

**A GROUP OF BLACK SOUTH AFRICANS' EXPERIENCE OF
TELLING THEIR UNTOLD STORIES ABOUT THE APARTHEID
ERA**

J VERMEULEN Hons. B.A.

**Dissertation (article format) submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements
for the degree of Magister Artium (Clinical Psychology) at the
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Potchefstroom

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- To the King of all ages, immortal, invisible, the only God be honour and glory for ever and ever, glory to God in the highest and peace to his people on earth. Kyrié Eléison.

SUMMARY

A GROUP OF BLACK SOUTH AFRICANS' EXPERIENCE OF TELLING THEIR UNTOLD STORIES ABOUT THE APARTHEID ERA

Key words: Untold / Alternative Stories / Narratives, Apartheid

The aim of this research was to explore a group of black South Africans' experiences of telling their untold stories of survival about the apartheid era. The expectation was that if they did become more aware of these alternative stories, it could have a far-reaching effect on their lives. Research indicates that when attention is given to these narratives they may be a powerful tool in not only recovering the story but also in focusing on the survivors' own consciousness and growth. Consequently personal meaning may be elicited by focusing on memories, and that which can be narrated afterwards. This may mean that by sharing these narratives the narrator may be enabled to construct a happier future via a positive rather than dissociative perspective simultaneously supplying the researcher with multifaceted data. A qualitative study was conducted with a group of seven black South African survivors of the apartheid era, ranging in age from 42 – 62 years. These participants formed part of an earlier study of Van der Merwe (2005) investigating their perceptions regarding factors that helped them to survive the apartheid era. For the present study, unstructured interviews were conducted focusing on their subjective experiences after the initial study. Analysis of the data yielded seven prevalent themes namely, a positive experience that made a difference, gaining of a positive attitude, not all white people are bad, transcending the past and moving on, awareness of personal strengths, forgiveness and starting to talk to family and friends. Recommendations are made concerning future research.

OPSOMMING

'N GROEP SWART SUID-AFRIKANERS SE ERVARING BETREFFENDE DIE VERTELLING VAN HULLE ONVERTELDE STORIES AANGAANDE DIE APARTHEIDSERA

Sleutelwoorde: Onvertelde / Alternatiewe stories / Narratiewe, Apartheidsera

Die doel van hierdie navorsing was om 'n groep swart Suid-Afrikaners se ervaring betreffende die vertelling van hulle onvertelde stories aangaande die apartheidsera te ondersoek. Daar is verwag dat hulle bewuswording oor hulle alternatiewe stories 'n verreikende effek op hulle lewens sou hê. Vroeëre navorsing het bewys dat aandag aan hierdie tipe narratiewe nie net tot 'n herlewing van die gebeure lei nie, maar ook tot bewustheid en groei by die verteller. Hierdie tegniek bewerkstellig dus herroeping van gebeure en 'n verskuiwing van fokus na persoonlike betekenis. Gevolglik kan persoonlike betekenis ontdek word deur die klem na herinneringe te verskuif. Wanneer die verteller sy/haar verhale meedeel, bied dit nie net vir die navorser 'n wye verskeidenheid data nie, maar bied dit ook aan die verteller die geleentheid om 'n gelukkiger toekoms deur middel van positiewe eerder as dissosiatiewe perspektiewe te vind. Die belewenis van sewe swart Suid-Afrikaanse wat die apartheidsera deurleef het en wat tussen die ouderdomme van 42 en 62 jaar is, is deur middel van 'n kwalitatiewe studie ondersoek. Hierdie deelnemers het vroeër deel gevorm van 'n ondersoek van Van der Merwe (2005) na hulle persepsies rakende faktore wat hulle gehelp het om die apartheidsera te oorleef. Vir die huidige studie is daar van ongestruktureerde onderhoude gebruik gemaak om die subjektiewe belewenisse van die deelnemers te ondersoek. Data-analise het sewe prominente temas uitgelik naamlik, positiewe belewenis wat 'n verskil gemaak het, die daarstelling van 'n positiewe houding, nie alle wit mense is sleg nie, verwerking van die verlede en motivering om aan te gaan, bewustheid van persoonlike sterkte, vergifnes en inisiëring van gesprekke met familie en vriende. Voorstelle vir toekomstige navorsing is gemaak.

LETTER OF CONSENT

We, the co-authors, hereby give consent that J Vermeulen may submit the following manuscript for purposes of a dissertation. It may also be submitted to the *South African Journal of Psychology* for publication.

.....

Prof. C.A. Venter

Supervisor

.....

Dr. Q.M. Temane

Co-supervisor

INTENDED JOURNAL AND GUIDELINES FOR AUTHORS

South African Journal of Psychology

The manuscript as well as the reference list has been styled according to the above journal's specifications.

(Guidelines for authors on next page.)

SOUTH AFRICAN JOURNAL OF PSYCHOLOGY

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1. The manuscript should be typed in 12-point font (Times New Roman) double-spacing
2. The first page should contain the title of the article, the name(s) of the author(s), as well as the address of the author to whom correspondence should be addressed.
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6. The headings should all start at the left margin and should not be numbered. The introduction to the paper does not require a heading.
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MANUSCRIPT TITLE, AUTHORS AND ADDRESSES

TITLE

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this research was to explore a group of black South Africans' experiences of telling their untold stories of survival about the apartheid era. The expectation was that if they did become more aware of these alternative stories, it could have a far-reaching effect on their lives. A qualitative study was conducted with a group of seven black South African survivors of the apartheid era, ranging in age from 42–62 years. These participants formed part of an earlier study investigating their perceptions regarding factors that helped them to survive the apartheid era. For the present study, unstructured interviews were conducted focusing on their subjective experiences after the initial study. Analysis of the data yielded seven prevalent themes, namely a positive experience that made a difference, gaining of a positive attitude, not all white people are bad, transgressing the past and moving on, awareness of personal strengths, forgiveness and starting to talk to family and friends. Recommendations were made concerning future research.

The Afrikaans term apartheid, meaning “apartness” or “separateness”, was used by the National Party, which ruled South Africa from 1948-1994, to mask the oppressive elements of its policies and practices (Bathish & Lowstedt, 1999). This period became known as the apartheid era in South Africa and was characterised by a policy of physical repressive, economically exploitative and ideologically racist or ethnic segregation. During this period the white minority-led government ruled the so-called non-white and non-black people with a set of legalised statutes (Lester, 1996) that translated into underdevelopment in areas where black people lived, detention without trial when opposing apartheid legislation, and so forth. In response to the then status quo several resistance groups formed and acted against the oppressive rule, resulting in a pattern of physical violence. This politically driven cycle of violence was brought to an end when the policy of apartheid was abolished in 1994 as the first democratically elected government came into power (Facts on File News Service, 1997).

However, at this time South Africa stood divided, as apartheid did not only result in a physical violence against people, but was an intrusive structure which pervaded all areas of life (Bathish & Lowstedt, 1999), such as where people could live and work, whom they could marry, the use of public amenities and so forth. Field (1999) states that some of the primary “costs” of the apartheid era were not “material” but rather incalculable and interwoven emotional costs, such as pain and loss suffered by the majority of South Africans.

In an attempt to address some of this pain and loss, as well as to ease the transformation process, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) was established (Field, 1999). The TRC was constitutionally founded in 1995 and officially started functioning on Reconciliation Day on December 16, 1995 and activities were suspended on 28 October 1998 (Jordaan & Jordaan in Van der Merwe, 2005; Truth and Reconciliation Commission, 2003).

The Commission was designed to bring into the public domain the violations of human rights from 1960-1994, the most violent phase of the apartheid era. Tobias (1999) describes this process by stating that the TRC, to a large extent, was an attempt to tell a story about South Africa’s most recent past. By telling this story the hope was that reconciliation, nation building and healing would be facilitated (Field, 1999). Thus, the TRC sought to construct a larger narrative out of separate narratives presented before its hearings. The hope was to assemble a broad sense of shared truth

from a body of truths and half-truths - after careful comparison, analysis and investigation - consequently resulting in the basis for unity out of a past of division and conflict. Nelson Mandela summarised this when he said "Only by knowing the truth can we hope to heal the terrible wounds of the past that are the legacy of apartheid. Only the truth can put the past to rest" (Time, 1998).

In order to attain the above, the TRC adopted a three-phase approach. The first phase involved the hearings where victims and perpetrators had the opportunity to share their stories. The second phase dealt with the attempt to understand individual and institutional motives as well as inquiries into the context and causes of violations. The last phase involved providing recommendations regarding the prevention of future violations as well as reparations and amnesty (Truth and Reconciliation Commission, 2003).

However, Field (1999) had his reservations that the struggle for emotional closure for individuals and communities may so swiftly be attained and stated that this process will probably be long-term and cross-generational in the making. He purports that how people remember and speak about the past – telling of events - will bring to light their own roles and feelings thereof in the past and how it influences the present. Field's opinion supports Bruner's (1988) view that narratives are used to describe a variety of ways humans perform the "telling of events." Angrosino, in Overcash (2003), defines narrative in a broad sense as a discourse that may or may not be linear in time and place; it may not even be constructed in the form of a plot as in a story.

Conversely, Carr (2004) suggests that narrative is not merely a way of describing events, but is a part of the events. The retelling merges events with reality, however "true" or "accurate" they may be. Narrative accounts detail unique experiences and perceptions pertaining to various aspects of humanity and culture (Steffen, 1997). Therefore, the definition used in this study in terms of narrative is that narrative, the telling of events, can provide insight to "tellers" on their human interaction, social moral conduct, perceived role responsibilities, and other perspectives integrated into their day-to-day living.

White and Epston (1990) have referred to these "day-to-day living" narratives as dominant stories. According to White (1995), a dominant story that has been reinforced by one's culture and thereby internalised is a habitual pattern of construing a situation or issue. Venter (1998) is of the opinion that dominant narratives direct and shape a person's life because people select from their life experiences those

events that fit into the dominant narratives that others and they have about themselves. These dominant narratives are then used to interpret further life experiences. Thus, it is a process that starts with remembering the past, positive and/or negative aspects, and then incorporating these memories into the present. This process of remembering, especially positive aspects, is closely linked to 'Psychofortology' (Wissing & Van Eeden, 2002) or 'Positive Psychology' (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000) which emphasises psychological strengths.

Bhuvaneswar and Shaver (2004) support the above when stating that attention to these narratives may be a powerful tool in not only recovering the story but also in focusing on the survivors' own consciousness and growth. Consequently personal meaning may be elicited by focusing on memories, what they can narrate afterwards. The telling of these narratives may, for example, enable the teller to connect with those who hear the story, to become free of the abusers, to be re-made into "story", to be able to assemble the fragments of family, identity, love and belonging into a coherent and sustaining whole. In short, this may mean that by sharing these narratives the narrator may be enabled to construct a happier future via a positive rather than dissociative perspective simultaneously supplying the researcher with multifaceted data.

Correspondingly, Coleman in Field (1999), states that memory is much more than recall of past stimuli. It involves emotion, will and creativity in the reconstruction of the past to serve present needs. The question arises as to what happens if an individual or group feels a lack of adequate opportunity to share the stories? According to Van der Merwe and Kgalema (1998) participants in the TRC process often expressed the wish for the Commission to return to their area, after hearings, for several reasons but in particular that they felt they had insufficient opportunity to express their feelings for the full story to be told. Williams (1999) adds that the TRC created the illusion of having the "voiceless" tell their own "authentic" stories, but that the "voiceless" had to adhere to what was media friendly. In other words which stories "sold" the best.

Several other authors (Bozzoli, 1998; Harris, 1998; Leggassick & Minkley, 1997) are also of the opinion that due to time, financial, and political constraints several South African citizens may not have had sufficient opportunity to share their dominant life stories. It can be hypothesised that the lives of many of the black adults who experienced the apartheid years might have been shaped by the dominant stories

of hardship and that the alternative stories of survival did not play an important role in the shaping of their lives.

Recently a study was conducted by Van der Merwe (2005) to address the following research question: "What are the untold stories of a group of black adults who survived the apartheid years?" The current researcher became interested in the Van der Merwe study after conversations with Van der Merwe's study supervisor. The question raised was whether the selected group of black adults, after sharing their alternative stories of survival with Van der Merwe, would in fact become more aware of their alternative life stories; their scripts as it were. Warner in Field (1999:4), describes this as follows: "At the core of the struggle for home [becoming aware of alternative life stories] lies the struggle for the way the story of place is told. Between what is remembered and what is forgotten, the self takes its bearings home. The question is no longer who is to guard the guardians, but who is to tell the story? Who can bear witness?" The main research question for this study then is: what are the experiences of a group of black South Africans telling of their untold stories about the apartheid era?

The motivation for this research was that the data that might be elicited could lead to further research and the possible planning of programmes to help people that experienced atrocities during the apartheid era to incorporate their alternative stories of survival with their dominant stories of suffering. Furthermore, the data from this study could be used to assist, not only these individuals, but any others who have experienced ongoing trauma.

RESEARCH

AIM

The aim of the research was to explore a group of black South Africans' experience of telling their untold stories about the apartheid era.

DESIGN

A qualitative research design was used. According to Neuman (2000) the emphasis in qualitative research is on the detailed examination of cases that arise in the natural course of social life. This type of examination usually results in presenting authentic

interpretations that are sensitive to specific socio-historical contexts. Thus it enables the researcher to consider various variables and hypotheses when exploring social life cases sensitive to specific socio-historical contexts. According to Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach and Zilber (1998) from a social, cultural or ethnic point of view, these social groups frequently are discriminated-against minorities, whose narratives express their unheard voices. Thus, researchers use narrative analysis in the belief that narratives generate data that are not accessible by more traditional methods and may even reveal themes inconceivable by the researcher (Hoyle, Harris & Judd, 2002).

Additionally Bhuvaneswar and Shaver (2004) state that narratives by survivors of human atrocities offer compelling entries into the experience of such violence as well as the effects thereof on the health and general functioning of these survivors.

However, the telling of narratives implies the use of some form of language. Freedman and Combs (1996) state that the narrative approach falls within the Post-modernistic framework implying a focus on how the language used constitutes the world and beliefs of the user, i.e. the language used by societies to construct their views of reality. Thus, in post-modernistic terms the only worlds that people can know are the worlds they share in language, and language is an interactive process, not a passive receiving of pre-existing truths (Van der Merwe, 2005).

PARTICIPANTS

The participants consisted of personnel and students of the North-West University (Potchefstroom campus), the Western College (Randfontein campus) and members of The South African Women's Federation. The same sample group as in the Van der Merwe (2005) study was used, as this was a follow-up study. The participants were informed during the Van der Merwe (2005) study that a follow-up study would be conducted approximately one month after his study. Seven of the nine participants in the Van der Merwe (2005) study were available for the present study, 5 males and 2 females. Unstructured interviews were conducted and recorded with six of the participants while the seventh participant, because of practical reasons, wrote down his experiences. Six of the participants spoke English and one spoke Afrikaans as a second language. The Afrikaans quotes used in this study were freely translated with

the original Afrikaans quote in block brackets immediately following the translated version. The participants ranged in age from forty-two years to sixty-two years.

Josselson and Lieblich (2005) claim that the narrative approach in psychology affords the researcher and participants the opportunity to be more "personally" present during the research process, allowing for the process, presentation and findings of the research project to be more holistic in nature. As a result of the above, basic information concerning each participant is provided under pseudonyms to ensure anonymity. For the sake of continuity the same pseudonyms as used in the Van der Merwe (2005) study will be used in this study. The following is a short description of the participants.

Lionel is a fifty-three-year-old Christian pastor who also works in finance (debt collection). He is married and has two children. He joined the South African Student Organisation (SASO) during his high school years. He describes himself as someone with high moral standards and being opposed to violence. As a result he chose to never actively resist the apartheid regime. He states that he resigned from both SASO and the church when he felt that these organisations became too violent. However, he mentioned that several of his friends were involved and died during the struggle. He states that he continuously prays for the betterment of people and situations.

George is forty-eight, the chief executive officer of a company, is married and has five children. He also describes himself as a Christian. His education includes a National Diploma in Human Resource Management. At the age of five he lost both his parents and immediately after the funeral was placed with his two siblings at their maternal grandparents for care. His memories concerning the apartheid years included a atrocious working conditions as a gardener for a white family, where the family pet dog was allowed to eat in the kitchen but his food was thrown at him through the back door. He also described a medical examination before he could start working in 1976 where he was humiliated by stripping down naked and his genitals being manhandled in the company of men old enough to be his father.

Matthew is fifty-five, married, has one child and is a pastor with a diploma in Theology. He is employed as a clergyman in the Christian religion. He was the only one of the participants actively involved in the uprising since 1976 until 1994. He describes several arrests for transgressions against the then laws such as not carrying

his identification documents ("dompas"). He claims that his life changed when he realised that he could not function on hatred any longer and decided to "give his life to God". He describes how his hatred then was turned into love. During the TRC hearings held in his area he transported people to and fro. He is still actively involved in the community and expresses the wish that more people would get involved with the youth and with the rehabilitation and reintegration of newly released prisoners.

Andre is forty-eight, married, has two children and is a campus manager. His tertiary education includes a B.Ed. degree. He also described himself as a Christian. He described frequent raids by the security police. However, he states that his prayers were answered and that things did change in the country as his children have the opportunity now to freely grow up and make up their own minds.

Marge is a sixty-two-year old Afrikaans speaking female. She is married, has three children and two grandchildren. She describes herself as a Christian. She is currently employed as a general assistant but expresses the wish to retire soon and move to her family in the Western Cape. She describes a childhood growing up in the rural areas of Somerset East and states that due to their poverty she hardly noticed the turbulent political times. She described the "separateness" of that time, black and white children playing apart and the separate toilets, a state she simply accepted as her struggle for survival was more prominent.

Simon is fifty-six, married, has two children and refers to himself as a Christian. He worked in student support at the time of the study. He has a Bachelor of Arts in Social Sciences and a Master's Diploma (M-Tec) in Human Resources Management. He described the important role education played in the shaping of his life. He was involved in the resistance as a student and still blames the previous regime for his father's death after they had been forcefully relocated. He is a very proud father but states that he fears that the past atrocities may occur again if the new generations do not learn from the past.

Mary is forty-two and currently employed as a social worker. She is proud of her Bahurutshe culture especially the social aspects thereof. She described herself as being unaware of apartheid until a visit to her mother in Johannesburg where an Afrikaans speaking family employed her mother. She reports that the lady of the house gave her a hiding during this visit for speaking English. This experience still haunted her at the time of the initial study as she stated that she sometimes still felt that Afrikaans speaking people were "out to get her". After 1994 she directed her

energies towards the drawing up of policies to govern the work of the child and female care in social services.

THE RESEARCHER

The researcher is a second year Masters Clinical Psychology student currently in internship, interested in Narrative Therapy and Psychofortology, in particular how these constructs manifest in a group setting. The data that might be elicited could lead to further research and the planning of programmes to help people that experienced atrocities during the apartheid era to incorporate their untold stories of survival with their dominant stories of suffering. Furthermore, the data from this study could be used to assist not only these individuals but any others who have experienced ongoing trauma.

METHOD OF GATHERING INFORMATION

The main question that was asked during each interview was "How did you experience the opportunity you had to talk about your stories of survival with Ernst Van der Merwe?" The interviews were audio-taped to ensure that the information provided could be accurately reproduced and notes were also taken for additional information, such as tearfulness and tone of voice (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998; Gubrium & Holstein, 2002; Rossouw, 2003). The interviews were conducted in the participants' offices. The data obtained in the interviews were then analysed and interpreted as indicated in the subsequent section.

ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION OF DATA

Data collected during the interviews were qualitatively analysed using McMillan and Schumacher's analytical process (Leedy, 1997). Data were grouped into as many categories as possible. Specific themes were then identified and analysed.

Strategies that were implemented in an attempt to enhance the trustworthiness of the data gathering and interpretation process included: the prior identification of potentially cultural insensitive perspectives the researcher may have by means of reflective discussions; the use of a skilled and trained researcher in especially listening and reflective skills; grounding interpretations in literature and describing the findings in a rich and detailed manner (Breakwell, 1990; Wilkinson, 2004); the interview sessions were audio-taped and transcribed; personal experiences in the form

of notes were made after each session; the transcribed interviews were read and verified by the supervisors.

ETHICAL ASPECTS

This study was part of a larger research project for which approval was obtained from the ethics committee of the North-West University. Participants were informed that participation in the study was voluntary and they had the option not to participate, or if they participated, that the interview could be stopped at any point if they so wished. During the Van der Merwe (2005) study participants were asked to sign consent forms for participation in his and the follow-up study, including permission for the research findings to be published anonymously by using pseudonyms. To ensure that ethical aspects were adhered to, information about the research was given to the participants as well as confirmation that confidentiality would be preserved.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Initially most of the participants with the exception of 3 were rather apprehensive about the process. Concerns voiced were a fear that the same work was being done as during the Van der Merwe (2005) study, that the current researcher was checking up on the work Van der Merwe had done, that the data gathered may be used against them, a fear of re-visiting the past again and what might happen with the data they provided.

Once these fears had been addressed the participants were more than willing to join in the research although they were still somewhat apprehensive as to how they might feel afterwards. Three of the participants repeatedly mentioned during the start of their interviews that they did not want to talk about the past anymore as they felt that they had dealt with it and expressed the wish to now simply carry on with their lives. These three participants did become more relaxed as the process progressed and supplied some of the richest information. All the participants, however, did indicate that they became aware of their alternative stories of survival after the Van der Merwe study and how these had started to shape their lives since then. As one of the participants put it: "I feel that if one talks you get an element of treatment."

During the interviews it was initially difficult to keep the participants focused on the main question asked. Many of the participants seemed almost compelled to re-

tell their stories and then to link this to how they became aware of their alternative stories. Thus, it was decided to allow the participants to re-tell their stories of suffering before redirecting them to the actual question.

Based on the participants' responses seven prevalent themes emerged during the current study. These included a positive experience that made a difference, gaining of a positive attitude, not all white people are bad, transcending the past and moving on, awareness of personal strengths, forgiveness and starting to talk to family and friends. However, these themes have many common characteristics, complicating the separate discussion of each. Thus, while discussing the themes it is important to bear in mind that some repetition of data may occur.

A POSITIVE EXPERIENCE THAT MADE A DIFFERENCE

All the participants indicated that they experienced the Van der Merwe study as positive, an experience that made a difference "...it was a very tremendous experience which made me think..." Closer examination as to what they meant with "difference" indicated that they were of the opinion that the experience changed them on several levels such as the way in which they view, think and feel about themselves, others, their friends and family members and the world.

Some of the participants indicated that they had a somewhat bleak outlook about the apartheid era, especially the role they played during those years. Only one member was actively involved in the armed struggle and the others indicated that they felt that they could have done more during those years than to "simply survive". One participant indicated that he was "...thrown in the deep end..." when the previous government procured his father's assets resulting in his father suffering a stroke and him being forced to leave school and start surviving on his own. This participant put it in the following way: "I felt like maybe things became clear after the talking. Ok, a positive attitude became clear for me afterwards. The conversation just triggered thoughts of the past and made me think afterwards." The realisation that he did the best he could, given the circumstances, was a freeing experience for this participant. Another participant recapped this change in view of the self, after sharing his story, in the following words: "I forgot how strong I am but that the past can eat that strongness up."

Several of the participants indicated that they not only viewed white people differently after the Van der Merwe study but also felt differently about them. Some

of the remarks made included: "But to my surprise I realised that not all white people are bad." and "I remembered the bad things whites did to me since I was a boy. I didn't want to talk to you today, I thought now what do this white man want again. I'm glad I did now realise that not all white people are bad." One participant, in particular, summarised the cognitive and emotional shift she had to make in order to be able to overcome her biased feelings and beliefs towards white people when she stated: "I realised that I'm wasting my strength worrying about the whites and that they are no longer out to get me ... I now work for all the people I serve and remember my strengths."

During the Van der Merwe study the participants indicated that family played an important role in their survival. The impression created by the participants was one of an almost reverence for the family, its influence and support. Several of the participants in the current study indicated that not only were they reminded of this important role but also became newly aware of the strengths they have in influencing this sub-system. One participant put it as follows: "I started talking to my family and friends about past but also about good from then....needed to tell them that I'm not so angry at white people anymore. We all have troubles and wrongs." Some participants also indicated that they felt that their families no longer played such an important role in supporting them and even expressed the fear that "...the new generation..." may make all that they fought for nought. Two of the participants stated the following in this regard: "Let me put it this way, the young people of today only care about themselves and don't want to listen or care about our stories from the past. They only want money, money, money...." and "But nowadays the children are naughty, not like it was [*Maar nou se dag die kinnars is stout, nie soos wat dit was.*]" Thus, some of the participants realised after the Van der Merwe study that many aspects they thought of as almost holy in the family had changed. Their view regarding the supportive role and the role they played in their families had all changed.

It also seems as if their outlook on life and the world in general had been affected after the initial study. Several of the participants indicated that they realised that they had an almost static view of the world, especially post-apartheid South Africa. Furthermore, they also indicated that they realised that they would need to change this in order for themselves and those close to them to be able to carry on in a more positive way. Some responses highlighting the above included: "Oooh, I was

afraid! Thought I was going to jail because I'm talking about the past. [*Oooh, ek was bang! Gedink ek gaan by die tronk omlat ek praat.*]" and "At first I thought my supervisors put Mr Van der Merwe up to talk to me..." and "I started to position myself differently...."

GAINING OF A POSITIVE ATTITUDE

Most of the participants indicated that the experience aided them in gaining a more positive attitude towards themselves, their current circumstances, as well as their current satisfaction with life, especially at work.

Gaining a positive attitude towards self seemed a prevalent theme after the Van der Merwe study. One of the reverends stated: "Personally after the interview I experienced an element of positive attitude which encouraged me ... by remembering them it was positive, it made me realise that I am still here that I can carry on and forgive."

It also seems as if the ability to talk about the past triggered thoughts pertaining to their satisfaction with their current circumstances. Several of the respondents stated that after sharing their stories they felt invigorated enough to start re-evaluating their current ways of living and realised that they needed to adjust these in order to feel more fulfilled. In other words, "The conversation just triggered thoughts of the past and made me think afterwards it felt as if a rock was lifted from my shoulders....", releasing needed energy to start addressing current circumstances. As some of the participants stated: "... a positive attitude became clear for me afterwards ... now know that I must work even harder in my business and not waste time on past but look forward." and "It was good to visit the past again and to know who I am."

It seems as if the main contributing factor in the gaining of a positive attitude was the feeling that by talking about the past, a past thought no longer have such a strong influence, enabled them to see themselves in a different light. The following participants' comments probably summarised this statement the best: "I could think about the good and the bad from that time [*Ek kon dink vir goed en sleg Van toe se tyd.*]" and "... bearing in mind that those issues of mine about the past are buried deep and by talking about them again brought a lot of them back. But by remembering them it was positive, it made me realise that I am still here that I can carry on and forgive."

NOT ALL WHITE PEOPLE ARE BAD

As has previously been indicated, participants viewed white people differently. Participants mentioned that they realised, after the initial study, that their perceptions about white people were flawed. At the start of the current study some participants indicated that they still felt negative towards whites; "I didn't want to talk to you today, I thought now what do this white man want again?" However, all the participants indicated during the interviews that they realised that this was "... a waste of energy..." or simply put "I'm glad I did (speak to you) I realise that not all white people are bad". They indicated that their changed perceptions revolved around three main sub-themes. Firstly all white people were active participants/ supporters of the apartheid era, secondly no white people were affected by this era and thirdly all white people are still abhorrent.

Several participants indicated that they were of the opinion that all whites were active supporters of the then oppressive government. They stated that during the time after telling their stories they started to remember white people who helped and supported them during that time. "I cried a lot. But I'm ok now, I needed to talk about those things ... I realised that not all white people are bad." Remembering these incidents gave rise to even more positive emotions enabling them to start changing their opinions about whites: "I'm not so angry at white people anymore." and "We all have troubles and wrongs. People are not all the same..."

Some participants also indicated "... I thought you whites always had it nice..." This perception changed after the initial study. Again they were reminded, by the telling of their stories, about white people who suffered during the apartheid era. One of the reverends referred to a Roman Catholic priest he knew during this time. He described: "... and then the police started to beat him in front of everyone..." another reverend referred to some of the NG Church ministers he knew and who helped him "... but he had to be careful, the church paid him...". Remembering these incidents and talking about them allowed the participants to realise that the opinions they had about white people were marred.

These realisations resulted in all of the participants stating that they had either changed these opinions or come to realise that they were starting to change them. As one participant stated: "...opened my mind as to who is wrong and who is right. I'm not so angry at white people anymore."

TRANSCENDING THE PAST AND MOVING ON

Transcending from the past resulting in a more positive move into the future was another compelling theme that emerged. The participants indicated that they realised after the telling of their stories that they were immobilising themselves by unconsciously emphasising the past and the wrongs they had endured. One participant stated: "... after talking to Mr van der Merwe... can start to forgive and carry on with my life, to transcend the past."

Transcending in the words of the participants mostly referred to a sense of freedom; from becoming free of limiting scripts in exchange of more broadening ones. The participants' responses typically included: "I realised I must forgive others and myself in order to become free" and "...waste time on past but look forward." These comments typically indicate the freedom they felt after acknowledging their limiting scripts.

By acknowledging these limiting scripts the participants indicated a positive move forward; a movement based on a change of attitude, towards themselves, others and the past: "... started to position myself differently..." and "I mean stuff that is past is past. [*Ek meen goeters wat verby is is verby*]."

Their responses seem to indicate that by simply telling their untold stories they viewed themselves differently and this change in view enabled them to see themselves in a different light, resulting in invigoration: "It was good to visit the past again and to know who I am." was how one participant described the effect of the process on herself. She further described the effect that "knowing who I am" had on her transgression by stating: "I realised that I'm wasting my strength worrying about the whites and that they are no longer out to get me ... I can now work even harder to help all other people."

With reference to a change in attitude towards others one of the reverends stated: "So we are able to revisit, aaah thinking about your thoughts and actions ... it is not your problem that you do not know the black community as much as I do or that I do not know the white community as much as you do. It is because we are churning over with these things ... that we can start knowing each other otherwise we are breaking it down instead of building it up therefore perpetuating the past."

A change in how the past is perceived as well as the attitude to that past also became clear especially if the following words are considered: "So we were all

victims and today a lot of that negative perceptions are still with us. But now what do we do, do we just sit down and say ... what ... it is there and we have to do something about it." and "For as much as you are white you are just as much part of this South Africa. We need your contribution we need to move forward regardless of one's skin colour or language or whatsoever. We need to move forward."

AWARENESS OF PERSONAL STRENGTHS

As mentioned, all the participants indicated that they experienced the Van der Merwe study as positive. One of the main reasons given was the impression that they became more aware of themselves; of who they were and could still be. Thus, an awareness of their personal strengths. Based on their responses it seems as if five personal strengths came to the fore. These were, resilience, ability to influence people, open-mindedness, the ability to learn and a positive attitude.

Several of the participants stated that they only realised after the Van der Merwe study that they actually survived. Not until after telling their stories did they realise what personal strengths they had, especially pertaining to resilience. One of the participants indicated: "...forgot how strong I am..." Another mentioned "... it was a long time ago ... now glad that I spoke to Mr Van der Merwe ... it now seems a bit better ... I survived [*dit was mos lang tyd gewees ... nou bly dat ek met Mnr Van der Merwe gepraat het ... lyk vir my dit bietjie beter ... ek't survive.*]"

Several of the participants indicated that they realised that they still had the ability to influence and help others. Especially the reverends indicated that they realised after the Van der Merwe study that they no longer "... invest so much in the youth ..." Another participant indicated that "I cried a lot ... realised if I still feel like this and I'm a trained counsellor ... there are many many people in the townships still suffering like me ... whose hearing them?" By recalling their own feelings after the Van der Merwe interviews and naming these, enabled the participants to realise that they still had the ability to help and be influential in their communities. "I'm known here in Ikageng ... I can get these guys together and they can talk about the past, just like I did with you's ... I can help them to also feel better" and "But when you guys came along I knew there was more I could do for this town, for this generation for this country. I can pass on my knowledge."

Another strength some of the participants realised was that they were more open-minded about the transformation process than they thought. A participant

stated: "... realised after interview that the TRC opened the wound but did not do anything to close it. They only thought financial compensation would close the wound. It was like an pretend from the government." This same participant was amazed at this statement and mentioned: "You know I never thought I would say that about the government, but its true." Several other participants mentioned that they found it interesting to realise that they were more accepting of the changes in South Africa than they would thought "we must all work together man ... no such nonsense [*niks sulke nonsens*] like in the past ... government must check itself for same not to happen again in South Africa like in those days..." and "...we must learn from experience ... youngsters must stop looking so much to the past and look more to what they can do about their lives...."

The fourth strength mentioned was one of being capable of learning: "...things became clear...". Thus, a realisation that they are still capable of learning and growing "...started getting my family back in line again ... even got extended family together and told them how we must change ... I couldn't wait to tell everyone what I learned afterwards..." and "not looking so much to the past, to the monsters that faced me but to what I can do about my life and my family's life."

A positive attitude would then constitute the last of the dominant personal strengths that the participants realised. Through telling their stories many realised that they actually were very positive during the time of the struggle in spite of everything that happened around them. "...you know we often laughed and made fun ... things were bad but I always knew I would succeed ..." and "...yes things weren't all just bad, I could cope [*ja dinge was nie net sleg, ek kon cope....*]" By remembering these positive attitudes the participants were able to realise these strengths and start to re-implement them into their daily lives: "I told my children not to lose hope after not getting the job ... my daughter mentioned my more positiveness recently ..." and "I can now do my job knowing that I am in charge ... I must not lose hope again."

FORGIVENESS

Forgiveness for themselves and others was another strong theme that emerged. All the participants mentioned that forgiveness was central to the experiences they had after the Van der Merwe study. This theme revolved around forgiving self and others.

Several of the participants indicated that they realised that they needed to first forgive themselves before they could start forgiving others, "... from a social psychological perspective you also need to forgive yourself for you to learn to be forgiven from other people because if you don't forgive yourself as an individual you cannot even accept forgiveness which other people are tendering towards you ..." and "...the most important and primary benefit that we get from forgiveness is self forgiveness."

Participants indicated that they experienced feelings of freedom, self-acceptance, peace, liberation and energy after forgiving others, "... must forgive ... in order to become free ... made me realise I can carry on" and "Every single time I talk I'm moved to another level of trying to forgive." One participant stated: "I feel that if one talks you get an element of treatment ... when you confess you actually get forgiven, but who forgives you ... you need to forgive yourself for you to learn to be forgiven ... it's also opened towards who is wrong and whom is right it made me thinking because this is a system we are talking about we are not talking about individuals ... People are all victims of their systems. People are saying all whites people got advantage from apartheid. But that's not true we were all victims of apartheid. It put for example fears into people ... we have to change our perspectives ... I can [now] pass on my knowledge" The participant, to describe how he came to think about the past after the first interview, used this statement to describe his path from telling his story to better self-understanding to the ability for forgiveness to transgressing the past and positively moving forward. Thus, by simply becoming more aware of alternative life stories started an almost tangible mobilisation process.

STARTED TALKING TO FAMILY AND FRIENDS

The theme of family and friends is closely linked to all the above themes. The participants indicated that they felt the urge to start sharing "... wanted to tell my daughters about that time again, I wanted them to realise what I went through for them to have what they have today." and "... children today seem to only want and get, they no longer want to fight for anything" with their families again. Sharing these experiences, they felt, may then assist their families, to understand them (participants) better. One of the participants said the following: "...if I tell them my memories they will know me better...."

Another reason given for wanting to share with the families was to empower their families to be able to appreciate what they have and not to make the same mistakes as they or the whites made, "... what I can do about my life and my family's life" and "So that we can start knowing each other otherwise we are breaking it down instead of building it up therefore perpetuating the past."

Some participants indicated that they felt the need to talk to their families due to the feeling of also sharing the good things that happened during the apartheid era to them, almost like a testimony of strength, faith and endurance: "... started talking to my family and friends about past but also about good from then ... they had to know some of the laughs from then ..." and "...it's important for them to know that not all was bad and that everyone make mistake"

It appears that the participants realised after their interview in the Van der Merwe study that they needed to start focusing on the more positive aspects of the apartheid era and not only "... bore them to tears ..." with stories of atrocities. The current researcher perceived a change in the participants' outlook from victim towards survivor.

This change in outlook is evident when the prevalent themes that emerged from this study are taken into consideration. These themes highlighted a change in perception and attitude, the need for forgiveness and a sense of freedom that comes from realising positive formally unacknowledged strengths.

CONCLUSION, LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the participants' responses during the current study seven prevalent themes emerged. These included positive experience that made a difference, gaining of a positive attitude, not all white people are bad, transgressing the past and moving on, awareness of personal strengths, forgiveness and starting to talk to family and friends. However, several sub-themes also surfaced as the data were analysed.

It seems that the telling of their untold stories of survival during the Van der Merwe study allowed the participants the opportunity to become more aware of their alternative stories of survival and growth. It would appear that the participants during the present study became even more aware of how these alternative stories surfaced after the Van der Merwe interviews.

All the participants indicated that they experienced the Van der Merwe study as positive and that they were of the opinion that it made a difference to their lives in general. Especially when they considered how they viewed, thought and felt about themselves, their family members, others and the past.

The effect of this change in view was particularly evident in the change the participants reported concerning how they started to view white people as less malevolent. It also seemed from their responses that the change in their perceptions, similarly, positively influenced their attitude and enabled them to transgress the past enabling a newfound move into the future.

The acceptance of these broader scripts, or rather the realisation of their untold stories of survival, seemed to have created an impression with them that they were more than their stories. They became more aware of their personal strengths, especially regarding their resilience, ability to positively influence others, open-mindedness, ability to learn and a positive attitude towards life.

However, all the participants indicated that central to the experiences and realisations they had, after the telling of their stories, was the "understanding" of forgiveness; forgiveness for self and for others. They indicated that after forgiving themselves and others they experienced feelings such as freedom, self-acceptance, peace, liberation and energy. It may appear that by telling their untold stories of survival the participants' self-understanding increased resulting in the ability to forgive. Forgiveness then triggered positive emotions (freedom, peace, energy) enabling them to incorporate these into their "new" life scripts and more positively start to live.

The effect of the above positive mobilisation process could be seen in their responses especially when the participants described feeling almost compelled to start talking about that era again, but this time focusing on the positive aspects they gained from then. In other words sharing their insights gained; sharing this with family members and close friends for improved understanding and empowerment. Succinctly, a need to inform those close to them about their change in position, from victim to survivor.

Closely linked to the above was their reported change in perception regarding their current circumstances and satisfaction with life. It seems as if the main contributing factor, ascribed to this change of perception, was the opportunity to simply talk about their pasts. The sharing of their stories seemed to enable the

participants to review their current circumstances, concluding that they have actually come a long way and that they are capable of handling ever-changing life challenges. Thus, a perceived change on an intra-personal level occurred.

Not only were their intra-personal perceptions changed but also their perceptions about the past. They reported a more positive move into the future due to a sense of freedom. The reported reason for this sense of freedom was the ability to unburden themselves of limiting scripts, in exchange for more broadening ones.

The acceptance of their broader scripts therefore seems to correlate with literature (Bhuvaneswar & Shaver, 2004; Steffen, 1997; Van der Merwe, 2005; Venter, 1998; White, 1995) as it seems as if it not only provided insight into their interaction with others, their moral conduct and role responsibility but also by incorporating these stories into their daily lives they increasingly became more aware of them enabling a growth in their own consciousness. In addition their responses also seem in line with the Bhuvaneswar and Shaver (2004) study where freedom from abusers by assembling fragments of family, identity, love and belonging into a sustainable whole was accomplished simply by “re-storying”.

However, the following should be taken into consideration when looking at the results from this study. The researcher involved could only speak Afrikaans and English, whilst these were the third or even fourth languages for all the participants. The lack of vernacular on the part of the researcher may thus have influenced the results as many nuances and perhaps finer details that could have emerged in a first language interview, could have been overlooked.

The perceptual distortions the sample group exhibited at the start of this study – may get into trouble, checking up on the previous researcher and so forth – may also have influenced the results. The respondents may have felt that they had to “paint a pretty picture of words” in order not to get the researcher of the previous study (Van der Merwe) “into trouble”.

It should also be noted that only one of the participants indicated the taking up of an active role in the armed struggle. The other participants’ responses indicated an almost passive role during the apartheid era. It could be argued that as a result they had “less” to forgive and it may have been easier for them to access alternative stories of survival.

The initial study was undertaken rather late in 2005 with the follow-up study approximately one month later. Unfortunately it coincided with the end of the

academic year. Since most of the participants were involved with academic responsibilities they were all pressed for time and initially indicated that they hoped that the interviews would not take up too much of their time.

The level of education could also have influenced this study. All the participants, bar two, had tertiary qualifications. Thus, the extent of intellectualisation and reaction formation in the responses of the current study is not clear.

Lastly, due to the limited space provided in an article the information had to be condensed. Considerable valuable information could have been lost as a result.

A direct comparison of this study with results from other studies cannot be done since similar investigations have not yet been conducted. Future studies conducted in this field should also consider variables such as age, language, specific cultural group, actual type of participation and involvement during the struggle, level of education, geographical area and time of year into consideration.

Furthermore, individual experiences during the apartheid era, such as direct exposure to violence or racism, could influence the psychological functioning of participants and should be explored in future studies, as this was not taken into consideration by the current researcher. Subsequently, many possible follow-up studies that could be valuable in affording participants and practitioners the opportunity to learn more about the positive effect of narrative therapy in the South-African context, such as: including all racial groups into similar follow-up studies as well as a possible "mixed" groups where South Africans from all sectors, influenced by the apartheid years, may get together and share their stories of survival. In addition it may be valuable to undertake the same study but this time using people who were more actively involved in the struggle in the sample group. An additional follow-up study, with the same sample group used in the Van der Merwe (2005) and this study, may be undertaken in an attempt to establish the long-term effects of becoming aware of untold stories of survival.

Based on the participants' responses it seems as if they not only became aware of their untold stories of survival but also experienced a positive change within themselves as a result thereof. Many indicated the necessity; they felt, of being able to share this experience with others they know, who may also benefit from "talking". As one participant puts it: "... we need to start projects of social awareness so that people get to know who they are and get proud of who they are because they didn't make themselves who they are, so we need to create acceptance." Follow-up

programmes could be developed and implemented allowing participants to formally share their untold stories of survival. By structuring the process in this manner participants may have the opportunity to support each other and “richer” information could also be gathered.

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