Once familiar with understanding how to read images in relation to participants’ explanation, the researcher decided to focus on stay-at-home mothers and working mothers. These two groups of mothers represented the sample population without impinging on the two focal roles which were to be explored in the study, namely professional women and mothers of children with developmental disability. Participants were asked to use images to explain their role. The images revealed intense reflection on their roles. Participants often expanded upon the images in great detail and used the discussion time to discuss other issues of interest as it related to the images.

2.4.4.2. The results of the pilot study

What emerged from the pilot study was the depth of emotional response that participants felt. This meant that the researcher had to display appropriate emotional sensitivity to what participants were conveying. More importantly, the researcher learnt to allow the participants to partly direct the interview. Also, the researcher had to dismiss preconceived ideas pertaining to the outcome of the interviews. As a result, the researcher was obliged to listen to the individual, which was perhaps the important skill to have learnt. Engaging with different individuals enabled the researcher to become familiar with the interpersonal dynamics governing the

research interview. No doubt it also allowed the researcher to revise and adapt the intended research protocol. The most important aspect of the pilot interviews were proper time management. The researcher learnt how to obtain information within the allocated time period. This involved limiting unnecessary chatter and subtly directing the flow of conversation as per the aims of the interview.

There were subtle aspects of the pilot study which proved to be invaluable. For instance, initially the researcher felt awkward about placing the voice recorder very close to their faces as it seemed too obtrusive. However, the poor quality of the recordings led to the researcher being honest and asking the participants their permission prior to placing the recorder in front of them.

In addition, the pilot study drew attention to logical planning such as carrying spare batteries, pens and pencils and extra notepads.

Overall, the pilot study was a highly effective way of understanding the requirements that the actual research protocol demanded. It also refined the researcher's interviewing skills.

2.5. DATA CAPTURE

The data were captured in the form of audio tapes which were transcribed, field observation notes, imagery presented by the participants and graphic displays of the interviews.

Qualitative data sees the researcher as the primary instrument for data collection and analysis meaning that the researcher has to ensure reliable methods of data capture (Silverman, 2000). The researcher audio-taped the interviews which were later transcribed. For all data recording methods a symbolic coding system depicting

verbal cues (such as false starts, repetitions and silences) as well as non-verbal cues (differences in intonation, pitch, gesture) was implemented (Meyers, 2003). A copy of the coding system is available in the appendix, marked annexure 'J'.

Potter (2006) recommends using a digital minidisc recorder with a flat microphone so as to enhance sound and recording clarity. The disc also has greater recording time in comparison to cassettes. The advantage of digital recordings is that it can be organized into computer files without compromising on the quality of the recordings. A Philipps 9350 minidisc recorder was utilized. The researcher also had a SANSUI personal microcassette recorder and a Dictaphone voice processor on standby in the event of an emergency.

The researcher made extensive field notes during the interviews which supplemented the transcriptions. The graphic depiction of the interview also served as a source of data capture.

2.6. RELIABILITY AND VALIDITY

Validity and reliability are of paramount importance in determining the credibility of the conclusions reached in the study. In the qualitative paradigm, there are many views about the meaning of validity and reliability. Some authors posit that all qualitative research is naturally subjective and therefore we cannot consider reliability and validity. Others, such as Gaskell and Bauer, (2003) posit that validity and reliability in qualitative research need to display the credibility of science operating within the social domain.

Validity refers to whether the research data and conclusions reflect the true nature of the sample and phenomenon in question (Silverman, 2000). The use of Participatory Action Research as a research design was more likely to engage participants in concepts such as trustworthiness and authenticity which is crucial for validity (Savin-Baden & Wimpenny, 2007). The use of imagery was validated by implementing the criterion of isomorphism and the hypothesis of comparison (Cornelissen, 2003). In addition the use of image-work was a valuable addition to participatory action research methods as it is based on core values such as empowerment of individuals and deep-seated expression of needs (Edgar, 2006). The time period between the task and the interview allowed participants clearer and firmly entrenched impressions of thoughts and emotions. This was evident from the pilot study where the researcher posed leading questions to the participants, where fortunately, there was minimal change in the opinions and perceptions of the participants. The graphic display of information as compiled by the participants and the researcher was a concrete method of establishing validity. This is known as communicative validity (Flick, 2004).

Reliability requires that the similar results can be obtained as measured by different researchers or over a period of observations (Silverman, 2000). However reliability in qualitative research does not aim to seek uniformity but rather to eliminate serious inconsistencies (Payne & Payne, 2004). Reliability in this instance was ascertained by having professionals with in-depth knowledge of the social phenomenon being studied rate the data at different points in time which is known as inter-rater reliability (O'Leary, 2004). The inter-raters comprised of an industrial psychologist having experience in the area of image-work; a speech-language therapist employed at a

special needs school and an audiologist currently employed within the business sector. The researcher felt that the diversity amongst the inter-raters would increase the level of objectivity towards the study. The inter-raters were required to read through each transcript and the images that the participants had chosen. In order to safeguard against potential bias the researcher implemented the following measures: each inter-rater was given three or two transcripts to read so as not to make the task cumbersome. Each transcript was void of comments made by the researcher. The inter-raters were not familiar with each other which prevented discussion of opinions.

The inter-raters were familiar with the aims and objectives of the study. The researcher used information from the pilot study to demonstrate the manner in which the data were to be analyzed.

The inter-raters compared the transcripts together with the images. In the process they identified themes and drew their own conclusions. Once this was completed, the researcher and the individual inter-rater compared findings and discussed differences that arose as per interpretation. On most occasions, there was congruence between the themes identified by both parties. For the themes that did not match, the researcher would discuss the findings with the other inter-raters in order to reach an appropriate conclusion.

The researcher also engaged in on-going reflexivity which is the process of maintaining high professional standards by reflecting on the experience of engaging in the research process with the participants (Gaskell & Bauer, 2003). The researcher kept a diary where she wrote down her encounters with all individuals in the study. This included her thoughts, emotions and questions. At a later stage she

went back and re-read that she had written. In this way the reflexivity task enabled the researcher to question her own practice, identify short-comings and strengths as well as determine the plausibility and coherence of the interview process. The researcher also recorded her own reactions and interpretations of the data collection process. This was not a mechanical process of note taking but rather the researcher's internal analysis of each stage of the research process.

Finally, the researcher also completed the task and was interviewed by colleague familiar with the image-work assessments. Incidentally, this colleague was also an inter-rater in the study. The task outcomes enabled the researcher to gain perspective on the role of the participant.

2.7. Data analysis

The nature of naturalistic enquiry is characterized by a 'fluid', interactive relationship between data collection and data analysis (Lee & Fielding, 2006). Analysis in the form of emergent themes, possible hypothesis and formation of patterns emerged during the course of fieldwork. The actual analysis of data served to confirm or disconfirm initial fieldwork assumptions and gain deeper insights into the findings of the study. Bearing this in mind it was necessary that the data analysis treated data as a window into human experience.

Prior to discussion of the method of choice for data analysis, there were three influential factors to consider (Ezzy, 2002). Firstly, the unit of analysis chosen was multiple case studies. Case studies are context and content specific which required holistic conceptualization, integration of information and deep understanding prior to analysis (Potter, 2006). The second point to consider was the voluminous nature of data collection associated with the interview method as well as the nature of

qualitative studies (Ezzy, 2002). Thirdly, the nature of the interview was based on images which aimed at deep metaphor elicitation. Kelly, (2006) describes the metaphor as a conceptual use of language where words are used out of the literal context to refer to meaning in another context. Data analysis had to consider the images as well as the interviews.

Acknowledging the complex nature of analyzing case studies, Patton, (2002) suggests that the researcher compiles all possible information pertaining to the case in a layered fashion. This meant that the researcher began with interview data, observations, the imagery material, contextual information, views and opinions about others. In this way the researcher built up the raw data that was needed for the analysis. Once this was obtained the researcher then converted the raw data into workable textual form. Taking the immense volume of data into account, the researcher opted for transcription of the interview data only. Lee and Fielding, (2006) as well as Patton, (2002) assert that trade-offs between transcription, time and theory are inevitable in qualitative research especially where only one researcher is available to the task. In addition, Holliday, (2006) argues that the richness of the data does not only arise from in-depth analysis of a single research method (such as transcriptions of the interviews) but rather the different sources which describe it (in this case the field notes, observations and imagery). The data analyzed comprised of transcriptions of the interview supplemented by observation records, field notes and the imagery collected from the participants.

Kelly, (2006) suggests that the images are analyzed in three ways. The interview data constantly needs to be checked with the images in order to ascertain whether or

not the same metaphors are being used, the context in which the metaphors exist and the manner in which the interview transcriptions substantiate the imagery metaphors or vice versa. Edgar, (2006) suggests immersion into the data by re-examining transcripts in relation to the images and getting a feel for the participants' use of language. In addition to these suggestions, the images and metaphors were laid out and categorized in order to establish thematic similarity and also to ascertain the type and quantity of metaphors present.

In light of the textual nature of the data, the most comprehensive method of data analysis was content analysis. The process began with the researcher reading the text in order to gain an overall impression of the content (Henning, 2004). The researcher then re-read the data in order to identify units of meaning.

There are two broad ways to assess the meaning of the data which can be described as bottom-up and top-down approaches (O'Leary, 2004). Utilizing both approaches to analysis enables the researcher to view the data holistically and simultaneously note the subtleties in the data that may have emerged. For the bottom-up method, the researcher employed word counts and cognitive maps (Ryan & Bernard, 2000). Word counts entailed analyzing the data for the frequency of particular words, comparisons of the different words that were used and contexts in which the words appeared. Cognitive maps consisted of a set of inter-related concepts known as schematas. The cognitive maps were an appropriate method of data analysis as the imagery techniques used were based on conscious and unconscious schematas.

The most common way of top-down methods was by means of thematic coding where the data was carefully read in order to discover and link themes. The concept of constant comparison as utilized in grounded theory was used to guide the analysis. Constant comparison entailed refining key concepts by looking for similarities and differences throughout the text (Silverman, 2000). The themes that emerged from this process were supported by the word counts and cognitive maps. The process of uncovering themes lead the researcher to link, compare and contrast findings as well as question the conditions under which they occur. This lead to the construction of a theory specific to the study.

3. RESULTS

This section will discuss the results obtained from the data collection. The results are presented according to the four roles which participants were deemed to fulfil. In addition, all results are displayed thematically and are a combination of images, transcriptions from the interviews as well as field notes as observed by the researcher.
A summary of the emergent themes and sub-themes according to the raw data have been tabulated and inserted into the appendix.

Throughout the study, an outstanding feature of the findings was the significant overlap of roles. Although each role was defined by core features, there was a seamless flow of characteristics from one to the other. Despite the close connection of roles, the imagery task revealed that the participants had ordered the roles that they occupy according to priority. This was evident from the manner in which participants unwittingly clustered more images around a role that was significant to them. Emerging themes, verbal and non-verbal body language as well as emotive words that emerged during the interview supported this finding. More importantly, it allowed the researcher to gain insight into how participants had conceptualised their own identities.

3.1. THE MOTHER AS A CAREGIVER

This role revealed that all the participants considered mothering to be the most significant role in their lives. The themes suggested that the participants viewed this role from three perspectives. The first perspective was an almost automated reaction to the term “mother” which was apparent from images of traditional obligations such as cooking, cleaning and nursing. The second perspective reflected greater depth in conceptualising the role of a mother. Here participants defined the role as mother as a nurturer whose aim is to facilitate psychological, mental and emotional growth. Participants also considered the effect of nurturing on themselves. Thirdly, participants examined the support structures which facilitated their role as mothers.