CHAPTER FOUR

METHODOLOGICAL ORIENTATION

4.1 INTRODUCTION

My methodological orientation is qualitative because it fits with my own way of being in the world and also with the research question, whereas a quantitative approach would miss the nuances I seek. Given the nature of the research question as an inquiry into psychopathology from the sufferer's point of view, part of the contribution this work hopes to make rests on its methodology. The existing bodies of literature are either quantitative or descriptively rich (particularly with regard to borderline psychopathology), but could be depicted as experience-distant. This is clear from the reviews covered in the preceding two chapters.

As an experience-near exploration of borderline aetiology was sought from sufferers themselves, it was considered appropriate to situate this research within a qualitative paradigm, influenced by a constructivist epistemology. In the way this paradigm and epistemology are used in this study, both rely on transactions that seek the creation of meaning through understanding in the interpersonal space.

Within this qualitative framework, I must consider several issues, which will guide the eventual research procedures:

- reliability and representation (will my method reliably lead me and others to the information I seek?);

- validity (will this method produce valid interpretations of this information?); and
- ethics (will this method be harmful to anyone in any way?).

Within the qualitative framework, several methods and tools are available from which I have selected the life history as the best means of gathering the information, as it is precisely such information that is required to answer the research question. The employment of thematic content analysis of life histories was considered a further extension of the methodological originality when dealing with the disorders of borderline psychopathology and deficient attention. Furthermore, this qualitative framework places much emphasis on a type of ethical responsibility, which demands an elevation of the voice of participants through presentation of long extracts from their histories.

This chapter deals with the general principles that inform the specific research procedures used, which will be discussed in the chapter that follows. These general principles have been divided into four sections – qualitative research, as it has been used in this study; the influence of a constructivist epistemology; a brief section on the case history; and, finally, the use of the life history, interpreted through the device of thematic content analysis. Specific examples of how I have put my methodological orientation into practice are sparse in this chapter but plentiful in the next.

4.2 QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

One form of qualitative research is meant to assist in questions of everyday life activities, i.e. "everyday sense-making procedures of people in specific milieu[s]" (Silverman, 2000:6); the examination of these questions is precisely my intention with regard to the participants in this study. At a basic level, and as a practising psychologist, I prefer working with qualitative, naturally occurring data that does not have numerical outcomes. Logically, this means I also prefer the use of unstructured rather than structured interviews, which allows what is unknown to emerge with greater ease than if the imposed meaning of structured interviews directs the process, however subtle this may be. My emphasis is strongly on the search for meanings and the textures of lived experience rather than on behaviour.

I have used a form of qualitative research, which I find pertinent to this study, named ‘emotionalism’ (Silverman, 2000). This has directed my basis as being in the field, with the desire for close contact with the participants and favouring personal biography. The data generated by such contact is taken as access to direct experience, allowing for the distortions of narration and representation, rather than the co-creation emphasized by discourse or narrative analysis.

4.2.1 Reliability and Representation

Just as in the case of quantitative research, qualitative research is concerned with reliability. In qualitative research, one of the ways in which reliability is defined is the “degree of consistency with which instances are assigned to the same category by different observers or the same observer on different occasions” (Silverman, 2000:175) or “the degree to which other researchers would match given constructs to data in the same way as the original researchers” (Seale, 1999:147). In this research, reliability was partially established by mechanical recording of data, followed by transcribing it and coding the data, both on computer, using the AtlasTi (1993) programme, and manually, and arriving at the same conclusions. In addition, a colleague assisted with data collection (she conducted two of the interviews) to ensure that it was not my personal interviewing style that produced particular data. I reviewed my understandings with certain participants and subjected my interpretations to peer examination (i.e. discussing possible meanings of the data with colleagues).

Ultimately, it is through good coding and retrieval that reliability is created, as well as through retaining good access to the words of the participants without interpolations. This has been made possible through the use of the life history (detailed below) and the presentation of large sections of participants’ talk in the text of this research (see Chapter Five); as well as a referencing system that enables tracking to the paragraph referred to in the data analysis and interpretation.

The attempt to achieve reliability of this kind began with clarifying my position as researcher in the field (see Research Procedures) and then stating as much as possible about the participants (although very little, given the small geographic area involved). This was followed by stating clearly the social situations in which participants found themselves; providing a full account of the theories and ideas that informed the research (see Chapters Two and Three), including those which were involved in possible coding schemes (see below); and, finally, paying attention to methodological reporting, with a detailed account of all aspects of method used (Seale, 1999). In addition, this study does take cognisance of the social/cultural context in which it is situated, noting the historical time at which mental illness in general and these disorders in particular are viewed.

Representational issues are currently concerned with problematics of voice, as well as text and ethical concerns. The researcher in the end necessarily produces texts, which are not equivalent with tape-recorded transcripts, which are themselves mediated by the interview situation. The reader audience (in this case academics and professional psychologists) also "shapes how voice is found and fashioned" (Oleson, 2000:231). Problems may arise if pieces of narratives are used in an unmindful manner, "taking individual voices to reflect group ideas, assuming that voices are free of power relations, researchers' failures to make clear their own positions in relationship to the voices or becoming 'ventriloquists'" (Oleson, 2000:232). Ignoring voice is to dismiss the toned nature of the account. The worry is about how participants' "voices are to be heard, with what authority and in what form…whether the account will only replicate hierarchical conditions found in parent disciplines" (Oleson, 2000:231) in the translation of private matters.

Whichever stance one assumes, because research is based on knowledge-producing interpersonal dynamics, the effects of these dynamics require constant, uncomfortable, interrogation. Haraway urges "diffracting, which turns the lenses with which researchers view phenomena to show multiple fresh combinations and possibilities" (in Oleson, 2000:230), analogously to Richardson's (2000) crystal metaphor of the research process. This is not extreme relativism, where all views are equal, but rather an elevation of the voice of those researched in an attempt to foreground accountability, situated knowledge and partial truths. As Oleson (2000) puts it "the view from nowhere becomes the view from somewhere, that of connected embodied, situated participants" (Oleson, 2000:230). In terms of producing this type of dedicated research, Freire's injunction is kept in mind: "If an important social issue needs resolution, the most vulnerable will have to lead the way" (in Christians, 2000:148).

In this study, representing the experience of these particular participants is a complex process. This is understandable as they are, according to their own reporting, so conflicted and 'disorganized' that the aim of the researcher would necessarily be to reduce these elements, during the interpretive process, in the interests of producing a coherent final account. Thus "speaking for" the participants has taken the form of presenting a series of their lived experiences that allow them to speak for themselves, although the researcher must necessarily interpret their experiences, which are also necessarily interpretations. However, in the process of this re-interpretation, the researcher does not remain "merely the connection between the field text, the research text, and the consuming community in making certain that such voices are heard" (Lincoln & Denzin, 1994:577). This is because the researcher enters the field with her own constructions, contained in her own history as well as in the paradigm and method of enquiry she chooses.

I have tried to explain the grounds on which selective interpretation has been made by making explicit the processes of my decision making that produced my interpretations as well as the logic of the method on which these decisions are based. "This entails acknowledging complexity and contradiction …and recognizing the possibility of silences and absences in their data" (Ramazanoglu in Oleson, 2000:230).

In adopting this position, the researcher is more like a facilitator, a means of going beyond the interviewee's points of view to a mediated grasp of their world (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). The researcher's position is not neutral, however, because "a major contradiction exists…despite the desire to engage in egalitarian research characterized by authenticity, reciprocity and trust. This is so because actual differences of power, knowledge, and structural mobility still exist in the researcher-subject relationship" (Lincoln & Denzin, 1994:577). There is no current solution to this powerful position of the researcher other than that urged by Lincoln & Denzin (2000) in that the end product is taken as no more than an emergent construction. However, generalisability is possible, within the demographic constraints of the respondents, despite the individual, situated nature of this research.

4.2.2 Validity

Validity in qualitative research is truth interpreted as "the extent to which an account accurately represents the social phenomena to which it refers" (Silverman, 2000:175), i.e. authenticity criteria are adopted. Credibility (truth/internal validity), transferability (applicability/ external validity), as well as confirmability (neutrality/objectivity) must all be kept in mind (Seale, 1999). In the qualitative research framing this study, trustworthiness and authenticity replace the yardstick of 'validity', a term which has quantitative connotations. Firstly, the reader needs to be able "to assess whether claims made are plausible given existing knowledge about a topic" (Seale, 1999:48). Variation must be explained rather than denied. Secondly, "core arguments require better supporting evidence than peripheral ones" (Seale, 1999:49). Thirdly, different sorts of claims must be made for different aspects of the work – a theory requires more support than a definition, for example. Any claims made, in any event, should be subject to revision, rather than being taken as the only truth.

Lincoln & Guba (2000) hold that validity in the chosen paradigm is uncertain and unsettled, defined by an ongoing questioning of what constitutes validity. Criteria for validity become, perforce, ‘whither and whether’, abandoning the “regulative norms for removing doubt and settling disputes about what is correct or incorrect, true or false” (Schwandt in Lincoln & Guba, 2000:179). Up to a point, I support the argument that we have to live through uncertainty because our type of inquiry has become “the practice of a form of practical philosophy – a deep questioning about how we shall get on in the world, and what we conceive to be the potentials and limits of human knowledge and functioning” (Lincoln & Guba, 2000:179).

Validity both in qualitative research generally and this study in particular has been approached through constant questioning of whether or not my interpretations of the data are valid. This I have done through careful selection regarding the quality of examples and the provision of constant comparison, i.e. finding other cases against which to test out provisional hypotheses formed from the first case, or against other data fragments in the same case. For example, the theme of ‘feeling persecuted by teasing’ arose in the analysis of the first interview and was confirmed throughout that interview and as the other interviews were analysed this theme was kept in mind as a point of reference or departure.

In general, concepts and themes were induced from Interview 1, and tested out as emerging hypotheses as further data became available. As I did so, I applied the refutability principle, which refers to the subjection of the data to every possible test in an attempt to refute initial assumptions about the data and to achieve a form of objectivity (which would mean that one begins with the notion that teasing is not going to be found, for example).

Secondly, there is comprehensive and consistent data treatment, which means that I applied emerging generalizations to all parts of data collected. (The question, in my mind, for example, would have been: is everyone teased, under what circumstances are they teased and what is their response or were they the initiating provocateur?).

Thirdly, I used the “contrary case” to counteract the charge of anecdotalism. In the case of this study, an additional interview was conducted after collection of the first data set with an individual presenting with the criteria for a DSM IV (1994) diagnosis of BPD but who had no difficulty at school, nor with paying attention. (This case, of Justine, had the elements of childhood trauma, including teasing, but the borderline criteria emerged only after she had a motor vehicle accident in which her executive functions were compromised). The purpose of contrary case analysis is to support or modify the scheme as it emerges: “The provisional analytic scheme is constantly confronted by ‘negative’ or ‘discrepant’ cases until the researcher has derived a small set of recursive rules that incorporate all the data in the analysis” (Silverman, 2000:180) and deviance has been explained. For example, the precise conditions under which teasing becomes traumatic and when it is not experienced in this way have been analysed (See Codebook extracts in Appendix). Seale (1999) considers explaining the deviance of the negative case (whether a small element such as teasing, or an entire case, such as that of Justine) to be the best form of validation throughout the process of interpretation.

> Seeking out and attempting to account for negative instances that contradict emerging or dominant ideas is a core approach in a fallibilistic analytic strategy devoted to improving the quality of research accounts. Willingness to seek out disconfirming evidence, and to allow this to modify general ideas, constitutes the essence of the scientific attitude (Seale, 1999:73).

Fundamentally, as I interpreted, I attempted to prove myself wrong. Further, grounds for inclusion in a theme (detailed in the Codebook, extracts of which are attached in an

Appendix) have been made explicit and the original form has in large part been retained (in the life histories which follow in Chapter Five) for the reader to make his/her own interpretations.

An additional method for counteracting anecdotalism is triangulation, i.e. combining different ways of looking at the problem or different findings, which has been done through comparing and contrasting my findings with the existing literature on healthy development and psychopathology, and with what I observed during the interviews themselves. Nevertheless, using comparison to improve validity has itself come under scrutiny. Stake (2000) sees comparison as competing with thick description, not producing it. He therefore advocates neither ignoring nor focusing on comparison. The point is accurate description and subjective but disciplined interpretation, respect for cultural difference, empathic representation, “all blending (perhaps clumped) within a constructivist epistemology” (Stake, 2000:444).

In seeking validity, I am aware that the inquiry should be generative of knowledge that does not displace lay forms of problem solving and meaning making, but rather supplements or complements them. Evaluative criteria include, rather than dismiss, emotionality, personal responsibility, caring, accounting for the political, multivoiced texts, and dialogues with those researched. This relating is based on reciprocity: the going back to participants, and an underlying assumption that they are experts on themselves and their contexts. In this way, I hoped to establish ‘truth’ value, in the sense of truth to experience. Therefore, I attempted member validation but this did not contribute significantly as only two participants could recall the interview substance and agree or disagree with my interpretations. Nevertheless, these participants did provoke further thoughts about claims I had made and the need for further gathering of evidence.

Finally, if quality is a criterion of validity, 'quality' is itself a notion mediated by specific discourse communities and research sites [mental illness; academic dissertation; borderline narratives; the dominant psychiatric discourse; the counter-discursive]. Quality is found in critical subjectivity – self-reflexivity, which is an intense and profound, intertwined exploration of self and research processes.

4.2.3 Theoretical Sampling

In contrast to quantitative research, the issue of generalisability in qualitative research is dealt with by theoretical sampling, purposively directed at choosing areas or individuals where the phenomenon under investigation is most apparent (such as individuals already diagnosed with Borderline Personality Disorder and a history of Attention Deficit/ Hyperactivity Disorder). Secondly, as qualitative research follows a theoretical logic, generalisability is of cases to a theoretical proposition not to a population. Choosing cases in terms of a theory does not mean, in this study, whether or not a particular hospital is representative but rather cases to which the theory refers. Subsequent studies might then explore this in different hospital settings. Theoretical sampling must be "designed to provide a close up, detailed or meticulous view of particular units which may constitute…cases which are relevant or appear within the wider universe" (Mason in Silverman, 2000:107).

The group of participants eventually interviewed was limited through three aspects of theoretical sampling. Firstly, this was selectively, based on knowledge gleaned from the literature. Secondly, practical considerations such as accessibility and affordability had to be taken into account. Thirdly, sampling maximised the conditions under which developmental issues of borderline psychopathology would become apparent. The point in this study was to examine the processes, mechanisms and meanings in the narratives of the participants, which elucidated developmental issues in borderline psychopathology and deficient attention; and *not* to establish the presence or absence of pathologies. Following this line of reasoning, the circumstances where the narratives would shed most light on the research question were selected.

Based on the literature dealing with both qualitative research (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000) and clinical research (Gualtieri, 1995; Ratey, Middeldorp-Crispijn & Leveroni, 1995; Blum & Noble in Ratey & Johnson, 1997), it appeared that the more chaotic the narrative, the more evident would be the processes, mechanism and meanings. As certain locations are most likely to elucidate the processes being studied (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994), I deliberately sought out "groups and settings, and individuals where and for whom the process[es] being studied were most likely to occur" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000:370).

Within these settings, I purposively selected cases, "based on extreme…cases, …cases that are somehow typical of a phenomenon" (Ryan & Bernard, 2000:780). Although "a single case may be sufficient to display something of substantive importance… Morse, 1994 suggests using at least six participants in studies where one is trying to understand the essence of experience" (Ryan & Bernard, 2000:780). I have used more than this, as a precaution. Looking for themes and building theories, as is the intent here, may require fewer cases than if the purpose was comparing across groups and testing hypotheses and models. Good theoretical sampling also dictates that one finds a case that is not likely to support the argument as detailed above, and one adult with BPD without a history of ADHD was therefore interviewed (Justine). Theoretical sampling offers greater flexibility during the process of research than do statistics. One is able to focus on a small part of the sample and use the rest for generalization, which then allows for extrapolation. This is so because in a radical sense, since basic social and psychological order can be found in any context, there is a suggestion that the same order found in one example will also be found anywhere. The depth involved in examining small case numbers can point to far larger phenomena.

4.2.4 Ethics

I use the term ‘ethics’ in two senses – research ethics and the value-laden nature of research. In terms of research ethics, privacy and confidentiality are prized ethical principles. Even so, people and places can be identified (which is why I have provided very little biographical data); researchers identify an issue as innocent but participants can see the same thing as misleading or betraying. Ethics contain an injunction to worry about carrying out research with good conduct, avoiding harm in data gathering, analysis and text production. “Rather rarely has it been noted that informed consent, freely given at one time, may fade or alter so that participants express curiosity or even scepticism about and resistance to the research at a later stage” (Oleson, 2000:233). Personal information “is lost in the complexities of interactions characterized by mobile subjectivities and multiple realities of both participants and researcher” (Oleson, 2000:233) whether by deliberate research strategy or because of everyday life. Translated here, this means I must question how I am towards the participants, a question which has arisen throughout this chapter, and the research process.

With regard to the value-laden nature of research, Schwandt (2000) deals with ethics as a question of “how to envision and occupy the ethical space where researchers and researched… relate to one another on the sociotemporal occasion or event that is ‘research’ and, consequently, how to determine the role, status, responsibility, and obligations the researcher has in and to the society he or she researches” (Schwandt, 2000:200-201). It follows then that morality must be theorized from an *experiential* basis, specifically in the experience of the “I-thou relationship” (Schwandt, 2000:204). Moral issues must be attentive to relationships, which are in turn encouraging of a researcher being ‘touched’ by the other’s life. Normative issues would then be based on knowledge that is contextual and narrative (not formal and abstract). The individual and relationship aspects are linked in the narrative. Problems would arise from the thin lines dividing control from care, and indifference from tolerance. There is no basis in rule-based argumentative conflict-resolution of competing moral claims, but rather a base in expression and communication.

The stance I have adopted is a consequence of acknowledging that “values feed into the inquiry process” (Lincoln & Guba, 2000:169): directing choice of problem, guiding paradigm, theoretical framework, data gathering and analytic methods, context, treatment of values already resident within the context, and presentation**.** The moral issue arises because a particular theory of knowledge is based on a specific way of seeing human action. Although quantitative methods have their place, one of its pitfalls is not allowing for context dependency. This means that insufficient cognisance is taken of social and cultural norms that are inextricably interlinked with ethical research practices. However, in this study, the value-laden nature of research is acknowledged.

Prior to choosing anything or deciding intentions, is the stance of being – for the participants, in which case morality is involuntary, uncalculated and compulsory. Caring is not seen as carrying out some form of ethics, but is "an ethical orientation, a particular ground of meaning and value with its own relational work" (Schwandt, 2000:205). The essence of this type of caring is not swayed by the 'happiness' of or being 'good' for the other, but is responsibility. Responsibility is specifically defined as "not as freely assumed, not as socially or politically or legally sanctioned; and yet as coming from outside rather than inside" (Schwandt, 2000:205). Justice, goodness, happiness, etc. come later. In this framework, I must responsibly relate to and represent participants, taking into account overt and covert contrary or conflicting forces. To attempt such an ethical stance, means making judgments from a particular standpoint or position. Responsibility means giving due consideration to the knowledge of how science contributes to human flourishing or failure to thrive.

Responsibility further means acknowledging the potential I have to create or destroy in the moment-to-moment relating to participants. In a way, I am fortunate that I have no university position. I have funded this research from private monies, which allows me some distance from employer-institutions. This has enabled me a degree of neutrality and some freedom from potential political forces.

In addition, the author's personal feelings and thoughts should not be obliterated by the requirement for objectivity in different paradigms because this requirement could omit the "person collecting the evidence, drawing the inferences, and reaching the conclusions" (Ellis & Bochner, 2000:734). Using the first person allows, in fact, insists upon personal accountability, balances the weight placed upon abstract, categorical knowledge with the weight of personal narrative. The trouble is that "[o]nce the anonymous essay became the norm, then the personal, autobiographical story became a delinquent form of expression" (Ellis & Bochner, 2000:734). Holding to that absent or implied voice and the authority contained in that form of writing is contrary to my intention to transgress this, if and when it is in the interests of the participants to do so.

> How helpful would it be to list references, define terms, abstract from and critique exemplars, formulate criteria for evaluation or theorize the perspective of the 'I', so readers can make our knowledge theirs? No, we need a form that will allow readers to feel the moral dilemmas, think with our story instead of about it (Ellis & Bochner, 2000:735).

Traditionally and currently, the self of the researcher has been neutrally bracketed out of the research as being 'contaminating', too subjective, too personal. The impact has been to leave the researched feeling vulnerable following their revelations, for example, after each interview. Therefore, I have written something of myself into the text, sharing my theoretical self (primarily in the theoretical model proposed in Chapter Eight and in the summary report-back I intend giving each participant) but limiting this in order not to overwhelm respondents' voices. The task is to avoid the "tendency for the self-absorbed Self to lose sight altogether of the culturally different Other" (Fine *et al,* 2000:109). A balance is required – the self must be present, as this constitutes a responsible narration of representations. Fine *et al's* (2000) statement is relevant: "In the hands of relatively privileged researchers studying those whose experience has been marginalized, the reflexive mode's potential to silence subjects is of particular concern" (Fine *et al*, 2000:109). Hence, at times I write in the traditional third person and, at others, in the first person.

To the extent participants differed from me, as female, English speaking, and from a certain socio-economic background, filters of language, gender, and personal history are in operation. Although postmodernists assume these filters obstruct the view completely, an extreme position, which I do not wholly support, it is conceded that observations are situated within and between the observer and the observed. Knowledge emerges from the interaction of observer (who has professional experience and knowledge) and observed (who has insider knowledge of problems and contexts).

4.3 A CONSTRUCTIVIST ATTITUDE

Fundamentally, I have chosen constructivism because the meaning-making activities around the phenomenon of borderline psychopathology in the development of the participants, i.e. their constructs, are of central interest to this study. Essentially, the individual, as an individual, is constructed in the interpersonal space (Stern, 1985). This is because there is collective generation of meaning as shaped by conventions of language and other social processes, to which the individual is inextricably interlinked (Gergen & Davis, 1985). In this way, the participants are, in a sense, 'products' both of their own agency and that of more powerful others. An understanding of the ways in which they are constructed and how they construct themselves would have to account for them both as such products, labelled diagnostically and packed in institutions *and* as processes of coming into being. "The self, in this approach…is taken to be 'a continuously changing and fluid history of relationships' [i.e. it is distributed across] 'the sum and swarm of participations in social life'" (in Wetherell, 1996:107). The self is thus mutually and jointly constructed over time.

In the course of individual development, which continues throughout life, there is a set of organizing principles around which the self becomes increasingly coherent in an ongoing process of structuralisation, constructions and reconstructions, i.e. acquiring structures of experience, organizing principles, patterns and meaning (Lee & Martin, 1991; Stern, 1985). The sense of self is founded on organization and re-organization of subjective experiences of self and other. “Mental states between people can be ‘read’, matched, aligned with, or attuned to (or misread, mismatched, misaligned, or misattuned)” (Stern, 1985:27). External power relations become transparent frameworks through which experience (categorized as good and evil by external authorities) is filtered. In the case of this study, the aim would be to understand the organizing principles around which the psyche of the individual participant is structured.

As in other qualitative methods, the constructivist approach aims to create relationships with the participants (in the interviews and, in some cases, subsequent therapies). The aim is also to re-represent the stories in ways that “grapple openly with problems of extent to which human action is locally and temporally shaped” (Lincoln & Guba, 2000:177), where appropriate. Uncovering the individual participant’s intrapsychic processes is an archaeological endeavour, searching for the roots of ‘truths’ in their original ‘points of view’. Truth, in the sense of qualitative research, is not necessarily located externally, but rather through language, in socially created infrastructures, which may foster oppression, injustice and marginalization. This can be taken, in some cases, into the individual through processes of internalisation and remain partially visible in their constructions.

In this study, I employ a moderate version of constructivism, which balances social factors in the individual history. If the situation warrants it, this position may well reject definitions of knowledge and evidence developed within the overt realist tradition. In other words, it continually prevails between absolute realism and absolute relativism. This is confirmed by the subtle realism openly advocated by Seale (1999), and which I have been following.

Constructions (including thought, language, awareness, and identity itself) are mediated by socio-historically constituted power relations. Thus, we are framed by context, defined by limitations and power in ordinary everyday life. Context refers to “each individual’s specific history, identity, and affective-emotional constitution and to the relationship between parties in the encounter with *its* history, identity and affective definition” (Schwandt, 2000:204). Spatial and temporal framings of experience are equally important to contextual analysis, which seeks to grasp the complexity of the mundane processes, events, and occasions in which ‘identities’ are formed and transformed” (Frow & Morris, 2000:318). Confrontation can take the form of creating new and transgressive texts, which break conventional social science boundaries. “Experiments with how to do this have produced ‘messy texts’ [that]…seek to break the binary between science and literature” (Lincoln & Guba, 2000:184) with the purpose of showing how people cope with the daily irritations and tragedies of living with universal truths of human existence. In certain respects, mine will be just such a ‘messy text’, searching for truths that are to an extent both partial and transient.

Because understanding of actions can be interpreted in several different ways, Schwandt (2000) offers three ways of defining understanding. The one that influences me most is *empathic identification*: Following Dilthey, this requires grasping the inner intention of the other, i.e. their subjective consciousness. Whether or not this is possible is subject to debate. “Nevertheless, the idea of acquiring an ‘inside’ understanding – the actors' definitions of the situation – is a powerful central concept for understanding the purpose of qualitative inquiry" (Schwandt, 2000:192), and this study in particular. However, I am also influenced by *phenomenological hermeneutics* in that it acknowledges that understanding can be disabled by prejudices that are held without reflection. The goal is not to be free of historical prejudice but to examine it critically and to change the disabling aspects. As both these types of understanding see action as meaningful, respect for the life-world is elevated and thus an ethical commitment is invoked.

Moving from a non-prejudicial point of view, it is maintained that one can still talk of 'the mentally ill'. There *are* actual differences and boundaries between the mentally ill and the mentally well, however they are conceptualised, even if the boundaries are not discrete. Such groups derive their construction from both their social bases and physical reality. Denial of this means denial of the responsibility of acknowledging this. Denial of this means "treating difference as a consumable good and identity purely as fiction" (Frow & Morris, 2000:318). Not only do groups such as the mentally ill have a mobile and provisional identity and unity, to an extent, but also their group is a result of real products of definite practices, which have consequences. The point then is to take these into account when examining the mentally ill (Frow & Morris, 2000).

The best way I believe to apply the above commentaries to the data is through the devices of thematic content analysis of the life histories elicited, influenced by the case history format, into which I turned the transcribed data at the first level of analysis. (See Chapter Five.)

4.4 CASE HISTORIES

A commensurable analytic strategy to that of the life history is that of the case history in that the case history too is both process and product. The case history technique can be directed at several cases to investigate a phenomenon, population or general condition, chosen because there is a belief that understanding them (i.e. the participants) will lead to better theorizing and understanding of a larger group.

Cases are organized around issues i.e. "complex, situated, problematic relationships. They invite attention to ordinary experience but also to the language and understanding of the common disciplines of knowledge" (Stake, 2000:440). Investigating the life history of each participant as a case is viewed as contributory to a refined understanding.

4.5 LIFE HISTORIES

> Biography, history and society "are the coordinate points of the proper study of man" (Mills in Miller, 2000:1).

Life history is also called the 'biographical method' and can be "any retrospective account by the individual of his life in whole or part, in written or oral form, that has been elicited or prompted by another person" (Watson-Franke in Tierney, 2000:539). Life history is an attempt to capture the essences of how a person in a specific interpersonal milieu develops, and to make theoretical sense of it (Dollard in Tierney, 2000). This is precisely my intention, evident in my research question, aim and rationale. Denzin observes that it is an "account of a life based on interviews and observations" (in Tierney, 2000: 539).

It is also said to be true that a life story becomes a life history only when it is contextualized by its particular social, historical, political, and economic constraints. I have used the life history approach because my interest, as specified in the research problem, is in “the effects of change across time, historical events as these events have impinged upon the individual, or his her movement along their life course” (Miller, 2000:74). “Cross referentially [this] could be extended to the point that at least partially reliable information on the previous psychological states of an individual may be gleaned” (Miller, 2000:75); and, in the hands of a skilled interviewer, their relevance to the present can be established. This is the main thrust in this study.

Furthermore, “the only direct purpose of life history ‘is as a commentary of the individual’s very personal view of his own experience as he understands it’” (Watson in Tierney, 2000:539). The emphasis in this study has been on the researched relationships to others. It might be defined differently – by method (interviews and observations) theoretical vantage point (hermeneutics, phenomenology) or disciplinary perspective (psychology). One thing about the definition of life history remains the same: “life history is related to biography, it is a retrospective account, and it involves some form of narrative statement” (Tierney, 2000:539). This is congruent with the data I first set out to find.

The purpose of using the life history is that it constitutes an interpretive practice, defined as the constellation of procedures, conditions, and resources, through which reality is apprehended, understood, organized, and conveyed in everyday life by the participants in this study. “Interpretive practice engages both the *how’s* and the *what’s* of social reality; it is centred both in how people methodically construct their experiences and their worlds and in the configurations of meaning and institutional life that inform and shape their reality-constituting activity” (Gubrium & Holstein, 2000:488) – *how meaning is constructed and what meaning is constructed.* There is a dynamic interplay of the how’s and the what’s: “It is on this terrain, … of lived-experience, that we are able to observe the august event of a self understanding itself through the twin moments of discourse and narrative” (Schrag in Gubrium & Holstein, 2000: 499).

In giving their life histories, participants tended to convey a sense of structure and order and, in the process, cast their actions for all practical purposes as rational, coherent, precedented, and reproducible. This was despite my perception of their histories as being chaotic in both nature and presentation. They accounted for their actions by prospectively invoking rules or retrospectively offering rule-motivated explanations for action. They justified their actions in their own ways and rationalized events (Gubrium & Holstein, 2000). The account established the context, which then provided the rationale for the account.

Rather than the slice of life approach, the focus was on complete lives or at least a significant portion of life i.e. their school-going years, depending on the age of the participant. Because of this, the issue of time predominates. Usually the present is important, but in the life history, the past takes on equal significance. “Time and time-related issues are central to the holistic viewpoint that lies at the core of the biographical perspective” (Miller, 2000: 21). Indeed, it is in life history research, as the very name implies, that a proper focus on historical change can be attained in a way that is lacking in many other methods. Such a focus is a dual one, moving between the changing biographical history of the person and the social history of his or her lifespan. "A life history cannot be told without a constant reference to historical change, and this central focus on change must be seen as one of life history's great values" (Plummer in Miller, 2000: 22). "The life history text, then, exists somewhere between history and memory" (Tierney, 2000, 545). Memories are recalled for reasons that they are important to someone – the speaker, the interviewer – in large part because of present contextual definitions of what constitutes identity, society and culture. The life history not only represents the memory of an individual, it produces an identity in its telling and re-telling (Tierney, 2000).

> Life histories are helpful not merely because they add to the mix of what already exists, but because of their ability to refashion identities…a goal of life history work in a postmodern age is to break the stranglehold of metanarratives that establishes rules of truth, legitimacy and identity (Tierney, 2000: 546).

The idea of history has two levels – first the individual has his or her own history of personal development and change along their life; and secondly historical events at the societal level occur as they develop. "In this respect, historical events and social change at the societal level impinge upon the individual's own unique life history" (Miller, 2000: 9). An example from the data of Interview 5 clearly illustrates this – the child had created a good aspect of life for herself as a gymnast and was due to go overseas, representing South Africa. However, at the last moment her trip was cancelled as it had been decided that South Africans were no longer welcome. It is the idea of change over time that sets this method apart from other qualitative methods.

> The biographical perspective centres itself midway between social structures and the individual as social actor. To tell about one's biography means telling about the constraints and opportunities that were available in the past and how one dealt with these – circumventing (or being thwarted by) obstacles, taking advantage of (or missing) opportunities. The biographical perspective is about the interplay between actor and social structure – how the individual has negotiated their path through a changing social structure (Miller, 2000:75).

This would apply, for example, through the changing demands of schooling. Unless the participant is old (or Borderline) he or she will have plans for the future. The biography is *supposed* to extend from the past through the present into the future. In the case of BPD, the final chapters remain to be conceived of. There is no anticipatory colouration from the future.

The life history utilizes moments of a life conveyed through a story. Less attention is paid to whether or not the event actually occurred at all, or in that form, than to what the implicit meanings for the text may be. These subjective perceptions will be malleable further due to changes in contextual structure and the passage of time as the effects of past structural influences recede and alter in the individual's own recollections (Miller, 2000). Life history queries the past and "affords authors and readers critical insights into not so much the dead past as the developing future" (Tierney, 2000:538).

The determiners of 'truth' in the life history method are the text and the reader although "certainly, analyses of contradictions between narrative and experience need to be explored and examined in any document. However, 'truth' in a life history does not have to be defined factually, especially in a world where such terms are inevitably contested, argued over and perspectival" (Tierney, 2000). Readers should regard narratives as a series of layers. Life history, life story, autoethnography and the like are situated within a series of complex and ambiguous political and cultural relations. The purpose is to piece together how these multiple presentations account for contested versions of reality. In this, I follow Bateson who in her study states "I have not tried to verify these narratives, beyond attending to issues of internal consistency and checking them against my knowledge of the individuals…The accounts are shaped by each person's choice and selective memory…These are stories I have used to think with" (in Tierney, 2000:542).

The point is not that the facts may be wrong or irrelevant but that the use of those facts determines, in a circular manner, how we think about truth and how we read a text: "what makes a fact a fact is not merely the act one sees or does, but the interconnections between who sees what when and how it gets reported by whom. 'A fact is like a sack which won't stand up when it's empty', says Pirandello. 'In order that it may stand up, one has to put into it the reason and the sentiment which caused it to exist'" (Tierney, 2000; 543).

From the earliest life histories, the role of the author has been contentious. Some claim that authors have the function of a tape recorder. However, no text is singularly created (Tierney, 2000). Translation, from speaker to author to reader is always provisional and there is a tendency for authors to study individuals and groups with whom they have much in common. Although the author may be similar to those he or she studies one cannot presume that the author function is irrelevant. All authors, all narrators, are situated; the challenge is to come to terms with the positions in which authors locate themselves. A text is always created not simply by the creator of the narrative and the individual who owns the tape recorder, but also by the multiple editorial decision makers who oversee the story's production. In the case of this study, such multiplicity would necessarily include various supervisions.

The challenge is for the researcher to come to terms with alternative realities different from his or her own, not to exoticise them so that the researcher might put them on display, but instead to create the conditions whereby the researcher tries to understand different lives in an empathic manner. Such a political position resituates the research endeavour of the life historian. The researcher does not simply try to find or explain oddities, but reflects back on why such a question is important and others not. The relationship of the researcher/author to the individual and to the text comes in for questioning and analysis. The resultant texts are seen as

> voyages of creation – for the historian, the person who speaks and the person who ultimately reads the final product. Texts have been used to colonize people by framing individuals and groups in one light and silencing them in another…The power that the author has is the ability to develop a reflexive text. Such a text enables readers to understand the author a bit better, to come to grips with the individual whose life is retold, and to reflect back on their own lives. A reflexive work of the kind I have argued for leaves a writer and speaker and reader vulnerable. Vulnerability is not a position of weakness, but one from which to attempt change and social fellowship (Tierney, 2000: 551).

A life history may also be a process where reader and researcher understand meanings through which someone else may make sense of a world. The text, whether it takes the form of a life history or a life story, can be seen as a personal narrative created by its participants who also are therefore able to define, reinforce, or change reality (Tierney, 2000).

Although it is easy for the sympathetic reader to glamorise the participants because they are ill and their legal position diminished they are not thus explained nor their destructive actions excused. The work must take issue with the interpretive devices of the past. In terms of what is considered factual or not, active mythmaking can be taken as intellectual fraud, or it can be seen as the meaning-making processes of the individual, as has been done here. Beverley (2000), for example, approves of a life history, which was found to be unsustainable in fact. “Thus the site for a researcher’s work is between memory and history, lost in the interstices” (Tierney, 2000:546). Texts are no longer set to gather facts by distant observers in order to make objective assertions.

Themes, with beginnings and ends, populate texts but people do not construct their lives in such orderly manner. Body movement inaccessible to the written page extends the themes and there is no question that academics tidy up texts to produce full sentences and grammatically correct statements. Even in a life history, then, “we must accept that the document is interfered with any number of ways, more or less predictably. For now the challenge in a world that we view as constructed on multiple levels by multiple parties is to seek some sense of voice and agency that enables action” (Tierney, 2000:544). With regard to the latter, in my use of the life history method, I remain in the service of the aim of this study i.e. the prevention and treatment of borderline psychopathology.

4.6 THEMATIC CONTENT ANALYSIS

To move from data gathering to interpretation, I have engaged in thematic content analysis, which refers to coding, and classification of themes within the data elicited by the tool of life history, discussed below. The point of thematic content analysis is to make inferences in the inductive mode, “making replicable and valid inferences from data to their context” (Krippendorf, 1980:1). Less manifest data has equal standing with the more overt form, in order to keep the mundanities of chronic subtle trauma alongside the acute traumatic events in terms of importance. This definition relates a connection to the issues of validity and reliability, which inform this study and are discussed below. Recording units have been as brief as a paragraph, or several paragraphs contiguous in terms of their meaning. Context units “delineate that portion of the symbolic material that needs to be examined in order to characterize a recording unit” (Krippendorf, 1980:59).

When using the approach referred to by Krippendorf (1980), the data is seen as always contextualized by structures, both societal and physical. Context defines the meaning and thus “to define oneself in talk is also to define the nature of social reality” (Wetherell, 1996:245). The ‘talk’ of the mentally ill is often of powerlessness. By definition, the mentally ill carry the implication of being erroneous, must listen to their caretaking authorities rather than speak, and not for themselves, and may become themselves unimportant and invalid. Research (detailed in Chapters Two and Three) on the mentally ill has traditionally been dominated by conceptualisations created in the context of objective experiments and “neutralized” qualitative/quantitative methodology. Such research is written up as case reports, proving or not proving something, and representing the mentally ill as alien others whose constituent parts merely require full description in the endeavour to know what makes them ‘tick’. Mental illness can thus be taken as one manifestation “of the discourses and power relations of the social and historical contexts that produced them” (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2000:280).

Although power relations are not the focus here, the research problem of this study itself is contextualized temporally i.e. how psychopathology is viewed at this point in time. The research problem came into being over time, influenced by my professional history. Data collection also occurred over time, rather than a momentary quantitative glimpse. Therefore, I acknowledge that this research is situated in this historical moment; claims to "truth" remain partial, and merely represent part of the ongoing process of research.

4.7 CONCLUDING COMMENTS

In this chapter, I have discussed my methodological orientation informing the specific research methods I use. This qualitative orientation, informed by constructivism, has its own inherent approach to reliability and representation, validity, sampling and ethics. Furthermore, this orientation has guided me to the use of the life history for gathering the data and thematic content analysis of it, as the best means of answering the research question. In the chapter that follows, I will deal with the details of how data was collected and analysed.