

**CULTURE AND THE SELF IN MORAL AND ETHICAL
DECISION-MAKING: A DIALOGICAL APPROACH**

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Declaration

Unless specifically indicated to the contrary,
this study is a result of my own work

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Mabandla kaMjokwane kaNdaba, baningi kakhulu abantu ababa negalelo empilweni yami, nokuyibona abenza ukuthi ngize ngikwazi ukusoconga lomqulu. Ngithanda ukudlulisela ukubonga okukhulu kumama wami u-MamDladla “Dladlo” Mkhize, okunguyena owangigqugquzela ukuthi ngikhuthalele imfundo, nakuba umuntu wabe ekhula ngaphansi kwesimo esinzonzo ngaphansi kukahulumeni wengcindezi. Ngiphinde ngidlulisela amazwi okubonga ku Mfu. Peter van Heeswijk, uMfu. Msizi G. Michelson nomndeni wonke wakwa-Sigujana e-St Joan of Arc, u-Nkosikazi Maureen Wright kanye no-Mnumzane L. Palliam, bonke ababa negalelo elinzulu empilweni yami.

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I would like to end with the following quotation from Credo Mutwa, a high ranking Zulu shaman:

When I was initiated for the first time in 1937 into the mysteries and knowledge of Mother Africa I was ordered by my teacher who was my aunt. She said I should go outside and fill a small clay pot with water. And then she said to me, “Look into the water—what do you see?” I was caught in a trap because an initiate is not supposed to have an ego. An initiate is not supposed to refer to himself. I said, “Aunt, I see a person in this water.” She said, “Who is that person?” I did not dare say it was me. I said, “It is the person I know who is the son of my mother, the only son.” And she said, “Yes, you are in this water, and the water is in you. Until you know that, that you and the water are one, you must not even drink the water, you must not even think about it, because you have cut yourself off from it.” (Emphasis added) (Available: <http://www.monolake.org/newsletter/00winter/11.htm> [2003, February 3])

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

List of Tables.....	xi
List of Figures.....	xii
Abstract.....	xiii

CHAPTER

I. INTRODUCTION.....	1
Research Problem and Questions.....	5
Justification for the Research.....	5
Methodology.....	6
Definition of Terms.....	7
Delimitations.....	9
Outline of Thesis.....	10
Conclusion.....	11
II. COGNITIVE-DEVELOPMENTAL APPROACHES TO MORALITY.....	12
Kohlberg's Theory of Moral Development.....	12
The Preconventional and Conventional Levels of Moral Thought... ..	14
Morality at the Postconventional Level.....	15
The Morality of Justice.....	16
Ideal Reciprocal Role-taking.....	18
General Characteristics of all Stages.....	19
The Invariant Sequence Hypothesis.....	20
The Assumption of Cultural Universality.....	20
On Empathy and Care.....	22
Anomalies in Kohlberg's Theory: The Feminist Challenge.....	23

Cultural Findings and Critique.....	26
Cultural Differences and Absence of Opportunities	
For Role-taking.....	27
Cultural Adaptations and Translations.....	29
The Philosophical Bases of Morality.....	31
Moral Decision-making and Worldviews.....	33
Time and Space Orientation.....	33
Orientation to Nature.....	34
The Nature of Human Activity.....	35
The Relational Orientation.....	35
Cognitivist Theories and Self-contained Individualism.....	36
Criticisms of Self-contained Individualism and Positivism.....	37
Narrative and Moral Development.....	40
Root Metaphors in the Study of Morality.....	40
Narrative and Contextualism.....	41
Conclusion: Toward the Dialogical Self.....	44
III. AN AFRICAN METAPHYSICAL ONTOLOGY.....	46
An African Metaphysical System.....	47
The Hierarchy of Beings.....	49
The Notion of Vitality or Life Force.....	53
The Principle of Cosmic Unity.....	56
The Communal View of Personhood.....	58
Possible Criticisms of the “Self-in-Community”.....	60
The Family Community.....	61
Contextualising the Metaphysical System.....	64
Implications for Moral Theory and Ethics.....	64
Communal Solidarity and Reciprocity.....	65

Familial Interdependence and Harmony.....	66
Moral Obligations Toward Strangers.....	67
Moral Action and Position.....	69
Conclusion.....	70
IV. SOCIO-CULTURAL APPROACHES TO SELF AND MORALITY.....	72
Mediation and internalization.....	73
Implications for the Study of Morality and Ethics.....	75
The Relevance of Vygotsky’s Views to Traditional African Worldviews.....	77
Beyond Vygotsky.....	78
Bakhtin’s Dialogism.....	79
Life as Authoring.....	79
Utterances as Units of Analysis.....	81
Utterances and Responsiveness.....	82
The “Addressivity” of Utterances.....	83
Utterance and Voice.....	85
Collective Voices.....	87
Social Languages.....	88
Speech Genres.....	89
Morality and the Self Re-considered.....	91
Toward a Dialogical Self.....	91
Dialogical Relationships.....	91
Polyphony and the Dialogical Self.....	93
Spatialisation in the Dialogical Self.....	94
The Innovative Quality of the Dialogical Self.....	96
The Dialogical Self: Implications for the Study of Morality.....	97
Moral Fairness: An Appeal to Another.....	98

	The Moral Audience.....	99
	Hierarchy and Power in Narratives of Moral Conflict.....	99
	Responsibility and Authorship.....	101
	Conclusion.....	103
V.	NARRATIVE AND MORAL JUSTIFICATION: HERMENEUTIC APPROACHES	104
	Narrative Approaches: An Overview of Criticisms.....	104
	Hermeneutics' Response to Moral Relativism.....	107
	The Anthropological Hermeneutics of Wittgenstein.....	108
	Language Games and the Forms of Life.....	108
	Forms of Life and Moral Justification.....	111
	Understanding Others' Forms of Life.....	113
	Gadamer and Habermas: The Intersubjective Nature of Knowledge.....	114
	Technical and Practical-moral Knowledge.....	114
	Gadamer's Historical Hermeneutics.....	117
	A Critique of Gadamer's Historical Hermeneutics.....	122
	Habermas's Discourse Ethics.....	124
	Discourse Ethics: An Evaluation.....	127
	Hermeneutics and Relativism: A Summary and Extension.....	130
	Hermeneutics and Critical Distancing.....	131
	Summary of the Literature Review and Context.....	133
VI.	METHOD	135
	Methods in Moral Development Research: An Overview.....	135
	Kohlberg's Cognitive Developmental Method.....	136
	The "Ready-to-Hand" Method.....	137
	The Voice-centred Relational Method: The Background.....	139

Theoretical Bases of the Method.....	143
Influences of Hermeneutic Philosophy.....	143
The Relational Method and Bakhtin’s Dialogism.....	145
Testing the Feasibility of the Relational Method.....	146
Piloting and Adaptation.....	146
The Main Study.....	149
Participants.....	149
Procedure.....	152
Research Design.....	153
Analysis.....	154
Reading 1: The Plot.....	156
Reading 2: The Voice of the Speaking Person.....	157
Reading 3: The Self-in-Relation.....	159
Reading 4: The Social and Cultural Context.....	161
Summary and Consolidation of Readings.....	162
Issues of Reliability and Validity.....	163
Reliability.....	164
Validity.....	165
Coherence.....	165
Theoretical Validation.....	166
Ethical Considerations.....	167
Conclusion.....	168
VII. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION: PART I.....	169
Morality as Connection to a Transcendental Other.....	169
Transcendental Others and Moral Regulation.....	173
Morality, Religion and Philosophy.....	177
Morality, Tradition and Time.....	180

The Communicative and Dialogical Relationship Between <i>Izinyanya</i> and the living.....	182
The Multiplicity and Fragility of the Self in African Thought.....	183
<i>Izinyanya</i> as Moral Audiences.....	185
Morality, Religion and Philosophy in Other Cultures.....	187
Moral Decision-making and Connection to the Family.....	188
Family and Position.....	191
Family and Conceptions of Self.....	193
Family and Morality in the Cognitivist Paradigm.....	197
Connection and the Community.....	198
Connection as <i>Ubuntu</i>	200
Connection to the Community and the Self.....	202
Comparisons with Gilligan’s Relational Ethic.....	205
Conclusion.....	206
VIII. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION: PART II.....	207
Dialogic Tensions in Moral Decision-making.....	207
The Relational and Emotional Nature of Moral Decision-Making.....	212
Conceptions of Self in the Narrative.....	213
Cognitivism and the Role of the Other in Self-definition.....	216
Tensions Between Moral Voices.....	218
Gender and Cultural Positioning in Moral Decision-making.....	223
The Socio-cultural Embeddedness of Moral Identity.....	227
Activity, Positioning and Moral Discourse.....	230
Positioning and Resistance.....	232
Positioning: The Tensions Between Mediational Means.....	233
Flexibility and Positioning Theory.....	234
Positioning and personhood.....	236

	Moral Identities and Collective Voices.....	236
	Ventriloquation and Moral Reasoning.....	238
	Gender and Power in Moral Decision-making.....	239
	Indirect Strategies Toward “Hearability”.....	242
	Strategic Topic Dominance.....	244
	Utterances as Units of Analysis in Power Relationships.....	246
	Conclusion.....	248
X.	CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS.....	249
	Summary of Conclusions about Research Questions.....	250
	Unique Contributions of the Study.....	253
	Implications for Policy, Research and Practice.....	254
	Implications for Theory.....	256
	Limitations and Criticism.....	257
	Indications for Further Research.....	259
XI.	REFERENCES.....	261
XII.	APPENDICES.....	287
	Appendix 1: <i>IsiZulu</i> Version of the Real Life Conflict and Choice	
	Interview Schedule.....	287
	Appendix 2: Sample Contact Summary Sheet.....	288
	Appendix 3: Sample Field Notes	289
	Appendix 4: Sample Worksheet for Reading 1.....	290
	Appendix 5: Sample Worksheet for Reading 2.....	291
	Appendix 6: Sample Interview Summary.....	292
	Appendix 7: Sample of a Matrix of Informants by Readings.....	293
	Appendix 8: An Example of a Consent Form: <i>IsiZulu</i> Version.....	295
	Appendix 9: An Example of a Consent Form: English Version.....	296

LIST OF TABLES

Table

1.	Kohlberg's Stages of Moral Development.....	13
2.	The Real Life Conflict and Choice Interview.....	147
3.	The Demographics of the Sample.....	151
4.	Transcription Symbols.....	170

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure

1.	Relationships Between Elements in the Hierarchy of Beings.....	51
2.	The Design of the Study.....	154
3.	The Dialectical Nature of the Reading Process.....	155
4.	Reading for Self-in-Relation.....	161
5.	The Person in Socio-Cultural Context.....	162

ABSTRACT

This study investigated *isiZulu*-speakers' conceptions of morality. The relationship between concepts of the self and morality was also explored, as were influences of gender, family and community on moral reasoning. Fifty-two participants of both genders were interviewed. The sample was drawn from urban, peri-urban and rural areas in KwaZulu-Natal. The participants were invited to tell a story involving a moral dilemma they had experienced in their lives. The resulting narratives were analyzed using an adapted version of the Relational Method, an analytic procedure developed by Gilligan and her colleagues (e.g. Brown & Gilligan, 1991) to analyze narratives of real life conflict.

Respondents considered morality to be a state of connection or equilibrium between the person, other people, and his or her social milieu. Connection is characterized by caring, just and respectful relationships among people and everything to which they stand in relation. Immorality, which is characterized by relationships devoid of care, justice and respect, results from a breakdown in social and communal relationships. Conceptions of morality were found to be dependent on respondents' understanding of the self. The view that morality is characterised by connection was associated mainly with the communal or familial self. However, tensions were also noted between competing concepts of the self within the person, namely the communal and independent selves. These tensions complicated respondents' choices in the face of moral conflict. Gender was also found to influence moral reasoning: in the face of moral dilemmas involving gender, men were concerned with the preservation of their masculine identities, while women found themselves positioned powerlessly by culturally defined narratives of femininity. These results are discussed with reference to traditional African philosophical frameworks and dialogical theory. The implications of the study to psychological theory, social science research ethics and health-related intervention policies are highlighted.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this study is to investigate understandings of morality among *isiZulu* speaking people in South Africa. Further, it explores the relationship between conceptions of morality and the self (personhood). The study is motivated by the fact that moral development research has been dominated by cognitive-developmental approaches (e.g. Kohlberg, 1981, 1984). These approaches maintain that psychological processes, including moral reasoning, are free of contextual influences. For instance, Kohlberg (ibid) posited a sequence of six structurally defined stages of moral reasoning, supposedly invariant in sequence and universal across cultures. Further, he defined the highest and most adequate stages of moral reasoning solely in terms of the principles of justice, to the exclusion of considerations arising out of empathy or care. According to cognitive-developmental approaches, decisions at the most advanced stages of moral thought are made from a disinterested, impartial position, independently of historical and social influences.

Cross-cultural studies have failed to support the universality thesis. Research has consistently shown that people from indigenous societies in particular tend to stabilize at Stage 3, falling under conventional morality (Edwards, 1975, 1981; Kohlberg, 1981, 1984). Cognitive developmentalists have argued that indigenous societies do not advance to postconventional morality due to absence of opportunities for role taking and leadership (Edwards, 1981; Kohlberg, 1984). The present study maintains that differences in moral decision-making occur because the notion of an autonomous self, on which cognitive-developmental approaches are based, is not universal. From a traditional African point of view, mature selfhood entails living interdependently with others (Ikuenobe, 1998; Menkiti, 1984). Thus, what appears to be conventional moral reasoning, from a cognitive-developmental framework, is based on a different concept of morality: a

concept that prizes harmony and interdependence between people and their social milieu (Verhoef & Michel, 1997; Ward, 1991).

There has been a growing awareness of the meta-theoretical, theoretical, and methodological limitations of cognitive-developmental approaches to morality (Day & Tappan, 1996; Gilligan, 1982; Shweder, 1982). These critics have pointed out that cognitive-developmental approaches do not take into account the multi-dimensional nature of the moral domain. Cognitive-developmental approaches disregard the relationship between moral experience, gender, culture and power (Day & Tappan, 1996). In psychology, these largely disregarded factors were given attention by Gilligan (1977, 1982), who questioned the assumption that psychological maturity involves an increasing differentiation of the self from the social and cultural context. Her research showed that, for women in particular, the morality of care exists simultaneously with the morality of justice.

Gilligan's work has led to the recognition that people are not limited to a single moral voice (Benhabib, 1992; Day & Tappan, 1996; Miller, 1997). Particularly, it is increasingly recognized that moral reasoning does not occur in a vacuum: it is mediated by language and other socio-cultural processes (Bhatia, 2000; Brown & Gilligan, 1991; Day, 1991). The present study explores traditional African moral perspectives that may have been marginalized because of researchers' reliance on Western philosophical assumptions about the self and the world.

At the methodological level, cognitive approaches have been criticized for relying on hypothetical moral dilemmas (Gilligan, 1982). This isolates the process of moral decision-making from the complexities of real life problems. Methods that use hypothetical dilemmas are consistent with the disembodied view of the self. From this perspective, both the knowing subject and the process of knowing are independent of social, cultural, and historical influences (Lapsley, 1996). Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, and Tarule (1986) have referred to this mode of knowing as "separate." It is characterized by an impersonal and distanced stance toward the object of one's knowledge. Separate

knowing is not universal, however (Belenky *et al.*, 1986). It stands opposed to “connected” knowing, which involves dialogue with the object of one’s knowledge, be it an idea, another person, or a community (Belenky *et al.*, 1986; Clinchy, 1996). Connected knowing is sensitive to the context in which one knows. Methodologically, it is consistent with narrative investigative approaches, which examine human experiences as they occur in culture, space and time (Brown & Gilligan, 1991; Day & Tappan, 1996; Lapsely, 1996). Given that the purpose of the present study was to investigate situated understandings of morality, participants were asked to narrate real life dilemmas. This is consistent with the tradition of story-telling, prized in most African communities (Akbar, 1984; Verhoef & Michel, 1997).

The present study is motivated by the increasing awareness that psychological science is a cultural manifestation (Gergen, Gulerce, Lock, & Misra, 1996). Psychology is based on culturally determined, presuppositions about the nature of reality and personhood. Traditional Western approaches to knowledge, for example, assume that individuals are unique, with a mind that is separate from the body. Further, it is assumed that scientists apply rules of inductive or deductive logic to record events in the world, without undue influence from values, motives, and other biases (Gergen *et al.*, 1996). These presuppositions are neither universal nor timeless: they are products of the scientific revolution that took place in the 16th and 17th centuries (Cushman, 1990). This period saw a gradual shift from community and religious orientations to a materialistic outlook toward social inquiry. This led to the view that social inquiry should be based on principles that are valid regardless of time, place and context. Following on this tradition, cognitive-developmental approaches sought to uncover timeless and universal stages of moral decision-making.

The universality of presuppositions derived from Western psychology has been questioned. Shweder (1991) has argued that cultural traditions and social practices transform the way we think about the world, resulting in divergences in psychological processes such as thinking, self and emotion. In an essay introducing cultural psychology, Shweder (*ibid*) questioned the dichotomy between mind and body, psyche and culture,

often assumed in the West. He defined cultural psychology as “the study of the ways subject and object, self and other, psyche and culture, person and context, figure and ground . . . require each other, and dynamically, dialectically, and jointly make each other up” (p. 73). Shweder emphasized that human beings give meaning to the socio-cultural environment inasmuch as their mental life is shaped by meanings emanating from it. Bruner (1990) has echoed similar views. He maintained that “the central concept of a human psychology is *meaning* and the processes and transactions involved in the construction of meanings” (p. 33, emphasis original). These developments highlight the need to study psychological processes such as morality with reference to the meaning systems of the people concerned.

The awareness that knowledge is mediated by social and cultural practices has opened up possibilities for investigating indigenous accounts of psychological processes (Bhatia, 2000; Gergen *et al.*, 1996; Kim & Berry, 1993; Sinha, 1986, 1993). To understand morality in indigenous contexts, we need to pay attention to the philosophical frameworks, linguistic practices, and other cultural meaning systems through which people make sense of themselves and the world.

The present study investigates the meaning of morality among *isiZulu* speakers, using African-based philosophical frameworks and epistemologies (Akbar, 1984; Myers, 1988; Verhoef & Michel, 1997). It is recognized, however, that in the modern world people are exposed to multiple worldviews and social realities. The challenge therefore, is to investigate not only exclusively African understandings of morality. Of most psychological relevance is the dynamic interpenetration of African and other worldviews. This thesis argues that this task can be accomplished by adopting the dialogical model of selfhood, based on Bakhtin’s (1981, 1984/1993) ideas. Dialogism is an appropriate framework for studying morality in multi-cultural societies because it provides for influences of multiple social practices on psychological development. In a country such as South Africa, it is important to study psychological phenomena with reference to different social and cultural practices. Apart from its long colonial history, the country

continues to be influenced by the Western world through the media and other forms of social contact.

Research Problem and Questions

The purpose of this research is to study conceptions of morality among *isiZulu* speakers. It seeks to relate these understandings to emic theoretical frameworks, including traditional African concepts of selfhood. Contextual influences on moral decision-making, such as community values, gender-related beliefs, and family influences, are explored. Questions addressed in the study are listed below. Theoretical issues pertaining to these questions are elaborated throughout the literature review.

- What is the meaning of morality for *isiZulu* speakers?
- How are these meanings related to concepts of personhood or the self?
- How do family and community values influence moral decision-making?
- What is the interface between gender and power in moral decision-making?

Justification for the Research

Modern psychology originated in the West. It was brought to developing countries as part of the general transfer of knowledge and technology. When the study of psychology was introduced in developing countries, attempts were made to understand indigenous people's experiences with reference to concepts derived in the West (Sinha, 1986, 2002). With the advent of cultural psychology and the increasing influences of interpretive disciplines such as hermeneutics, it is now recognized that psychological processes are culture-based (Gergen *et al.*, 1996; Lucariello; 1995). Sinha (1986, 2002) has argued that unless serious attempts are made to indigenize psychology, the discipline will continue to have a limited impact on issues facing developing countries. To address this concern, the present study investigates understandings of morality among the Zulu, with reference to traditional, African conceptual frameworks.

The most immediate applications of the study are in the area of research into ethics and informed consent. Faden and Beauchamp (1986) argued that ethical principles such as autonomy are founded on (deontological) moral theory. It follows that without knowledge of a people's understanding of what constitutes right and wrong (their theory of morality), ethical conduct in research and practice may be compromised. At the moment, these issues are most important in South Africa, where research is under way to develop culturally appropriate procedures for conducting HIV/Aids vaccine trials in vulnerable populations (Gasa, 1999; Lindegger & Richter, 2000).

Methodology

Cognitive-developmental approaches to research in moral development have used standard hypothetical dilemmas (e.g. Colby & Kohlberg, 1987a, 1987b). These dilemmas are based on the assumption that principles of justice are the primary defining feature of the moral domain. The use of hypothetical dilemmas is meant to elicit issues of rights and duties, to the exclusion of moral concerns arising out of empathy and care (Kohlberg, Boyd & Levine, 1990).

Given that the purpose of this study is to investigate culturally situated understandings of morality, the above mentioned methodology is inappropriate. Instead, data were collected and analyzed using a revised version of Gilligan's voice-centered, relational method (Brown & Gilligan, 1991; Gilligan, Brown, & Rogers, 1990). Participants were invited to tell a story involving a moral dilemma which they had faced in their lives. Influences of family, culture, community, and other factors, were explored through probing questions. Interviews were tape-recorded and later transcribed. The transcripts were then analyzed using guidelines for reading interviews of moral conflict and choice (Gilligan *et al.*, 1990; Mauthner & Doucet, 1998). The method involves reading a respondent's story several times, each reading focusing on a particular aspect of the narrator's lived experience. For the purposes of this study, the reading process was adapted to take into

account the value attached to family and community in traditional African settings. This adaptation is discussed in Chapter 6.

Definitions of Terms

This section introduces and defines key theoretical concepts used in the study. It should be noted, however, that while operational definitions are given, the meaning of these terms unfolds throughout the study, as the reader grasps the context of the work as a whole.

Indigenous psychologies: have as a distinguishing feature the study of human psychological processes in their cultural context, *using concepts, theories, and belief systems that are indigenous to the groups under investigation*. Human experience is studied and interpreted from local actors' perspectives (Ho, 1998; Kim & Berry, 1993). Indigenous psychologies differ from *indigenization*, which is an attempt to transform concepts and theories developed in the West, in order to make them relevant to local cultural contexts (Sinha, 1993). The move toward indigenous psychologies follows on from the understanding that modern scientific psychology, as it is taught in academic and other institutions, reflects Western assumptions about knowledge, people, and the world. These assumptions may or may not be appropriate for explaining experiences of others in the rest of the world (Sinha, 1986, 1993, 2002).

It should be noted that the move toward indigenous psychologies is not concerned with studying exotic people in distant places. It applies to developing as well as developed countries (Kim & Berry, 1993). Heelas (1981) demonstrated this using the concept of personhood as an example. He argued that the concept of a person as a unique, bounded entity is *indigenous* to the West. When psychology was imported to colonized countries, its concepts were unilaterally applied *as if* they were universal, to the exclusion of local understandings and explanations (Sinha, 1986).

Indigenous psychologies recognize the multiplicity of perspectives within a group. For this reason, they do not assume *a priori* that some perspectives are superior to others. Neither is the call to explore indigenous psychologies a rejection of Western or other perspectives. The position taken in this study is that psychology needs to develop perspectives that interpenetrate each other, given people's exposure to multiple points of view (Gergen *et al.*, 1996). However, this requires a full explication of historically marginalized perspectives, as well as attention to political and power dimensions involved in the production of knowledge.

The independent construal of self: refers to the traditional Western understanding of the self as a bounded container, existing independently of other similarly bounded selves. From this perspective, the goal of socialization is to achieve independence from others. This entails that one's behaviour be organized with reference to internal thoughts, feelings, and actions (Markus & Kitayama, 1991, 1994; Matsumoto, 1994). People are treated as prior to, and more fundamental than, the social order, which is in turn regarded as a means to realize individuals' ends (Miller, 1994). This notion of the self is also known as self-contained individualism (Hermans, Kempen, & van Loon, 1992; Sampson, 1988).

The interdependent construal of self: is the view of the self prevalent in non-Western cultures such as Asia (Matsumoto, 1994) and Africa (Mwawenda, 1995). These cultures emphasize the fundamental connectedness among people. The goal of socialization is not separation, but harmony of one's interests and goals with those of the group. No clear boundaries are drawn between self and other, mind and context. It is also known as the collectivist self (Markus & Kitayama, 1991, 1994; Mwawenda, 1995).

Dialogism: is a term arising from the literary writings of Bakhtin (1981, 1984/1993). It is the view that meaning, knowledge and understanding do not arise from actions of isolated individuals, but from the dynamic interdependence between actors located in space, time and context. Psychological processes such as mind and self do not unfold internally, from within the individual; they *emerge* dialogically, from the communicative processes of

individuals located in social and cultural contexts (Bandlamudi, 1994; Hermans & Kempen, 1993; Morson & Emerson, 1990).

Izinyanya (ancestors): According to traditional African belief, especially in the region South of the Sahara, life does not end with physical death. The deceased who lived moral and exemplary lives join other ancestors before them in the spiritual world. This would happen provided their families had performed appropriate rituals of integration on their behalf. Once elevated to ancestorhood, *izinyanya* can intercede with God on behalf of their descendents (Ngubane, 1977).

Hermeneutics: There cannot be a simple definition of hermeneutics, given the historical developments in the understanding of the term. Broadly, hermeneutics is the discipline that seeks to interpret and understand the meaning of recorded expressions of human experiences. It is concerned in particular with experiences of real life actors, rather than hypothetical subjects. It therefore emphasizes the perspectival and situated nature of human understanding (Burkett, 1988; Ricouer, 1979; Tappan, 1990).

The moral point of view: is the view that moral judgments should be taken from a perspective that transcends the particularity of all situations, and they should disregard the value systems of those concerned (Kohlberg *et al.*, 1990).

African: In this study, the term “African” is used in a narrow sense to indicate indigenous African people, particularly those living in the region South of the Sahara.

Delimitations

The main sample in this study comprised *isiZulu* speakers. For this reason the study refers to understandings of morality among the Zulu. It should be noted, however, that the philosophical framework that forms the basis of the study is shared by a number of African communities, especially in the region South of the Sahara. Findings therefore apply potentially to those African communities that subscribe to this framework. It is

only for methodological reasons that I refer to understandings of morality among the Zulu. It is important to make this distinction because there is nothing about Zulu-ness *per se*, that explains the findings, *except the shared conceptual framework*. However, it is methodologically sound to wait until similar studies have been repeated with African communities other than isiZulu speakers, before entertaining such a generalization.

Outline of Thesis

This thesis consists of 9 chapters. The present chapter presents the background and scope of the study. Chapter 2 discusses Kohlberg's theory of moral development. Philosophical underpinnings of cognitive-developmental approaches to morality are presented. It is argued that these approaches fall short because, taking the Kantian tradition as a point of departure, they attempt to understand morality independently of the philosophies, languages, and cultures of the people concerned. Gilligan's (1982) work, premised on the relational self, has shown that alternative conceptions of morality exist, over and above the justice dimension identified by Kohlberg (1981). The chapter concludes with an introduction to narrative approaches. These approaches make it possible to understand psychological processes as they occur in context, space and time.

A framework for understanding morality in African contexts is introduced in Chapter 3. According to this framework, morality cannot be understood independently of the social and cultural context. The notion of personhood behind this understanding of morality is introduced and discussed. Given exposure to various worldviews and perspectives characteristic of the modern world, psychological research can no longer rely on one conceptual framework. Chapter 4 examines socio-cultural approaches to morality and self, beginning with the work of Vygotsky. Bakhtin's (1981) notion of dialogism is then introduced. It is argued that dialogism enables one to study multiple cultural factors impinging on moral decision-making, without resorting to "either-or" approaches that have characterized cross-cultural research.

The thesis is based on the narrative paradigm. Narrative approaches reject the notion that universal, timeless criteria exist by which one is able to distinguish right from wrong. Chapter 5 discusses alternative, hermeneutic approaches to the problem of moral relativism, given the absence of grand narratives of legitimation. Methods used to collect and analyze data are discussed in Chapter 6. It is argued that, unlike methods relying on hypothetical dilemmas (e.g. Colby & Kohlberg, 1987a), Gilligan's relational methodology is most appropriate for investigating situated understandings of morality (Brown & Gilligan, 1991). Results are presented and discussed in Chapters 7 and 8. Chapter 9 draws conclusions of the study. Implications for social service delivery are highlighted, as are recommendations for further research.

Conclusion

This chapter has introduced the background to moral development research. Studies of morality in developing countries have relied on Western concepts. For psychology to have an impact on problems facing developing countries, it is important that social phenomena be explained with reference to indigenous concepts. This study examines understandings of morality among *isiZulu* speakers, using traditional African frameworks as points of departure. Data were collected and analyzed using Gilligan *et al.*'s (1990) guide for analyzing interviews of moral conflict and choice. Key concepts in the study were defined, and the outline of the thesis was provided.

CHAPTER 2

COGNITIVE-DEVELOPMENTAL APPROACHES TO MORALITY

The previous chapter highlighted the importance of adopting a socio-cultural perspective in studying psychological phenomena. This chapter introduces some of the key tenets of Kohlberg's (1981, 1984) theory of moral development. This is followed by a critical evaluation of findings pertaining to the cross-cultural applicability of the theory. It is argued that to understand cultural variations in moral decision-making, one has to come to terms with worldviews or conceptual frameworks that people use to make sense of the world. The model of personhood that underpins cognitive-developmental approaches to morality, self-contained individualism, is introduced and critiqued. It is shown that cultures with different conceptions of personhood understand morality differently. Finally, using Gilligan's (1977, 1982) work, it is argued that narrative approaches to psychology provide a meaningful framework for investigating morality in indigenous contexts.

Kohlberg's Theory of Moral Development

Due to the sheer volume of Kohlberg's work, a full account of his ideas on moral reasoning is beyond the scope of this study. The following section introduces what he saw as being the stages of moral development. Their characteristics are then discussed, as are cross-cultural findings. It is argued that Kohlberg, following the Western philosophical tradition, defined morality in terms only of justice. As a result, he ignored care and empathy, regarded as important aspects of moral being in other cultures.

Building on Piaget's (1924/1969, 1932/1965) earlier work on moral theory, Kohlberg (1981, 1984) identified three levels of moral thought: the pre-conventional, conventional and post-conventional. Each of these is subdivided into two stages, resulting in six stages altogether (Table 1, page 13). Cross-cultural findings concerning the first three of these stages have, on the whole, yielded consistent findings (Murphy & Gilligan, 1980). These stages will be discussed briefly. Stages 4, 5, and 6, on the other hand, have been a focus of a number of cross-cultural controversies. These stages are therefore discussed at length.

Table 1. Kohlberg's Stages of Moral Development

Level 1 *Preconventional*

At this level, the child is responsive to cultural rules and labels of good and bad, right or wrong, but interprets these labels in terms of either the physical or the hedonistic consequences of action (punishment, reward, exchange of favors), or in terms of the physical power of those who enunciate the rules and labels. The level is divided into the following two stages:

Stage 1: The punishment and obedience orientation. The physical consequences of action determine its goodness or badness regardless of the human meaning or value of these consequences. Avoidance of punishment and unquestioning deference to power are valued in their own right, not in terms of respect for an underlying moral order supported by punishment and authority (the latter being stage 4).

Stage 2: The instrumental relativist orientation. Right action consists of what instrumentally satisfies one's own needs and occasionally the needs of others. Human relations are viewed in terms like those of the market place. Elements of fairness, of reciprocity, and of equal sharing are present, but they are always interpreted in a physical pragmatic way. Reciprocity is a matter of "you scratch my back and I'll scratch yours," not of loyalty, gratitude, or justice.

Level 2: *Conventional level*

At this level, maintaining the expectations of the individual's family, group, or nation is perceived as valuable in its own right, regardless of immediate and obvious consequences. The attitude is not only of *conformity* to personal expectations and social order, but of loyalty to it, of actively *maintaining*, supporting, and justifying the order, and of identifying with the persons or group involved in it. At this level there are the following two stages:

Stage 3: The interpersonal concordance or "good-boy nice-girl" orientation. Good behavior is what pleases or helps others and is approved by them. There is much conformity to stereotypical images of what is majority or "natural" behavior. Behavior is frequently judged by intention- "he means well" becomes important for the first time. One earns approval by being "nice".

Stage 4: The "law and order" orientation. There is orientation toward authority, fixed rules, and the maintenance of the social order. Right behavior consists of doing one's duty, showing respect for authority, and maintaining the given social order for its own sake.

Level 3: *Postconventional, Autonomous, or Principled Level*

At this level, there is a clear effort to define moral values and principles that have validity and application apart from the authority of the groups or persons holding these principles, and apart from the individual's own identification with these groups. This level again has two stages:

Stage 5: The social-contract legalistic orientation, generally with utilitarian overtones. Right action tends to be defined in terms of general individual rights, and standards that have been critically examined and agreed upon by the whole society. There is a clear awareness of the relativism of personal values and opinions and a corresponding emphasis upon procedural rules for reaching consensus. Aside from what is constitutionally and democratically agreed upon, the right is the matter of personal "values" and "opinion." The result is an emphasis upon the "legal point of view," but with an emphasis upon the possibility of changing law in terms of rational considerations of social utility (rather than freezing it in terms of stage 4 "law and order"). Outside the legal realm, free agreement and contract is the binding element of obligation. This is the "official" morality of the American government and constitution.

Stage 6: The universal ethical principle orientation. Right is defined by the decision of conscience in accord with self-chosen ethical principles appealing to logical comprehensiveness, universality, and consistency. These principles are abstract and ethical (the Golden Rule, the categorical imperative); they are not concrete moral rules like the Ten commandments. At heart, these are universal principles of *justice*, of the *reciprocity* and equality of human *rights*, and of respect for the dignity of human beings as *individual persons*.

(From Kohlberg, 1981, pp. 17-18)

The Preconventional and Conventional Levels of Moral Thought

At the first stage of the preconventional level (Table 1), also known as the “punishment and obedience” orientation, the moral status of an action is determined by the physical consequences for the actor. If the action results in punishment, then it is bad and should not be done. If it results in reward or lack of punishment, then it should be done, regardless of the human meaning of the act. In the second stage, also known as the “naïve instrumental” orientation, good actions are those that are instrumental in satisfying one’s needs, and occasionally, those of others. A Stage 2 individual may help others, with a view to being helped in return.

Goodness at the conventional level entails conformity to others’ needs, including family, nation, and social groups. The existing social order is supported and justified.

At Stage 3, pleasing others and living up to expectations is of paramount importance to the individual. What is good is that which earns one approval. This stage is also known as the “good-boy nice-girl” orientation. Maintenance of the social order, showing respect for authority, and doing one’s duties, are the major determinants of the good for Stage 4 individuals. This stage is also known as the “law and order” orientation.

Kohlberg (1981) maintained that the major disadvantage of Stage 4 reasoning is that it does not provide guidelines for creating new norms. At this stage, individuals abide by already existing group norms: they take no part in their creation. Furthermore, this stage does not provide a basis for making judgments involving different interest groups in society. Morality remains relative only to one’s group. From a cognitive-developmental perspective, this is a major shortcoming, given the assumption that moral judgments should transcend particular contexts. Kohlberg (1981) therefore reasoned that universality in moral judgment can only be possible at the level that defines morality for anyone and in any situation, that being the principled or postconventional level.

Morality at the Post-conventional Level

At the postconventional level, also known as the principled or autonomous level, morality is “freed” from the authority invested in any person or group at any point in time (Kohlberg, 1981, 1984). Unlike Level 2 moral reasoning, moral principles become universal and valid regardless of one’s group’s beliefs and ideas.

Within this level, and representing what are regarded as the most advanced and most adequate stages of moral thought, are Stages 5 and 6 (Kohlberg, 1981; Kohlberg *et al.*, 1990). At Stage 5, also known as the “social-contract legalistic” orientation, morality is based on social standards that have been critically examined, and consented to, by society as a whole. The postconventional nature of Stage 5 derives from the fact that morality entails “cognitive action upon, rather than cognitive conformity to, the values and institutions of society” (Kohlberg *et al.*, 1990, p. 174). Stage 5 differs from Stage 4 because the latter “has a perspective primarily determined by the given rules and values of society” (Kohlberg, 1981, p. 153). Rules governing Stage 4 are not derived from mutual agreement among citizens. On the other hand, Stage 5 “has a perspective necessary for rationally creating laws *ex nihilo*” (ibid, p. 153, emphasis added) in the form of a mutually agreed-upon social contract among citizens. The social contract consists of procedural rules, as may be found in a constitutional democracy. It “presupposes that both the obeyer of the law and the lawmaker have the proper orientation and that the lawmaker has received the rational consent of the individuals who make society” (Kohlberg, 1981, p. 154). Stage 5 is thus legalistic and utilitarian in character: it assumes that all citizens participate in the creation of laws, from which they supposedly benefit.

The procedural nature of Stage 5 moral reasoning provides a framework for the elimination of moral relativity, a major problem for Stage 4 reasoning. There is a possibility, however, that relativity and arbitrariness will result from individual differences when dealing with social situations which are not covered by the legal sphere or the social contract (Kohlberg, 1981). Falling within this group are instances in which individuals may be required to disobey constitutionally legitimate laws which prescribe unjust action. A good example would be support for apartheid laws of the former South African Nationalist government. These laws

denied franchise and advancement opportunities to Blacks. According to Kohlberg (1981), only Stage 6 moral reasoning suffices for such situations. At this stage, also known as the “universal ethical principle” orientation, moral judgments are based on the recognition of the unconditional worth and dignity of all human life, the principle of justice, and the principle of role-taking (Kohlberg, 1981, 1984; Kohlberg *et al.*, 1990). Stage 6 requires us to treat each person as an end, and not a means, given the inherent value of human life. It is therefore an unconditional duty to save human life wherever possible, irrespective of the social standing or group membership of the person whose life is at stake. Furthermore, this decision should be made from a disinterested point of view, so that it is consistent with the actions of any moral agents who would find themselves in a similar situation (Kohlberg, 1981).

Other central characteristics of the Stage 6 moral position are justice and reciprocity.

The Morality of Justice

Although individuals have concern for others’ well-being throughout the six stages of moral development, it is mainly at Stages 5 and 6, and especially Stage 6, that this concern is based on what Kohlberg (1981, 1984) regarded as true principles of justice. Kohlberg (*ibid*) defined the moral point of view in terms of justice. The morality of justice is best understood with reference to the work of Rawls (1972), from whom Kohlberg drew considerably in formulating his theory. Rawls presented a theory of justice based on social contract theories, as found in the works of philosophers such as Locke, Rousseau and Kant. According to the social contract theory, principles of justice “are the principles that free and *rational* persons concerned to further their own interests would accept in an *initial position of equality* as defining the fundamental terms of their association” (Rawls, 1972, p. 14, emphasis added). That is, principles are “just” if they have been formulated under conditions that recognize the equality, autonomy and rationality of each individual. Rawlsian subjects are free and autonomous in the sense that they are not influenced by cultural and historical values. Their deliberations are guided by principles to which they themselves have consented. Because of its supposed independence from historical and cultural factors, this notion of subjectivity is sometimes referred to as existing “prior to society” (Witherell & Pope-Edwards, 1991).

As mentioned above, parties taking part in deliberations to determine principles of justice must be “rational.” It is important to expand on the model of rationality envisaged in social contract theories, given that this is one of the most criticized aspects of Kohlberg’s work. Rawls’s model of rationality is instrumental: it assumes that an individual would take the most effective means toward desired ends. Thus, “a rational person is thought to have a coherent set of preferences between the options open to him [sic]” (Rawls, 1972, p. 143). Options are then ranked depending on how they further one’s purposes. Finally, a plan of action is developed that is considered most likely to achieve one’s desired ends. One of the shortcomings of this model is that it assumes that, in the face of dilemmas, individuals will have all the necessary information to act upon. It further assumes that value orientations do not come into the picture. Alternative models of rationality are explored in Chapter 5.

If principles of justice have been chosen under the conditions spelt out above, they are referred to as “justice as fairness” (Rawls, 1972, p. 11). With these principles in mind, moral agents begin a dialogue, with a view to achieving consensus. Consensus does not mean however, that individuals will agree to be bound by the decisions of the majority in society. Borrowing from the work of Frankena, Kohlberg argued that the moral point of view is characterized by an ideal consensus that comes only at the end. It is consensus that “will be concurred in by those who freely and clear-headedly review the relevant facts from the moral point of view” (Frankena, cited in Kohlberg *et al.*, 1990, p. 163). In other words, this is the consensus that will be achieved by those who have examined relevant facts from an impartial perspective: a position that transcends the particularity of each situation (Young, 1987).

To fully constitute “justice as fairness,” moral principles must be chosen from the “original position” and under the “veil of ignorance.” The “original position” is a hypothetical situation corresponding to the state of nature in social contract theories. Its essential characteristics are that no one knows his or her social status, class, position, gender, or race in society. Neither do participants know their “fortune in the distribution of natural assets and abilities, intelligence, strength, and the like” (Rawls, 1972, p. 12). Because parties do not know their identities or how alternatives available to them will affect their individual cases, they are said

to be deliberating “behind a veil of ignorance.” Rawls envisaged that it is only under such circumstances that no one will be advantaged or disadvantaged in the choice of the principles of justice. Justice as fairness is thus a product of an agreement between mutually-disinterested, rational agents. The agents are “mutually-disinterested” in the sense that they take no interest in one another’s interests, or their religious or metaphysical orientations. Following Rawls (1972), this is the idea of justice endorsed by Kohlberg and his colleagues (Kohlberg, 1981, 1984; Kohlberg *et al.*, 1990).

The above mentioned concept of justice has had a major influence on the research conducted in the cognitive-developmental paradigm. Kohlberg *et al.* (1990) admitted that the assumption that justice is the defining feature of the moral domain led his research team to focus on dilemmas that were meant to gauge subjects’ reasoning about conflicting rights, or the distribution of scarce resources:

The kinds of questions which we asked in our dilemmas were deontic questions focusing on rights and duties. The questions we have seldom asked are aretaic questions, that is, *questions that focus on the moral value of lives or persons that ask about ideals of the good life or the good person.* (ibid., p. 305, emphasis added)

Throughout this dissertation, this is what is meant whenever it is maintained that cognitive developmental approaches defined the domain of the moral too narrowly. Kohlberg’s concept of morality excludes responsibilities arising out of care or empathy. His views on the role of care in moral decision-making are discussed below.

Ideal Reciprocal Role-taking

Another essential characteristic of Stage 6 moral reasoning is ideal reciprocal role-taking. This entails taking others’ perspectives in resolving moral dilemmas. Reciprocal role-taking involves “temporarily separating the actual identities of persons from their claims and interests in order to assess what would be the relative merits of those claims and interests from the point of view of *any person* implicated in the dilemma” (Kohlberg *et al.*, 1990, p. 167, emphasis added). It is envisaged that this is possible if people adopt the position of the “generalized other” (Benhabib, 1992). We reason from the point of view of the “generalized

other” if we deliberately approach issues from an impartial position, without taking into account the historical and contextual circumstances of those concerned. This position, it is envisaged, would help moral agents to “transcend the particularity of every personal point of view and to look at the situation from a position that considers every individual value system in the same way, disregarding whose value system it happens to be” (Taylor, cited in Kohlberg *et al.*, 1990, p. 167).

The notion of ideal reciprocal role taking led Kohlberg (1984) and his colleagues (Kohlberg *et al.*, 1990) to liken the highest level of moral decision-making to “moral musical chairs.” Moral musical chairs requires each individual to imaginatively consider moral dilemmas from the position of others who are also involved. They should continue doing so, until they reach a fair or balanced situation (Kohlberg, 1984). A solution is considered fair if it is reversible. Reversible solutions are those that would be considered just or acceptable by all parties concerned, irrespective of their initial positions. It is further envisaged that all moral agents who have engaged in the requisite cognitive activities, such as reciprocal role-taking, would arrive at these solutions.

Conclusions reached under reciprocal role-taking are regarded as being able to be made universal in the sense that if a judgment is deemed right for particular instances, it should be right for an imaginary universe of all similar situations, and for all moral actors who could be involved. Universality is achieved when “a decision is acceptable to any person involved in the situation who must play one of the roles affected by the decision, but does not know which role he or she will play” (Kohlberg, 1981, p. 168). In other words, moral judgments should be consistent across persons and time (Kohlberg *et al.*, 1990). Universality and reversibility are thus the essential components of Stage 6 reasoning.

General Characteristics of all Stages

So far, emphasis has been laid on the special characteristics of postconventional moral reasoning. Characteristics of all the stages are discussed next. Attention will be paid to issues that are most pertinent to cross-cultural comparisons, namely the invariant sequence

hypothesis and the cultural universality thesis.

The Invariant Sequence Hypothesis

According to Kohlberg (1981, 1984), the six stages of moral development are invariant in sequence and are universal across cultures. Invariance of sequence means that people progress through the stages in a forward directed manner. Stages cannot be skipped, nor is regression to previously held stages possible. Furthermore, the latter stages are considered ethically higher and adequate than the previous ones (Kohlberg, 1981).

In support of the invariant sequence hypothesis, Kohlberg (1981) cited studies in which adolescents were presented with prepared arguments in favour of or against a particular choice, for each stage of the moral dilemmas. These adolescents could understand and put the arguments in their own words, if the arguments were at or below their own modal stage. On the other hand, arguments pitched at a level higher than their own modal stage were distorted into ideas consistent with their own stage or the one below. Because the subjects understood arguments at their own level and below, while only those subjects who were already in transition to the next stage understood arguments pitched one level above their own stage, Kohlberg (1981) concluded that the “stages constitute a hierarchy of cognitive difficulty with lower stages available to, but not used by those at higher stages” (p. 132). Failure to understand advanced stages was interpreted as evidence that advanced stages supplant the previous ones. Lower stages, however, remain available to subjects at higher stages of moral thought. Later, it will be shown that “regression” to previously-held stages of moral development has been observed (Murphy & Gilligan, 1980), thus casting doubt on the invariant sequence hypothesis.

The Assumption of Cultural Universality

Throughout his career, Kohlberg was opposed to what he considered the threat of ethical relativism in moral theory. In his first volume of essays on moral development (Kohlberg, 1981), he declared: “I am happy to report that I can propose a solution to the relativity

problem that has plagued philosophers for three thousand years” (p. 12). He attributed this problem to what he regarded as a confusion resulting from the tendency to conclude that people *ought* to have different moral values simply because their values were different in the empirical realm (i.e. the confusion between the philosophical and empirical basis of universality). Basing his argument on “detailed cross-cultural studies on the development of moral thinking” (ibid. p. 12), he maintained that the stages of moral development are universal across cultures. Individuals in all cultures are said to pass through these stages in the same order (Kohlberg, 1981, 1984; Nisan & Kohlberg, 1982). Where individual or group differences occurred, Kohlberg argued that this was due to cultures progressing through the stages at varying speeds, with possible differences in the end-points of development. The rate and terminal point of development, he argued, are influenced by societal complexity and the availability of opportunities for role-taking (Kohlberg, 1981). Kohlberg thought that not only are the basic moral categories universal across cultures, he was also of the view that the sequence of moral development “is not significantly affected by widely varying *social, cultural, or religious conditions*” (Kohlberg, ibid. p. 25, emphasis added).

The view that societal factors retard moral development in traditional societies is problematic. How can we conclude that a phenomenon (stages of moral reasoning) that has not been empirically demonstrated in a group, has been retarded by social and cultural factors, when *it is the very existence, or nature of the phenomenon*, that is being questioned? The assumption that, had the phenomenon been observed, it would have followed a sequence already observed in another setting (i.e. the sequence of stages is the same across cultures) is equally problematic. What if the influence of “societal complexity” is so profound, that the phenomenon itself is altered, *rendering our investigative methods incapable of capturing it*? In other words, it may be possible that “advanced” stages of moral reasoning are not observed in traditional societies because their understanding of morality is different. Evidence pertaining to the universality thesis is evaluated below.

On Empathy and Care

It has been mentioned that Kohlberg defined morality in terms of criteria of justice. Excluded from his definition were obligations arising from care or empathy, which he, like Rawls (1972), regarded as supererogatory obligations. He thus maintained that “the quantitative role of affect is relatively irrelevant for understanding the structure and development of moral judgment” (Kohlberg, 1981, p. 140).

It is important to expand on the notion of supererogatory obligations. Rawls (1972) defined supererogatory obligations as acts which “a person does for the sake of another’s good even though the proviso that nullifies the natural duty is nullified” (p. 439). That is, when we engage in supererogatory obligations, we are not under any obligation to pursue those acts. The acts are supererogatory in the sense that they go beyond the call of duty. Consequently, Rawls (ibid) argued that the “difference between the sense of justice and the love of mankind [sic] is that the latter is supererogatory, going beyond the moral requirements and not invoking the exemptions which the principles of natural duty and obligation allow” (p. 476). Similarly, Kohlberg (1984) maintained that moral judgments oblige us to take action because they are “*universalizable prescriptions*” (ibid., p. 289, emphasis original) in the Kantian sense of the categorical imperative: that one acts according to a maxim that one wishes at the same time to be a universal law. Examples of such prescriptions are prohibitions against theft, hurting innocent others, or breaking of promises (Kohlberg, 1984).

Another reason Kohlberg (1981) regarded moral decisions based on empathy as non-universalizable, is that he thought it would be unrealistic to expect moral agents to act all the time from considerations of care. The logic is that they would soon tire, given the number of situations that call for empathy. He concurred with Nunner-Winkler (1984) that an ethic of care falls under positive or imperfect duties. These are “duties which do not prescribe specific acts but formulate a maxim which is to guide action, for example, the practice of care” (Kohlberg, 1984, p. 359). On the other hand, negative or perfect duties, such as the injunction to refrain from harming innocent others, “can be followed by everybody at any time and location and with regard to everybody” (ibid, p. 359).

In summary, Kohlberg proposed a theory of moral development, consisting of six stages. The stages are organized hierarchically, with higher stages representing advanced and adequate modes of moral reasoning. At the most advanced level, the moral point of view is defined in terms of justice issues. Moral responsibilities arising out of care and empathy are regarded as supererogatory. The stages are characterized by an increasing differentiation of the moral point of view from the social context. The stages are also supposed to be invariant in sequence, and universal across cultures.

Anomalies in Kohlberg's Theory: The Feminist Challenge

Gilligan (1977, 1982) was the first to launch a serious challenge to Kohlberg's theory of moral development. She critically questioned the sex differences in moral decision-making that had been observed in previous studies (e.g. Kohlberg & Kramer, 1969, cited in Gilligan, 1977). These studies had shown that women's moral reasoning tends to stabilize at Stage 3 (the interpersonal concordance orientation). Kohlberg and Kramer maintained that Stage 3 is sufficient for resolving moral dilemmas faced by women, which have to do with interpersonal relationships. Gilligan (1977) argued that conventional morality was not an indication of an inferior mode of moral thought on women's part. She pointed out that traditional approaches to psychological development are premised on Western, male understandings of psychological maturity. They assume that developmental maturity involves "an increasing differentiation of self from the other and a progressive freeing of thought from contextual constraints" (Gilligan, 1977, p. 481).

Gilligan (1977) argued that women's moral judgments differed from those of men, owing to a different way of knowing self, others and the world. She pointed out that women emphasize connection to and empathy for others, rather than separation and detachment. From this perspective, the purpose of development is not to separate from but to develop and promote meaningful relationships with others. This requires making judgments that are sensitive to the concrete circumstances of another, rather than deciding from an impartial position envisaged in the Kohlbergian framework. A relational understanding of self, argued Gilligan, leads

women to a different, but not deficient, conception of morality: the ethic of care or responsibility.

The ethic of care or responsibility was illuminated when real life, open-ended interviews were substituted for the standard hypothetical dilemmas (Gilligan, 1977, 1982). Unlike the morality of justice, this ethic recognizes feelings, empathy and connection to others as important aspects of moral decision-making. Premised on human interdependence and responsiveness, it highlights prevention of harm and promotion of others' welfare (Lyons, 1988). It is not concerned with hypothetical moral subjects but the consequences of one's actions on real life, concrete people (Murphy & Gilligan, 1980).

The morality of care should not be confused with an endorsement of the morality of the oppressed, as others have argued (e.g. Card, 1988; Chang, 1996). Following Harding (1987), Card and Chang are skeptical of the coincidence of African and feminine moralities. They argue that this is a Nietzschean slave morality, arising out of the social domination that both women and Africans have endured. Human interdependence, and hence, caring, is an integral part of traditional African philosophical frameworks (Akbar, 1984; Mbiti, 1991; Myers, 1988; Verhoef & Michel, 1997) (see Chapter 3). There is no reason why Africans should not have developed a different moral orientation, consistent with their philosophies or worldviews, *independently* of Western domination. Further, if the African caring orientation is born out of domination, one would expect it to be least prevalent in societies that have had little contact with Western cultures. Those most exposed to Western ways of life should show the most caring orientation. This has not been borne out by research evidence. Using the traditional Kohlbergian research method, Edwards (1975, 1981) found that the scores of Western educated Africans were closer to those of their Western counterparts. The morality of care does not reflect Western domination: it is a different moral voice, based on a different understanding of self and relationships. This understanding recognizes connection as an integral aspect of human life (Gilligan *et al.*, 1990).

Another problem that emerged with Kohlberg's framework was that, in the transition from adolescence to adulthood, a significant proportion of subjects appeared to regress from

previously acquired stages of development. This was an anomalous finding because, according to the theory, the stages of moral development are invariant in sequence. How should we make sense of these findings? Is the regression an indication that these subjects had become incapable of using what are supposedly the most advanced stages of moral decision-making? Murphy and Gilligan (1980) used these finding to hypothesize that there are two types of postconventional thought: postconventional formal and postconventional contextual. The former addresses the problem of moral relativism by appealing to concepts such as the social contract or natural rights. These concepts are used with the view of hypothetical subjects, or what Benhabib (1992) has called the “generalized other,” in mind. Postconventional contextualism, on the other hand, remains sensitive to the concerns of real life, concrete subjects. Postconventional contextualism recognizes that answers cannot be objectively free from context. As a result, it remains responsive to the situation by focusing on the consequences of one’s choices (Murphy & Gilligan, 1980). Thus, the apparent regression from previously attained stages of moral development can be explained with reference to different understandings of postconventional morality.

Following Gilligan, other critics of Kohlberg’s theory have argued that the assumption that the moral point of view should transcend all perspectives, abstracts people from concrete circumstances to situations that do not exist in real life (Benhabib, 1987, 1992; Young, 1987). These authors point out that it is difficult to envisage the kind of person that remains, once contextual markers such as gender and identity, have been removed. Furthermore, how does one apply the notion of reversibility or reciprocal role-taking, unless one considers issues from the standpoint of people with a concrete history, identity, attitudes and desires? Without knowledge of the concrete other, argued Benhabib (1987, 1992), it is not possible to meaningfully test whether situations are universal and reversible, because we lack the essential information to determine whether others’ moral situations are like or unlike ours.

Is the ethic of care exclusive to women? Although research (Gilligan & Attanuci, 1988; Gilligan & Wiggins, 1988; Lyons, 1988) has shown that this ethic is significantly associated with women, it can exist simultaneously with the morality of justice. Gilligan *et al.* (1990) adopted a musical metaphor to explain this co-existence. They argued that the ethics of care

and justice can accompany each other, in the same way that different melodies complement each other according to the laws of counterpoint. Counterpoint is defined as “the art of adding a related, but independent melody [with] fixed rules of harmony, to make a harmonic whole, . . . a thing set up in contrast or interaction with another” (Webster, 1970, cited in Gilligan *et al.* 1990, p. 115). If one adopts the musical metaphor, moral maturity is no longer characterized by either justice or care: it is the ability to harmoniously blend the two together, according to the demands of a situation.

The recognition of the morality of care points toward the need to diversify the moral domain by identifying voices that have as yet not been accorded significance in the moral landscape. These are the voices of the marginalized groups in society (Bing & Reid, 1996). The call to recognize the voices of these groups is in line with the increasing recognition of the social and cultural mediation of moral thought (Brown & Gilligan, 1991; Day & Tappan, 1996; Tappan, 2000). However, before understandings of morality in different cultural settings are discussed, the cross-cultural validity of Kohlberg’s theory will be evaluated.

Cultural Findings and Critique

As mentioned previously, Kohlberg’s studies, and those of others (e.g. Edwards, 1975, 1981; Kohlberg, 1971, 1981, 1984; Nisan & Kohlberg, 1982) indicate that higher stages of moral development are “absent” in traditional and peasant communities. Stages 1, 2 and 3 were found to be common in traditional and peasant societies, whereas advanced stages (4, 5, and 6) were associated with Western liberal societies. Kohlberg (1981) explained these differences in terms of opportunities for role taking. He argued that in societies where there is greater participation in institutions of civil society, such as the family and schools, moral development is stimulated through peer interaction and communication, participation in decision-making, and delegation of responsibilities to the child. Edwards’s (1975, 1981) studies, conducted with an African population, will be used to illustrate this point.

Using an adapted version of the Kohlberg Moral Judgment Interview, Edwards (1975) assessed moral reasoning among university students, secondary school pupils and community

leaders in Kenya. Stage 4 reasoning was found to be significantly more common among university students than among community leaders. However, the two groups did not differ with respect to the prevalence of Stage 3 reasoning. Edwards (1975) argued that university students had had access to higher education and the modern economy, both of which supposedly promote higher stages of moral reasoning through increased participation. She further attributed Stage 4 reasoning to a movement away from traditional ways of life, where face-to-face interactions and kinship bonds prevail, towards more anonymous and impersonal modes of existence, characteristic of urban societies. This, she argued, familiarizes one with notions of authority, punishment, rule and law. These are considered important to conditions of life in urban societies (Edwards, 1975).

An “absence” of advanced stages of moral development in traditional societies is a common finding. For example, Nisan and Kohlberg’s (1982) comparison of the moral judgment of city and rural dwellers in Turkey led to the same conclusion as that of Edwards (1975). The rate of moral development was found to be “slower” among village dwellers, who tended to stabilize at Stage 3. Echoing Edwards (1975), Nisan and Kohlberg (1982) suggested that Stage 3 may be a sufficient mode of moral functioning in traditional societies, where social consensus is important, and face-to-face interactions still constitute the dominant social order. Studies reviewed by Snarey (1985) all indicate that Stages 4 and above are absent among working class and traditional folk societies. Nisan and Kohlberg (1982) argued that simple and undifferentiated ways of life prohibit these societies from reaching higher stages of ethical thought. On the other hand, however, Snarey (1985) suggested that complete absence of Stage 4 and above in all traditional societies, including leaders, may be an indication of biases in the scoring system. Snarey also suggested that Kohlberg’s higher levels of moral reasoning could be based on culturally defined values, which are not salient in indigenous communities.

Cultural Differences and Absence of Opportunities for Role-taking

The argument that advanced stages of moral development are absent in traditional societies because of the absence of opportunities for role-taking will now be considered. The question is: what constitutes “opportunities for role-taking?” Kohlberg (1981) mentioned “family

participation, communication, emotional warmth, sharing in decisions, awarding responsibilities to the child, [and] pointing out consequences of action to others” (p. 142). Equally important are the extent of interactions in peer group discussions and opportunities for active leadership roles (Edwards, 1981).

The question is: Why should the above mentioned characteristics be the sole preserve of liberal Western societies? Consider, for example, the way children were raised in most traditional African societies. They were organized into age-equivalent groups, each group having an overall leader. In addition, leaders for specific functions, such as dancing, were chosen (Msimang, 1975). These groups had mechanisms for resolving disputes and for communicating with other, similarly-constituted groups or elders. Within the group, individuals were allocated various responsibilities. Even the highest office in the land, that of the king, was subject to the *ibandla* (a gathering of elders) who, through *indaba* (dialogue or debate), were responsible for making decisions affecting the nation. This system extended downward to the family, where mechanisms for resolving disputes such as marital discord were in place. Even to date, rural African societies continue to use these mechanisms in resolving disputes. All the above point at the importance attached to dialogue and the allocation of responsibilities in traditional societies. Therefore, it does not follow that the “absence” of advanced stages of moral thought among traditional African communities is due to a lack of opportunities for leadership or peer interaction.

To understand differences in moral decision-making, one needs to engage with the way morality is defined in cognitivist theories. It is important to examine whether Kohlberg’s moral dilemmas are comprehensive enough to cover the way morality is understood in different cultures. Kohlberg (1981, 1984) argued that the moral issues covered in his dilemmas, namely life versus law, conscience versus punishment, and issues of contract versus authority, represent real moral conflicts for anyone anywhere, *provided appropriate cultural modifications were made*. The following section addresses the possibility that differences in moral reasoning between Western and traditional societies are due to inadequate cultural adaptations of the testing material.

Cultural Adaptations and Translations

It could be argued that cross-cultural differences in moral reasoning occur because Kohlberg's moral dilemmas have not been satisfactorily adapted for use across cultures. Cultural adaptation involved translating dilemmas into interviewees' languages, changing the names of characters involved, and the use of locally relevant content. It should be noted, however, that even with the revised and improved scoring system, village societies scored lower than urban dwellers. Studies conducted in Turkey showed that even the oldest village dwellers did not advance beyond Stage 3 (Colby & Kohlberg, 1987a, 1987b). How can these results be explained?

Simpson (1974) pointed out that even if standard translation procedures have been adhered to, and other adaptations made, stimulus equivalence cannot be guaranteed in psychological assessment. This view was supported by Greenfield (1997), who argued that for a test to have the same meaning across cultures, testees must share the assumptions, values and communication patterns assumed by the test. It is incumbent upon the researcher not only to show that items mean the same thing for all cultures involved; but also to ensure that the value of responses to particular questions be agreed upon. Furthermore, the traditional Western assumption that knowing occurs independently of one's context must be shared. The value attached to testing, which assumes that it is acceptable to communicate with strangers about issues that have no immediate relevance to one's context, must also hold across cultures (Greenfield, 1997). It is only when there is agreement on these issues that stimulus equivalence can be guaranteed. Alternatively, the issues on which dilemmas are based should emanate from the culture under investigation. If neither of these conditions is met, differences in moral development may not mean cultural differences in ethical principles. Quite to the contrary, these may reflect "differences in the comprehension and definition of a situation according to the meaning which it has for specific groups" (Simpson, 1974, p. 90).

Cross-cultural differences in performance, resulting from variations in the definition and meaning of a situation, were best illustrated by Cole, Gay, Glick and Sharpe's (1971) work on abstract thinking among non-literate village communities. Cole *et al.* initially thought that the

Kpelle people of Liberia were not capable of abstract thinking. This followed the observation that in a categorization task, the Kpelle kept on arranging objects in terms of their functional relatedness, and not according to conceptual categories. It was only when they were asked how a *foolish* person would arrange the objects, that they sorted them conceptually. Had instructions not been varied, the researchers would have concluded that the Kpelle are incapable of abstract thinking. Moral development researchers should also look into the meaning that questions have for various groups, before declaring that other groups are not capable of principled moral thinking.

The importance of a cultural and situated understanding of problem solving is further illustrated by the following anecdotal example, told by a student in a graduate cultural psychology class: A European-educated, African primary school teacher was determined to make arithmetic education relevant to her pupils. So she posed the following question to a rural boy: "If you are looking after 5 goats, and one of them jumps over the fence, how many remain behind?" The boy answered: "None." Puzzled, the teacher posed the question again, with some slight variations: "Remember, you had 5, and one jumped over the fence." The boy insisted: "None remain behind, Ma'am." The teacher then asked the boy to give a reason for his answer. To which the boy responded: "Ma'am, if one of them jumps over the fence, all the goats will follow suit. So, none will remain behind." Although anecdotal, this story clearly shows that what appears to be a stupid answer, is in fact based on a good contextual understanding of goat behavior. What appears to be a neutral stimulus, couched in a language and content that a rural boy should identify with, turns out to be not neutral at all.

Similarly, before cultural differences in moral development can be pronounced, one has to demonstrate that the groups involved are in fact engaged in the same activity: that the *meaning* of the situation is the same for all (Simpson, 1974). In conducting cross-cultural research, it is not sufficient to adapt testing material. A group's philosophical assumptions about knowledge; the assumed relationship between oneself as a knower and what is to be known; and the context in which one has to know, must be taken into account (Belenky *et al.*, 1986; Greenfield, 1997). This is consistent with cultural psychology, which maintains that cultural traditions transform people in various ways, resulting in a dynamic interdependence

between mind and culture (Shweder, 1990). Cultural psychology differs markedly from traditional cognitive approaches, which seek to isolate the mind and study it independently of context.

The Philosophical Bases of Morality

Could cultural differences in moral decision-making be due to different philosophical frameworks? To answer this question, it is important to consider Kohlberg's position on the relationship between morality and philosophical assumptions. Kohlberg (1981) maintained that "there is no philosophically neutral starting point for the psychology of morality" (p. 98). However, he did not follow up on this insight by studying the philosophical underpinnings of morality in non-Western cultures. Probably, this was because of his conviction that the content and structure of morality is the same across cultures, irrespective of each group's philosophical orientation. Simpson (1974) pointed out that Kohlberg's philosophic pluralism is limited to Western liberal philosophy. His conception of morality is based on the Kantian formalist tradition, as evidenced by extensive citations from philosophers such as Rawls, Frankena, and Habermas (Campbell & Christopher, 1996).

Given the philosophical basis of Kohlberg's theory in Western liberal thought, how are cross-cultural differences to be explained? How do we account for the absence of Stages 4, 5 and 6 in traditional non-Western societies? As mentioned previously, Kohlberg conveniently argued that this is due to a lack of opportunities for role-taking. A more informed approach, however, would involve a critical examination of the life philosophies of the communities concerned. Commenting on the observed cross-cultural differences in Kohlberg's work, Simpson (1974) maintained that "a philosophical system which supports a *universal* theory of development must account for conceptual differences which arise in the varying perceptions and explanations of reality adhering to the customs and broad social environments of diverse groups" (p. 84, emphasis original). Because Western liberal philosophy does not represent systems of thought in the entire world, definitions of morality should take into account the particular world in which one has to be moral. Before pronouncing cultural differences in moral decision-making, Kohlberg should have made an attempt to understand cultures

through their own languages, philosophies and history (Huebner & Garrod, 1991).

The importance of taking into account a culture's own definition and understanding of reality in moral research is shown in the work of Vasudev and Hummel (1987). Working with an Indian sample, they found that participants construed dilemmas, such as Heinz's, as real rather than hypothetical. As a result, they were reluctant to prescribe that Heinz should steal the drug, favouring social and collective solutions instead. Vasudev and Hummel (1987) argued that this should not be regarded as conventional morality "but a principle in favor of socially and morally responsible solutions which cannot, should not, under their conceptions of justice, be the burden of a single individual" (p. 111). Similar results were reported by Snarey (1985), who found that in addition to the traditional Kohlbergian postconventional morality, kibbutz-born Israelis subscribed to the principle of collective community equality and happiness. This principle is not captured in Kohlberg's scoring system. Working in China and New Guinea respectively, Dien (1982) and Tietjen and Walker (1984) concluded that the issue of the relationship of the individual to the community was of great moral significance to these communities.

It is evident from the studies cited above that the differences in moral decision-making between Western liberal societies and other communities are consistent across continents. These differences cannot be explained by the absence of opportunities for role-taking because most cultures provide such opportunities. Furthermore, it cannot be said that differences are due to indigenous societies progressing through the stages at a slower rate because, unless the full range of stages has been demonstrated, it is impossible to know if they would indeed follow the hypothesized sequence. The fact that even in Western societies, very few individuals attain Stage 6 (Kohlberg *et al.*, 1990), lends further support to this point. Given that cross-cultural differences exist nonetheless, what is needed is an overarching conceptual framework to account for them. Following Jensen (1997) and Miller (1994), I hypothesize that differences result from variations in worldviews, the cultural hypotheses we use to explain reality and to navigate the world.

Moral Decision-making and Worldviews

Miller (1994) and Jensen (1997) have argued that differences in moral decision-making emanate from cultural variations in meaning systems or worldviews. A worldview is a set of basic assumptions that a group of people develops in order to explain reality, its place, and its purpose in the world (Mishra, 1997). These assumptions provide a frame of reference that is used to address problems in life.

Worldviews arise in response to a set of core questions that people in all cultures have had to respond to, in the course of their development (Sue & Sue, 1999). These are questions pertaining to the nature of the world (what is the world like?) and the meaning of personhood (Aerts *et al.*, 1994). Once established, worldviews shape our attitudes, values and opinions, as well as the way we think and behave (Sue, 1978). Although minor variations exist in how worldviews have been conceptualized, the following have been identified as important components in the literature: people's relationship to nature/environment, their orientation with respect to space and time, the preferred mode of activity, and the relational orientation (Lock, 1981; Shweder, 1982; Sue, 1978; Sue & Sue, 1999).

Time and Space Orientation

Space and time orientation are important aspects of worldviews. Kluckhohn and Strodtbeck (1961) argued that cultures vary in their conception of time. A culture may emphasize history and tradition, the here and now, or the distant future. For example, Western societies tend to emphasize the future. Time is further organized into linear segments, marked by what people are doing at the time (Hall, 1983; Hall & Hall, 1990). Traditional communities, on the other hand, concentrate on the past and the present. The importance of the past among traditional Africans is evidenced by the value attached to keeping the memory of ancestors alive (Mbiti, 1991). From an African perspective, it is not the passage of time *per se* that matters. One's lived experience - the relationship between oneself and others, including the ancestors and God - is more important. People should promote the balance or interdependence that is thought to exist between themselves and everything to which they stand in relation. Paying

attention to context and relationships is therefore more important than the mathematical division of time. Failure to pay attention to context and relationships may disrupt this balance itself (Pennington, 1985). Aspects of this worldview are discussed in Chapter 3.

Lock (1981) points out that time and space orientation are intertwined. Self-awareness involves an appreciation of where one is in the present as well as where one is likely to be in the future. This is relevant to moral decision-making because it makes it possible to relate one's actions to both the past and the future (Heelas, 1981). For example, morality in traditional African cultures involves awareness of oneself within a family that has a history and tradition. It also incorporates an awareness of what might happen to oneself in the future, should one fail to meet interpersonal and other responsibilities. Moral action is thus guided not only by where one is at the present, but it also involves the knowledge that immoral conduct may lead to one's spirit being rejected by the community of ancestors after death (Mbiti, 1991).

Orientation to Nature

Another dimension of worldviews is the orientation to nature. This dimension answers the question: How is the relationship of people to nature understood? Cultures that emphasize the past tend to see life as largely determined by external forces beyond one's control, such as God, ancestors, and fate (an external locus of control). For example, Nieto (1995) maintained that rural Puerto Ricans regard themselves as subjugated by nature. Future-oriented cultures, on the other hand, emphasize mastery and control over the environment: a situation that pertains in many Anglo-Saxon societies (Ivey, Ivey, & Simerk-Morgan, 1997). Where the present is important, people and nature co-exist. Value is placed on living harmoniously with nature. This is the case for indigenous Americans (Garret & Garrett, 1994) and Africans (Myers, 1988). In these cultures, violation of harmonious relationships between people and their milieu may be regarded in moral and ethical terms (Verhoef & Michel, 1997).

The Nature of Human Activity

The human activity dimension of worldviews answers the question: What is the preferred mode of human activity? Traditional Western cultures place value on *doing* over the *being* or *being-in-becoming* mode of activity. This emanates from the belief that one's value as a person is determined by personal accomplishments (Sue & Sue, 1999). It is believed that progress in life results from effort and hard work. This mode of being is most evident in the way people identify with what they do (their occupations), and the value placed on children knowing what they will become when they grow up (Sue & Sue, 1999). Other cultures, on the other hand, emphasize *being* or *being-in-becoming*. In this mode, value is placed on harmony and attainment of spiritual fulfilment. It is believed that human beings are born worthy of respect and dignity, irrespective of their achievements. Furthermore, people are obliged to fulfil responsibilities to others and the community, in accordance with their position and status. Failure to do so may be regarded in moral terms (Miller & Bersoff, 1992).

The Relational Orientation

This dimension of worldviews is concerned with how the self is defined in relation to the other and the environment (Lock, 1981; Sue & Sue, 1999). Markus and Kitayama (1991, 1994) and Shweder (1991) have argued that there are cultural differences in how the self is defined. Traditional Western cultures regard the self as a bounded entity: it is defined in terms of its internal attributes such as thoughts and emotions. Individuals are regarded as autonomous beings: they exist independently of social and contextual factors. Where relationships with others and the social order exist, they are thought to be established through discretionary choice (Shweder, 1982). This view of selfhood is also known as self-contained individualism (Sampson, 1988) or the independent view of self (Markus & Kitayama, 1991, 1994). On the other hand, the self in indigenous societies and non-Western cultures in general is context-based (Shweder, 1991). The self is defined in terms of one's relationships with others, including the family and the community. The goal of socialization is not to be autonomous but to harmonize one's interests with those of the collective. This view of selfhood is also called the collective or interdependent self (Markus & Kitayama, 1991, 1994).

The dimensions of worldviews mentioned above are intertwined. Self-definition, for example, is not only influenced by place (where one is located), but it also takes into account the time dimension (Lock, 1981). When traditional African approaches to the self are discussed (Chapter 3), it will be shown that the decision to honour family obligations is influenced by both the memory of one's ancestors (the past), and the contemplation of what will happen to oneself after death (the future self).

It should be noted that although worldviews differ between cultures, technological developments in the modern world make it possible to be exposed to diverse perspectives. The present study recognizes that moral decision-making in a changing society is influenced by multiple worldviews. It is therefore the dialogical interchange between worldviews that is of significance to research. Researching the relationship between multiple worldviews and psychological processes, argued Hermans and Kempen (2001a), requires the notion of the dialogical self.

Although all components of worldviews are important in moral decision-making, the present study focuses primarily on the relational orientation. Influences of self-contained individualism on cognitive approaches to morality are explored below. It is argued that self-contained individualism is by no means universal. It is a product of historical and cultural circumstances.

Cognitivist Theories and Self-contained Individualism

Cognitive approaches to morality are premised on the notion of an autonomous self. This view of the self, characterized elsewhere as "self-contained" (Sampson, 1988) and "independent" (Markus & Kitayama, 1991, 1994), defines people with reference to unique internal attributes such as thoughts and emotions. It is assumed that the goal of human development is the realization of these attributes. If individuals are free and autonomous, it follows that context will have little or no bearing on moral development. This is why Kohlberg's highest stages of moral reasoning assume that individuals are bound only by laws and principles that they have

created *ex nihilo* or from behind a “veil of ignorance” (Rawls, 1972). It is assumed that family and community values play no role in these deliberations.

Self-contained individualism emanated from a positivistic approach to social science: the dominant paradigm in the 20th century (Cushman, 1990). Positivism regards social science phenomena as part and parcel of nature, to be analyzed through the same methods that have brought undoubted success in the natural sciences. As a result, attempts are made to explain human consciousness in terms of universal, ahistorical, and acultural psychological laws (Cushman, 1990; Richardson & Fowers, 1998).

Cushman (1990) and Richardson, Rogers and McCaroll (1998) have argued that positivism originated in the scientific revolution of the 16th and 17th centuries. During this period, there was a gradual shift from community and religious orientations, to a scientific materialistic outlook that extolled the value of detached reasoning (Richardson *et al.*, 1998). The major proponents of this view were Descartes and Hobbes (Dunne, 1995; Faulconer & Williams, 1990). Descartes argued that the mind and the world were two separate entities. He maintained that the “I” or “ego” is “irrefutably present to itself as a pure extensionless consciousness, . . . without a body and with no acknowledged complicity in language, culture, or community” (Dunne, 1995, p. 138). Similarly, Hobbes regarded human action and personality as part and parcel of nature. He argued that social inquiry should be based on assertions that were valid regardless of *time, place, and circumstances* (cited in Bernstein, 1976). Following on this tradition, traditional cognitive approaches to morality have tried to establish moral principles that are true of anyone, anywhere, and at any time.

Criticisms of Self-contained Individualism and Positivism

The individualistic view of the self came under severe scrutiny in the latter half of the 20th century. Critics pointed out that the conception of the self as rational and transcendental is neither universal nor ahistorical. Faulconer and Williams (1990) argued that even for early Greek philosophers, it was the relationship of the individual to the community, rather than individuals *per se*, that was important. Harmony and interdependence between humans and

the larger cosmos was the central feature of the traditional Greek view of the self. Individuals were regarded as the smallest unit of the community. Most important, they derived their definition from the community more than they defined the community (Faulconer & Williams, 1990).

If the traditional Greek view of the self preceded the idea of self-contained individualism, it should be noted that this is the case if one takes the Western history of ideas as the point of departure. Although self-contained individualism is the dominant basis of intellectual discourse and societal organization in the West, it is by no means the dominant force in the world (Geertz, 1979; Sampson, 1993). Self-contained individualism has not been the dominant basis of societal organization in many communities. Shweder and Bourne (1991) have shown that the communal sense of personhood is prevalent in many Asiatic and Indian communities, even at present. Similarly, Markus and Kitayama (1991, 1994) and Mwawenda (1995) argued that people of Asiatic and African origin value an interdependent construal of the self. In most non-Western societies, self-understanding takes place in the context of a significant group (Sampson, 1993). The goal of socialization is not individuation, but the promotion of connection and interdependence among individuals, and helping children to realize their position and responsibilities within the social order (Markus & Kitayama, 1991, 1994; Shweder, 1990).

If one takes interdependence between people as a point of departure, the view that interpersonal duties and responsibilities are supererogatory, becomes questionable. This view is based on the individualistic assumptions of the Kantian philosophical framework. Miller and Bersoff (1992) showed that the Hindu Indian perspective on morality, premised on the interdependent view of the self, regards interpersonal duties and responsibilities in fully principled terms. Similarly, it is argued in the next chapter, people in traditional African settings are said to be moral beings (*bangabantu*) to the extent that they fulfil their responsibilities toward others and the social group (Menkiti, 1984; Ogbonnaya, 1994).

Social constructionists have also criticized positivistic approaches to social science (Burr, 1995; Durrheim, 1997; Gergen, 1973, 1985, 1990, 1994; Hermans *et al.*, 1992). From a social

constructionist perspective, the way we understand the world is “a product of historically situated interchanges between people” (Gergen, 1985, p. 267). Knowledge does not reside in people’s heads: it is co-created by a community of people with a shared understanding and history. Knowledge is transmitted socially through linguistic and other social practices (Cottone, 2001; Gergen, 1999). Social constructionists position themselves against Descartes’s dictum: *cogito ergo sum* (I think, therefore I am). The dictum is based on the classical theory of mind, which prizes reflective thought or “pure reason” (Labouvie-Vief, Orwoll, & Manion, 1995). From a social constructionist perspective, mind and body cannot be separated because “[b]uried in a body, the human mind is in history and makes history at the same time” (Hermans *et al.*, 1992, p. 24). Because mind is a product of a social reality, there cannot be a transcendental reality beyond language and culture (Burr, 1995). As a result, Gergen (1985) argued that social inquiry should be directed not at uncovering underlying and timeless bases of human behaviour, but at the historical and sociocultural origins of various world constructions.

Social constructionists regard morality and ethics as social and cultural practices that can be meaningfully understood in context (Cottone, 2001; Gergen, 1999). From a practical point of view, this means that the study of morality in indigenous contexts should involve genuine dialogue *with* (and not *about*) the people concerned (Sampson, 1998; Shotter, 1998). This entails engaging with the voices of displaced, oppressed, and marginalized people, whose reality has traditionally been explained by others, often from detached, theoretical perspectives (hooks, 1990).

Incorporating culture and context into psychological studies does not imply that a single culture has a monolithic influence on individuals. Nor does it mean that culture is static. Gergen (1990) pointed to the multiple social and cultural factors that contribute to self formation. He maintained that television and other media expose us to cultural and social perspectives from all over the world. The process whereby we are exposed to various relationships and viewpoints he called *social saturation*. The self emanating from this process he referred to as the *saturated self*. The *saturated self* is populated, or even overpopulated, with others’ perspectives. “Increasingly we emerge as the possessors of many voices. Each

self contains a multiplicity of others, singing different melodies, different voices, and with different rhythms” (Gergen, 1990, p. 83). The question becomes, how is it possible to speak in many voices and yet retain the unity of the self? It will be argued later that a dialogical view of personhood makes it possible to accommodate multiple selves.

Narrative and Moral Development

The above-mentioned problems with cognitive-developmental approaches have intensified calls for the need to take into account the multi-dimensional nature of the moral domain (Benhabib, 1992; Day & Tappan, 1996; Gilligan, 1982). Using a narrative perspective, the present study investigates understandings of morality among *isiZulu* speakers in South Africa. This perspective was chosen as the paradigmatic framework because it is evident from the literature (Benhabib, 1992; Gilligan, 1982) that it is most suitable for studying psychological phenomena in their cultural and historical context.

Moral experience exists in *time* and *relationship*, these being the fundamental dimensions of narrative (Day & Tappan, 1996; Gilligan *et al.*, 1990; Tappan, 1991a, 1991b). When people are asked to account for their choices, they always do so by composing a story that recounts events in a temporal sequence (Day, 1991). What is important, however, is not the sequencing of events per se, but the moral meaning, or the point of view, that is taken with respect to them (White, 1981). In the following sections, the relevance of narrative approaches to the study of situated morality is demonstrated by drawing contrasts between the basic frameworks (root metaphors) guiding cognitive and narrative approaches respectively.

Root Metaphors in the Study of Morality

Root metaphors are frameworks for construing events in the natural or social world. They are world hypotheses, derived from common sense, which are used to understand and interpret the world (Sarbin, 1986). Pepper (1942) argued that to understand the world comprehensively, human beings search for basic analogies. Once established, these analogies play an important role in determining the philosophical or scientific models to be applied in observing,

classifying, interpreting and explaining data.

Cognitive-developmental approaches to morality take organicism as the root metaphor. Organicism sees the world as striving toward integration or wholeness. It is assumed that there are internal processes concealed within an organism. These processes are supposedly unfolding and striving toward integration over time. This is evidenced by the emphasis placed on the progressive attainment of stages, culminating with principled reasoning, the “end point” of moral development. Organicism attempts to unravel general laws of human development. It is assumed that culture, context, time and place play little or no role in this process. Where these factors are considered, they are usually regarded as nuisance variables that obscure the emergence of universal psychological principles. It is thus not surprising that the “absence” of advanced stages of moral thought among indigenous societies is blamed on lack of opportunities for role-taking.

Narrative and Contextualism

Unlike organicism, the narrative paradigm considers psychological phenomena in their context (Sarbin, 1986). Attention is paid to intentions and meanings people attach to their experiences, as these are lived in *space* and *time* (Bruner, 1986). People resort to story-telling to organize these events and experiences in a meaningful way. The human tendency to assign meaning to even meaningless events was demonstrated by Michotte (1946, cited in Sarbin, 1986). Michotte showed this by manipulating the movements of two rectangles, A and B. If rectangle A was moved toward a stationary rectangle B, and then stopped, followed by the movement of rectangle B, participants resorted to a narrative to attribute causality to the movement of the rectangles. For example, they would say that rectangle B got out of the way of rectangle A. Bruner (1986) and Sarbin (1986) used this finding as evidence that people are not passive recipients of experience. Quite the contrary, they are thought to be actively involved in the construction of meaning. In the process they use narratives to organize actions into meaningful sequences of events.

Once completed, narratives provide coherent, plausible and intelligible accounts of how and why things happened (Polkinghorne, 1988; Freeman, 1997). Thus, argued Bruner (1990), “the central concept of a human psychology is *meaning* and the processes and transactions involved in the construction of meanings” (p. 33, italics in original).

Bruner (1986) has highlighted the characteristics of narrative approaches. He distinguished between paradigmatic and narrative modes of thought. The former is most common in the natural sciences. It is characterized by a search for proofs and truth that go beyond particular contexts. Its intention is to discover general laws to explain all cases of the same kind. On the other hand, narrative thinking is meant to convey the richness and variety of life experiences. It is most suitable to considerations of meaning in life: these are considerations such as the kind of life one should live, or the ethical or moral thing to do in particular circumstances (Howard, 1991). Thus, while paradigmatic thinking leads to universal truths, narrative modes of thought seek connections and meaning between events as they occur in space and time.

Narrative and culture.

It is sometimes argued that narrative approaches make it difficult to distinguish between acceptable and unacceptable meanings (Lourenço, 1996). The question of validation in the narrative paradigm is addressed in Chapter 5.

It should be noted, though, that the narrative paradigm recognizes that meaning is not an idiosyncratic property of individuals. Narratives are socio-culturally embedded: they contain meanings shared by a group of people (Bruner, 1990; Cushman, 1990; Howard, 1991; Gergen & Gergen, 1988; Polkinghorne, 1988; Sarbin, 1986; Vitz, 1990). Bruner (1990) and Heelas (1981) argued that every culture develops an indigenous psychology. These are cultural views, theories, assumptions and metaphors that have a bearing on psychological topics (Heelas, 1981). An example of an indigenous psychology is a shared understanding of what it means to be human (the theory of the self). Culture tales or narratives are the primary vehicles of indigenous psychology (Bruner, 1990; Howard, 1991). Cultural knowledge is passed on from generation to generation through language, myths, fairy tales, histories and stories

(Polkinghorne, 1988). To participate as a competent member in one's society requires an appreciation and knowledge of the range of meanings that the culture has developed over time. The social and historical embeddedness of narrative was emphasized by Gergen and Gergen (1988):

The process of story telling is not the act of an autonomous and independent actor. First, we found that the actor's capacities for intelligibility are embedded within a sociohistorical context; in the telling of a story the actor is relying on certain features of a preexisting social order. In this sense it would be plausible to say that the culture is speaking through the actor to produce itself. Further, we found that self-narratives depend on the mutual sharing of symbols, socially-acceptable performances, and *continued negotiation*. (p. 40, emphasis added)

The fact that narratives are situated in cultural and historical contexts does not mean that culture provides a single narrative for individuals to tell. Culture provides a multiplicity of narratives, within which individuals' narratives are nested. For example, in addition to resorting to narratives that are part of their historical and cultural tradition, individuals also construe unique narratives portraying their development from childhood to adolescence and adulthood. These narratives will cover aspects of their lives such as their school or professional careers (Gergen & Gergen, 1988).

Cultural narratives, and the meanings associated with them, are not static. Nor is there a uni-directional and predictable relationship between narratives and how individuals employ them to deal with problems in life. Quite to the contrary, cultural meanings are subject to continued negotiation and re-negotiation over time. This is a vindication of the dynamic interdependence between mind and culture. Cultural traditions and practices transform the psyche (the way we think). On the other hand, we also apply our thought processes to change the traditions themselves (Bruner, 1990; Shweder, 1990). This dynamism between mind and cultural meaning systems allows for vibrant changes through new contributions and/or gradual deletion of old patterns. It also makes it possible to explain the existence of multiple narratives within a culture, as individuals position themselves in relation to cultural narratives in different ways. This issue will be discussed at length, once the notion of a dialogical

self has been introduced.

Conclusion: Toward the Dialogical Self

This chapter presented the major tenets of Kohlberg's theory of moral development. From a Kohlbergian perspective, morality occurs in stages, beginning with the hedonistic pre-conventional level, and culminating in principled, post-conventional thought. Stages are supposedly invariant in sequence and universal across cultures. Following Rawls (1972), Kohlberg (1981) defined morality in justice terms, thereby relegating actions arising out of empathy and care to a supererogatory status.

Moral universality has not been demonstrated across cultures. Even in Western societies, most people do not reach Stage 6 (Kohlberg *et al.*, 1990). It was argued that differences in moral decision-making result from different philosophical assumptions and worldviews. The morality of justice is premised on the view that individuals are autonomous and disembodied. People's moral actions are hence guided by abstract and timeless principles. On the other hand it has been shown that cultures that emphasize harmony and interdependence see interpersonal duties and responsibilities, regarded as supererogatory obligations in Kohlberg's scheme, in fully principled terms (Miller & Bersoff, 1992). This has led to calls to investigate the socio-cultural mediation of moral thought, with a view to identifying voices that have not yet become part of the moral landscape.

Narrative approaches are most suited to studying morality in context, given the emphasis these approaches place on history, space and time. This does not mean however, that approaches premised on self-contained individualism are irrelevant. Individualistic approaches to the self cannot be completely disregarded, given that they are also products of historical and cultural orientations (Cushman, 1990). What is called for is a comprehensive theory that will take us beyond "either-or" explanations. Such a theory should account for the co-existence of alternative, and even competing perspectives, within a single personality. Dialogical approaches to the self (Bakhtin, 1981, 1984/1993; Dunne, 1995; Taylor, 1991) make it possible for an individual to hold multiple positions (Hermans, 2001a, 2001b;

Hermans & Kempen, 1995).

Before the dialogical self is discussed, it is important to examine the worldview and philosophical assumptions that inform traditional African understandings of the person and the world. This worldview and philosophical orientation need to be discussed at length, lest one falls victim to the tendency to uncritically subordinate locally-derived empirical data to the assumptions, theories and concepts emanating from the West (Anyanwu, 1981). This is not meant to renege on the dialogical concept of selfhood. It is an attempt to ensure that traditional African approaches to the self enter the dialogue as full partners with other approaches.

CHAPTER 3

AN AFRICAN METAPHYSICAL ONTOLOGY

The concept of culture I espouse. . . is essentially a semiotic one. . . . Man [sic] is an animal suspended in webs of significance he himself has spun. I take culture to be those webs, and the analysis of it to be therefore not an experimental science in search of law but an interpretive one in search of meaning. (Geertz, 1973, p. 5)

A proper understanding of morality in non-Western cultures should begin with an examination of the philosophies, languages and worldviews, through which people experience their world (Hubner & Garrod, 1991; Simpson, 1974; Vasudev & Hummel, 1987). This chapter presents a metaphysical framework that informs an understanding of reality from a traditional African point of view. The most important aspect of this framework is that reality is organised hierarchically, from inanimate objects at the bottom, to human and spiritual beings at intermediate levels, culminating with God at the apex. All organisms and objects in the hierarchy are endowed with a creative energy or life force, by virtue of which they are capable of influencing and being influenced by other elements. To know is to understand the dynamic interdependence between elements within the system. The self which emanates from this framework is immersed in social relationships. Similarly, morality is grounded in everyday life experiences.

The following section discusses the above-mentioned metaphysical framework, followed by its moral implications. Although discussed with reference to African experiences, the basic tenets of the framework are shared by a number of indigenous societies. Furthermore, these ideas are neither static nor the sole determinant of African moral thought. The framework exists alongside, and in dialogue, with other ideas and belief systems.

An African Metaphysical System

Metaphysics is concerned with people's conceptions of reality, their position in the universe, and their relation to others and the environment. It is a people's attempt to grapple with fundamental questions pertaining to existence, space, time and causality (Teffo & Roux, 1998). It could be seen as a worldview, through which people think, feel and act, in relation to the world. Metaphysical ontologies not only prescribe what is, but also incorporate ideals of what can be, the ideal of the cosmic and natural order, and its possible defects. For example, traditional African societies hold the view that there should be harmony and interdependence between elements in the cosmos. From this perspective, immorality ensues from a disconnection between parts comprising the whole: Metaphysical systems thus provide a framework by means of which people make sense of themselves and the world.

Metaphysical systems may be regarded as cultural models (Quinn & Holland, 1987) or meaning systems (Miller, 1997). These are the taken-for-granted models, by means of which people make sense of the world and their behavior in it. Let me address a common criticism of attempts to introduce indigenous knowledge systems to academic and other forms of discourse. It is often said that this amounts to reification of culture. This criticism fails to take into account the dynamic nature of meaning systems. Cultural meaning systems are always in dialogue with other bodies of knowledge, thereby undergoing innovation and renewal. Such has been the case with independent Christian churches in Africa. These churches have successfully interwoven traditional African and Christian belief systems (Oosthuizen, 1989). Discussing African belief systems, without taking into account historical changes, is neither meaningful nor desirable. There are indeed changes and adaptations, resulting from colonization, Western-type education, industrialization and exposure to Western media. Exposure to multiple worldviews entails that there cannot be a simple, one-to-one correspondence between a meaning system and how it is employed in real life. In order to understand the complexity of human experience, we have to take into account the dynamic interpenetration between various worldviews, a process Gadamer (1975) called the fusion of horizons of meaning. This process is explained in Chapter 5. Rather

than arguing for a complete break with cultural meaning systems, or a complete immersion in them, attention should be paid to the processes through which they unfold or fail to unfold over time, as they come into contact with other bodies of knowledge (Maffi, 1998).

A related issue is the relationship between metaphysical ontologies and psychological topics such as morality. Do we need metaphysical ontologies to make sense of morality? Much and Har e (1994) maintained that a culture's psychological discourse is a reflection of dominant local metaphysical ontologies, from which are derived theories of the person, the social context, and the natural order. All psychologies are somehow "connected to underlying metaphysical ontologies which . . . order things in specific ways with regard to what is 'good' and 'bad', 'right' and 'wrong' about conditions of life" (Much & Har e, 1994, p. 308). Unfortunately, the Western history of ideas has created an illusion that theories of right and wrong are objective, universalizable, and free of roots in historically particular metaphysical systems.

Although Western psychologies deny roots in metaphysical systems, Much and Har e have (1994) argued that the dualistic Western concept of the person can be traced back to the soul (mind)-body dichotomy of early Christian thought. During this period the soul was considered part of the person complex oriented toward divinity or God. Hence it was given preference over the body. This laid a foundation for a morality that favoured the spirit, and later, the mind, over the body. Eventually this led to psychological theories of morality that valued abstract generalizations, and not concrete particulars. Metaphysical ontologies are central to traditional African understandings of morality (Verhoef & Michel, 1997). Furthermore, it has been argued that they can serve as a foundation for an African-based psychology (Akbar, 1984; Nobles, 1972, 1991).

Before discussing the worldviews through which Africans make sense of themselves and their relationship to the world, it is important to note that these views are not necessarily shared by all Africans. African scholars are not in agreement about the existence of a unifying African worldview or metaphysics. As a result, there has been a tendency of late to approach

metaphysical issues in a culture-specific way (e.g. Wiredu, 1991, 1992). However, I would argue, along with Teffo and Roux (1998), that although there may not be a unifying African metaphysics, there is nevertheless an approach to reality shared by Africans. Its central tenets are beliefs about God, the universe, and notions of causality, person and time (Myers, 1988). Historically, these views have been associated with large parts of Africa and can be regarded as typical of African metaphysical thinking, especially in the regions South of the Sahara. To say that there is an African worldview does not mean every member of a culture should adhere to it, in the same manner that not every European adheres to individualism as a way of life. The worldview described here should be regarded as an attempt to explain human reality that is indigenous to Africa (Myers, 1988). Every group is confronted by challenges and problems in the course of its historical development. Over a period of time concepts, worldviews and assumptions are developed to address these problems (Heelas, 1981). The theoretical framework discussed in this chapter should be seen in that context.

While Western psychologies often deny their roots in metaphysical systems, these are very important in African thinking (Myers, 1988; Nobles, 1972, 1991; Verhoef & Michel, 1997). In the next section, four interdependent philosophical assumptions, bearing directly on psychological topics such as morality, are discussed. These are (a) the hierarchy of beings, (b) the notion of vitality or life force, (c) the principle of cosmic unity, and (d) the communal view of personhood.

The Hierarchy of Beings

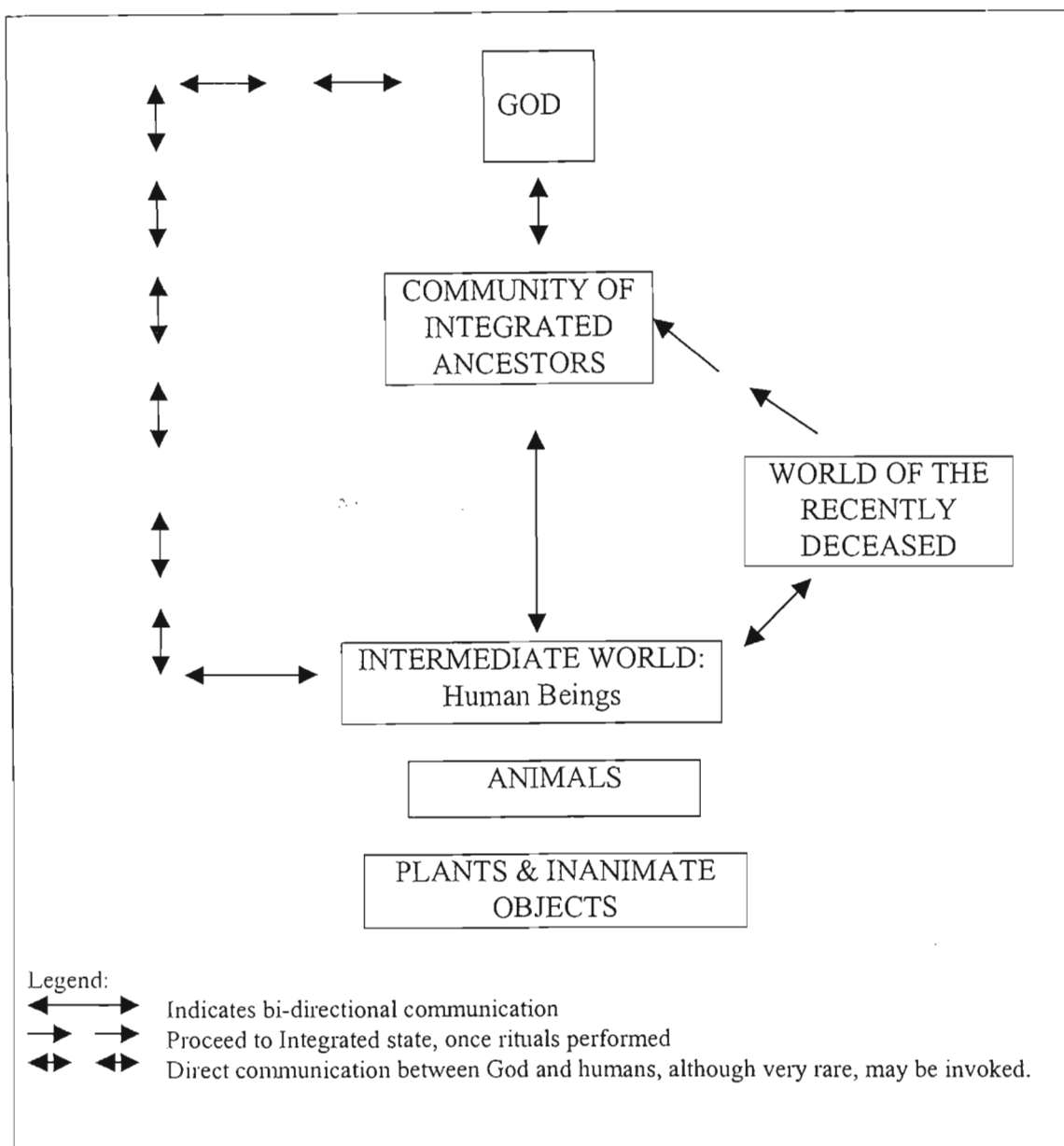
From a traditional African point of view, all things in the universe are connected ontologically to each other. Beings and objects in the universe are organized hierarchically (Mbiti, 1991; Ngubane, 1977; Ruch & Anyanwu, 1981). Intricate webs of relationships exist between organisms and objects in the hierarchy, with each object and organism dependent upon and capable of influencing and being influenced by others. The nature and direction of influence is determined by the amount of life force (energy or power, discussed below) possessed by each

object or organism.

At the lowest level of the hierarchy are inanimate objects and plants. These have very little life force of their own. As a result, they have no direct influence on superior beings such as humans, except through an intervention of a higher force (e.g. herbs being manipulated by humans for magical purposes). Animals occupy the level immediately above that of objects and plants. The next level, which Ngubane (1977) referred to as the intermediate world, consists of humans. Humans can communicate directly or indirectly with the living-dead (ancestors) (Mbiti, 1991), who occupy the next level of the hierarchy. Ngubane (1977) maintained that the world of the ancestors is divided into two. First, there is the world of the recently deceased. The recently deceased do not proceed directly to ancestorhood. First, they remain in an “in-between state” until their relatives have performed rituals of integration on their behalf. While in this state, they are incapable of interceding with God on humans’ behalf. Then there is the world of integrated ancestors, those who have had rituals performed for them. Integrated ancestors are capable of communicating with God on behalf of their relatives. Ancestors, whose world is both analogous and contiguous to that of humans, continue to interact with, and remain interested, in the affairs of their relatives (Teffo & Roux, 1998). Through acts of libation and sacrifices, a link is maintained with one’s ancestors, thereby ensuring a continued audience with God. The relationship between the three worlds is represented graphically, in Figure 1 (page 51).

It is important to expand on the notion of ancestors because this has caused a great deal of confusion, sometimes resulting in misrepresentation of African belief systems. This is often reflected in the view that Africans worship ancestors (Dzobo, 1992; Mbiti, 1991). This confusion is complicated by the fact that in English, the word “ancestor” means any person from whom one is descended (Geddie, 1901/1964; Swannell, 1992). However, Africans’ conception of ancestors is different. Who is an ancestor, from an African point of view? To begin with, I would propose that the word *izinyanya* be substituted for ancestors, to avoid the possible confusion with the meaning of ancestors in the English language.

Fig 1. Relationships Between Elements in the Hierarchy of Beings¹



Not every person qualifies to be an *inyanya* (singular). Only those who have lived an exemplary life, a life characterised by high moral standards, can be elevated to the status of an *inyanya*. An

¹ The influence of animals, plants and objects on other elements on the hierarchy of Beings has not been mapped because there is very little that has been written about it. This is perhaps because they are thought to have limited life force or energy.

example of these standards is the promotion of mutual interdependence and harmony within one's family and community. Once rituals of integration have been performed, the deceased who were good moral exemplars join the community of *izinyanya*. This is a spiritual community of deceased family members who lived according to high moral standards.

A person does not have to die to be considered *inyanya*, however (Dzobo, 1992). Older members of the family, whose lives are worthy of emulation, may be referred to as *izinyanya*. In this case also it remains essential that integration rituals be performed after death, to bring their *ubunyanya* status to completion. The relationship between the living and *izinyanya* is one of interdependence. The latter need the former to perform rituals on their behalf, so that they can be elevated to an influential status that gives them an audience with God. Having been elevated, they can now negotiate with God on behalf of their descendants, thereby ensuring family prosperity and unity (Ngubane, 1977). Thus, family members and *izinyanya* need each other for continued existence.

Izinyanya are moral paragons or exemplars of good conduct. Because of their superior moral qualities, their values and principles continue to be cherished. These are adopted as normative standards of conduct. It is believed that the world of *izinyanya* is no different from that of humans. In their world, *izinyanya* continue to live an exemplary life. They remain interested in their families' affairs. As guardians of morality, *izinyanya* punish bad conduct by withdrawing their interest in family matters. Such withdrawal is undesirable because it breaks the chain of communication between individuals and God. When *izinyanya* withdraw, it is believed that the family is effectively cut off from God, the source of all life. Rituals and acts of libation are not ancestor worship. They ensure that through *izinyanya*, one remains connected to God, the highest source of life.

God is at the apex of the hierarchy. Although at the apex, God² is not apart from the rest of the world. Teffo & Roux (1998) maintained that “together with the world, God constitutes the spatio-temporal ‘totality’ of existence.” (p. 140) That is, God does not rule the world from a distance, but permeates everything in it. In the forthcoming discussion, it is shown that God’s omnipresence is consistent with the holistic worldview: an account of the world in which everything is interconnected in such a way that elements of the whole are contained in each part.

The Notion of Vitality or Life Force

Beings and objects in the hierarchy are endowed with a life force. Since first propounded by Tempels (1959), the notion of life force has been a source of great controversy in African scholarship. According to Myers (1988), life force refers to the energy or power that is the essence of all phenomena, material and immaterial. Everything is endowed with “energy,” spirit, or creative force. The idea of life force as “spirit” does not imply ghost-like, inner powers of an occult nature. It refers to dynamic creativity, thought to be the most precious gift of God, descending hierarchically from God to *izinyanya*, elders, human beings and all that is created. (Kasenene, 1994). The creativity of God’s power is manifest in the changing seasons, birth, the cycles of nature, and in human achievements. God is the very source of this creative force. It is extended to *izinyanya*, human beings, and other creatures and creations lower in the hierarchy, in descending order. Human beings are, to a certain degree, capable of influencing events in the world because they partake of this creative life force. Ideally, one should always use life force to maintain vital connections between family members, the community, and the rest of nature.

Life force is a religious principle that is very difficult to explain in human terms. Dzobo (1992) refers to it as the God-life, the supreme creative power of God that is found in all creation, a

² “God” is used redundantly, to avoid the traditional use of the male pronoun. Most languages in Southern Africa do not have gender pronouns. Furthermore, there is no evidence of the notion of a gendered God in most parts of Southern Africa at least. This is probably due to the fact that although the existence of God was acknowledged, the nature of the Supreme Being was considered to be beyond human comprehension (Mbiti, 1991).

power that all people should affirm in their daily lives. Whether life force exists or not is irrelevant for the purposes of this study. What is important is that the belief is held by a large number of people, and continues to influence their perception of the world. Myers (1988) argued, and I concur with her, that life force may entail a reality, beyond that which can be known through the five senses. Insofar as humans are concerned, however, life force can be inferred from people's behavioral relationships with their milieu.

Before expanding on the idea that life force is inferred from people's relationships with their environment, a crucial distinction needs to be made between the principle of life force, the principle of life (being alive), and being full of energy (vitality as in liveliness). The principle of life force cannot be reduced to the quality of being alive, given that both the living and the deceased partake of this vital element. When the Nguni and the Sotho of Southern Africa say *uyaphila / o ea phela* (he or she has life), they are not referring to biological life. They are referring to a person's lived experience: the harmony that ought to exist between a person and his or her social milieu, as evidenced in a person's day-to-day relationships with others. From an African point of view, life is a never-ending spiral of human and communal relationships, defined in terms of reciprocal obligations (Dzobo, 1992; Mbiti, 1991). It is the responsibility of all individuals to promote vitality in the community by fulfilling their duties and responsibilities, according to their positions or roles (Kasenene, 1994).

* Human beings were also expected to live harmoniously with animals and nature. This organic view of the universe, the principal feature of which is to think ecologically, making few or no distinctions between nature and culture, is another common characteristic of indigenous societies (Howard, 1994; Maffi, 1998). Living harmoniously with the natural environment meant that it had to be harvested to the extent that it was necessary to support human needs. This had to be done respectfully and religiously, the example of which being rituals that accompanied planting and harvesting. Respect for the principle of life is also illustrated in the practice of traditional healers in offering prayers to some plants before harvesting them for medicinal purposes. It is believed that not only does this make the plant more effective, but also failure to do so could

cause it to fail to re-germinate. The idea behind this practice is that harvesting the plant in a disrespectful manner would cause it to die, which means that it would not be available to support human life in the future. Indigenous healers working with Western- trained scientists to find a cure for HIV/Aids have indicated that plants should be harvested respectfully. This involves *performing some religious practices before harvesting them* (Burford, Bodeker, Kabatesi, Gemmill, & Rukangira, 2000). Behind this concern is the respect for the principle of life, and a recognition of the interdependence between the natural and the human environment.

It should be noted that I am not arguing that Africans followed (or follow) this principle all the time. My intention is to present what is regarded, from a traditional African point of view, as the *ideal* standard of the Good. In summary, the principle of vitality entails co-existence with one's milieu and strengthening of vital relationships in the community (Kasenene, 1994; Ruch & Anyanwu, 1981). Severance of vital relationships constitutes the opposite of the Good, and is morally unacceptable from a traditional African point of view.

Due to the constant, interactive nature of life forces in the universe, it is possible for unknown forces to intervene in the order of events. The nature of this intervention is beyond human understanding. Because of the belief that unknown events can intervene in human affairs, Africans deny the possibility of events happening by accident. Should something happen (e.g. a personal tragedy), cause is sought as to how individual, family, or a sinister force might have contrived to bring about the undesired consequence. This is because of the belief that the creative life force can be manipulated for sinister purposes. Witchcraft is an example (Ngubane, 1977). The tendency among Africans to prefer teleologically inclined explanations can be attributed to this belief. Teleological orientations assume that "reality hangs together because of aims, and is driven by aims" (Teffo & Roux, 1998, p. 134). Consequently, questions are not only directed toward why events happen. Of most interest is why they happen to *someone* at a *particular locality* and at a *certain point in time*. That is, meaningful explanations are those that take into consideration individuals' relationships with their milieu (Teffo & Roux, 1998).

In conclusion, life force is the creative energy, extending directly from God to all that is created. Through this life force all share in God's creative energy or spirit, although not to the same degree. The creative power descends vertically from God to *izinyanya*, human beings, and all that is created. Mutual sharing in the creative spirit eschews dualistic conceptions of the world. This entails that there cannot be clear-cut distinctions between object and subject, self and other, given that we all share in God's creative energy. Life force is predicated upon the notion of consubstantiation, which is the sharing of the substance of the whole with each of its parts (Myers, 1988). Dualistic distinctions between mind and body, and spirit and matter, do not make sense because everything is dependent upon, and shares in, another. The notion of being in harmony with one another and the universe, or consubstantiation, is best explained through the principle of cosmic unity.

The Principle of Cosmic Unity

Cosmic unity is closely related to the notion of vitality (Anyanwu, 1981; Kasenene, 1994; Kinoti, 1992; Verhoef & Michel, 1997). Sometimes referred to as a holistic conception of life, it entails a connection between God, *izinyanya*, animals, plants and inanimate objects (Mbiti, 1969; Verhoef & Michel, 1997). Cosmic unity means that everything is perpetually in motion, influencing and being influenced by something else. This is another principle shared by a number of indigenous societies. According to Howard (1994) and Maffi (1998), indigenous societies do not view the world in a mechanical, cause-effect manner. They subscribe to a holistic view of the world in which units of analysis are not abstracted from their context. What has evolved from this point of view is that knowledge through participation, rather than separation and abstraction, is to be prized. One does not know by standing and observing at a distance. To know is to participate in the dynamic process which involves interaction between parts and the whole. Analysis of discrete elements in isolation from their context cannot account for the flux of becoming (Myers, 1988). Rather, becoming can only be accounted for by a holistic approach that relates individual elements to the total system. The dynamism between parts and the whole, characteristic of the African worldview, is illustrated in the following quotation from Senghor

(1966, p. 4), in which he draws contrasts between traditional European and African worldviews:

[T]he African has always and everywhere presented a concept of the world, which is diametrically opposed to the traditional philosophy of Europe. The latter is essentially static, objective, dichotomous; it is in fact dualistic in that it makes an absolute distinction between body and soul, matter and spirit. It is founded on separation and opposition, on analysis and conflict. The African on the other hand, conceives the world, beyond the diversity of its forms, as a fundamentally mobile yet unique reality that seeks synthesis.

Myers (1988) has argued that a holistic conception of life is compatible with the new physics (quantum and relativity theories). Unlike classical physics, the new physics sees the world in terms of interacting, inseparable components, which are perpetually in motion. The observer or scientist is integral to this process, rather than detached. Similarly, Capra (1988) has drawn parallels between the new physics and the mystic philosophical traditions of the East and other traditions. He has argued that mystical thought “provides a consistent and relevant conception of the world in which scientific discoveries can be made in perfect harmony with spiritual and religious beliefs” (p. 11). Although writing about Eastern belief systems, Capra maintained that his views apply equally to all mystically based belief systems.

Parallels between traditional African worldviews and modern physics are found in bootstrap philosophy in particle physics (Chew, 1968; Chew, Gellman, & Rosenfeld, 1964). The idea behind bootstrap philosophy is that there are no fundamental building blocks of matter. The universe is composed of dynamically interacting particles. These particles behave in a self-consistent manner. Their behaviour is self-consistent because they contribute to the generation of others, which in turn generate them (Chew *et al.*, 1964). Bootstrap philosophy, argued Chew *et al.*, might be extended to the existence of consciousness alongside with the rest of nature.

Although it is too early to draw definitive conclusions about the relationship between consciousness and the new physics, Chew *et al.*'s (1964) position is supported by Capra's (1988) study of mystical traditions. These traditions do not draw distinctions between

consciousness and nature. Furthermore, not only do we become aware of ourselves through participation in the world but we continue to produce cultural traditions and life forms, which in turn shape our consciousness. Because everything is perpetually in motion, influencing and being influenced by something else, social science research can no longer afford to follow the fragmented, disinterested model of the natural sciences. In the natural scientific model, human phenomena are investigated in isolation from their context. This model is inadequate, especially in communities that subscribe to a worldview such as the one described here. Capra (1988) has argued that consciousness has to be at the forefront in the study of human phenomena. In other words, what we know about the world and ourselves is inseparable from our worldviews or *ways of knowing* (Belenky *et al.*, 1986; Howard, 1994). Likewise, we need to understand morality with reference to the metaphysical framework of the people concerned.

The Communal View of Personhood

Another important principle underlying traditional African thinking is that of *communal life*. Personhood in African thought is defined in relation to the community. This conception of personhood makes it essential to discuss understandings of the term “community” in African scholarship. Community does not mean a “mere collection of individuals, each with his [sic] private set of preferences, but all of whom get together nonetheless because they realize . . . that in association they can accomplish things which they are not able to accomplish otherwise” (Menkiti, 1984, p. 179). The term does not refer to a collection of atomistic individuals who gather together to pursue common goals. The idea of community refers to an organic relationship between component individuals (Menkiti, 1984). Coetzee (1998) defined the idea as “an ongoing association of men and women who have special commitment to one another and a developed (distinct) sense of their common life” (p. 276). A community results from a shared understanding of a characteristic way of life. A sense of community exists if people are closely interconnected and mutually recognise the obligation to be responsive to one another’s needs. The tendency among traditional societies to regard a number of people as members of one’s family, irrespective of the actual genetic relationship, stems from this understanding of community.

Extension of terms such as mother and father to others goes hand in hand with a moral obligation to act responsively, in a manner that is befitting of these terms (Verhoef & Michel, 1997). For example, parental responsibilities may be assumed by anyone, through the practice of collective rearing of children (Mkhize, 1999). This is informed by an understanding that the child will grow and develop leadership and/or other qualities that will enhance the life of the community as a whole. As a result the entire community is expected to play a vital role in raising children.

*Interdependence between individuals and community means that personhood cannot be defined solely in terms of physical and psychological attributes (Menkiti, 1984). It is through participation in a community that a person finds meaning in life (Kasenene, 1994; Kinoti, 1992; Menkiti, 1984; Verhoef & Michel, 1997). The importance of the community in self-definition is summed up by Mbiti's (1969) dictum "I am because we are, and since we are, therefore I am" (p. 214). The rootedness of the self-in-community is reflected in sayings such as *umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu* (Nguni) or *motho ke motho ka batho babang* (Sotho). These roughly translate to "it is through others that one attains selfhood." Similarly, the Xhivenda equivalent, *muthu u bebelwa munwe* (a person is born for the other) points at the interdependence between self and other. Personhood in African thought is defined relationally: a person does not exist alone, but always belongs to a community of similarly constituted selves. Belonging carries with it a dynamism or "dance of harmony [because] everyone who belongs is continuously moving, adjusting to the rhythm of life within the community" (Ogbonnaya, 1994, p. 77). This occurs as individuals attend to their responsibilities to others and the natural environment, in order to maintain communal equilibrium. Social equilibrium is maintained if all fulfil their duties and responsibilities, according to their position or status.

The notion of *ubuntu* (roughly, "humanness"), as in the saying *umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu*, is an affirmation of the relational principle of being. It is an affirmation of the principle that in order to qualify to be human, one needs to recognize and respect the humanity of others, in the diversity of this humanity's forms and content (Louw, 1999). The concept of *ubuntu* locates the self not inside the person, but at the point of contact with other human beings. This contrasts sharply with

the dominant Euro-American view that regards the self as a “container” of one’s mental properties and powers (Sampson, 1993). *Ubuntu* is also consistent with Gilligan’s (1982) view that the self is immersed in webs of relationships, comprised of significant others. If the concept of the self is at the centre a people’s conception of the moral (Gilligan, 1982; Hekman, 1995), it follows that studies assuming a traditional Euro-American view of the self as a point of departure cannot arrive at a critically balanced understanding of African moral systems.

Possible Criticisms of the “Self-in-Community”

Ikuenobe (1998) raised some plausible criticisms of the African concept of the person. He notes that a communitarian view of the self presents a picture of individuals under the totalitarian control of the community. While it is possible that obligation to the community could be exploited for ideological or oppressive purposes, the notion of the person-in-community is not a denial of individuality (Myers, 1988; Ogbonnaya, 1994). Individuals can transcend the perspective of the community in creative ways. The assumption, however, is that as a result of this transcendence the community will be transformed to a higher level of functioning and harmonization. The relationship between an individual and the community is thus a multi-directional one in which “the community is preserved and enriched by the ‘highest riches’ of the person . . . just as the person is continually enriched by the experience of emergent selves in the persona-communal” (Ogbonnaya, 1994, p. 78). This is a vindication of the principle of interdependence between parts and the whole: individuals are part of a collective (community) that they create, and which in turn, creates them (Myers, 1988).

The relationship between individuals and the community is not always a smooth one: tensions are likely to occur (Gyekye, 1984, 1992). Nevertheless, it is envisaged that these tensions could be resolved in a way that restores interdependence, and perhaps even advances the community to a higher level of functioning than before. This could be the case with creative individuals who invent novel ways of doing things. Initially, their inventions may be viewed with suspicion: however, once the invention has been shown to benefit the community as a whole, the individual

is acclaimed as a hero, a model to be emulated. Dzobo (1992) illustrated the dynamic interdependence between an individual and the community using the analogy of the fingers and the hand. The fingers represent free, unique, independent members of society. However, they are firmly rooted in the hand (the whole). However, the hand (community) is incomplete without the fingers (individuals). The view of the self-in-community recognises the possibility of tensions between the person and the community. The ideal is that these tensions would be resolved in a way that enhances both the individual and the community. However, with exposure to a myriad influences and with participation in many communities, such tensions are likely to be more problematic. What is needed is a comprehensive model to explain the effects of exposure to multiple worldviews. Such a model should be able to explain the emergence of the self from multiple perspectives, while accounting for the power dimensions involved in the process. The next chapter argues that the notion of a dialogical self, based on the literary writings of Bakhtin (1981, 1984/1993), makes this possible.

The Family Community

If the community in general is important, then the family community is of utmost significance. It forms an essential element of an individual's social reality and personal identity, apart from which personhood is almost inconceivable (Paris, 1995).^{} It should be noted that the African family is not restricted to the Western notion of a nuclear family. It constitutes a closely-knit community of relatives, including both the living and the deceased (*izinyanya*) (Moyo, 1992). Deceased family members continue to participate in the day-to-day affairs of their families once integration rituals, known as *ukubuyisa* in Nguni or *kugadzira mudzimu* in Xhivenda (meaning to bring back or to domesticate *izinyanya*), have been performed. Through the totemic system, the definition of the family could be extended to include plants, other non-living objects, and anything connected with human relationships (Mbiti, 1969). The family, as defined above, is *the most important aspect of self-definition.* To be disowned by one's family is to cease to exist as a human being.

The family is hierarchically organized, from the oldest member to the youngest child. Members are bound by a reciprocal understanding of their roles and responsibilities. These roles depend on one's position and status in the hierarchy. The elder, usually the oldest member of the family, has the all-important responsibility to ensure that the family remains a thriving, cohesive unit, and is thus highly respected. Older members have the most complete memory of the family's lineage, and are considered to be much closer to *izinyanya* than younger members are (Mbiti, 1991). The notion of respect is often misunderstood. It emanates from a mutual understanding that a person with an elder's status and position would act in a dignified and *morally responsible manner*, so as to promote familial harmony. Failure to do so diminishes the elder's status. Irresponsible elders may in turn be punished by *izinyanya*, who do not look kindly upon family members who neglect their responsibilities (Moyo, 1992).

The moral nature of personhood.

It has been mentioned that the concept of a person in African societies is that of a person-in-relation, a "being-with-and-for-others," and not an isolated, atomistic individual. To attain personhood, it is not sufficient to be merely a biological organism with physical and psychological attributes. Personhood does not follow automatically simply because one is born of human seed. Rather, it is something that must be earned (Menkiti, 1984; Ruch & Anyanwu, 1981). Menkiti (1984) referred to this as the "processual" nature of being. Children are born into first a family community. They then undergo rituals of incorporation, culminating in some societies in the rites marking the passage from childhood to adulthood. It would seem that the "processual" nature of personhood means that one becomes a person as one "goes along" in society. Indeed, Menkiti (1984) took this position when he argued that children are not fully human. Following Gyekye (1992), however, I would argue that the idea that personhood must be earned refers to a person's *moral conduct*. It is not a denial of personhood to children. The notion that personhood is not a given is an affirmation of an understanding that there are moral ideals and standards that ought to guide a person's life. These are standards such as generosity, benevolence, and respect (Gyekye, 1992). A person who is wanting in these standards cannot be

called a human being, no matter their age: no matter the rituals they have undergone or performed. Rituals are cultural practices or vehicles for moral education (Mbiti, 1991). While it makes sense to assume that a person who has completed them has received more moral education than the one who has not, it does not follow that completion of rituals insulates a person from moral deficiencies. Because one can fall short of moral standards at any stage in the life cycle, being a person could be regarded as a process of *becoming*; an unpredictable, open-ended process during which personhood may be achieved, lost, and regained, depending on one's circumstances.

It should be noted that the view that morality is inseparable from personhood is not solely African. Indeed, Hekman (1995) has argued that in every culture "to become a person is to become a moral person" (p. 126). This view is discussed here because it is central to African thinking. It contrasts sharply with traditional cognitive approaches, which define morality in terms of universal and invariant stages. Furthermore, concepts of personhood differ across cultures (Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Shweder & Bourne, 1991), thereby making it important to investigate what it means to be a moral person in diverse cultural settings.

A number of sayings exist in African societies to refer to people who have failed to meet moral standards expected of a fully human person. These are sayings such as *ga e se motho* (Tswana) or *a ku si muntu* (Nguni), literally meaning "he or she is not a person." According to Gyekye (1992), the Akan of Ghana have a similar phrase, *onnye' nipa*, meaning "not a human being." The fact that similar sayings are found in a number of African states South of the Sahara, points at commonalities in African conceptions of personhood. It should be emphasized that standards of personhood are not of an abstract, theoretical type. Possession of the qualities of personhood is reflected in people's relationships with others and their milieu. It is referred to as *ubuntu* in the Nguni languages, and *botho* in Sotho/Tswana. *Ubuntu* is inferred from people's knowledge of their duties and responsibilities within a community of other, interdependent human beings. It goes beyond consciousness of one's position and responsibilities within the family and the community: it is the *be-ing* of this knowledge itself. *Ubuntu* is the *concrete* or *practical*

realization of this knowledge, and not a cognitive appraisal thereof. However, because a person is always a being-with-and-for-others, failure to attain personhood points blame at the individual, his or her family and his or her community. Just as it is a collective responsibility to raise children, people's moral shortcomings reflect poorly on their family and community. This is consistent with the notion of a person-in-community, discussed above.

Contextualising the Metaphysical System

The metaphysical system discussed above should be viewed in the context of history, time and place. It does not have a monolithic influence on African morality, nor is it limited to Africans. As mentioned previously, people are exposed to multiple perspectives, resulting from cultural and historical changes. Once incorporated into people's ways of thinking, these perspectives are capable of entering into a dynamic relationship with each other: a dialogical process that may result in the emergence of new perspectives out of the old. It is this dialogue between perspectives that is of psychological significance. The dialogue should address questions such as how African worldviews interface with new ideas such as Christianity and individualism? Do they exist simultaneously with these other worldviews? Does exposure to new ideas affect men and women, the young and the old, in the same way? These questions are important, especially given findings by Gilligan and her colleagues (Gilligan, 1982; Lyons, 1988), who have shown that a different moral voice (care) can exist alongside the voice of justice. It is therefore pertinent to establish a place for African voices in the wider moral landscape. Before the relationship between African and other worldviews is discussed, the moral implications of the metaphysical system mentioned above will be considered.

Implications for Moral Theory and Ethics

From a traditional African point of view, morality cannot be understood independently of the relationships between people, and their context. Social equilibrium between people should be maintained: this occurs as individuals observe their responsibilities toward each other, *izinyanya*,

God, and everything to which they stand in relation. Severance of relationships in the hierarchy of beings and objects results in disequilibrium, and this is considered undesirable. Consequently, people should know their position and behave in a manner that ensures that equilibrium is maintained. This view of human relationships will be discussed with reference to three main points: human solidarity and reciprocity, familial interdependence and harmony, and responsiveness to one's position and status. The aim is to show that morality in African thought is not only grounded in practical, everyday life, but also that it defines the very nature of what it means to be a person. To fall short of moral standards is synonymous with deficiencies in personhood.

Communal Solidarity and Reciprocity

Morality in traditional African thought is grounded in practical activity. It calls for people to live harmoniously and in solidarity with others. Children are socialised to this view through observation and participation in activities that foster harmony and solidarity. From birth onwards, they are expected to learn from others' selfless efforts to maintain interdependence and social harmony within their family and the community. At the level of the community, these efforts involve activities such as *ilimo*³ and *ukusisa*⁴. Although the nature of these activities is changing with the times, they continue to be manifested in a variety of ways. Their most common adaptations are found in *Stokvels* (community saving schemes) and *Masingwabisanē* (community-organized burial schemes). Having been socialised through similar activities, children become aware of the caring they have received from others. As a result, they feel morally obliged to reciprocate in kind when a need arises (Gbadegesin, 1998; Verhoef & Michel, 1997).

³ *Ilimo* is a practice whereby neighbours join together to help till another's fields. It is extended to other activities such as building a house or burying the dead.

⁴ Loaning someone cattle so that he or she can plough the fields and milk the cows.

Moral transgressions disrupt communal unity. This occurs when people fail to observe their obligations and responsibilities toward each. Verhoef and Michel (1997) called this a circular moral process. In a circular process, the community is always in a state of flux: it is strengthened if people fulfil their mutual obligations; moral transgressions weaken the community by causing separation between people. Furthermore, there is an ontological dimension to moral goodness. Doing wrong entails not just being individually in disharmony with the social order, it may disorganise this order itself. The disorganization of the social order may result in calamitous consequences to the community as a whole. For example, it is believed that breaking a taboo may result in drought (Ruch & Anyanwu, 1981). However, separation resulting from moral transgression could be rectified if the community works interactively to re-establish social connection, interdependence; and hence, communal unity (Verhoef & Michel, 1997). Thus, human action is geared toward reconstructing, preserving and enhancing the community. In turn, the community is supposed to enhance the quality of life of its members.

Familial Interdependence and Harmony

It has been mentioned that the family community is the most important community of all. Given that connection to the family is regarded as the definition of personhood *par excellence*, it follows that separation from it is of extreme moral significance (Mbiti, 1969). The ethical implication is that family members ought to observe mutual obligations toward each other (Ackah, 1988; Gyekye, 1992; Mbiti, 1991). Family members are bound together by bilateral relations. They are expected to be generous to family members in need, and to maintain close contact with the family by, amongst other things, attending important rituals and gatherings. Maintaining unity and harmony within the family is of supreme significance, as is behaving in a manner that does not dishonour it. Members who dishonour their families risk being disowned, which is regarded as the worst punishment that could be visited upon a person (Mbiti, 1991). To be disowned is to be disconnected, which is equivalent to non-existence.

It is the responsibility of the head of the family to ensure that discord between family members does not occur. Family discord disrupts the bond with *izinyanya*. This in turn terminates the family's audience with God. The Nguni people refer to this as *ukufulathelwa izinyanya* (literally, to have ancestors turn their backs on the family). A disconnected family is without protection from God, and is unlikely to prosper. The duty to ensure that the family does not become disconnected from God rests with the head of the family. This duty is perceived in moral terms.

The author is aware of the social and cultural changes taking place within African families and communities. One of the purposes of this study is to investigate how these changes affect moral reasoning. People living in transitional societies are often faced with competing points of view. In a modernising society, traditional obligations toward the family and the community exist amidst other worldviews. It is possible to envisage tensions between loyalty to one's family and the community, and the desire to pursue individualistic interests. The study seeks to shed light on moral dilemmas such as these, and the processes by which they are resolved.

Moral Obligations Toward Strangers

It remains controversial whether the generosity accorded to family members is extended to strangers. For example, Ackah (1988) and Kasenene (1994) maintained that generosity has to be extended to strangers, while Verhoef and Michel (1997) argued that it is limited to relatives. Responding to this question in an "either-or" fashion is not likely to be productive. It would further entail the notion that a culture's way of understanding is complete, without contradictions and inconsistencies. What has to be pointed out, however, is that a slight distinction should be drawn between generosity to family members, and generosity in general. As mentioned previously, family members are morally bound to be responsible to one another *by virtue of the special nature of their relationship*. As members of the same kin, they share special memories of how they were nurtured by other family members in time of need. Further, they are connected to God through the same *izinyanya*, to whom they are all morally accountable. The importance of this point will be clearer in the next chapter, when the role of internalised "audiences" in moral

decision-making (Day, 1991) is discussed. For now, it is sufficient to state that generosity to family members is of moral significance because of the special nature of the relationship between family members, who are bound to each other by bonds of kinship.

Generosity to strangers is a question that cannot be resolved in a simplistic, “either-or” way. There are injunctions from traditional proverbs and sayings, urging people to be good to strangers. To this effect, an *isiZulu* proverb states that *isisu somhambi asingakanani, singungenso yenyoni* (literally, “the stomach of a traveller is not that big, it is about the size of a bird’s kidney”). The proverb urges people to provide food to strangers, and to be good to them in general. On the other hand, however, it is likely that because of the close-knit family system, moral offences committed by outgroup members against members of one’s own group would receive serious attention. This is more likely if offences in question pose serious threats to the harmony and continued existence of the kinship group as a whole (Verhoef & Michel, 1997).

How could this seeming inconsistency between caring for members of one’s family as opposed to caring for strangers be explained? Opatow’s (1990) notion of moral communities could prove useful here. Opatow argued that people create moral communities, resulting in those outside the group being excluded from that moral domain. Ward (1991) observed a similar phenomenon in her research with African-Americans. She explained it in terms of a group’s collective history and memory. In instances of conflict between in-group and out-group members, a group’s collective memory becomes salient, thereby influencing people’s actions or decision-making. This is particularly so if there is a history of antagonism (e.g. racial or ethnic oppression) between groups concerned. In view of these studies, it is important to adopt a cultural and historically situated perspective in researching moral decision-making. Such a perspective is likely to shed light on individual inconsistencies in moral decision-making involving in-group and out-group members.

Moral Action and Position

We have seen that people in African societies are uniquely positioned in their communities, depending on status variables such as age and gender (Verhoef & Michel, 1997). Each position entails obligations thought to befit a person of that status. To be a fully functioning, morally competent person entails knowing one's culturally designated position, and acting accordingly. Age is very important in determining one's social position. Older people are likely to have a longer collective memory of the community than younger community members. With this comes the knowledge thought to be indispensable to the survival of the group, such as the preservation of community integration and social harmony (Menkiti, 1984). Thus, the status of the elders is earned by virtue of the richness of their knowledge and experiences, which they are expected to bring to bear in matters of moral judgement (Ikuenobe, 1998). The role played by elders in resolving marital and other forms of conflict, is an example. By virtue of their age, elders are considered closer to *izinyanya*. The all-important duty to conduct rituals to ensure that the family remains connected to *izinyanya* and God is entrusted to them. This is why respect for elders is regarded as one of the most important moral injunctions. Connections to *izinyanya* and God and hence social equilibrium are maintained by respecting elders. It should be emphasised, however, that respect goes with the mutual understanding that elders will exercise their wisdom fairly and to the benefit of the group as a whole (Paris, 1995). Older people have a moral responsibility to conduct themselves in a manner that promotes connection between people and the community.

Gender remains the most problematic of all status variables in theorising African morality. A tendency to accord women lower status than men has been reported in a number of studies (Ansah, 1991; Kayonga, 1992). The origins of this practice are not clearly documented. Possibly, it stems from the mostly patriarchal nature of African societies, which recognise succession along male lines. There are also differences in the moral upbringing of boys and girls. For example, while good character is encouraged in the raising of both girls and boys, it is regarded as *the* defining feature of mature womanhood.

These gender disparities, however, are by no means an indication of blanket disrespect for women in African cultures. There are moral injunctions exhorting men to respect women. For example, traditional African societies considered beating a woman to be a cowardly act. It resulted in loss of dignity and status for the perpetrator and family alike. Age was also a moderating factor in the gender hierarchy. Although women in general were accorded lower status than men, older women were treated with the same respect as their male counterparts, even by men (White & Parham, 1990). In view of the reported gender disparities in the upbringing and treatment of women in African societies, it is important to investigate how experiences of moral dilemmas are mitigated by one's gender. It is also essential to explore the interface between gender, power and age in moral decision-making.

Conclusion

A philosophical framework for understanding morality has been presented. According to this view, objects and organisms in the universe are organised hierarchically, from inanimate objects at the bottom, to God at the apex. Human and spiritual beings occupy intermediate levels. A dynamic interdependence exists between all elements within the system, which are capable of influencing and being influenced by others, depending on their life force. This dynamism means that reality can be understood by studying the system as whole, rather than isolated parts. Similarly, personhood cannot be conceived independently of the relationship between the individual and his or her community. It is argued that incorporation of this framework in researching and theorising morality may lead to an identification of moral perspectives that have not been adequately accounted for as yet in the psychological literature. From a traditional African perspective, morality is grounded in communal life, and it is characterised by harmonious relationships between individuals and their milieus (Anyanwu, 1981; Verhoef & Michel, 1997). This differs from the traditional Western tradition, which regards morality as an individualistic concern dictated by one's conscience.

However, with the rapid social and cultural changes taking place in African communities, and the cross-pollination of ideas between cultures, psychological research can no longer afford to remain insulated in one conceptual framework. The current study explores the relationship between an African concept of personhood and morality, using the philosophical background and worldview presented above, as points of departure. Further, it examines African moral perspectives in the context of the voices of justice and care identified by Kohlberg (1981, 1984) and Gilligan (1977, 1982) respectively. Exposure to different cultures and systems of thought makes it imperative to take into account the many factors that influence individual development. The task of acknowledging these influences is made possible by the socio-cultural approaches advocated by Vygotsky (1978, 1981a, 1986) and Bakhtin (1981, 1984/1993), amongst others. In the next chapter, a historical overview of socio-cultural approaches to psychological phenomena, including the self, is undertaken.

CHAPTER 4

SOCIO-CULTURAL APPROACHES TO SELF AND MORALITY

This chapter introduces socio-cultural approaches to morality and the self. Vygotsky's account of the social origins of higher mental functions (Valsiner & van der Veer, 1988) provides a framework by means of which to investigate the socio-cultural bases of moral thought. According to Vygotsky, cultural tools, such as language, mediate thinking and other psychological functions. Once internalized, these tools are used to guide people's behaviour. Internalisation enables people to function as competent members of their societies. The purpose of this chapter is to show that moral reasoning, like thinking, has social origins. Moral reasoning is a product of internalized social relations and practices (Tappan, 1991a, 1991b).

Although Vygotskian perspectives shed light on moral reasoning, they do not make clear how collective social practices influence individual functioning (Werstch, 1991). Vygotsky concentrated on the relationship between mental life and interpersonal or small group processes. Bakhtin (1981) went a step further. He pointed at the dynamic relationship between individual psychological processes and collective social practices. His notion of dialogism, and in particular, the analogy between literary authorship and living, provide a model that can be used to account for the emergence of psychological processes from collective cultural practices. Further, dialogism emphasizes the importance of engaging others' perspectives or worldviews. This facilitates the possible recognition of previously ignored moral voices, alongside other moral orientations.

To introduce the thinking of Vygotsky and Bakhtin, two central concepts of theirs, mediation and internalization, are discussed. The ethical and moral implications of Vygotsky's theorizing are then discussed, followed by an analysis of Bakhtin's dialogism. Bakhtin's work is introduced to show that, from a dialogical point of view, morality results from a selective

assimilation and appropriation of worldviews. The openness (flexibility) of the dialogical self facilitates this process.

Mediation and Internalization

Vygotsky, one of the leading figures in the socio-cultural tradition, located the origins of higher mental functions in social life (Wertsch, 1991). This was against the dominant social science view that psychological functions can be broken down into smaller properties, and studied in isolation from their context (Wertsch & Stone, 1985). Vygotsky maintained that in order to understand higher mental functions (e.g. thinking), we have to understand how cultural tools mediate them, and how these tools are internalized to direct our behaviour (Shotter, 1989; Wertsch & Stone, 1985). Mediation is a process by means of which individuals or groups employ cultural tools, such as language, to carry out their actions (Wertsch, 1995). Through mediation, social relations between people (the inter-psychological realm) become part of an individual's internal (intra-psychological) world.

Mediation can be illustrated by contrasting Piaget and Vygotsky's understanding of the role of "self talk" in child development. Piaget (1924/1969) viewed children's "self-talk" as an indication of immaturity or lack of social interest. He expected this tendency, which he termed "egocentric speech," to disappear as children matured cognitively and socially. Vygotsky (1966), on the other hand, argued that children use "egocentric speech" as a tool to solve problems. He noted that "egocentric speech" repeats earlier social relations between children and adults. It marks the beginning of a process by which children begin to converse with themselves in the same way that they had earlier conversed with others. Initially, children require external assistance to solve problems. Gradually, they begin to guide themselves through problems, while verbalising instructions previously given by adults or competent peers. Eventually the language used by others is incorporated into children's psychological world (i.e. internalized). It becomes a tool that directs their behaviour (Shotter, 1989; Wertsch & Stone, 1985). For Vygotsky, the supposed disappearance of "egocentric" speech means that the social

relations it represented have become part of the inner world of the child. This implies that an understanding of social relations between children and their social environment can provide insight into psychological functions. The purpose of this chapter is to show that the process of internalization can be used to theorize about moral reasoning (Tappan, 1997c).

How are interpersonal activities transferred to the intra-psychological realm? To answer this question it is necessary to analyse Vygotsky's account of learning and development in children. Vygotsky distinguished between two levels of development, namely the "actual developmental level," and the "potential" or "zone of proximal development" (ZPD) (Vygotsky, 1978). The zone of "actual development" refers to fully-matured mental functions. It is indicated by children's ability to solve problems independently. It could be regarded as the end product of development (Vygotsky, 1978). The "zone of proximal development" on the other hand, refers to maturing functions. It is determined by what the child can do with the assistance of adults or other competent children. Formally, it is defined as "the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers" (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 86). Development takes place at the ZPD level. Adults and competent peers interact with children, supporting them to master the values and skills essential to become competent members of their society (Tappan, 1998). This view has found support from Rogoff (1990, 1995), who also maintained that children advance their understanding through "apprenticeship" with others in culturally organized activities.

The end product of mediation is internalization. With internalization, processes originally outside of people's control, such as using verbal rehearsal to solve problems, become part of their intra-psychological world. People resort to "inner dialogue" to recall internalized processes, in order to use them to construe, inform and direct their behaviour (Shotton, 1989). For example, children in traditional African villages are introduced to the behaviours of sharing and interdependence through practices such as eating from a common bowl. Initially, young children do not know values like sharing. Thus, they may want their own bowl. At this stage it

may be necessary for parents or someone else to supervise this activity. They may even refer to the legend of Manyosi¹ to reinforce the behaviour of sharing with others. Once these practices have been internalized, however, parental or external involvement is no longer necessary. Let us assume that these children are now grown-ups. In the face of a dilemma between helping their younger siblings financially through school, and pursuing an individual life in the city, they are likely to recall the story of Manyosi. Now, their “inner dialogue” with this story guides their actions.

Implications for the Study of Morality and Ethics

Mediation and internalization have several moral and ethical implications. To highlight these, it is important to point out that internalization does not represent a mere transfer of what words stand for - their referential or indicative function - into the intra-psychological realm. Although initially words have an indicative function for children (they point at things), it is the *multiple meanings* and *associations* that they arouse in one’s consciousness, that are of importance in internalization. To begin with, children understand word meaning in terms of the sign-object relationship - what the words stand for. For example, the word “lion” initially refers to the animal known by that name. It is only when a child has reached an *advanced understanding* of the meaning of words: an understanding based on sign-sign relationship, that a truly symmetrical adult-child interaction can take place (Lee, 1985; Wertsch & Stone, 1985). This is illustrated with a situation that may occur in a traditional village community. In this context, the shout “lion!” is correctly interpreted as a signal that danger is around the corner. Whereas previously it might have been necessary to tell children to run for their lives, this becomes unnecessary once an understanding based on sign-sign relationship has been grasped. The word “lion” is now understood in its *sense*, in terms of the psychological connotations it arouses in one’s consciousness (Vygotsky, cited in Tappan, 1997c). This interpretation is consistent with Shotter’s (1989, 1993b), who argued that the meaning of words in “inner speech” does not come

¹ According to Zulu cultural legend, Manyosi ate an entire goat all by himself, refusing to share with others. The saying “*Sobohlu Manyosi!*” warns him that he will need others’ assistance in the future, because a goat cannot fill him up for life.

from dictionaries. Rather, it is derived from the connotations associated with their use in one's speech community. Words in "inner speech" represent "the nature of those psychological processes that are mediated by the use of historically invented and socially developed aids and devices" (Shotter, 1989, p. 194).

Ethical and moral implications of internalization will now be addressed. Moral reasoning is accomplished through words, language, and forms of discourse. Language and other forms of discourse act as "psychological tools": they enable people to be, think, feel, act, and experience their surroundings in a manner that is intelligible and legitimate in their socio-cultural context (Tappan, 1997c). It was argued above that what is important in internalization is word sense: the psychological connotations aroused by words in one's consciousness. The words we use are not neutral: they are endowed with a moral *sense*. To become an autonomous member of a society, one has to understand the moral sense of the words, as they are used in specific settings. Moral reasoning can be thought of as a socio-cultural practice mediated by a people's vernacular language (Tappan, 1998). The Nguni word "*umuntu*" is a good example. A growing child first understands this word in terms of its sign-object relationship (a human being). However, as we saw in Chapter 3, the word is also imbued with the *sense*: "to be human is to be moral." It is only when children understand this meaning that they can participate competently in society.

Internalization is also a moral activity in that it involves an ethical transformation. Shotter (1993a, 1993c) contends that internalization enables children to learn to do on their own what they initially did under the supervision of adults. Through internalization, "the child learns to practice with respect to himself (sic) the same forms of behavior that others formerly practiced with respect to him" (Vygotsky, 1966, pp. 39-40). Internalization may be construed as a transformation of our responsibility for things (Shotter, 1993a, 1993c), which is an indispensable part of becoming a competent person in one's society:

In learning how *to be* a responsible member of a certain social group, one must learn *to do* certain things in the right kind of way: how to perceive, think, talk, act, and to

experience one's surroundings in ways that make sense to the others around one in ways considered legitimate. (Shotter, 1993b, p. 73, emphasis original)

Internalization is an ethical-moral process because it involves acquiring ways of understanding oneself as a human being, in relation to others. The ethical-moral nature of this process lies in the fact that these ways of being are not ours. They have always been there, serving other people's purposes (e.g. the internalization of dominant gender relationships).

Vygotsky's concepts, such as mediation and internalisation, provide us with a framework to theorize about the emergence of morality from collective forms of social life. Furthermore, the notion of "inner dialogue" can shed light on how people rehearse their options in the face of a moral dilemma.

The Relevance of Vygotsky's Views to Traditional African Worldviews

How relevant are Vygotskian perspectives to the study of morality in African contexts? The dialectical relationship between the person and his or her community in traditional African societies has been discussed. From a traditional African point of view, personhood does not reside "inside" the person: people are always seen in the context of their surroundings. This view of personhood, also known as the self-in-community, is consistent with Vygotsky's notion that psychological processes, which would include self-understanding, originate in social life. We saw in Chapter 3 that traditional African societies locate human functioning within the context of the family and the community (the social realm). Further, the tradition of socializing children through story-telling (Verhoef & Michel, 1997) is a form of semiotic mediation. Behind each story is a moral lesson, pitched at a level that the child can understand. The importance accorded to the spoken word in most African societies provides fertile ground for studying how language mediates moral functioning.

Beyond Vygotsky

Although Vygotskian perspectives provide fertile ground for studying cultural conceptions of moral reasoning, these approaches are limited. They do not adequately address the role of broader social and cultural processes in individual development. Vygotsky's work was limited to small group interactions, such as parent-child dyads. He did not spell out the relationship between cultural, historical, and institutional settings, and various forms of mediated action (Wertsch, 1991). As a result, he fell short of providing a genuinely socio-cultural approach to mind. Bakhtin's (1981, 1984/1993) dialogical account of human functioning addresses these issues comprehensively.

Further, Vygotsky did not spell out the nature of the relationship between various internalised words in the individual's psyche. Obviously, in the process of growing up, children are exposed to various, sometimes contradictory, socio-cultural traditions and points of view. Vygotsky did not deal with the processes by which these contradictions are negotiated and resolved.

Vygotskian psychology also tends to be limited to instrumental action or labour activity, such as technical, tool using knowledge. As a result, it ignores *phronesis*²- a form of practical knowledge concerned with the know-how of making decisions according to one's social responsibilities and situational demands (Shotter, 1989). Further, Vygotskian psychology does not emphasize one's social identity, nor does it take into account influences of *positioning* in interpersonal relationships. *Positioning* refers to "a complex cluster of generic personal attributes, structured in various ways, which impinges on the possibilities of interpersonal, intergroup and even intrapersonal action through some assignment of such rights, duties and obligations to an individual as are sustained by the cluster" (Har e & Langenhove, 1999a, p. 1). For example, the views of a person who is positioned as knowledgeable in a particular field will be accorded more respect, should issues pertaining to that field be discussed. The respect and status accorded to elders in traditional African societies, illustrate positioning. Elders have a longer collective

² *Phronesis* is discussed at length in chapter 5.

history of the community: they are expected to use their knowledge and experience to promote communal interests (Paris, 1995). Their opinions take precedence when moral and ethical issues arise. Vygotskian psychology cannot account for the power or lack of it, which results from one's positioning, in the process of moral decision-making.

The above-mentioned shortcomings call for an extension of Vygotskian accounts of development. The dialogical framework, advocated by Bakhtin (1981, 1984/1993), appears to be a logical extension of Vygotsky's work.

Bakhtin's Dialogism

It should be noted that Bakhtin was a literary analyst: he analysed relationships between characters and the author in written works. However, he was interested in living language, which is speech as it is spoken by concrete individuals, and addressed to immediate as well as distant audiences (Skinner, Valsiner, & Holland, 2001). He took the Russian literary tradition as his point of departure. This tradition regarded the creative process, and in particular, the creation of literary texts (e.g. writing a novel) as a model for the study of human life (Kozulin, 1991). Bakhtin drew parallels between the process of writing (production of literary texts) and living. His account of individual development (becoming) is based on the concept of "life as authoring" and existence as a dialogue (Holquist, 1990; Kozulin, 1991).

Life as Authoring

The idea of life as authorship is premised on the understanding that "the world is not given but conceived" (Clarke & Holquist, 1984, p. 59). The world is not given to us as an object of our consciousness because we cannot have direct access to it independently of our experiences. Quite to the contrary, we make sense of the world and ourselves through an active process of engagement. This may involve activities such as thinking, doing and communication (Kozulin,

1991). Human activities, argued Bakhtin (1981), parallel the process of literary authorship.

Clarke and Holquist (1984) expressed the relationship between authorship and living as follows:

Life as event presumes selves that are performers. To be successful, the relation between me and the other must be shaped into a coherent performance, and thus the architectonic activity of authorship, which is the building of a text, parallels the activity of human existence, which is the building of a self. (p. 64)

Writing a novel is an active process. It involves building ideas into a text, within the context of established literary genres. In so doing, novelists express their opinions, thereby *authoring their* point of view. Similarly, we inevitably express (author) our points of view in our responses (actions) to challenges in life. With the analogy of “life as authorship,” a foundation was laid for a meaningful understanding of psychological functioning through the study of literary processes.

Another similarity between literary authorship and living is that, in the same way that novelists situate their works within established literary genres, so do human actions take place within the sphere of particular cultures. We live in a world that is already pre-configured in a particular way. Therefore, our actions must take into account what is already established, within a given sphere of communication (Kozulin, 1991; Shotter, 1993a). In the study of morality, these are the already existing models of the good and the bad life. People judge our actions with reference to these models.

Bakhtin’s analogy between living and authorship provides us with a framework to understand psychological processes by studying human activities. Human activities cannot be studied out of context, however. By definition, our lives unfold in a world populated with other people, with whom we interact on an ongoing basis. Human actions are better studied with the utterance as the unit of analysis because the utterance is concerned with the relationship between speech subjects.

Utterances as Units of Analysis

Utterances are appropriate for studying real life human activities. Although he studied literary texts, Bakhtin was concerned with language as a living process; namely the manner in which language expresses relationships between real embodied people, and their life conditions in general. For this reason Bakhtin positioned himself against the prevailing theory of linguistics of his time, which was dominated by Saussurian linguists. Saussurian linguists studied grammatical units, such as sentences, phrases, words and phonemes, in order to uncover underlying and stable patterns of language. These units were studied independently of the context of their users. Sentences are abstract linguistic units which do not belong to anyone and are not addressed to anyone. Bakhtin argued that such units are inappropriate because they cannot tell us anything about actual relationships between embodied beings.

To understand language as a living process, Bakhtin turned his attention to the study of the whole utterance (Holquist, 1983; Vasiléva, 1985; Wertsch, 1990). Utterances are real, responsive, interactive units (Shotter, 1993a). Bakhtin (1986) defined the utterance as:

a unit of speech communication . . . determined by a change of speaking subjects, that is, a change of speakers. Any utterance - from a short (single-word) rejoinder in everyday dialogue to the large novel or scientific treatise - has, so to speak, an absolute beginning and an absolute end: its beginning is preceded by the utterances of others, and its end is followed by the responsive utterances of others The speaker ends his utterance in order to relinquish the floor to the other or to make room for the other's active responsive understanding. (p. 71)

Unlike sentences, words, and phrases, utterances always belong to "individual speaking people, speech subjects" (Bakhtin, 1986, p. 7). They are thus consistent with a model of human understanding based on people as performers. Bakhtin maintained that human speech acts cannot be fully understood outside the actual conditions of use. "Speech acts can only exist in reality only in the form of utterances of individual speaking people, speech subjects" (Bakhtin, 1986, p.

7). Utterances not only belong to real, embodied people, they also elicit a response from the one to whom they are addressed. Bakhtin (1986) referred to this as the responsiveness and “addressivity” of utterances.

Utterances and Responsiveness

Utterances presuppose someone with whom one can agree or disagree. Bakhtin (1986) found the study of utterances appealing because utterances indicate the gaps or boundaries in the flow of speech between speaking subjects (Shotter, 1993a; Wertsch, 1990). Once the utterance of one speaker has been finalized, the other speaker can assume a responsive attitude toward what has been said:

When the listener perceives and understands the meaning . . . of speech he [sic] simultaneously takes an active, responsive attitude toward it. He [sic] either agrees or disagrees with it . . . augments it, applies it, prepares for its execution and so on. . . . Any understanding of live speech, a live utterance, is inherently responsive, although the degree of this activity varies extremely. Any understanding is imbued with response and necessarily elicits it in one form or another: the listener becomes the speaker. (Bakhtin, 1986, p. 68)

The responsive nature of utterances makes them consistent with the model of human life as “authoring.” Utterances are concerned with social relations between embodied rather than abstract beings. Bakhtin (1986) sees communication as movement. It is a constant struggle in which people occupying different positions attempt to influence each other in some way (Holquist, 1983; Shotter, 1993a). We express our points of view as we engage with other people, in the same way that novelists express theirs in writing. Furthermore, life “authorship” takes place within constraints and/or affordances provided by the culture. When the question of speech genres is addressed, we shall see that people resort to personal attributes such as social class or gender in their everyday utterances. By studying the *responsive positions* people take toward

each other's utterances, we learn not only about each's social position, but the origin of each's *worldviews* from the collective basis of social life (Shotter, 1993a).

The "Addressivity" of Utterances

One of the distinguishing features of the utterance is what Bakhtin termed the "addressivity" of voices (Bakhtin, 1986; Wertsch, 1991). Utterances are by definition, dialogical. Whenever an utterance is made, there is always an actual or imaginal audience of listeners (Hermans, 1997; Wertsch, 1991). Every utterance has an addressee or a "second party" whose responsive understanding is being sought. The notion of "addressivity" follows from the fact that people are not passive in their conversations with others. Quite to the contrary, they engage in activities such as negotiation, agreeing, disagreeing and questioning (Sampson, 1993; Shotter, 1995). The very composition and style of the utterance will depend on the audience for whom it is meant, and must, of necessity, take into account the effect it will have on them (Bakhtin, 1986). For example, a young boy who wants permission from his mother to play football for his team on a Sunday morning, instead of going to church, will put his request with great politeness and respect.

"Addressivity" extends beyond actual participants in a dialogue: it includes real or imagined others, for whom the utterance is meant and from whom some responsive understanding is sought (Bakhtin, 1986). For example, when we contemplate doing something our parents do not approve of, we may engage in an internal dialogue with them, though they are not present.

"Addressivity" brings to our attention that higher mental functions do not involve the activity of a solitary thinker, because the internal world of the person is "populated" with others. In a similar vein, Arendt, noted that:

the thinking process . . . is not, like the thought of pure reasoning, a dialogue between me and myself, but finds itself always and primarily, even if I am quite alone in making up my mind, in an anticipated communication with others with whom I must finally come to some agreement. (cited in Bernstein, 1983, p. 218)

The fact that “addressivity” includes imagined others highlights that we cannot claim to be alone in what we are doing, even in our thoughts. Our actions must always be oriented toward others, and must anticipate their responses, in order to be meaningful. Traditional psychological theories of human development, on the other hand, posit that people reason in isolation (Sampson, 1993). For example, in the cognitivist paradigm, moral reasoning (e.g. Kohlberg, 1981, 1984) is a matter of individual legislation (Day & Tappan, 1996). It is envisaged as occurring independently of others, history, context and time (Benhabib, 1992). Bakhtin’s dialogism opens up the possibility of studying the role played by others, real or imagined, in moral reasoning.

Bakhtin (1986) also maintained that the “addressivity” of utterances extends to a “third party” or a “superaddressee.” This is an indefinite audience: it consists of anyone who may subsequently encounter the utterance. The “superaddressee” also includes a system of ideas or beliefs, an appeal to God, or scientific knowledge. Utterances exist within an established sphere of communication, a sphere already imbued with meaning (Bakhtin, 1986; Holquist, 1983; Shotter, 1993a). Their meaning cannot be deciphered independently of the history of ideas and social relations. To be meaningful, utterances must take into account *perspectives*, *worldviews*, and *positions* associated with a given sphere of communication or topic:

However monological the utterance may be . . . however much it may concentrate on its own object, it cannot but be, in some measure, a response to what has already been said about the given topic, on the issue given, even though this responsiveness may not have assumed a clear-cut external expression. It will be manifest in the overtones of the style, in the finest nuances of the composition. The utterance is filled with *dialogical overtones*, and they must be taken into account in order to understand fully the style of the utterance. (Bakhtin, 1986, p. 92)

The fact that utterances can be addressed to an indefinite audience, or refer to a system of ideas and beliefs (Bakhtin, 1986), is illustrated by former South African president, Mr Rolihlahla

Nelson Mandela's closing remarks at the opening of the defence case during the Rivonia trial on the 20th of April 1964:

I have fought against white domination, and I have fought against black domination. I have cherished the ideal of a democratic and free society in which all persons live together in harmony and with equal opportunities. It is an ideal which I hope to live for and to achieve. But if needs be, it is an ideal for which I am prepared to die.

(Available: <http://www.anc.org.za/ancdocs/history/rivonia.html>)

To whom is this speech addressed? It is addressed to the judge, those present in court, the entire South African community, and the international community. Further, the speech escapes its immediate circumstances. It has relevance to anyone who subsequently encounters it, such as groups finding themselves in circumstances similar to those of the former South African president. It is an appeal to the universally acknowledged ideal: the equality of all peoples, and the unacceptability of the domination of one group over another.

In moral decision-making, we appeal to the "superaddressee," consisting of worldviews, ideas, or perspectives associated with a given topic, to function as "witnesses" or "judges" of our actions. For example, when African elders caution their children against neglecting family responsibilities - invoking *izinyanya* in the process - they are appealing to a "superaddressee," consisting of a system of ideas pertaining to the relationship between *izinyanya* and the living. To do justice to local understandings of morality, researchers need to pay attention to various idea systems.

Utterance and Voice

Closely intertwined with the utterance is the concept of "voice" (Holquist, 1983; Holquist & Emerson, 1981; Vasiléva, 1985; Wertsch, 1990). Every utterance exists insofar as it can be produced by someone (Wertsch, 1990). The term "voice" indicates "the speaking personality, the speaking consciousness" (Holquist & Emerson, 1981). An utterance is endowed with a voice when speakers adopt an *expressive, evaluative attitude* toward the subject of their speech

(Bakhtin, 1986). Although language contains expressive words, their evaluative nature is realized only in particular concrete situations. Bakhtin argued that “words belong to nobody, and in themselves. . . evaluate nothing. . . . [T]hey can serve any speaker and be used for the most varied and directly contradictory evaluations on the part of the speakers” (Bakhtin, 1986, p. 85). Voice entails an expression of a personal (i.e. authorial) position with respect to a particular subject (Vasiléva, 1985). It touches upon, but is not reducible to, expressive intonation and other vocal-auditory signals. If I stick my tongue out at someone, I am expressing my contempt for that person. My action is voiced. On the other hand, if I am angry with my superior but pretend to be happy in his presence, I lack voice. The term “voice” generally applies to the speaking subject’s *perspective*, *worldview* and *belief system* with regard to written and other forms of communication (Wertsch, 1990). Having a “voice” is the very condition for the existence of a dialogue, an alternation of subjective *points of view* between partners (Vasiléva, 1985). Speakers have “voice” when they use words in a language to express their point of view.

The concept of “voice” does not mean that individuals produce utterances independently of their social contexts. Bakhtin, like Vygotsky, situated the origins of psychological functions in social relationships (Tappan, 1991a). The speaking subject is “embedded in a particular sociocultural context, and a specific semiotic and a linguistic milieu, *out of which come voices, languages, and forms of discourse that serve to shape and mediate their psychological functioning and their experience*” (Tappan, 1991a, p. 12, emphasis added). Individuals never formulate their speech in isolation. Even in our thoughts, we take into consideration “audiences” that have been internalised as a result of growing within certain *speech genres* or *spheres of communication* (Shotter, 1993a). The authorial positions people take in relation to issues do not emanate from inside their heads. They are appropriated, as it were, from opinions and views of speech communities of which they are part. Meaning arises out of the dialogical relation between self and other, and ultimately, from the point of view of the communities in which we belong (Volosinov, 1986).

Collective Voices

Apart from unique speech events such as individual utterances, Bakhtin was concerned with how collective voices shape psychological development, or what he called “becoming” (Bakhtin, 1986; Werstch, 1990). He paid attention to types of speech, produced by certain groups in society. He referred to these types of speech as collective voices (Bakhtin, 1986; Wertsch, 1990). The term refers to opinions, points of view, and perspectives that reflect the views of our social and cultural communities. These voices can be reflected in the way individuals speak about themselves. Dialogism includes ventriloquation, a process by which a person’s utterance incorporates voices of social groups and institutions (Bakhtin, 1981).

Collective voices are not neutral: they are imbued with expressive meanings. This is because utterances do not belong entirely to individual speakers. They have always existed “out there,” belonging to other people and social groups. Words cannot be “neutral” because they have always been used for particular purposes. They thus carry with them traces of meanings associated with their use in particular spheres of communication (Bakhtin, 1981; Shotter, 1993a). Bakhtin (1981) expressed this as follows:

The word in language is half someone else’s. It becomes ‘one’s own’ only when the speaker populates it with his (sic) own intention, his own accent, when he appropriates the word, adapting it to his own semantic and expressive intention. Prior to this moment of appropriation, the word does not exist in a neutral and impersonal language. . . , but rather it exists in other people’s mouths, in other people’s concrete contexts, serving other people’s intentions: it is from there that one must take the word, and make it one’s own. (Bakhtin, 1981, pp. 293-4)

The notion of collective voices enriches our understanding of psychological mediation. Collective forms of life also mediate higher mental functions. Collective voices tie psychological processes to the social and cultural context, because by definition, they belong in the social and cultural sphere. For the purposes of studying morality, attending to collective voices provides a

basis for exploring tensions that people experience, as they struggle to make personal sense of voices from various speech communities. When a person is speaking, we can ask critical questions such as: “Who is speaking?” In other words, by attending to collective voices, we can understand how people ventriloquate their social groups’ ideas when they speak. It also enables us to study whether these ideas have been appropriated into the self as one’s own.

Two types of collective voices are critical in this study: social languages and speech genres.

Social Languages

Bakhtin (1986) noted that a variety of social languages might exist within a national language (e.g. *isiZulu*). Social languages represent the position or status of the speaker in society (Hermans, 1996; Wertsch, 1991). Languages spoken by different professional groups, urban and rural dialects, and the languages of various age groups or generations, are all examples of social languages. For example, we can distinguish between the young and adult population in one linguistic community, based on their social languages. In South Africa, *Tsotsietaal* (township slang) is associated with the youth. Apart from indicating that one is trendy, its use forms an important part of one’s social identity (belongingness). On the other hand, an adult who uses *Tsotsietaal* is unlikely to be respected by fellow adults, because the language is inappropriate for his or her position. Speakers never produce utterances in isolation; they speak in social languages.

The fact that we speak in social languages has several implications for research into moral reasoning. In studying narratives of moral choice, we can ask the question: What is the relationship between an individual’s views, and the social language(s) of his or her group? To what extent has the person made personal sense of these views? Where tensions between personal and social/collective views are noted, we can study the processes by means of which these are resolved.

Also, the notion of social languages has implications for researchers. To understand the diversity of moral voices, we need to engage critically with the social languages of the people concerned. Cognitive developmental approaches to morality have been criticised for relying too heavily on the language of abstraction. This language is associated with a select group of highly educated Western males, who were subjects in Kohlberg's studies (Simpson, 1974). As social scientists, we need to be aware that our theories and methodologies are tied to particular social languages. The fact that our social languages are class-bound, calls upon us to reflect critically on the historical, professional, and cultural discourses that constrain or enable us to understand psychological processes across cultures (Hawes, 1998).

Speech Genres

While the distinguishing feature of social languages is the social position of the speakers, speech genres are characterised by the *typical situations* in which they are invoked. They are the "*generic forms of the utterance*" (Bakhtin, 1986, p. 78), such as greetings and intimate conversations between friends. Speech genres are products of a community's history and collective way of life. They are acquired from our concrete experiences with those around us.

Speech genres represent a manner of viewing the world and the self (Sampson, 1993). When a person uses a particular genre, his or her experiences are structured by it. For example, suppose a man is on the verge of separating from his girlfriend, against his wishes. If he tells her that "you can't do that to me, because I am a man," what are we going to make of this statement? This man is expressing himself through a speech genre. The expression "I am a man" is being invoked in a situation in which his manhood is at stake. The expression cannot be understood independently of the relations between the sexes in his community.

Speech genres take into account not only the context and personal interrelations between speakers, but also their social positions (Bakhtin, 1986). People may resort to the use of many genres, depending on the context and position of those being addressed. For example, a young

boy may use *Tsotsitaal* in the company of his peers, to impress upon them that he is part of the group. However, he will use standard *isiZulu* when addressing his parents or teachers, in order to show respect. We can thus think of speech genres in terms of related, interdependent and continually changing speech “positions” between speakers.

It is important to pay attention to speech types in studying moral reasoning. This will enable us to understand how moral voices emerge from the social and cultural context. It can possibly highlight the gender and other contradictions inherent in moral reasoning. For example, Maccoby (1990) studied communication patterns between boys and girls. She found that girls favoured an enabling style. This style pays more attention to the relationship, in order to facilitate the conversation. On the other hand, boys favoured a critical, restrictive style, which often led to conflict escalation. However, Broverman, Vogel, Broverman, Clarkson and Rosenkrantz (1972) showed that the enabling style was thought to be characteristic of mature womanhood, but not of mature adulthood. Mature adulthood was defined in terms of autonomous (abstract) thinking, traditionally associated with men. Postconventional morality, it will be remembered, favours abstract modes of thought. The fact that characteristics defining “mature womanhood” and “mature adulthood” differed for women puts them at a disadvantage (Benhabib, 1992; Gilligan, 1977, 1982; Hekman, 1995). To be a “mature woman” means “not being a “mature adult.” Paying attention to speech types allows us to study tensions arising from contradictions such as this one, especially as they apply to moral reasoning.

It has been shown that Bakhtin’s (1981) analogy of “life as authorship” enables us to study psychological processes with reference to social relations and practices between people. It has been argued that such studies should use the utterance as the unit of analysis. Utterances express dialogical relations between embodied beings. These utterances are also imbued with perspectives or points of view, within a given sphere of communication. This makes them meaningful units of analyses for studying contextualised psychological phenomena.

Morality and the Self Re-considered

In the previous chapters, it was argued that morality cannot be separated from concepts of the self (Benhabib, 1992; Gilligan, 1982; Hekman, 1995). The view of selfhood emanating from Bakhtin's dialogism is discussed next.

Toward a Dialogical Self

Traditional approaches to psychology proclaim a unitary, disembodied self. Bakhtin's dialogism leads to a socially-engaged self. A dialogical self is decentralised: it is composed of multiple characters, all capable of engaging dialogically with each other (Hermans & Kempen, 1993). Although others have proposed that the self is multiple (e.g. Higgins, 1987; Markus & Nurius, 1986; Markus & Wurf, 1987), a Bakhtinian approach accounts for the social and cultural emergence of these selves.

To introduce the aspects of a dialogically-conceived self, the forthcoming discussion will distinguish between logical and dialogical relationships. Characteristics of the dialogical self, namely, polyphony, spatialisation, innovation, and power dynamics, are then highlighted. Wherever possible, parallels are drawn between the dialogical self, and the traditional African view of selfhood, discussed in Chapter 3.

Dialogical Relationships

The starting point in understanding Bakhtin's ideas on the self is the notion of dialogue. The self is constructed actively and dialogically, in our encounters with others (Bandlamudi, 1994). Dialogical relationships are better understood in comparison with logical relationships (Hermans & Kempen, 1993). Logical relationships constitute a closed system. That is, they do not allow for further commentary, beyond what is permissible in terms of the logical rules by which the statements are related. Bakhtin (1984/1993) showed this by comparing two identical statements,

namely “life is good” and “life is not good” (see also Hermans & Kempen, 1993, 1996; Vasiléva, 1985). From the point of view of Aristotelian logic, the two statements are identical. Similarly, the statements “life is good” and “life is not good” only express a relationship of negation. Dialogical relationships, on the other hand, pre-suppose (and recognise) the *other*, with whom one can agree or disagree. A dialogical relationship between these pairs of statements exists if they are uttered by two embodied beings, either in agreement or disagreement with each other. The meaning of the statements can be fully grasped only in the context of the relationship between speakers.

The same could be said of the dialogical self. Unlike the unitary self, affirmed in idealistic philosophy, the dialogical self is located at the point of contact with another, equally voiced consciousness. Bakhtin regarded communication as an essential aspect of personhood. For him, “the very being of man [sic] . . . is a *profound communication*. *To be* means to *communicate*. . . . To be means to be for the other; and through him [sic] for oneself” (Bakhtin, 1984/1993, p. 287, emphasis in original). The dialogical self is not pre-given. It emerges from exposure to others’ voices. Once internalized, these voices exchange dialogue with each other on an ongoing basis.

The view that the self emerges from relationships is consistent with African conceptions of personhood. Let me illustrate this by re-examining the saying *umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu*. This saying can be interpreted as: “the being of selfhood is attained dialogically, through participation in the community of other human beings.” Dialogicality is even more evident in the Xhivenda equivalent, *muthu ubebelwa munwe*. This translates: “a person is [already] born for the other.” Both sayings highlight that the self cannot be conceived of independently of social relationships. Parallels between African views of the self and dialogism make the latter a meaningful theoretical base for exploring conceptions of morality in an African context.

Polyphony and the Dialogical Self

The dialogical self can be further understood with reference to Bakhtin's (1984/1993) analysis of Dostoevsky's literary works, and in particular, the relationship between characters and the author in his novels (see also, Hermans, 1996, 1997; Hermans *et al.*, 1992, Vasiléva, 1985). Bakhtin (1984/1993) noted that Dostoevsky created a special kind of novelistic genre, namely, the polyphonic novel. Polyphony is concerned with the position of the author in the text, or what may be called the authorial viewpoint (Morson & Emerson, 1990). A polyphonic novel does not contain one authorial viewpoint. Instead, there are several characters, with independent and mutually opposing voices. The characters are continually engaged in a dialogical relationship with each other. The author's (Dostoevsky's) perspective is just one of many: characters are also capable of authoring and defending their views and perspectives. Each character is "ideologically authoritative and independent; he [sic] is perceived as the author of a fully-weighted ideological conception of his own, and not as the object of Dostoevsky's finalizing artistic vision" (Bakhtin, 1984/1993, p. 5). This leads to a "*plurality of independent and unmerged voices and consciousness, a genuine polyphony of fully-valid voices*" (ibid., p. 6, emphasis in original). The voices are capable of entering into a dynamic relationship with each other. This involves, amongst others, questioning, agreeing and disagreeing.

Multiple, independent voices characterise the dialogical self. These voices represent points of view that we internalise as a result of growing up within certain social and cultural spheres. These voices can be accommodated within a single person. The different voices, like characters in a polyphonic novel, can engage dynamically with each other. Unlike the unitary self, the dialogical self is characterised by a plurality of consciousness.

Pluralism and the self in African thought.

A pluralistic conception of selves is consistent with the African worldview discussed in Chapter 3. Ogbonnaya (1994) argued that "the human person must be seen as a community in and of

itself including a plurality of selves” (p. 75). Plurality of selves is expressed differently, depending on one’s cultural group. The Balong of Cameroon believe that a person is born with different souls, which represent the parents, *izinyanya*, God and other spiritual beings (Ogbonnaya, 1994). Similarly, most traditional societies in South Africa believe that over and above a unique self, a person is born with a spiritual self, representing his or her *izinyanya*. The spiritual self is thought to be more pronounced in those called to become traditional diviners and healers (*izangoma*). Because the call is unsolicited, it sometimes results in a struggle between the spiritual self and the individual personality. The former seeks to dominate the latter by directing it to assume a healing function in society. Should the individual accept the call to healing, the spiritual self becomes capable of holding an independent conversation with the individual self. It can be consulted for healing purposes. This example shows that the idea of multiple selves lends itself to a meaningful conceptualisation within a traditional African worldview.

From a research point of view, polyphony opens the possibility of studying a single individual’s inner world in the form of the relationship between the various characters positioned at different, albeit sometimes opposing, conflictual spaces within the self. These could be the parental, spiritual, religious or other voices that are part of the self.

Spatialisation in the Dialogical Self

At this point, it is necessary to briefly discuss Bakhtin’s understanding of the relationship between an idea and a person entertaining it. For Bakhtin, an idea represents a person’s point of view: it cannot be separated from the person voicing it. Likewise, the person holding it becomes a fully-fledged personality by virtue of that idea (Morson & Emerson, 1990). Because it is the idea that defines the person, it is possible to metaphorically externalise it, in order to give it a personality of its own. The spatial metaphor refers to an idea that has been externalised, with a personality of its own, telling its own story, from its own vantage position. The best example of this is found in Dostoevsky’s novel *The Double*, which introduces a second hero (the Double) who personifies the interior voice of the first author (Golyadkin). Once the voice of the first hero

has been personified and externalised, a fully-fledged, dialogical relationship between the two becomes possible.

The dialogical self could be conceived *spatially*, as a multiplicity of autonomous authors in an imaginal landscape. Each author is capable of telling different stories from different perspectives (Hermans, 1996, 1997). The imaginal others could be parents, grandparents, and even deceased relatives (Hermans, 1997, Josephs, 1997). Once voices have been spatialized, it becomes possible for a person to move from one position to another, in response to changes in situation and time. Each of these positions can be endowed with a voice (Hermans & Kempen, 1993). Each voice is capable of telling its own story, independently of other voices (Hermans, 1996, 1997).

Spatialisation and the self in traditional African thought.

The traditional African view of the self can be re-conceptualised in a way that is consistent with the spatialisation metaphor. As mentioned previously, traditional healers are capable of speaking in various voices. When a voice representing *izinyanya* is speaking, it does so independently of the person's view. That is, it represents its own perspective. This is supported by the view that the voice of *izinyanya* can be at odds with the individual's, leading to a struggle between the two. It is envisaged that, with the assistance of a highly trained spiritual medium, dialogical interchange can be entered into with the spiritual voice. In the case of people being called to become healers, against their wishes, *izinyanya* can be addressed directly, through the medium of *impepho*³. During this process, a request is made that they give the person leave to lead a life of his or her own. This lends support to the view that a framework for a dialogical, communicative, and spatialised view of the self already exists in traditional African thought.

For the purposes of studying morality, polyphony makes it possible to ask individuals to situate themselves temporarily and spatially in relation to their narratives. Asking individuals to reflect

³ Holy incense, used by diviners and elders, for traditional religious purposes.

on their thoughts at the time of the dilemma can elicit the temporal dimension. These thoughts can then be compared to their present thoughts. Both time positions could be endowed with a voice (e.g. What was your view then? What is your view now?) Spatially, individuals could be asked to take other persons' perspectives. Respondents could be asked to view a situation as a man, a woman, or someone from a different religion or culture, endowing each position with a voice of its own. In this way, dialogue between different perspectives becomes possible. The meaning attributed to moral dilemmas arises from the dialogical contact between various selves, located differently with respect to space and time (Holquist, 1990).

The Innovative Quality of the Dialogical Self

Another feature of the dialogical self is its innovative character (Hermans, 1996, 1997). The dialogical self is always challenged by questions, disagreements, and confrontations. This interchange of voiced perspectives leads to re-positioning, and eventually, innovation or self-renewal (Hermans, 1996). This is in line with the behaviour of characters in a polyphonic novel, who continually ridicule attempts to turn them into voiceless objects at the mercy of others' finalising descriptions. That is, the characters "sense their own inner unfinalizability, their capacity to outgrow . . . from within and to render *untrue* any externalizing and finalizing definition of them" (Bakhtin, 1984/1993, p. 59, emphasis original).

Because of its ability to position and re-position itself, the dialogical self cannot be described exhaustively. Always oriented toward the future, the dialogical self is continually challenged to reposition itself in the light of new information. This is consistent with Bakhtin's (1984/1993) argument that "nothing conclusive has yet taken place in the world, the ultimate word of the word has not yet been spoken, the word is free, everything is still in the future and will always be in the future" (p. 166). For example, when a rural man who believes in patriarchy comes to study in a modern university in a major city, he is soon challenged to re-consider his position in the light of new information (e.g. gender equality). The innovative nature of the dialogical self has several implications for moral experience. From a dialogical perspective, an authentic moral

position cannot be finalized. It is always open and willing to consider moral voices emanating from a diversity of perspectives.

The Dialogical Self: Implications for the Study of Morality

Dialogism entails the requirement that moral and ethical discourse should pay attention to voices of local bodies. The term “bodies” in dialogism is not limited to physical bodies (Holquist, 1990). It incorporates “bodies” of knowledge, such as indigenous psychologies (Heelas, 1981; Ho, 1998; Kim & Berry, 1993; Kim, Park & Park, 2000) and traditional knowledge systems (Myers, 1988). It is indeed these knowledge systems that constitute collective voices essential to individual development. Cultures differ in their orientation of the self with respect to dimensions such as time and space (e.g. see Hall, 1983; Hall & Hall, 1990; Lock, 1981). Space and time are indispensable components of the dialogical self. A truly dialogical account of human functioning should consider how local time, space and self orientations influence psychological processes.

At the same time, we need to capitalise on the *relational* and *innovative* nature of the dialogical self. According to dialogism, meaning emerges at the point of contact between “bodies” of knowledge (Holquist, 1990). A more fruitful approach is the one that explores processes that *happen at the point of contact between indigenous and other (e.g. Western) knowledge systems.*

The following section discusses a dialogical account of moral reasoning. It is argued that moral action should be understood as an appeal to another being. The role played by internalised “audiences” in moral reasoning, be they significant others or beliefs systems, is discussed, as are issues of power and authority in moral dialogue. Finally, questions of accountability and responsibility in moral action are discussed.

Moral fairness: An Appeal to Another

Given that dialogism rejects the view that moral decisions are made with reference to internally-held principles, how can people's appeals to moral fairness be understood? From a dialogical perspective, appeals for moral fairness represent an attempt to accomplish something with another person (Day & Tappan, 1996). Dialogism implies that one is always talking to someone. Speech is an attempt to craft a belonging. It is an attempt to enter into a dialogue with, and be recognized by, another. Moral action does not ensue from internally-held principles. It represents "an ongoing dialogue among different stories, scripts, and scenes . . . that can be put into practice by the people who take them as tools, their guides for joining, reproaching, and in other ways mending and breaching relationships" (Day & Tappan, 1996, p. 9).

Day and Tappan (1996) thought that cultural tools such as stories mediate moral life in four related ways. First, in the face of a moral dilemma, possible courses of action are rehearsed with the aid of stories. Second, stories are employed to communicate what has happened to figures comprising the moral audience, that is, those who are important in the psychological world of actors. Third, actors use stories to arrive at their own understanding of what has happened or what might happen. In the process, they "induce their audience (and interviewer) to participate in both the production and the comprehension of what is intended in the act of speech" (Day, 1991, p. 38). The meanings of our actions are not arrived at in isolation. They are "recruited," as it were, from the audiences comprised of those who matter to us. This results in the expansion of the repertoire of our own possible interpretations. Lastly, individual narratives do not take place in a vacuum, but follow the common discursive "forestructures" (Gergen & Gergen, 1988) or cultural narratives that both enable and constrain everyday thoughts, feelings and experience (Bruner, 1990). In the process of rehearsing their stories, actors compare them against the dominant narratives in their social world (Day, 1991). An individual is never alone in moral decision-making.

The Moral Audience

Drawing from empirical interviews with children, adolescents and young adults, Day (1991) argued that moral life does not only take the form of stories, but is also theatrical. Actors rehearse their stories before real or imaginary audiences of significant others in their lives. The concept of the “moral audience” follows directly from the multifaceted, spatialised self proposed by Bakhtin (1986). It is also consistent with the idea of the “addressivity” of voices, discussed earlier. Even as one grows, one continues to tell stories, to consult, rehearse, and be accountable to someone. The difference is that the audiences we appeal to may change or become associated with different meanings over a period of time. Moral development, argued Day (1991), ensues from the “formation and transformation of moral audiences” (p. 28) before whom one most centrally acts.

It will be remembered that “addressivity” extends to the “third party,” such as systems of ideas and beliefs. Belief systems are also capable of acting as moral audiences. For example, we may judge our actions with reference to religious or cultural beliefs and traditions. For the purposes of studying culturally-situated conceptions of morality, the pertinent question is: Who constitutes audiences in people’s moral deliberations? We can also investigate tensions arising from struggles between different, perhaps equally important moral audiences. I have in mind here tensions between responsibilities toward the community and the need to pursue an individual career. Africans with a Western-type education are likely to experience such tensions (Mkhize & Frizelle, 2000). The relevance of audiences before whom one acts could also differ according to one’s gender and relative positioning within a group. This study explores some of these issues.

Hierarchy and Power in Narratives of Moral Conflict

It has been argued that in the process of growing up, we assimilate ways of seeing the world and ourselves that are dominant in our speech communities. In turn, these may be reflected in our speech. Ventriloquation is a process by which voices of groups and institutions are reflected in

individuals' utterances. Dialogism makes it possible to study the origins of the way people speak about themselves, what is ventriloquated in their speech, because it focuses on voiced perspectives. Dialogism addresses questions such as: *Whose* voice(s) dominate moral narratives? *Whose* story is being told? From *whose* perspective? By carefully studying the way people speak, we may identify influences of gender, class, hierarchy and power in narratives of moral conflict (Brown & Gilligan, 1991).

Given that the dialogical self is composed of multiple voices, the question of the power dynamics between them becomes inevitable. Hermans (1996) and Hermans and Kempen (1993) have argued that dialogue not only creates a differential ordering of positions, but it also “restricts the multiplicity of possible positions in the process of socialisation” (Hermans & Kempen, 1993, p. 73).

The voices comprising the dialogical self are not necessarily equal in importance. Dialogue is not only ordered horizontally, but vertically as well (Hermans, 1996). Referring to Linell's (1990) work, Hermans (1996) and Hermans and Kempen (1993) showed that conversations between interlocutors are characterized by the emergence of symmetrical and asymmetrical (dominance) relationships between voices. Although conversation usually requires turn taking between interlocutors, and hence alternation between dominance versus subjugation; it is possible for one conversant, or groups, to hold perpetual power over others. This follows from the fact that positions emerging in a conversation “can be partly understood as reproductions of culturally-established and institutionally congealed provisions and constraints on communicative activities” (Hermans & Kempen, 1993, p. 73).

It is important to examine dominance and power relations in this study, given the argument that morality in traditional African communities is dependent on social position and personal attributes such as gender and age (Verhoef & Michel, 1997).

Responsibility and Authorship

The fact that dialogism locates meaning between self and other raises the question of individual responsibility or accountability in moral action. Ascription of responsibility is essential to any moral theory. If meaning emerges between self and other, can we hold individuals accountable for what they do? Despite the dialogical nature of our being, Bakhtin (1990) maintained that we nevertheless assume responsibility or “answerability.” The world is always addressing us and we are alive and human to the extent that we respond to it (Holquist, 1990). Addressivity calls upon us to respond to issues confronting us in life. Our responses begin to take a form or text of their own, as we engage with the world (Holquist, 1990). We inevitably express our point of view in the way in which we respond to life challenges.

According to Tappan and Brown (1989) and Day and Tappan (1996), authorship is expressed in the stories we tell. Just as an author of a novel expresses his or her *point of view* in the process of writing it, so too do we express our responsibility in the moral stories that we tell. In telling a story, we adopt *a point of view* or position in relation to the events in the narrative as a whole. Clark and Holquist (1984) maintain that responsibility comes about as a result of individuals making meaning for themselves out of the voices that initially exist between self and other:

The means by which a specific ratio of self-to-other responsibility is achieved . . . comes about as the result of efforts by the self *to shape meaning out of the encounter between them*. What self is answerable to is the social environment, what self is answerable for is the authorship of its responses. (pp. 67-68, emphasis added)

To say that we are responsible for our actions does not mean that Bakhtin is abandoning the notion of dialogism (Tappan, 1991a, 1991b). Dialogism is very complex: it eschews simple, “either-or” distinctions. Individuals are responsible for their actions not because they are autonomous, independent agents. The very act of entering into *dialogue presupposes a position or voice that has been formed as a result of exposure to others’ voices*. However, because the dialogical self is not fixed, people remain open to change resulting from exposure to others



voices. When individuals claim authority for their perspectives, they do so in the context of other voices, which have now been appropriated to become their own:

The importance of struggling with another's discourse, its influence in the history of an individual's coming to ideological consciousness, is enormous. *One's own discourse, one's own voice, although born of another or dynamically stimulated by another, will sooner or later begin to liberate themselves from the authority of the other's discourse.* (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 348, emphasis added)

This citation highlights that although our perspectives are born of others' voices, it is through a process of selective assimilation that we can merge these perspectives, resulting in a voice of our own.

Bakhtin's (1981) distinction between two types of discourses, namely *authoritative* and *internally-persuasive* discourses, further illustrate authorship. Authoritative discourse is the word of authority or tradition. Transmitted from the distant past, it is accepted wholeheartedly, without scrutiny. It demands unconditional allegiance, and refuses to be challenged. Therefore, it constitutes monologue, rather than dialogue. For example, an imposition of theories of morality and ethics derived mainly from the West on indigenous people, without taking into account local understandings of these concepts, constitutes an authoritative discourse between different bodies of knowledge.

Moral autonomy is achieved when one speaks with an *internally-persuasive* voice. Initially, the word is on the borderline between self and other, it "is half someone else's" (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 293). Moral development involves a selective assimilation of others' voices, thereby making them one's own. *Internally-persuasive discourse* permits individuals to engage in a dialogue with other internally-persuasive voices. This results in new meanings. Individuals are responsible for their thoughts and actions, to the extent that these are populated with their own intentions and accents (Bakhtin, 1981; Day & Tappan, 1996).

The idea of a struggle between various discourses opens up the possibility of studying the hegemony of one moral voice over another. Narratives of moral choice are populated with different moral voices, struggling for hegemony within the individual. Which of these voices is authoritative? Which ones are internally-persuasive? Can the social languages or speech genres from which the voices emerge be identified? How do individuals deal with conflicts between various moral perspectives? The purpose of this study is to shed light on these questions. Conceived dialogically, morality ensues from the struggle of being an embodied and relational being. It is an attempt to find one's voice, in a world populated by a myriad of competing voices.

Conclusion

Beginning with the work of Vygotsky, this chapter introduced socio-cultural approaches to morality and the self. Vygotsky maintained that cultural tools, such as language, mediate psychological functions. Vygotskian approaches to psychology, however, tend to be limited to interpersonal and small group interactions. Bakhtin's dialogism accounts for the role of collective voices in psychological mediation. Dialogism acknowledges that people can vacillate between multiple perspectives. Viewed from this perspective, moral development results from a selective appropriation of others' voices. Once appropriated into the self, these voices serve as "audiences." People appeal to these "audiences" in moral decision-making. One of the purposes of this study is to investigate personal tensions resulting from dialogical interchanges between multiple moral audiences.

CHAPTER 5

NARRATIVE AND MORAL JUSTIFICATION: HERMENEUTIC APPROACHES

This chapter reviews the main criticisms against narrative approaches to moral thought. The cornerstone of these criticisms is that the rejection of metanarratives of legitimation, in favour of local ones, makes it impossible to adjudicate between various moral points of view. Drawing from the hermeneutics of Wittgenstein (1953), Gadamer (1975) and Habermas (1984), it is argued that theorizing about the diversity of moral points of view, without resorting to moral relativism, is possible. The above-mentioned hermeneutic traditions maintain that criteria for adjudicating between opposing moral claims are arrived at intersubjectively, through dialogue. These criteria emerge from a group's shared background practices and traditions. Moral relativity can be avoided because background cultural practices arise in response to common human problems. It is therefore possible to understand others' background practices with reference to our own.

Two main hermeneutic approaches that have addressed the *process* by means of which we can understand others' way of life are discussed: Gadamer's fusion of horizons of understanding, and Habermas's discourse ethics. The strengths and weaknesses of each position are discussed. Following Ricoeur (1979), it is argued that a truly moral point of view should always remain *open* to alternative ways of seeing the world.

Narrative Approaches: An Overview of Criticisms

One of the major contributions of narrative approaches to the study of moral development is the rejection of the idea of a disinterested knower. From a narrative point of view, the self is relational, contextual and mediated by language. Because the self is contextual, narrativists argue that moral theory should take local narratives into account. This position has led to the criticism that narrative approaches prefer local to grand narratives. Universalists have argued that by

rejecting grand narratives, in favour of local ones, narrativists make it difficult to distinguish between right and wrong, acceptable and unacceptable narratives (Kahn, 1993; Madsen, 1992; Puka, 1991a, 1991b). Of late, the most vehement criticism has come from Lourenço (1996), who has argued that rejection of grand narratives may lead “to nihilism in terms of action, and to opportunism in terms of justice and interpersonal relationships” (p. 84). He supports this argument by referring to the meta-ethical assumptions comprising the cornerstone of Kohlberg’s theory. Kohlberg (1984) discussed a number of interdependent assumptions that formed the basis of his empirical investigations. These were drawn mainly from analytic philosophy. Because the assumptions are interdependent, only the three that bear most directly on questions of validation will be discussed: legitimacy, commensurability and universality.

The assumption of legitimacy is concerned with criteria for distinguishing between legitimate (acceptable) and illegitimate (unacceptable) moral positions. Universalists have argued that rejection of grand narratives of legitimation leads to fragmentation and discontinuity between moral points of view (Lourenço, 1996; Puka, 1991a). They maintain that without universal narratives, it is difficult to determine if one way of life is preferable to another. Lourenço opined that to discount grand narratives amounts to embracing the view that all moral narratives are of equal value. Such a position, he argued, makes it impossible to define a truly moral point of view.

Closely related to the assumption of legitimacy is commensurability, namely the comparability of various conceptions of morality. For example, if there are no grand narratives, how do we compare the moral conceptions of different cultural groups? For example, should a group that endorses female circumcision be left uncensored, because the practice is “moral” within its own sphere? For universalists, multiple moral narratives make it impossible to make comparisons between differing moral points of view.

Finally, traditional Kohlbergian approaches first assume that the meaning of morality is universal across cultures. They then proceed to demonstrate universality in the empirical realm. Proponents

of Kohlberg's theory argue that this approach is preferable because it avoids contradictions and moral opportunism. Universalism appeals to meta-ethical assumptions that go beyond the contextual and cultural origins of a theory (Helwig, Tisak, & Turiel, 1990). Further, the assumption of universality requires that stages of moral development occur in the same sequence across cultures.

Universalists attempt to avoid incommensurability between different moral narratives, by appealing to context-free criteria. They conveniently ignore the fact that grand narratives of legitimation have not been empirically demonstrated. If one begins with an assumption that the meaning of morality is universal, and then proceeds on this basis to investigate morality empirically, should one hold on to the original assumption if group differences are observed? How are these group differences to be explained?

Furthermore, Kohlberg (1984) derived his meta-ethical assumptions from Western moral philosophy (e.g. Frankena, Kant, and Rawls). Would the study of Buddhism or African moral philosophy have led to the same meta-ethical assumptions? What if, like the philosophers that Kohlberg relied on, the "grand narratives" turn out to be Western narratives? Hekman (1995) has emphasized the need to be aware of dominant moral codes, whose hegemony is maintained by powerful public institutions. Similarly, Bakhtin (1981) was highly critical of universal languages. He argued that such languages often operate in the midst of heteroglossia. In the study of morality, it could be argued that "grand narratives" of legitimation also exist in the midst of heteroglossia: the marginalised local codes of indigenous and other minority groups. The critical question is not whether a trans-historical code exists. Rather, researchers need to address the dialogical relationship between dominant and marginalised moral codes. That is, given that some codes are dominant, and others marginalised, how can we establish validation criteria that are fair to all? From the point of view of this study, the first step is to *identify* marginalised codes. It is only then that a meaningful dialogue between codes can take place.

Despite the above-mentioned criticisms of universal approaches to morality, the problem of the normative justification of moral action remains important (Gardiner, 1992). How are our actions to be evaluated, given the absence of trans-historical, pre-given normative criteria? Although this issue cannot be addressed comprehensively in this thesis, possible hermeneutic approaches that can be built upon to establish criteria to distinguish between legitimate and illegitimate moral narratives are introduced. Given that there are multiple conceptions of morality, I am of the view that moral universality *emerges* from the common human predicament (Kempen, 1996; Lock, 1981). Every cultural group encounters life challenges during the course of its development. These are challenges such as birth, death, and other life transitions. Although groups handle these challenges in different ways, it is possible to understand others' ways of life, by engaging dialogically with them, and by comparing others' to our own. Hermeneutic approaches renounce absolute truth, but avoid moral relativism by postulating historically situated conditions that, although culturally-variable, nevertheless make intersubjective agreement, and hence meaning, possible (Matthews, 1994; Widdershoven, 1992).

Hermeneutics' Response to Moral Relativism

As mentioned previously, it is beyond the scope of this study to comprehensively address the problem of relativism and objectivity in moral theory. Nevertheless, developments in the hermeneutic tradition are discussed. These developments can enable us to establish criteria with which to distinguish between acceptable and unacceptable moral narratives. The discussion draws mainly from the anthropological hermeneutics of Wittgenstein (1953), Gadamer's (1975) historical hermeneutics, Habermas's (1984) critical hermeneutics, and to a limited extent, Ricouer's (1979) philosophy. Although differences exist between these traditions, for the purposes of this study, and following Gardiner (1992), Pirog (1987), and Widdershoven (1992), they will be treated as variations of the same theme.

The above-mentioned philosophers renounce absolute truth but also maintain that intersubjective agreement can be arrived at through dialogue. These philosophers' ideas are also related through

the concept of life-world: the shared background activities or cultural traditions that give rise to our actions. However, there are some notable differences of approach, especially between Gadamer and Habermas. The two disagree on the role of tradition in the justification of actions. Although these differences are touched upon, the purpose of this discussion is not to resolve them but to shed more light on the problems involving moral justification. It is argued that an emancipatory hermeneutics should guide decision-making by critically relating our actions to the past, while recognizing that human experience should always remain *open* to new and multiple ways of conceiving the world (Bakhtin, 1984/1993; Ricoeur, 1979).

The Anthropological Hermeneutics of Wittgenstein

The purpose of this section is to draw parallels between Wittgenstein's argument that there are multiple language games, and the narrativists' position that there is a diversity of moral discourses (Hekman, 1995). Wittgenstein rejected the view that there is a universal, metanarrative: he argued that there are multiple "language games," each justifiable with reference to criteria internal to the game itself. Justification is to be found in a group's form of life: the taken-for-granted background social practices and cultural traditions. Due to the shared nature of human life, it is possible to understand others' forms of life by relating them critically to our own. The relationship between Wittgenstein's (1953) philosophy and moral justification is discussed with reference to two critical terms: language games and forms of life.

Language Games and the Forms of Life

Wittgenstein's later philosophy, his notion of language games in particular, provides a way for theorising about the diversity of moral voices (Hekman, 1995). The term "language games" is better explained with reference to Wittgenstein's understanding of the relationship between words or concepts in a language and objects of experience. In *Philosophical Investigations*, Wittgenstein (1953) argued that language does not have a unitary essence that can be captured in a single formula. This position is different from that of logical positivists, who thought the task

of philosophy was to find the exact meaning of words. For Wittgenstein, the function of language is not to name objects: each word is capable of assuming a number of meanings, depending on the context in which it is used. Language is not uniform: we use it for a host of different activities, such as reporting, describing, taking orders and expressing emotions. The various usages of linguistic expressions, as well as the functions they fulfil, Wittgenstein called “language games” (van der Merwe & Voestermans, 1995; Widdershoven, 1992). Wittgenstein (1953) maintained that “the term ‘language *game*’ is meant to bring into prominence the fact that the *speaking* of a language is part of an activity, or a form of life” (par. 23, emphasis original). In other words, the speaking of a language cannot be separated from what we are trying to achieve through speech, nor can it be thought of independently of the social and cultural traditions of the people speaking it. The use of the term “game” does not mean that the activities described by Wittgenstein are frivolous (Grayling, 2001). The term highlights that words in a language, like a variety of games, can be thought of in terms of a network of complicated, overlapping relationships. To understand the meaning of language, we have to come to terms with the way in which words are used in multiple contexts.

The concept of language games can be illustrated with a hypothetical example of a simplified communication between a builder (A) and an assistant (B), in a society with a limited vocabulary (Wittgenstein, 1953). When A says “pillar” or “block,” B responds by passing the required building material on to A. The words “pillar” and “block” do not just refer to the building material in question, but the entire network of responses or social relations between the builder and the assistant. A’s speech and B’s responses derive their meaning from the context of what they are doing (e.g. building a house), and not from a correspondence between the word “pillar” and the building material. Wittgenstein (1953) argued that children learn their native language through practical activities, such as the one described above. That is, to know a language is to know the network of responses and practices associated with its use.

The emphasis on social responses into which language is woven puts Wittgenstein’s position close to Vygotsky’s (Shotter, 1993a; Shotter & Katz, 1996). Vygotsky (1978) maintained that

meaning is present in the social act before we can become consciously aware of it. For example, he attributed the origin of the gesture of pointing to a child's unsuccessful attempt to grasp something. The child's action (pointing), however, engenders a response from others: it becomes a gesture for them. The meaning of the act of pointing is rooted in spontaneous reactions. It cannot be understood independently of the context and social responses it elicits from others. Similarly, the notion of language games indicates that word meaning is contextual: words get their meaning from the way we use them at crucial moments, to make differences in the flow of events in the activities in which we are involved (Shotter & Katz, 1996).

Wittgenstein (1953) further argued that within a language there are contained a multiplicity of language games, such as the language describing the relationship between the builder and the assistant described above, the simplified language used by children, and acts such as shouting and giving orders. The term "language games" draws our attention to the fact that "the *speaking* of a language is part of an activity, or a form of life" (Wittgenstein, 1953, par. 23, emphasis original). That is, words do not refer to objective entities "out there," rather, speech is embodied and relational: it points at the different ways by means of which we engage with each other and the world. Put differently, we make contact with the world through language games or forms of talk available in our social and cultural communities (Shotter & Katz, 1996).

It has been mentioned that the speaking of a language cannot be separated from a form of life. Specifically, what are the forms of life that Wittgenstein is referring to? In order to answer this question, it is important to point to the bi-directional relationship between language games and a group's collective *representation of reality*. Language games cannot exist independently of social practices represented normatively by a group (van der Merwe & Voestermans, 1995; Widdershoven, 1992). Language games cannot function without "a set of publicly accepted rules or culturally determined conventions which govern the use of language within that language-game" (van der Merwe & Voestermans, 1995, p. 33). Forms of life are the practices and traditions assumed by a group of people in the language game they use (Grayling, 2001). Put differently, they are the taken-for-granted, "hurly burly" or "background" social activities that

reflect a group's shared way of life. The relationship between experiential forms of life, and language-games through which their meaning is expressed, is one of interdependence. The shared experiences constituting specific forms of life precondition the meaning and people's understanding of the language-games. That is, language (in a language game) finds meaning against a group's background forms of life. On the other hand, forms of life have to be expressed through language. Without the sharing of meaning through language games, our life experiences "would be senseless and would not lead to the collective formation of the forms of life in which our common experience of the world is encapsulated" (van der Merwe & Voestermans, 1995, p. 34). From a Wittgensteinian point of view, moral justifications have to be understood with reference to criteria emanating from a group's form of life.

Forms of Life and Moral Justification

Does the argument that words derive meaning from the way they are used compound the problem of moral justification? It should be noted that although language is central to human functioning, Wittgenstein (1953) maintained that one cannot resort to linguistic justifications indefinitely. Eventually, when justifications have been exhausted because one has reached bedrock and the spade is turned, one can only state, "this is simply what I do" (Wittgenstein, 1953, par. 217). In other words, our actions are eventually justified by the surrounding circumstances: the presuppositions, social practices or forms of life, constituting a group's tried and trusted patterns of dealing with life's problems (van der Merwe & Voestermans, 1995; Widdershoven, 1992). Our judgments are not determined by the actions of isolated individuals, but by the background social activities shared by a group:

How could human behavior be described? Surely only by sketching the actions of a variety of humans, as they are all mixed up together. What determines our judgement, our concepts and reactions, is not what one man [sic] is doing now, an individual action, but the whole hurly-burly of human actions, the background against which we see any action. (Wittgenstein, 1953, par. 567)

The process of growing up consists of learning the form of life of one's cultural community. To be a competent member of one's society, indeed, to be an *umuntu* (moral human being), requires one to be competent in the language games of one's culture. The view that our actions gain their meaning from cultural forms of life, is consistent with the notion of the self-in-community, discussed in Chapter 3. According to the notion of the self-in-community, to be a human being is to know and observe obligations and responsibilities associated with one's position in society. A person who has failed in these obligations is considered a "non-human person" (*aku si muntu*). This means such a person lacks the moral sensibilities associated with mature personhood. In other words, the person's social relations and practices are at odds with the forms of life; the cultural practices and traditions that serve as a reference for moral conduct in his or her group.

Psychological concepts, including morality, can be understood as language games (Hekman, 1995). Hekman (1995) has argued that if one begins with the assumption that moral discourse constitutes a language game, then different moral voices, such as care (Gilligan, 1977, 1982) and justice (Kohlberg, 1981, 1984) are predicated on different forms of life. The voice of care prizes caring and interdependent relationships, while the voice of justice extols autonomy and independence. Because there are multiple moral language games, it is possible to envisage the voices of care and justice existing simultaneously. This position is consistent with Gilligan's (Brown & Gilligan, 1991) thinking. It is incumbent upon researchers, therefore, to identify moral languages rooted in culturally varied forms of life. The present study investigates moral language(s) informed by a philosophical framework that prizes interdependence between the individual and the community.

The possibility of diverse moral languages does not mean that moral action cannot be justified. Unlike traditional cognitive approaches, which seek to establish universal narratives of legitimation, a Wittgenstenian account holds that justification is grounded in the forms of life (Hekman, 1995). Morality is not relative because forms of life provide "*the inherited background against which . . . [we] distinguish between true and false.*" (Wittgenstein, 1953, par. 94, emphasis added)

Understanding Others' Form of Life

The notion of forms of life provides a partial answer to the problem of moral justification. It could be argued that there are indeed cultural variations among different forms of life. If moral action is justified with reference to criteria internal to the language game itself, does it follow that what is morally right is determined by my group's way of life? Can people in one group understand others' forms of life? Can we establish a common basis for distinguishing between acceptable and unacceptable moral narratives?

Although forms of life are likely to differ between groups, there is nevertheless a unity brought about by, to borrow Heidegger's (1962) terminology, our "thrown-ness." This term refers to the fact that existence is not a matter of choice. As human beings we *find* ourselves in the world, a situation that requires us to engage in thought and action to solve problems we encounter. These are problems emanating from our corporeality, such as self-definition (e.g. what does it mean to be human?) and orientation with respect to time and space (Lock, 1981; Kempen, 1996). For example, spatial orientation requires all human beings to travel physically from one place to another. However, there are historical variations in what is regarded as an adequate means of transport (Widdershoven, 1992). Because forms of life arise in response to basic life problems, it is possible to arrive at universal but variable understandings of human phenomena, or what Shweder and Sullivan (1993) called "universalism without the uniformity" (p. 514). This is the reason that Wittgenstein (1953) rejected the argument that alien forms of life cannot be understood. He maintained that "the common behavior of mankind [sic][serves as a] system of reference by means of which we interpret an unknown language." (par. 206)

Although we can understand others' forms of life with reference to our own, the *process* by which this is to be attained has not been spelt out. There is also a possibility that one cultural group will impose its form of life on others. We have already seen the hegemony of the language game of justice in the study of morality (Hekman, 1995). In an attempt to shed light on the problem, this thesis discusses two main hermeneutic approaches that have examined this issue.

These are Gadamer's (1975) historical hermeneutics, in particular his notion of the "fusion of horizons" of understanding, and Habermas's (1984, 1990) theory of discourse ethics. Although there are some notable differences of opinion between these scholars, they nevertheless share with Wittgenstein the notion that language and historically constituted life forms are important determinants of meaning and human rationality (Gardiner, 1992; van der Merwe & Voestermans, 1995; Widdershoven, 1992).

Gadamer and Habermas: The Intersubjective Nature of Knowledge

It is beyond the scope of this work to fully articulate Habermas's and Gadamer's positions on the question of rationality and universality. Only the essential elements of their positions are discussed. The purpose is to point to aspects of their theoretical works that can be built upon to justify moral claims. To begin with, an overview of their criticism of instrumental reason in social science inquiry is presented.

Basing his work on the philosophy of Aristotle, Gadamer (1975) drew a distinction between two kinds of knowledge: *techne* (technical knowledge) and *phronesis* (practical-moral knowledge). Habermas (1984) agreed with Gadamer that practical-moral knowledge should be at the forefront of human inquiry. However, despite the importance both attached to *phronesis*, they differed in their appropriation of the term. Their differences centred on the role of tradition in practical decision-making. Before looking into their understanding of the role of tradition in decision-making, it is important to touch briefly on the major differences in meaning between *phronesis* and *techne*.

Technical and Practical-moral Knowledge

Aristotle drew a distinction between two kinds of knowledge systems: *techne* and *phronesis* (cited in Bernstein, 1976). *Techne* refers to knowledge associated with expert mastery of activities or techniques that are essential in order to create products or artifacts. It is routine

knowledge that, once mastered, can be applied with little or no variations to any situation at hand. An example is the skill associated with the work of an artisan, such as a cabinet-maker (Bernstein, 1976; Gadamer, 1979). Once artisans have mastered the basic skills required for cabinet-making, they can apply them routinely to make any cabinet. *Phronesis*, on the other hand, is the ethical know-how: the knowledge essential to accommodate one's actions to others and to respond appropriately to the demands of one's environment. Unlike objects in the natural environment, human beings acquire knowledge of themselves, and hence become who they are, through their actions or deeds. *Phronesis* can thus be regarded as the knowledge one has of oneself as an ethical being. It is concerned with social relations and practices. Although both forms of knowledge involve a practical element, it is *phronesis* that is relevant to narrative approaches to morality. Its relevance is highlighted by the differences between the two.

Differences between *phronesis* and *techne*.

Gadamer and Habermas criticized modern society for failing to distinguish between *techne* and *phronesis* (Richardson & Fowers, 1998; Richardson & Woolfolk, 1994). According to Aristotle (cited in Bernstein, 1976), *phronesis* involves an aspect of wisdom that cannot be found in *techne*. Once a technical skill has been mastered (*techne*), it can be applied habitually, without taking the specifics of the situation into account (McGee, 1998). *Phronesis*, on the other hand, requires one to make context-sensitive judgments (Gadamer, 1982). For example, despite the presence of codified rules, *phronesis* comes into being in courts of law when judges apply their wisdom by softening or intensifying an instance of law, in accordance with the demands of a particular situation (Gadamer, 1982). The practical wisdom required of *phronesis* distinguishes it from *techne*, which involves a habitual application of rules following a predetermined plan. Moral decision-making does not involve a habitual application of previously learned skills to cases of the same kind. Hence, it cannot proceed in a technical manner. Moral decision-making involves *phronesis*: the ability to vary one's judgments in order to respond to the demands of the situation.

Another essential feature of *techne* is that it is characterised by a *constant relationship* between means and ends. Once artisans have mastered their trade, they need not re-evaluate their technique every time it is used to make a similar product. That is, *techne* does not require a re-appraisal of the technique each and every time it is used. The outcome of technical applications is always known in advance. Technical procedures exist which, if followed, result in a table, no matter the piece of wood used, no matter the craftsman. *Phronesis*, on the other hand, is manifest in our day-to-day encounters in a myriad of ways. It is not defined by a predetermined *telos*, but the constant re-appraisal of both the strategies for attaining goodness, as well as the re-appraisal of the *potential for good in particular circumstances* (Gadamer, 1982). As a result, the right means to realize ends cannot be known in advance because the ends are not fixed but variable, and are often being questioned (Gadamer, 1982; McGee, 1998). This distinction is important for moral decision-making, which requires agents to respond to concrete life situations, rather than to apply abstract or technical principles.

Phronesis also differs from *techne* in that it is not just something that one knows: it is part of one's Being or selfhood. Practical-moral knowledge requires us to display aspects of ourselves in all situations and social relationships. We come to a better understanding of ourselves through engagements with others and the world. Thus, argued Gadamer (1982), the *phronimos* "does not know and judge as one who stands apart and unaffected; but rather as one united by a specific bond with the other" (p. 288). *Phronesis* is characterized by a connected way of knowing: one is not detached from the subject to be known. Technical knowledge, on the other hand, is something that one knows apart from oneself. For example, artisans do not have to relate aspects of their lives to the technical know-how of their trade. That is, they do not have to approach life as cabinet-makers in everything they do (Gadamer, 1982). This is an important distinction for the study of morality: to be moral cannot be separated from selfhood. This being the case, it is essential to begin with a culture's understanding of personhood in studying moral decision-making.

Gadamer (1982) and Habermas (1984) argued that the priority given to purposive rationality has led to technical issues being confused with practical-moral ones, in many spheres of life. We use purposive rationality to maximise control of events toward desired end-states. Decisions based on purposive rationality rely primarily on the calculation of costs and benefits (Richardson & Woolfolk, 1994). Due to the over-reliance on purposive rationality, knowledge has become more technical in nature. The result is that where one would have expected to find a *phronimos*, one finds instead people whose expertise is based on the techniques of their respective fields (McGee, 1998). Such an approach to science reduces practical-moral concerns to matters of technical application (Bernstein, 1976). A current example of this is found in HIV/Aids prevention programmes in Southern Africa. These programmes promoted the use of condoms (a technical solution) without taking into account the cultural, gender and power dimensions among people using the intervention device. Practical-moral knowledge would have paid attention to processes such as how gendered subjects negotiate sexuality, given historical and culturally-sanctioned power differences.

Although Gadamer and Habermas agree that our judgments are guided by practical knowledge, they differ on how *phronesis* operates in real life. For Gadamer (1975), *phronesis* has an ontological dimension: it is concerned with how individuals make concrete decisions in the context of their traditions and culture. For him, the validity of our actions results from the process he calls the *fusion of horizons of understandings*. For Habermas, on the other hand, decision-making is guided by rules and principles that can be agreed to by *everyone* in a given situation. Our decisions, he maintained, are binding because they have been subjected to communicative practices governing discourse ethics.

Gadamer's Historical Hermeneutics

We have seen that Gadamer emphasized *phronesis*: the ability to make judgements according to the exigencies of a situation. Given the variability that goes with context, how is the validity of judgements made under these circumstances to be determined? Furthermore, can these

judgements be universal and binding upon all participants? Like Wittgenstein, Gadamer (1975) argued that “reason exists for us only in historical concrete terms” (p. 245). As a result he rejected the idea of an abstract universal standard. The validity of our interpretations, he maintained, is grounded in tradition. It results from our participation in the activities of our culture. Tradition provides a worldview or perspective that frames our understanding. The following section explores the historical nature of understanding. It also looks at how this process is mediated by language through the fusion of horizons of understanding. Following Hekman (1995), parallels are drawn between Gadamer’s historical hermeneutics, and Gilligan *et al.*’s (1990) argument that moral theory should pay attention to the multiple ways in which we construe experience and hence, reality.

The historical nature of understanding.

Gadamer (1975) maintained that understanding is inescapably immersed in tradition. That is, understanding is mediated by presuppositions about the nature of knowledge that are shared by a historical community. Tradition can be understood with reference to Heidegger’s notion of the forestructure of understanding (Johnson, 2000). For Heidegger, understanding is based on what we already know, a fore-having that serves as a framework to guide our interpretations and actions. For example, when we are ill, we go to a physician, who diagnoses the illness, and prescribes treatment, according to established medical understandings of the time (Johnson, 2000). A person who has a different understanding of illness may go to a traditional healer or spiritual medium instead. In both cases, patients’ and healers’ responses are not arbitrary. They are guided by traditions or pre-suppositions of the communities in which they belong. Because we are immersed in traditions of our communities, Gadamer (1975) argued that it is impossible to stand outside of a situation so as to have an objective understanding of it.

One of Gadamer’s concerns was the rehabilitation of the concept of prejudice. Beginning during the Enlightenment period, the idea of prejudices was associated with unfounded, irrational judgements. Authority emanating from tradition was frowned upon: everything had to be

subjected to the objective canons of reason. Contrary to this tradition, Gadamer (1975) uses the term “prejudice” to point at the fact that understanding is always subject to *effective history*. That is, understanding always occurs within an historical context. Effective history “determines in advance both what seems to us worth enquiring about and what will appear as an object of investigation” (Gadamer, 1975, p. 264). From a Gadamerian point of view, arbitrariness of meaning and moral relativity can be avoided because understanding is rooted in the historical interpretations of a given object. This position is in contrast to traditional approaches to morality, which maintain that mature moral understanding results from the acquisition of abstract principles, independently of context and time. Gadamer’s position that understanding is community-based makes his views consistent with Wittgenstein’s (1953), who argued that background forms of life provide a basis for interpreting human actions. If understanding is historical, it follows that morality should be studied contextually, beginning with pre-suppositions constituting the background understandings of communities under investigation.

The linguistic mediation of human understanding.

If our interpretations are determined by the traditions in which we are immersed, cannot tradition give rise to different interpretations? If cultural traditions could be interpreted differently, how does one decide between different interpretations? Furthermore, how does one distinguish between historically-situated understandings that throw more light onto the meaning of a text from those that obscure its meaning? These are some of the issues raised by Warnke (1987) with respect to Gadamer’s hermeneutics. She points out that Gadamer (1975) addresses some of these questions by appealing to the linguistic character of all understanding. Although all knowledge is situated in tradition, the tradition is constructed through language to form what Gadamer (1979) called “hermeneutics’ claim to universality” (p. 87). He argued that the human world is constituted through language. In other words, it is not possible for human understanding to occupy a position outside of language, which can then be translated back into language. Language is not just a tool that we use to speak with each other about the world “out there.”

Quite to the contrary, the world itself is constituted through the medium of language. Language provides a horizon of human experience: a worldview through which we experience and express ourselves in new ways (Gadamer, 1975).

Given the multiplicity of worldviews or horizons expressed in various languages, is it possible to arrive at a universal human understanding? Gadamer (1975) argued that various languages might be regarded as variations of “one logic of experience” (p. 413). In other words, we cannot conclude that reason is divided because there are many languages. It is our finiteness, the particularity of our existence, that is captured in the variety of languages. Gadamer’s position that language arises in response to problems posed by our concreteness brings him closer to Wittgenstein. As argued previously, although Wittgenstein’s forms of life differ between groups, they nevertheless arise in response to basic human concerns shared by all. Because there is “one logic of experience,” we can understand others’ languages by relating them to our own.

Although language arises in response to common human concerns, we nevertheless respond to these in culturally-varied ways. For example, although all groups have understandings of what it means to be human, concepts of personhood vary from culture to culture (Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Shweder & Bourne, 1991). Understandings of what it means to be a man or woman in society also vary. Consider, for example, a group that practises female circumcision. Someone who has not undergone this practice may be considered “incomplete” as a woman, and “unfit” for marriage. Do others have a right to intervene in this group’s way of life? Can Gadamer’s hermeneutics help us to arrive at a non-relative understanding of what is the right thing in such circumstances? How does truth emerge from various languages and forms of life? Gadamer (1967, in Widdershoven, 1992) argued that we should not conclude that reason is divided simply because there are a variety of languages. The historical and linguistic nature of our situation provides a perspective or horizon, from which it becomes possible to understand the other. By engaging in what he called “the infinite conversation oriented to truth” (Gadamer, 1967, cited in Widdershoven, 1992, p. 111), it is possible to arrive at a universal understanding of human

experience. Gadamer envisaged this happening through a dialogical process known as the “fusion of horizons.”

The “fusion of horizons” of understanding.

Genuine understanding according to Gadamer (1975) emanates from a dialogical process, resulting in what he called the fusion of horizons. This is a special type of dialogue, undertaken with a genuine and sincere attempt to understand the other. Although understanding is inevitably situated in prejudices, Gadamer (1979) maintained that we must nevertheless “seek and acknowledge the immanent coherence contained within the meaning claim of the other, [and be prepared to] recognize the other as right and to let him [sic] or it prevail against me” (p. 86). Genuine dialogical understanding involves an attempt to view something from the perspective of another. The process entails entering into a conversation with a view to reaching consensus. In the example of female circumcision mentioned above, we can envisage proponents of this practice arguing that it enhances their daughters’ prospects of marriage. They may even argue that many women in their community support it. On the other hand, detractors may argue that it amounts to genital mutilation and also results in complications during childbirth. We can envisage that participants in the debate are motivated by the desire to reach consensus, and are hence open to the possible truth of their opponents’ perspectives. When the fusion of horizons is reached, both groups of participants emerge with a broader and enhanced understanding of the various issues surrounding female circumcision.

The notion of reaching an enhanced understanding begs the question whether the fusion of horizons should result in substantive agreement? Warnke (1987) addressed this issue at length. She argues that the fusion of horizons does not entail concrete agreement with the other’s position, although this is not ruled out. Rather, conversation oriented to truth is entered into in order to understand another. The fusion of horizons reflects an advanced understanding of the issues in question. This results from a critical examination of one’s perspective in relation to the claim to truth emanating from the other’s views. From a Gadamerian perspective, the fusion of

horizons of understandings helps us to address the problem of relativity owing to differences between groups' forms of life.

A Critique of Gadamer's Historical Hermeneutics

Where does Gadamer's historical hermeneutics take us, insofar as the problem of the normative justification of moral action is concerned? Gadamer has been criticized for allegedly denying the role of critical reason in the justification of actions (Gardiner, 1992; Johnson, 2000). His position that tradition serves as a basis for determining the validity of our claims, it is argued, makes it impossible to adjudicate between rival interpretive traditions. Questions have also been raised about the relevance of Gadamer's hermeneutics to emancipatory ethics, given his emphasis on tradition (Hekman, 1995; Johnson, 2000). Does it mean that oppression of groups such as women and minorities, can be justified with reference to tradition? *Whose* tradition should be used as a frame of reference? These questions highlight the need to address the relationship between tradition and critique in the normative justification of moral action.

It should be noted that although Gadamer maintained that human understanding is shaped by tradition, he did not advocate an uncritical acceptance of authority. He also maintained that "it is a grave misunderstanding to assume that emphasis on the essential factor of tradition which enters into all understanding implies an uncritical acceptance of tradition and sociopolitical conservatism" (Gadamer, 1979, p. 87). Gadamer realized that prejudices may impair our recognition of a historical experience. For this reason he urged that pre-understandings be subjected to criticism, in order to distinguish between true and false prejudices. True prejudices facilitate our understanding of the text by *connecting it to a shared body of meanings that define particular linguistic communities*. False prejudices, on the other hand, result in misunderstanding because they are not tied to a community's shared body of knowledge (Gardiner, 1992). By adopting an interpretive stance distant to one's position, Gadamer (1975) maintained that false prejudices could be filtered from true ones. Distancing involves questioning one's prejudices. It involves temporal and other forms of distancing, such as having an encounter with someone who

has a different point of view (Johnson, 2000). Gadamer envisaged that this process would lead eventually to enhanced understanding and elimination of false prejudices. However, he remained convinced that the process *cannot be undertaken from outside tradition*. Historical understanding is neither possible nor meaningful if we situate ourselves beyond tradition (Gadamer, 1979). Because there cannot be a universal, Archimedean point from which the authority of tradition can be evaluated, Gadamer concluded that eventually tradition should be accepted as the only judge of a community's self-understanding. The correctness of our interpretations rests, finally, on their conformity to the horizons of meaning or prejudices shared by a linguistic or cultural community.

Gadamer's position that prejudices can be overcome through communication has been criticised by Habermas (1971) and Wellmer (1974), amongst others. They have pointed out that language and tradition are not neutral media, serving only to facilitate understanding. Language and tradition can serve ideological purposes: for example, both can be used to legitimize relations of domination and oppression between groups. Also, one can refer to the literature pointing at the inferiority of women and minorities to justify the exclusion of these groups from positions of public responsibility (Bing & Reid, 1996). One can also quote statistics pertaining to women who are reportedly happy with female circumcision, as a reason to uphold this practice. Habermas (1970), in particular, argued that Gadamer's acceptance of tradition as the final arbiter of claims to truth renders historical hermeneutics incapable of dealing with what he called systematically-distorted communication. This is a distortion of communication that is carried through language and tradition. It may involve coercion and force. Habermas agrees with Gadamer that understanding is mediated by language, but criticises him for what he regards as an idealistic treatment of language. For Habermas, Gadamer's treatment of language fails to take into account the oppressive nature of social relations (Gardiner, 1992).

Habermas's concerns find support in the work of Ricoeur (1973a). Ricoeur maintained that, contrary to what Gadamer's hermeneutics would have us believe, ideology "cannot be treated as a particular case of misunderstanding, amenable to interpretive methods which would dissolve it

into a higher understanding” (p. 159). Thus, although Gadamer’s hermeneutics can deal with contingent misunderstandings, it remains helpless in the face of institutionalised disruption of communication through ideology (Gardiner, 1992; Ricouer, 1973b). Attention to ideology and other forms of domination is important to ethical theory, especially given the race, gender and economic disparities in society (Ansah, 1991; Bing & Reid, 1996). Habermas sought to address the problem of systematically distorted communication by appealing to standards of practical reason, which he argued, exist independently of tradition. His position is spelt out in the theory of discourse ethics.

Habermas’s Discourse Ethics

Habermas (1984) attempted to avoid the constraints of both instrumental rationality and moral relativism by positing generic features of dialogue that can be used to test the validity of truth claims. He argued that a theory of moral development is doomed to failure from the start if it does not address the question of the universality of the moral point of view (Habermas, 1990). In his theory of discourse ethics, Habermas introduced what he called the principle of universalization (U). This principle is based on presuppositions of argumentation, called communicative action, which supposedly transcend cultural perspectives.

The principle of universalization (U).

Habermas’s principle of universalization (U) is based on his theory of discourse ethics (D). Discourse ethics can perhaps be better explained with reference to Kant’s categorical imperative. Kant held that the test of the universality of the moral point of view is the categorical imperative. The categorical imperative requires one to act only on the maxim by which one can at the same time will that it should become a universal law (Kant, in Campbell & Christopher, 1996). As we have seen with Kohlberg’s, moral theories derived from Kant’s position have been criticised for relying on abstract, formal criteria to justify moral claims. In the previous chapter, it was shown

that abstract moral principles are insensitive to context: they are difficult to apply to concrete, real life cases.

Habermas (1990) sought to replace the Kantian categorical imperative with the theory of discourse ethics. This theory holds that “for a norm to be valid, the consequences and side effects that its *general* observance can be expected to have for the satisfaction of the particular interests of *each* person affected must be such that *all* affected can accept them freely” (Habermas, 1990, p. 120, emphasis original). In other words, valid norms are those that can be freely accepted by all participants, irrespective of their role in dialogue. Participants must also be willing to accept the consequences emanating from the observation of these norms, without coercion. Habermas thus maintained that a universal moral point of view is still feasible. Universality, however, is not arrived at monologically or behind the Rawlsian veil of ignorance. It results from practical discourse (D), and requires reciprocal role taking. In other words, D requires participants to place themselves in the place of *everyone* else and to be prepared to accept the outcome of the dialogue no matter what their own position. Discourse ethics is procedural: it establishes communicative presuppositions to be made to ensure the impartiality of the process by which claims to validity are tested. These presuppositions are discussed in Habermas’s (1984, 1990) theory of communicative action.

The theory of communicative action.

Discourse ethics is guided by argumentative presuppositions spelt out in Habermas’s (1984, 1990) theory of communicative action. According to communicative action, speakers are rational if they can substantiate their positions or actions with reasons. These reasons should be convincing and acceptable to anyone taking part in the dialogue. Furthermore, participants accept that consensus will be achieved not through coercion, but argumentation. It is the force of the better argument that should win.

Communicative action presupposes an *ideal speech situation*. This is an argumentative situation characterised by a free exchange of ideas. The ideal speech situation requires human beings to be fully responsible to one another, and to be prepared to consider as many perspectives as possible, in the search for truth. It is assumed that speakers can participate equally in dialogue, have a right to initiate, question or defend any normative claim, without being dominated by others (Bernstein, 1976). Communicative action requires participants to be oriented toward understanding, and not success. Orientation toward success is driven by the need to have one's arguments prevail over those of others. It may result in actors trying to influence each other strategically through weapons, threats, or other coercive means, if argument fails. Orientation toward reaching understanding, on the other hand, requires actors to remain sincere in their attempts to reach consensus (the truth). They justify their positions with reasons, and not arbitrary authority (Habermas, 1990).

Communicative action also assumes that actors share a background lifeworld. The lifeworld consists of the cultural practices that are taken as givens in dialogue. Habermas (1990) recognized that human rationality is embedded in the social, cultural or natural environment. Rationality is not only the ability to support one's position with evidence, it also involves justification of one's actions against a reservoir of culturally transmitted knowledge. The lifeworld "offers a storehouse of unquestionable cultural givens from which those participating in the communication draw agreed-upon patterns of interpretation for use in their interpretive efforts" (Habermas, 1990, p. 35).

It should be noted that Habermas (1990) drew a distinction between what he called the "*lifeworld*" and the "*world*." The *lifeworld* comprises undifferentiated, traditional worldviews, passed down from generation to generation. Undifferentiated worldviews, he maintained, are characterized by a mythical understanding of reality. They involve an uncritical acceptance of cultural norms and traditions. He gave an example of traditional societies' ways of life, whose understanding, he maintained, is tied up in myths, such that it is impossible to distinguish between subjective and objective understandings of the social and cultural worlds. A universal

moral point of view, he argued, requires that “the spheres of things about which we can reach a fallible agreement at a given point become detached from the diffuse background of the lifeworld with its absolute certainties and intuitive presence” (Habermas, 1990, p. 138). Habermas maintained that we can distinguish between undifferentiated worldviews, immune from critique, and decentered ones, arrived at intersubjectively through dialogue. Worldviews become decentered when they are freed from traditional forms of life, cultural heritage or political affiliation. Decentered worldviews are a product of dialogue and argumentation. Because they follow from a due process of dialogue, they are acceptable to all parties, irrespective of their value orientations. Our actions are justified against decentered worldviews, and not the *undifferentiated lifeworld*.

Decentered worldviews, in turn, become part of *world perspectives*. This refers to the background knowledge, assumed by the speakers, that provides a horizon for further argumentation. Should this background knowledge be called into question, discourse arises “to test the truth claims of opinions (and norms) which the speakers no longer take for granted” (Bernstein, 1976, p. 210). At this point, Habermas has diverged from Gadamer’s (1975) understanding of *phronesis*. Gadamer was more concerned with how *embodied beings* interpret tradition to make decisions *in the face of concrete problems*. His concerns were thus ontological. Habermas, on the other hand, is concerned with epistemological issues. For him, practical knowledge consists of commonly agreed upon rules and principles. Universal values are those that have been arrived at argumentatively, by engaging in communicative practices, freely acceptable to all, no matter what position they take in the dialogue. The background lifeworld, consisting of previously tested cultural knowledge, provides a reference system to test the validity of participants’ claims.

Discourse Ethics: An Evaluation

Habermas attempted to avoid the constraints of both instrumental reason and relativism by positing generic features of dialogue, to be used to test validity claims. His major achievement,

according to Richardson and Woolfolk (1994), was the substitution of a dialogical form of argumentation for the traditional silent thought-experiment, characteristic of the Kantian model of universality. That is, discourse ethics does not ask what an individual moral agent should or would will, without self-contradiction, to be a universal moral maxim. Instead, attention shifts to the norms or institutions that members of an ideal speech community would freely abide by in testing truth claims. The test of universalizability in discourse ethics is not a position of non-contradiction, but communicative agreement.

Discourse ethics also requires all actors to participate in the moral conversation. Participants have the right to raise objections and to defend their positions with reasons, without fear of victimisation. It thus offers a communicative model of rationality. Human rationality is defined as the ability to articulate and support one's position in dialogue, rather than the ability to decipher the truth, behind the veil of ignorance. The test of the validity of our claims to truth, according to Habermas, is not their conformity to universal, abstract principles. Members of an ideal speech community determine valid norms intersubjectively.

Although Habermas's emphasis on language is welcome, his notion of an ideal speech situation has been criticized. It has been argued that it is idealistic and impossible to realise in real life (Bernstein, 1976; Gardiner, 1992; Richardson & Fowers, 1998; Richardson & Woolfolk, 1994). The ideal speech situation requires a person to act according to rules and procedures that have been agreed to by *everyone*. It is not clear how these rules would guide moral agents in the face of real life, concrete dilemmas (Gardiner, 1992). Habermas interprets *phronesis* in a technical way, as the application of rules and principles. What is lost in the process is the explanation of how embodied moral agents use their wisdom to interpret tradition, in order to respond according to the demands of a particular situation. For Gadamer (1975), this is a critical component of *phronesis*. Thus, although discourse ethics is a welcome departure from Kantian-type thought experiments, others have argued that it amounts to a return to the categorical imperative. The only difference is that discourse ethics requires moral agents to act according to rules agreed to by all (Benhabib, 1992; Bernstein, 1976).

The ideal speech situation has also been questioned on the grounds that it is unrealistic to expect a macro-ethic to be developed through discourse in a context in which a significant percentage of the world lives in dire poverty (Dussel, cited in Mendieta, 1995). Can the poor contribute equally with the rich to this dialogue? It is also questionable whether the model of communicative action Habermas proposed is consistent with the values of the rest of the world. Is communicative action not modeled on the West's emphasis on reason? This position is by no means shared by all cultures.

Another problem with Habermas's discourse ethics is that it re-invents the Kohlbergian distinction between justice concerns and "matters of the good life." Discourse ethics requires that issues of justice, which can be settled by rational argument, be set apart from evaluative ethics. A truly moral point of view, argued Habermas (1990), requires that:

moral questions, which can in principle, be decided rationally in terms of criteria of justice or the universalizability of interests are now distinguished from evaluative questions, which fall into the category of issues of the good life and are accessible to rational discussion only *within* the horizon of a concrete historical form of life or an individual life style. (p. 178, emphasis original)

Consequently, Habermas (1990) argued that issues of care and responsibility, raised by Murphy and Gilligan (1980), are matters of personal decision-making, falling outside the domain of the moral. This argument results in the narrowing of the domain of the moral, and runs counter to the need to identify previously ignored or oppressed moral perspectives. As Benhabib (1992) has argued, the way the domain of the moral is defined, and the kinds of justificatory constraints that moral judgements should be subject to, are two different matters. That is, universalism in ethics should spell out *the procedures through which decisions are made, rather than specifying the domain of the moral itself*. The task for discourse ethics should be to spell out how procedural universalism can be applied to instances of care, rather than excluding care concerns from the domain of the moral (Benhabib, 1992). If we exclude care concerns, are we treating with respect the many who regard interpersonal responsibilities as truly moral? Ways of reaching agreement

are important in moral and ethical decision-making. They should not come at the expense of marginalising others' moral perspectives, however.

Despite the above-mentioned criticisms, Habermas's theory highlights the importance of criticism in ethical theory. The challenge is to develop a critical theory that is not distanced from moral agents' concrete historical circumstances.

Hermeneutics and Relativism: A Summary and Extension

Hermeneutic approaches provide fertile ground to theorise about the justification of the moral point of view. The philosophical traditions discussed above renounce the idea of absolute truth that has characterised logical positivistic social science. Wittgenstein (1953) emphasised the diversity of language games. This position is consistent with narrativists' contention that there are multiple moral discourses. Moral discourses find justification with reference to the forms of life, namely the background social practices and traditions shared by a group. It is possible to understand others' languages games (and hence, moral discourses) because forms of life arise in response to challenges faced by all cultural groups, in the course of their development.

To explore the process by means of which we can understand others' forms of life, I turned to the philosophies of Gadamer and Habermas. Both emphasize the practical nature of knowledge. However, they differ in how practical knowledge guides decision-making. Although dialogue is central to both, Gadamer regarded tradition as the ultimate judge of our interpretations. Habermas, on the other hand, saw tradition as a possible repository of untruths, a source of ideological forces operating in the interests of dominant groups in society. Gadamer's position is more consistent with the argument that morality should be concerned with how embodied, historical beings make decisions in real life. Habermas emphasized critique and universal standards, which position, unfortunately, led him to a narrow definition of morality in terms of only justice concerns. The crucial question, it would appear, is how to recognise the role of tradition in moral decision-making, while making it possible to adopt a critical distance to avoid

opportunism? It is beyond the scope of this work to address this question. However, hermeneutics can benefit from the philosophy of Ricouer (1973a, 1973b; 1979). Ricouer defended the view that hermeneutics can foster a critical distance from tradition without losing the hermeneutic character of understanding. This makes a hermeneutic critique of ideology possible.

Hermeneutics and Critical Distancing

Ricouer (1979) objected to Habermas's ideal speech situation, which he saw as a return to a monological social science. Nevertheless, he maintained that a hermeneutic critique of ideology is feasible. He agreed with Gadamer that our knowledge is rooted in tradition. However, he maintained that we ought to take a suspicious and doubting attitude toward what is handed down through tradition (Burkett, 1988; Gardiner, 1992; Ricouer, 1973a). The question then becomes one of what form critical distancing ought to take.

Critical distancing, or what Ricouer (1973a, 1979) called "distanciation," is made possible by polysemy. This is the potential of words in a language to have more than one meaning. Words have infinite possibilities. These possibilities emerge intersubjectively in a dialogue between two or more parties (Ricouer, 1973b). The polysemic character of language results in a "surplus of meaning," thus requiring an interpretive phase in order for the speakers to discern the meaning of a text of experience. This "surplus of meaning" makes it possible to avoid a reduction of meaning to a monological, ideological perspective (Gardiner, 1992). This becomes possible through "distanciation," a process by which one moves beyond what could be considered the "true" or "essence" of the meaning of a text of human experience, by relating that experience to various *historical, cultural and social contexts* (Ricouer, 1979).

To illustrate distanciation, Ricouer (1979) drew an analogy between written texts and human actions. He argued that the human actions become *distanced* from actors' immediate contexts and intentions, in the same way that literary works are interpreted in relation to context and time.

The meaning of biblical texts, for example, is not tied to the intention of the authors. Their meanings are debated taking into account context and time. Similarly, the meaning of human actions is not fixed by authors' intentions. Once performed, human actions can have consequences of their own, over and above whatever the actor might have intended. For the purposes of studying morality, this means that we cannot be content with what people say they meant (*intended*) when acting in a particular way. Our interpretations should take into account the actor's explanations, but also critically *relate* these to the social and cultural understandings of the time. This process involves a critical, dialogical encounter with multiple interpretive perspectives. In order to avoid the use of tradition for ideological purposes, people's accounts of their actions cannot be taken at face value, simply because they argue that these accounts are "indigenous" or "traditional." They need to be examined critically, in relation to the socio-cultural context. In addition, cognizance should be taken of the historical changes that have taken place as a result of exposure to various belief systems.

The importance of distancing in the examination of people's explanations of their actions is illustrated in the case of a Swazi man who sexually abused his 13-year-old daughter, impregnating her in the process (Hall, 2000). In his legal defense, he argued that it is the traditional custom of his clan for fathers to sleep with their daughters, in order to produce a male heir. He further justified his position by quoting from the Bible. It should be noted that he too draws from multiple perspectives to justify his actions (the traditional and the religious). In reaching its decision, the court considered testimony from groups of traditional elders and clerics. Both groups unanimously rejected the defendant's claim. This example shows that critical *distancing* applies to both Euro-American derived perspectives as well as those of traditional African origin. Without critical distancing, one runs the risk of having tradition used to justify certain groups' interests. The Relational Method, discussed in the next chapter, makes such *distancing* possible because it incorporates temporal, cultural and historical dimensions in interpreting narratives of moral choice.

Distanciation also means that human deeds can transcend the social conditions in which they occur. This happens as agents' actions are *recreated* and *related* to different social contexts and historical epochs. For example, researchers working in medical ethics can take the Tuskegee experiments (Kimmel, 1996) as a point of departure. Lessons drawn from these experiments can be used to inform the drafting of more humane codes of ethical conduct. For this reason, Ricouer (1979) argued that human actions, like written text, can become an "open work, the meaning of which is 'in suspense' . . . waiting for new interpretations which decide their meaning" (p. 86). *Distanciation* implies that objectivity in the human sciences cannot be fixed and timeless. It ensues from a dialogical process in which the meaning of human action is debated, taking into account its historical context. Objectivity is arrived at *intersubjectively* and argumentatively, by a community of interpreters. This process takes cultural and historical contexts into account.

Ricouer's notion of *distanciation* provides a basis for theorizing about a critical hermeneutics. It satisfies concerns raised by Habermas by emphasizing the role of critique in moral theory. However, Ricouer ties critique to concrete historical circumstances, rather than the ideal speech situation. Furthermore, the notion of the infinite possibilities of meaning places him much closer to Bakhtin's (1981) philosophical position. Bakhtin (1984) would also emphasize that whatever meaning is arrived at through dialogue this meaning cannot be absolute and finite. Ideological monologism can be kept at bay only by a critical hermeneutics that prizes dialogue over absolute knowledge (Gardiner, 1992).

Summary of the Literature Review and Context

The study began with a review of the context of moral development research. Studies showing that women and people from non-Western cultures do not attain the highest stage of moral thought, were reviewed and critiqued. It was shown that traditional approaches to morality *restrict* the moral domain to that which includes only justice concerns. Alternative conceptions of the moral are either ignored or considered irrelevant to ethical decision-making. It was also shown that these approaches are rooted in Western philosophical assumptions about personhood.

The rest of the world does not necessarily share these assumptions. To understand other cultures' conceptions of morality, an analysis of their philosophical assumptions about personhood and the nature of the world in general should be undertaken. An overview of traditional African approaches to personhood showed that they regard selfhood as rooted in community. Moral and ethical implications of this conception of selves were discussed.

Using Bakhtin's (1981) theory of dialogism, it was argued that the individualism-collectivism antinomy can be breached by turning our attention to the processes by means of which the voices emanating from the social world get transformed through mediation to become part of an individual's functioning. Hermeneutic responses to the problem of moral relativism were then discussed. The present study seeks to identify understandings of morality among *isiZulu* speaking South Africans. It also attempts to illuminate the relationship between gender and power in moral decision-making.

CHAPTER 6

METHOD

This chapter describes the method adopted in the study. It begins with a brief evaluation of traditional and hermeneutic methods that have been used to study moral development. The voice-centred, relational interview procedure, used for data collection and analysis in this study, is then presented. This method draws from a number of theoretical positions, such as the philosophical works of Dilthey (1979) and Ricoeur (1979), both of whom contributed enormously toward the development of a methodology that is appropriate for understanding lived aspects of human experience. Recently, the method has been enriched with concepts drawn from the literary writings of Bakhtin (1981), especially his notion of dialogism and *voice* (Brown & Gilligan, 1991). Having discussed how the method was applied, the present chapter addresses questions of reliability and validity in qualitative research. Finally, ethical considerations are discussed.

Methods in Moral Development Research: An Overview

Until recently, the most commonly used method in moral development research is the one originally developed by Kohlberg (e.g. Colby & Kohlberg, 1987a, 1987b). This method relies on using hypothetical moral dilemmas developed by the researcher. In order to provide a background to the voice-centred, relational method (referred to hereafter as the Relational Method), cognitive-developmental approaches to moral development research are discussed. The purpose is to show that, owing to their reliance on hypothetical moral dilemmas, these approaches are inappropriate to the study of experience-based moral phenomena. It is argued that the Relational Method is best suited to the study of situated understandings of morality because dilemmas are elicited from participants, rather than presented by researchers. This is particularly important when investigating moral experiences of a people whose voices have been hitherto largely excluded from social

science research (Gilligan, 1977, 1982; Verhoef & Michel, 1997). While the Relational Method may be relevant for studying real life moral dilemmas, the question of its appropriateness, in comparison to other hermeneutic-grounded methodologies (e.g. Packer, 1985), remains unanswered. Brief comparisons are drawn between the Relational Method and Packer's (1985) hermeneutic method. The latter is based on an analysis of real life interactions between actors. It is argued that the Relational Method is more appropriate because dilemmas are not defined or contrived in advance by the researcher. They are elicited from participants' experiences.

Kohlberg's Cognitive Developmental Method

Kohlberg's method relied on the use of a standard set of hypothetical moral dilemmas (Kohlberg, 1984; Nisan & Kohlberg, 1984). These dilemmas are posed to respondents, followed by probing questions. The most famous of these is the Heinz dilemma (Nisan & Kohlberg, 1984). Heinz's wife is sick with a rare form of cancer. A druggist has discovered a cure, but is charging an amount ten times what it cost to make the drug. The druggist refuses to sell the drug to Heinz at a reduced cost. Having presented hypothetical dilemmas to subjects, Kohlberg followed up with probing questions. An example is whether Heinz should steal the drug to save his wife's life? Participants' responses are then allocated a rating that places them in the preconventional, the conventional, or the postconventional mode of moral thought.

While Kohlberg deserves credit for almost single-handedly bringing the study of moral development to the forefront in psychology, his reliance on hypothetical scenarios makes it difficult to understand real life dilemmas, a major objective of the present study. The grounding of his approach in the Kantian tradition of the epistemic subject makes it difficult to apply in communities with a different, especially communal, orientation to life. Gilligan (1982) and Hekman (1995) have argued that morality and self are intertwined. There is no place for different conceptions of selves in Kohlberg's scheme. It

is perhaps not surprising that those who define the self mainly in relational terms, such as women (Belenky *et al.*, 1986; Gilligan, 1977, 1982) and indigenous communities (Ikuenobe, 1998, Ogbonnaya, 1994) have been found morally wanting in Kohlberg's scheme. Further, Kohlberg's emphasis on justice reasoning narrowed the domain of the moral considerably (Benhabib, 1992). The purpose of this study was to investigate participants' own *definitions* and *meanings* of morality, with a view to identifying marginalized moral voices. This requires a methodology that is sensitive to embodied beings, speaking about their dilemmas, within social and cultural contexts. Hermeneutic approaches are most suited to the study of situated, real life phenomena.

The next section discusses the hermeneutic methodology developed by Packer (1985). This method is based on the analysis of interactions between actors in a real life, conflictual situation.

The "Ready-to-Hand" Method

Packer (1985, 1989) has developed a hermeneutic methodology for studying moral reasoning. This method is based on Heidegger's (1962) three modes of engagement with the world: the *ready-to-hand*, the *unready-to-hand*, and the *present-at-hand*. The *ready-to-hand* mode reflects our day-to-day engagement with the world. We engage in this mode automatically, without deliberation. It involves activities such as talking to friends, using a tool such as a hammer, or driving a car. These skills are so over-practised that we are not fully conscious that we are using them. In fact, our ability to successfully carry out these activities depends on our non-awareness of them. Our performance is likely to be compromised if we consciously focus on them (e.g. focusing on shifting gears and engaging the clutch while driving a car, is likely to compromise one's performance).

We enter the *unready-to-hand* mode when we confront a problem, which results in a breakdown in our everyday practical activities. For example, in attempting to use a

hammer, we realise it is too heavy. Its weight now comes to the fore, whilst previously it was transparent. Even then, it is not the actual weight (e.g. so many kg's) of the hammer that is important, but the fact that one cannot use it to accomplish a particular task (Packer, 1985). Thus, an aspect of the hammer stands out against the background, which is the activity we are trying to accomplish.

The *present-at-hand* mode occurs when we detach ourselves from what is happening, in order to reflect theoretically on it. Logical analysis and calculation are engaged to solve the problem. For example, in the case of using a hammer, we begin to think about it as an object with weight and mass, independently of the situation (Packer, 1985).

Packer (1985) argued that the *ready-to-hand* mode provides the most direct access to human phenomena, because it involves practical everyday activity, free from theoretical reflection. Based on this mode, he has developed a methodology for studying moral conflicts arising from social interaction. He begins by video-recording conversations between participants in a conflictual social interaction (e.g. the Prisoners' Dilemma Game) (Luce & Raiffa, 1957). This is followed by the analysis of video recordings. *Valuative and moral positions*, such as talk about *trust* and *responsibility*, are identified as they *emerge* from conversations between participants. This method differs from Kohlberg's. Categories of moral experience are not fixed *a priori*: they are developed from the interaction itself.

Although this method is concerned with lived experience, it differs from the one adopted in the present study. The major difference is that the *ready-to-hand method* relies on situations contrived and structured by the researcher, such as the Prisoners' Dilemma game. As a result, the *range* and *depth* of moral dilemmas that emerge are limited. Although narratives do not capture dimensions of lived experience in the same way that video-recordings do, they nevertheless render important information on how individuals reflect on their experiences. Further, it could be argued that for moral and ethical

purposes, it is how individuals reflect on what they have done - the lessons learnt for future purposes - that is important. If one assumes that morality is about an understanding of *individuals' own understandings* of their lived experiences, then there is scope for interpreting narratives of real-life experience (Tappan, 1990). Interviews enable the researcher to inquire deeply into social and cultural influences which underpin moral-decision-making, one of the main objectives of the study. The multiple readings undertaken in the voice-centred, relational method facilitate identification of these influences.

The Voice-centred Relational Method: The Background

In this study, data collection and analysis were guided by the voice-centred relational method, originally developed by Brown, Gilligan and their colleagues (Brown, Debold, Tappan, & Gilligan, 1991; Brown & Gilligan, 1991; Brown, Tappan, Gilligan, Miller, & Argyris, 1989; Gilligan *et al.*, 1990). The method was developed to study the relationship between voices of *justice* and *care* in girls' and women's narratives of moral conflict. Others have since adapted it to investigate various aspects of moral development (Tappan, 1990, 1997b), childhood trauma (Geismar, 1996), motherhood and postnatal depression, and how heterosexual couples share housework and childcare responsibilities (Mauthner & Doucet, 1998).

How does one conduct research using the Relational Method? To begin with, participants are invited to tell a story involving a moral conflict or uncertainty in their lives. The intention, according to Gilligan *et al.* (1990), is "to provide a way for a reader to *tune his or her ear to the voice of a person telling a story* about moral conflict and to listen for voices of justice and care" (p. 94, emphasis added). The emphasis on attending to other people by listening to them is important in the study of those whose perspectives do not

form part of mainstream academic discourse. In listening to others, we affirm them as human beings.

The method is said to be “relational” because the act of telling a story implies an audience. Further, as we listen to another’s story, we can no longer claim to be neutral observers. However, we are moved or affected by their sufferings, sorrows, joys and achievements. Gilligan *et al.* (1990) have reflected on the shortcomings of methods that favour sight and vision for interpretation. These methods encourage objectivity and atemporality. In using the metaphor of voice and hearing, the Relational Method on the other hand draws our attention to human connection. It brings to the fore the various possibilities that can occur in a conversation with another. These include the potential for misunderstanding, mistranslation, disagreement and even indifference to another’s speech or plight (Gilligan *et al.*, 1990).

Connection with another’s experience is perhaps best exemplified by Sampson’s (1998) reflection on his reactions upon visiting Yad Vashem, a Jewish holocaust museum in Israel. Upon seeing carved on the wall the faces of children who had perished, and hearing the sounds of moaning voices, his first reaction was to flee. He wanted to get out of the place as fast as he could. It was only later, and upon further reflection, that he realized he was upset because he was reluctant to connect with the pain and suffering the children had endured. In other words, he was reluctant to understand the children’s plight on their own terms: pain and suffering. In the Relational Method, the interviewer tries to connect with narrators, in an attempt to understand them on their own terms. However, it is recognized that in listening to and interpreting others’ stories, we are influenced by values and assumptions of our own interpretive communities (Tappan & Brown, 1992). Immersion in interpretive communities is taken cognizance of by the metaphor of listening. Listening allows for the possibility of miscommunication or misunderstanding

arising from one's listening style, preconceived assumptions, and values (Gilligan *et al.*, 1990).

A question may be asked: why use stories? Story-telling as a research method finds support in the observation that narrative is an important medium by which people make sense of their lives (Dunne, 1995; Polkinghorne, 1988; Sarbin, 1986). Story-telling is also supported by Bruner (1990), Freeman (1997) and Mishler (1986), who argued that it is not only part and parcel of everyday conversation: interviewees almost exclusively respond to questions with narratives whenever an opportunity is given. Furthermore, in the process of storytelling, an opportunity is created for dialogue or engagement in the form of questions, requests for clarification, and even disagreement. White (1981) argued that narrative not only lists a sequence of events coherently; it also endows them with a moral point of view. Storytelling is also consistent with the African oral tradition (Verhoef & Michel, 1997). As a result, participants are less likely to feel alienated by an invitation to tell a story. This should lead, one may assume, to a better exposition of their voices or positions, given that they are responding in a medium that suits them better.

Using narratives is also advantageous because they provide a fruitful avenue for studying human experience in its historical and *cultural context, space and time*. A story is always told from the standpoint of the narrator, rather than the researcher (Gilligan *et al.*, 1990). This is important because narratives of moral development have been told mainly from the Western, male perspective (Gilligan, 1982; Gilligan *et al.*, 1990; Simpson, 1974). The Relational Method concentrates on practical, *lived* aspects of moral functioning, rather than abstract hypothetical dilemmas (Tappan, 1990). It attempts to highlight moral concerns as they *emerge* in people's narratives. Tensions and contradictions conveyed in people's stories are also noted. Unlike methods that use hypothetical dilemmas or situations contrived by the researcher, the Relational Method focuses on participants' dilemmas as they have occurred in *social and cultural contexts*. This makes it appropriate

for investigating culturally embedded constructions of moral experience (Brown & Gilligan, 1991; Tappan & Brown, 1992).

Another advantage of the Relational Method is that, built into the analysis, is an attempt to consider people's stories from many perspectives. Analysis involves reading a person's narrative four times, listening for different *voices* about relationships as these voices emerge in that person's narrative. The purpose is to explore the many positions from which stories can be told. Gilligan *et al.* (1990) conceived of the reading process as "looking through a different interpretive lens, each lens bring[ing] into focus different aspects of the narrative" (p. 99). Consider a narrative involving, for argument's sake, a woman who is positioned as inferior or powerless in her marriage. If interviewed, she may espouse a position that is consistent with traditional beliefs about women. She may even appear indecisive when asked about personal decision-making. Looking at her life with only one interpretive lens, powerlessness and indecisiveness come to the fore. However, when one approaches the interview from a different angle, one may learn that the woman has managed to raise her children through sacrifice, dedication and hard-work. If this was done under restrictive Apartheid conditions (if she is Black and lived in South Africa prior to 1994) and gender restrictions imposed by cultural norms, one can appreciate her efforts even more. The image of a powerless woman now shifts to the background, and a picture of a strong willed person emerges. If the researcher adopts another lens, let us say an "integrative" one, it would perhaps become clear that her indecisiveness, apart from being an indication of powerlessness, might be based on a model of decision-making that is communal, rather than individualistic (Gasa, 1999). By approaching her story from as many view-points as possible, the interpreter is now in a better position to elucidate meanings or voices that would have remained hidden, had only one interpretive lens been used. Application of the four readings to the present study is discussed below.

Theoretical Bases of the Method

I have emphasized that the Relational Method facilitates incorporation of African perspectives in theorizing the meaning of morality. Why is this the case? I shall argue below that this is because it is essentially rooted in hermeneutics, a discipline concerned with meaning and interpretation. The method is indebted to the hermeneutic philosophies of Dilthey (1979) and Ricouer (1979). Both philosophers worked toward developing a methodology with which to study practical human *experiences* and *meanings*, without having to resort to what they considered the “alienating objectivity” associated with natural scientific methods of inquiry. In the sections that follow, my intention is not to fully explicate the theoretical positions of Dilthey and Ricouer, rather it is to situate the method within a discipline concerned with human meanings. I shall also argue, albeit briefly, that the method’s emphasis on *polyphony* and *voice* makes it theoretically consistent with the dialogical conception of selves.

Influences of Hermeneutic Philosophy

Dilthey (1979) and Ricouer (1979) were concerned with developing a research methodology that captures the *meaningfulness* of human experience, what Heidegger (1962) called the “life-world” (*Lebenswelt*). Dilthey’s greatest contribution to the hermeneutic method was his notion of the hermeneutic circle: in order to understand complex human phenomena, one must enter into a special kind of relationship with a person’s experience. This involves an attempt to understand parts of the experience in terms of the whole, which in turn informs the understanding of the parts. For interpretive purposes, human experience must be moved from the realm of lived experience and must be captured symbolically in some way. Dilthey (1979) used the term “expression” to indicate human experiences that have been captured symbolically (Tappan, 1990). Human experiences or actions can be expressed through spoken or written language, and

other forms of communication, such as music, poetry and stories. In the study of moral conflicts, lived experience is *expressed* in the narratives or stories people tell (Tappan, 1990).

The Relational Method allows one to enter into a hermeneutic circle when interpreting narratives of moral experience. One begins with an analysis of the constituent parts of the interview (Readings 1 - 4). As one moves from one reading to another, a fuller picture of respondents' moral dilemmas, including social and other influences, begins to emerge. The readings are interdependent, rather than sequential. The way respondents speak about themselves (Reading 2) cannot be understood independently of their relationships with characters in the story (Reading 3: Self-in-relation). The position that the "I" takes is always in relation to other actors. For example, a narrator may express self-doubt or helplessness in relation to someone seen as more powerful. Relationships with others are themselves rooted in socio-cultural institutions and beliefs, such as family values and gender beliefs, which *prescribe* ways of relating to another person, given one's position. Socio-cultural institutions in turn reinforce and perpetuate ways of speaking about oneself (Reading 2). The circular nature of this process means that interview parts cannot be understood independently of the narrative as a whole, including its context (Brown *et al.*, 1989; Tappan, 1990).

Although lived experience could be studied through stories and other modes of human expression, studying it objectively, without losing its meaningfulness, remained a paradox. The paradox for Dilthey (1979) and Gadamer (1975) was that an attempt to objectively study, and hence arrive at theoretical explanations about human phenomena in general, would alienate (distance) them from the realm of *lived experience*. Ricoeur's (1979) major methodological contribution was in showing that objectivity in the human sciences need not subscribe to the natural scientific notion of a detached scientist. Unlike foundationalists (e.g. Hirsch, 1967), who argued that interpretation and objectivity reside

in the recreation of the *original meanings* of the author, Ricouer (1979), like Fish (1980, 1986), maintained that meaning is not fixed by authorial intent. The implication is that the quest for objectivity in the human sciences can no longer be limited to a re-discovery of the original meanings of the author or actor. On the contrary, objectivity is arrived at *communicatively*. It results from an intersubjective process by which interpreters enter into dialogue about human action, taking into account history, context, and time. Ricouer (1979) called this process *distanciation*.

The notion of distanciation implies that when studying morality, researchers need to appreciate that their research methodologies and conceptual categories are not value-free. These reflect values and assumptions of interpretive communities that have produced them. Consequently, it is imperative to stand back and reflect on the values and assumptions underpinning one's practice. As shown in Chapter 5, this involves a critical, dialogical encounter with others' interpretive perspectives. The Relational Method facilitates this process by recommending that narratives of moral choice be read several times, from many vantage points.

The Relational Method and Bakhtin's Dialogism

The Relational method is also consistent with the dialogical conception of selves. This finds support in the argument that the challenge facing psychologists extends beyond issues of group differences to a critical consideration of *positions* from which our theoretical observations are made (Gilligan *et al.*, 1990). This can be done by addressing questions such as: *Who* is observing *whom* in the social sciences? In whose *terms* and *interest* are these observations made? Does the researcher speak *with*, or *about*, participants? *Whose* story is being told, and under *what* social and cultural circumstances? (See Brown & Gilligan, 1991). The list of questions is endless. As we

pose these questions, our attention is drawn to power dimensions inherent in the act of speaking (Bakhtin, 1981). By attending to these questions, we begin to engage meaningfully with *speech genres* and *social languages* ventriloquated in individuals' talk. Furthermore, dialogism's cognizance of the co-existence of multiple voices facilitates incorporation of African perspectives as partners of Western voices, without falling victim to "either-or" explanations.

Having discussed the origins of the Relational Method, and its relevance to the African context, the question of its application in the present study will be addressed. First, the pilot study will be described, followed by the main study.

Testing the Feasibility of the Relational Method

Pilot interviews were conducted using an *isiZulu* version of Brown *et al.*'s (1989) Real Life Conflict and Choice Interview (Table 2. See Appendix 1 for *isiZulu* version). The advantage of a semi-structured interview is that, while it allows respondents to provide complex real life narratives, a degree of structure is retained to give direction to the process. It also allows the researcher to probe for clarification at different stages, whenever necessary. The purpose is not to *extract* information from interviewees, but to arrive at a *shared understanding* of how interviewees experience aspects of their own lives. The understanding is a shared one, in acknowledgement that interviewers participate in the process of generating meaning (Franklin, 1997).

Piloting and Adaptation

The author, with the assistance of a postgraduate student in Clinical Psychology, translated the Interview Guide into *isiZulu*. Translation focused on *meaning*, rather than linguistic equivalence between words. Particular attention was paid to the difficulty of conveying the concept of morality in an Nguni language. This was important because

there is no single word that neatly translates into “morality” in Nguni. Furthermore, regional differences in language usage are common. Code-switching, a common phenomenon among bilingual Black South Africans, exacerbated these differences. The purpose of the translation was to facilitate understanding, rather than to produce an “instrument” that was “psychometrically equivalent” to the original English version.

Table 2. The Real Life Conflict and Choice Interview

Introductory paragraph: Thank you for agreeing to this interview. As human beings, we are all now and then faced with situations in which we have to make decisions. This may emanate from our work, family situations, relationships, or other aspects of our lives. However, sometimes we may not be sure what to do. Could you please describe a situation in which you faced a moral conflict and you had to make a decision, but were not sure what to do? If you want to, take some time to think about the situation, and tell me when you are ready. (Follow up with probes):

1. What was the situation? (get full elaboration of story)
2. What was the conflict in this situation? Why was it a conflict?
3. In thinking about what to do, what did you consider? Why? Is there anything else you considered?
4. What did you eventually decide to do? (Explore the short term, long-term consequences of acting this way or that way, if not covered in above)
5. Do you think it was the right thing to do? Why/Why not?
6. What was at stake for you in this dilemma? What was at stake for others? What was at stake in general? What effect could/did the decision have on you as a person?
7. How did you feel about it? How did you feel about the others involved? Who came to your support at the time? How did you manage the conflict?
8. Is there another way to see the problem, other than the one you have described?
9. Consider the way you acted. What does it tell us about you as a person (or, a person who is _____). E.g., leader, woman, etc., depending on respondent’s position)
10. When you think back over the conflict you described, do you think you learned anything from it?
11. Suppose you were to face a similar situation in the future, would you still act the way you did? Why/Why not? Suppose the situation involved someone else (or another group), and not the person (group) you described. Would you still act the way you did? (exploring boundaries of morality)
12. Do you consider the situation you described a moral problem? Why/Why not? What does morality mean for you? What makes something a moral problem?
13. How does a person come to be a moral being? (Explore the role of family, ancestors, religion, and community in becoming a moral being, if these not volunteered spontaneously).

(Adapted from Brown *et al.*, 1989)

One of the major concerns at this stage was whether the questions would make sense to respondents who were not used to formal interviews, such as those with lower levels of education. In order to address this concern, the pilot study included participants of a lower level of education, whose daily engagements required little or no communication in English.

Six participants took part in the pilot study. Three of them (two females and one male) were employed as general workers (cleaners) by the local university. They ranged in age from 25 to 40. The highest level of education attained among them was Standard 6 (Grade 8). The remaining three were a female lecturer, a male lecturer, and a female postgraduate student in psychology (age range: 24-45). All respondents were Nguni-speakers (Five *isiZulu*-speaking, and one *isiXhosa*-speaking). Interviews were conducted in *isiZulu*, although in interviewing the latter three, English words were occasionally used together with *isiZulu* equivalents. This practice is consistent with the way African languages are spoken by most bilingual and multilingual youth and adults in South Africa. This phenomenon, known as code-switching, is well documented in the relevant literature (Kieswetter, 1995; Kunene, 1996).

Using an open-ended, semi-structured interview protocol as a guide (Table 2), participants were invited to tell a story involving a moral dilemma they had faced in their lives. The interviewer followed up with probing questions for clarification.

Contrary to my fears, the pilot study, including the interviews with general workers, proceeded without major difficulties. A few adaptations were necessary, however. Once the introductory paragraph of Table 2 had been read, a number of participants requested time to think about a relevant story. I therefore decided to include a sentence reassuring respondents that they could take time to think of a story, if they so wished. Three questions were added to the original Interview Schedule. These were Questions 9, 11 and

13. It was observed that some respondents reacted with surprise that some questions were asked at all. These respondents thought that some of the questions asked were about what they regarded as given, something that was understood by all. This was often the case with the question about why people should look after their (extended) families. Usually the response would be a counter-question such as: what kind of person does not honour the obligation to look after relatives? Such a response hints at respondents' understanding of what it means to be a person. Consequently, Question 9 was added, explicitly asking what the respondents learnt about themselves, given the way they responded to the moral dilemmas. Question 11 was added to explore how respondents would resolve a similar dilemma in the future, adding a *time* dimension to the conflict. Finally, Question 13 asked respondents to explain how a person comes to be a moral being. In particular, the role of *family, community and religious beliefs* in the process of moral becoming were explored.

The Main Study

The following section describes the main study. Sampling, procedure, research design, and analysis are discussed, as are matters of reliability, validity and ethical considerations.

Participants

Participants for this study were drawn from urban and rural areas in the province of KwaZulu-Natal. Sampling was of the nonprobability, *purposive* type (Maxwell, 1998; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Patton, 1990). In purposive sampling, the researcher is driven by the need to select information-rich cases which are then studied in depth. For the purposes of this study, participants in influential positions in their communities were identified (e.g. professionals, town councilors, elders, community and youth leaders). These participants were chosen because, by virtue of their responsibilities, they were likely to be challenged to make decisions impacting on others' lives. Sampling was also

influenced by the need to identify individuals representing predominantly traditional and urban ways of life. The choice of older people and people in influential positions was *theory driven*. Traditional African views on morality and personhood emphasise the role played by elders in modelling morally-acceptable behaviour. Furthermore, elders are regarded as repositories of cultural knowledge, and often serve as “community counselors.” They are consulted for advice and resolution of disputes between community members. They are thus a crucial source of information.

Experiences of people in influential positions (e.g. professionals) are likely to be different from experiences of those occupying less influential positions (e.g. general workers). For example, the former probably exercise more power, and are more independent in their work, than are the latter. Both Maxwell (1998) and Miles and Huberman (1994) emphasise the need to look at similar and contrasting cases in order to test the robustness of a theory or findings (maximum variation sampling). For this reason, the sample included younger and older participants of both genders. Among respondents were professionals, general workers, students and scholars and the unemployed.

Participants were identified through already existing networks between the university and surrounding communities. Members of staff in the university were approached to help identify key informants they had come to know through their community outreach programmes. Once interviewed, informants were asked to identify others who could provide valuable information, a procedure known as snowball sampling (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Patton, 1990). Sampling proceeded until redundancy of information was achieved (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

The demographics of the sample are shown in Table 3. The sample consisted of 52 participants. Of these, 29 (55.8%) were females, and the remaining 23 (44.2%) were

males. There were 48 *isiZulu* speakers, three *isiXhosa* speakers, and one respondent of Tswana origin. *isiZulu* and *isiXhosa* belong in one language group (*isiNguni*). The Tswana respondent was fluent in *isiZulu*. A total of 24 respondents (46.2%) were from predominantly rural backgrounds, while the remaining 28 (53.8%) were from predominantly urban areas. In the South African context, it is sometimes difficult to make distinctions between rural and urban dwellers. During the Apartheid era, it was common for many Blacks to have two residential areas (one closer to the cities, for work purposes, and the other in a rural areas where they were supposed to be permanently domiciled). As a result, all “urban” respondents spent parts of their lives in rural areas, but had subsequently come to settle permanently in urban areas. Similarly, “rural” respondents spent some time in urban areas but considered themselves permanently settled in rural areas. The urban sample was highly educated compared to the rural sample. It consisted of professionals including psychologists, university lecturers, social workers, lawyers, students and a few unemployed men and women. The rural sample had a few professionals (mainly teachers), students, and older men and women.

Table 3. The Demographics of the Sample

	<u>Urban</u>		<u>Rural</u>	
<u>Men</u>		<u>Women</u>	<u>Men</u>	<u>Women</u>
5 professionals	8 professionals		2 professionals (teachers)	2 professionals: teacher &
4 self or unemployed	3 general workers		2 unemployed elders	a high school matron
3 students/scholars	5 students/scholars		2 general workers	2 unemployed elders
			5 students/scholars	2 general workers
				7 students/scholars

Procedure

Appointments were scheduled telephonically or through home visits. Wherever possible, participants were interviewed in their offices or residences, in an effort to minimize power differences between them and myself. The study was introduced as an attempt to understand people's experiences of real life moral dilemmas. Participants' concerns and questions about the study were addressed at this stage. The researcher conducted all interviews. They were tape-recorded with participants' permission. As recommended by Brown *et al.* (1989), interviewees' judgments about situations were followed up with probing questions. Attention was paid to language indicative of moral injunctions, such as the use of *ought* statements. Respondents were probed in particular about significant others, real or imaginal, who had a bearing on their decision-making in the face of a moral dilemma.

Sometimes participants used idiomatic language to describe experiences of moral conflict. While this added depth to emerging meanings, it was important to double-check that my understanding of idioms co-incided with their correct meaning as used by the participants. This was achieved by giving a verbal summary, and checking if it was consistent with participants' meaning.

Interviews varied in duration from 45 to 75 minutes. Interviews with older respondents took more time, as cultural rules of etiquette had to be observed. An attempt was made to transcribe interviews within two days after they were conducted. Unfortunately, this was not always possible, due to the timing of appointments. Where this was achieved, I added my impressions of what was happening at various stages of the interview while the encounter was still fresh in memory. Personal impressions were put in parentheses. After each interview had been transcribed, a contact summary sheet (Miles & Huberman, 1994) was completed, noting main concepts, themes, issues and hunches that emerged (Appendix 2). Responses that called for further clarification from respondents were noted

in the contact summary sheet. Where it was possible and necessary, brief follow up appointments of about 15 - 30 minutes were made with respondents to clarify issues identified during the transcribing phase. Ten follow-up interviews were conducted.

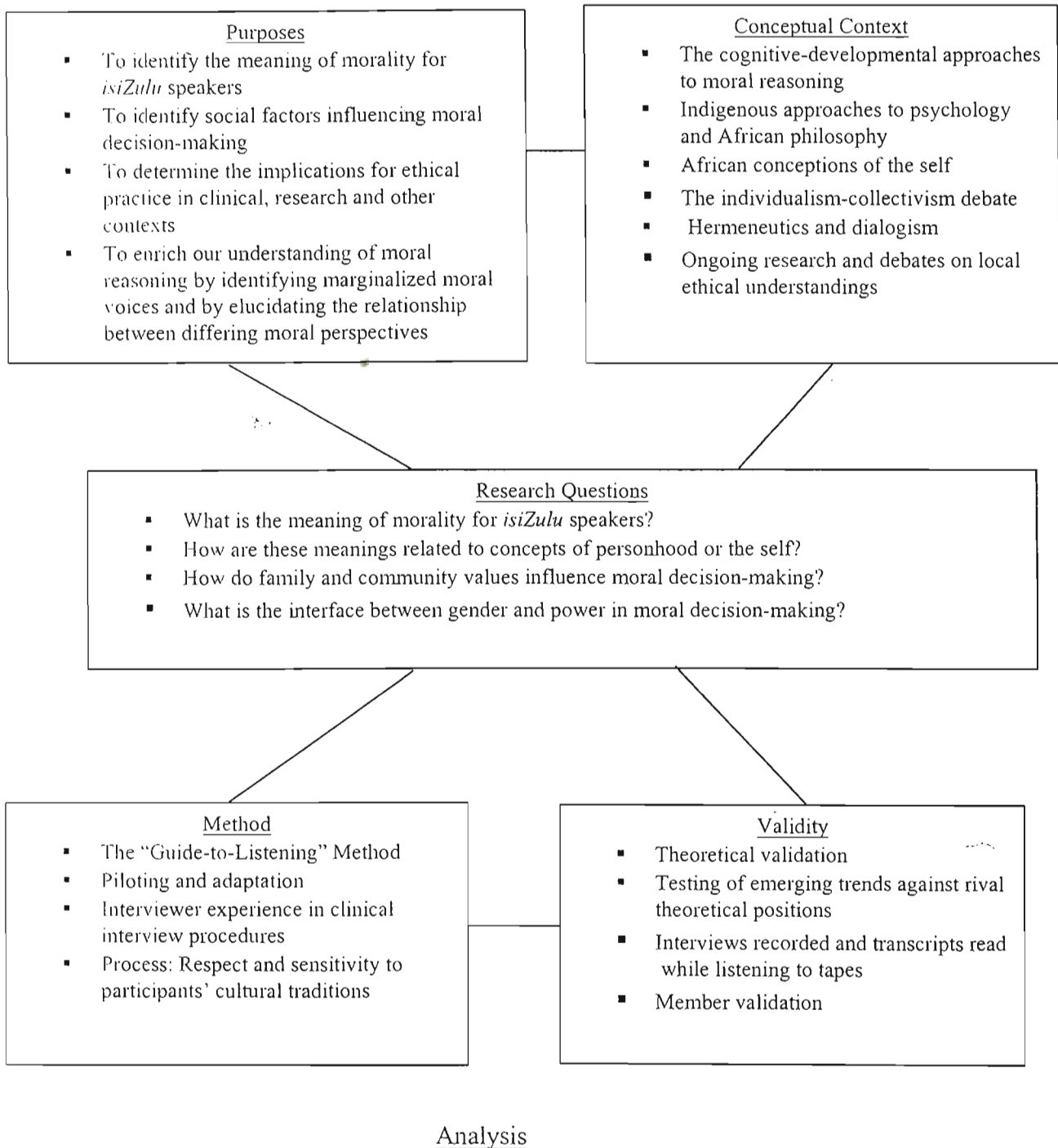
Research Design

Research design is conceived differently in qualitative research as opposed to quantitative research. Maxwell (1996, 1998) has argued that design can be regarded as a coherence between various components of a study, namely the way these components are related to one another. Although similar models of qualitative research designs have been discussed (e.g. Janesick, 1994; Patton, 1990), this study relied mostly on Maxwell's because he has clearly articulated the relationships between various components of a study. He has developed an *interactive* model of research design, consisting of five main components: purposes of a study, its conceptual context, research questions, methods employed and validity considerations.

The *purpose* of a study is its ultimate goal, what it intends to illuminate. It incorporates the practices the study seeks to influence. The *conceptual context* refers to its theoretical background, such as preliminary work in the field. It incorporates researchers' observations and experiences. *Research questions* address specific issues the researcher seeks to understand by conducting the study. *Methods* refer to techniques used to collect and analyse data. Finally, *validity* explores alternative explanations of findings as well as potential threats to the validity of conclusions (Maxwell, 1996, 1998). The extent to which these five components are related to each other, constitutes the design of the study.

The purpose of the current study was to investigate the meaning of morality in a sample of Black African, *isiZulu* speakers. Figure 2 illustrates the design of the study, with reference to the components discussed above.

Figure 2. The Design of the Study

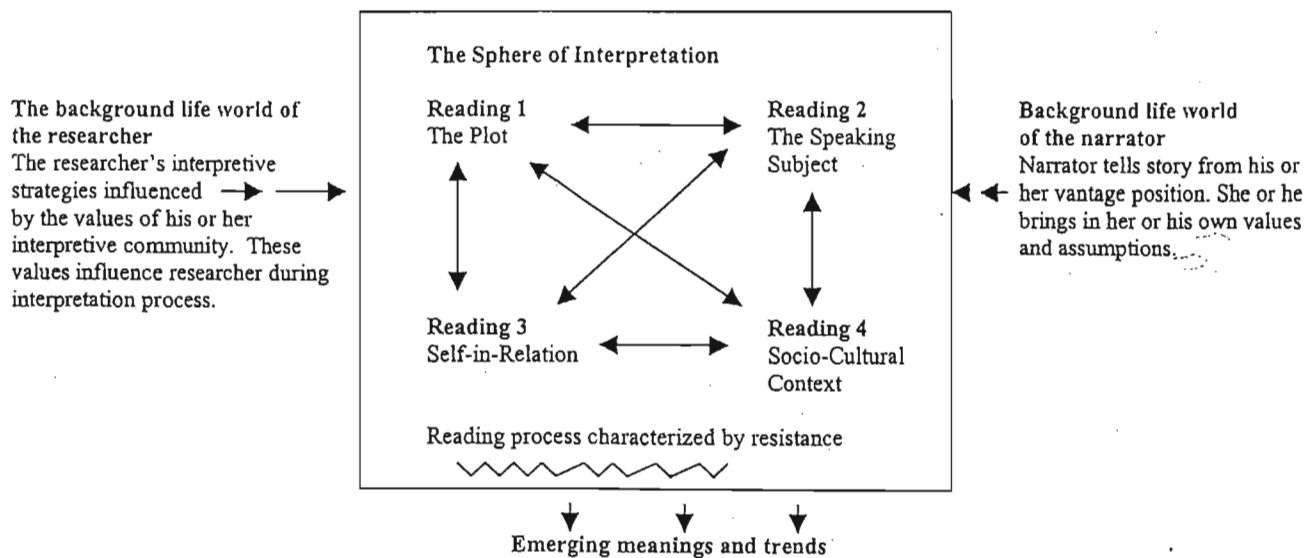


Analysis followed the Relational Method (Brown *et al.*, 1989; Brown & Gilligan, 1991; Gilligan *et al.*, 1990; Mauthner & Doucet, 1998; Tappan & Brown, 1992). The method is

dialectical: interpreters continually reflect on their own values and assumptions, as they try to understand the meaning of human experience (Tappan & Brown, 1992). This is in recognition that interpretation is influenced by interpreters' relational and social contexts, including their theoretical backgrounds. The same as interpreters do, narrators also bring to bear their own horizons of understanding when telling stories. Interpretation occurs at the point of contact between these two horizons. It is important to address power and authority issues in analyzing interviews, especially given historical imbalances which have been associated with horizons of understanding in academic discourse. Therefore, the reader or interpreter should reflect on the values and assumptions which might condition his or her understanding of the text. Similarly, the horizons of understanding which respondents use to justify their narrative positions should be critically evaluated.

The dialectical nature of the reading process is illustrated in Figure 3. Bi-directional arrows point at the interdependent nature of the four readings.

Figure 3. The Dialectical Nature of the Reading Process



Interpretation began with this dialectical process in mind. It should be noted, however, that from the beginning of the study, field notes and contact summary sheets had been

made (Appendix 3). These form part of the analysis. Further, beginning in the early stages, brief memos were written on cards, spelling out hunches, concepts and themes as they emerged (Miles & Huberman, 1994). The writing of memos continued during the reading process described below. As the reading progressed, the relationship between emerging concepts became focused, thus speeding up the writing of memos.

Reading 1: The Plot

The purpose of the first reading is to identify main events and protagonists in a story. The reading attends to the story in general: it seeks to identify conflicts involved in the narrative. The researcher highlights the metaphors, images, repeated words, themes and idiomatic expressions used by respondents to talk about their moral experiences. Contradictions and inconsistencies in their narrative positions are also noted. Attention is also paid to extra-linguistic cues, with a view to understanding how the narrators experienced the conflict (Brown & Gilligan, 1991; Gilligan *et al.*, 1990; Mauthner & Doucet, 1998).

Practically, how was this process accomplished? Using a coloured pen, the researcher highlighted metaphors, repeated words, idiomatic expressions, and other aspects as mentioned above. For example, a narrator might use the metaphor of *heaviness* (*kwakunzima!*) to indicate that the situation was emotionally stressful. The word “heaviness” was highlighted whenever it occurred in the story. Marginal notes and comments were also entered on the transcripts. As recommended by Gilligan and her colleagues, I also listened to the original tapes as I was reading. Paying attention to extra-linguistic cues captured the emotional tone of each story. For example, one respondent exclaimed “*kwakunzima!*” (literally, “it was heavy!”), followed by heavy sighs. These extra-verbal cues support the fact that the experience was emotionally stressful. A worksheet was completed after each reading, capturing conflicts, contradictions and themes that emerged (Appendix 4).

This reading also involves a critical reflection on one's privileged position in listening to others' narratives. Readers attend to their thoughts and feelings, including how they relate with narrators and their narratives. Attempts are made to take into account biases that might be the result of personal interests and social position, such as race and class (Brown, 1994). One of my concerns during this stage was that as a Black African, I have for a long time been uncomfortable with the individualistic bias of mainstream academic psychology. This is at variance with the communal orientation of many African cultures. This may have led me to be biased in favour of instances confirming communalism, while ignoring examples of individualism. For this reason, it was important to constantly reflect on my ideas, values and assumptions, as I read the interviews (Brown, 1994).

Even with the personal reflection mentioned above, biases remain a possibility. In order to get a different perspective, a colleague was requested to independently read the first five interviews. She was asked because she was familiar with the Relational Method, as we had previously used it to study ethical dilemmas in the nursing profession (Gambu & Mkhize, 2000). Having read the five interviews, we compared notes, worksheets and themes. This broadened our perspectives by highlighting issues that had escaped our attention. We followed this by reading another five interviews independently, and compared our notes again. The preliminary concepts and themes that guided the reading of the remaining interviews were derived from this joint process. Although it would have been preferable to read and discuss all interviews jointly, her work commitments and the lengthy nature of the reading process ruled this out.

Reading 2: The Voice of the Speaking Person

The second reading followed the one described by Brown and Gilligan (1991) and Mauthner and Doucet (1998). The purpose is to read for the active self, telling a story in a drama in which he or she is an actor (Brown *et al.*, 1989). The listener traces voices of the

“I” speaking in the story. This involves attending to how people talk about themselves, their lives and the world they inhabit (Mauthner & Doucet, 1998). The researcher attempts to identify various *voices* colouring respondents’ narratives (Whose *voices* or *perspectives* can be identified in the story?). This reading also helped me to identify emergent representations of self in the stories. The following questions were addressed: How do respondents talk about themselves? Do they talk in individualistic or relational terms? Of more importance, however, were *shifts* and *tensions* between the “I”, reflecting respondents’ own voices, and the “we”, pointing at communal or others’ viewpoints. Negotiation of tensions between these two perspectives has been shown to be paramount in conflicts involving career choice (Mkhize & Frizelle, 2000).

Using a different colored pen, instances in which respondents used personal pronouns such as “I”, “we”, “you”, and other words indicating tensions between self and others, were highlighted. In *isiZulu*, these correspond to *ngi-*, *si-*, *u-*, and their derivatives. Marginal notes indicating repeated words and phrases were also made. These were then entered into a worksheet prepared for this purpose (Appendix 5).

It could be argued that listening for the “I” emphasizes an individualistic notion of the self. Individualism is inappropriate in an African setting, where people define themselves primarily in relational terms (see Davis (1994) and Lykes (1994) for this critique, and Brown (1994) for a response). These criticisms fail to take into account that the reading aims not to identify the pronoun *per se*, but the *voices* or *perspectives* emanating from the way participants talk about themselves. The “I” does not imply individualism. It is an expression of a *point of view*. It will be remembered that for Bakhtin, the speaking subject, or the person, cannot be separated from his or her ideas (Morson & Emerson, 1990). In reading for the “I”, the intention is to identify the source of participants’ ideas or perspectives. Can the ideas be attributed to the speaking subject (“I”) or the social groups to which they belong?

In another attempt to avoid an individualistic (or, on the other hand, a collectivist) reading of the interviews, I paid attention to the *shifts* and *tensions* between these two self orientations. Narrative shifts and tensions are part and parcel of living in a multicultural society, in which some perspectives are valued more than others. As a person who has had to function in Western-type institutions (e.g. a university), while maintaining my roots in traditional African ways of life, I identified with these tensions.

Reading 3: The Self-in-Relation

This reading, like the fourth, differed slightly from the one by Brown and Gilligan (1991). This was motivated by the fact that while concerns of justice and care were expected to emerge, concentrating on these two moral voices from the start could have led to a selective reading. This would have made it difficult to identify emergent moral voices, thereby defeating the purpose of the study. I therefore approached narratives with openness, ready to listen to voices of justice, care and others. Brown and Gilligan (1991) regard the first two readings as cornerstones of the method. They make provision for departures in the remaining readings, depending on one's purposes.

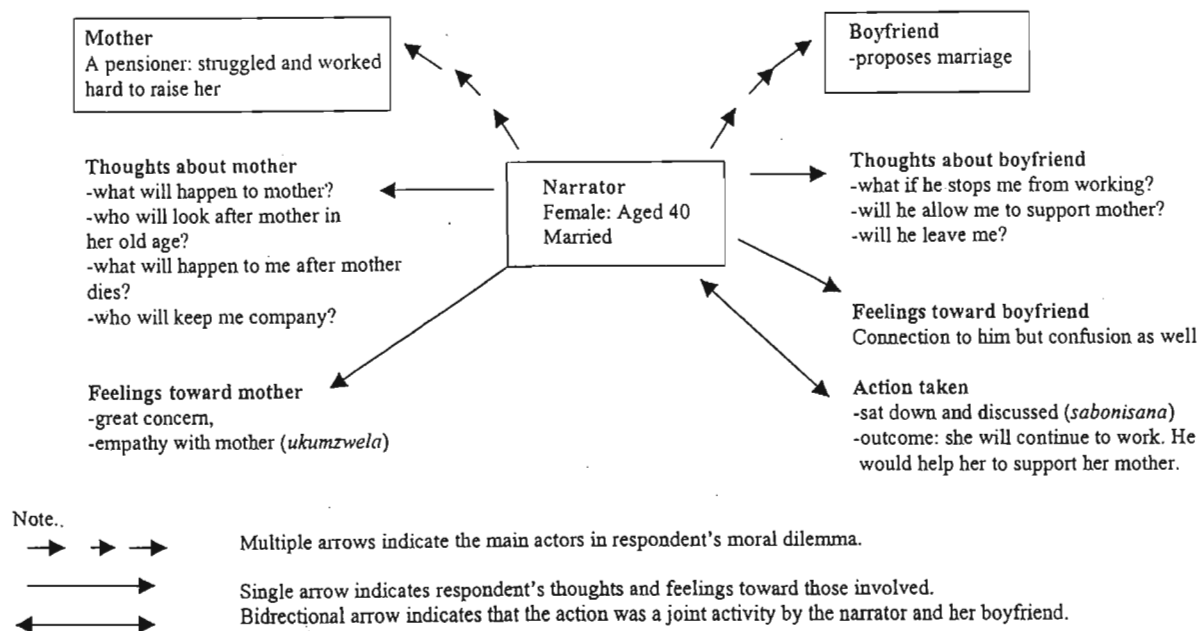
The third reading concentrated on how participants spoke about their relationships with others, such as their children, spouses, and whoever was involved in their broader social networks. These included relationships with real and imaginal others, including the deceased, who nevertheless remain active *audiences* in the person's psyche. The purpose was to identify critical moral and other concerns in these relationships. The logic was that moral concerns, be they about justice or care, should emerge within the context of relationships. As mentioned previously, this was done to minimize the possibility of excluding emerging moral voices, by focusing exclusively on justice and care.

I began this reading by identifying all the characters in the narrative. On a separate A3 piece of paper, used as a summary sheet, a circle was drawn at the centre, representing the

narrator. It was linked by arrows to other circles representing actors in the narrative. The relationship between the narrator and the actors was then established (e.g. father or mother). Words used by narrators in speaking about each actor were entered on appropriate parts of the summary sheet. Tappan's (1990) three dimensions of moral experience, namely cognition, affect and action, were applied to this reading. Analysis was guided by the following questions: How does the narrator *feel* about others in the narrative? Is he or she angry with them? What does the narrator *think* of himself or herself in relation to others? Are these thoughts *voiced* or *censured*? Is there any *action* taken? Why/Why not? What was the outcome of *action* or *non-action*? What were the narrators' *thoughts* and *feelings* about having *acted* or *failed to act*? What did this make them think of themselves? For example, the reader looked for feelings of powerlessness or inferiority in relation to the other. The role played by differences in power and/or status in the interaction between the narrator and each actor was explored.

An example of how this reading proceeded is shown in Figure 4. Once concerns between narrators and actors in their stories had been mapped, they were listed in point form at the bottom of the worksheet. These were concerns such as caring, connectedness and powerlessness.

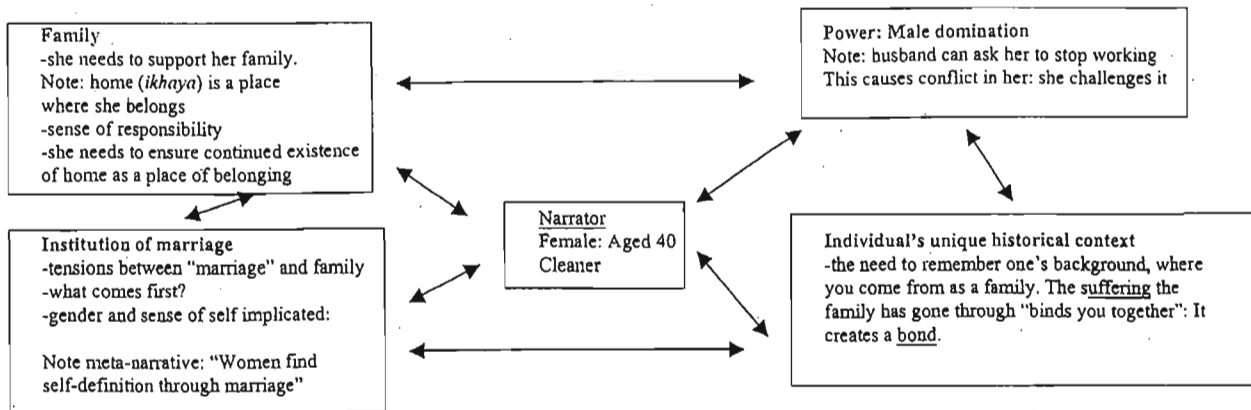
Figure 4: Reading for Self-in-Relation



Reading 4: The Social and Cultural Context

The last reading took into account social, political and cultural contexts which have a bearing on narrators' decisions about moral dilemmas (Mauthner & Doucet, 1998). A number of important social and institutional categories in moral decision-making had emerged during the pilot study. These were categories such as *family, religious beliefs, community*, and beliefs about *gender roles*. As in the third reading, a circle was drawn on an A3 sheet of paper to represent the narrator. Other circles were drawn around the centre to represent institutions and beliefs involved in the narrator's story. The reading was influenced by questions such as: What is the *nature* of the relationship between the narrator and each institution? What is at stake between the narrator and each institution? (e.g. power, subordination, support and personal integrity). As in Reading 3, these concerns were summarized and listed in point form. An example of Reading 4 is shown in Figure 5.

Figure 5. The Person in Socio-cultural Context



Note: Bidirectional arrows indicate that the narrator is influenced by these systems but she also influences them by her actions. Further, the systems are interdependent: they interact and influence each other.

Summary and Consolidation of Readings

Having completed the reading process, I made short narrative summaries of each transcript (For example, see Appendix 6). Concerns such as the power dynamics between participants, family and community influences, and conceptions of self, were noted. In a further attempt to facilitate a comparison of participants across the four readings, a matrix of informants by readings (Readings 1 - 4) was constructed (Miles & Huberman, 1994) (for example, see Appendix 7). The rows captured issues from one individual, while columns compared all individuals on one reading. A count was taken of participants' concerns, which had been listed at the bottom of the worksheets for readings 3 and 4. These were "simple" counts, because the fact that an issue was raised, tells us nothing about the dynamics involved, such as contradictions in narrative positioning.

The next step was to draw relationships between emerging concepts, I again enlisted the services of my colleague who had assisted in the initial analysis of data. Worksheets, memos, and narrative summaries were laid on the table. We then theorized aloud about possible relationships between emerging concepts. This process took two days to complete. To maintain the richness of the data and to facilitate “thick description,” I then returned to a copy of the transcripts. Texts illustrating similar concepts were cut and pasted together. These were used as excerpts in the write-up. Analysis thus involved a lengthy, back and forth process. It began with the reading of each interview narrative. Then, memos, summaries, and matrix displays were constructed. Even in writing up the study, there were occasions when the original transcripts were consulted again.

Issues of Reliability and Validity

Traditional notions of reliability and validity (e.g. Anastasi, 1988) are based on assumptions that are irrelevant for interpretive approaches to research (Brown *et al.*, 1989; Janesick, 1994; Patton, 1990). Lincoln and Guba (1985), Maxwell (1992), Mishler (1990), Tappan (1997b) and Tappan and Brown (1992) and others have made attempts to clarify issues of reliability and validity from the standpoint of qualitative research. Despite minor differences, these authors agree that the correspondence notion of truth is inappropriate for assessing validity claims in qualitative research. They also concur that interpretive communities of which the researcher is a member play an important role in the construction and validation of knowledge.

Using Kuhn’s (1970) notion of “shared exemplars,” Mishler (1990) argued that validation should be concerned with the trustworthiness of *procedures* by means of which validity claims are made. This entails an explication of how observations were transformed into data and findings. Similarly, Kvale (1995, 1996) has argued that validation is concerned with the quality of craftsmanship during the process of data collection, analysis and

theoretical interpretation. Reliability and validity considerations were informed by these ideas, as well as the practical recommendations made by Miles and Huberman (1994).

Reliability

According to Miles and Huberman (1994), reliability (or dependability) is concerned with the extent to which the research process is consistent and stable over time and across researchers and methods. Following their recommendations, data were collected from a variety of participants and settings (e.g. younger and older people in urban and rural settings). Wherever possible, interviews were transcribed during the two days after they were conducted. This enabled me to supplement them with field observations and impressions. Contact summary sheets were completed, and follow-up interviews conducted, where necessary. Some interviews lasted longer, to accommodate cultural values of people in rural areas in particular. For example, rushing conversations is deemed to be impolite.

Feedback was also sought from colleagues and experts in African Studies as soon as initial data were available. The feedback looked at ways participants talked about moral issues, such as the use of words *ubulungiswa* (righteousness) and *ubuntu* (humanness). The appropriateness of these words for representing moral experience was confirmed. The feedback was incorporated into subsequent interviews by asking respondents what the relationship was between these words and morality. Finally, a colleague was involved in the early and final stages of interpretation. I constantly checked my views against hers to facilitate personal reflection and to broaden perspectives that were brought to bear in the interpretation process.

Validity

As mentioned above, validation in qualitative research is not concerned with establishing a correspondence between findings and the “real world.” It purports to demonstrate that some interpretations of texts (human actions) are more probable than others (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Ricouer, 1979). For Ricouer, procedures of validation belong in the same category as Popper’s (1984) criteria of falsifiability. He maintained that the purpose of establishing the validity of interpretations is not verification, but the determining of which explanations are more compelling than others. Similarly, Kvale (1995, 1996) has argued that validation involves argumentation: it should be conceptualized communicatively. Thus, the types of validities described below, namely *coherence* and *theoretical validation*, are a means to arbitrate between competing explanations.

Coherence

Coherence is about the credibility of the study: whether it makes sense to readers and to the people being studied (Miles & Huberman, 1994). It examines the consistency and systematic relationships between concepts. Two strategies were adopted to improve coherence: triangulation and member validation.

Triangulation combines different methodologies and theoretical frameworks to study the same phenomena (Bloor, 1997; Janesick, 1994; Patton, 1990). This study used theoretical triangulation (Janesick, 1994; Patton, 1990; Miles & Huberman, 1994). Results were interpreted from a number of theoretical perspectives, such as hermeneutics, dialogism, and African cosmologies.

Findings were also referred to a few informants for feedback, a procedure known as *member validation*. This was an attempt to establish *interpretive validity* (Maxwell, 1992). This is the extent to which results make sense to the people *whose meaning is in*

question. Informants who had indicated that they would be available for follow-up interviews were approached for comments on emerging themes. While an attempt was made to broaden the range of participants used for member validation, this was not always possible because of logistic reasons. Eventually, follow-up interviews were conducted with four women and three men from the urban setting, and three women and three men in the rural areas. Although Bloor (1997) warned that triangulation and member validation cannot validate findings *per se*, he nevertheless considered the two important for reflexive elaboration, given that they “may yield new data that throw fresh light on the investigation and provide a spur for deeper and richer analysis” (p. 49).

Theoretical Validation

Traditional notions of validity emphasize the generalisability of findings to other contexts, known as external validity (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Generalisation from sample to population is not the major purpose in qualitative research. The purpose of generalisation is *analytic* or *theory-connected* (Maxwell, 1992, 1998; Miles & Huberman, 1994). Analytic generalisation “takes place through the development of a theory that not only makes sense of the particular persons or situations studied, but also shows how the same process, in different situations, can lead to different results” (Maxwell, 1992, p. 293).

One of the most important types of validity in the quantitative paradigm is *construct validity* (Cronbach & Meehl, 1955). In qualitative enquiries, construct validity comes closest to what Maxwell (1992) called *theoretical validity*. According to Maxwell (*ibid*), “theoretical understanding refers to an account’s function as an explanation, as well as a description or interpretation, of the phenomena” (p. 291). He distinguished between two components of a theory: the concepts or categories it employs, and the relationships postulated between them. The first, he argued, closely matches what is traditionally known as construct validity. The second comes closest to internal or causal validation.

Theoretical validity was established by comparing results to the traditional African conception of the person, discussed earlier. Using the notion of the dialogical self, it was possible to theoretically account for individuals who seemed torn between individualistic and communal selves.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical issues are particularly important in qualitative studies because they involve verbatim interview transcripts, rather than statistical summaries of variables (Kvale, 1996). The relationship between the researcher and participants had to be carefully managed. This was particularly so for those respondents who narrated dilemmas involving painful emotional experiences. The researcher relied on his skills as a trained therapist to handle such problems. I listened to these experiences and where appropriate, referred participants to appropriate counselling services.

Participants were informed about the purposes of the study and the procedures to be followed. Permission to audio-record the interviews was obtained. The participants were also made aware that, once identifying data had been removed, verbatim interview extracts were to be used for illustrative purposes. The tapes were kept in a locked cabinet to safeguard confidentiality. All interviews were conducted and transcribed by the researcher himself, thereby limiting access to the information. A few participants who requested to see their transcripts were afforded the opportunity to do so when follow-up interviews were conducted. Often it turned out they wanted to ensure their viewpoints had been correctly reflected. Often, these were the participants who felt very strongly about the need to indigenize psychology.

Participants also signed an informed consent form (Patton, 1990; Punch, 1994). The form was written in *isiZulu* (Appendix 8 and Appendix 9 for the English version). It was read to participants where necessary. A few participants declined to sign it, citing its legalistic

and formal nature. It should be noted that in traditional African cultures, the trust participants have in the person of the researcher takes precedence over written statements. Trust is earned by observing traditional rules of etiquette. This includes conducting one's affairs with patience and respect. Asking participants to sign forms could be interpreted as a sign of untrustworthiness on the part of the researcher. For this reason, these participants' cultural expectations were respected. This is in line with Gasa's (1999) argument that informed consent procedures should take differing cultures into account. Finally, in order to minimise power differences between the researcher and the participants, interviews were conducted in the latter's premises, wherever possible.

Conclusion

This chapter began with a brief discussion of traditional and other hermeneutic methods used in moral development research. This was done to show that the Relational Method is most suitable for studying situated understandings of morality. The theoretical origins of the Relational Method were discussed, followed by a description of the pilot study. Procedures used to collect and analyse data in the main study were then presented. The last section addressed the reliability, validity and ethical concerns as they applied to the study. Results are presented and discussed in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 7

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION: PART 1

The first research question concerned the meaning of morality for the sample. The respondents defined morality as interdependence or connection between people and their social milieu. Three interdependent levels of connection emerged: connection to (a) a transcendental Other, (b) the family, and (c) the community. Results in support of the “connection thesis” are presented. Connection is based on a dynamic worldview. It is argued that this worldview prizes connection precisely because of the highly permeable, and multiple view of the self in traditional African thought. An African approach to morality, it will be shown, is inescapably communicative and dialogical. This is because, in a world in which everything is functionally connected, interplay between elements in the ontological hierarchy cannot be avoided.

This chapter intends to illustrate the broader worldview that underpins moral reasoning in traditional African thought. Thus, only those interview extracts that highlight broader aspects of this conception of moral reasoning have been chosen. This has been done in order to give a voice to a dimension of moral experience that is usually ignored in the literature. Other aspects of moral reasoning, such as the observed dialogical tensions between worldviews and moral orientations are discussed at length in Chapter 8. Transcription symbols employed in the extracts are described in Table 4 (page 170).

Morality as Connection to a Transcendental Other

Thirty-four respondents (65%)¹ maintained that morality entails a relationship with a religious Other (cf. Mbiti, 1991). This was often expressed as living a life connected to God and/or *izinyanya*. Moral people are aware that transcendental beings such as God appraise their actions. This means that one is never alone in moral decision-making. There is always an Other, before

¹Percentages are only rough indicators. They do not necessarily indicate the prevalence or the “strength” of each moral orientation. In using the Relational Method, the interviewer becomes part of the process by means of which meaning is created on an ongoing basis.

whom one's actions are rehearsed (cf. Day & Tappan, 1996).

Table 4. Transcription Symbols

Symbol	Meaning	Examples
[]	The words between square brackets have been added by the author, where the meaning of the word could be inferred from the context.	I have no [romantic] interest in him. Yeah! [I did not want to] hurt his feelings.
()	The author has added the word between parentheses: (a) where he felt that English translations do not adequately capture the original Nguni meaning (e.g. for idiomatic expressions); (b) To add clarity, where it was difficult to determine the person to whom the pronoun refers (independently of the context)	So, people who are not connected to God have lost life (<i>abasaphili</i>) They realized that I was not supporting him (the project manager)
(.)	Indicates a brief pause.	Ehm (.). It was very painful!
<i>Italic</i>	Indicates narrator's emphasis	<i>If you quarrel, izinyanya get angry.</i>
CAPITAL LETTERS	Indicate changes in the tone of voice. The tone is louder, compared to the rest of the interview. This was taken to mean a stronger conviction about a particular point of view.	SHE WAS ALMOST LIKE A SISTER TO ME.
<i>CAPITAL LETTERS AND ITALICS</i>	Tone is louder and emphasized.	<i>SHE WAS ALMOST LIKE A SISTER TO ME.</i>
<u>Underlined words</u>	Indicate the author's (rather than respondents') emphasis	<u>... I am going to lose a lot of support from Black students</u>

Note. The Relational Method, which was used in this study, focuses on the unique relationship between the interviewer and the interviewee. It also focuses on the relationship between the narrator and the significant others in his or her story. These relationships cannot be adequately captured by transcription symbols. Attempts have been made to describe these relationships qualitatively in the Results and Methods chapters. Given this context, fewer transcription symbols were used.

The following extract illustrates the idea of morality as connection. It was drawn from an interview with Nomusa, a middle-aged female schoolteacher. Having described her dilemma, she was asked to comment on the role of religion in moral decision-making. Although the respondent had not raised the issue spontaneously, the follow-up question is in line with the Relational Method. The method makes provision for testing the limits by asking narrators to comment on theoretically relevant issues or concerns raised by other respondents. Nomusa's responses to questions are as follows:

Nhlanhla: Do you think religious beliefs have a role to play in morality?

Nomusa: I would like to emphasize religion. To begin with, [to] respect is to fear God. If you know God exists, and that you are here because of God, that restrains you. You think if I've hurt someone, let me apologise. *Because you know that your life is ultimately connected to God.*

Nhlanhla: It is connected to God?

Nomusa: Yes! And then there are *abaphansi*². We as Black people, some of us, . . . believe *abaphansi can see us. They are watching over us, monitoring our actions. There is also the belief that they are much closer to God, sitting by the right hand side. By being connected to abaphansi, you are ultimately connected to God.*

Nhlanhla: People who are not connected to *abaphansi* or to God, how would you describe them?

Nomusa: It varies! If we take religion in general, every religion extols the name of God. The difference is how connection with God is envisaged. Some see connection coming through Jesus, others through Shembe.³ But ultimately, all of them point to God, the source of life. *So, people who are not connected to God have lost life (abasaphili). They have lost self-respect. They do not care. They have lost unembeza*⁴.

Nhlanhla: In other words, would you say that a person who cannot choose between right and wrong has no connections?

Nomusa: Yes. *That person never considers that, as I am doing this, God can see me. That person does not connect (akaxhumani). [Such people] have lost connection with God, and everything that matters. They live in a world of their own.*

(Extract 1)

² Literally, "those below." It is another term for *izinyanya*.

³ Rev. I. Shembe is the founder of the Southern African, traditionally-oriented, Nazareth church.

⁴ Literally, *unembeza* means having a conscience. Respondents in this study described it as an "inner voice".

This passage highlights the moral significance of connection. People are connected to an invisible, transcendental Other, before whom they must account for their actions. The moral significance of being connected is that “if you know God exists, and that you are here because of God, that restrains you”. The knowledge that one is always in the company of an invisible Other (God) limits the range of possible actions.

One’s actions are also “visible” to *izinyanya*: “We as Black people . . . believe that *abaphansi* can see us. They are watching over us, monitoring our actions”. This view originates from the belief that *izinyanya* accompany their descendants wherever they go, to protect them from harm (cf. Mbiti, 1991; Wiredu, 1992). To be connected is to bear God and *izinyanya* in mind when one acts. This implies that connected people are never alone in moral decision-making. Their actions must be always oriented to a transcendental Other.

The objection is often raised that not all Blacks believe in *izinyanya*. The narrator seems to anticipate this argument. Her remark that “[w]e as Black people, some of us, . . . believe that *izinyanya* can see us” should be seen in that context. As far as this study is concerned, the number of people subscribing to this view is irrelevant. To expect everyone to share one belief system implies that worldviews are static and rigid. This study appreciates that worldviews presented here probably have different meanings for different people. Nevertheless, unless we engage with them from within, we can never fully understand how they are changing in context and time.

Connection is an integral part of life or being a person. For example, the narrator says “. . . people who are not connected to God have lost life.” What does “losing life” mean? Traditional African worldviews do not limit life to an organism’s biological state. Life is a never-ending spiral of relationships and connections (cf. Paris, 1995). To “lose life” is to be severed from God, the webs of significance characterising human relationships and everything one stands in relation to. Immoral people “*have lost connection with God, and everything that matters*”. They “... live in a world of their own.” This indicates the respondent assumes that the “good life” requires that one’s interests be harmonized with those of others. The purpose of life is not to stand out, but to find one’s place among others.

The extract also indicates that immorality is indexed by disconnection. Disconnected people are indifferent to the existence of a transcendental Other, be it *izinyanya* or God. They do not care that their actions are “visible” before God. A person who cannot choose between right and wrong “never considers that, as I am doing this, God can see me.” In other words, transcendental beings have no moral validity for disconnected individuals. The view that immorality results from disconnection is supported by the fact that disconnected people “have lost self-respect, . . . care, . . . [and] *unembeza*.” Care is a well-known dimension of moral being (cf. Benhabib, 1992; Gilligan, 1977, 1982). “*Unembeza*” and “respect” emerged as important moral voices in this study. Chapter 8 captures the dynamic interplay between these moral voices.

Transcendental Others and Moral Regulation

The role of transcendental Others in moral decision-making has been discussed. It has not been indicated how this Other is invoked in actual moral decision-making, however. A story in which an appeal was made to *izinyanya* and God, during the course of a dilemma, appears below. Mandla, a middle-aged College lecturer, narrated how his cousin threatened to shoot revellers during an *ukubuyisa*⁵ ceremony. The story highlights an appeal to worldviews or belief systems to guide others’ behaviour (cf. Jensen, 1997).

Nhlanhla: So, what was the dilemma for you in this situation?

Mandla: My dilemma was that, I had to seize the weapon before he hurt someone. We could not afford to have someone hurt, let alone killed within family premises, during so important a function. Yet, I was scared.

Nhlanhla: So, what did you do?

Mandla: I pleaded with him to give me the weapon, telling him how dangerous it is to carry a weapon in the presence of so many people. I said: “Let me have the weapon for safe-keeping, I will surrender it to you after the ceremony.” But he would hear none of it. The situation was getting desperate because there was commotion. Anything could have

⁵ A religious ceremony to integrate the spirit of a deceased person with his/her family. Literally, it means to “bring back.”

happened, like, someone being shot accidentally. You know, with weapons, nothing is predictable.

Nhlanhla: **What happened eventually?**

Mandla: Can you believe it? While I was standing there, pleading with him, his sister appeared from the kitchen, [and] went straight to him. While I was watching, short of words, she slapped him on the face, took the weapon from him, and said: “What are you doing? What do you think the sleeping ones (*izinyanya*) will say, producing a weapon within family premises? Do you want to drive them away?”

Nhlanhla: **So, where do *izinyanya* come in, in the question of morality?**

Mandla: Well, the family first exposes you to religion. I can put it that way, in the Western sense. In the traditional sense, *izinyanya* are one of the tracks that lead to God. *Izinyanya* are God’s messengers: they mediate between humans and God. . . . According to tradition, the name *Mvelinqangi* (God) is not usually mentioned [because] . . . for us Black people, God is very high. That is why we approach God indirectly, through *izinyanya*. As for your question, *izinyanya* are important in maintaining morality. At all times, people must do things accordingly: they must behave themselves. *If they do not, izinyanya will turn their backs against them (zibafulathele). Once this happens, you no longer have representation before God. Now, you are like a blind person. . . . Your family is hanging in the air (usemoyeni nje⁶).* Consider your family, and the homestead (*umuzi*), for example. Do you think they belong to you? . . . They belong to *izinyanya*, and ultimately, to God. *So, if you do wrong, you disgrace not only your name, but also your family name, izinyanya, and eventually, the name of God. So, izinyanya give us a moral standard.*

(Extract 2)

A brief background to the *ukubuyisa* ceremony is necessary to fully appreciate the magnitude of Mandla’s dilemma. Traditional African societies believe that the ceremony “promotes” a deceased family member from an “in-between state” (a state of being neither a human being nor an *inyanya*) to being an *inyanya* (cf. Ngubane, 1977). This gives the deceased power to protect progeny from harm, and to intercede on their behalf before God. The entire lineage of *izinyanya* is believed to be present during the function, having been invited through the medium of

⁶ An expression, meaning to be displaced from the rightful order of things.

*impepho*⁷ (Mosue, 2000). They participate in the feast, together with the deceased who is being “promoted”. The statement: “We could not afford to have someone hurt, let alone killed within family premises, during so important a function,” should be seen in that context. Quarrelling disrupts the relationship between *izinyanya* and their descendants. It is worse if misconduct occurs during a religious ceremony. The presence of *izinyanya* is thought to be heightened during ceremonies. Thus, a threat of violence during the function was a serious offence. *Izinyanya* could have withdrawn their presence as a result. This would leave the family vulnerable to harm.

The story again indicates that morality is conceptualised as a relationship. Both parties must fulfil their obligations to maintain the relationship in a state of equilibrium. Immorality sets in when the equilibrium is disrupted. Usually, wrongdoing by humans destabilizes equilibrium. This is because humans are at the centre of the ontological hierarchy (cf. Holdstock, 2000; Sow, 1980). This means that equilibrium or disequilibrium is thought to be caused by their actions or moral failures.

The story also illustrates an appeal to a shared belief system in order to regulate behaviour. Worldviews prescribe what is considered acceptable and unacceptable conduct. They also offer the means by which to handle deviations from these prescriptions (cf. Jensen, 1997). For example, weapons cannot be touched during a ritual ceremony. Shouting or talking loudly is also prohibited. Mandla’s cousin violated these prescriptions. It is of note that Mandla’s appeal to logic (carrying a weapon is dangerous) to restore calm was ineffective. The sister, on the other hand, appealed to the religious and moral significance of the function itself. This empowered her to reprimand her brother. Outside the context of the function, her actions could have escalated the conflict. By invoking a shared belief system, she was able to reprimand him.

Worldviews also provide an account of causality (cf. Jensen, 1997). They offer explanations to questions such as: Why are things the way they are? Extract 2 hints at causes of family disintegration. Disconnection, we learn, is considered to have adverse consequences for the

⁷ Traditional incense: a few days prior to the ceremony, the senior elder burns incense at *Emsamo* (“Upper Place” or altar). Known and unknown *izinyanya* are verbally invited to partake in the ceremony.

family as a whole. If people do not act accordingly, “. . . *izinyanya* will turn their backs against them (*zibafulathele*).” This is undesirable. It cuts the family off from God: “Once this happens, you no longer have representation before God. Now, you are like a blind person . . . your family is hanging in the air.” To be left “hanging in the air” is to be disconnected from the hierarchy of beings, or the cosmic order of things. A disconnected family is displaced. It is without guidance and direction (i.e. blind). Prosperity and protection from harm, usually afforded by *izinyanya* (cf. Mbiti, 1991), are withdrawn. It is of note that an individual’s actions have consequences for the family as a whole. It is thus in the interest of the family to ensure that actions that could lead to disconnection and disintegration, are avoided.

Izinyanya are not distanced figures. They are immediately present in their families. To “know” them involves knowledge of a practical-moral (cf. Gadamer, 1975) rather than the cognitive kind. It requires people to be responsive to their circumstances. This includes fulfilling responsibilities toward the family, depending on one’s position. The following section briefly explores the nature of the relationship. The extract is from an interview with Vusi, a 26-year-old male, fourth year University student from a rural background.

Nhlanhla: **Morality, distinguishing between good and bad, where do *izinyanya* come in?**

Vusi: There are many things. . . . Like, discord and quarrelling within the family is not good. There must be peace and quiet at all times, because quarrelling touches upon *izinyanya*. *If you quarrel, izinyanya get angry. They lose interest (badikibale) and distance (baqhele) themselves from you. . . . A sacrifice will be required to restore connection. So, they require peace, harmony, and respect within the family. When they distance themselves, their absence will lead to great discord among family members (inxushunxushu ekhaya). So, knowing that izinyanya exist makes you a responsible person. You will know and love members of your family (wazise abantu basekhaya), and give support where necessary.*
(Extract 3)

This extract indicates that *izinyanya* are not abstract beings “out there.” They are experienced by others as persons, with whom a speaking relationship exists (cf. Holdstock, 2000). Further, they are interested and involved in the day-to-day affairs of their families (cf. Mbiti, 1991). Belief in their immediate presence is underscored by the fact that they are described in human terms. This

is supported by the view that they are considered capable of experiencing emotions. They can get “angry”, engage (have “interest”) or disengage (“distance themselves”) with human beings. To invoke them is to appeal to an audience of real people (cf. Josephs, 1997), capable of having a relationship with oneself.

To “know” *izinyanya* requires one to act in accordance with this knowledge. This involves responsiveness to the needs of the family. Thus, says the narrator, “. . . *knowing that izinyanya exist makes you a responsible person. You will know and love members of your family (wazise abantu hasekhaya), and give support where necessary.*” The word “responsible”, as used here, does not mean “being the cause of.” It refers to the knowledge of one’s obligations, and attending to them (cf. Shweder, 1982). These obligations are discussed below.

Worldviews not only provide a diagnostic account of human problems: they also offer the means by which to alleviate human suffering (cf. Bruner, 1990; Jensen, 1997). For example, one can deduce from the extracts above that it is undesirable to be disconnected from *izinyanya*. Should disconnection occur, however, the culture provides mechanisms to restore connection (cf. Mbiti, 1991). Vusi mentions that “a sacrifice will be required to restore connection” (Extract 3). This usually takes the form of a dialogue between the living and *izinyanya*, in the presence of all family members. The elder addresses *izinyanya* directly, as if speaking to living human beings. Forgiveness is sought for known and/or unknown offences committed by family members. The elder urges *izinyanya* to re-establish connection with the family (cf. Mbiti, 1991; Josephs, 1997). This points to the interdependent nature of the relationship between *izinyanya* and their families.

Morality, Religion and Philosophy

The results above support the religious and philosophical bases of morality in traditional African thought. In both Extracts 1 and 2 above, the respondents described morality in terms of religious obligations to God and *izinyanya*, who are thought to be an integral part of the world of the living. The view that traditional African moral systems are premised on philosophical and religious worldviews is also echoed by Holdstock (2000) and Nobles (1991), who argue that African philosophy is the foundation of Black psychology. African philosophy is grounded in

practical life: it is inseparable from what people do. This philosophy is expressed through religion because traditional African scholarship makes no sharp distinctions between religion and philosophy (Mbiti, 1991; Nobles, 1991). Religion is not conceptualised in abstract terms. It is an integral part of a person's existence: a way of being in the world (Biko, 1978; Zahan, 1979). Religion reflects the "*concrete, real and lived whole*" of a people (Ruch & Anyanwu, 1981, p. 134, emphasis original). From this perspective, religion cannot be divorced from the realm of social relationships. It can be realized only through participation in the community of other people (Holdstock, 2000) (The notion of morality as connection to the community is discussed below).

An important component of African philosophy and religion is the holistic conception of life (Verhoef & Michel, 1997) or living holism (Holdstock, 2000). In traditional African thought, human beings do not stand aloof from others and from the surrounding environment. Nor do they focus on teasing things apart to study their components in isolation. Instead, attention is paid to the organic relationship between human beings and their context. This stems from the African view that the universe consists of a myriad of interconnected, hierarchically-organized signifiers (Nobles, 1972, 1991; Nsamenang, 1992, 1999; Zahan, 1979). People who subscribe to this view conceptualise the universe as a three-tiered space (see Chapter 3). It is believed that communication and interrelationships between the various levels in this space continue on an ongoing basis (Sow, 1980). God, who is at the apex of the hierarchy, is considered the overall creator and sustainer of life. God presides over the destinies of human beings, animals, plants, and all that is created (Sow, 1980; Nobles, 1972, 1991). The view that one's actions are "visible" to God and *izinyanya*, who in turn punish immoral conduct, is consistent with an organic view of the universe in which everything is influenced by everything to which it stands in relation.

According to African mythology, God "withdrew"⁸ His/Her active involvement in the world (Zahan, 1979). That is, God is generally regarded as remote and not concerned with the day-to-day affairs of the living (Holdstock, 2000). Despite having "withdrawn" from the world of the living, God's spirit or energy is believed to permeate the whole universe. For example, the Tswana/Sotho word for God, *Modimo*, means the one who penetrates and permeates everything.

⁸ See Zahan (1979) for various myths explaining how God's "withdrawal" took place.

God's spirit is believed to be available in varying degrees to *izinyanya*, human beings, animals, plants and objects (Toldson & Toldson, 2001). Because God participates in everything, every interaction is potentially an interaction with God (or someone/something with a Godly element). Immorality is conceptualised as disconnection from God because it violates the organic inter-relationships that should exist between human beings and their environment.

We have mentioned that human beings are at the centre of the African metaphysical ontology (Sow, 1980). This means that connection and disconnection are determined by human actions. To understand this, we need to re-examine the moral implications of God's "withdrawal" from the universe. God's "withdrawal" gave human beings greater freedom of action in the world. Human beings constitute "the central element of a system on which [they] impose a centripetal orientation" (Zahan, 1979, p. 6). Their actions must always be oriented toward preserving and enhancing the interconnected quality of the universe. As Holdstock (2000) notes, "holism is lived experience. The belief that everything belongs together is directly translated into the actualities of daily living" (p. 162). Interdependence and harmony are achieved if people fulfil their duties to the family, the community, and the surrounding environment. To be "connected to God" is to participate in the rhythm of life.

Despite having "withdrawn" from the earth, God continues to monitor human activities. It is believed that God can see and punish all wrongdoers, no matter how secret their actions (Nsamenang, 1992). Normally, God does not monitor human actions directly, according to African scholarship. This responsibility falls upon *izinyanya*, who occupy the level immediately below God in the hierarchy of beings (Sow, 1980). *Izinyanya* are powerful intermediaries between God and their descendants, with whom they remain in contact. Although invisible, *izinyanya* remain engaged in the world of the living. This finds support in Extract 2, where a threat to participants in a religious ceremony was construed as an offence to *izinyanya* themselves, who were considered to be present during the ceremony.

To further understand the role played by *izinyanya* in moral decision-making, we need to re-examine traditional African conceptions of their status and the nature of their world. *Izinyanya* are family members whose lives are moral exemplars. They are religious and social models to be

emulated to avoid societal destabilization. The world of *izinyanya* is the quintessence of perfection. It is associated with poise, tranquillity and peace because of the prestigious moral character of its inhabitants (Zahan, 1979). Family members ought to emulate this world. For example we learn from Vusi in Extract 3 that “[w]hen they [*izinyanya*] distance themselves, their absence will lead to great discord among family members.” Family discord is the opposite of the tranquillity and poise thought to characterize the world of *izinyanya*: it drives them away. The fact that human actions impact on *izinyanya* is a further indication that the worlds of the two are intertwined. For a state of morality to exist the family and by extension, the community ought to be modelled on the world of *izinyanya*.

Having been disconnected from the source of life (God) because of the severance of the link with *izinyanya* (i.e. their withdrawal), the family’s spiritual resistance is thought to be lowered. It is envisaged that this leaves the family vulnerable to misfortune and disintegration (cf. Extract 3). Among actions that potentially could cause this breakdown in the relationship are: failure to perform appropriate rituals, lack of compassion for family members and others, and dissension among kin (Nsamenang, 1992). The view that knowing that *izinyanya* exists requires one to be a “responsible person” [and to] give support where necessary” (Extract 3) should be seen in that context. To be connected to *izinyanya* is to recognise their presence by fulfilling one’s obligations to them and the family.

Morality, Tradition and Time

African conceptions of “tradition” and time have a bearing on the relationship between *izinyanya* and moral reasoning. Zahan (1979) argues that “time is inconceivable without generations as its framework” (p. 45) in African scholarship. The three time dimensions - past, present and future - are understood in relation to the succession of one generation by another. Nobles (1991), echoing Mbiti (1969), notes that time in traditional Africa was measured according to events that had already occurred, the events taking place, and events that were to occur immediately. If events did not have the possibility of occurring immediately, they constituted the category of “no time”. Most importantly, succession of individuals linked by birth ties is oriented toward the past, rather than the future. It is toward the past, constituting the world of *izinyanya*, that the self is oriented.

Izinyanya, it will be remembered, have achieved personal completion (spiritual status) through their deeds. Human beings emulate them by attempting to follow on their high moral standards. It is on these grounds that traditional African understanding of morality pays more attention to the past.

Time in traditional African thought was also “phenomenal.” It had to be experienced with reference to events taking place in one’s life or community, going backwards to events already experienced by one’s predecessors. Justification of moral reasoning on the grounds that *izinyanya* did the same is not a regression to the past as an end in itself. The “aim is to trace the present from the past and thereby justify it.” (Zahan, 1979, p. 47) Moral justification is usually made in the name of “tradition”. Tradition is the collective experience of a community. It “constitutes the totality of all that successive generations have accumulated since the dawn of time, both in spiritual and practical life. It is the sum total of the wisdom held by a society at a given moment of its existence” (Zahan, 1979, p. 47). This knowledge is always oriented toward sustaining and preserving the life of a community.

It could be objected that the view that morality is based on *izinyanya* is, by definition, static. The community of *izinyanya* does not constitute a closed system. It is incessantly evolving and perpetually increasing with each successive generation (Zahan, 1979). This means that although people justify their actions with reference to tradition, changes are possible. Changes are not synonymous with the rejection of the past, however, unless one adopts a linear conception of time (as something that moves from the present to the future). Holdstock (2000) argues that “the ideas that nothing exists in isolation, that life is sacred, a communion of souls, cyclical, a constant renaissance, . . . transcends the limitations of time and space, and cannot be evaluated from a linear perspective” (p. 163). On these grounds, moral justification does not exclude tradition. It emerges from the knowledge accumulated by a community over the duration of its existence, as it attempts to keep abreast with changes taking place in the world.

The Communicative and Dialogical Relationship Between *Izinyanya* and the Living

The worlds of *izinyanya* and the living are characterised by a high degree of permeability. The fact that the living can be in harmony or disharmony with *izinyanya* (Extracts 2 and 3) indicates that communication between the two is common. The breakdown in the relationship between the two can be restored through sacrifice (Extract 3), further indicating the communicative and ongoing nature of the relationship. From a traditional African point of view, life is inconceivable independently of human and communal relationships. Parties in the relationship are bound to each other by reciprocal obligations. As Dzobo (1992) argues, death does not end the obligations of the living to the dead, nor does it terminate the privileges the living enjoy from *izinyanya*. To maintain communication (harmony) with *izinyanya*, the living need to offer them prayers and sacrifices, and abide by their high moral standards. This ensures the presence of *izinyanya* among the living, which is indispensable to the life of the latter. The relationship between *izinyanya* and the living is thus a symbiotic one: “The two are intimately tied together in kinship bonds that make the individual and the ancestors interdependent on each other.” (Holdstock, 2000, p. 171)

The fact that the relationship between *izinyanya* and the living is thought to be characterized by equilibrium or disequilibrium points at the dialogical nature of the relationship between the two. For example, it has been shown that human failures are believed to cause an imbalance between the world of *izinyanya* and the living (Nsamenang, 1992; Sow, 1980). Should this happen, there are institutionalised systems in place, to combat familial and community disintegration that may occur (e.g. Extract 3). Usually, this takes a form of an appeal by the family elder(s) to the community of *izinyanya*. During the course of a sacrifice, the elder(s) address *izinyanya* directly, asking for forgiveness and re-establishment of equilibrium (Mbiti, 1991). The typical appeal by an elder to *izinyanya*, which many African people have participated in or witnessed, including this author, was summarised by Kopytoff (cited in Josephs, 1997) as follows:

Communication with the dead takes the form of a conversational monologue, patterned but not stereotyped, and devoid of repetitive formulae. One speaks the way one speaks to living people: “You. [such and such], your junior is ill. We do not know why, we do not know who is responsible. If it is you, if you are angry, we ask your forgiveness. If we have done wrong, pardon us. Do not let him die. Why do you not look after us properly?” The words typically combine complaints, scolding, sometimes even anger, and at the same time appeals for forgiveness.

(Kopytoff, 1971, cited in Josephs, 1997, p. 363)

The example above is typical of an appeal to *izinyanya* in the event of an illness in the family. Similar appeals are made to incorporate new-born babies into the family, during marriage ceremonies, significant achievements by family members, and in the event of death in the family. This highlights the permeable, dialogical and relational nature of the world of *izinyanya* and the living. Immorality results in the breakdown of this relationship.

The Multiplicity and Fragility of the Self in African Thought

The role of *izinyanya* in moral decision-making can be further understood with reference to the multiple nature of the self in traditional African thought. It has been shown that the self is inextricably interwoven with spiritual beings. To explore this idea further, it is important to discuss an often overlooked, yet critical understanding of the self in traditional African societies. The self in traditional African thought is not only communicative and dialogical: it is multiple in space and time.

From a traditional African point of view, the self is not only bound horizontally to the living, but also vertically, to spiritual beings and those yet to be born. Spiritual beings and those yet to be born are not “out there”: they constitute an integral part of the living person. As Zahan (1979) argues, “the African carries within himself [sic], physiologically and psychically, his own genitors and their respective ascendants” (p. 9). Ogbonnaya (1994) expresses a similar view. He argues that “the human person must be seen as a community in and of itself including a plurality of selves” (p. 75). He does not refer to a community outside the person. Rather, this is the community of selves constituting the internal world of the person. He maintains that:

The person in African worldview should be visualized as a centrifugal force capable of emanating other complex selves that can interpermeate each other as well as other selves generated from other persona-communal centers. This centrifugality of the person reaches into all directions and touches all events that contribute to the full person – the mythical past, the generational past, the ever present nature, and the self in the process of being born. (Ogbonnaya, 1994, p. 79)

Sow (1980) concurs with Ogbonnaya (1994) and Zahan (1979) that the traditional African view of the self is multiple and deeply communicative:

Inseparable from his [sic] social dimension, the individual in Africa . . . *appears composite in space, multiple in time, extending and testifying to a culture of rich complexity . . .* Only an anthropological perspective that views the person as a living system of social relations and a system of interaction with the realm of the symbolic will enable one to grasp the way in which Africans experience the self. (Sow, 1980, p. 126, emphasis added)

To further illustrate that the traditional African worldview is consistent with the idea of multiple selves within a person, Sow (1980) cites from the work of Thomas and Lineau, who wrote as follows:

The concept of person sums up and brings together ideas and principles of traditional Negro-African thought. Indeed, one finds there the necessity of pluralism, the networks of participation and correspondence that bind the subject to the group and to the cosmos, the verbal dimensions, the dynamic and unfinished quality, the richness and the fragility, the important role assigned to the milieu, and the inevitable reference to the sacred. (Thomas & Lineau, 1975, cited in Sow, 1980, p. 127)

The quotations above do not view the self only as multiple, but it is also situated in time, and within webs of independencies and relationships. It is also characterised as “unfinished” and “fragile” (Thomas & Lineau, 1975, in Sow, 1980), meaning that it cannot be described as “complete” at any point in time. The “unfinished” nature of the self in African thought brings us to an issue that has not been fully explored in the literature. That is, why do traditional moral systems promote harmony and interdependence? It is suggested that this is precisely because of the possibility of tensions between the various selves comprising the individual. In a world characterised by connection and plurality, destabilisation (tensions) are more likely than in a world of abstract, individualized thinkers.

Ogbonnaya (1994) brings to our attention that selves within the person are always engaged in interplay with each other. The relationship between internal communal selves resembles the one between the individual and the community. Ideally, the various selves should work together interdependently, without the loss or sacrifice of other aspects of the communal self. However, problems of power and dominance between selves arise, threatening to destabilize the community of selves. That is, selves can be in conflict with each other. The predicament of

someone called by *izinyanya* to become a healer, exemplifies this. Because the call is unsolicited, it may result in a struggle between the spiritual self and the individual personality. The former seeks to dominate the latter by directing it to assume a healing function in society. With the assistance of a highly trained spiritual medium, it is possible for an individual to enter into a dialogue with the spiritual self, and, through the medium of *impepho*⁹, request it to forgive him or her for not accepting the call to heal.

If the chosen individual accepts the calling and qualifies as a traditional healer, the spiritual self becomes capable of holding an independent conversation with the individual self, and can be consulted for healing purposes. It is the general view that the spiritual self speaks with its own voice, independently of the voice of the healer. Because the healer is not aware of what the spiritual self is saying (through him or her), the service of an interpreter is usually solicited. This lends support to the view that multiple selves within a person can be engaged in a dialogical interplay with each other. The imbalance noted between the person and God or *izinyanya* can also occur internally, within the person, as highlighted by the example cited above. However, the ability of the self to take on new meanings, its “unfinished” (“fragile”) quality, makes restoration of equilibrium possible. Morality (connection), therefore, could be viewed as an ongoing struggle to reconcile views emanating from the various parts of the self.

Izinyanya as Moral Audiences

Another way to conceptualise the role of *izinyanya* in moral decision-making is through the notion of moral audiences (Day, 1991). Day (ibid) and Day and Tappan (1996) have argued that individuals are never alone in moral decision-making. Moral action always occurs in the context of a relationship with others, be they real or imaginal. Actors use stories to rehearse and interpret moral dilemmas in relation to others, who form internalised audiences, “before whom they act, and by whom they are judged” (Day & Tappan, 1996, p. 70). In this study, God and *izinyanya* formed important moral audiences. Moral actors rehearsed their stories before them.

Respondents did not appeal to God and *izinyanya* in general, however. Their appeal was guided by the belief that the self is connected to these systems. This appeal is consistent with a holistic

⁹ Holy incense, used by diviners and elders, for traditional religious purposes.

worldview. It differs from traditional cognitivist approaches, which endorse a disembodied and transcendental view of the self. Kohlberg's subjects reason from an impartialist point of view, which can be adopted by anyone at any point in time and history. The results underscore the need to study moral dilemmas in their social, cultural, and historical contexts (Day, 1991; Day & Tappan, 1996; Gilligan *et al.*, 1990).

The notion of moral audiences is consistent with Bakhtin's (1981) views on the addressivity of utterances. Bakhtin (1981, 1986) and Holquist (1983) argue that whenever an utterance is made, there is always an audience of imaginal listeners, whose responsive understanding is sought. The addressivity of utterances extends beyond individuals. It includes a system of ideas or belief systems (Bakhtin, 1986; Holquist, 1983). In this study, respondents appealed to religious beliefs. They tried to make sense of their moral dilemmas with reference to these idea systems. We are socialized into these beliefs in the course of growing up (Bhatia, 2000).

The idea systems referred to above do not represent abstract, theoretical concepts that we come to know "cognitively". They represent the views of real people, whom we have met in relationships. Even when these people are no longer there, we continue to consider their beliefs, or what they stood for, in the face of moral dilemmas. This stems from the fact that the voice of the deceased in African thought is accorded immense religious and moral significance (Holdstock, 2000; Nsamenang, 1992). This is similar to the way the deceased are perceived in traditional Indian thought (Bhatia, 2000). Bhatia maintains that "within the Indian context, the notion of the transmigration of the soul implies that people continue to have a relationship with the dead even after they have left the earthly world." (p. 159) This relationship includes moral obligations between the living and the deceased. The similarity between these two cultural traditions can be attributed to commonalities between Indian and African worldviews, especially their conception of the self as relational and extended in time (Markus & Kitayama, 1991).

Conceptualising moral decision-making in terms of moral audiences makes it possible to account for individual and group changes in moral action over time. Day and Tappan (1996) argue that:

Consistency of moral action thus has much to do with the consistency of the audience to which such actions are played. Moral principles are developed and sustained, or changed, in relation to

the parties who compose the audience, and moral actions are rehearsed before them. (p. 70) Although written with the view of intra-individual changes in mind, this paragraph applies to differences between individuals as well. It also explains intergenerational differences in moral action. In the narratives to come (e.g. Extract 4 below), we encounter moral actors whose dilemmas emanate from the fact that their descendants do not share their cultural point of view. This indicates that cultural reference systems are not important in and of themselves. The manner in which people dialogue with, and appropriate these systems individually, should be considered (Day & Tappan, 1996).

Morality, Religion and Philosophy in Other Cultures

It has been argued that moral reasoning, from a traditional African perspective, is based on a religious and philosophical worldview. Researchers in other cultures have highlighted the importance of religious and philosophical assumptions in moral reasoning. For example, Huebner and Garrod (1991) argue that Western moral theories cannot adequately account for moral reasoning in Buddhist societies. They maintain that moral reasoning among Tibetan monks is based on the notion that suffering is an inescapable part of life. According to this belief, suffering is brought about by one's conduct in the previous life. It can only end when one is re-born. This means that to understand the moral reasoning of the Tibetan monks, one needs to understand phenomenal existence. Likewise, Vasudev and Hummel (1987) opine that moral reasoning among the Hindu is based on Ahimsa. Ahimsa is the principle of non-violence. It applies to all forms of life. In a similar vein, Dien (1982) argues that the Confucian tradition, which extols promotion of social harmony and cultivation of one's inherent goodness, is the basis of moral reasoning in Chinese thought. Traditions such as the ones mentioned above, together with the results of the present study, underscore the importance of taking into account worldviews and philosophical assumptions in studying morality in varying cultural contexts (Jensen, 1997).

Cognitive-developmental approaches, on the other hand, separate morality and ethics from religion. Kohlberg (1981) argues that the sequence of moral development is not "dependent on a particular religion or on any religion at all in the usual sense" (p. 25), nor is it affected by

varying cultural and social values. In the Western tradition, “morality is fundamentally individualistic in nature. It is dictated by one’s conscience and has little to do with outside religious forces” (Verhoef & Michel (1997, p. 394). This implies that if one studies morality, beginning with the assumption that religion and morality are independent, traditional African communities are unlikely to perform at the postconventional level. The postconventional level separates moral reasoning from social and religious values. The postconventional level in Kohlberg’s moral scheme envisages that moral principles are valid independently of individuals and social groups subscribing to them (Kohlberg, 1981).

Moral Decision-making and Connection to the Family

The previous section touched briefly on the importance of the family in moral decision-making. This section expands on this theme. The need to refer to *izinyanya* again in this section arises from the fact that they are thought to occupy both the human and spiritual realms (cf. Mbiti, 1991). Thus, they are also part of the family. So far, the focus has been on the implications of being severed from spiritual beings. The moral significance of being connected to the family will now be addressed.

It may be stated that most cultures prize family solidarity. Although this is mostly true, differences exist in the way “family” is defined. According to traditional African perspectives, “extended”¹⁰ family members are an integral part of the family, as are *izinyanya* (cf. Paris, 1995). Further, mature personhood is defined by immersion in, rather than separation from, the family (cf. Verhoef & Michel, 1997). On the other hand, traditional Western approaches define the family primarily in nuclear terms (cf. Shweder, 1982). The goal of psychological development is to individuate, in order to realize one’s innermost potential (cf. Gilligan, 1977, 1982). Thus, one needs to be sensitive to cultural understandings of the meaning of the term “family”. Culture-specific, and often taken-for-granted obligations ensuing from being part of the family need to be considered. Unless otherwise indicated, the word “family” always refers to the “extended family” in this study.

¹⁰ The Nguni equivalent, *umndeni*, means “extended” family: It requires no qualification.

Forty-four respondents (85%) referred to morality and connection to the family. The moral significance attached to the family is highlighted by an extract from an interview with Baba Khumalo, a 68-year-old, retired farm-worker.

Nhlanhla: Thank you very much for agreeing to be part of these interviews. Could you please tell me about a situation where you were faced with a moral dilemma, and you did not know what to do?

Baba Khumalo: My dilemma has a long history to it, son, but I will try to shorten it. We are a big family. My brothers and I came here as farm workers. Eventually, we settled permanently. All my brothers are now deceased: I am now the head of the entire family. The most painful thing is that the family is dispersing, because my brothers' children are very stubborn. They do not want to respect. That puts me in a very difficult situation because I can see that times have changed. Things are no longer the way we were brought up. On the other hand, there is a problem, because they were left with me, under my guidance. That is my problem, son. It is an ongoing problem.

Nhlanhla: I hear, Baba. Now, how would you pinpoint the real problem in your situation?

Baba Khumalo: As I've said, they were left with me. It is my responsibility to ensure that the family stays together.

Nhlanhla: Why is it important that the family stays together?

Baba Khumalo: Well, what a question! *The family is the backbone of a person's life.* For example, I call myself Khumalo. Who is Khumalo? He was an outstanding member of the family. We derive our name from him. I can't call myself a person if there is no family. A person is not just dangling in the air: people are not born and then left on their own, like snakes. A person is connected to his/her family, and this goes back to the sleeping ones, *izinyanya*.

Nhlanhla: Let me put it this way, Baba. The way I see it, the family is now too big. It follows that as the family gets bigger, dispersion is inevitable?

Baba Khumalo: I see the way you are thinking. What is important to me is that my brothers asked me to look after their children. For me, it would be a personal failure if the family disperses before my very own eyes.

Nhlanhla: Is there something else that came to your mind, while you were dealing with this situation?

Baba Khumalo: As I've already said, *my brothers gave me specific instructions to look after them.* I have supervised the marriage ceremonies of some of them. I'm looking forward to doing the

same with the rest. Sometimes I ask myself: Why bother! I never quarrelled with my brothers. We never looked down upon each other. The most painful thing is that they [the children] do not respect me. They talk anyhow, disregarding the fact that there should be no noise [quarrels] within the family. *I cannot be involved in making noise within the family, especially with the children. So, that makes me very sad. I sometimes think of leaving them alone. Then, I remember my brothers' words. I can't look down upon their words.*

Nhlanhla: Anything else that came to your mind?

Baba Khumalo: Another thing is that I am now old and I am looking at the way forward.¹¹ I am the elder: I am the one who is looking after the family. It would be a grievous mistake if the family disintegrates during my turn as elder. That would mean, my way toward *izinyanya*, in the next world, will not be clear. *It is painful that the family will disintegrate during my tenure as elder. That means I am the one who failed.*

Nhlanhla: You mentioned that this means your way to the next world will not be clear?

Baba Khumalo: We Blacks believe that family unity is very important. It is the responsibility of the head of the family to ensure it. If the family is united, until you return to the world of *izinyanya*, your place among them is ensured.

Nhlanhla: Let me say, suppose there is an elder, like you. But this elder has failed to look after the family. What will happen to that person in the next world?

Baba Khumalo: I cannot be sure, but I believe that person will never see the world of *izinyanya*. Once that person has left this world, he/she will wander aimlessly. His/her soul will wander aimlessly, like an outcast. . . . That is undesirable, because a person's life ends with joy when she/he is re-united with kin in the next world.

(Extract 4)

This extract will be employed to show that connection to the family entails fulfilling one's responsibilities. Mostly, the nature of these responsibilities is dictated by one's position in the family hierarchy. Ability to meet one's responsibilities has a bearing on how the self is conceived. Challenges resulting from inter-generational differences, and other influences, are presented and discussed.

¹¹ This means that his days are numbered: he is looking forward to death.

Family and Position

Worldviews incorporate an understanding of the nature of human relationships (cf. Jensen, 1997; Kluckhohn & Strodtbeck, 1961). Baba Khumalo perceived the situation as a moral dilemma because, as head of the family, he saw it as his responsibility to ensure family unity. The situation is of moral relevance because of his position (elder, head). However, this goal seems to be eluding him. His brothers' children do not show him the respect he deserves: "The most painful thing is that they do not respect me. They talk to me anyhow, disregarding the fact that there should be no noise [quarrels] within the family." The moral ideal for the narrator is that family members should observe their positions, and respond accordingly. The children violate his integrity as an elder, by failing to relate to him in a manner deserving of his status.

The extract shows the significance attached to hierarchy and position in moral decision-making (cf. Verhoef & Michel, 1997). From a traditional African perspective, age is one of the most important determinants of status within the family. Younger members of the family are expected to respect elders. The latter are in turn entrusted with the obligation to ensure family coherence and survival (cf. Mbiti, 1991). By not respecting his position, the children make it difficult for the narrator to fulfill his moral responsibility of keeping the family united.

It has been mentioned that the type of responsibilities toward others depends on one's position in the family hierarchy. Position is defined not only by age or gender, nor need one be an elder to assume family responsibilities. Moral responsibility also emanates from the uniqueness of one's position. For example, a person who is employed is better positioned to support the family economically, compared to the one who is unemployed.

Responsiveness to one's unique position within the family is illustrated by Nomusa's dilemma. Nomusa, a middle-aged schoolteacher, was the sole breadwinner in her family. She decided to take unpaid study leave to improve her qualifications at one of the national universities. This meant leaving her mother, a pensioner, and her siblings, without adequate financial support. The narrator felt guilty because she could not support her family during her studies. Her moral

dilemma is highlighted in the following passage:

Nhlanhla: So, what was the moral problem for you in this situation?

Nomusa: The moral problem was [that] I had responsibilities. I was a breadwinner at home. My mother was already on pension. . . . While at the university, I thought a lot about the situation I left behind at home. I kept wondering how they were managing. As the breadwinner, . . . the responsibility was on my shoulders.

Nhlanhla: Why is it important for a person to look after the family?

Nomusa: *That is very important. Especially, because your parents raised you, they carried you (bakuthwalile), they educated you, and did everything for you.* It is the only way to thank them, especially if they are old and retired. It is now your turn to assume parental responsibilities. IT IS VERY IMPORTANT! VERY IMPORTANT! It is a way of showing that you are a thankful person.

Nhlanhla: I like the word you used, *ukuthwala* (“to carry”). It gives me a mental picture of the nature of the relationship between oneself and parents. Now, let us consider other people. They were also “carried” but when they are old, they forget their families, and their parents. How would you describe such people?

Nomusa: That would be a very ugly thing to do! (*kubi kabi lokho!*). That is a person who lacks caring, an irresponsible person. A person who does not, especially who does not show love and . . . thankfulness. . . . Because, even if you come from a well-to-do family, . . . there is always something you can do to thank your parents *Because, I was born of a human being, I am a human being, but I would not have been able to raise myself. . . . I survived because someone was there for me. Had my mother and father abandoned me, I would not have survived. In the course of growing up, they taught me many things. That is why I am the person that I am now.* So, there comes a time when the situation is reversed. . . . It is now my turn to help. . . . *At this point, I lend a hand (ngelula isandla) to acknowledge that it is because they are human beings . . . that I have also grown up to be a human being (Kungoba bangabantu, ukuthi nami ngingumuntu manje).*

(Extract 5)

In the extract above, Nomusa construed her situation as a moral dilemma because of her position as sole breadwinner. She had to be sensitive to the special circumstances of her family. Taking unpaid leave put the burden of supporting the family squarely on her mother’s shoulders. Nomusa felt guilty because her mother had to support the family with her meager pension

income. It is the narrator's unique position as sole breadwinner that created the dilemma. This shows that position does not depend on hierarchy only. People are expected to be sensitive to their unique roles within their families. Failure to do so is regarded as immoral.

Family and Conceptions of Self

The view that human beings are connected to their families forms an important part of self-understanding in the extracts cited above. For example, family unity has a bearing on how Baba Khumalo (Extract 4) sees himself as a person. The family is an important part of his personal identity. "A person is connected to his/her family, and this goes back to the sleeping ones, *izinyanya*", he says. The embeddedness of the self in the family is illustrated by an *isiZulu* proverb about the offspring of snakes, which he cites. Unlike the offspring of snakes, which are left to cater for themselves from birth, a person remains connected to others. For the narrator, personhood is inconceivable independently of the family (cf. Menkiti, 1984; Paris, 1995). He attempts to find meaning in life by immersing himself in the family's affairs, rather than by separating himself from them.

Failure to meet his obligations brings to the fore the image of self-as-failure: "For, me, it would be a personal failure if the family disperses before my very own eyes." Later in the interview, he refers to failure again: "It is painful that the family will disintegrate during my tenure as elder. That means I am the one who has failed." On the other hand, he spoke with great pride of his accomplishments in the role of elder. This includes having supervised the marriage ceremonies of some of his brothers' children (a successful self). This at least makes him feel accomplished as an elder.

Another image of self emerging from this dilemma is what I would call a possible future self (c.f. Markus & Wurf, 1987). His concerns are driven by the belief that "if the family is united, until you return to the world of *izinyanya*, your place among them is ensured." Failure, on the other hand, could mean rejection in the next world: "Once that person has left this world, . . . his/her soul will wander aimlessly, like an outcast. . . . That is undesirable because a person's life ends with joy when she/he is re-united with kin in the next world." This shows that the narrator

imagines himself in a different context in space and time. His conception of reality (cf. Jensen, 1997) incorporates a world beyond the present one. Acceptance in the next world depends on his actions in the present, however. Most important, it depends on whether he has fulfilled his obligations as an elder. Thus, the narrator has to consider the envisaged future self in his actions.

The view that moral reasoning should take into account changes in time and place (cf. Day & Tappan, 1996; Gilligan *et al.*, 1990) finds support in Extract 4. Baba Khumalo is fully aware of the source of his dilemma. It emanates from cultural changes, brought over by time. He says of his predicament: “That puts me in a very difficult position because I can see that times have changed. Things are no longer the way we were brought up.” He tries to balance this insight with the memory of his brothers’ words: “On the other hand, there is a problem, because they were left under my guidance.” The memory of his brothers comes to the fore when he is dealing with this issue: “So, that makes me very sad. Sometimes I think of leaving them alone. Then, I remember my brothers’ words. I can’t look down upon their words.” He could not simply disregard this memory, especially given the belief that the last words of the deceased ought to be respected (cf. Mbiti, 1991). Thus, inter-generational changes require the narrator to play a lesser role in the affairs of the [extended] family. On the other hand, he is answerable to the memory of his deceased brothers, who form an internal audience (cf. Day, 1991). The dilemma highlights the importance of studying morality with reference to changes in context and time (cf. Day & Tappan, 1996; Gilligan *et al.*, 1990).

The view of the self that is immersed in relationships is also evident in Nomusa’s narrative (Extract 5). For her, the obligation to care for family members stems from the memory of having been cared for by other family members. Caring for parents is important because “. . . *they carried you (bakuthwalile), they educated you, and did everything for you.*” This statement points at the reciprocity of human relationships, especially between parents and their children. The *isiZulu* word *-thwala* (to carry) supports this. The word refers not only to the physical act of carrying (a baby). It points at the dependent nature of the relationship the child has with his or her parents. Parents take responsibility for the well-being of the child, who would otherwise be unable to cater for himself or herself. Having been cared for by others in time of need, the narrator felt morally obliged to reciprocate in kind. This supports the view that moral decision-

making takes place within a network of relational ties (cf. Benhabib, 1992; Gilligan, 1982; Paris, 1995).

Extract 5 also highlights the view that failure to recognize the mutuality of human relationships, by caring for others, is considered in moral terms. Nomusa describes failure to meet family obligations as absence of love and thankfulness, irresponsibility, and lack of care. In *isiZulu*, thankfulness (*ukubonga*) is relational. It is about recognizing relationships that sustained one in time of need. Further, it points at the obligation to reciprocate in kind, where necessary and if one can afford to do so. This is partly in recognition that one becomes a human being through others' sacrifices, as the narrator points out:

I was born of a human being, I am a human being, but I would not have been able to raise myself. . . . I survived because someone was there for me. Had my mother and father abandoned me, I would not have survived.

The expression "to be born of a human being" is used to remind people of the pain of childbirth. It is a call to be empathetic to others. The expression is often contrasted with having "sprung out of a stone" (*ukuqhumama etsheni*). The latter is used to describe people who lack empathy, especially for those who are close to them. A stone is a thing: it feels no pain. Nomusa acknowledges that the moral sensibilities associated with being human result from having been cared for by others. Thus she "lends a hand" to acknowledge that "[it is] because they are human beings . . . that I have also grown up to be a human being." Failure to look after one's parents indicates that one does not have the thankfulness, care, and responsibility associated with a fully human (moral) being.

Conceptions of morality evident in the extracts mentioned above cannot be fully understood without reference to the role of the family and the other in self-definition. Human beings do not constitute a closed system in African thought. People do not stand in opposition to the environment or others. Rather, they enter into a relationship with their surrounding environment, including other people. There is constant communication between the self and the other, "a sort of osmotic exchange, owing to which man [sic] finds himself permanently listening, so to speak, to the pulse of the world" (Zahan, 1979, p. 9). The high degree of permeability between the self

and the other or the environment means that people do not possess the unity attributed to them in traditional Western thought. The human being is always in relation with others, including the surrounding environment. This view of the self, traditionally called interdependent, relational, or communal (Mwawenda, 1995, 1999; Sow, 1979; Zahan, 1979), is distinguished from the traditional Western concept of the self, called independent, disembedded, or abstract (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). The moral implications of the relational view of the self will now be discussed. Comparisons will be drawn with the moral point of view emanating from an independent view of the self.

In traditional African thought, the family constitutes one of the most important reference systems for the self, and human beings find their place and meaning in life in relation to the family (Mbiti, 1991; Nsamenang, 1992, 1999). The (extended) family, which is the basic unit of societal organization, provides a reference system for the self. It extends on both the horizontal and vertical dimensions. On the horizontal dimension, relational ties to the living bio-lineage, such as parents, sisters, and brothers, bind the individual. On the vertical dimension, the individual is bound to *izinyanya* as well as those who are yet to be born.

Izinyanya, who partly belong in the spiritual world, while constituting an important part of the family, are immediately present in the world of the individual. They can manifest themselves in a variety of ways, such as in dreams or in the form of the family's totem. Success and happiness on earth, it is believed, depend on the extent to which *izinyanya* are satisfied with family members' actions. The relationship between family members is one of reciprocity (Coetzee, 1998). Family members who can afford to are expected to help those in need. Even in contemporary African society, it is usual for poor parents and relatives to jointly sacrifice their earnings to ensure that an academically able child gets an education that will maximize future employability. Interdependence is sustained if the child maintains regular links with the family, upon completion of his or her studies. This can be achieved by lending financial, moral, leadership and other forms of support to the family (Mwawenda, 1999). Failure to do so constitutes a moral failure, punishable by *izinyanya*.

Family and Morality in the Cognitivist Paradigm

The importance which traditional African worldviews attach to the family in moral becoming, differs from cognitivist models. For Kohlberg (1981, 1984), people attain the highest and adequate forms of moral reasoning when they “graduate” from conventional to postconventional thought. It is thought that this transition brings with it the ability to appraise moral dilemmas independently of family and social groups. Respondents in the present study, on the other hand, regarded responsiveness to the family and others as an indispensable part of being moral. This is because they do not view psychological development in terms of separation from the family, but in terms of connection to it. Participants who subscribe to this view are likely to score at the conventional level of Kohlberg’s moral scheme (e.g. Ferns & Thom, 2001). This should not be construed as evidence of moral deficiency. Rather, we should interpret it with reference to the perspective of the people concerned (Simpson, 1974).

It should be noted that cognitivist approaches do not maintain that responsibilities toward the family and others have no moral validity at all. These responsibilities are regarded as supererogatory. They attain full moral status only when they are linked to justice or the protection of individual rights. Interpersonal responsibilities that do not involve justice issues or rights are deemed a matter of individual choice (supererogatory). This is based on the view that beneficence obligations (helping needy others) should be limited in scope to avoid exhausting the moral agent.

Miller (1994), Miller and Bersoff (1992) and Miller *et al.* (1990) however question the view that interpersonal responsibilities are supererogatory. They have shown that different cultures view these responsibilities differently. For example, Americans tend to view interpersonal responsibilities as either *personal-moral* or matters of *personal choice*. Personal-moral issues arouse a sense of objective obligation, but do not fall within the scope of legitimate regulation. Matters of personal choice do not arouse a sense of objective obligation, nor do they fall within the scope of legitimate regulation. In India, on the other hand, people consider interpersonal responsibilities in fully moral terms. For Indians, these issues involve personal obligation, and

are perceived to be within the scope of legitimate regulation (Miller & Bersoff; 1992, Miller *et al.*, 1990). This means that the view that the morality of interpersonal responsibilities is supererogatory is not universal.

Miller (1994) argues that the above-mentioned cultural differences stem from variations in conceptions of the self. The Kohlbergian approach assumes an autonomous, decontextualised self. It is in line with the Rawlsian (1972) conception of subjects. Rawls's subjects enter into relationships voluntarily, in order to safeguard their own interests. This view of the self is not universal (Shweder & Bourne, 1991). Other cultures emphasize interdependence, which "entails seeing oneself as part of an encompassing social relationship and recognising that one's behavior is determined, contingent upon, and, . . . organized by what the actor perceives to be the thoughts, feelings, and actions of others in the relationship" (Markus & Kitayama, 1991, p. 227). Knowledge of one's role and responsibilities within the social order is an important component of this view of the self. Traditional Eastern (Indian) and African views of the self are similar in many ways (Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Mwavenda, 1995). Both prize a connected, rather than a separate, self.

Connection and the Community

The idea of the connection between family members, is extended to the community. This view was expressed by 73% of the sample. Connection means that people are responsive to the needs of others in their community. Community was not conceived only in geographic terms: it is seen as consisting of a network of people, with a shared history and memory of mutual interdependence (cf. Gbadegesin, 1998). A state of morality exists if the relationship between the individual and the community is characterised by mutual interdependence. This is realised if community members fulfil obligations toward one another.

An extract from an interview with Mbali highlights the idea of connection between community members. She is a 30-year-old executive in one of the government departments. Prior to the extract following, she had spoken at length about moral obligations toward the family:

- Nhlanhla:** You have spoken about *ubuntu*¹² in the family. How does the community come in?
- Mbali:** Well, it is the same practice in the community. My extended family should also look after their family members, etc. This spreads to the community as a whole. According to my knowledge, the community should be united. They should be *a community*. It [the community] should be together, although this does not always happen these days. People tend to live their lives in isolation. But, if things were done accordingly, like, for instance, I will tell you about communal burial schemes. In an African community, if a person dies, the neighbours are the first to visit the family, before the relatives arrive, who may be living far away. The neighbours are the first to visit the family. You will see them busy helping out. The same thing happens if there is a marriage. So, you should have *ubuntu* to those who share life¹³ with you. In return, they will have *ubuntu* with you.
- Nhlanhla:** *Ubuntu* does not end with the family. It spreads out?
- Mbali:** It spreads out.
- Nhlanhla:** Let me stop here. Is there anything else you would like to say?
- Mbali:** We are talking about morality. These days people act anyhow. The bond between them has been lost. For example, do you know that our communities harbour criminals within them? People go out at night, and break into their neighbours' houses. And we keep quiet. So, I believe the bond between people has been lost.
- Nhlanhla:** Why is the bond you are talking about important?
- Mbali:** The bond I am talking about is the future of our youth. If the bond is there, the youth grow up knowing that they are a community. They know that they must lend support to a neighbour in need. They grow up with a sense of community. This prevents the things I've been talking about, such as the criminal element. Criminals now roam at large because we are not united. The moral fibre has been lost. People do not feel personally affected if a crime has been committed against their neighbours. . . . Whereas in a normal society, the community will not harbour a criminal.
- (Extract 6)**

Extract 6 above repeats many of the responsibilities expected among family members.

Connection to the community means that its members acknowledge mutual responsiveness to

¹² People have *ubuntu* if their relationships are characterized by care and interdependence.

¹³ The respondent used the expression *ukuphila nabo*, literally, "to live with." Figuratively, the term means those whose lives are interwoven with yours.

each other's needs. It is in view of this that the narrator opines: "... you should have *ubuntu* to those who share life with you." To "share life" with others is to acknowledge their happiness or suffering as one's own. This is expressed mostly through action, rather than mere words. For example, in the event of a death (which the narrator cites), the community mobilizes to provide counselling and other forms of support to the family of the deceased¹⁴. Thus, connection to the community points at a life of interdependence among its members.

Connection is also expressed as a "bond" between members of a community. The nature of this bond is such that one feels affected by the plight of another. This contributes to moral and social stability. The narrator bemoans the loss of this bond: "...these days. . . people live their lives in isolation." The weakening of connections between people is indicated by the fact that "... they do not feel personally affected if a crime has been committed against their neighbours." The issues raised by the narrator are similar to Ward's (1991) concerns. Ward argued that the violence observed among African-American adolescents resulted from the disruption of the bonds of interdependence: a violation of the principle of care and connectedness among community members: "What has been lost to the violent Black teenager is an awareness that aggression against the other. . . is aggression against the self" (Ward, 1991, p. 182). The results indicate that morality is characterized by interrelatedness and interdependence between community members.

Connection as *Ubuntu*

In many traditional African languages, the bond assumed to exist between community members, is known as *ubuntu* (or *botho*, in Sotho, and *hunhu*, in Shona). This is a complex word, pointing at both the bond between community members, as well as the moral be-ing of selves constituting the community. *Ubuntu* points to the state of flux, or becoming, between members of a community. The word is derived from the Nguni stem *-ntu*, meaning a human being. The prefix *ubu-* falls in the class of nouns that denote a process or becoming. The complete word, *ubuntu*, means the process of becoming a person, or the *be-ing* of personhood. From this linguistic

¹⁴ Known as *ukulindisa* (literally, to "wait with the family") if they happen before the funeral, or *ukubona* (to "see") if they happen after the funeral. The therapeutic value of these support groups cannot be discussed here.

analysis, it could be concluded that to define morality as *ubuntu* means that it is thought of as being an indispensable part of being a human being. However, personhood in African thought, it will be recalled, is interwoven with the be-ing of others. Be-ing (*ubu-ntu*) is conceived as a perpetual movement and sharing of the values and virtues thought to constitute the life of a community (Ramose, 1999; Shutte, 1993, 2001). These are virtues such as care, justice, respect and empathy for others (Louw, 1999, 2001; Ramose, 1999). As Tutu (cited in Holdstock, 2000) notes, people with *ubuntu* are compassionate, gentle and always willing to use their strength to support the weak. Absence of *ubuntu* is synonymous with being incomplete as a human being.

Two extracts illustrate the view that *ubuntu* or morality is part of personhood (or the life of a people within a community). The first is from an interview with Senzo, a 20-year-old scholar from a Black urban township. The second is from an interview with Mandla, a middle-aged College lecturer:

Nhlanhla: You have said that people in the community should have *ubuntu*. Could you describe *ubuntu*?

Senzo: [A person without *ubuntu*] is *lifeless* (*umuntu ongaphili*). Ehh, No! [shakes head]. That person does not have life, if he/she cannot choose between right and wrong.

Nhlanhla: What do you mean? Life in a bodily sense?

Senzo: I do not mean life in a bodily sense. *I mean that such a person does not have ubuntu. He/she is not a person That person is no longer complete in his/her be-ing (akaphelele ebuntwini bakhe), because it is the ability to know right from wrong, in the way you do things, that makes you a person.*

(Extract 7)

Mandla opined in a similar manner:

Nhlanhla: What does morality mean to you?

Mandla: It means the root of *ubuntu* (*kuyimpande yobuntu*). I could say, in fact I can make two distinctions. *It means a life that is complete in the good (impilo ephelele ebuhleni)*. I do not refer to life in a medical sense, like getting sick and the like. I mean life . . . as in one's lived experience (*ngokwenkambo*). *I mean, life as it reveals itself in one's day-to-day engagements with other people.* (Extract 8)

Asked to define morality, both respondents referred to *ubuntu*, life, and “completion.” The three concepts were used interchangeably, in line with the metaphorical nature of *isiZulu*. A person who cannot choose between right and wrong “does not have life” (Extract 7). Such a person is not “complete in his/her being . . . because it is the ability to know right from wrong, that makes you a person.” This extract indicates that morality is part of being a person. Immorality (absence of *ubuntu*) is indexed by being devoid of life. People have life if they live harmoniously with others. To be a person requires one to engage in the dynamism constituting the life of a people. This entails responsiveness to social obligations, among other things. Failure to do so is considered to be an indication of an “incomplete” self. The position developed in this thesis is consistent with Hekman’s (1995) view, who has argued that in every community, developing a moral voice is an indispensable aspect of becoming a person.

Mandla (Extract 8) also sees morality as an integral part of *ubuntu*. He defined it as “the root of *ubuntu*”, which is an interesting analogy. It indicates that morality is the *source* (the “root”) of personhood. This means that *ubuntu* is inseparable from social relations and practices, namely the things people do. As Mandla points out, it is part of the good life or “lived experience.” This finds support in the view that life “*reveals itself in one’s day-to-day engagements with other people.*” These engagements are referred to as *inkambo* in *isiZulu*. *Inkambo* means a life journey. It is derived from the Nguni root *-hamba*, literally, “to go or travel.” Unlike a single journey (*uhambo*), *inkambo* is an appraisal of a person’s life at a point in time, within a community of other people. It refers to a history of a person’s relationships with others and his or her world. An “incomplete” journey (*inkambo engaphelele*) means one has fallen short of the standards of *ubuntu*. This indicates that *ubuntu* (morality) is grounded in communal life.

Connection to the Community and the Self

Like connection to the family, connection to the community is an integral part of a person’s sense of self. This self is enacted in one’s relationships with others in one’s community. This was evident in Doda’s dilemma, a middle-aged male nurse and traditional healer. His dilemma involved assisting a colleague to challenge an unfair dismissal.

Nhlanhla: [So, one must come to the assistance of the other] even if that does not concern you directly?

Doda: It depends! It depends on how that thing touches you. In my case, I was helping her not only because we worked together. *WE LIVED TOGETHER. WE RENTED ACCOMMODATION AT THE SAME QUARTERS. SO, SHE WAS ALMOST LIKE A SISTER TO ME.* Even if we did not stay together, we were like brothers and sisters at work. We lived like a community. We had that kind of relationship. She was one of the people who made my work enjoyable. They were giving me a lot of support.

Nhlanhla: So, there was that connection. You lived like a family?

Doda: *Yaa! There was that mutual, I do not know how to put it, a mutual understanding, a connection, a bond. . . .* Because, you see, if you start in a job, people are happy for you. They appreciate you as a person. *Those people sustain you; they make you live (bayakuphilisa). They make you feel like a person . . .* She was one of the people behind my success, by merely appreciating the things I did. There was that connection among the staff.

(Extract 9)

This extract shows that Doda and his colleagues shared a way of life characteristic of a community. For example, he says: “*WE LIVED TOGETHER. WE RENTED ACCOMMODATION AT THE SAME QUARTERS. SO, SHE WAS ALMOST LIKE A SISTER TO ME.*” He was not only motivated to help her because they lived and worked together, but she was also like a family member. As such, he had to respond to her plight in the same way he would to someone connected to him through family ties. The dismissal “touched” him. This means that it affected him personally and emotionally. The narrator viewed the situation from the point of view of one who was connected to it.

The narrator also appeals to the reciprocal nature of relationships among the staff. There was “*mutual understanding, a connection, a bond*” between staff members. Their relationship was characterized by mutual interdependence. The colleague in question was “. . . one of the people who made my work enjoyable.” She was “. . . one of the people behind my success, by merely appreciating the things I did.” This statement points at the mutual responsiveness assumed in human relationships (cf. Paris, 1995). The narrator found personal meaning through participation

in the community of other workers. This is supported by the view that “these people sustain you (*bayakuphilisa*), they make you feel like a person.” His own well-being and sense of self were dependent on this community.

The results presented above support the view that the self in traditional African thought is not only interwoven with the family, it is also embedded within interpersonal and social contexts (Mwawenda, 1999; Nobles, 1991; Nsamenang, 1992; Ogbonnaya, 1994). Selfhood can only be attained by maintaining a mutual and interdependent relationship with one’s community.

Consistent with this, children are socialized to realize that their well-being lies with the welfare of others in their society. The ideal goal of (psychological) development is to realise the self fully by contributing to society, which in turn should develop its members (Dzobo, 1992).

Human beings become fully human by virtue of incorporation . . . into the human community” (Nsamenang, 1992, p. 75). Without such socialization, people are not fully deserving of the term “human beings” (that is, *abantu* or moral beings) (Nsamenag, 1992).

The above-mentioned view led Menkiti (1984) to conclude as follows about traditional African conceptions of personhood:

It is in rootedness in an ongoing human community that the individual comes to see himself [sic] as a man, and it is by first knowing the community as a stubborn perduring fact of the psychological world that the individual comes to know himself as a durable, more or less permanent, fact of this world. (pp. 171-172)

Likewise, Mbiti (1969) wrote:

In traditional life, the individual does not exist alone but corporately. He [sic] owes his existence to other people, including those of past generations and his contemporaries. He is simply part of the whole. The community must therefore make, create, produce the individual; for the individual depends on the corporate group. . . . Whatever happens to the individual happens to the whole group, and whatever happens to the whole group happens to the individual. The individual can only say: “I am, because we are, and since we are, therefore I am.” This is the cardinal point in the understanding of the African view of man. (Mbiti, 1969, p. 108-109)

The interdependence between the person and the community has moral implications. For example, children are traditionally regarded as an important asset of the community. Raising

them is a communal responsibility. Thus, a mother is responsible for her children as well as those of others because “all the children in the community are *her* children.” (Verhoef & Michel, 1997, p. 396, emphasis original). Likewise, children are traditionally expected to be respectful to elders in the community, as if the latter were their biological parents. This is fostered by the use of terms such as “brother”, “sister”, “mother” and “father” beyond biologically related relatives to community members in the same age-cohort. Although there is no bond of kinship between the parties, people so described are morally and psychologically bound to behave consistently with the cultural scripts of the terms used (Nsamenang, 1992).

The emphasis that traditional African communities place on observing one’s obligations as a member of the community led Verhoef and Michel (1997) to describe indigenous African morality as a circular process. Traditional African communities, they argue, are always in motion or flux. The community is “unified through mutual obligations between individuals, . . . weakened by separation of individuals through moral transgression, [and] . . . reunified through the interaction process of the whole community working together to re-establish the relationship between individuals” (ibid, p. 404).

Comparisons with Gilligan’s Relational Ethic

The results of the present study are similar to those reported by Gilligan (1977, 1982) on women. Gilligan argues that emotional responsiveness is an important component of the moral domain. Her theory of morality is situated: it is defined with reference to historical connections and relationships. Gilligan’s (1982) moral agent is embedded, rather than separate and generalized (Benhabib, 1987, 1992; Blum, 1988). Similarities between African approaches to morality and Gilligan’s relational ethic stem partly from the fact that both endorse an interdependent view of the self (Card, 1988). Despite these similarities, differences exist between the two. The African concept of relationships tends to be much more inclusive than Gilligan’s. For example, it includes the deceased and even those who are yet to be born (Sow, 1980; Nsamenang, 1992). Further, underlying the importance attached to relationships in African thought is a metaphysical framework that connects people to *izinyanya*, God, and their social milieu. A proper study of morality in indigenous societies requires a critical dialogue with such ontologies. This is

consistent with the call to situate the study of morality in context and time (Bhatia, 2000; Day & Tappan, 1996; Gilligan *et al.*, 1990).

Conclusion

This chapter presented a traditional African understanding of morality. The results support the view that moral reasoning is premised on comprehensive worldviews. Worldviews spell out a people's understanding of their place and position in the world, their orientation to others, and their understanding of reality (Jensen, 1997). Respondents in this sample understood morality with reference to connection with others and one's social milieu. This stems from a traditional African worldview that conceives the universe as a unified, interdependent whole (Myers, 1988; Nsamenang, 1992; Ramose, 1999; Sow, 1980; Zahan, 1979). According to this worldview, everything is functionally connected. Human beings are expected to live symbiotically with the universe. Moral goodness is not conceived in abstract, individualistic terms. Rather, morality exists when the balance between elements in the hierarchy of beings is maintained. Balance is maintained if people remain responsive to one another, according to their position and status. Immorality results from a disruption of the system's equilibrium. This happens if people fail to be responsive to one another.

It has also been shown that the concept of the self plays an important part in the understanding of morality. A traditional African account of moral reasoning is premised on a relational and communicative view of the self. Further, morality is an indispensable part of becoming a person (*ubu-ntu*). Selfhood and morality are interwoven with the welfare of others. Neither can be realized independently of a community of other selves.

CHAPTER 8

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION: PART II

In the previous chapter, it was shown that morality in traditional African thought is founded on the principle of connection. Moral orientations such as respect and care were briefly introduced. This chapter highlights the simultaneous existence of, and dialogic tensions between moral points of view. These tensions arise from competing conceptions of selves within a single person. The chapter also presents influences of gender, power and positioning (cf. Haré & van Langenhove, 1999a) on moral decision-making. It is shown that positioning is socio-culturally embedded. Collective voices or understandings of what it means to be a man or woman in one's society influence moral identity. Moral dilemmas ensue from the struggle to craft an identity, given the field of signs and symbols made available by the culture (cf. Penuel & Werstch, 1995). This underscores the need to study moral decision-making as it occurs in context and time.

Dialogic Tensions in Moral Decision-making

This section presents the tensions noted between moral positions and conceptions of selves in moral decision-making. Fewer but longer extracts are employed, to enable the reader to follow tensions as they develop. First, the discussion captures the relational and emotional context of moral decision-making. Competing conceptions of selves are then examined, as are moral perspectives discernible from the extracts.

To illustrate the issues mentioned above, an extract from an interview with Vusi, a male post-graduate student from a rural background, will be used. Vusi was given the task by his brothers of driving them in a bid to avenge the death of a family member. The story unfolds as follows:

Vusi: It was during the beginning of this year. So, my brother, who works in X (a major city), was hijacked and killed. His car, and everything in it, was taken. We

got a lead, as to who had killed him, and that they lived in this place called Y. So, as a family, we sat down and decided that we had to do something, because the boys who had killed him were known in the area: they specialized in hijacking cars. It was decided that we had to take action against them. So, we got a car and we had to drive to their place, called Y. I am the one with the driver's licence. So, as a driver, I had to drive the car. We had to go to this place called Y. It was very painful! The person who had died was a major breadwinner. He was the most responsible family member. Personally, as a person who was very close to him, I had to show closeness, even after his death. So, I had to drive the car. There were five of us: four others and myself. The plan was that once we arrived at Y, I had to stay in the car, at a distance. Once they had done what they wanted to do, I would drive the get-away car. *Inside, I was afraid. I thought about my education. I was doing something against my principles (imigomo yami).* In my entire life, I've never told myself that I will be involved in anything to do with killing or hurting another human being. *Now, I was involved in the thing they wanted to do. At the time, what they had done to our brother was very painful. AND I WANTED THEM TO BE PUNISHED! . . . This means that, to me, the conflict was: I had to do something that was against my life principles. In my entire life, I never thought I would be involved in anything to do with killing and hurting others.* At the same time, I had to show the family, my brothers and his mother, because we are brothers but our mothers are different¹, I had to show that I loved him. Because we were very close. I remember that the night he was shot, we had been together during the day. So, when his mother saw me after they shot him, she said: "They have shot my son, but I am glad that you are alive!"

Nhlanhla **His mother said that?**

Vusi: Yes. So, that means I have to take his place in her heart. That meant a lot to me. The way everyone was angry! They wanted those who had done this to be punished. But what if we got caught? What about my studies? I am a student; my future is still ahead of me. Now, I had to be involved in such things.

Nhlanhla: **Anything that came to your mind?**

Vusi: Yes. In my mind there was a great debate, which I could not resolve. When I tried to convince them otherwise, they said: "Don't worry, you will just drive. You won't be involved." So, we arrived at this place called Y. We looked for an

¹ He comes from a polygamous family.

area called N, but we could not find it, and it was getting dark and dangerous. So, eventually we went back home, as we could not find them that day. So, I tried another plan. I said: “Why don’t we contact the police? . . . *But at the same time, as I was giving this opinion, I did not want to appear as a coward.* I had to avoid that; otherwise, they would think being educated has turned me into a coward. So, I gave this opinion in a matter-of-fact way. We contacted the police but at the same time we were scared, as they could have been in cahoots with the criminals. . . . Even though we contacted the police, we continued our search the next day. So, as we were travelling, *unembeza* was killing me inside, that I am driving a car, carrying would-be murderers. But at the same time they had to be punished because they had done wrong. He who lives by the sword dies by the sword. Inside, I wanted them to be punished, but I did not want to be personally involved. . . . But somehow they had to feel the pain that we felt. We were looking for them again, but *unembeza* was against what we were doing. “Why Me! Why should I be the one driving the car?” . . . So, that is the most difficult situation I faced in my life, having to decide whether to withdraw or not, and the meaning the family would attribute to my withdrawal. What would they say? They would say I am forsaking him (the deceased) because he is dead? At the same time I thought: “What about me? If I do not think of myself as a member of the family, do I like what is happening?” And you find that inside; that is against your feelings, that I am doing this because they say I must do it. Although I do not want to do it, I do not want to show the Me (*ubu-Mina*). Because, my inside, it is weak compared to my outside, which is what I show.

Nhlanhla: **In this situation, what did you decide to do, eventually?**

Vusi: There is a problem because we can’t find these people, but the plan that they must be punished is still there. I’ve decided maybe I should find them another driver. But, I do not want to appear as a person who is withdrawing, a coward. You see, because I want to protect my integrity. When I’m among my brothers, yes, they know that I am furthering my studies but they expect me to conform to other things. Because, if I see this situation differently, they will say: “Look, he does not want to work hand in hand with us.” So, I want to do it [get another driver] and the way I’ve planned it, it looks like it is going to work.

Nhlanhla: **Previously, you mentioned your principles: that the situation was against your principles. Would you explain?**

Vusi: Yes. In my entire life, I've never seen myself hurting another human being. Because, I think everyone has the right to life. If someone is going to be harmed, I put myself in the position of that person, and I realize it must be painful. You see? *But if a person has caused pain to others, he/she must be punished.* But I do not want to be the one responsible for the punishment.

Nhlanhla: **You also mentioned that your personal integrity was at stake in this dilemma?**

Vusi: You see, like, amongst us as brothers, we are a big family. Yes, I may be educated . . . but, among my people, those I associate with, I WANT TO APPEAR AS A MAN AMONG MEN (*UKUVELA NJENGENSIZWA KWEZINYE*). [Even though I am educated] MY MANHOOD IS STILL THERE! During traditional events (*imicimbi*), I carry a shield. *Yeah! It must be clear that I am a man: I do not fear other men.* I sometimes tell people: "Men! (*Madoda!*), we² may be educated, but as a boy, I went through all traditional courage testing rituals. I fought! (*ngaqhathwa!*). Sometimes I would lose, but I often won. You see, the fact that we are educated; education is just a means to get porridge.³ It cannot change the fact that I am a man. MANHOOD! I WAS BORN WITH IT! WHEN I WAS BORN, MY MOTHER SAID: "BEHOLD, I HAVE BEGOTTEN A MAN." SHE DID NOT SAY: "I HAVE BEGOTTEN A COWARD."

Nhlanhla: **In other words, your manhood was at stake?**

Vusi: Yeah! If someone has wronged the family, AND YOU PUNISH THEM, when you return home [from punishing the person], you get the dignity you deserve as men. You send a message that people can't mess around with your family. *The women who have married into the family will take pride in the fact that they have married real men. Men who deserve to be married! (amadoda okuganwa!). Men who do not like wrong!* Even the children of the family will take pride in you. . . . Men in our village will respect us. Because, people were asking questions: "Why are you so quiet?" You see, that alone, "Why are you so quiet?" That meant a lot to us. . . . It motivated us to take action.

Nhlanhla: **It must have been a very difficult situation indeed?**

²The use of "we" does not indicate a plural. It is a reflection of the tendency among the Nguni to sometimes speak about themselves in the plural, e.g. when addressing a meeting.

³ An expression, meaning education is a means to evade poverty.

Vusi: I regard it as the most difficult situation I've faced in my life. . . . I had to do something that violates my principles. But if I do it, inside I will remain guilty. Why me? I've always told myself that I have compassion: that I do not want others to be hurt. So, I realized my principles were going to be broken, because I was going to do this ugly thing.

Nhlanhla: You mentioned your education earlier?

Vusi: Education had a great role to play. Because, the more I'm educated, the more I become a coward. People even say that educated people are cowards. I do not know whether it is cowardice or thinking too much. . . . But there was a thought that we could be killed. And what about the time and other investments I have made in my education? All this would come to nothing. The death of one person does not mean that all of us must die.

Nhlanhla: Earlier, you mentioned that *unembeza* was “killing” you. Could you elaborate?

Vusi: *Unembeza*, the way I see it: I associate it with biblical teachings. It is a voice that guides you to do the right thing. If I am doing something and I think of God, I get scared if it is a bad thing.

Nhlanhla: You get scared?

Vusi: Yes. That I am doing something that contradicts the will of God.

Nhlanhla: In other words, your decision is based on how God might see it?

Vusi: Yes. I tell myself that, because of Christian teachings, because we grew up under Christianity. If I am thinking of doing something, I consider that God can see me. If I am afraid when I think of God, it means the action I am contemplating is outside God's will.

(Extract 1)

This extract will be discussed with reference to the following points: the relational and emotional nature of moral decision-making, the conceptions of self embedded in the narrative, the tensions between moral voices, and the relationship between moral decision-making and gender identity.

The Relational and Emotional Nature of Moral Decision-making

The webs of relationships within which the dilemma unfolds (cf. Tappan, 1991a) are worth noting. First, there is the relationship between the deceased and his entire family. The deceased seems to have occupied a very special position within the family. He was “a major breadwinner . . . [and] the most responsible family member.” To say that he was the “most responsible” indicates that his family relied on him for guidance and overall support. The loss of him was thus a major blow. The experience was a very emotional one for the family. It triggered anger and pain. Statements such as “[i]t was very painful” and “[t]he way everyone was angry!” indicate that the dilemma unravelled within a highly charged emotional atmosphere.

The narrator’s dilemma was complicated by the special nature of the relationship between him and the deceased. He refers many times to the fact that the two of them were very close. This put him, as someone who was close to the deceased, under pressure to act: “Personally, as a person who was close to him, I had to show closeness, even after his death.” The extract also indicates that the family expected nothing less than full cooperation on his part: “At the same time, I had to show the family, my brothers and his mother . . . I had to show that I loved him. Because we were very close.” The situation was complicated by the words uttered by the deceased’s mother, when she saw the narrator for the first time after the incident: “They have shot my son, but I am glad that you are alive.” These words strengthened the bond between the narrator and his family. The words meant that he had to take his brother’s place in her heart. It is suggested that the mother’s words remained embedded in him, serving as an audience of some sort (cf. Day & Tappan, 1996), as he grappled with the dilemma. The relational context made it very difficult for the narrator to distance himself from his family’s intentions.

Finally, there is the relationship between male members of the family and other men in the village community. The narrator and his brothers were concerned that failure to avenge the death would be seen as a sign of weakness. It would compromise their

standing as men in the eyes of other men in the village. Moral decision-making and masculinity are discussed at length below.

Conceptions of Selves in the Narrative

A number of concepts of selves emerge in Vusi's narrative extract. These selves are sometimes in rivalry with each other (cf. Hermans, 1996, 2001b; Wertsch, 1991). These are the communal (or the self-in-family) and the independent views of the self. The narrator was torn between these two perspectives of the self. Sometimes, the communal self dominates, while the independent self recedes to the background. On other occasions, the independent self dominates, and the communal one recedes.

The self-in-family wants him to participate in the revenge mission. This would confirm his position as an integral part of the family. Failure to participate would give the family a different message. He says, for example: "So, that was the most difficult situation I faced in my life, having to decide whether to withdraw or not, and the meaning that would be attributed to my withdrawal by the family." He was concerned that non-participation would be seen as an act of distancing himself from the family. This would mean that he would be severing the relationship with the deceased. The questions he posed to himself, in what resembled an internal dialogue, reflect this: "What would they say? They would say I am forsaking him (the deceased) because he is dead?" This voice, representing the position of the family, is sometimes expressed with more conviction: "Yeah! If someone has wronged the family, AND YOU PUNISH THEM, . . . you send a message that people cannot mess around with your family." The narrator's situation was complicated by the fact that his sense of self is inextricably intertwined with the family.

The independent view of the self (cf. Markus & Kitayama, 1991, 1994) is evident in various parts of the extract. The narrator opines about having to drive the car: "Why me? Why should I be the one driving the car?" He resorts to the pronoun "I" (*Ngi*) to express his personal views (cf. van Langenhove & Haré, 1999). He is also worried that his possibly bright future, as a student, could be ruined if he participates in the revenge

mission: “But what if we get caught? What about my studies? I am a student, my future is still ahead of me.” Talking as an independent actor, the narrator feels uneasy about participating in the revenge attempt.

Although the lines cited in the paragraph above point largely at a separate view of the self, they cannot be interpreted simplistically. This is because the dialogical self is characterised by movement. The same words could take on different meanings, depending on how they are used (cf. Hermans, 2001a). For example, in the paragraph above the narrator sees education as a means to advance personal goals. Elsewhere, he sees it as a means to benefit the community: “Everything I do, most of the time, I do not do it for myself. . . . If I get education, I say to myself. . . ‘In what ways are they [the community] going to benefit from my education?’” This complexity, characteristic of the dialogical self, highlights the need to focus on how the person vacillates between both the communal and independent selves. The unit of analysis should be the voice endowed to each utterance, as the self vacillates from one position to another.

The way the narrator uses pronouns to associate or distance himself from the actions of his family members, illustrates the movement between various selves. For example, he mentions: “I had to drive the car, . . . [and] once we arrived at Y, I had to stay in the car, at a distance, [and] once they had done what they wished to do, I would drive the get-away car.” Using the pronouns “I” and “they,” he associates and distances himself from his brothers’ intentions. Later, he says: “As we were travelling, *unembeza* was killing me. I couldn’t believe that, ME! I was driving a car carrying would-be-murderers.” When the narrator talks with the voice representing the family, the people in the car are his brothers. When he examines the situation as an individual, they are “would-be-murders,” wanting him to participate in “this ugly thing” that “they wanted to do.” At the same time, he had to show empathy with the deceased, as a family member. The shifts between the “I” and “they” indicate the various selves involved in the dilemma. This movement is made possible by the spatial organization of the dialogical self (cf. Hermans, 1996, 1997, 2001b; Hermans *et al.*, 1992); its ability to shift positions according to changes in place and time.

Moral dilemmas in this study point at the shortcomings of dualistic psychological explanations, or the individual-society antinomy, represented by “methodological individualism” and “methodological collectivism” respectively (Hermans & Kempen, 1995; Wertsch, 1995). Methodological individualism regards individuals as existing prior to society. It asserts that “no purported explanations of social (or individual) phenomena are to count as explanations, or . . . as rock-bottom explanations, unless they are couched wholly in terms of facts about individuals” (Lukes, cited in Wertsch, 1995, p. 83). Methodological individualism subscribes to the rational, objective view of the self. It assumes that people are fully defined before they enter into relationships with others (Fogel, 1993). Traditional cognitivist approaches to morality fall under the category of methodological individualism. They attempt to explain moral reasoning in terms of cognitive representations and inner principles (Day & Tappan, 1996). To be a fully moral self, one needs to reason “behind a veil of ignorance” and from “an original position” (Rawls, 1972). On the other hand, methodological collectivism explains everything in terms of social and cultural practices. All facts about individuals are explained in terms of societal influences.

The results of this study cannot be accounted for exclusively in terms of either individualism or collectivism. Respondents’ narratives were populated by many voices, which were struggling for hegemony within the self (Josephs, 1997; Tappan, 1997c). Moral dilemmas emanated from people’s attempts to live in a manner that is consistent with the communal view of the self. On the other hand, there were voices representing a different view of the self in relationships. These voices endorsed an independent construal of the self (Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Sampson, 1988). Both views are socio-culturally mediated. That is, they do not ensue from “within” the person. Rather, they are a product of our exposure to multiple social and cultural points of view. Some of these views extol an individualistic view of the self, while others prize interdependence.

The view that tools such as language mediate human functioning means that the psychological split between what is “internal” and “external” of the person is no longer

tenable. As Wertsch (1995) argues, “if one accepts the claim that cultural tools play an important role in mediated action, one is led to recognize that [mental functioning] . . . can never be attributed solely to individuals” (p. 90), but to individuals acting with mediational means (Penuel & Wertsch, 1995).

To make sense of the results discussed above, we need the dialogical view of selfhood. Dialogism acknowledges the emergence of personhood from social and collective forms of life. The self arises from the context of social relationships and practices, and hence, it is from the start a product of language (Day & Tappan, 1996). People are immersed in semiotic and linguistic milieus, “out of which come voices, languages, and forms of discourse that serve to shape and mediate their psychological functioning” (Tappan, 1991a, p. 12). The dialogical self is populated by many voices and perspectives (Hermans, 1997, 2001a; Wertsch, 1995). Each voice is capable of authoring its point of view. Multiple voices within the self can accompany and oppose each other dialogically (Hermans, 1997, 2001a; Hermans & Kempen, 1993). As Hermans and Kempen (1993) note, polyphony implies “a plurality of voices representing a plurality of worlds that are neither identical nor unified, but rather heterogeneous and even opposed” (p. 42). The tension between various selves (Hermans, 2001b), observed in this study, is explained by the fact that voices comprising the dialogical self can be ideologically independent of each other (Morson & Emerson, 1990).

Cognitivism and the Role of the Other in Self-definition

It could be argued that dialogism is not the only perspective that recognizes the role of the other in self-definition. Indeed, using the notion of relational schemas, some cognitive theorists have attempted to account for the role of the other in self-understanding (Anderson, 1983; Baldwin, 1992; Baldwin, Carrell & Lopez, 1990). Relational schemas consist of three elements, namely (a) an interpersonal script, (b) a self-schema for oneself in the relationship, and (c) a schema for the other in the relationship. An interpersonal script is episodic in nature. It is a cognitive generalization based on repeated interactions with important others. It includes the roles of various people involved in the interaction,

the pattern of the interaction, and a summary statement of resultant behaviors and responses.

The relationship between actors in an interpersonal schema could be conceptualized dialogically. This, in a way, accounts for some of the interactions observed between actors in this study. However, relational schemas lack the critical *innovative* feature of truly dialogical relationships (Hermans, 1997). Relational schemas are relatively stable because they are based on “repeated experiences with similar interactions” (Baldwin, 1992, p. 468). The meaning of relational schemas is located in the past. The dialogical self, on other hand, is challenged not only by new information, but also by internal contradictions as well. These challenges lead to new meanings, resulting in innovation or self-renewal (Hermans, 1996, 1997). The dialogical self is “unfinalizable” because it is always oriented toward the future. Its meaning is not located in the past but the future. This is particularly important for “moral experience, wherein different moral voices, from different moral perspectives, must be kept alive, and treated with respect, so they can partake in the ongoing dialogue that is the self.” (Tappan, 1997c, p. 384)

Another problem with the concept of relational schemas is that it focuses on immediate interpersonal relationships between actors. It does not mention how cultural, historical, and institutional factors influence self-understanding. The dialogical self, on the other hand, emerges not only from interpersonal experiences, but also from collective voices as well. Relational schemas cannot account for a special kind of multi-voicedness, namely *ventriloquation*, which involves individuals speaking with voices representing specific groups in society. As Hermans *et al.* (1992) argue, the dialogical self “is embedded in a historical context with deep implications for both the form and content of narratives and dialogical processes” (p. 29). The dialogical self seizes meaning from narratives in its social and historical context. Relational schemas, on the other hand, are limited to interpersonal interactions.

Tensions Between Moral Voices

Tensions were observed between various moral voices in the respondents' narratives. These were the voices of care, justice and respect for life, and *unembeza*. For example, in Extract 1, Vusi speaks from a position associated with intense emotional pain and the desire to punish the perpetrators: "At the same time, what they had done to our brother was very painful. AND I WANTED THEM TO BE PUNISHED!" He justifies this position because "*if a person has caused pain to others, he/she must be punished.*" Another position coming to the fore is that inflicting harm on others is against his personal principles, such as the right to life and the injunction not to harm others: "This meant that, to me the conflict was: I had to do something that was against my life principles. . . . I've never seen myself hurting another human being. Because, I think everyone has the right to life." These principles were in conflict with the course of action he and his brothers were pursuing (inflicting harm). These positions engage dialogically with each other throughout the narrative. Sometimes, the voice representing the family (i.e. emotional pain, the desire that perpetrators be punished) seems to dominate. On other occasions, it recedes to the background, while his "personal principles" take centre-stage.

The fact that the narrator regarded himself as an empathetic person complicated his situation: "If someone is going to be harmed, I put myself in the position of that person, and I realize it must be painful." This makes him uneasy with his role as a would-be-accomplice to murder. On the other hand, emotional and family ties to the deceased required the narrator to empathise with him. Family members expected a visible demonstration of empathy, through active participation in the revenge effort. The narrator was caught between empathy for the deceased, and empathy for the would-be-victims of their revenge efforts.

Another voice, *unembeza*, militated against participation in the revenge effort. He defines *unembeza* in religious terms: "If I am doing something and I think of God, I get scared if it is a bad thing." It is interesting to note that *unembeza* is something he experiences emotionally and bodily. *Unembeza* could be conceptualised as an inner moral audience

(cf. Day & Tappan, 1996). The narrator concluded that God would not approve of their actions. This finds support in the statements: “So, as we were travelling, *unembeza* was killing me inside.” In *isiZulu*, the expression “to be ‘killed’ by *unembeza*” indicates he felt morally guilty. *Unembeza* was “killing him” because he was proceeding with a course of action he knew to be immoral.

To further illustrate tensions involved in moral decision-making, an extract from an interview with Mbali, a Black postgraduate student, is introduced. Mbali related an incident that happened when she was an undergraduate university student and house committee member in her residence. She had to impose a fine on another Black student, who had neglected her house duties. These were the early days of racial integration in one of the local university residences, and there were very few Black compared to White students in residence. Black students formed a very close-knit community. She found herself torn between fairness (fining the Black student) and the fear of alienating herself from other Black students. She told her story as follows:

Nhlanhla: **The situation you have just described, do you consider it a moral problem?**

Mbali: It is very difficult, because when I was growing up at home, I was taught the proper way of doing things. That if there is a job that you have been assigned to, you have to do it. Or if you can't do it, you apologize or enlist someone to do it on your behalf. So, it was a problem that she made a mistake and did not apologise. So, what caused the dilemma for me was that a person is a person because of others (*umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu*). I was taught that you accommodate people, you try to bend a little here and there, so that you can grow through people, and also allow them to grow through you. So, I did not know what to choose, between the maxim that a person is a person because of others, and applying the house rules. So, I told myself that . . . I am going to lose a lot of support from Black students, but those who know me, those who are prepared to stand for the truth, will realise that it is indeed *ubuntu* that I should fine her. Otherwise, people will do as they please.

Nhlanhla: **Is there anything that came to your mind while you considered the situation?**

Mbali: This thing was unfortunate because it involved race, and I felt bad when I found out later on that some White house committee members did not fine White students. . . . It was a gamble because the decision isolated me. . . . But I told myself that, in the future, as a leader, am I going to be deciding on the basis of race? Because if I am deciding on the basis of race, then at another level, I am communicating that our [Black] people can't decide, they are lowering standards, they are not principled in their decision-making. So, it was important to be fair and honest. . . . so as to preserve the dignity of Black people.

(Extract 2)

Faced with a racially-charged dilemma, Mbali found herself torn between empathy for a fellow Black student, and fairness. She also considered the consequences of acting fairly (personal alienation). This was important, given the history of South African race relations. Despite the possibility of personal alienation, she went ahead to apply the principle of fairness.

In both Extracts 1 (Vusi) and 2 (Mbali) above, there is an interplay of multiple voices. These are voices such as care, fairness, justice (respect for life), and in Vusi's case, even revenge. Tensions between actors' voices and the voices of their families (Vusi) or their social groups (Mbali) occur throughout the narratives. The various voices constituting the moral landscape engage dynamically with each other. Individuals vacillate between them, according to changes in situation and time. The tensions ensue from the struggle of being an embodied (rather than abstract) being. Embodied beings are called upon to make moral choices in concrete, real life situations. They have to make judgements of a practical-moral type. This requires them to respond to the exigencies of the situation. In both cases, these exigencies are such that the narrators are called upon to act in a just and principled way, in contexts that are generally considered unjust. Dialogism enables us to study the circumstances in which one voice, rather than the other, comes to the fore under such circumstances.

The tensions observed are consistent with the dialogical self. The dialogical self can vacillate between contradictory positions. It is characterized by a high degree of

movement. Gilligan *et al.* (1990) and Hermans and Kempen (1993) employ the musical metaphor to capture the fluid character of the self. Gilligan *et al.* (1990) argue that “the unity of self can be compared to the unity of musical composition where meaning at any one moment is indeterminate, since it can only be apprehended in time” (p. 109). In a similar vein, Hermans *et al.* (1992) note the fluid and indeterminate nature of the multiple positions that the dialogical self can occupy:

The *I* has the possibility to move, as in space, from one position to the other in accordance with changes in situation and time. The *I* fluctuates among different and even opposed positions. The *I* has the capacity to imaginatively endow each position with a voice so that dialogical relations between positions can be established. (Hermans *et al.*, 1992, p. 28)

Conceiving the self dialogically enables us to transcend the shortcomings of the unitary self, which speaks with only one moral voice. Dialogism makes it possible to study morality in terms of the tensions and the struggles between various parts of the self. As Day and Tappan (1996) argue, the moral self results from the process by which “the words, language and forms of discourses encountered in one’s own context collide, collude, and combine, . . . provok[ing] a need to establish and define a voice (or voices) of one’s own.” (p. 73)

The tensions between moral voices could be conceptualised as a struggle between authoritative and internally-persuasive discourses (cf. Bakhtin, 1981; Day & Tappan, 1996; Tappan, 1991a). Authoritative discourse represents voices belonging to others (the family, authority, etc.): rooted in the past, it demands that we obey it unconditionally. In the case of Vusi, his family required him to demonstrate empathy with the deceased, by participating in the effort to avenge his death. Vusi has not integrated the multiple voices in a way that represents a voice of his own (cf. Bakhtin, 1981). By his own admission, he does not want to show his own position (the “Me”) because “my inside, it is weak, compared to my outside, which is what I show.” Hence, despite his misgivings, he goes along with what “the family was doing.”

Internally persuasive discourse, on the other hand, merges others’ voices with the person’s. It awakens new and independent meanings in the person, and is always oriented

toward the future. Bakhtin (1981) notes that although “[o]ne’s own discourse and one’s own voice is born of another or dynamically stimulated by another, [they will] sooner or later begin to liberate themselves from the authority of the other’s discourse” (p. 348). For example, Mbali (Extract 2) battles with a situation similar to Vusi’s (Extract 1), namely personal views versus those of a group. It is of note that she *re-defines* her decision to fine the Black student (fairness) as a real embodiment of *ubuntu*. She maintains that “. . . [t]hose who know me, those who are prepared to stand for the truth, will realise that it is indeed *ubuntu* that I should fine her.” Further, she maintains that this decision is in the interest of the (Black) group as a whole. It shows that Black people are not biased in their decision-making. What appears to be a principle-based decision is redefined to serve (at least) the long-term interest of the group. By re-defining the situation for herself, Mbali is able to honour her point of view. This is consistent with Bakhtin’s (1981) position, who maintains that we “author” (express) who we are through the things we do, including the utterances we make. Authorship involves “honoring (or “authorizing”) what one thinks, feels, and does with respect to what is right and wrong—even in the face of potential conflict and disagreement.” (Tappan & Brown, 1989, p. 190)

The results discussed above support the view that people are not limited to speaking with a single moral voice (Day & Tappan, 1996). Gilligan and her colleagues (Gilligan & Attanucci, 1988; Gilligan & Wiggins, 1988; Gilligan *et al.*, 1990; Lyons, 1988) have noted the existence of two voices: justice and care. The voice of justice advocates fairness and equality, while the voice of care advocates responsibility in relationships. Considered alone, the voice of justice is inadequate for understanding the complexities of moral decision-making. The voice of justice stipulates that what is right for one person will be right for any person under similar circumstances (Shweder, 1982). As Shweder argues, this idea is incomplete because human beings will resemble each other in some respects, and differ from each other in other respects. The principle of justice falls short of specifying the resemblances and differences that are relevant to moral decision-making. Abstract principles do not indicate to us what kind of society to fashion. Nor do they inform us of the kinds of relationships we ought to have with one another (Shweder,

1982). By adding voices which speak of care and respect, to that of justice, we can come to a better understanding of moral reasoning in real life situations.

The simultaneous existence of more than one moral voice raises another problem, namely how people make moral decisions in the face of contradictory moral positions. This was evident in this study, where empathy for a family member was at odds with the demands of justice. Bakhtin's (1981) notion of authorship provides a partial answer to this problem. The problem is philosophical, and beyond the scope of this study. However, I would like to point the reader to the works of Benhabib (1992), who has explored the relationship between the voices of justice and care. Likewise, Gilligan *et al.* (1990) use a musical metaphor to highlight the relationship between moral voices. They argue that moral voices can be "harmonized according to the laws of counterpoint" (p. 115). Moral voices with a melody of justice, for example, can be enriched by viewing the same situation from the perspective of care and respect. This metaphor provides a good starting point for elucidating how people solve dilemmas involving tensions between various moral voices.

Gender and Cultural Positioning in Moral Decision-making

Tensions between different selves and moral voices in decision-making have been explored. This section explores the interface between gender and moral identity. The purpose is to show that the process of moral decision-making and gender identity are intertwined (cf. Tappan, 2000). It is argued that moral dilemmas ensue from the struggle to craft an identity as a woman or man, given the dominant scripts afforded by one's culture.

To explore concepts of masculinity embedded in narratives of moral conflict, reference is made to Vusi's narrative (Extract 1 above). Additional shorter extracts are also supplied in support of the masculinity thesis. To highlight gender dimensions involved in women's narratives of moral choice, an extract from an interview with Tha (Extract 3) appears below. Later, it is supplemented with shorter extracts from other interviews.

At the age of 19, Tha found herself an only female member, among a group of students doing community work in a rural setting. The group expected her to perform typically “feminine” duties, such as cooking. She was also pressurized to have a romantic relationship with the project manager. The story unfolds as follows:

Nhlanhla: **Could you tell me about a situation that posed a moral dilemma for you?**

Tha: As students, we volunteered now and then to do community service. We had this student organization called X, which placed us in groups anywhere in the country. Sometimes we worked in the old-age homes, orphanages, etc. So, it happened that one day I found out that I was the only girl in the group, and we were stationed far away, in a rural area. Other girls who were supposed to come could not make it. I had to represent my school. My moral dilemma was that we had to stay there and sleep there, for three weeks. I was the only girl in the group. We were based in a very rural community. The community could not figure out my contribution to the job, as a woman, [especially given that] . . . the job was of a manual nature. They assumed I must be someone’s girlfriend. Even amongst us as students, we came from different backgrounds, and our perceptions about women were not the same. My conflict was that some students in the camp had certain perceptions about women in general. They thought that a woman belongs in the kitchen, or to entertain a man as a girlfriend, etc. So, I did not know how to handle the sexual interest they had in me, especially the project manager. The stereotypes of the community in which we worked did not help either. In particular, it was assumed that I must be the project manager’s girlfriend: otherwise, why did I come alone? Even the group itself suspected that. So, I was under a lot of pressure to act like his girlfriend. My position, on the other hand, was that we were all the same. We were all there to make a difference to the community. I did not know how to handle this conflict. I am a human being too! I have feelings! I did not want to be used. The conflict was: How do I show him, nicely, that I have no [romantic] interest in him, without hurting his feelings.

Nhlanhla: **So, you were under pressure to be his girlfriend, the one in charge?**

Tha: Yes.

Nhlanhla: **How did he react to that?**

Tha: I knew him because we had been in touch telephonically, to arrange for the project. I tried, jokingly, to explain my position to him. I explained that I am a

gender activist: I did not expect to be treated in a special way. . . . Initially, it was OK. We respected each other. . . . But then, he came under pressure because of the community's assumptions. He was under pressure to look at me not as a comrade sister. . . . Somehow, he felt he must entertain me.

Nhlanhla: **While you were thinking about this situation, what else came to your mind?**

Tha: I WAS IN TROUBLE! I WAS IN TROUBLE! (Sigh). He was older than me. I respected him. He had come all the way from Pretoria!⁴ He had a car and a cellphone, and everything. He never stayed in the camp. He just came to supervise our work and disappeared again. But we were supposed to work together with him, as a group. . . . But he remained very high! He would come and ask: "How are things going?" And then he would give me a lot of attention. That was wrong, because I was the only woman, and a group leader. That created a lot of tension in the group.

Nhlanhla: **So, your dilemma was, how to resolve this problem, given his position?**

Tha: *HIS POSITION! HIS POSITION!* We also depended on him for money and food. As a group leader, I could not afford to be in conflict with him. He was powerful! At the same time, I had to see to it that my group's needs were met. I had to ensure that my group remained happy. *I had to maintain a good relationship with him.*

Nhlanhla: **It must have been a very difficult situation?**

Tha: We often ran out of food. He [the project manager] would disappear from the campsite, without letting us know his whereabouts. Maybe he did it purposely, to undermine my role as a woman and group leader. So, we would run short of food. By the end of the day . . . and for the benefit of us all, I would prepare the food. *As a woman, I can prepare a good meal, with very few resources at my disposal (ngiyakwazi ukupatanisa).*

Nhlanhla: **You said you told the project manager "nicely" that you were not interested. Why was it important to you to avoid hurting his feelings?**

Tha: Yes! Yes, because . . . he would think of himself as an inferior person. He would begin to question himself: "Tha does not like me! What is wrong with me?" That would have hurt the relationship in the group as a whole.

Nhlanhla: **In other words, it was important to sustain the relationship in the group?**

⁴ Pretoria, the seat of the South African government, symbolises authority.

Tha: Yeah! [I did not want to] hurt his ego, his manhood. Probably, where he comes from, he has a reputation, that no woman can resist him. No woman dismisses him.

Nhlanhla: So, what did you do, eventually?

Tha: It was difficult! It was difficult because, even though I tried to explain to him that we were comrades, please let us be together in this thing, he never understood. He regarded the other boys in the group as inferiors, and he thought they were standing on his way. It was a big challenge.

Nhlanhla: So, what did you eventually do in this situation?

Tha: We tried to hold group meetings with him. But even in those meetings, he would prevail, because of his superior education. Everything was in his favour. We gave him our suggestions, but he never considered them, because he thought we were silly, perhaps.

Nhlanhla: So, what was the outcome in this case?

Tha: When I raised a suggestion and he would not take it, I told the group I was going to disappear, to get lost. They thought I was joking. So, I just hid in the near-by bushes. It was getting dark and they did not know where I was. That got them worried and that brought cohesion in the group. I could hear them talking to themselves: "Where is Tha? Where is Tha? She has disappeared as she said!" That was another strategy I resorted to, unintentionally, anyway. I also wanted to give myself some time because I could not take the pressure anymore. . . . When they found me, just sitting, they apologised. . . . They realized it was not that I was supporting him (the project manager). From then on they stood together with me when we had meetings with him. That made it a little easier, negotiating with him.

Nhlanhla: What did you learn in this dilemma?

Tha: [I learnt that] in order to live with yourself, . . . to be congruent with yourself, you have to stand up for your beliefs, although it is hard. Because, once you diverge from your beliefs, you will never forgive yourself. Then you will see that you are a failure. In my case, I was standing up for other women. So, if I diverge [from my beliefs], where is my leadership?

(Extract 3)

The discussion below will show that gender and power dynamics play an important role in moral reasoning. Throughout the results, we encounter individuals struggling with dominant narratives of what it means to be a man or woman in their societies. Following Tappan (2000) and Penuel and Wertsch (1995), it is argued that the development of moral reasoning is an important part of identity formation, or ideological becoming (Bakhtin, 1981). First, the socio-cultural embeddedness of moral identity is explored. Second, it is shown that moral dilemmas occur during the course of an activity, as moral actors position and re-position themselves in relation to the dominant gendered scripts in their culture.

The Socio-cultural Embeddedness of Moral Identity

Cultural narratives of what it means to be a man or woman played a major role in the dilemmas experienced by both Vusi (Extract 1) and Tha (Extract 3). Notions of manhood or womanhood unfold between the urban and educational, and the rural settings. The narrators were struggling with dominant gender discourses embedded in these settings.

In the case of Vusi, the educational institution, where he is a student, and the rural community, where he resides, appear to endorse different accounts of what it means to be a man. Education is associated with cowardice in the rural setting. If the narrator failed to participate in the revenge mission, the view that he had become a coward would be supported. Thus, to protect his masculinity, he had to withdraw strategically from the family's revenge mission. This is supported by the following concern, which he voices in an attempt to persuade his brothers that the murder should be left to the police to deal with:

So, I tried another plan. I said: 'Why don't we contact the police?' . . . *But at the same time, as I was giving this opinion, I did not want to appear as a coward.* I had to avoid that: otherwise, they would think that being educated has turned me into a coward. So, I gave this opinion in a matter-of-fact way.

To avoid the perception that Western-type education had turned him into a coward, Vusi expresses an opinion, while pretending that he was not fully committed to it.

Withdrawing directly from the revenge mission would compromise his image as a brave man in his society; an important part of his male identity. This identity is most salient in the rural community, as indicated by the following lines:

You see, like, amongst us as brothers, we are a big family. Yes, I may be educated, but among my people, those I associate with, I WANT TO APPEAR AS A MAN AMONG MEN. . . . [Even though I am educated] MY MANHOOD IS STILL THERE!”

When the narrator is “among my people” education becomes something that could (potentially) deprive one of manhood. The need to show that he has not been deprived of manhood is at its strongest when he is “among my people”, it could be argued. Thus, the meaning of manhood is contested between the educational setting and the rural context.

A further reading of the story indicates that the narrator is of the opinion that the differences between him and his brothers result from differences in worldviews: “People say that educated people are cowards. I do not know whether it is cowardice or thinking too much, thinking differently about issues.” This hints at the fact that education results in a different way of seeing the world. These differences are probably most evident to him, having been exposed to both settings and worldviews. The extract highlights the need to study moral dilemmas resulting from the simultaneous participation in different cultural communities.

Like Vusi’s, Tha’s dilemma (Extract 3) takes place in a rural setting, a point mentioned several times in the narrative. Embedded in this setting are understandings of relationships between men and women in that society. First, there is the relationship between the narrator and the rural community itself. The community has a different, and stereotyped, understanding of the position and role of women in society. This is complicated by the fact that the narrator was the only woman in the group. She says: “The community could not figure out my contribution to the job, as a woman, [especially given that] the job was of a manual nature. They assumed that I must be someone’s girlfriend.” Second, the relationship between the narrator and fellow group members was also coloured by gender stereotypes. She says that “[e]ven amongst us as students, we

came from different backgrounds, and our perceptions about women were not the same.” The dilemma emanates from the discrepancy between her views about women, and the views of those around her.

The extracts discussed above indicate that moral reasoning does not occur in isolation. Rather, we found respondents battling with dominant forms of talking in their particular cultural settings. This implies that moral reasoning does not happen “inside” people’s heads, with reference to internally-held-principles (Day & Tappan, 1996). It is mediated by psychological tools such as language. Vygotsky (1981b) maintains that “psychological tools” or signs mediate human action. Mediated activity (e.g. thinking) is “human action carried out by an individual or a group, that ‘employs a cultural tool’ or ‘mediational means’” (Wertsch, 1995, p. 89). Most important, these forms of talking are embedded in social and cultural contexts, such as our communities and families.

The socio-cultural embeddedness of conceptions of manhood and womanhood observed above, points to the necessity to situate the study of narratives of moral identity “in settings where forming identities are at stake in the course of an activity” (Penuel & Wertsch, 1995, p. 90). The study of moral becoming needs to focus on challenges social and cultural factors provide to moral identities as they emerge. These challenges are re-enacted in settings such as the media, the community, and other areas of public discourse. Each setting has its own meanings, symbols, voices and field of signs (Penuel & Wertsch, 1995). In this study, moral identities (e.g. the meaning of manhood or womanhood) were contested in settings such as the family or the community. Moral actors struggled “against dominant discourses of their identity to construct a different way of speaking about themselves and develop new ways of action.” (Penuel & Wertsch, 1995, p. 90) The results of the study are consistent with Vygotsky’s (1978) account of psychological development. Vygotsky argues that it is the very process or struggle, rather than the end point of development, that is of most psychological relevance. This view is captured by his “genetic” or developmental method, which stipulates that “to encompass in research the process of a given thing’s development in all its phases and changes . . . fundamentally means to discover its nature, . . . for it is only in movement that a body

shows what it is.” (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 65) Unlike cognitivist approaches, which prize the end-point of development, Vygotsky calls our attention to processes that are undergoing transformation over time. In this study, it was the meaning of what it entails to be a man or woman in a particular setting or community that was contested.

Meanings embedded in social and cultural institutions constrain the range of options available to individuals (Penuel & Wertsch, 1995; Tappan, 2000). This arises from the fact that cultural tools are already imbued with others’ meanings. Meanings embedded in them “belong to a cultural capital inherited and invested by new actors through history” (Hermans & Kempen, 1993, p. 73). Cultural tools have been used by others, to serve their own purposes. This implies that to understand the role of gender in moral becoming, we need to engage with questions such as: What kinds of narratives about the self (being a woman or a man) are available in the social and cultural context? Do these narratives enable or constrain the kind of person one can become? Whose purposes do they serve?

Activity, Positioning and Moral Discourse

In both Extracts 1 and 3, gender identity is not a theoretical concept: it is contested practically, during the course of an activity. That is, it is with reference to particular activities (things that people do or fail to do), and in relation to other people, that gendered selves are contested. Let us consider the manner in which Vusi describes himself. The *isiZulu* expression, “a man among men”, cited many times during his interview, refers to fearless people. Apart from denoting the masculine gender, the word “*insizwa*” (a man) refers to a person of great courage in battle. Vusi points at further evidence of his masculinity by drawing our attention to his biography, the things he has done in the past:

During traditional events (*imicimbi*) I carry a shield. Yeah! It must be clear that I am a man: I do not fear other men. I sometimes tell people: ‘Men! . . . we may be educated, but as a boy, I went through all traditional courage testing rituals. I fought! . . . You see, the fact that we are educated; education is just a means to get porridge. It cannot change the fact that I am a man.

In traditional Zulu society, the shield is a marker of manhood. It symbolizes readiness for battle. Not only does he carry a shield, he also participated in the events that boys must go through, in the transition to manhood. Most important, this biography is cited in settings where his manhood is in doubt, due to his education. When his brother was killed, Vusi was availed of the opportunity to demonstrate that his manhood, an important part of his social identity, had not been negatively affected by education. His narrative highlights the importance of studying moral decision-making in contexts in which identities are being formed and/or challenged (cf. Tappan, 2000).

In a similar manner, Tha (Extract 3) found herself positioned stereotypically not only by the community in which she and the group worked, but also by the members of her group as well. Some members of her group, of which she was the immediate leader, “thought that a woman belongs in the kitchen, or to entertain a man as a girlfriend, etc.” The moral dilemma emanates from different perceptions of the roles and responsibilities of women in society. The meaning of womanhood is contested with reference to two activities (cf. Penuel & Wertsch, 1995). Both the group and the community thought she was there to play the role stereotypically associated with women: cooking and provision of sexual favours. The manual nature of the job (i.e. it required physical strength, associated with men) exacerbates the situation. The narrator had to deal with these dominant discourses of what it means to be a woman (cf. Penuel & Wertsch, 1995), in that setting.

These extracts support the view that moral reasoning is not reducible to the act of solitary individuals. A mediated action approach focuses on what people *do* in specific social and cultural contexts (Tappan, 1997c, 1998; Penuel & Wertsch, 1995; Wertsch & Stone, 1985). The primary unit of analysis in mediated action is not the individual’s inner principles, but individuals acting with mediational means:

In this approach, what we are attempting to interpret, explain, or analyze is meaningful human action, rather than inner states of individuals or sociocultural processes considered in isolation. The language and other signs that people use to describe themselves in the course of action are not, in this view, seen as an impediment. By speaking and listening to others, the claim may be made, the signs as incorporated into the flow of action

actually construct, or build up the sense of self by providing terms to individuals they may employ when talking about themselves to others. (Penuel & Wertsch, 1995, p. 91)

Socio-cultural approaches to psychology conceive moral reasoning as an activity. It is a relational practice in terms of which people feel, act and think, in relation to those around them (Brown & Gilligan, 1991; Gilligan *et al.*, 1990; Tappan, 1997c). This differs from the cognitivist approach, which abstracts moral reasoning from its context (Benhabib, 1992). Moral reasoning is not about mastering advanced stages of moral thought. Instead, it is concerned with how people relate to one another. These relationships can be incorporated into the way people talk about themselves (Gilligan *et al.*, 1990). Viewed this way, the “moral life becomes an ongoing dialogue among different stories, scripts, and scenes. . . that can be put into practice by the people who use them as their tools . . . *for joining, reproaching, and in other ways mending and breaching relationships*” (Day & Tappan, 1996, p. 75, emphasis added). Construing morality as a practical activity requires us to pay attention to the cultural scripts, or the mediational means, that people appeal to in their interactions with others.

Positioning and Resistance

It has been shown that people are positioned in a variety of ways in their interactions with others. One may be expected to assume a traditional male script (e.g. bravery) or a typical female role (e.g. cooking). However, people can resist positions assigned to them by others or their communities. Tha’s interview narrative (Extract 3) illustrates this. Having been positioned by the group and the community as a sexual object and cook, she responds by re-positioning herself, thereby expressing a different view of gender and relationships. Tha rejects the positions assigned to her by appealing to her own point of view. Her position was that “we were all the same. We were all there to make a difference to the community.” She appeals to equality between the sexes (we are all the same) and the purpose of their activities: changing the lives of the people in the community. In another attempt to re-position herself, the narrator also appeals to her rights to be treated with dignity, as a human being: “I am a human being too! I have

feelings! I did not want to be used.” This appeal echoes the principle of the universal dignity and equality of human beings (cf. Kohlberg, 1981, 1984). It should be noted, however, that this is not an appeal to an abstract principle. The narrator refers to the fact that she has feelings. In other words, she is a concrete human being, capable of being (emotionally) hurt, if treated as an object. She appeals to both the principle of respect and equality, and sensitivity to the feelings of real life, concrete actors.

The narrator also attempts to re-position herself by appealing to her beliefs as a gender activist. This appears to be an important part of her identity. She warded off the project manager’s advances because “I am a gender activist: I did not expect to be treated in a special way.” Being treated in a stereotypical fashion was incompatible with her ideals and principles. This is supported by the view that “. . . in order to live with yourself . . . you have to stand by your beliefs, although it is hard.” Not only were her beliefs and principles at stake, but also the entire cause she stood for: the rights of other women. Thus, she says: “In my case, I was standing up for other women. So if I diverged [from my beliefs], where is my leadership?” Through deliberate self-positioning, a process by which people express their personal identity by referring to their personal agency, beliefs, or biography (cf. van Langenhove & Haré, 1999), Tha expresses a different view of gender and relationships.

Positioning: The Tensions Between Mediational Means

The various forms of positioning and counterpositioning, evident in Tha’s interview, reflect tensions between *social* and *personal* positions (Hermans, 2001b; Wertsch, 1995). Social positions “are organized by societal definitions, expectations and prescriptions” (Hermans, 2001b, p. 263). Positions available to people within a dialogue are not freely constructed: they are culturally embedded (van Langenhove & Haré, 1999; Moghaddam, 1999). Conversations between participants reflect “narrative forms already existing in the culture, which are part of the repertoire of competent members, who . . . can jointly construct a sequence of position/act-action storylines” (van Langenhove & Haré, 1999, pp. 19-20). We learn the moral ascriptions associated with categories such as gender by

growing up as members of particular societies, and through participation in the social languages and genres of our speech communities. On the other hand, “personal positions receive their form from the particular ways in which individual people organize their own lives, sometimes in opposition to or protest against the expectations implied by societal expectations” (Hermans, 2001b, p. 263).

The fact that individuals can resist socially-ascribed positions points to the fact that the relationship between mediational means and action is not mechanistic (Wertsch, 1995, 1998). There is always an “irreducible tension, or dialectic, between mediational means, on the one hand, and their unique use by an individual or individuals, on the other.” (Wertsch, 1995, p. 90) In other words, cultural tools can only be understood in action, when they are being employed by individuals to attain ends. The use of a cultural tool is characterized not only by tension (as others resist it), but also by the unpredictability of the outcome of the process of using the tool. For example, in this study, we saw participants trying to re-position themselves, in protest against social expectations arising from their social positions. People may re-position themselves by appealing to a different moral order (e.g. we are all human beings), or by referring to their specific individual attributes (e.g. I am a caring person) (Harfe & van Langenhove, 1999b). In each case, the outcome was different, depending on how the process was negotiated. Thus, a proper study of moral reasoning should focus on the tension (dialectic) between cultural tools and human action.

Flexibility and Positioning Theory

Flexibility is one of the distinguishing features of the dialogical view of the self (cf. Hermans, 1996, 2001a), a feature this view shares with positioning theory. The dialogical self can move from one position to another, according to situation and time, endowing each position with a voice in the process. This results in a variety of independent, sometimes even contradictory meanings, being espoused by a single person. Movement from one position to another was noted in Tha’s narrative. Although she rejected being positioned as a cook, on some occasions, she accepted it:

He would disappear from the campsite, without letting us know his whereabouts. Maybe he did it purposely, to undermine my role as a woman and group leader. So, we would run short of food. By the end of the day, . . . and for the benefit of us all, I would prepare the food. As a woman, I can prepare a good meal, with very few resources at my disposal.

A careful reading of these lines indicates that cooking is now endowed with a new meaning. The narrator cooked to protect her identity as a capable female leader, which she felt was being threatened by the manager's actions. Speaking as a competent female leader, a skill that otherwise communicated her subservient position, is turned into a strength. The extract shows that the meaning attached to cooking was not fixed. It depended on the speaker's position and objectives. The extract highlights the usefulness of the notion of positioning, as opposed to roles, in theorizing about personhood. Roles indicate fixed, static personality attributes (van Langenhove & Har e, 1999). The dynamics observed in this study, on the other hand, can be more easily understood with reference to changes in subject positions.

Positioning theory (Davies & Har e, 1990, 1999; Har e & van Langenhove, 1999b) accounts for the gender dynamics observed in this study. Attributes such as rank and gender influenced interpersonal and even intrapersonal interactions among moral actors. The respondents assigned rights, responsibilities and duties to others, depending particularly on their gender. Positions are always assigned in relation to people. Men and women in this study were positioned in relation to each other by culturally defined scripts of what it means to be a man or woman, among other factors. The moral implication of positioning ensues from the fact that people may be expected to perform certain actions, or behave in a particular way, by virtue of the position they occupy, or because they belong to a particular institution (van Langenhove & Har e, 1999). Moghaddam (1999) concurs with this view. He argues that:

positioning takes place within a specific moral order, such as a gender group, . . . ethnic group, tribe, and society. Moral orders are maintained by certain linguistic practices through which social relations between people. . . and groups of people are regulated and

by which social norms or standards or personality, character, and physical appearances are promulgated. (p. 80)

Positioning and Personhood

Davies and Har e (1990, 1999) maintain that the notion of positioning contributes to our understanding of personhood. Traditional psychological theorizing is based on a unitary, self-contained view of the self. That is, the individual is thought to be a container of personal dispositions, such as thoughts, emotions, personality traits and attitudes. These dispositions, thought to reside “inside” the individual, are relatively stable over time. Positioning theory, on the hand, focuses on how “subjectivity” emerges from discursive practices. These practices could involve interpersonal interactions, and the manner in which people interact with meanings embedded in social and cultural institutions. Discursive practices are not fixed: they are always shifting and changing with the storyline. This means that meanings attributed to the self or one’s position change as the storyline unfolds (Moghaddam, 1999). Positioning theory is thus better able to account for the changes in narrative positions adopted by the participants in this study.

Contradictions in self-understanding, inherent in the notion of positioning, have been used within post-structural feminist theory as entry points to an understanding of the gendered nature of our being (Davies & Har e, 1999). These contradictions are also consistent with dialogism, which recognizes the highly problematic and future-directedness of meaning (Hermans, 1996; Hermans & Kempen, 1993).

Moral Identities and Collective Voices

It has been argued that socio-culturally embedded narratives mediate moral identity. Gendered cultural narratives do not exist “out there”, however. They can be represented internally in the way individuals talk about themselves and others. For example, Vusi (Extract 1) refers to collective forms of communication to make sense of his dilemma. Let us consider the following: “WHEN I WAS BORN, MY MOTHER SAID:

‘BEHOLD, I HAVE BEGOTTEN A MAN.’ SHE DID NOT SAY: ‘BEHOLD, I HAVE BEGOTTEN A COWARD.’” This does not mean that the narrator remembers what was said when he was born: he is simply ventriloquating what Zulu parents usually say, when a male child is born. The words do not refer to the biology of the child. Rather, they indicate the parents’ wishes that the new-born will fulfil expectations traditionally associated with manhood in that society. In other words, the narrator refers to a speech genre (cf. Bakhtin, 1986) to make sense of himself and his experience in the world (cf. Sampson, 1993). A speech genre, it will be recalled, is “a typical form of utterance; [it] correspond[s] to typical speech communication, and consequently, also to contacts between the *meanings* of words and actual concrete reality under certain typical circumstances” (Bakhtin, 1986, p. 61, emphasis original). Attention to speech genres and social languages bring to the fore the role played by contextual factors in the mediation of moral reasoning because, by their definition, collective forms of communication are tied to social and historical contexts (Penuel & Wertsch, 1995).

Collective cultural scripts also positioned male members of Vusi’s family. They felt pressurised to protect the integrity of their (extended) family in the village as a whole. The following supports this:

Yeah! If someone has wronged the family, AND YOU PUNISH THEM, when you return home . . . you get the dignity you deserve as men. You send a message that people can’t mess around with your family.

In the sentences cited above, Vusi echoes what appears to be a dominant belief in his cultural community. In the eyes of the villagers, ability to protect one’s family defines one as a man (among other men). There was pressure to avenge the death “because people were asking questions: ‘Why are you so quiet?’ That meant a lot to us. . . . It motivated us to take action.” This internal dialogue, in which the narrator repeats the words of others to himself, indicates that he is not alone in telling this story. He engages with the opinions of concerned others in his village community. In making his decision, Vusi had to take into account many voices emanating from the social context.

Ventriloquation and Moral Reasoning

The extracts cited above illustrate that social languages and speech genres lead to a special kind of multi-voicedness, namely *ventriloquation*. Ventriloquation is a process by which individuals speak through another voice or a voice type. Individuals are never alone in producing utterances: they always resort to the voices of their families, their communities, or social institutions (Hermans & Kempen, 1993; Wertsch, 1990; Wertsch, 1998). Bakhtin (1981) argues that utterances do not arise *ex nihilo*, from a single solitary voice. Instead, “the word in a language is half-someone else’s” (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 294). The words we use are not neutral, they belong to others. Words “have the taste of a profession, a genre, . . . a generation, an age group. . . Each word tastes of the context and contexts in which it has lived its socially charged life; all words and forms are populated by intentions” (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 293). This means that a truly socio-cultural account of moral reasoning should explicate the process by which others’ words are incorporated into one’s own. Viewed this way, the study of moral decision-making should attempt to elucidate the origins of the voices that can be heard in individuals’ narratives of moral choice. We should pay attention to questions such as: “Whose voices? In what body? Telling what story about relationships (from whose perspective and from what vantage point?) In what societal and cultural framework?” (Brown & Gilligan, 1991, p. 43) Such an approach broadens the study of moral reasoning beyond the paradigm of cognitive representations. It incorporates relationships between concrete embodied beings, as they exist in context, history and time.

We should also note that collective forms of communication do not have a single, static meaning, to which the meaning of utterances can be attached unproblematically. Shotter (1995) argues that “utterances have an *argumentative meaning* that can only be understood in the context of the culture at large, once all the *counter-positions* (or *dilemmatic themes*) within it . . . have been elucidated” (Shotter, 1995, p. 65, emphasis original). Billig (1996) also notes the importance of examining positions and counter-positions put forward in support of, or against, a particular point of view. In this study, these dilemmatic positions were expressed mostly in terms of differences between

personal positions available to moral actors, and their socially-ascribed positions. This indicates that morality should be situated not only in its cultural context, but it also needs to be analyzed critically. We need to attend to the polyphony of voices within a culture, their power dimensions, and the way the voices relate dialogically with each other. Dialogism enables us to examine claims and counter-claims as they relate to the self and morality.

Gender and Power in Moral Decision-making

In this study, the tensions between collective (social) and personal positions were often associated with gender and power. Power differences between men and women were evident in the extracts discussed above. In Vusi's narrative (Extract 1), women and children are positioned powerlessly. For example, while men get prestige in the village from their own *actions* or *agency*, women and children derive the same indirectly, through the actions of their men: "*The women who have married into the family will take pride in the fact that they have married real men. Men who deserve to be married.*" This also applies to children: "Even the children of the family will take pride in you." The equation of women with children, it could be argued, indicates that the narrator does not regard men and women as equals. Women and children are depicted as powerless and dependent relative to men.

However, it was not always the case that men depicted women as powerless. In another interesting narrative, told by Zenzele, the relationship with an accomplished (powerful) woman became a status symbol for him, proving his manhood. Zenzele was a 22-year-old Technikon student at the time of the interview. His dilemma began when his girlfriend, a qualified social worker, requested "timeout" from the relationship, to decide whether they were mutually suitable. This troubled Zenzele, because it compromised his identity as a "complete" man. His standing among his peers, who envied him for going out with a professional woman, was also jeopardized. These concerns are briefly illustrated in the following extract:

Nhlanhla: So, your girlfriend wanted a break in the relationship?

Zenzele: Yaa! According to her, she did not want a complete separation, just a short break to reconsider our relationship. But I had this pride! (*iqholo*). I thought I would not be a complete boy anymore (*umfana ogcwele*), if I gave her an opportunity to do that. I thought she wanted to try a relationship with someone else, before deciding whether I was the right guy for her. I had a problem . . . in arriving at a decision, because I really loved her. *But, I did not want to lose my dignity (isithunzi sami) in the eyes of the other boys.*

Nhlanhla: Really, what was at stake for you?

Zenzele: My dignity was at stake.

Nhlauhla: Your dignity?

Zenzele: Yaa! People respected me because I was going out with this professional woman. I was a scholar at the time, not even at a tertiary institution. . . . *Although it was painful to separate, preserving my dignity was essential. I was concerned about the perception of those who knew I was going out with her.*

Nhlanhla: You were concerned that you would lose dignity in the community and among your peers?

Zenzele: Yaa! Dignity is very important to me. It [the relationship] gave me pride and confidence (*iqholo nokuzethemba*). You see, . . . when I gave an opinion among my peers, they listened to me. I had a voice among them (*nganginezwi kubona*). To lose dignity would mean that what I said would not carry much weight . . . because, they would say: “How does he know? He was jilted!” So, I feared losing voice.

(Extract 4)

This extract indicates that the relationship was a source of pride and self-esteem to the narrator. It enhanced his status among his peers, affording him the right to speak and be heard (i.e. it empowered him). This finds support in the statement: “When I gave an opinion among my peers, they listened to me. . . . To lose my dignity would mean that what I said would not carry much weight.” It could be argued that he derived pride from having “conquered” a woman of superior standing (a professional), despite being a scholar. The request for “timeout” was a serious dent in his male identity (being a “complete boy”). It conjured up images of inadequacy. The narrator decided that

“preserving my dignity was essential” despite that *“it was painful to separate.”* Despite emotional pain, the narrator adopted a façade of independence (“I went for a complete break”), which he considered truly definitive of manhood.

Power issues were perhaps most evident in women’s narratives of moral choice. The relationship between Tha (Extract 3) and the project manager best illustrates these power dimensions. The project manager derived immense power from his position, gender, education and age. The narrator respected him because “he was older than me. . . . He had come all the way from Pretoria. He had a car and a cellphone, and everything.” His power is symbolically represented by the fact that he came from Pretoria, the seat of the South African government. The car and the cellphone are symbols of status, especially among students. These material possessions, and superior education, gave him a competitive edge over the other boys, in the competition to gain the attention of the only woman in the group. Further, he appears to have been under pressure from the community to play the male “script”, consistent with a man in a powerful position like he was: “Initially, it was OK. We respected each other. But then he came under pressure because of the community’s assumptions. . . . Somehow he felt he must entertain me.” Power differences between the actors, and the beliefs of the people in the setting where the dilemma unfolds, limited Tha’s options.

Not only did the narrator contend with the power wielded by the manager, she had to take into account the need to maintain cohesion in the group. The tension between herself and the manager threatened to disrupt group unity. The younger male members of the group felt undermined by his actions. The narrator opines: “He regarded the other boys in the group as inferiors, and he thought they were standing in his way.” The narrator found herself at the centre of a conflict in which the project manager was testing his dominance.

Although the narrator was aware that the manager’s actions were potentially disruptive, his position and power prevented her from unequivocally voicing her point of view. Her personal investment in the success of the project, and their material dependence on him, complicated the picture. This is captured in the following lines:

HIS POSITION! HIS POSITION! We also depended on him for money and food. As a group leader, I could not afford to be in conflict with him. He was powerful! At the same time, I had to see to it that my group's needs were met. I had to ensure that my group remained happy. *I had to maintain a good relationship with him.*

The narrator was torn between the group's needs, and the fear of alienating the manager. Her options limited by the power differences between them, she resorted to a series of indirect strategies, in an attempt to get her point across. These are explored below.

Indirect Strategies Toward "Hearability"

The extent to which one can be "heard" in a conversation or relationship is determined by one's position (cf. Hermans, 2001b). Tha and her group are powerless in relation to the project manager: as a result, he does not consider their points of view seriously. In other words, they are not "hearable." Tha laments the fact that during group meetings, the manager "would prevail . . . because of his superior education." Neither did he take their suggestions seriously "because he thought we were silly, perhaps." The power wielded by the manager constrained the interactions between him, the narrator, and the group. He could afford to remain indifferent to their concerns, without fear of incurring negative consequences.

In an attempt to get her point across, without jeopardising her relationship with the manager, the narrator resorted to a series of strategic moves. For example, unable to tell him directly that she was not romantically interested in him, she only "tried jokingly to explain my position to him." The fact that she could express herself only "jokingly" regarding his advances is testimony to her powerlessness. This is likely to compromise the impact of her message, however. She is running the risk of being misinterpreted or not taken seriously. Not surprisingly, this strategy did not work.

It also emerges that the narrator was tentative in her conversations with the project manager to avoid hurting his masculine identity. She appears aware that relationships between women and men are an integral part of the latter's social identity. The dilemma

provides a setting in which these identities are contested. For example, asked why it was important to avoid hurting his feelings, she replies:

Yes! Yes, because. . . he would think of himself as an inferior person. . . . [I did not want to] hurt his ego, his manhood. Probably where he comes from, he has a reputation, that no woman can resist him.

The narrator could not openly challenge the dominant discourses about gender that were unfolding, due to her powerlessness. What stands out in these lines is that she seems to infer conclusions from information beyond that which is immediately available to her. From her own knowledge of gender relations, she deduces that the manager “would think of himself as an inferior person” and that “[p]robably where he comes from, he has a reputation, that no woman can resist him.” The narrator has also learnt that one should not hurt the ego of a powerful man. It could be argued these assertions are based on her knowledge of *typical dynamics* between (powerful) men and women in her society. Indeed, this is consistent with an analysis based on utterances, rather than isolated sentences. Speakers do not produce utterances alone or in isolation: utterances are related to previous utterances before them. This shapes and/or restrains what speakers can say in a conversation, and to whom it can be said. Bakhtin (1986) argues that “the topic of the speaker’s speech, regardless of what this topic may be, does not become the object of speech for the first time in any given utterance” (p. 93). Each utterance contains viewpoints, opinions, worldviews, theories, etc., which have already been elucidated, debated and articulated in various ways, within a given sphere of communication. In this case, established dynamics between men and women constrain the range of responses available to the narrator, and hence her resort to indirect strategies.

Tentative suggestions did not help the narrator to deal with the project manager and the simmering tension in the group. It was only when she resorted to drastic measures (complete withdrawal), a form of protest, that her group realised she was not in cahoots with the manager: “When I raised a suggestion and he would not take it, I told the group I was going to disappear, to get lost. They thought I was joking.” This strategy drove the message home. The group realized that she was not colluding with the manager. This unified the group, enabling it to successfully challenge the manager: “From then on they

in a position to influence her job prospects. It appears that he exploited this vulnerability on her part. The situation was compounded by the fact that he had resources (i.e. reliable transport), while she did not. She relied on him for a lift to the interviews, as the area was not easily accessible by public transport. Wary of jeopardizing the relationship, Zandi could only prevent him from holding her hand by dominating the discussion: "*So, I kept on talking, talking, talking, to avoid silence, which he would take of to hold my hand.*" Although she dominates the discussion, she remains powerless, because circumstances prevent her from voicing her position directly and unequivocally.

The results are consistent with a dialogical understanding of how power operates in relationships. Hermans (1996, 2001b) and Hermans and Kempen (1993) note that in symmetrical relationships, actors exchange the roles of "power holder" (speaker) and "power subject" (listener). When the relationship becomes asymmetrical, one party does not relinquish the role of "power holder." This happens when one party becomes more dominant than the other. This limits the other person's opportunity to initiate the conversation and/or to state his or her point of view. This concurs with Shotter (1993b), who argues that the powerless lack the "formative" or "form-giving" function of speech. That is, the powerless find that ways of speaking are already in function in society, reflecting the views of dominant groups, within which they are forced to formulate their experiences. In this study, women often found themselves positioned as powerless and dependent. As a result, their points of view were not heard. In other words, powerlessness silenced them. Brown and Gilligan (1991) and Gilligan *et al.* (1990) have reported similar findings. They note that patriarchy renders girls voiceless. These gender and power dynamics "can be partly understood as reproductions of culturally established and institutionally congealed provisions and constraints on communicative activities" (Hermans & Kempen, 1993, p. 73).

Power differences have been noted to have similar effects in interactions between different cultural groups. Chang (1996) found that Chinese students studying in the United States experienced tensions in their relationships with Americans. They wanted to speak out to defend their integrity and dignity, but felt under pressure to remain silent in

order to maintain social harmony. They could not speak out because they were positioned as powerless in the relationship. A theoretical and methodological approach that is concerned with voice, argue Brown and Gilligan (1991), enables us to “understand how those not represented as full human beings within such a system [of power] exist and resist, how they create and sustain their humanity both above ground and underground” (p. 44).

Utterances as Units of Analysis in Power Relationships

Power dimensions observed in this study further highlight the usefulness of utterances, rather than grammatically well-formed sentences, as units of analysis in moral research. Unlike abstract sentences, which belong to nobody, utterances belong to real life, concrete actors (Morson & Emerson, 1990). They are thus appropriate for exploring moral conflicts between embodied actors. Sentences do not refer to the position of the speakers because “the sentence as a language unit is grammatical in nature. It has grammatical boundaries and grammatical completedness and unity” (Bakhtin, 1986, p. 74). On the other hand, the utterance is a real, responsive unit, because, when it is finalized, the other has “the possibility of responding to it or, more broadly, of assuming a responsive attitude to it” (Bakhtin, 1986, p. 76). As Bakhtin (1986) argues, “the speaker ends his [sic] utterance in order to relinquish the floor to make room for the other’s responsive understanding” (p. 71). In this study, those speakers who had power were able to express their points of view, while those who were powerless were prevented from “taking the floor” to express their views directly.

Another feature of utterances that makes them relevant to the study of morality is their orientation to the future, or what might unravel between speakers. Utterances are inherently ethical because they must take into account the *possible reactions* of those to whom they are addressed. Unlike sentences, which are abstract linguistic units, utterances have an author as well as an addressee (Bakhtin, 1986). When speakers formulate their utterances, they must take into account the addressee’s rank and social position, for example. Speakers must consider the possible effects their utterances will have on their

audience. Bakhtin (1986) argues: “both the composition and particularity of the utterance, the style of the utterance depend on those to whom the utterance is addressed, how the speaker (or writer) senses and imagines his [sic] addressee, and the force of their effect on the utterance” (p. 95). In this study, speakers formulated their utterances with the *position* and *possible reaction* of the addressees in mind. For example, Tha’s decision to express herself “jokingly” (Extract 3) was taken to avoid harming the manager’s sense of masculinity (and probably, to avoid the repercussions of doing so). Throughout the study, we see respondents orientating their speeches toward those around them, including their communities. Others were trying to influence or elicit a particular response from participants in various ways (e.g. to cook), or not to be seen in a particular manner (e.g. a coward). These illustrate that the position of the speakers, and the already established viewpoints within a given cultural sphere, are important in studying moral decision-making. Moral decision-making is best studied with the utterance as a unit of analysis because utterances demarcate gaps between speakers. Shotter (1992) argues that “it is these gaps, the ‘distances’ between the ‘positions’ of all those who might respond to what we say, and the struggles to which they give rise to, that constitute the ethico-rhetorical landscape . . . into which our attempted formulations must be directed.” (p. 14, emphasis added)

The power dimensions involved in moral decision making, especially in conflicts between men and women, have been noted. The results point at the need to take gender and power seriously when theorizing about moral reasoning. Given that the self is embedded and embodied, and the fact that it exists in history, space and time (Gilligan *et al.*, 1990), only a situated, rather than an abstract, account to moral reasoning can explain gender and power dimensions observed in this study. We need to recognize gender as a power system in society. Social scientists need to reflect critically about the vantage positions from which they speak about gender differences (Gilligan *et al.*, 1990).

Conclusion

This study has shown that moral decision-making is not a solitary activity: it is a relational process. Moral decision-making unfolds within webs of relational ties. These ties include other people, one's family, and the community. Taking the individual as the primary unit of analysis is thus unlikely to yield meaningful information about moral decision-making across cultures. The relationship between the individual and his or her socio-cultural milieu needs to be taken into account. Moral decision-making is a mediated activity. Thus, the focus should be on how people employ cultural tools at their disposal to make sense of themselves and the world.

The concept of the self plays a critical role in moral decision-making. However, individualistic and communal self orientations are not mutually exclusive. Rather, respondents were sometimes distributed between these two views of the self. The rivalry between these selves was noted, with each self articulating its own point of view. Also, participants espoused multiple moral voices: care, justice, respect and *unembeza*. These voices engaged dynamically and dialogically with each other. These results lend support to the call to diversity voices comprising the moral landscape (Day & Tappan, 1996; Gilligan *et al.*, 1990). Dominance and other forms of relationship between these voices need to be studied and articulated.

The roles of gender and positioning in moral decision-making were discussed. Cultural narratives (Howard, 1991) or collective voices (Hermans, 2001b), constituting what it means to be a woman or man in one's society, have a bearing on moral reasoning. Moral dilemmas ensue from the struggle to craft an identity, given the fields of signs provided by one's cultural community. Gender and power in the dilemmas studied were intertwined. Some women could not directly articulate their positions, fearing the consequences of jeopardizing their relationships with powerful others, usually men. The results support the view that research on moral reasoning should move away from the paradigm of mental representations (Day & Tappan, 1996). Moral reasoning needs to be investigated as it occurs in culture, space and time (Gilligan *et al.*, 1990).

CHAPTER 9

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

Traditional cognitive approaches posit universal stages of moral development. These stages have not been empirically demonstrated to occur in all cultures, however. People living in traditional societies tend to score at Stages 3 and 4 of Kohlberg's (1981, 1984) moral scheme. In this study, I have argued that traditional societies "fail" to attain advanced stages of moral thought as measured by Kohlberg's moral scheme, because cognitivist moral theories assume an abstract view of the self. They also define morality narrowly, in terms of justice concerns only. Morally significant concerns in cultures that traditionally prize a connected view of the self (Benhabib, 1992; Gilligan, 1982; Verhoef & Michel, 1997) are left out.

The purpose of this study was to explore the meaning of morality in a sample of *isiZulu* speakers. *isiZulu* is a sub-division of a larger group of languages, collectively known as *isiNguni*. The study is informed by two main (but inter-linking) theoretical positions. It draws from a traditional African ontological perspective, which conceives reality as being interconnected. Different elements within the ontological hierarchy interact dynamically. They are thus capable of influencing, and being influenced, by others. The notion of a dialogical self (Day & Tappan, 1996; Hermans & Kempen, 1993) was also used. Dialogism accounts for the co-existence of, and dynamic interactions between, multiple perspectives within an individual. Drawing from the writings of Sow (1980) and Zahan (1979), I have argued that traditional African worldviews presuppose a dialogical account of the self and the world.

The study posed four main research questions:

- What is the meaning of morality for *isiZulu* speakers?
- How are these meanings related to concepts of personhood or the self?
- How do family and community values influence moral decision-making?
- What is the interface between gender and power in moral decision-making?

Data were collected using an adapted, *isiZulu* version of the Relational Interview Method. This method was originally developed by Gilligan and her colleagues (e.g. Brown & Gilligan, 1991). Fifty-two participants were interviewed: 48 *isiZulu* speakers, 3 *isiXhosa* speakers, and one respondent of Tswana origin. The narrative approach was chosen because it is most suited to studying relational and culturally-embedded constructions of moral experience (Gergen & Gergen, 1988; Gilligan *et al.*, 1990). Analysis followed the reading procedures as recommended by Brown and Gilligan (1991), Brown *et al.* (1989), and Mauthner & Doucet (1998). The methodology was adapted to take into account social and cultural dynamics of *isiZulu* language and traditions.

Summary of Conclusions About Research Questions

Participants in this study regarded morality as living a life (*impilo*) connected to other people, the family, the community, and all beings one stands in relation to in the ontological hierarchy. Connection, which is an indispensable part of *ubuntu* (the process of becoming a human being among other human beings), entails caring, respectful, empathetic, and just (fair) relationships between human beings and their social milieu. A state of morality exists if each person who belongs to the community works toward maintaining its equilibrium by fulfilling social obligations, according to his or her status or position. Immorality is a state of being disconnected from the world of social and human relationships because one has failed in one's social obligations toward others. Disconnection (immorality) has an ontological dimension to it. It is not only about individuals being in disharmony (dissonance) with themselves, it also destabilizes the whole system's equilibrium. It is envisaged that this could manifest itself in unjust relationships, absence of care and the occurrence of illness or criminality among community or family members. Thus, it is considered important that all people work toward ensuring that equilibrium is maintained by fulfilling their obligations. The dialogical and communicative nature of this account of moral reasoning was underscored by the fact that, should disconnection occur, institutionalised practices may be employed to restore connection.

It was argued that the above-mentioned conception of morality is based on a holistic worldview (Akbar, 1984; Myers, 1988). This worldview prizes a communal view of the self. Communal approaches to the self differ from traditional Euro-American accounts of subjectivity, which regard the individual as a container of psychological processes. According to the latter, the goal of psychological development is to achieve personal autonomy. Hence, morality is regarded as a matter of individual legislation, uninfluenced by socio-cultural factors and people's philosophical presuppositions about the nature of the world and their place in it. From the communal perspective, which is characteristic of traditional African approaches, personhood is a never-ending process of communicative and dialogical relationships between the person and his or her surrounding environment. Personhood, and hence moral being, is inconceivable independently of the world in which one has to be moral. Moral personhood requires an ongoing balance between the needs of individuals and those of the system in which they belong. Individuals contribute their unique riches to the community, which in turn sustains them, thus ensuring the system's equilibrium.

These results highlight the importance of taking into account worldviews in studying psychological processes such as moral reasoning (Jensen, 1997). The nature of human relationships, or how the self is conceived in relation to others, is an important dimension of worldviews. Psychological development requires one to develop an understanding of what it means to be a competent member of one's society (Heelas, 1981; Oyserman & Markus, 1998). This involves responding to questions such as: "Who am I?" and "Where do I belong?" People do not develop responses to these questions in isolation, nor do they fashion such responses anew all the time (Oyserman & Markus, 1998). Their responses are influenced by values and belief systems of the groups to which they belong. Concepts of personhood incorporate visions of a good life, or what it means to be a moral person. Thus, argues Taylor (1989), "To know who you are is to be oriented in moral space, a space in which questions about what is good or bad, what is worth doing and what is not, what has meaning and importance for you, and what is trivial and secondary" (p. 28).

However, tensions were noted between individualistic and communal views of selfhood. Participants attempted not only to reconcile their personal positions with the need for belonging, they also vacillated between the two positions. Similar tensions were noted between moral orientations such as care, empathy, justice and respect. Moral voices not only existed simultaneously, they also engaged dialogically with each other, with individuals moving from one moral voice to another, depending on the view of the self salient at the time. These tensions support the view that the individual-society antinomy (Sampson, 1993; Wertsch, 1995) is unlikely to be helpful in cultural research. Due to permeable cultural boundaries, people are increasingly exposed to multiple points of view (Hermans, 1996, 2001a; Hermans & Kempen, 1998), which are appropriated into the self. This results in the co-existence of independent, and even contradictory conceptions of the self or points of view (Oyserman & Markus, 1998). Dialogism not only recognizes the multiplicity of selves within a person, it also accounts for how selves position and re-position themselves according to changes in situation and time (Hermans *et al.*, 1992). Because the dialogical self is located in culture, space and time, it provides an appropriate model by means of which to study tensions between individuals (agents of action) and the cultural tools that mediate the self or moral being (Tappan, 2000).

The study also investigated the interface between gender and power in moral decision-making. The results indicate that gender identity, particularly the notions of what it means to be a man or woman in one's society, plays an important role in moral decision-making. Manhood (masculinity) was associated with power, and womanhood (femininity) with powerlessness. Discrepancies between culturally determined social positions and personally determined positions led to tensions and moral dilemmas. The results highlight the importance of gender and social positioning in moral decision-making (Gilligan *et al.*, 1990). This supports the view that moral decision-making should be studied while it occurs during the course of an activity, and in settings where forming identities are at stake (Tappan, 2000).

Unique Contribution of the Study

The first contribution of the study is of a methodological nature. This study is the first to apply the Voice-Centred, Relational Method to investigate indigenous conceptions of morality in a sample of *isiZulu* speakers in South Africa. Previous studies of moral reasoning among the indigenous people of South Africa have relied on Kohlberg's moral scheme (e.g. Ferns & Thom, 2001). The Relational Method is useful in studying situated accounts of moral reasoning because it allows categories of moral experience to emerge from the study itself. The method enables the researcher to see marginalized moral perspectives, thus broadening the domain of moral experience. The research method is appropriate for those interested in studying how men and women of various cultures construe moral being. Most important, the method allows the researcher to study the dynamic relationship between traditional African and traditional Euro-American conceptions of psychological experience. It could also be used to study topics such as (emerging) gender and racial identities, both of which are important in a country such as South Africa, with a colonial and apartheid legacy.

The study also contributes to our understanding of moral reasoning in varying cultural contexts. The respondents' view that morality is a state of equilibrium, which can be destabilized by relationships devoid of *ubuntu*, and restored if people engage in appropriate reparatory processes, enlarges our understanding of moral experience. The study is the first to empirically show this systemic account of moral reasoning in the South African context. It is also the first to apply the theory of dialogism to account for the tensions and contradictions involved in ethical and moral decision-making among indigenous South Africans. Within the South African context, and in the African community in particular, the influences of social, cultural, and institutionally determined gender and power dynamics in moral decision-making, have not until now been empirically explored.

Implications for Policy, Research and Practice

The results of this study have several implications for research and health policy. Particularly, the study has implications for the understanding of research and professional ethics. Ethical conduct, be it in the fields of research or professional practice, requires the researcher or practitioner to enter into dialogue with the lifeworld of others, their worldviews and forms of life. Traditional, universalistic approaches to ethics often fail to take into account the historical background and the “corresponding memories, stories, and expectations” (Hermans, 2001a, p. 24) of people in developing societies. These approaches assume an abstract and generalized view of the self. Considering others’ points of view in ethical decision-making is a matter of ethics in and of itself. It affirms the other as a fully-fledged consciousness with whom one can enter into dialogue. The traditional African ontology presented in this study, and in particular the conception of morality as a state that exists between people and their context, can offer insight into our understanding of the general ethics debate. The importance of this issue is underscored by the many efforts that have been made to develop ethical guidelines for conducting health-related research in developing societies (e.g. Nuffield Council on Bioethics, 2002).

One of the most complex problems to have arisen in the conduct of research in developing societies is that pertaining to individual versus community consent in research (Gasa, 1999; Lindegger & Richter, 2000; Nuffield Council on Bioethics, 2002). From the traditional view of informed consent, individuals have the autonomy to consent to research and medical interventions. Traditional African approaches, on the other hand, emphasize the dynamic relationship between the person, the family and the community. This has led to many debates about whether individual or community consent is relevant when dealing with people of African descent. Concepts of subjectivity which emerged in this study, particularly the view that people exist within webs of relational ties, highlight the need to locate people in their social and cultural contexts. At the same time, the tensions between individuals and mediational means (cultural symbols) suggest that a *process* approach to ethics and informed consent may be more meaningful. This would entail conceiving the ethics of informed consent to be a relational practice by means of

which one enters into dialogue with another. Conceived this way, obtaining informed consent would involve *phronesis* or knowledge of a practical-moral kind (Gadamer, 1975; McGee, 1998). *Phronesis* is characterised by the ability to make judgements taking into account the contingencies of a situation. It differs from technical or theoretical knowledge, which involves an application of codified rules and principles. In practice, *phronesis* in informed consent would entail entering into a relationship with another. It is a joint meaning-making process involving both the researcher/practitioner and the participant. The parties work together to identify voices that have a bearing on the process, which are then critically related to the perspectives of both the researcher and the participant. This conception of ethics and informed consent, similar to the model suggested by Betan (1997), would require different approaches to ethics training which would recognize power and other relational dynamics between actors. This training should also involve exposure to differing moral and ethical systems.

The emergence of gender identity as an important factor in moral decision-making has implications for other applied fields in the social sciences. Taking note of the gender system can enable social scientists to develop culturally sensitive HIV/Aids interventions in Southern Africa. The study shows the centrality of masculinity and power dynamics supported by culturally-established practices in moral conflicts between men and women. It is conceivable that men might be resorting to having multiple female partners to “prove their manhood.” Unfortunately, early HIV/Aids intervention programmes focused on individuals’ cognitions. Such an approach fails to take into account the power dimensions inherent in the gender system. This study can inform efforts to incorporate the necessary understanding of the role of gender in HIV/Aids intervention programmes (e.g. UNAIDS, 2000).

Reports of violence among Black male teenagers in South African schools have increased recently. In this study, a link was found between conceptions of manhood and using violence to solve problems. It is highly likely that this problem-solving style will also spill over into the relationship with one’s spouse or partner. Writing with respect to the African-American population, Ward (1991) noted that alienated male teenagers may use

“acts of violence . . . as a means of proving their manhood.” (p. 180). This indicates that violence prevention programmes in the schools can benefit from the incorporation of components dealing with the gender identity - masculinity in particular.

Implications for Theory

Perhaps the greatest implication of this study has to do with the manner in which we theorize about the psychological subject and psychology in general. The presuppositions that underpin Western psychology - particularly the notion of a self-contained person - are rooted in particular philosophical and value systems. The imposition of theoretical frameworks and models derived from the West marginalizes local forms of knowledge. In order to be responsive to its social, historical, and cultural context, psychology needs to incorporate the diverse ways in which men and women of various cultures and classes create meaning in their lives, including the manner in which they reflect upon their lived experience (Parker, 1999). Psychology needs to take into account the indigenous languages, philosophies, and worldviews through which people make sense of themselves and the world. Gergen *et al.* (1996) note that for a long period, psychology in India relied on borrowed theoretical and methodological frameworks. Traditional Indian philosophical traditions and concepts were not only denied entry to academic discourse, they were also given little respect, and were regarded with suspicion. Gergen *et al.* (1996), Paranjpe (2002) and Sinha (2002) maintain that traditional thought systems contain a goldmine of psychological insights that have not been exploited by psychologists. The same could be said about psychology in South Africa, which has by and large, maintained a distance from indigenous African thought systems (Holdstock, 2000). The inclusion of the metaphysical framework presented in this study into psychological discourse – and its attendant conception of the subject as a being-with-and-for-others (*umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu*) – will broaden our understanding of the psychological processes at work in developing societies. It will also concretize our understanding of psychological functioning by locating human values, motivations and behaviours in their cultural context (Martin-Baro, 1994; Maiers, 1991; Prilleltensky, 1997; Tolman, 1994).

The call for the indigenization of psychology does not mean that Western philosophical and psychological traditions have to be abandoned. As Gergen *et al.* (1996) note, the intention is not to generate culturally-exclusive psychologies. The modern world is characterized by rapid changes, so cross-pollination of ideas between cultures occurs more rapidly than it did in the past. In the same way that Western psychology cannot afford to ignore African worldviews, it would be shortsighted of African scholarship to remain insulated in only one conceptual framework. It is imperative to take into account the many factors that influence individual development. As mentioned previously, people live in multiple worlds, in which dialogues between the local and the national/international are common (Hermans & Kempen, 1998; Hermans, 2001a). What is therefore needed is dialogue between different cultural, philosophical, and methodological traditions. In South Africa, this dialogue should address the dynamic co-existence of, and interactions between, traditional African and Western worldviews. I have argued that such dialogue is made possible by the socio-cultural tradition advocated by Vygotsky (1978) and Bakhtin (1981, 1990). I have also maintained that the holistic-organic African worldview, which conceives the person in relation to the social environment, is compatible with dialogism (Sow, 1978; Ramose, 1999). However, we should also note that dialogue can only take place between equals, otherwise it deteriorates into monologue. Thus, inter-cultural dialogue cannot proceed meaningfully without a full explication and recognition of traditional African thought systems.

Limitations and Criticisms

Participants in this study were primarily *isiZulu* speaking, with an exception of four (three *isiXhosa* speakers, and one participant of Tswana cultural origin). Further research with other African populations in South Africa should be conducted to test the robustness of the “connection” thesis. Given that sampling in this study was purposive, one cannot generalise the results to other African population groups. Studies are needed to demonstrate that the “connection” thesis arises out of a shared philosophical framework, rather than being of Zulu or Xhosa cultural origin *per se*.

Another limitation arises from the fact that, throughout the study, the researcher had to strike a balance between capturing common conceptions of what constitutes morality for the sample, and needing to highlight and demonstrate tensions and contradictions inherent in actual moral decision-making. Further studies using even smaller samples, and analysing intra-individual tensions and contradictions at length, are needed.

Perhaps the greatest limitation of the study is owing to the fact that interviews were conducted in *isiNguni* (*isiZulu* and *isiXhosa*), while the results and the discussion were presented in English. There are many differences between the Nguni languages, which are highly idiomatic and context-dependent, and English, which (comparatively) tends toward abstraction. Attempts were made to translate the interviews without losing idiomatic equivalence, but this cannot be guaranteed. Language points to something beyond itself, the background lifeworld or forms of life (Hekman, 1995; Wittgenstein, 1953) of a people, and these are very difficult to translate. This is particularly so for a bilingual researcher who, by virtue of his or her knowledge of the forms of life inherent in the original language, can easily assume that these have been adequately captured in the target language (English). Likewise, there is a possibility that translated interviews will be read with reference to the forms of life of the target language. I have tried to minimise such errors by using footnotes to explain potentially confusing words. In some cases, original *isiZulu* words are also included in parentheses. This problem will remain with us so long as one language (voice) has to make itself known through another voice – an inherently difficult process. I hope this problem will be minimized if various languages (forms of life) in South Africa are prepared to enter into dialogue with a view to fully understanding one another (Gadamer, 1975).

Finally, this study could be criticised on the grounds that it has been influenced by the values and the theoretical and philosophical orientations of the researcher. In qualitative studies, which are concerned with the processes by which meanings are constructed, the phenomena under investigation are more important than method *per se* (Crawford & Valsiner, 2002). The Relational Method adopted in this study is appropriate for teasing

out meanings, tensions and cultural complexities in moral experience. This was the main objective of the study.

Qualitative approaches to research are also criticised for supposedly having a lack of objectivity. From a qualitative perspective, subjectivity is an integral part of the research process. Qualitative approaches, unlike their quantitative counterparts, recognize that methodologies are rooted in philosophical and theoretical traditions. Methodology is not conceived as a set of tools or methods. Rather, it “is a process of linking theoretical frameworks and their guiding assumptions, phenomena, and methods” (Crawford & Valsiner, 2002, p. 92). From this perspective, the research design, research questions, analytical procedures, and the way the research is conducted, inform each other in a cyclical manner. This approach recognizes that data do not exist as “facts” separate from the theoretical and philosophical orientations of the researcher. Data are mutually constructed or derived during the very process of their collection. The researcher’s socio-cultural positionality – his or her membership in a particular research community, the assumptions he or she makes about the world, and his or her intuitive and subjective experiences - influences data collection (Crawford & Valsiner, 2002). Validity in qualitative research does not hinge on methods but the explication of interpretive processes and the researcher’s positionality (Crawford & Valsiner, 2002; Maxwell, 1992).

Indications for Further Research

The tensions between moral orientations such as justice and care indicate the need to study the dynamic relationship between moral voices. Such studies should address questions such as: Under what circumstances do people speak with one voice as opposed to another? How are tensions between individualised positions and societal positions resolved? What is the relationship between reason and emotion in moral decision-making? Although Benhabib (1992) and Blum (1988) discuss some of these issues from a philosophical position, as does to a certain extent Gilligan *et al.* (1990), empirical studies need to be conducted to elucidate the relationship between moral voices.

Questions about the relationship between reason and feeling have a bearing on moral justification. I have argued that despite the seemingly problematic relationship between the two, moral justification is possible because moral agents are situated within interpretive communities (Tappan & Brown, 1992), which provide narrative fore-structures, or grounding, for their actions. I further argued that this requires distancing (Ricoeur, 1979), a process by which agents' actions are situated within historical, cultural, and social contexts. Following the same line of thought, it is possible that we could learn more about tensions between moral voices if we situate them within moral communities. This means that rather than asking questions about individuals, research could be directed toward investigating what constitutes just and moral communities? We could then ask how people make moral decisions under conditions considered just and fair, as opposed to conditions considered unjust? This is based on the observation that tensions between reason and emotion were most intense in circumstances where injustice was seen to inhere in the system itself (e.g. having to fine a fellow Black student, while operating within an unjust apartheid system). Such an approach to moral research, while it would probably raise philosophical problems beyond the scope of this study, would seem to be consistent with a view that conceives morality as an organic relationship between elements within a system. However, given that there are many (moral) systems "out there", a truly moral point of view is the one that remains open to the infinite possibilities of dialogue between them (Bakhtin, 1984; Gardiner, 1992). This study is an invitation to South African psychologists, researchers and communities in general to begin this dialogue.

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Appendix 1: *IsiZulu* Version of the Real Life Conflict and Choice Interview Schedule

Isingeniso: Ngiyabonga kakhulu ukuthi uvumile ukubamba iqhaza kulolucwaningo. Njengabantu, kuyenzeka sibhekane nezimo ezidinga ukuthi sithathe izinqumo. Kungaba isemsebenzini, ekhaya, izinqumo ezithinta abasondelene nathi ngokothando, neminye imikhakha yempilo. Kwesinye isikhathi kuye kwenzeka singabi naso isiqiniseko ukuthi iziphi izinqumo okumele sizithathe. Ngicela ungichazele ngesimo owake wabhekana naso, lapho kwakumele uthathe khona isinqumo, kodwa wazithola usunokushayisana kwemibono kuwena ngaphakathi, ngoba ungenaso isiqiniseko sokuthi isinqumo sakho sinabo yini ubulungiswa. Ngicela ungixoxele udaba lwakho lonke, ukuthi kwaqalaphi, kwenzekani, kwaye kwafikaphi. Ukhululekile ukuthatha isikhashana usacabanga ngesimo esinjengalesi owake wabhekana naso.

Imibuzo (isetshenziswa ngokulandela isimo sengxoxo)

1. Ngicela ungichazele isimo owabe ubhekene naso (thola isimo ngokugcwele)
 2. Kulesisimo owawubhekene naso, yini eyabe idala ukungquzulana kwemibono kuwena ngokobu-lungiswa? Kungani lento yabe idala inkinga yokushayisana kwemibono kuwe?
 3. Ngesikhathi ucabanga ngozokwenza, yini owabona kumele uyibhekele? Ikhona enye into owabona kumele uyibhekele, ngaphezu kwale osuyishilo?
 4. Wacina uthathe siphi isinqumo? (Buzisisa ngemiphumela yesinqumo enkathini eseduze, nemiphumela yaso ngokuhamba kwesikhathi, noma enkathini ezayo, uma umxoxi engavange achaze)
 5. Ucabanga ukuthi lokhu owakwenza kwabe kuyinto efanele (enobulungiswa)? Kungani/Kungani kungenjalo?
 6. Yini eyabe ibalulekile, ikuthinta kakhulu kulenkinga? Yini eyabe ithinta abanye? Yini eyabe ibalulekile nje jikelele? Isinqumo sabe sinamuphi umphumela kuwe, noma sabe sinokuba namuphi umphumela kuwe?
 7. Yimiphi imizwa owaba nayo ngalesisimo? Yimiphi imizwa owaba nayo mayelana nabanye ababethinteka kulesisimo? Ubani owazwelana nawe wakwesekela kulesisimo? Wabhekana kanjani nalokhu kungquzulana kwemibono kuwe?
 8. Ngabe ikhona indlela eyahlukile esingabona ngayo lenkinga owawubhekene nayo, ngaphandle kwalokhu osukuchazile?
 9. Ake sibheke lendlela owacina wenze ngayo. Ngabe isitshelani mayelana nawe njengomuntu (noma, umuntu oyi-_____, isibonelo, umholi, umuntu wesifazane, njll, ngokuhambisana nesikhundla sallo ophendulayo).
 10. Uma ucabanga ngalenkinga yokungquzulana kwemibono owawubhekene nayo, ngabe sikhona isifundo owasithola?
 11. Uma ungase ubhekane nesimo esithi asifane nalezi enkathini ezayo, ngabe uyophinde wenze ngalendlela owenza ngayo? Kungani/Kungani ungeke wenze njalo? Ake sithi lesisimo sesibandakanya omunye umuntu noma elinye iqembu, hhayi lomuntu noma leliqembu olichazile. Ngabe ungenze ngendlela efanayo kulomuntu/kuleliqembu? (inhloso ukubona imincele yobulungiswa, ukuthi buhambisana nomuntu noma iqembu yini)
 12. Ngabe lesisimo osichazile singachazwa njengesibandakanya inkinga yobulungiswa? Kungani/Kungani kungenjalo? Ngabe ubulungiswa busho ukuthini kuwe? Yini iyenza into ibe inkinga ephathelene nobulungiswa?
 13. Kwenzeka kanjani ukuthi umuntu abe umuntu onobulungiswa? (Buzisisa ngeqhaza lomndeni, abaphansi, inkolelo, kanye nomphakathi, uma lowo ophendulayo engavange akubalule lokhu).
-

Appendix 2: Sample Contact Summary Sheet

Name: Tha

Age: 19, Female

Occupation: Scholar

Date: 18 March 2000

Striking issues in the contact

- The importance of gender and power in the moral dilemma.
- Contradictions in story: Shifts between individualistic and collectivist concerns. Respondent tries to establish independence from her family, yet she is very proud of her family tradition (see how she cites her clan names with pride, and the fact that she is an *inkosazana* (princess) of the clan.
- The encounter (and interview) were characterized by a high degree of emotion.

Information obtained:

- The cultural prescription of moral behaviour (e.g. a "good girl" behaves like this!)
- Some cultural narratives are constraining (as the one cited above), and others are a source of pride (e.g. being a princess of the clan).
- The interplay between feelings, action and thoughts in moral decision-making
- Negotiation as a problem-solving strategy (but note her powerlessness in the relationship), and the strategies she uses to counter it.

Areas for further clarification:

- The view that moral people have "life" (*baya-phila*).
- The view that to be moral is to be a "human being." See how other respondents respond to these issues.
- How does one recognise a "moral being"? What does it entail, behaviourally?

Appendix 3: Sample Field Notes

Interview with Sindi

- clash between the good of the individual and the good of the group
- family and ancestors in decision-making – role played by deceased
- Moral person is one who is connected- disconnected person is dead
- The good is that which promotes harmony: “in helping others you are helping yourself.”
- Reference to *umuntu umuntu ngabantu* (a human being is a human being because of other human beings)
- Morality involves respect for life (i.e. not to kill)
- Morality involves respecting oneself and others

Interview with Zenzele

- Strong sense of manhood in interview: respondent felt his being as a man would be “incomplete” if she allowed girlfriend “timeout” from the relationship...to see if they were compatible.
- His masculinity is the key issue
- At stake: his “personal dignity” and status among peers, and in his community
- Relationship gave him confidence, voice among peers
- Decision involved conflict of emotions
- Morality: Elders model appropriate behaviour
- Morality- A life-long project, a person’s life (*inkambo yomuntu emhlabeni*)
- The role of God in moral reasoning
- Family: trains you to be a moral person
- Moral people have inner voice (conscience) that talks to them (*unembeza*)
- Morality is to think for oneself as well as for others

Interview with Thobi

- Morality is *inkuliso* (upbringing): it reflects the way your family and community raised you.
- Morality is responsibility toward the family: it is ubuntu
- The need to live in harmony with one’s community
- A bond between members of a community: connection
- Respect for elders and others: Elders to model moral behaviour
- The role of religion in moral reasoning

Appendix 4: Sample Worksheet for Reading 1

Purpose of Reading: To understand story as it was experienced by the narrator
To identify recurrent images, metaphors, and contradictions
Personal Reflection

Narrator: Tha (19- year- old female student)

Background: Female student is an only female in a group of students doing voluntary community service in a rural area. Expected by the rest of the group, and the community they were serving, to conform to traditional stereotypes of womanhood, by having a relationship with the project manager and by doing typical feminine chores (e.g. cooking).

Threats: Of sexual harassment and/or rape and physical abuse.

Recurrent Metaphors: “Heaviness”: Indicating that the situation was experienced as an extremely difficult and a challenging one to handle, due to her being powerless in relation to the project manager. The situation was “Very tough! Very tough! Very tough!”

Images and Feelings: Situation experienced as emotionally exhausting and frustrating. An image of being “trampled upon” and being “killed” or “killing” others emotionally.

Tensions and Contradictions:

- Balancing the need to respect project manager, while not allowing herself to be used or abused
- Avoiding damaging the project manager’s sense of masculinity by hurting his feelings
- Preserving unity in the group by doing some of the feminine chores she is good at without sacrificing her beliefs as a gender activist
- Ongoing tension between her beliefs as an individual and communal or group beliefs

Reflection: Nana’s situation is a good example of the gendered dimension of moral experience. It reflects the frustrations faced by many women in society due to cultural prescriptions and powerlessness on their part. The frustration caused by the difficulty to escape from the situation is of note.

Appendix 5: Sample Worksheet For Reading 2

Purpose of Reading: To identify the “speaking subject” or “I” in the story
To identify tensions between the voice of the person (“I”) and the voice/s of the group or others (“We”)
To look for emerging conceptions of the self

Narrator: Tha (19- year- old female student)

The “I”

- A clear sense of an independent (feminist) voice, speaking against perceived male domination
- Reference to her own personal principles and beliefs
- In terms of activities, her personal position is indicated by the refusal to do feminine duties (e.g. cooking)
- The decision to withdraw and hide from the group is an attempt to state her independent position, given her powerlessness.

The “We” (the group)

- Self is also defined in relation to her family. For example, she takes pride in being a princess of her clan, as indicated by the extensive citation of her clan names during the interview
- Concerned with the welfare of the community that they were serving
- Her decision to cook so as to preserve group unity (but also to protect her identity as a capable female leader)

Emerging sense of self

- The sense of self is caught between two moral worlds: the view that sees women as subservient to men, and an independent view of the self, defined in terms of personal principles and actions
- There are tensions between the pride of being a member of a clan with a proud tradition, and the fact that the same clan tradition could be used to restrict her independence.
- The self vacillates continually between these two positions.

Appendix 6: Sample Interview Summary

Participant: Mandla (Middle-aged College lecturer, male)

Participant in a moral dilemma as cousin produces a gun, threatening to shoot people during a traditional religious ceremony. Action violated the sacred nature of the ceremony, including the ancestors. He wants to disarm him and yet he is scared this could cause commotion, resulting in people being hurt. His cousin's sister eventually disarms him by appealing to the religious nature of the function.

Emerging Conceptions of Morality

Morality is an integral part of being a person

Respondent of the view that morality defines one as a person: it is the "root of being a person" (*kuyimpande yobuntu*). A person firmly rooted in personhood respects himself or herself, young and old, animals, and nature. Respondent says respect makes one a moral person and at the same time, "respect is morality itself."

Morality is to live a life that is "complete in the Good" (*impilo ephelele ebuhleni*)

The respondent does not mean life in a bio-medical sense, but life in terms of how one relates to other people, or one's lived experience. This life is about practical, day-to-day engagements with others: it includes compassion for others, and sharing what one has, including knowledge. This, according to the respondent, is an essential component of being a "complete person." Lived experience also requires one to be diligent: people should work to improve themselves so that they can be "complete people". This necessitates contributing toward the welfare of one's family and the community. Respondent says community is not merely defined by one's immediate neighbourhood: it can be formed spontaneously by those who "share life" (i.e. those who, by virtue of their actions, recognise the bond of interdependence among themselves).

Morality as a quality of being thoughtful toward others and being guided by principles

People who can distinguish between right and wrong are thoughtful toward others. Their interactions with others are guided by principles such as fairness, caring, respect and kindheartedness. These principles are interdependent: one cannot be a caring person and yet be disrespectful toward others, for example. The principles are also an indispensable part of being a "complete person" or of living a life "complete in the Good." One cannot develop these principles if one's life is not complete in personhood (*uma impilo yakho ingaphelele ebuntwini*).

Morality is a Godly quality in the person

To conduct oneself morally means to conduct oneself in a manner that is Godly (*ngendlela enobuNkulunkulu*). The family teaches one to respect God, and hence, it could be regarded as the backbone of growing into moral personhood. The family teaches us that *umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu* (one becomes a human being because of other human beings).

Morality is harmony with family members and *izinyanya* (ancestors)

Failure to live harmoniously with others, especially within the context of the family, angers the ancestors, causing them to withdraw their protection. This leaves the family vulnerable to harm. To avoid this, family members must do their respective duties. Family are morally obliged to support one another, especially in time of need.

Appendix 7: Sample of a Matrix of Informants by Readings

Informant 1: Age: 40

Gender: Female

Occupation: Cleaner

Reading 1: The Plot:	Reading 2: The Speaking Subject	Reading 3: The Self-in-Relation	Reading 4: The Socio-cultural Context:
<p><u>Context</u></p> <p>-A young girl leaves her family (<i>ikhaya</i>) to find employment to support her family</p> <p>-Finds work but poor pay. Not enough money to send to the family.</p> <p>-Loses job and unemployed for a short while.</p> <p><u>Conflict:</u></p> <p>-Needs to send money home but cannot do so during period of unemployment (will family understand?)</p> <p>-Gets romantically involved with man.</p> <p>-Concerned that the man will propose marriage, which will mean leaving her mother and her siblings without financial support.</p>	<p><u>Tension</u></p> <p>-Between the self ("I") and the need to support mother and family ("We"). Choice between marriage (for herself) and her mother and her siblings, whom she supported.</p> <p><u>Sense of self</u></p> <p>-Self is defined in terms of relationship with mother and the family: "I cannot leave my mother for the joys of marriage. I have to struggle where I began" (<i>kumele ngizabalaze la ngaqala khona</i>).</p>	<p><u>Relationship with mother</u></p> <p><u>Thoughts:</u></p> <p>-Worried by thoughts such as "what will happen to my mother if I get married?"</p> <p><u>Feelings:</u></p> <p>Empathy for her mother: "I really felt for my mother, she had been working since we [she and her siblings] were very young" (<i>nganginokumzwela</i>)</p> <p><u>Relationship with boyfriend</u></p> <p><u>Thoughts:</u></p> <p>-Was concerned about what would happen if her boyfriend asked her to "stop working once we are married. What will happen to my mother then?"</p> <p><u>Action:</u></p> <p>-Dialogue: "We sat down and discussed the issue. He felt empathy for me when I stated my position" (<i>wazwelana nami kwisimo engikuso</i>).</p> <p><u>Decision:</u></p> <p>-They agreed to help each other: "We will help both ways. He will help my family, and I will help his too [after we get married]" (<i>Sizolekelelana: Uzongifaka isandla, nami ngimfaka isandla</i>).</p>	<p><u>The Family:</u></p> <p>-The moral imperative to support the family: "The most important issue for me was that there was no one to look after my family...as a person who is responsible for 'the family'" (<i>njengomuntu ophethe ikhaya</i>).</p> <p><u>Marriage</u></p> <p>- The cultural belief that a woman finds "completion" in marriage versus her responsibilities toward her family of origin: "I should not put marriage before everything else, while [members of my family] are going hungry."</p> <p><u>Gender and Power in Relationships</u></p> <p>-Note the view that a man can decide that his wife cannot continue working: "He could have agreed [to let me continue to work] prior to marriage, only to refuse me permission to work thereafter" (<i>...kanti uzobuye ashintshe umqondo wakhe, athi anghlale</i>).</p> <p><u>Individual's historical context</u></p> <p>-Note the view that moral reasoning is contextual: it is influenced by one's historical circumstances, such as the memory of how one was raised: "People's lives are not the same. For those of us who grew up observing the suffering of our families (<i>usizi lwasekhaya</i>), we always think about whether they have eaten or not" [i.e. their well-being].</p>

Reading 1: The Plot:	Reading 2: The Speaking Subject	Reading 3: The Self-in-Relation	Reading 4: The Socio- Cultural Context
<p><u>Context</u></p> <p>-She is a student in a racially-mixed University residence.</p> <p>-She is a Member of House Committee, and has responsibility to fine offenders. She is the only Black person in a committee of 30.</p> <p>- Black friend has to be fined: Her difficulty is that she knows she is from a poor background</p> <p>-Fining her is also difficult as she is perceived as a “representative” of a Black voice in a racially-charged environment.</p> <p>- The Black cleaning staff in the residence also saw her as a representative of Black people.</p>	<p><u>Tension</u></p> <p>-The tension is between her views as a person, driven by her internal principles and standards (“I”), and concern for the group (“We”), arising out of the history of Black oppression in SA.</p> <p><u>Sense of isolation</u></p> <p>-Disconnection from fellow Blacks: “Within the House Comm, I was very isolated.”</p> <p>-She feared further isolation should she punish Black student: “We came to the university together, we struggled (<i>sitabalasa</i>) together. I knew her condition and background” (This is a “We” voice).</p> <p>- Note the tension between the principle of fairness (in an environment historically considered unfair to Blacks) and the need to connect to the group.</p> <p><u>Emerging self</u></p> <p>She re-frames her decision to fine her in a manner that is consistent with group interests: She was a role model of “a principled Black person.” Her action indicated that Blacks are not biased decision-makers. This enables her to maintain her sense of belonging.</p>	<p><u>Relationship with friend:</u></p> <p><u>Feelings:</u> She was hurt. Friend shouted at her, calling her a “sellout.”</p> <p><u>Thoughts:</u> - She thought about the implications of fining the Black student: “What am I trying to prove? To whom?”</p> <p><u>Action:</u> -She decided to fine, justifying this on the grounds that “I had been very patient with her.”</p> <p><u>Feelings about action:</u> -She was emotionally hurt: “My heart was very painful. . . . It was like I had to sacrifice one of our own so as to prove myself. But she is the one who put me in a tight spot” (Note again how she justifies her action).</p> <p><u>Consequence of her action</u> -It led to alienation from friends and Black staff. One friend supports her, saying: “You did well.”</p> <p><u>Relationship with parents</u> -Faced with the dilemma, she thought about how her parents raised them: “if a child is wrong, she/he is wrong, and must be treated the same [as other children]”. Note again reference to fairness.</p>	<p><u>The South African history of race relations</u></p> <p>-The apartheid policy, and the antagonism it generated between Blacks and Whites, influenced her reasoning: “There were 30 of us in the team, and I was the only Black. So, I had to stand for the Black voice. . . . There were very few of us [Blacks] in residence, especially on our floor. So, we had to stand together”</p> <p><u>Family background</u></p> <p>-Her family, and the offending student’s family, were both considered: “I had to take into consideration my own family background, the fact that I like her, also come from a difficult family background. My Blackness (made things even more difficult. And the background that I come from, the background of “heaviness” [difficulty]. (Note her appeal to a common history of difficulty and oppression).</p> <p><u>The Context in which she had to act</u></p> <p>-She discovered that unlike her, other House Committee members were biased in favour of their race groups, indicating the generally unfair context in which she had to act: “I was very disappointed to learn that house comm members of other race groups (referring to Whites) did not penalise those of their race group. There were very few of us who were fair.”</p>

Appendix 8: An Example of a Consent Form: *Isizulu* Version

UNIVERSITY OF NATAL
Psychology Department
Private Bag X01, Scottsville, 3209
Ucingo: 033-2605963
Isikhahlamezi: 033-2605809

Mnumzane/Nkosikazi/Nkosazana ehloniphekile

Ngingumfundi esizindeni sezemfundo ephakeme sase-Natali. Njengenxenywe yezifundo zami, kumele ngenze ucwaningo ngthole izimvo zabantu mayelana nesihloko esithile. Inhloso yocwaningo lwami ukwazi kabanzi ngokuthi abantu bazenza kanjani izinqumo uma bebhakene nezimo lapho kunokungqubuzana kwemibono ethintana nobulungiswa, noma uma unembeza wabo uphikisana nabafuna ukukwenza. Ngizokucela ukuthi ungixoxela udatshana lapho wazithola usesimweni esifana nalesi empilweni yakho. Ngizobe sengilandelisa ngemibuzo ukucacisa lapho kungacacile khona. Ngicabanga ukuthi lengxoxo izothatha cishe imizuzu engu-50. Ingxoxo yonke izoqoshwa ngesi-qophamazwi, bese ibuye ibhalwa njengoba injalo ukuze ihlaziywe.

Ukuzibandakanya kulolucwaningo kungokukhululekile, akunampoqo. Inkulumo-ngxoxo iyohlelwa ngesikhathi esihambisana nawe. Ngaso sonke isikhathi umcwaningi uyokuhlonipha ukuba yimfihlo kwayo yonke imininingwane ecoshwelwe kule-ncululo-ngxoxo.

Uma kwenzeka ushintsha umqondo wakho mayelana nokuzibandakanya nalolucwaningo, unelungelo lokuhoxa noma inini, ngisho noma ucwaningo seluqalile. Umcwaningi uyolihlonipha lelungelo ngaso sonke isikhathi: Ukuhoxa ngeke kube nomthelela omubi kuwe.

Imiphumela yalolucwaningo iyobhalwa ngokufingqiwe. Yize kunokwenzeka ukuthi kucashunwe engxoxweni yakho njengoba injalo ukucacisa amaphuzu athile, imininingwane ebalula umuntu ngamunye iyogodlwa.

Uma ufisa ukubamba iqhaza kulolucwaningo, uyacelwa ukuba ulobe igama lakho uphinde usayinde emgqeni ngezansi.

Mina _____ (igama) ngiyavuma ngokukhululekile ukubamba iqhaza kulolucwaningo oluchazwe ngasenhla. Ngichazelwe inhloso yocwaningo nokuthi lubandakanyani. Ngियाqonda ukuthi ngingahoxa noma inini uma ngifisa.

Sayinda

Indawo

Usuku

Ngiyabonga kakhulu ukuthola lelihuba lokukhuluma nawe.

Yimi ozithobayo

N. Mkhize

Sayinda

Appendix 9: An Example of a Consent Form: English Version

UNIVERSITY OF NATAL
Psychology Department
Private Bag X01, Scottsville, 3209
Telephone 033-2605963
Fax 033-2605809

Dear Sir / Madam

I am a registered student at the University of Natal. I am conducting research as part of my studies. The purpose of this research is to understand how people make decisions in the face of real life moral dilemmas. You will be requested to tell a story involving a moral conflict you once faced. The interviewer will then ask you questions to clarify aspects of your story. The interview will take about 50 minutes. The interviews will be recorded and later transcribed verbatim for the purposes of analysis.

Participation in this study is voluntary. Appointments for interviews will be held at a time that suits you. The researcher will respect the confidentiality of the information collected during the interviews.

Should you change your mind or feel uncomfortable in any way during the interview, please exercise your right to withdraw at any point. The researcher respects your right to do so. You will not incur any negative consequences by exercising this right.

The results of this study will be presented in the form of a summary. Although verbatim extracts from your interview could be used for illustrative purposes, particulars that could identify you personally will be removed.

Should you be willing to participate, please indicate this by writing your name and signature below.

I _____ (name) voluntarily consent to participate in the study as described above. The purpose and nature of the study have been explained to me. I also understand that I can withdraw at any point, should I wish to do so.

Signature

Place

Date

Many thanks for the opportunity to talk to you.

Yours Sincerely

N. Mkhize

Signature