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Reminiscence and the Social Relations of Ageing

**A Discourse Analytic Study of Reminiscence
Work with Older People**

by

Kevin Buchanan

A Doctoral Thesis

**Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements
for the award of**

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Abstract

'Reminiscence work' is currently a popular component of care provision for older people in the UK. However, despite the prevalence of positive 'anecdotal' reports, systematic research has so far failed to show consistent evidence of the benefits of reminiscence work for older people. This thesis addresses this problem in two ways.

First, a discourse analytic approach is used to illuminate current debates about the value of reminiscence work. In practical terms, this involves a detailed analysis of spoken and written texts about reminiscence and reminiscence work, including journal articles, conference papers, training manuals, and transcripts of interviews with practitioners, proponents and critics of reminiscence work. This analysis is presented in three substantive chapters, which demonstrate that discursive formulations of the nature and value of 'reminiscence' and 'reminiscence work/therapy', produced by its practitioners and proponents, are orientated to the constitution of social relations in which older people are positioned as respected and valued participants in social encounters and in community life. This orientation is shown to be in conflict with discursive formulations produced in accounts of research, which formulate the value of reminiscence in psychological rather than social-relational terms. The discrepancy between 'anecdote' and 'evidence' is accounted for in terms of this difference in orientation between practice and research.

Second, the thesis applies the same discourse analytic approach to the study of conversational activity in reminiscence groups. Data for this analysis consist of transcripts of audiorecorded reminiscence groups conducted in three different care settings. The analysis is presented in two substantive chapters, which continue with the theme of social relations. It demonstrates that talk about the past in reminiscence groups affords the discursive accomplishment of 'membership' and positive age identities. It also shows how group workers' discursive practices, when similar to those of pedagogical discourse, can work to constitute negative age identities for older participants. The thesis ends with recommendations for both practice and research.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Over the last 10 years, reminiscence work has become a ubiquitous feature of care provision for older people in the UK. Older people in community settings and in residential homes gather in organised groups to reminisce, with aid of photos, objects, music that are representative of earlier times in their lives; they are encouraged to contribute to books of memories documenting living and working conditions of earlier times in particular communities and localities; they collaborate with others in the writing and performance of theatre productions which serve to celebrate, mark and share the narratives of their individual and joint experiences within and across generations. Such work currently enjoys a wide appeal across a wide variety of community settings and populations, and has gained the active support and promotion of a number of voluntary and professional groupings concerned with services for the elderly.

The growing use of reminiscence work in the care of older people can be seen as just one strand of a wider concern to provide resources for cultural engagement, embracing such activities as oral history, adult education, and community publishing. Such is the popularity and burgeoning growth of reminiscence work that some have characterised it as a 'social movement' (Bornat, 1989b). Alongside these developments, there has been a corresponding growth of a research and practice literature examining the efficacy of, and offering guidance on, reminiscence work (eg: Butler, 1963; McMahon and Rhudick, 1964; Lewis, 1971; Coleman, 1974, 1986; Kiernat, 1979; Lesser, Lazarus, Frankel and Havasy, 1981; Ryden, 1981; Norris, 1982, 1986, 1989; Gibson, 1989).

One recurrent topic of discussion in this literature is the failure of experimental studies of reminiscence groupwork to show consistent evidence of benefits reported in 'anecdotal' accounts produced by practitioners and proponents of reminiscence work (see, for example, Merriam, 1980; Thornton and Brotchie, 1987; Bornat, 1989b; Norris, 1989; Gibson, 1989). Some have taken this lack of 'hard evidence' to signify that group reminiscence has no special beneficial consequences for older people, and have argued that research on reminiscence should be abandoned (Thornton and Brotchie, 1987). Others have argued that research has only just begun, and that rigorous empirical research will eventually corroborate 'anecdotal' reports of its benefits (Bornat, 1989b; Gibson, 1989).

This call for further research is the starting point for this thesis. However, the research reported here departs radically from current approaches to researching reminiscence work. Research to date has been carried out mainly within the traditional psychological paradigm, taking measures of 'psychological function' and 'psychological state' have been taken from older people before and after participation in reminiscence groups (eg: Perrotta and Meacham, 1981; Berghorn and Schafer, 1986-7; Baines, Saxby and Ehlert, 1987; Goldwasser, Auerbach and Harkins, 1987; Bachar, Kindler, Scheffler and Lerer, 1991). Such research is informed by research which predates the growth of reminiscence work, and which has studied reminiscence as a 'mechanism' or 'function' associated with the ageing process (eg: Butler, 1963; McMahon and Rhudick, 1964; Lewis 1971).

A fundamental argument of this thesis is that this research paradigm does not address the constructive consequences of language use. A wide range

of work in linguistic philosophy, sociology and psychology has demonstrated that language cannot be seen as a merely referential medium, describing a world which exists independently of its descriptions (eg: Wittgenstein, 1953; Austin, 1962; Garfinkel, 1969; de Saussure, 1974; Foucault, 1971,1972; Heritage, 1984; Potter and Wetherell, 1987; Edwards and Potter, 1992). Rather, it is productive of that world. This point of not merely of philosophical interest. If language is constructive in this way, then the ways in which people construct the world through language have real consequences.

From this perspective, reports of experimental studies of reminiscence work come to be seen as discursive formulations of the nature and value of reminiscence work, which have functional consequences in the contexts in which they are produced, cited, and otherwise mobilised. Moreover, there is no *a priori* reason to accord them higher status than other accounts emanating from practitioners and proponents of reminiscence work. Rather than having the final word, they are resituated as moves in an ongoing argument which is constitutive of the nature and value of reminiscence work.

The research reported here is concerned in part with documenting the moves in this argument, and with identifying their consequences. It will demonstrate that this argument has consequences for the social relations of ageing – that is, for the position of older people in their relations with others, and in the communities in which they live. This is so, not merely in the sense that they might be denied the benefits claimed to ensue from reminiscence work. It is so in that discursive formulations of the value of reminiscence embody formulations of the nature of ageing, and can be used to justify or resist the social marginalisation of older people. The

argument is not just about the value of reminiscence, but about the value of older people.

Research on reminiscence work cannot stand outside this argument, but must inevitably contribute to it, whether or not this is recognised or acknowledged by those doing the research. This study represents a conscious attempt to engage with this argument. It presents an analysis of reminiscence work and reminiscence research as a domain of discursive action. In practical terms, this involves an analysis of discourse about reminiscence and reminiscence work, produced by its practitioners, researchers and proponents. In addition, it involves an analysis of discourse in reminiscence groups, which current research approaches have so far failed to address. This analysis represents an attempt to take seriously practitioners' accounts of the value of their work, in that it addresses the actual terms of conversational engagement in reminiscence groups to which these accounts relate.

The remainder of this introductory chapter presents a brief summary of the content and arguments of subsequent chapters.

Chapter 2 presents an account of the history and current forms of reminiscence work, followed by a brief review of research on reminiscence and ageing, and reminiscence groupwork. This review focuses on the nature of the research, rather than on the detail and findings of specific studies. The chapter ends by identifying three problems with current research on reminiscence work: (1) the discrepancy between experimental and 'anecdotal' accounts of the value of reminiscence work for older people; (2) the problem of variability in the definition and

conceptualisation of 'reminiscence' as an object of research; (3) the lack of any account of group reminiscence as conversational action.

Chapter 3 presents discourse analysis as a means of addressing these problems. It begins with an account of work demonstrating that language is medium of social action, which has informed current approaches to the analysis of discourse. Following this, the chapter sets out the analytical resources to be used in the substantive chapters of the thesis: Potter and Wetherell's (1987) approach to discourse analysis, conversation analysis, and the insights afforded by other work demonstrating that discourse embodies contradictory representations of the objects, events and experiences which it addresses. The chapter closes by noting how the discourse analytic perspective might address the problems of reminiscence research identified in Chapter 2, by (1) using variability in the formulation of the nature and value of reminiscence and reminiscence work as an analytical resource in identifying the functional consequences of these formulations, and (2) making possible an analysis of group reminiscence as conversational action.

Chapter 4 presents an analysis of literature related to reminiscence and reminiscence work. This analysis shows that discursive formulations of the significance of reminiscence in later life embody arguments about the nature of ageing and the social position of older people, and that these formulations have consequences for the social relations in which older people are inserted. It shows further that, while accounts of research on reminiscence tend to formulate its value for older people in psychological terms, accounts produced by practitioners and proponents of reminiscence work tend to formulate its value in social-relational terms. On this basis, it is argued that while the accounts of practitioners and proponents can be

seen as pursuing the stated anti-ageist concerns of reminiscence work, the accounts of reminiscence research have different implications, and can be seen as working against these anti-ageist concerns. The discrepancy between 'anecdote' and 'evidence' is thus recast as a consequence of the differential orientation of these accounts.

The social-relational theme is continued in Chapter 5, which presents an analysis of extracts from interviews with reminiscence workers, focusing on the ways in which they formulate the association between reminiscence and ageing. This analysis shows further evidence of the favouring of formulations which have positive social-relational consequences for older people in the discourse of practitioners. In doing so, it offers further evidence that these formulations embody arguments concerning the nature of ageing and the social position of older people, and shows how practitioners' talk is structured in terms of contrary positions in this argument. Again, the point is that the anti-ageist project of reminiscence work is pursued through the discursive practices of reminiscence workers.

Chapter 6 focuses on current debates regarding the status of reminiscence work as 'therapy'. It presents an analysis of both talk and texts related to reminiscence work: talk in the form of extracts taken from transcripts of interviews, conference workshop sessions and incidental conversations with care workers, psychologists and academics, and texts in the form of journal papers, conference papers and training manuals. This analysis demonstrates that the designation of reminiscence work as 'therapy' has contradictory consequences in that, while it constitutes reminiscence as an activity affording 'special benefits' to older people, it has social-relational implications which are antithetical to formulations of reminiscence work

as an 'ordinary', egalitarian activity. This dilemma is apparent in practitioners' discourse, in its variable mobilisation of, and resistance to, formulations of reminiscence work as therapy. This resistance is shown to be part of more general resistance to formulating reminiscence work in the terms of professional discourse, and thus provides further evidence that practitioners' representations of reminiscence work are oriented to social-relational concerns, in this case to the social relations of care provision. At the same time, their espousal of the 'therapy' label brings with it an evaluative agenda which focuses on 'psychological function', raising again the problems identified in Chapter 4 concerning the different orientations of research and practice.

In Chapters 7 and 8, the focus of analysis moves from discourse about reminiscence to discourse in reminiscence groups. Data for these analyses consists of transcripts of group reminiscence sessions in three different care settings: a residential home, a geriatric day hospital, and a day centre for older people. The analysis in Chapter 7 addresses claims related to the beneficial consequences of group reminiscence for the 'identities' of older participants, and for the social relations between them. It shows how talk about the practices of the past works to constitute situated identities for older participants as members of the 'culture of the past', and how talking together in this way works to constitute membership in the present.

Chapter 8 presents an analysis intended to address claims made regarding the potential of group reminiscence to effect changes in status relations between care workers and older participants. This analysis shows how the discursive practices of group workers afford older participants the opportunity to work high status identities as historical informants. However, this analysis also identifies practices which work low status

identities for older participants, through their similarity to forms of pedagogical discourse. The contradictory nature of group workers practices is identified as a consequence of the contradictions of care provision, which functions both to serve and supervise its recipients.

Finally, Chapter 9 discusses the implications of these analyses for reminiscence work as an arena of care practice, and makes some suggestions regarding avenues for further research.

Chapter 2

Reminiscence: Practice and Research

This chapter presents an account of the history and current forms of reminiscence work in the UK. This is followed by a brief review of research on the significance of reminiscence in later life, and research oriented to the evaluation of the benefits of reminiscence groups for older people. The chapter ends by identifying some key problems of current research into reminiscence and reminiscence work.

Varieties of reminiscence work

Reminiscence work is currently practiced with older people in a wide variety of institutional and community settings, including residential homes, daycentres, day hospitals, geriatric wards in general and psychiatric hospitals, community centres, sheltered housing projects and libraries. Equally various are the defining characteristics of the older people who participate. Reminiscence work may be specifically targeted at older people who are socially isolated, confused, clinically depressed, suffering memory or sensory impairment, or categorised as having 'learning difficulties'.

Whatever form it takes, and whatever the setting, reminiscence work involves talking with older people about the experiences and events of their lives. Its most common manifestation is the reminiscence group, a 'discussion group' normally led by one or more group workers, whose role is to chair the discussion and to encourage reminiscence on the part of older participants. Discussions tend to be thematically structured – schooldays, work, domestic life, the wars, and so on – and a small industry has grown up supplying pictures, sounds, artefacts and even smells from

the first half of this century, as prompts for reminiscing (eg: Help the Aged, 1981; Age Exchange, 1988; Winslow Press, 1989). Most often, this activity is seen as an end in itself, engaged in for the benefits it is thought to confer on those who participate. Occasionally, however, such groups will be set up with a tangible end-product in mind, often a collaboratively-written account of participants' reminiscences.

Reminiscence work may also be carried out on a one-to-one basis, either through preference, or where the temperament or circumstances of the older person preclude participation in a group. Such work is often termed 'life history' work, and will often involve the production of a written account of the person's life experiences.

Another form of reminiscence work is 'reminiscence theatre', pioneered by Medium Fair (Langley and Kershaw, 1981-82), and currently exemplified in the work of the London-based Age Exchange Theatre Company. This work involves the incorporation of older peoples' accounts of their life experience into theatre productions, which are then performed for audiences of older people in pensioners' clubs, theatres, community centres, sheltered housing units, homes and hospitals. The name 'Age Exchange' also signifies an important intergenerational aspect of this work, with some projects involving the participation of children together with older people and professional actors and theatre directors in the production of plays based on memories of wartime evacuation, or of the local area in which the children and older people live.

Objectives of reminiscence work

Gibson (1989), in a training manual which can be seen as constituting a 'state of the art' account of reminiscence work, offers a useful summary of

reasons for encouraging reminiscence in work with older people. In her view, reminiscence offers the following benefits: it "encourages self-worth"; it "confirms and enhances self-identity"; it "encourages and enriches social exchange"; it "alters others' perceptions and understandings" of older people; it "preserves and transmits the cultural heritage"; it "reverses the gift relationship" between younger and older people, and between care workers and their older clients; it "assists with the assessment of present functioning"; it "builds bridges between a person's past and present"; and finally, it is "for most an enjoyable experience". Reminiscence, then, is seen as having a range of beneficial effects, both personal and social. One or more of these formulations of the benefits of reminiscence work can generally be found in accounts of reminiscence work produced by its proponents and practitioners (eg: Lesser, Lazarus, Frankel and Havasy, 1981; Norris and Abu El Eileh, 1982; Cook, 1984; Norris, 1986; Thompson, 1988; Wright, 1988; Forrest, 1990; Gibson, 1992).

A brief history of reminiscence work

The emergence of reminiscence work has been traced to a number of influences. Bornat (1989b) and Thompson (1988) see the development of oral history in the late 1960s and early 1970s as an important precursor of reminiscence work. Both refer to a growing realisation, during that time, that the oral history interview was a two-way process – that the experience of collecting oral testimony was often as rewarding for those providing it as for those collecting it. Bornat also points to the influence of community publishing projects started in the 1970s, in which working-class people were encouraged to produce their own art and literature, with a strong emphasis on autobiographical accounts. These developments had characteristics which continue to be found in reminiscence work – a

recognition of the benefits to be gained from talking about one's past, the production of written accounts based on such talk, and a concern with empowering marginalised people by giving them a voice. Bornat (1989b) places great emphasis on this aspect of reminiscence work, characterising it as a 'social movement', with an agenda which^{is} as much political as it is recreational or 'therapeutic'. This emphasis is also reflected in other accounts of reminiscence work (eg: Norris, 1982; Thompson, 1988; Gibson, 1989).

Another event cited as a major factor in the emergence of reminiscence work is the change in the view of reminiscence within gerontology and psychology in the 1960s and early 1970s. Around this time, papers began to appear which challenged the prevailing view of reminiscing in older people as a regressive and even pathological activity (eg: Butler, 1963; McMahon and Rhudick, 1964; Lewis 1971). These papers presented evidence suggesting that reminiscing was, in various ways, beneficial for older people, and that it contributed to 'successful ageing'. Robert Butler's 1963 paper was particularly influential. He argued that reminiscing was part of a process of 'life review', engaged in by all older people, which involved 'taking stock' of one's life in preparation for one's approaching death.

While these developments can be seen as providing grounds for encouraging older people to engage in reminiscence, a number of authors (Thompson, 1988; Bornat, 1989b; Gibson, 1989) point to one particular event as a catalyst for the current burgeoning practice of reminiscence work in the UK. This was the publication in 1981 of the tape/slide package *Recall* by the charity organisation Help the Aged. The *Recall* package was developed as part of a government-funded project, later taken over by

Help the Aged, which was concerned with improving the environment of mentally frail older people who were permanent residents of hospital wards. The package consisted of images and sounds depicting life in the first eighty years of the twentieth century – schooldays in the 1900s, youth in the 1920s, the First and Second World Wars, and so on. Cheap and simple to use, it proved to be very popular amongst those working with older people in care settings, who used it as a basis for running staff-led reminiscence groups. *Recall* inspired the development of other, more locally-oriented tape/slide packages (eg: Gibson, 1984, 1986), and also prompted moves to provide training for those running reminiscence groups.

The flourishing of reminiscence work has resulted in publications intended to serve as a means of communication between practitioners, and as guides to practice. In the late 1980s, Help the Aged began to publish a newsletter called *Recall Review*, reporting on reminiscence work with older people in the UK. This has lately been reincarnated as *Reminiscence* magazine, published three times a year. Prominent among guides to practice are Norris (1986), Wright (1988) and Gibson (1989), the latter constituting a particularly comprehensive, state-of-the-art account of reminiscence practice. In addition to publications, there have been regular exhibitions and conferences on reminiscence and life history work. Notable in this respect are the three *Exploring Living Memory* exhibitions held in London in the 1980s, and a recent annual conference of the Oral History Society dedicated to reminiscence work.

Researching the function of reminiscence in later life

Research into the role of reminiscence in later life has focussed on its possible 'adaptive value', as a way of coping with the experience of

growing old. All reviews of the literature (Merriam, 1980, Romaniuk, 1981; Kastenbaum, 1982; Molinari and Reichlin, 1985; Thornton and Brotchie, 1987) cite the American gerontologist Robert Butler as the inspiration for this research. Butler's 1963 paper, entitled 'Life review: An interpretation of reminiscence in the aged', presented clinical and literary evidence suggesting the universal occurrence of a mental process of reviewing one's life, prompted by a realisation of approaching death.

After Butler's paper came a number of studies investigating the possible 'adaptive functions' of reminiscence for older people. Some of these studies have investigated the relation between self-reports of older peoples' reminiscence activity, gained by means of questionnaires, and variables such as 'life satisfaction' and 'self concept' (Havighurst and Glasser, 1972), 'ego adjustment' (Boylin, Gordon and Nehrke, 1976), and 'self regard/image enhancement', 'present problem-solving' and 'self understanding' (Romaniuk and Romaniuk, 1981). Others have used measures of reminiscence activity derived from interviews with older people, and investigated the association of these measures with measures of 'depression' (McMahon and Rhudick, 1964; Lieberman and Falk, 1971; Coleman, 1986), 'life satisfaction' (Lieberman and Falk, 1971; Coleman, 1986), current life circumstances (Lieberman and Falk, 1971; Coleman, 1986), 'self concept' (Lewis, 1971), and personality, 'ego strength', anxiety, and social interaction (Revere and Tobin, 1980). Some of these studies have also sought to identify different types of reminiscence, with correspondingly different functions (McMahon and Rhudick, 1964; Revere and Tobin, 1980; Romaniuk and Romaniuk, 1981; Coleman, 1986).

The studies differ in terms of their design, the way reminiscence is defined and differentiated, the nature and circumstances of participants, and

whether their findings support the authors' hypotheses. The details of these differences are not immediately relevant to the purposes of this discussion. However, it is worth noting that Coleman (1986) concurs with other reviewers in stating that: "Taken together, as many studies seem to have found no evidence for the adaptive value of reminiscence as have found positive evidence" (p11). Despite this equivocality, many of these studies are cited in contemporary accounts of reminiscence work as providing grounds for engaging in such work.

Researching reminiscence work

Research into the possible benefits of reminiscence work for older people, carried out in the UK and the US, has focussed almost exclusively on reminiscence groups. In the main, this research has used a pre/post test format, with various psychological and behavioural measures being taken before and after participation in a series of group reminiscence sessions. Measures used in these experimental studies are as follows:

Self-esteem questionnaire (Perrotta and Meacham, 1981)

Depression scale (Perrotta and Meacham, 1981; Goldwasser, Auerbach and Harkins, 1987; Bachar, Kindler, Scheffler and Lerer, 1991)

Life satisfaction inventory (Hobbs, 1983; Bender, Cooper and Howe, 1983; Baines, Saxby and Ehlert, 1987; Berghorn and Schafer, 1986-7)

Tests of cognitive function (Bender, Cooper and Howe, 1983; Baines, Saxby and Ehlert, 1987; Berghorn and Schafer, 1986-7; Goldwasser, Auerbach and Harkins, 1987)

Researcher ratings of participants' mood outside the sessions (McKiernan and Bender, 1990)

Observational measures of social, communicative, and other forms of behaviour outside the group sessions (Kiernat, 1979; Bender, Cooper and Howe, 1983; Baines, Saxby and Ehlert, 1987; Goldwasser, Auerbach and Harkins, 1987)

As well as these psychological and behavioural measures, a few studies have included measures intended to assess the effect of reminiscence groups on social relationships between older participants. Bender et al (1983), working with confused older people, assessed changes in participants' recognition of other participants from photographs. Berghorn and Schafer (1986-7) assessed changes in the number of other participants known to each participant, while Fielden (1990) used sociograms to assess changes in affiliation between group members. Baines et al (1987) is the only study to attempt systematic measurement of variables relevant to relationships between participants and group workers, by recording changes in staff knowledge of participants.

Only two experimental studies have attempted systematic observation of activity which takes place within groups. McKiernan and Bender (1990) used time sampling methods to assess changes in participants' level of 'engagement' in the group. Hobbs (1983) assessed level of participation based on participants' verbal contributions.

In summary, these experimental studies have been concerned mainly with measures of changes in psychological state and behaviour. Only a few have looked for evidence of social-relational changes, and only two have departed from the 'before and after' format to look at what goes on during group sessions. The studies discussed have involved various populations of older people, including those diagnosed as suffering from

depression and dementia. The studies differ in their design, and many have been criticised for failing to meet the criteria of experimental research (Thornton and Brotchie, 1987). For example, some included 'control' groups, in which participants discussed topics related to the present rather than the past (eg: Berghorn and Schafer, 1986-7; Fielden, 1990), while others did not. In another context, these issues would be a central topic of discussion, but here the aim is to illustrate in general the approach that has been taken to researching reminiscence work. Nor is it necessary here to discuss the findings of individual studies. It is, however, important to note that, taken as a whole, the findings of these studies are contradictory, and do not consistently show that participation in reminiscence groups is beneficial for older people (Thornton and Brotchie, 1987).

Besides these experimental studies, there are many reports of a more impressionistic nature, in which claims are made regarding the benefits of participation in reminiscence groups without any systematic measurement being reported (eg: Lesser, Lazarus, Frankel and Havasy, 1981; Norris and Abu El Eileh, 1982; Cook, 1984; Forrest, 1990; Gibson, 1992). These reports tend to place greater emphasis than experimental reports on such issues as participants' enjoyment of the groups, participants' engagement in the group sessions, and the effects of participation on social relationships between participants, and between participants and care workers. The following quote from Gibson (1992), reporting on a study involving reminiscence groups in day centres and residential homes in Northern Ireland, is typical of such reports:

Although many residents had lived in close proximity to each other for years, engagement in reminiscence groups appeared to transform the quality of their relationships. Sharing the same

residential home had not meant shared lives. Through reminiscing in groups they discovered common origins and past experience of which they had no inkling. For such people living private lives in public places it was as if group reminiscence served the dual purpose of putting them in touch with their personal past as well as putting them in touch with other people in the present. In this way the then and there enriched the here and now. (Gibson, 1992: 34-5)

These impressionistic reports are consistently positive. In addition, similar 'anecdotal' reports of the positive benefits of reminiscence work appear regularly in *Help the Aged's Reminiscence* magazine, and in guides to practice (eg: Gibson, 1989).

Problems of reminiscence research

The mismatch between anecdotal and experimental reports

It will be apparent from the previous section that the literature on reminiscence work is characterised to some extent by a mismatch between 'anecdotal' or impressionistic reports of benefits, emanating mainly from practitioners and proponents, and experimental studies which show no consistent evidence for such benefits. This problem is explicitly referred to in all areas of the literature, from academic articles and conference papers (Merriam, 1980; Thornton and Brotchie, 1987; Bornat, 1989b; Norris, 1989) through to training manuals (Gibson, 1989). Responses to this state of affairs have varied. On the one hand, some have taken the lack of 'hard evidence' to signify that reminiscence has no particular benefits for older people, and concluded that research into reminiscence should be abandoned (Thornton and Brotchie, 1987), or refocussed as part of a more general set of issues concerning the dynamics of small groups (Bender, 1991). On the other hand, others have argued that research has only just begun, and that more rigorous research will eventually corroborate anecdotal reports of benefits (Bornat, 1989b; Gibson, 1989). This problem is

not merely of academic significance, since the provision of resources for practice (materials, training etc.) may depend on the existence of 'hard evidence' of its benefits.

Variability in the definition and conceptualisation of reminiscence

A recent review paper, written by two clinical psychologists (Thornton and Brotchie, 1987), reviewing the empirical work on reminiscence, highlights the lack of conclusive evidence of its beneficial effects, and decries the lack of precise definitions of reminiscence, which inhibits progress in research:

It is clear that even in studies using an empirical approach the definition and measurement of the key construct of reminiscence itself vary widely and seriously hamper any comparisons among studies. (Thornton and Brotchie, 1987: 95)

The problem of variability in the definition and conceptualisation of reminiscence is raised in other reviews of the literature (Lo Gerfo, 1980-81; Merriam, 1980; Molinari and Reichlin, 1984-5; Buechel, 1986), where it is often identified as being responsible for the contradictory findings in the area.

The missing account of activity in reminiscence groups

This third problem is not raised in the research literature. It is raised here as a consequence of the perspective taken in the present study. To date, only two studies have undertaken systematic analysis of activity which takes place within reminiscence groups. This analysis has involved the sampling of behavioural indices of 'engagement' (McKiernan and Bender, 1990), and recording the number of words and duration of speech of participants (Hobbs, 1983). Anecdotal and impressionistic reports of reminiscence work often present accounts of what occurs in the groups,

either reporting and interpreting the content of participants' talk, or describing changes in participants' behaviour, and make claims for the beneficial effects of reminiscence groups based on these accounts. It is arguable that a systematic analysis of what goes on in reminiscence groups would be an appropriate way of addressing these claims. However, the quantitative measures used so far are limited in this respect. What is needed is a means of going beyond merely measuring the amount of talk, and getting at what is accomplished through the conversations which take place in reminiscence groups.

In summary, then, the inconclusive findings of experimental studies of reminiscence work are at variance with the consistently positive nature of anecdotal and impressionistic reports. One possible explanation for these inconclusive findings, proposed in the literature, is variability in the definition and conceptualisation of reminiscence. At the same time, there is a notable absence of any systematic analysis of the conversational activity which takes place in reminiscence groups. One way of addressing the mismatch between experimental and anecdotal accounts, then, would be by means of a research approach which can handle variability in the construct of reminiscence, and which can address the conversational activity in reminiscence groups. The next chapter presents discourse analysis as a research approach which meets these requirements.

Chapter 3

Discourse, Dialogicality and Social Action

A central focus of the research reported in this thesis is the use of language in reminiscence work and reminiscence research. The use of language is clearly fundamental to group reminiscence, involving as it does people talking together about the past. The use of language is equally fundamental to reminiscence research. When participants fill in a questionnaire or test form, when coders categorise stretches of interview talk, when observers categorise a particular behaviour, when experimenters deploy operational definitions, they are dealing with linguistic categories and linguistic descriptions. Such uses of language are, in the main, treated as unproblematic. Language is treated as a neutral, transparent medium for the description of mental states, feelings, actions, events and so on. The relation between these things and the language used to describe them is taken to be one of reference – words refer to, stand for, things. Certainly, there may be disputes relating to such issues as the way ‘reminiscence’ should be defined, or the veracity of a particular description of an event which occurred in the past, or the reliability of questionnaire responses. Nevertheless, underlying all these activities is the assumption that an accurate definition, description or report is, in principle, achievable.

This view of language, however, has been called into question by a growing body of work in linguistic philosophy, sociology, social theory and, latterly, in psychology. Common to this body of work is a view of language as a medium of social action, rather than as an abstract referential system (eg: Wittgenstein, 1953; Austin, 1962; Garfinkel, 1969; de

Saussure, 1974; Foucault, 1971,1972). This work has led to the development of a number of approaches to the empirical analysis of discourse. This chapter presents a brief account of this work and the research approaches it has engendered, and then moves on to consider their implications for researching reminiscence work. In doing so, it will provide grounds for the analyses of talk and writing about reminiscence and reminiscence work, and conversation in reminiscence groups, to be presented in subsequent chapters.

Language as social practice

The theory of speech acts

The view of language as a medium of action can be traced to the later writings of Wittgenstein (1953) and in particular to Austin's (1962) theory of speech acts. Austin's theory was formulated in opposition to a view of language as an abstract, referential system. He was concerned to show that utterances are not only statements about the things to which they refer, but can also be seen as performing actions in the context in which they are produced. According to Austin, any utterance can be seen as performing three kinds of actions. First, it is a locutionary act – an act of saying something meaningful. Second, it is an illocutionary act – a communicative action, such as an offer, request, or command. Third, it is a perlocutionary act – it has consequences in the context in which it is uttered. Austin's work also drew attention to the importance of the context of an utterance in determining the nature of the action it was doing. This theory, with its emphasis on the importance of social context in determining meaning, and the function of linguistic utterances as actions, has had a profound and seminal influence on the study of language as social practice.

Ethnomethodology

Austin's theory was developed primarily as a philosophical thesis to counter to prevailing philosophical views of language, and as such has proved problematic in its application to the study of actual talk (Potter and Wetherell, 1987; Nofsinger, 1991). The ethnomethodological perspective on language use, however, is firmly rooted in the practicalities of everyday life. The project of ethnomethodology, as formulated by Garfinkel (1969), is to describe the methods and procedures of common-sense reasoning which people use to achieve shared understandings of their social world, and which are fundamental to the conduct and organisation of social life. A crucial move in this enterprise was to treat members' talk as a topic of research in its own right, rather than using it as a resource for understanding their actions, as in the form of interviews or other accounts collected as data for research. Ethnomethodological studies draw attention to three characteristics of talk which are pertinent to the present discussion.

First, talk is **indexical**. That is, in order to understand the meaning of an utterance, the recipient must examine features of the context in which it is produced – who produced it, what has been said previously, what activity the interactants are involved in, and so on. This is true of the vast majority of utterances, and is not confined to the class of words traditionally identified as 'indexical expressions' (eg: 'that', 'you', 'it', etc). The assumption that words simply 'stand for' or 'refer to' things fails to take into account the tacit procedures of interpretation which are required to bring 'words' and 'things' into correspondence in the particular situation in which the words are produced. Taking account of this fact ties the production of meaning to the particular concrete situations in which language is used, rather than locating it in the language itself.

Second, talk is **reflexive**. Any state of affairs can be described in a potentially infinite number of ways. Any description, then, will be selective, attending to certain features of that state of affairs, and ignoring others. In this way, talk works to constitute the context in which it is produced, and thus bears a reflexive relationship to that context. While the interpretation of an utterance necessitates an examination of the circumstances of its production, the utterance works at the same time to constitute the nature of those circumstances. This means that talk is not merely a referential commentary on actions, events and situations, but is rather a constitutive part of those actions, events and situations.

Third, talk is **action-orientated**. This point follows from the previous two. In reflexively constituting the context in which it is produced, talk is like any other action. An utterance is a move in a sequence of activity, has consequences for the ensuing trajectory of that sequence of activity, and is treated as such by interactants.

While these points are presented here in abstract form, they are derived from studies of the detail of people's everyday reasoning practices (eg: Garfinkel, 1969; Wieder, 1974). As in the case of speech act theory, they draw attention to the status of talk as action, and to the importance of social context in the interpretation of talk. However, they also go further in emphasising the reflexive properties of talk. These insights have had an important influence on the development of current approaches to the study of language use. In particular, they inform the research programme of conversation analysis (see below), and have also provided foundations for developments in discourse analysis (Potter and Wetherell, 1987).

Semiology and poststructuralism

While ethnomethodology deals with language use in everyday interaction, other influences have come from work which has a far broader focus, done in the field of cultural analysis. This work is the legacy of Saussure's (1974) insights into the nature of language: that the relationship between words and the things they signify is an arbitrary one, and that meaning inheres in the relationship of signs to each other in a system of signs, rather than in the relation between signifier and signified. These insights led to the development of semiology, the science of signs, and a number of analyses of various domains of human activity as semiotic systems (eg: Barthes, 1974, 1985; Fiske and Hartley, 1978; Krampen, 1983). The importance of this work is in emphasising that meaning is not an inherent or natural property of objects, events or actions, but is the product of the systems of conventions and distinctions which people use to 'decode' them. Also important here is work in the poststructuralist tradition which developed as a response to the limitations of semiology. This work is notable for its concern with the role of 'discourses' in the constitution of various realms of human activity, and of subjectivity itself (eg: Foucault, 1971,1972).

The three areas of work summarised above have been enormously influential in a variety of disciplines concerned with the study of language. Although very different in their concerns and methods, all three have informed current approaches to the analysis of discourse.

Discourse Analysis

The term 'discourse analysis' has been used to describe a variety of approaches to the study of language use (see Potter, Wetherell, Gill and

Edwards, 1990). Here, it is used to denote the research approach formulated initially by Gilbert and Mulkay (1984), and developed by Potter and Wetherell (1987). Potter and Wetherell (1987) emphasise three characteristics of discourse which are important to their analytical strategy: function, construction and variation.

Function

The concept of function denotes the 'action-orientation' of discourse as discussed earlier. Discourse is used to do social actions, such as blaming, excusing, apologising, requesting, justifying, mitigating, and so on. Besides these local, interpersonal actions, 'function' is also intended to capture what might be termed the broader 'macrosocial' consequences of discourse – the way, for example, particular ways of speaking work to constitute particular kinds of gender relations, or to legitimate the power of a particular social group in society.

Construction

Discourse is constructed from pre-existing linguistic resources. When we offer an excuse, or an apology, when we offer a description or explanation of some event, we mobilise such resources. These resources comprise not only the vocabulary and grammar of the language we speak, but also a range of other discursive forms, such as metaphors, narrative forms, axioms, proverbs, and so on. The notion of construction also draws attention to the fact that we select from this set of resources certain forms rather than others. A further point here, following from the insights of ethnomethodology and poststructuralism, is that, as well as being constructed, discourse is constructive of the events, objects, actions and situations in relation to which it is used.

Variation

On some occasions, the function of discourse may be self-evident. The utterance "please pass me the salt", for example, obviously functions as a request. However, as Wetherell and Potter (1988) point out, the functions of discourse are generally not so easy to determine. Interpersonal actions such as 'requesting' may be done indirectly, allowing a request to be rejected without loss of face for the person making the request (Drew, 1984). Similar difficulties can be encountered in specifying the 'macrosocial' functions of discourse.

The functions of discourse, then, are generally not directly available for study. Potter and Wetherell's solution to this problem is to direct analytic attention to variation in the way discourse is constructed. Variation in discourse is a consequence of the fact that people do different things with it. Just as the availability of different discursive forms serves as a resource for speakers/authors to perform different kinds of actions, so too can it serve as a resource for analysts in identifying those actions. Systematic variation in discursive constructions across different contexts can be used to test hypotheses about the function of particular constructions. It is this aspect of Potter and Wetherell's approach which constitutes a crucial step forward in the study of discourse and its consequences.

Interpretative repertoires

To say discourse is variable is not to say it lacks regularity. Rather, this regularity is to be found, not in the discourse of individual speakers/authors, but in the discursive forms that are available to them to be mobilised in particular contexts. The analysis of variation is directed to the identification of such discursive forms. In particular, discourse analytic studies have focused on the identification of 'interpretative

repertoires' (Gilbert and Mulkay, 1984). Wetherell and Potter describe them as follows:

Repertoires can be seen as the building blocks speakers use in constructing versions of actions, cognitive processes and other phenomena. Any particular repertoire is constituted out of a restricted range of terms used in a specific stylistic and grammatical fashion. Commonly these terms are derived from one or more key metaphors and the presence of a repertoire will often be signalled by certain tropes or figures of speech. (Wetherell and Potter, 1988: 172)

The term 'interpretative repertoire' was first coined by Gilbert and Mulkay (1984), in their study of the discourse of scientists working in the field of biochemistry. Gilbert and Mulkay were initially interested in producing a sociological account of a theoretical dispute in the field. To this end, they recorded and transcribed interviews with biochemists, and obtained academic papers, letters and other materials related to the dispute. They found that the accounts in these materials were highly variable and contradictory, even when these accounts were produced by the same individual. This led them to focus their attention on the descriptive practices by which the scientists characterised events and actions in these accounts, and to attempt to identify the functions served by these practices. In doing this, Gilbert and Mulkay identified two distinct interpretative repertoires: the 'empiricist' repertoire and the 'contingent' repertoire.

The empiricist repertoire, predominant in formal research papers, was used to represent the scientists' findings as reflecting an objective reality, and as being arrived at through the formal procedures of scientific investigation uncontaminated by personal or social influences. This repertoire involved the use of passive, impersonal forms (eg: "It was found that...") and rarely mentioned the author's own involvements and

commitments. The contingent repertoire was more common in interviews, and involved a wider range of linguistic forms. This repertoire was used to represent scientists' actions and findings as contingent on social and personal influences, rather than purely empirical phenomena. Gilbert and Mulkey found that these repertoires were an important resource in accounting for discrepancies between the findings and theories of different scientists.

Following Gilbert and Mulkey, a number of discourse analytic studies have used the interpretative repertoire as a unit of analysis (eg: Potter and Reicher, 1987; Wetherell and Potter, 1992; Soyland, 1980). A particular advantage of this strategy is that it avoids the tendency towards the reification of 'discourses' prevalent in other approaches to discourse analysis more closely aligned with poststructuralist work (eg: Parker, 1989). In such approaches, discourses are viewed as systematised sets of statements, and are accorded the status of causal agents. Like the notion of 'discourses', the notion of 'interpretative repertoire' emphasises that speakers/authors have at their disposal a bounded and identifiable set of discursive resources, and also that the consequences of using these resources may not be intended or recognised. However, its advantage is that it locates these resources as "a constitutive part of social practices situated in specific contexts" (Potter, Wetherell, Gill and Edwards, 1990: 209).

Rhetoric and dialogicality

The identification of interpretative repertoires and their variable use in different contexts is one means of getting at the functions of discourse. However, it is important to note that, while discursive actions may be designed to have certain effects, there is no guarantee that they will be

successful in achieving those effects. Excuses may not be accepted, blaming may be countered with mitigation, and so on. There is thus an important rhetorical dimension to discourse (Billig, 1987). For example, Edwards and Potter (1992), in applying discourse analysis to the traditional psychological topics of memory and attribution, demonstrate the ways in which versions of events are constructed in such a way as to pre-empt other possible versions, and identify a range of techniques which people use to undermine each others descriptions, attributions of blame, and so on. In this sense, discourse is inherently dialogical, in that situated descriptions, versions, attributions, etc. take shape in relation to other possible versions. The availability of contradictory interpretative repertoires as accounting resources, as identified in Gilbert and Mulkay's (1984) study, can be seen as another facet of this phenomenon.

This dialogicality is also noted by Billig, Condor, Edwards, Gane, Middleton and Radley (1988) in their discussions of the 'ideological dilemmas' which structure common-sense talk and thinking. By means of an analysis of people's talk in relation to a variety of social domains, they demonstrate that, rather than displaying a coherent internally consistent organisation, common-sense is dilemmatic in character, and that, in their talk, people struggle with the contradictions and inconsistencies that it embodies.

This work has important resonances with ethnomethodological insights regarding the 'openness' and 'inconclusiveness' of linguistic descriptions (Garfinkel, 1969; Heritage, 1984). What it points to is the inherent uncertainty of linguistic representation (Bowers and Middleton, 1991). Words do not stand in a one-to-one correspondence with the world. Any version is one of a number of possible versions, and rhetorical work must

be done in order for it to stand as the version in the circumstances of its formulation. Thus, representation, rather than being a static, referential business, is recast as in dynamic terms, as an ongoing argument, which is never resolved once and for all, but which must be engaged in anew whenever we attempt to represent some aspect of our world in words.

Before turning to the implications of the above discussion for research on reminiscence work, it is necessary to discuss briefly another approach to the study of language use which will inform the analyses presented in subsequent chapters.

Conversation Analysis

As mentioned earlier, conversation analysis developed out of ethnomethodology. A major concern of conversation analysis (CA) has been to describe the tacit systematic procedures underlying the production and understanding of natural conversation. Based on detailed verbatim transcripts, conversation analytic studies have accumulated to provide an elaborate account of the 'technology' or 'architecture' of conversation(eg: Schegloff, 1968; Sacks, Schegloff and Jefferson, 1974; Schenkein, 1978; Atkinson and Drew, 1979; Atkinson and Heritage, 1984; Goodwin, 1986; Button and Lee, 1987). Like discourse analysis, CA focuses on the actions that are accomplished through the design of utterances. However, it is particularly concerned with the way in which the sequential placement of utterances in conversation is used by interactants as a resource for producing and interpreting utterances. In the turn-by-turn unfolding of conversation, each turn is addressed to matters raised by the turn preceding it. One example of this general phenomenon is the 'adjacency pair' structure (Schegloff, 1968; Schegloff and Sacks, 1973), in which the production of a first conversational action – for example, a question or a

greeting – is oriented to as requiring the production of a second – an answer, a return greeting, and so on. This, then, is a kind of rule, but not in any deterministic sense. Rather, it is normative, in that, in the absence of a response, the first speaker may legitimately repeat her action, sanction the non-respondent, or draw certain inferences from the non-response.

Such rules can be seen as a resource by which interactants shape the trajectory of action sequences. However, they also serve as a resource for interactants to see how others understand their actions. This can be seen in the following example, taken from Heritage (1988):

A: Why don't you come and see me some times.

B: [I would like to.

Here, B's response, by taking the form of an 'acceptance', treats A's utterance as an invitation. Had B responded by saying "I'm sorry, I've been so busy lately", that is, by offering an apology, she would instead be displaying her understanding of A's utterance as a complaint. Thus, the relationship between actions in sequence serves as an interpretative resource for interactants. At the same time, and this is crucial to CA as an analytic strategy, it serves as a resource for analysts of interaction, in that turns in conversation publically display participants readings of the actions done by preceding turns.

CA's concern with the sequential placement of utterances leads to a finer grained analysis of talk than that involving the identification of interpretative repertoires (Wooffitt, 1992). Such repertoires are generally identified across broad stretches of talk, and while they are important in the identification of interpretative resources at speakers' disposal, they

miss the resources available in the structure and sequential trajectory of talk. This means that they also miss the way in which interactants' use of such interactional resources is occasioned in and by the unfolding of conversation.

Of particular relevance here is Wooffitt's (1992) point that an analysis based on interpretative repertoires fails to deal with the ways in which interactants mobilise 'social identities' and assumptions related to 'category membership' as occasioned interactional resources. A range of studies have demonstrated that interactants orientate to the implications that their own and others' talk have for their identity in the current interaction (eg: Smith, 1978; Sacks, 1979; Watson, 1983; Drew, 1984, 1987; Widdicombe and Wooffitt, 1990; Wooffitt, 1992). For example, Wooffitt's (1992) study of accounts of paranormal experiences shows how speakers' accounts are designed in such a way as to provide for their identity as an 'ordinary' person, and to ward off implications that they are gullible or unbalanced. This work serves as an argument for treating 'identity' as a dynamic, situated, and interactionally-occasioned phenomenon, rather than as some static property internal to the individual. At the same time, it demonstrates that the study of the local occasioning and negotiation of identities requires attention to the turn-by-turn organisation of talk.

Having discussed current approaches to the study of language use, the next section will consider the implications of these approaches for researching reminiscence work, as a prelude to the analyses presented in subsequent chapters.

Implications for researching reminiscence work

The discursive construction of 'reminiscence' and 'reminiscence work'

The preceding discussion directs attention to the fact that descriptions and definitions of reminiscence, and formulations of its value for older people are constructed and constructive. Linguistic representations of the nature of reminiscence, its significance in later life, and the value of reminiscence work, make up a domain of discursive action, whose pragmatic orientation and constructive effects are analysable. From this perspective, the problems of reminiscence research identified at the end of the previous chapter appear in a very different light.

Variability in the definition and conceptualisation of reminiscence, identified as a problem for research (Lo Gerfo, 1980-81; Merriam, 1980; Molinari and Reichlin, 1984-5; Buechel, 1986; Thornton and Brothie, 1987), is recast as a resource for research. Rather than attempting to eradicate this variability through greater consistency, clarity, etc., the discourse analytic perspective treats it as an inevitable consequence of the fact that descriptions and definitions are constructed and action-oriented. This variability can be examined for the clues it offers regarding the functional consequences of particular formulations of the nature of 'reminiscence' and its significance for older people.

A similar approach can be taken to the problem of the mismatch between positive anecdotal reports of the benefits of reminiscence work for older people, and experimental studies which show no consistent evidence of benefits. This mismatch can be seen in terms of variability in accounts of the nature and value of reminiscence work. Again, this variability can be used as a resource in identifying the functional orientation of accounts of

the nature and value of reminiscence work to be found in the writing and talk of researchers and practitioners.

Reminiscence groups as arenas of conversational action

As the previous chapter made clear, research on group reminiscence has tended to rely on measures which are removed from the context of activity itself. These measures consist mainly of self reports of 'depression', 'life satisfaction', 'self-esteem', etc.. The assumption underlying the use of these reports is that they reflect internal states which may be correlated with, or changed by, participation in reminiscence groups. These reports are systematic descriptions of mental states and feelings. From the perspective outlined above, such descriptions cannot be taken as merely reflecting their objects, but rather as constructive of those objects. Such descriptions mobilise notions of 'self' and 'mentality' which are culturally and historically contingent, and which can be seen as being reproduced by psychological measures, rather than simply being calibrated by them (Sampson, 1983; Henriques, Holloway, Urwin, Venn and Walkerdine, 1984). Viewed in this way, such measures appear to bear little relation to what goes on in reminiscence groups. In contrast to this approach, the discourse analytic approach offers resources for the analysis of the activity in reminiscence groups as conversational action. It enables research to move beyond relatively crude measures of engagement (eg: McKiernan and Bender, 1990; Hobbs, 1983) into a detailed analysis of the rhetorical work being done as care workers and older people talk together.

The analytical resources identified in the foregoing will be used in the analyses of talk and text related to reminiscence work presented in subsequent chapters. The analyses presented in Chapters 4,5 and 6 will

focus on variability in the discursive representation of reminiscence and reminiscence work, and will identify interpretative repertoires, and other regularities of discursive practice. In addition, conversation analytic resources will be brought into play where the analyses focus on transcripts of talk from interviews, incidental conversations and conference workshops. Conversation analytic work will also inform the analyses of talk in reminiscence groups, presented in Chapters 7 and 8. It is important to stress here that no attempt is being made to define certain kinds of talk as 'reminiscing'. Rather, the interest will be in the kinds of interactional accomplishments which reminiscence groups afford, whether or not the talk produced in these groups might be described as 'reminiscence'.

Chapter 4

Writing About Reminiscence: Psychology, Oral History, and the Social Relations of Ageing

Recent years have seen the development of discussions about the 'image' of older people in society which have a parallel in discussions about ethnic minority groups, the disabled, and women. Common to all these discussions is a concern that the demographic category in question is represented in negative terms, and that this renders them at a disadvantage in society, legitimating prejudice and discrimination. Older people are routinely dealt with in terms of stereotypical images which associate ageing with decline and decrement, and which characterise them as dependent and socially marginal (Giles, 1991). Arguments have been advanced for raising consciousness with regard to the damaging consequences of such stereotypical assumptions about older people, and for developing other ways of understanding the nature of old age which are less oppressive (eg: Butler, 1969; Levin and Levin, 1980; Bornat, Philipson and Ward, 1985; Tyler, 1986; Philipson, 1989; AUT, 1991; Coupland, Nussbaum and Coupland 1991).

Reminiscence work is very often located as part of such a project. It is common in accounts of reminiscence work to find statements which explicitly associate this work with an attempt to change perceptions of older people. Reminiscence work is variously construed as a means of changing such perceptions, or as itself a sign of these changing perceptions (eg: Beaton, 1980; Coleman, 1986; Bornat, 1989b; Gibson, 1989). Moreover, there is among the broad range of activities going under the name of 'reminiscence work', a strand of work explicitly concerned with

empowering older people, through participation in continuing education, adult literacy and community publishing projects (eg: Lawrence and Mace, 1987; Bornat, 1989a). Bornat (1989b) identifies such work as a major force in the development of reminiscence work.

However, this concern with the social position of older people has not been prominent in reports of research on reminiscence work. Instead, the tendency has been to focus on the possible psychological benefits of reminiscence. This is not to say a concern with social relationships is entirely absent. For example, there has been some research on the effects of reminiscence work on relationships between care workers and older people in their care (Baines, Saxby and Ehlert, 1987), or between older people themselves (Norris and Abu El Eileh, 1982; Fielden, 1990). Nevertheless, research has concerned itself primarily with the effects of reminiscence work on the psychological state of the individual older person (eg: Perrotta and Meacham, 1981; Goldwasser, Auerbach and Harkins, 1987; Bachar, Kindler, Schefler and Lerer, 1991).

The value of reminiscence for older people, then, is represented in a variety of ways in the research and practice literature related to reminiscence work. This chapter presents an analysis of these different representations. This analysis will show that they embody arguments about the nature of ageing itself, and more particularly, arguments about the social relations of ageing – that is, about how older people are to be positioned in their relations with others in society. It will demonstrate that these different representations have different social relational consequences for older people, and show how these representations are mobilised by authors in arguing for changes in the social relations of ageing. It will demonstrate further that accounts of systematic research

into reminiscence and ageing tend to represent the value of reminiscence for older people in 'psychological' terms, while 'anecdotal' accounts of reminiscence work tend to represent this value in 'sociological' terms. It will be argued that the current mismatch between 'hard' evidence and anecdotal reports of the benefits of reminiscence is in part a consequence of this tendency to favour different representations of its value, and that this mismatch, rather than being merely a matter of evidence, signifies a difference in orientation to social relational concerns between research and practice.

The psychological functionality of reminiscence

Arguments about the value of reminiscence for older people are not recent. Most accounts of reminiscence research or reminiscence practice place the emergence of reminiscence, as an object of research and practice, in the context of opposing formulations of the value of reminiscence for older people. So common are such accounts, and so similar in form, that they may be represented in terms of the following 'generic narrative':

Reminiscence was once considered to be an undesirable, or even pathological activity as far as older people were concerned. It was thought to be a symptom or cause of mental deterioration, and was thus actively discouraged, at least in care settings. Then, in 1963, the American psychiatrist and gerontologist Robert Butler published an article in which he claimed reminiscence was a psychologically healthy activity for old people, in that it contributed to a vital process which he termed the 'life review'. Following Butler, people have come to realise that reminiscence is (or may be) especially beneficial for (at least some) older people.

This narrative describes a reversal in ideas about the value of reminiscence – a move from negative to positive value, initiated by Butler's work. However, the move to ascribe positive value has taken a variety of forms in the literature. In this section, analytical attention will be focussed on three of the most frequently cited academic papers on reminiscence and ageing: Butler (1963), McMahon and Rhudick(1964) and Lewis (1971). The analysis will identify two formulations of reminiscence and its value for older people (henceforth abbreviated as 'reminiscence-and-ageing'), common to all three papers. It seems appropriate to start with Butler's own contribution, given the seminal role that is accorded to it in the literature. Extract 1 is taken from Butler's 1963 paper, entitled 'The life review: An interpretation of reminiscence in the aged'.

Extract 1

The prevailing tendency is to identify reminiscence in the aged with psychological dysfunction and thus to regard it essentially as a symptom.... In contrast, I conceive of the life review as a naturally occurring, universal mental process characterised by the progressive return to consciousness of past experiences.... Presumably this process is prompted by the realisation of approaching death, and the inability to maintain one's sense of personal invulnerability.
(Butler, 1963: 65-66)

In this extract, Butler formulates the "prevailing" view of reminiscence-and-ageing, and sets his own formulation in opposition to it. In his formulation, rather than being a sign of "psychological dysfunction", reminiscence is psychologically **functional** for older people – it is part of the "life review", "a naturally occurring, universal mental process". Butler saw this process as the "denouement of character", as an effort to organise the experiences and actions of one's life into a coherent and meaningful whole in the face of the reality and inevitability of death. The

interest here is not in the validity of this hypothesis, but rather in the fact that it ascribes a particular value to reminiscence, and that it does this in a certain way, by representing reminiscing as psychologically functional.

Extract 2 is taken from Lewis's (1971) paper, entitled 'Reminiscing and self concept in old age', which reports the first experimental study of reminiscence and ageing.

Extract 2

Although this mechanism may seem rigid and tiresome to other persons, this may be a way of maintaining self esteem. Therefore in studying the aged and in caring for them, this pattern of reminiscing about identifying (sic) with one's past should be respected rather than treated as garrulous behaviour of no consequence.
(Lewis, 1971: 242)

In this extract, we find a similar formulation of reminiscence as psychologically functional for older people. In this case, its functionality is represented in terms of a "mechanism" for "maintaining self esteem". As with Butler's paper, this formulation is set in opposition to a formulation of reminiscence which represents it as having negative value, as "garrulous behaviour of no consequence".

Extract 3 is taken from a paper entitled "Reminiscing in the aged: An adaptational response" by McMahon and Rhudick (1964). This paper reported a study involving Spanish-American War veterans who, in the course of attending an outpatients clinic, had impressed staff with their success in coping with the problems of ageing, and who subsequently became the focus of attempts to explain this notable success. It was found in interviews that the veterans engaged in a great deal of reminiscing.

Extract 3

[Reminiscence] is popularly regarded as a sign of mental deterioration. Clinical evidence for such deterioration was absent in these subjects, and previous studies had already established them as well above average in both intelligence and physical condition.... These facts suggested that reminiscing in some way might be related to the success of this group in coping with problems of later life. (McMahon and Rhudick, 1964: 292)

Here again the "popular" representation of reminiscence as "a sign of mental deterioration" is countered with a representation of reminiscence as psychologically functional for older people, as an aid to "coping with problems of later life". At the end of their paper, McMahon and Rhudick list a range of likely functions: "maintaining self esteem, reaffirming a sense of identity, working through and mastering personal losses, and contributing positively to society" (p. 297).

On the basis of various kinds of evidence, these three papers represent reminiscence as psychologically functional for older people. This formulation of the value of reminiscence in later life will be identified as an interpretive repertoire (Potter and Wetherell, 1987). In that it is used to account for the value of reminiscence in terms of psychological function, it will henceforth be identified as the 'psychological' repertoire.

One consequence of this 'psychological' repertoire is that it provides a justification for doing further research into the functions of reminiscence in later life. Another consequence is that it provides a justification for doing reminiscence work; for actively and deliberately encouraging older people to reminisce, with a view to reaping the psychological benefits of such an activity. All three papers orient to both of these possibilities, suggesting directions for further research, and discussing the 'therapeutic'

potential of reminiscence. In these early papers, then, we see the emergence of reminiscence as an object of research and as an object of practice.

However, this 'psychological' repertoire is also used in another way, more immediate to the context of its formulation. That is, it is mobilised to counter a formulation of reminiscence which constructs it as dysfunctional, or as having no value. This way of formulating the value of reminiscence will be termed here the 'dysfunctional' repertoire. In each of the three papers under discussion, this juxtaposition of contrary repertoires is done in the service of a particular kind of argument. Consider again Extract 2, taken from Lewis's paper. Here, Lewis is doing more than setting a formulation of reminiscence-and-ageing in opposition to another popularly-held formulation. He is arguing for a particular kind of conduct towards older people when they reminisce, and arguing against another kind of conduct – that reminiscing "should be respected, rather than treated as garrulous behaviour of no consequence". A similar move is made in Butler's and McMahon and Rhudick's papers, as shown in Extracts 4 and 5.

Extract 4

Recognition of the occurrence of such a vital process as the life review may help one to listen, to tolerate, and understand the aged, and not to treat reminiscence as devitalised and insignificant.
(Butler, 1963: 72)

Extract 5

The advances of science and modern methods of communication have contributed to a decreasing respect for reminiscing behaviour in the aged. With the steadily increasing numbers of aged in our modern society, it seems essential that we find new ways to provide opportunities for them to contribute their knowledge of the past.

Anxious relatives sometimes discourage reminiscing behaviour within the family group because they consider it a sign of deterioration in their loved ones. It would appear, quite to the contrary, that we should create occasions for older people to reminisce and not expect their reminiscences to conform to the standards of accuracy of historical texts. (McMahon and Rhudick, 1964: 294)

In each of these three extracts (2, 4 and 5), the 'psychological' repertoire is mobilised to counter the dysfunctional repertoire, and this is done in the service of advancing what is essentially a **moral** argument concerning the appropriate response of others to the reminiscences of older people. Each extract sets up a scenario in which others – "one" (Butler); "other persons" (Lewis); "anxious relatives" (McMahon and Rhudick) – respond in a particular way to such talk. It is through the responses of these others that reminiscence is constructed as valueless: they "treat reminiscence as devitalised and insignificant" (Butler); they see it as "rigid and tiresome", and "treat it as garrulous behaviour of no consequence" (Lewis); they "discourage reminiscing behaviour... because they consider it a sign of deterioration" (McMahon and Rhudick).

In the context of these responses, the 'psychological' repertoire is used as a basis for exhorting these people to respond differently: "to listen, to tolerate or understand the aged" (Butler); "should be respected" (Lewis); "this behaviour should be encouraged; we should create occasions for older people to reminisce and not expect their reminiscences to conform to the standards of accuracy of historical texts" (McMahon and Rhudick).

The 'psychological' repertoire deployed in these papers implies consequences both for reminiscence research and practice and for the social relations in which older people might find themselves situated. The

construction of reminiscence as a 'mechanism', 'process' or 'response' can be used as an argument for a change in other people's conduct towards older people when they are reminiscing, and by implication, as an argument for a change in the social relations of ageing.

Of course, it might be argued that the main purpose of these papers is to contribute to gerontological knowledge, and that the moral exhortations discussed are secondary to this purpose. However, the use of the 'psychological' repertoire as a basis for these exhortations is more than a footnote to research findings. In particular, Butler's formulation and use of the 'psychological' repertoire must be set in the context of his more general concern with changing the social relations of ageing. As well as being associated with the 'discovery' of the psychological value of reminiscence, he is also credited with coining the term 'ageism' in another paper entitled 'Age-Is: Another form of bigotry' (Butler, 1969). Further evidence of the importance of the social relational implications of the 'psychological' repertoire is to be found in later texts. For example, a number of papers discussing reminiscence work include in their text the direct quote from Butler's paper presented in Extract 4 (Buechel, 1986:34; Johnston, 1981-82:38). Others refer explicitly to the social relational implications of Butler's argument. In Extract 6, for example, taken from an article discussing the use of reminiscence, Butler's contribution is constructed in terms of the **legitimation** of reminiscence in the face of the "impatience and frustration" of others.

Extract 6

Butler recognised the significance of such reflective activities and termed the process "life review". In so doing, he provided legitimacy to behaviour of the old that sometimes has been regarded

by younger people with impatience and frustration.
(Ryden, 1981: 461)

One striking example of this representation of Butler's influence is an account by Dobrof (1984). Dobrof's account documents the effects of Butler's ideas on care practices, and is frequently quoted or referred to by active proponents of reminiscence work (eg: Coleman, 1986:10; Bornat, 1989b:18; Gibson, 1989:9; Hopkins and Harris, 1991:2).

Extract 7

In a profound sense, Butler's writings liberated both the old and the nurses, doctors and social workers; the old were free to remember, to regret, to look reflectively at the past and try to understand it. And we were free to listen, and to treat rememberers and remembrances with the respect they deserved, instead of trivialising them by diversion to a bingo game. (Dobrof, 1984: 2)

It is to be expected that, having argued for the psychological functionality of reminiscence in later life, Butler's work would be cited as a justification for the deliberate encouragement of reminiscence in the context of 'reminiscence work'. However, Extract 7 goes much further than this. Rather than using Butler as a justification for practice, it is crediting him with transforming the social relations of care. "Liberated" from a view of reminiscence as dysfunctional, the old were "free" to reminisce, and their carers were "free" to listen to them "with the respect they deserved."

The construction of reminiscence as psychologically functional for older people has social relational implications. These implications are explicitly topicalised in the literature – the preceding analysis has shown that the 'psychological' repertoire is used in arguments for changing social relations, and is credited with accomplishing such changes. The point being that the significance of the 'psychological' repertoire for

reminiscence work does not inhere in its status as psychological 'fact', but rather in the consequential implications and uses previously demonstrated. In studying reminiscence work, it is important to address this issue. A research agenda which focuses only on the psychological benefits of reminiscence misses the consequences of the way reminiscence is represented in discourse. In Extract 7, Dobrof's discussion orients, not to the psychological benefits of reminiscing, but to the consequences of a particular formulation of the value of reminiscence, in "liberating" people from the tyranny of another formulation of its value.

This argument can be developed further through a consideration of other features of the 'psychological' repertoire, and through a comparison of this repertoire with another formulation of reminiscence-and-ageing to be found in the reminiscence literature – one in which reminiscence is represented as having social as well as personal value.

The personal and social value of reminiscence

It is important to note that the moral exhortations made in Extracts 2, 4 and 5 are made on the basis of the 'functionality' of reminiscence for the older person. That is, these exhortations are not made on the basis of the value of the talk for its recipients. On the contrary, it is acknowledged that it may not have any value in this sense. Lewis, for example, does not exclude the possibility that "this mechanism may seem rigid and tiresome to other persons". Similarly, for Butler, it is the "recognition" of the process of life review, rather of the interpersonal value of the talk, which might "help one to listen".

Extract 5 is more optimistic on this point, suggesting that "we find new ways to provide opportunities for [the aged] to contribute their knowledge

of the past." This is a reference to the lapsed "storytelling function of older people" (p294) in modern society, which McMahon and Rhudick discuss in some detail in their paper. In discussing reminiscence as fulfilling a 'storytelling function', they appear to be moving away from a strictly psychological account of its value for older people, towards a more sociological account. However, in Extract 5, this "storytelling function" is presented as having lapsed due to "the advances of science and modern methods of communication". Thus, in this account, reminiscence no longer has the interpersonal and social significance it once had, and "new ways" have yet to be found to re-establish it. Thus, although McMahon and Rhudick suggest the possibility of interpersonal value, their account is essentially one of personal value.

The 'psychological' repertoire, although it accords value to reminiscence, restricts it to the domain of personal value. That is, reminiscence is of value to the reminiscer, in performing the various functions reported in the papers, but its social value, whether for immediate interlocutors or for the wider society, remains in doubt.

It is appropriate to qualify the position of these papers, because they do not entirely rule out the possibility that the reminiscences of older people might have some interpersonal or social function. McMahon and Rhudick, in discussing the 'storytelling function' of older people, imply that their reminiscences might at least be directed towards others, even if they are no longer perceived as relevant to those others. Similarly, Lewis suggests that "reminiscence may be used as a means of initiating social communication, even though it is largely one-sided" (p242), and that it "seems to answer a need felt by disengaging old persons... but it also in a sense enables them to re-engage by seeking out potential listeners." (p.243).

This emphasis on the personal value of reminiscence, and de-emphasis of interpersonal value, is an important feature of the 'psychological' repertoire and the moral argument in which it is invoked. In response to a formulation of reminiscence which represents it as valueless, the 'psychological' repertoire does not assert that the reminiscences of older people have interpersonal value. Instead, it works to counter the dysfunctional repertoire by offering a different account of the apparent lack of value: that reminiscence has no interpersonal value because it is not meant for others, but is rather a self-directed 'mechanism', triggered by the ageing process.

In terms of the social relations of ageing, the 'psychological' repertoire represents something of a compromise. It is used in an argument for giving attention and respect to older people, but it does not explicitly call into question the value placed on reminiscence by the "other persons" who may find it "rigid and tiresome" (Lewis),"devitalised and insignificant" (Butler), or "a sign of mental deterioration" (McMahon and Rhudick). This formulation, then, places the reminiscences of older people outside the category of normal social communication. Potentially, this places older people outside of the normal processes of social intercourse, at least when they are reminiscing. Even though they are speaking to us, they have nothing to say from our point of view – we must tolerate this socially valueless talk, and listen because it is 'good' for them.

The 'psychological' repertoire can be contrasted with another interpretive repertoire of reminiscence-and-ageing to be found in the literature. Extract 8 is an example of this way of representing the association between

reminiscence and ageing, and is taken from a recently published training pack for potential practitioners.

Extract 8

REMINISCENCE PRESERVES AND TRANSMITS THE CULTURAL HERITAGE - To value the past is to enrich the present. Each time a person dies history dies with them. To have listened to others is to have captured some of that past, which in turn preserves the oral traditions of our varied cultural backgrounds. (Gibson, 1989:3)

In this extract, talk about the past is represented as communicating "cultural heritage" and "history", as something which can "enrich the present". Here, then, reminiscence is accorded high **social value**, as oral history. This formulation can be contrasted with the 'psychological' repertoire, which accords reminiscence **personal value**, while leaving its social value in some doubt. In Extract 8, the "storytelling role" (as referred to in McMahon and Rhudick, 1967) is no longer defunct - there is no need to find "new ways" of making the knowledge of older people relevant and useful in the present. On the contrary, this knowledge is represented as unambiguously valuable for others.

This way of representing the association between reminiscence and ageing will henceforth be termed the 'sociological' repertoire, given its emphasis on the social (interpersonal, cultural) value of reminiscence, and its common association of older people's reminiscences with the fulfilment of a 'social role' particular to them.

This 'sociological' repertoire has, in turn, different implications for the way interlocutors might respond to the reminiscences of older people. The 'psychological' repertoire is mobilised in the course of exhorting

others to listen to and respect these reminiscences because they have personal value for the reminiscer, even though they may appear to have little social value – indeed, this accounts for the lack of social value, in that the talk is construed as primarily self-directed. In terms of the 'sociological' repertoire, on the other hand, one listens for one's own benefit, and for the benefit of society as a whole – to "enrich the present", to "capture some of that past". Moreover, this is not just a past which is general to all older people - each individual has in their possession some unique piece of history, so that "each time a person dies history dies with them." By representing reminiscence as having high social value, this version serves as a much stronger argument for listening to and respecting the reminiscences of older people. Further examples deploying this 'sociological' repertoire are presented in Extracts 9 - 11.

Extract 9

It became increasingly evident that the patients had a unique wealth of wisdom and experience to share with others and gained considerable pleasure from doing so. (Norris, 1981: 5)

Extract 10

Listen to the aged for they will tell you about living and dying. Listen to the aged for they will enlighten you about problem-solving, sexuality, grief, sensory deprivation and survival. Listen to the aged for they will show you how to be courageous loving and generous. They are the distinguished faculty without formal classrooms... they teach not from books but from long experience in living. (Burnside, 1975: 1801)

Extract 11

For the community, the expression of reminiscence can be of great importance to shaping local identity. The past helps develop the future, and the linking of older and younger people can be more positively approached with the rich resources of reminiscence. (Wright, 1988: 3)

Extract 9 is taken from an account of a reminiscence group session with psychogeriatric patients. It explicitly constructs their reminiscences as having social value, and orients to the social relational implications of this: "a unique wealth of wisdom and experience to share with others". In Extracts 10 and 11, the social relational implications of the 'sociological' repertoire are made more explicit still. In Extract 10, older people are "the distinguished faculty without formal classrooms", and are thus accorded high status as teachers of younger generations. Again too, there is the repeated exhortation to "listen to aged". In Extract 11, the "rich resources" of reminiscence facilitate "the linking of older and younger people". As is evident from these examples, the 'sociological' repertoire is characterised by metaphors of wealth, and often represents older people as teachers. In contrast to the 'psychological' repertoire, it places the reminiscences of older people firmly within the category of normal social communication, and thus locates older people within the normal processes of social intercourse. Indeed, it represents reminiscence as an especially worthy form of social communication, and thus accords older people a special place in social life, at the centre rather than at the margins.

The distribution of the repertoires in the literature

So far, two distinct repertoires have been identified through which authors represent reminiscence as having positive value in later life. The crucial difference between these two repertoires lies in their implications for the social relations of ageing. Both repertoires are to be found in the published literature on reminiscence and reminiscence work. However, there are some differences in their distribution in this literature. For example, the 'sociological' repertoire is commonly deployed in contemporary accounts of reminiscence work produced by its practitioners

and proponents (eg: Beaton, 1980; Norris, 1981; Norris and Abu El Eileh, 1982; Wright, 1988; Gibson, 1989), but is rarely found in early papers reporting research on reminiscence (Butler, 1963; McMahon and Rhudick, 1964; Lewis, 1971; Lieberman and Falk, 1971; Havighurst and Glasser, 1972). This difference might be explained in terms of a change over time in the formulation of the value of reminiscence. Extract 12, taken from the only academic book devoted to reminiscence, is particularly interesting with regard to this hypothesis.

Extract 12

It has to be admitted that the storytelling function of the old has become devalued in modern societies.... Nevertheless, the recent growth of interest in oral history has done something to reverse this trend. It has led to a revaluing of the memories ordinary individuals possess of the times they have lived through. The memories of the oldest generations have come to appear especially valuable.... (Coleman, 1986: 13)

Like McMahon and Rhudick (1967), Coleman refers to the devaluation of the "storytelling function of the old" in "modern societies". However, whereas McMahon and Rhudick in Extract 5 see the need for finding "new ways to provide opportunities for them to contribute their knowledge of the past", for Coleman, this has been achieved – the memories have been "revalued". This difference might well be accounted for by the fact that there is a difference of some 20 years between the publication of McMahon and Rhudick's paper and Coleman's book.

However, another way of understanding this differential distribution of the two repertoires is in terms of the kinds of texts in which they appear. Not only is the 'sociological' repertoire encountered more frequently in later texts, but it is also more commonly found in the literature related to

the practice of reminiscence work, which has grown since the 1980s (eg: Beaton, 1980; Norris, 1981; Norris and Abu El Eileh, 1982; Wright, 1988; Gibson, 1989). It is less commonly encountered in the research literature, or in texts whose authors are concerned with research rather than practice (eg: Langley, 1981-82; Perrotta and Meacham, 1981; Reid, 1981-82; Bender, Cooper and Howe, 1983; Hobbs, 1983; Baines, Saxby and Ehlert, 1987; Berghorn and Schafer, 1986-7; Goldwasser, Auerbach and Harkins, 1987; Thornton and Brotchie, 1987; Bachar, Kindler, Scheffler and Lerer, 1991).

Some support for this argument is provided by the continued appearance of the 'psychological' repertoire in more recent writings. Extracts 13 and 14 are taken from a collection of papers discussing 'reminiscence theatre', which includes reports of actual theatre projects and commentaries on the general value of this kind of work. The two extracts are taken from papers written by psychologists, commenting on the value of the work.

Extract 13

We have all listened endlessly to elderly relatives and no doubt have been bored by stories that we have heard a dozen times, but perhaps we have not appreciated the importance of the event to the storyteller. (Langley, 1981-82: 3)

Extract 14

I find it sad to have to face the fact that the elderly no longer have a special role to play as elders, as repositories of the accumulated knowledge and wisdom of their culture. One of the consequences of the growth of other ways of storing information is that their reminiscences came to be of value only to the elderly themselves. One of the benefits of reminiscence theatre is that it puts the problem in focus. (Reid, 1981-82: 36)

In Extract 13, the lack of interpersonal and social value of reminiscence is represented as common knowledge, and is constructed in terms of others responses ("We have all listened endlessly... and no doubt have been bored..."). In mitigation for this, it is suggested that we may not have "appreciated the importance of the event to the storyteller", the implication being that we might respond differently if we were to appreciate this "importance". In representing reminiscence as having personal value, but no social value, and in implying that an appreciation of this personal value might change the orientation of the listeners, the author is mobilising the 'psychological' repertoire in a similar way to the early papers on reminiscence discussed previously. Extract 14 is the final paragraph of another commentary paper. In this extract, the author takes a position similar to McMahon and Rhudick's, in Extract 5. Here, the 'storytelling function' is still defunct, and this is accounted for in terms of technological change ("the growth of other ways of storing information"). Thus, reminiscence has no social value, but is "of value only to the elderly themselves".

Two points can be made. First, the differential distribution of these two repertoires in the literature can be seen as part of the emphasis of social relational issues in the literature reporting on practice, compared with their de-emphasis in the literature reporting systematic research on reminiscence. Coleman's account of change in the valuation of reminiscence in Extract 12 echoes his own and other accounts which explicitly associate reminiscence work with changing images of older people (eg: Beaton, 1980; Bornat, 1989b; Gibson, 1989). The research literature, on the other hand, tends to be concerned with the psychological benefits of reminiscence, rather than the social and cultural benefits formulated by the 'sociological' repertoire.

The second point is that both the 'psychological' and the 'sociological' repertoires continue to coexist in the literature, albeit in different sections of it. Both repertoires remain current. Moreover, the two repertoires are not necessarily contradictory. One could for example, formulate an account of the value of reminiscence in which its psychological benefits inhere in the value it holds for others, and a number authors have done this (eg: McMahon and Rhudick, 1967; Norris, 1981; Thompson, 1988). Nevertheless, there is a tension between them. Some of the extracts discussed clearly contradict other extracts, most particularly in terms of the social value they ascribe to the reminiscences of older people. Are these reminiscences boring, and/or (sadly) irrelevant to the present? Or do they represent rich resources for understanding our own lives and communities? Similarly, while both repertoires have implications for the social relations of ageing, they have different implications. Do we respect these reminiscences out of respect for the psychological task that is being done, or because they are of genuine interest and value to us? Are these reminiscences to be understood as part of a struggle to defend the ramparts of the self against the incursions of ageing, or are they to be understood as imparting the fruits of experience, as transmitting and renewing our shared cultural heritage?

The presence of these contradictions points to an ongoing argument, a continuing dialogue about the nature of reminiscence, and beyond this, about the social relations of ageing. This can be seen as a consequence of the inherent uncertainty of linguistic representation, discussed in Chapter 3. In order to stand as an 'adequate' description, any formulation of reminiscence and its value for older people will inevitably be oriented to undermining or discounting other, potentially contrary, formulations.

Thus, the 'adequacy' or 'truth value' of a particular formulation has to be accomplished each time it is formulated. The battle is never won in any final sense, but must be joined anew on each occasion of representation. Just as Butler's paper opposes one representation of reminiscence with another representation, so do contemporary texts continue to engage in the same argument.

Having identified these two repertoires, their different implications for the social relations of ageing, and their continued currency, it is now possible to consider their relationship to the cultural resources at our disposal for understanding the nature of ageing.

Common senses of 'ageing'.

Any account of the value of reminiscence for older people must of necessity also formulate what it is to be 'old', and what it is to be an 'older person' in society. To say that reminiscence fulfils a special need for older people is to assume that such a need is in some way a consequence of ageing. Similarly, to say that the reminiscing of older people fulfils a 'social function' is to assume that ageing qualifies older people to fulfil this 'function'. In terms of the analytical orientation set out in Chapter 3, just as the nature of 'reminiscence' cannot be taken as given, but must be discursively constructed from available resources, so too must the nature of 'old age' be constructed. Moreover, just as we can sensibly account for the value of 'reminiscence' in a number of different (and potentially contradictory) ways, so too can we produce different accounts of 'old age'.

There is a growing body of work in the contemporary literature of social gerontology and related disciplines, discussing 'ageing' and 'old age' as social constructions (eg: Freeman, 1984; Featherstone and Hepworth, 1989;

Gubrium and Wallace, 1990; Giles, 1991). These discussions vary in their focus, but all have in common a rejection of structural-functionalist accounts (eg: Cumming and Henry, 1961; Riley, 1971; Dowd, 1975). Some have highlighted the historical and cultural relativity of notions of the life course as an ordered and naturally-given sequence of stages, each with its specific characteristics and tasks (eg: Freeman, 1984; Featherstone and Hepworth, 1989). Others have drawn attention to the ways in which different constructions of ageing are formulated and deployed in everyday life. Gubrium and Wallace (1990), for example, present a discussion of the similarity between gerontological theories of ageing and 'lay' theories of ageing used by 'ordinary' people (ie. people other than gerontologists), and argue that these theories must be understood as resources for sense-making rather than as factual descriptions. Other work in this vein has paid particular attention to the ways in which discursive formulations of 'old age' are themselves used as conversational resources (Giles, 1991).

This section will relate the repertoires of reminiscence-and-ageing identified earlier to the discursive formulation of 'ageing'. It has already been noted that these repertoires have different implications for the social relations of ageing. This point will be elaborated, and a further argument made that the different repertoires of 'reminiscence-and-ageing' embody or invoke different commonsense representations of ageing. The 'psychological' repertoire can be linked to a view of ageing which constructs it as a process of decrement. In the examples discussed earlier, reminiscing is constructed as a means of coping with various aspects of this process of decrement: as "maintaining self esteem" (Lewis, Extract 2); as "prompted by the realisation of approaching death" (Butler, Extract 1); as "coping with problems of later life" (McMahon and Rhudick, Extract 3). On the other hand, the 'sociological' repertoire can be seen as embodying a

view of ageing which emphasises the knowledge and experience which inevitably accrues in the course of a long life. This knowledge and experience is variously constructed as "cultural heritage" (Extract 8), "history" (Extract 8), "wisdom" (Extract 9), "oral history" (Extract 12).

Both these ways of representing ageing are commonplaces in our culture. Ageing can plausibly be represented as a process of decline, and equally plausibly as a process of gaining experience and knowledge. However, these 'discourses of ageing' can be distinguished not only in terms of the different aspects of ageing which are emphasised or made salient, but also in terms of the different implications this selective emphasis has for the social position of older people.

When ageing is constructed in terms of decrement, it seems natural for older people to move to the margins of social life. In accounts of ageing informed by this view, older people are represented as turning away from the mainstream of social life, becoming self-absorbed, dependent and passive (eg: Cumming and Henry, 1961). Both the dysfunctional and the 'psychological' repertoires locate reminiscing as part of this process, either as a symptom of decrement, or as talk which is essentially self-directed, as motivated by this decremental process and the awareness of its end point, death. A formalised version of this 'decrement' discourse can be found in Cumming and Henry's (1961) 'disengagement theory', a functionalist account of ageing in which 'successful ageing' is construed as involving a process of disengagement from social life, in preparation for the ultimate separation of death. Indeed, Lewis (1971) explicitly formulates his view of reminiscence in terms of this theory, suggesting that reminiscing may serve as a means of avoiding "the discrepancy in self concept that old age represents to a formerly engaged and active member of society" (p. 240).

On the other hand, when ageing is constructed in terms of the accretion of knowledge and experience, it is natural to accord older people a place at the heart of social life, as teachers, 'elders', or even leaders, as repositories of this knowledge. Although not elevated to the status of a gerontological theory, we can find formalisations of this discourse arising specifically in relation to reminiscence, in discussions of the 'storytelling function' of older people (McMahon and Rhudick, 1967; Coleman, 1986; see Extracts 5 and 12).

This suggests that the 'sociological' repertoire of reminiscence-and-ageing can be seen as an argument against the 'decrement' discourse, as a move to oppose it with another discourse which has different social-relational consequences. A parallel can be drawn here with gerontological work which takes a broadly 'anti-ageist' position (eg: Levin and Levin, 1980; Tyler, 1986; Dant, 1988; Hockey and James, 1990; Coupland, Nussbaum and Coupland, 1991). Within this body of work, it is common to find, not only discussion of the social construction of ageing, but also an argument against prevailing constructions. In such accounts, we find explicit formulations of the 'decrement' discourse, so formulated as to mark both its relative status and its undesirable consequences for older people. For example, Coupland, Nussbaum and Coupland (1991), in a review of work on "social attitudes and ageism", present evidence of the ways in which older people are routinely assumed to have physical, mental and sensory deficiencies in comparison to younger people, and go on to argue that these assumptions are endorsed by gerontological research. They quote Levin and Levin (1980), who argue that "the literature in gerontology is shot through both with the assumption of decline with age, and, perhaps partly as a result of this assumption, with the findings of physical,

psychological and sociological deterioration in ageing individuals" (p. 2, quoted in Coupland, Nussbaum and Coupland, 1991:89). In another paper, Coupland and Coupland (1990) identify two traditions in research on "language and the elderly": the 'deficit' tradition, which incorporates a view of ageing as a decremental process, and an 'anti-ageist' tradition, which actively resists these assumptions, and is concerned with the ways in which language reproduces 'ageist attitudes'.

This work can in turn be seen as part of the more general project to raise awareness of, and change, ageist practices in our society referred to earlier. Very often, this project is characterised by the explicit rejection of a 'decremental' view of ageing. For example, a recent AUT policy statement on "age discrimination" (AUT, 1991) states: "Underlying ageism is the unfounded assumption that older people suffer from diminished intelligence and judgement and are rigid, less willing to adapt to new developments and unable to change. Possession of these characteristics is not of course dependent on age. Ageism fails totally to allow for variation between individuals" (p.1).

The point being made here, then, is not simply that the interpretive repertoires identified can be located within these more general formulations of the nature of ageing, nor simply that the tensions between them can be seen to embody tensions between these discourses of ageing. It is also that the argument about the value of reminiscence is part of an argument about the nature of ageing. Moreover, this argument is essentially a moral argument; an argument about the place of older people in society, how they should be treated by others. It is not just about how ageing should be understood, or about how the value of reminiscence

should be understood – it is about the social consequences of different ways of understanding these things.

This point is especially significant when we understand that formulations of the value of reminiscence do not merely 'reflect' different formulations of ageing, but at the same time reproduce them. Different discursive formulations of reminiscence can be seen as both constituting, and being constituted by, the different formulations of ageing discussed here. When an older person talks about their life and experiences, we can sensibly describe this talk as "garrulous behaviour of no consequence" (Lewis, 1971:242), or as the operation of a "defence mechanism" (Lewis, 1971:243). In doing so, we both invoke the commonplace version of ageing as decline as the implicit grounds for these descriptions, and in doing so reproduce that version – each reflexively constitutes the other. At the same time, we both take as given the social marginality of older people and reproduce that social marginality. Such talk can also be sensibly described as the 'voice of experience', as "cultural heritage". This is grounded in, and at the same time reflexively constitutes, a view of ageing which emphasises the accretion of experience, and the social relational implications of that view. This point is not merely of theoretical interest. It^{is} implicitly recognised in current efforts to proscribe sexist, racist or ageist language. These 'ways of speaking' about reminiscence and ageing can be brought to bear in concrete situations of practical engagement with older people; they are available as justifications, mitigations, as arguments for and against various courses of action.

This last point is of particular relevance to the earlier discussion of anti-ageist work. In this work, while the 'decrement' discourse is easily identified and criticised, there is no alternative discourse which is

specifically linked to ageing. Most often, resistance is done in terms of an 'egalitarian' discourse. That is, the 'decrement' discourse is represented as engendering and justifying discrimination and marginalisation, and the argument against it is couched in terms of 'individual rights' and 'equal opportunities' (eg: AUT, 1991). In this context, the 'sociological' repertoire of reminiscence-and-ageing can be seen as the formulation of an alternative or counter to 'ageist' formulations which is, specifically, an alternative formulation of ageing. This version can be seen as re-animating, bringing back into circulation, giving a new legitimacy to, the 'experience' discourse. Thus, we can be more specific about the way in which reminiscence work is implicated in an argument for a change in attitudes to older people. It is implicated in virtue of its provision of **discursive resources** which can be deployed in such an argument.

Concluding comments

The foregoing analysis has demonstrated that reminiscence as a discursively constructed object is implicated in an argument about the social relations of ageing. Two distinct interpretive repertoires of reminiscence-and-ageing have been identified in the reminiscence literature, and have been shown to have different and contrary implications for the social position of older people. Such implications are explicitly oriented to in 'seminal' research papers, where the 'psychological' repertoire is used as a basis for moral exhortations to listen to and respect older people's reminiscences. A similar orientation to the social status of older people is found in the literature related to the practice of reminiscence work, where we find the 'sociological' repertoire deployed. This repertoire accords social value to reminiscence, and thus serves as a stronger argument for repositioning older people in their relations with others. It has been further argued that social relational

implications of these two repertoires derive from their invocation and reproduction of different discourses of ageing, and thus that the two repertoires can be located in a broader dialogue about the nature of ageing and the social position of older people.

This chapter began by noting that, in the literature related to the practice of reminiscence work, such work is often located as part of an 'anti-ageist' project, challenging 'negative stereotypes' of older people. It has been argued here that the 'sociological' repertoire of reminiscence-and-ageing mobilised in this literature is an important contribution to this project. However, it has also been noted that this concern with the social status of older people is rarely found in the contemporary research literature, and that, while the 'psychological' repertoire is ubiquitous, the 'sociological' repertoire is almost entirely absent. In closing this chapter, this last point will be discussed in more detail.

In Chapter 3, it was argued that the traditional paradigm of psychological research does not address the constructive consequences of discursive formulations of reminiscence and its value. The foregoing analysis can be seen as an elaboration of this argument. This analysis has attempted to relativise the hypothesis that reminiscence is psychologically functional, a hypothesis which has been the main focus of empirical research into the benefits of reminiscence for older people. This research serves to reify the 'psychological' repertoire, and thus fails to address the way in which it is deployed in social relational arguments. Moreover, it fails to address the social relational concerns which have been shown to be central to the practice of reminiscence work. Worse still, it promulgates a version of reminiscence-and-ageing which is grounded in a representation of ageing

as decrement, and which thus lends itself to the legitimization of the social marginalisation of older people.

This analysis, then, offers further insight into current debates about the value of reminiscence work. It demonstrates that research is at odds with practice, not only in terms of its criterion of acceptable evidence, but also in terms of its orientation to a central concern of practice, the social status of older people, and that in a sense, albeit unwittingly, it can be seen as working against the concerns of practice.

This problem will be addressed further in Chapter 6, in the context of an analysis of current debates about the 'therapeutic' status of reminiscence work. The next chapter will extend and elaborate some of the arguments of the analysis presented here, by identifying other discursive practices of reminiscence work which evidence a concern with the social relations of ageing. In doing so, it will move from the medium of writing to the medium of talk, and to a fine-grained analysis of the ways in which practitioners of reminiscence work formulate the value of reminiscence for older people.

Chapter 5

Talking about Reminiscence: Common Senses of Practice

Reminiscence work, as an arena of practice, represents a diversity of ways of working with older people and their memories and biographies, of techniques for eliciting, recording, sharing, marking the value of, such material. It also embodies a diversity of discursive practices through which the nature and significance of these activities are formulated. Reminiscence work can be characterised not only by regularities of technique, but also by regularities of talk and text – ways of speaking and writing about reminiscence, about reminiscence work, and about older people which are as much a part of 'doing reminiscence work' as running a reminiscence group or working with someone to compile a life history book.

The previous chapter presented an initial analysis of some of these discursive practices. This analysis focused on the ways in which the value of reminiscence for older people is formulated in the literature related to research and practice, and showed how these formulations take shape as part of a dialogue or argument about the social relations of ageing. In doing so, it sought to recast formulations of the value of reminiscence in later life as discursive constructions which have functional consequences. This chapter presents an analysis which seeks to continue and extend that discussion. It does so by focussing on talk rather than text, specifically on how care workers engaged in reminiscence work talk about reminiscence and its value for older people.

This change of focus has a number of consequences. It allows consideration of the specifically conversational resources which speakers use to construct accounts of the nature and value of reminiscence. To the extent that the talk examined involves two sided conversations, this furnishes us with extra analytical resources, in that it makes available interactants' interpretations of talk as a 'proof criterion' for the analyst's interpretation (see Chapter 3; see also Atkinson and Heritage, 1984). This then is an extra resource compared with the textual analysis in the previous chapter. As will be demonstrated, this analytic advantage makes possible an analysis of the dialogical structuring of discursive formulations of reminiscence-and-ageing, which both corroborates and extends the analysis presented in the previous chapter.

A further consequence of focussing on the talk of practitioners, is that it affords examination of the ways in which they themselves make sense of their work; that is, some of the interpretive resources which they use in accounting for the value of their work for the older people in their care.

The data for analysis in this chapter consist of extracts from transcripts of audio-recorded interviews conducted with care workers who run reminiscence groups with older people in their care. The interviews were open-ended and informal. The aim was to get practitioners to talk about their use of reminiscence work, its value for older people, its applications, limitations and problems. (Details relating to the selection of interviewees can be found in Appendix I; a copy of the interview schedule can be found in Appendix II.) In the course of doing the interviews, it was found that most of these workers were accustomed to talking to others about their work. Due to the popularity of, and interest in, reminiscence, they very often found

themselves in the position of accounting for the practice of reminiscence work – why it is done, what it can do for older people, and so on – to students of one sort or another, or to visitors interested in what was being done.

As in the previous chapter, the analysis is concerned with the identification of different and distinct formulations of reminiscence-and-ageing in discourse. This is achieved through a consideration of the various metaphors, analogies and figures of speech used by speakers to characterise reminiscence and old age. In addition, however, and as a consequence of dealing with talk rather than text, the analysis will also focus on the detail of how particular versions are built up in conversation.

"I don't like to keep these away from today"

Extract 1 consists of three segments taken from an interview with Mary (names have been changed), an employee of a national charity for older people. Her job is to care for a group of physically frail old people who are brought to a day centre one day a week. At the centre, they are given lunch, take part in a variety of organised games, and chat amongst themselves. Reminiscence is among the range of activities provided in the charity's daycentres (according to a typewritten information sheet), and Mary's supervisor had identified this group as particularly suited to the purpose of observing and tape recording reminiscence groups. The extract presents three segments from the interview with Mary, in chronological order. In the extract, Mary and the interviewer are discussing her use of reminiscence with the group. (A key to transcription conventions can be found in Appendix III).

Extract 1

Segment (i)

- Mary y'see/ with these [Mary's group] they're up to date/ they know what went off yesterday and they know what's going on in the world
- (2)
- Kev right/ yeah
- Mary and I think with these/ it's best to keep 'em-/ it's alright to go back now and again they'll go back on their own anyway sometimes/ just back on their own/ but very often they talk about/ things now/ which I think's a good thing to keep them up with the everyday goings on
- Kev d'y- d'you reckon it could be: like/ not a good idea then to talk too much about the past to encourage it
- [
- Mary not all the time no/ not all the time not not with your mentally alert
- Kev no
- Mary I was gonna say these are well up with everything that's going on I mean he'll (indicates elderly man in room) discuss things he's seen on the TV the news and-/ and I think when you go back into the war days I think it depresses them enough/ with what they're hearing today without taking them back/ to war days
- Kev right right/ but you still do it/ now and then
- Mary I still do it now and then/ and sometimes they'll take themselves back/ they'll take themselves back

Segment (ii)

- Mary I think mine [Mary's group] are up to date so you gotta keep em up to date
- Kev yeah ((laughing))

Mary you know you can't keep throwing them back because
 they're already here and in it y'know what I mean

Segment (iii)

Mary I don't like to keep these [Mary's group] away from today

To begin with, consider Mary's representation of the nature of reminiscence and its value in old age. In all three segments, reminiscence is represented as a kind of time travel – to reminisce is to *"go back"*, to be *"away from today"*. The past and the present (*"they're already here and in it"*) are construed as places, and talking about the past is construed as displacement from the present.

As well as this, there is an implication that such displacement might be detrimental, at least for those older people who are *"mentally alert"* and in touch with the present - *"I think mine are up to date so you gotta keep em up to date"* ; *"not all the time no not with your mentally alert"*. Reminiscence is contrasted, not just with being *"up to date"* but with keeping *"up to date"*. Take people *"back"* too much, the argument suggests, and they might stay there, finding it impossible to *"keep up"* with contemporary circumstances and events. The use of the verb phrase *"go back"* suggests not only physical displacement, but also regression. In this account, there is a hint of an association between reminiscence and mental deterioration in older people.

This formulation, then, can be seen as an example of the dysfunctional repertoire of reminiscence-and-ageing identified in Chapter 4. As such, it invokes a formulation of ageing as 'decrement', representing old age as a time of life when 'keeping up' becomes difficult, when decline and disengagement from the present (and thus from the concerns of the rest of society) are an ever-present threat, and indeed ultimately unavoidable.

In the light of the argument in the previous chapter, the fact that a care worker who practices reminiscence work should produce such a formulation seems to be somewhat anomalous. It was suggested there that, in the literature related to reminiscence, the dysfunctional repertoire is routinely and explicitly refuted in the reminiscence literature, in favour of formulations which accord reminiscence personal or social value (eg: Butler, 1963; McMahon and Rhudick, 1964; Lewis, 1971; Coleman, 1974, 1986; Kiernat, 1979; Lesser et al, 1981; Ryden, 1981; Mortimer, 1982; Norris, 1986; Gibson, 1989). It was further noted that these arguments constitute an important justification for the practice of reminiscence work. Here, however, we find a practitioner producing a formulation which contradicts these arguments. Certainly, Mary's account of the value of reminiscence is unusual in this respect. Nevertheless, there is a way in which it can be reconciled to the argument developed in Chapter 4. In order to see this, we must consider two things: the work it is doing in the context of its production, and the conversational resources from which it is constructed.

Most accounts of reminiscence-and-ageing given by the care workers interviewed can be taken as justifications for doing reminiscence work. In this extract, however, (and in most of the interview), Mary is expressing her

reluctance to do reminiscence work, and in the process is mounting an argument for not doing it. As the interviewer, I orientate to this interpretation of her talk with my statement *"but you still do it now and then"* at the end of Segment (i). This *"now and then"* is borrowed by Mary in her next turn (*"I still do it now and then"*), as a description of the frequency with which she runs reminiscence groups. In this extract, then, Mary can be seen as accounting for her sparing use of reminiscence work with the older people in her care. The discursive resources which she mobilises to do this are of such a nature as to make her reportedly infrequent use of reminiscence eminently plausible, and indeed desirable. The argument runs along the following lines: if reminiscence involves displacement into the past, and if older people are anyway in danger of not keeping up with the present, then such displacement should not happen too often, since it would reduce their chances of keeping up, being up to date, living in the present. It is therefore prudent to engage sparingly in such an activity. In this sense, Mary's mobilisation of the dysfunctional repertoire accomplishes the interactional task of accounting for her own care practices.

In the light of the status of this account as an argument for not doing reminiscence work, more detailed consideration will be given to the conversational resources which Mary uses to build her account in Segment (i). Mary uses a number of devices to qualify her formulation of reminiscence-and-ageing. One way she does this is to particularise her account, explicitly applying it to her own group through the use of qualifying phrases like *"with these"* and *"mine"* (cf. Billig, 1985; Middleton, 1991). Another way she does this is to construct her account so as to make available the inference that reminiscence is detrimental to older people, rather than

making an explicit statement to that effect. For example, she refers to talking about the present as a *"good thing"* - *"they talk about things now which I think's a good thing to keep them up with everyday goings on"* – the implicit contrast being that talking about the past might not be such a good thing. Moreover, even in making this comparison she is guarded. She begins to say *"I think it's best to keep em"* and then cuts off this statement to offer a qualification of it, before producing what appears to be an different version of her original turn beginning - *"which I think's a good thing to keep them up with everyday goings on"* - where *"best"* has been replaced by *"good thing"*, a construction which avoids making a direct evaluative comparison between reminiscing and talking about the present.

It can be argued that Mary's account is organised in this way precisely because it is anomalous. It presents a formulation of reminiscence-and-ageing which is routinely refuted in the literature. Moreover, this refutation is part of a wider collection of practices predicated on the beneficiality of reminiscence, some of which impinge directly on Mary's own work: the provision and promotion of reminiscence by her employer, and the attentions of the interviewer, who clearly considers reminiscence valuable enough to do research into, and on whose behalf she has previously set up and orchestrated reminiscence sessions. In short, Mary is presenting an 'unorthodox' formulation of reminiscence-and-ageing, and its indirect and qualified construction, through the use of the conversational devices described above, marks its status as such.

A further point of interest here is that, as the interviewer, I produce a version of a similar form, as an upshot to Mary's second turn, and

formulated as a question: *"d'y- d'you reckon it could be: like/ not a good idea then to talk too much about the past to encourage it"*. Like Mary, my formulation avoids making a direct negative evaluation of reminiscence by using the phrase *"not a good idea"*; it formulates this as a possibility rather than a fact (*"could be"* rather than *'is'*); and shows hesitancy in producing this formulation in drawing out the vowel in *"be:"* and in the pause after *"like"*. In addition, the use of the word *"like"* can itself be seen as a further qualification of the formulation: it is not exactly X, but it is like X. Thus, my talk as interviewer displays sensitivity to the 'unorthodox' status of Mary's formulation of reminiscence-and-ageing.

At this point, rather than retaining the descriptor 'unorthodox' here, this conditional and indirect formulation will be referred to as a 'dispreferred' formulation. The use of the term 'dispreferred' draws on the notion of 'preference status' formulated in conversation analytic work, particularly in Pomerantz (1984) (although see also general discussion in Atkinson and Heritage, 1984; Sacks, 1987; Levinson, 1983). Pomerantz discusses and illustrates the ways in which the design of a conversational response to an assessment offered by another speaker reflects the response's 'preference status'; that is, whether or not it is oriented to by participants as being invited by, or relevant to, the initial assessment. In Pomerantz's analysis, one mark of the preference status of an action is the degree to which it is explicitly formulated. For example, where agreement is the preferred next action, disagreement will be weakly or indirectly stated. Of course, the conversational phenomena presented here differ from Pomerantz's data, in that the 'assessment' of reminiscence as an unproblematically 'good thing' has not been voiced in the immediately preceding conversation.

Nevertheless, it can be argued that there is sufficient similarity between the phenomena described to make the notion of 'preference status' both useful and appropriate. It is so in that it allows for an examination of the situated formulation of 'orthodox' positions within specific discursive practices, rather than as situation-independent, pre-existing representations. This point requires some elaboration.

It might be argued that the above analysis tells us nothing we did not know already. We would expect that, in the context of reminiscence work, negative representations of reminiscence would be resisted, and treated as undesirable and 'unorthodox'. Why would people who use reminiscence in their work, or whose employer promotes it, say baldly that it is harmful to their elderly clients? This argument, however, misses a crucial point. It is certainly plausible that such an orthodoxy exists, indeed it would be difficult to see how practice could continue if it did not. The point is, how is such an orthodoxy constituted? It can be argued that it is constituted, in part, by the discursive practices identified here.

This then leads to a further point. Mary's talk has thus far been characterised as accomplishing a delicately-handled defence of an unorthodox position. However, this is only half the story. It would be more accurate to say that it involves a movement between contrary positions, that it embodies a dialogue about the nature and value of reminiscence. This dialogicality is an important feature of Mary's talk, in that the plausibility of her formulation of reminiscence-and-ageing rests on its inclusion of the view opposite to the one being argued for. To say that reminiscence is always a bad thing, for everyone, would not merely be unorthodox, it would invite immediate disagreement.

Indeed, such 'extreme case formulations' (Pomerantz, 1986) are commonly-used rhetorical devices, and operate on this very basis.

Mary herself uses such formulations in her account. For example, in response to the interviewers question as to whether it is a good idea to talk about the past, she replies "*not all the time no*". By discounting the extreme case, this formulation works to guarantee agreement, in that no one would agree that reminiscing "*all the time*" is a good idea. Another instance of this kind of formulation is her use of the word "*keep*" in "*I don't like to keep these away from today*", with its implication of a state of affairs which is permanent. Mary's deployment of these formulations has the effect of advancing her case against doing reminiscence work.

A further point about Mary's "*not all the time no*" needs to be made here. Had she started her turn a second later, we would have to take its form as a response to the interviewer's "*too much*" ("*all the time*" clearly being "*too much*"). However, she starts her turn just as this is said, and thus her choice of this particular formulation can be said to be independent of the interviewer's overlapped talk. It is interesting, though, that I as the interviewer should come out with an extreme case formulation at the same time as Mary. "*Too much*" reminiscence is, by definition, an undesirable amount, and thus this formulation has the effect of advancing Mary's own argument against doing reminiscence work. Again we see further evidence that as the interviewer, in borrowing Mary's conversational forms, I am sensitive to her agenda, and oriented to the potentially 'unorthodox' nature of her argument.

Mary's inclusion of the opposing view is more than just a consequence of her attempt to pre-empt other arguments. It is also a consequence of the recognition that there is some truth in those arguments. It is the apparent non-recognition of this truth, the stating of the 'extreme' case, that invites disagreement. The dialogical structure of Mary's account handles contradictory 'truths' about reminiscence and later life.

The coexistence of contradictory truths means that the argument for one particular version must be done anew in each situation (cf. Billig, 1987). It has already been suggested that the constitution of reminiscence work is accomplished partly through the formulation of such arguments, through discursive practices oriented to privileging certain versions over others. In this sense then, Mary's version of reminiscence-and-ageing is not anomalous. Through her indirect formulations, her particularisations and qualifications, she is marking as dispreferred a formulation of reminiscence-and-ageing which has negative consequences for older people.

"You've got to remember your past 'cos thats part of you"

Extract 2 is taken from an interview with Anne, a staff nurse in a geriatric day hospital attached to a large psychiatric hospital. As part of her work, she runs twice-weekly reminiscence groups for clinically depressed and confused older people. Immediately previous to the extract, the discussion has turned to common criticisms directed at reminiscence work.

Extract 2

- Kev what about the other criticism of reminiscing erm/ that
its/ its just an encouragement for people to live in the
past and and not face up- no
 [
- Anne no I don't agree/ I don't agree with that at all/ no/
no/ cos I think you've got to:/ remember your past cos
thats part of you/ your past and how/ and how you've
lived/ and that can help you deal with what's happening
today or tomorrow/ so no I don't agree with that at all/ I
think it's a good thing to reminisce and remember
- Kev mmm/ it is something we all do
 anyway isnt it
 [
- Anne mmm/ that's right/ it's not just the elderly

In her reply to my question at the start of the extract, Anne offers a formulation of the value of reminiscence which constructs it as oriented to present circumstances, and unequivocally beneficial. Her account emphasises the intimate relation between memory and self, biography and identity (*"you've got to:/ remember your past cos that's part of you"*), and the importance of past experience as a guide for action in the present and future (*"that can help you deal with what's happening today or tomorrow"*).

In presenting this account, Anne is countering my formulation, as interviewer, of reminiscence as *"an encouragement/ for people to live in the past"*. To the extent that this latter formulation is congruent with Mary's formulation of reminiscence as displacement from the present, Anne's account might be seen as a contrasting argument to the position taken by

Mary in Extract 1. A number of analytical points can be made about this contrast between Anne's and Mary's accounts.

First, the contrast between the two accounts is in part a consequence of the different kinds of rhetorical work being done with them. Whereas Mary's version accounts for her reportedly sporadic use of reminiscence, Anne can be seen as countering a formulation of reminiscence which calls into question the value of her own reportedly regular practice of reminiscence work, and presenting an alternative version which accounts for this practice.

Formulating the value of reminiscence in terms of the maintenance of identity and as a resource for dealing with present and future circumstances renders its regular use unproblematic – in fact, one could perhaps say 'the more the better', given the nature of the benefits implied.

There are, however, further interesting differences between Mary's and Anne's versions of the value of reminiscence. In the making her claim that reminiscence is not so good for the "*mentally alert*", Mary makes a distinction between "*mentally alert*" older people and others that are not so "*mentally alert*". Now, it could be argued here, from a developmental-functionalist point of view, in which reminiscence is considered to be an activity which is functional in later life, that these two versions of reminiscence differ because they relate to different populations – that reminiscence is good for the confused and depressed older people in Anne's care, but not so good for Mary's 'mentally alert' group. However, it will be suggested instead that such distinctions are rhetorically occasioned.

In Mary's case, this distinction is a central feature of her argument. Anne, however, makes no such distinction. Instead, she relates her argument to people in general, by using the generic *"you"* in her response to the interviewer's question. The interviewer's response (*"it is something we all do anyway"*) can be seen as orienting to the generality of her claim. At this point, Anne makes this generality more explicit still by stating *"its not just the elderly"*. Here, then, in the course of constructing a plausible argument for the value of reminiscence, not only does Anne not distinguish between different elderly client groups, she explicitly rejects a distinction between older people and other people, at least as far as reminiscence is concerned. This rejection, this inclusion of older people in the category of 'people in general', is occasioned in the trajectory of the conversation between Anne and the interviewer.

Thus, we see that when we attend to the local and particular features of the different accounts of the value of reminiscence in Extracts 1 and 2, it is a mistake to account for their difference in terms of a distinction between elderly populations. Rather, they differ in whether or not such distinctions are occasioned in the unfolding conversation.

A further contrast between Mary's and Anne's accounts can be seen in the relative directness of their construction. In contrast to Mary's conditional and qualified version, Anne's version is much more directly formulated. She states her disagreement explicitly and repeatedly (*"I don't agree/ I don't agree with that at all/ no/ no"*) and ends with the unequivocal assertion that *"it's a good thing to reminisce and remember"*. This directness can be seen as marking the preference status of her version of reminiscence-and-ageing. In

taking the position she does, she is aligning herself with arguments that are routinely and widely used to justify the practice of reminiscence work: that reminiscence is not merely 'living in the past', that it is relevant to the present, and is indeed a beneficial activity for older people. The directness with which her account is formulated can be seen as marking it as a preferred formulation of reminiscence, as against Mary's dispreferred formulation. Moreover, this preferred formulation is one which constructs reminiscence as oriented to the present rather than the past, and thus has positive implications for older people. This positive position is further enhanced by representing reminiscence, and the benefits ascribed to it, as relevant to people in general.

However, just as the indirectness of Mary's account is in part a consequence of taking into account other possible formulations, so is the directness of Anne's account also attributable to its position in dialogue. Anne's unequivocal disagreement is not only constituting an 'orthodox' position. It can also be seen as a consequence of the extreme case put to her by the interviewer. To suggest, as he does, that reminiscence is "*just an encouragement to live in the past*" is to rule out of court, with that "*just*", all other possible accounts of the value of reminiscence. Thus, Anne can be seen as responding to this extreme case formulation in equivalent terms, stating the opposite case unequivocally. Here again, then, we have dialogicality, this time as actual dialogue between two speakers. The movement between extremes which is evident in the first two turns of Extract 2 can be seen as the same movement which is evident in Mary's attempts to take account of both positions – to argue that reminiscence is not just one thing, nor is it just the other.

Again, then, it would be a gross characterisation of the data to say merely that Mary and Anne take opposing positions in relation to the value of reminiscence. We might even argue the opposite: that there is some agreement between them, in that Mary, like Anne, takes some pains to say that reminiscence is not just an encouragement to live in the past, although it may be so for her group. In an important sense, then, Anne and the interviewer are having the same argument with each other, in the first two turns of Extract 2, that Mary is having 'with herself' in Extract 1.

"All they've got to give is their memories"

Extract 3 is taken from an interview with a medical nurse, Jane, working with elderly patients who attend a day hospital attached to a large general hospital. Most of the patients are suffering from the effects of arthritis or recent strokes, and attend the day hospital for medical check-ups, various kinds of therapy, and a cooked lunch. Each morning, before lunch, selected patients are gathered in the 'group room', where Jane orchestrates discussion groups which are partly reminiscence-based. Immediately previous to the extract, Jane has been talking at length about how she attempts to keep her clients up to date with what's going on in the world – men's use of make up, the price of petrol, changing sexual mores, the expansion of air travel – and how this "stimulates their thinking". This account is followed by the interviewer's question, at the start of the extract, about the place of reminiscence in the group sessions.

Extract 3

Kev so/ I mean/ we're going way beyond reminiscence here really/
reminiscence seems to be a component in this-

Jane reminiscence is part/ I mean sometimes they just sit and chat about the old days/ that's fine cos reminiscence is valuable/ it helps them feel that they've got/ something to offer/ people/ as I explain to the learner nurses/ if you've got/ on your ward a care for the elderly ward you'll hear people say/ ooh he's telling me that story again about when he was in the war or/ when he had- was shot or/ something/ and as I say to the learners/ that's all these people the elderly people have to give in return/ I said/ look we're doing for them physically by/ looking after them looking after their physical needs/ taking them to the toilet/ pulling their knickers down for them/ sitting them on the toilet/ even wiping their bottoms and pulling their knickers up/ they want to say thank you in some way/ all they've got to give is their memories/ and that's why you find old people are always going on about the past/ because that's all they've got to give to say thank you/ and if anybody is wise enough that people should be/ if somebody starts talking about the past instead of thinking/ oh gawd here we go again/ they should think ((cough)) make the time to listen because/ someone of the younger generation/ I'm thirty two but I feel very honoured that I can learn so much about the past/ just through talking to them they are walking encyclopaedias/ make the most of the elderly listen to them listen to what they've got to say/ because once you've got a knowledge about/ the past about earlier this century about what they can tell you/ it gives you a great deal of insight for the future/ I always say the past gives you the wisdom for the future

In this extract, we find a number of formulations of reminiscence-and-ageing. These are structured in various ways around the theme of social exchange, emphasising the role of others in the activity of reminiscing, as well as that of the reminiscer. Jane begins by accounting for the value of reminiscence for her elderly patients, and for their acts of reminiscing, in terms of reciprocation for the ministrations of their carers - *"it helps them feel that they've got/ something to offer/ people"*; *"that's all they've got to give to say thank you"*. In this formulation, the value of reminiscence (for both reminiscer and audience) inheres in the fact that it is offered as reciprocation,

rather than in any intrinsic value it might have. This is followed by a second formulation, which represents reminiscence as the transmission of culturally and personally valuable knowledge (*"I feel very honoured that I can learn so much about the past/ just through talking to them they are walking encyclopaedias"; "once you've got a knowledge about the past about earlier this century about what they can tell you/ it gives you a great deal of insight for the future"*). Here, in contrast to the first version, reminiscence is presented as having high intrinsic value, independent of its status as a means of reciprocation.

These two versions of the value of reminiscence in later life serve, in Jane's account, as the basis for a moral exhortation to learner nurses (*"as I explain to the learner nurses"; "as I say to the learners"*), urging them to listen to their elderly patients (*"make the time to listen"; "make the most of the elderly listen to them listen to what they've got to say"*). In fact, much of the extract is formulated as an account of how Jane describes reminiscence to student nurses.

In the service of accomplishing this moral exhortation, Jane's account is rhetorically organised to undermine another formulation of the value of reminiscence. The formulation which Jane seeks to undermine is not stated explicitly in the extract, but is made available indirectly through the reported speech and thoughts of others - *"you'll hear people say/ ooh he's telling me that story again about when he was in the war or/ when he had- was shot or/ something"; "if somebody starts talking about the past instead of thinking oh gawd here we go again"*. From these reported reactions, we are able to infer that reminiscence is construed here as repetitive talk, which is by implication

self-indulgent and of no interest to others. This use of reported speech/thought accomplishes a number of things. First, it has the effect of ascribing this particular view of reminiscence to people other than the speaker (Jane) or her interlocutors (whether student nurses or the interviewer). This in turn enables Jane to mark this implicit formulation of reminiscence-and-ageing as problematic or prejudiced without threat to the 'face' of her interlocutors, even though she is at the same time exhorting them not to take such a position (cf. Goffman, 1981, on 'footing'; see also Wooffitt, 1992, and Widdecombe and Wooffitt, 1989, for examples of similar uses of reported speech in conversation).

Formulating the association between reminiscence and later life in terms of social exchange works to counter the version of reminiscence as self indulgent talk, and mark this version as prejudiced, by constructing reminiscence as meant for others. This argument builds over the course of Jane's account. First, in introducing the notion of reciprocation, she describes reminiscence as the only resource available to older people in such a process (*"that's all these people the elderly people have to give in return"; "all they've got to give is their memories"; "that's all they've got to give to say thank you"*). This formulation works to simultaneously construct reminiscence as a token of social exchange and offer mitigation for its apparent lack of 'exchange value'. Thus, it is the fact that reminiscence is offered as reciprocation that serves as a potential basis for a moral exhortation to *"listen"*, rather than any intrinsic value it might have. One might say 'its the thought that counts' here.

This version of 'reminiscence-as-reciprocation' is then used to account for the supposed propensity of older people to reminisce (*"that's why you find old people are always going on about the past/ because that's all they've got to give to say thank you"*). This move is interesting in that this supposed propensity is another aspect of the association between reminiscence and old age, besides 'function', which has been a focus of empirical research (eg. Lieberman and Falk, 1971; Revere and Tobin, 1980; Romaniuk and Romaniuk, 1981). Here we see it being used rhetorically. Jane presents it as common knowledge (as something you simply *"find"* going on in the world) and using her formulation of reminiscence to account for this 'fact' increases the plausibility of that formulation – it 'fits the facts', so to speak.

Following this, and continuing with the theme of social exchange, Jane produces a second formulation of the value of reminiscence. In this version, reminiscence is construed as having high exchange value, as encyclopaedic knowledge, as *"wisdom for the future"*. Moreover, it is construed as being of particular value to the nurses she is 'talking to' – *"someone of the younger generation I'm thirty two but I feel very honoured that I can learn so much about the past"*. This formulation provides a much stronger basis for a recommendation that student nurses listen to their elderly patients. Reminiscence is now of value in its own right, and of particular value for their age group. Thus, through the course of the extract, we see Jane formulating the value of reminiscence in such a way as to accomplish the business of making (or, in this case, reporting the making of) such a moral exhortation.

There are clear similarities between the rhetorical work accomplished by Jane's account and the work done by the interpretive repertoires of reminiscence-and-ageing discussed in Chapter 4. The two contrasting formulations of reminiscence-and-ageing which Jane uses are recognisable as the 'psychological' repertoire and the 'sociological' repertoire respectively. The first not only constructs reminiscence as having personal rather than social value, but also serves to account for this lack of value. In contrast, the second accords reminiscence social value. Both versions are formulated in opposition to the 'dysfunctional' repertoire. Moreover, all three versions are deployed in the service of a moral exhortation to "*listen to the elderly*", and are thus embedded in an argument about the social relations of ageing. Jane's formulations of reminiscence-and-ageing, then, can be seen as invoking the same contrary discourses of ageing discussed in the previous chapter, and their same contradictory social-relational implications. Just as authors of texts on reminiscence can be seen as deploying formulations of reminiscence-and-ageing to argue for change in the social relations of ageing, so we can see Jane using similar resources to argue for a change in social relations between student nurses and their elderly patients.

It is important to note, though, that these versions are formulated as arguments. In producing an account of the value of reminiscence, Jane does not simply say that reminiscence is reciprocation, or that it is the expression of wisdom. Rather, her account has a dialogical form. She formulates versions of reminiscence-and-ageing which accord it value, in contrast to a version which casts it as valueless. In advancing her own argument, Jane must discredit other opposing positions, which are themselves tenable - that reminiscence may also be experienced as boring or repetitive, and irrelevant

to the concerns of the care workers who may be its temporarily captive audience.

Discussion

The above analysis has brought us further along the road towards an understanding of discursive construction of reminiscence-and-ageing, and in doing so can be seen as a corroboration and extension of the analysis presented in Chapter 4. A variety of formulations of the nature of reminiscence and its value for older people have been identified. From a developmental-functionalist viewpoint, this variety might be accounted for in terms of a range of hypotheses to be tested, or as being applicable to a range of different groups of older people. This viewpoint, however, ignores the performative, indexical and inconclusive status of such formulations, as set out in Chapter 3.

Instead, these formulations can be seen as accounting resources, held in common by speakers. The analysis shows some of ^{the} diversity of these resources, and also how they are used in accounting for practice. Speakers use different formulations of reminiscence-and-ageing, not only to argue for or against the use of reminiscence work with the older people in their care, but also to argue for or against more general care practices, as Jane does in Extract 3. This variety is characterised by contradiction and opposition. The accounts examined take the form of a dialogue or argument about the nature of reminiscence and its value in later life. Versions of reminiscence-and-ageing take shape in relation to other, contrary versions, and the accounts themselves embody movement between these versions: reminiscence as past-oriented or present-oriented, reminiscence as self-oriented or other-oriented,

reminiscence as socially valuable or of no value to others. Moreover, the analysis has shown that these contradictions are not only present between different speaker's accounts, but are also an important feature of the internal organisation of those accounts.

The fact that this dialogicality occurs both within and across speakers shows that this talk cannot be accounted for simply in individual terms, as the expression of speakers' beliefs. Neither is it sufficient to say that speakers are drawing from a static 'set' of representations of reminiscence-and-ageing - rather, these accounts are constructed through movement between contrary positions. What we see in this talk is evidence of a phenomenon which is at once dynamic and collective.

In this respect, the data are very similar to those of Billig, Condor, Edwards, Gane, Middleton and Radley (1988), discussed in Chapter 3. They illustrate, with examples from a variety of settings, the ways in which talk is characterised by the presence of opposing themes, and can be seen to be handling dilemmas of an ideological and practical nature. They argue that 'common sense' is itself made up of contrary themes - that in attempting to account for their experiences or actions in commonly-sensible ways, people find themselves having to deal with contradictory 'truths', and can be seen to seek a balance or compromise between these contradictions in their talk:

The presence of contrary themes in discussions is revealed by the use of qualifications. The unqualified expression of one theme seems to call forth a counter-qualification in the name of the opposing theme. There is a tension in the discourse, which can make even monologue take the form of argumentation and argument occur, even when all participants share similar contrary themes. (Billig et al, 1988: 144)

This seems to be precisely the phenomenon identified in the foregoing analysis, and suggests it to be a general property of talk. However, to the extent that the talk examined here pertains to an identifiable arena of practice, it can be seen as revealing the operation of a 'common sense' of reminiscence work. The contrary formulations identified can be seen as the raw materials from which interviewees construct commonly-sensible accounts of their work, the materials with which they literally make sense of their own care practices.

It is important to note, then, this sense-making cannot be a once-and-for-all matter. Rather, on each occasion of accounting for practice, the resulting account will not be determined in advance, but will take shape according to the arguments raised and how they are formulated. Thus, such accounting will always be situated in the flow of action, and be sensitive to the interactional business in hand. On this basis, then, it can^{be} argued that the 'sense' of reminiscence work is being continually reformulated as practitioners talk about their work.

Moreover, in that individual speaker's accounts are built up in the form of dialogue or argument, it can be argued that they bear the mark of previous occasions of conversational sense-making, and thus that the sense-making practices identified have themselves been forged socially, in discussion and argument. This then leads us to locate the 'understanding' of the nature and value of reminiscence work (for both practitioners and analysts) at the level of discourse. There is no need to look beyond the discourse to a set of representations which informs the talk examined here. Rather, this talk can

itself be seen as an embodiment of a dynamic 'community of discursive understanding', within which practitioners continually formulate and reformulate the nature of their work.

This is not to say that 'anything goes' when practitioners talk about their work. On the contrary, any identifiable arena of practice will by definition favour particular ways of representing and talking about that practice. Such regular 'ways of speaking' work to constitute and maintain the boundaries of practice. In the foregoing analysis, the work done by this talk is apparent in the 'preference status' of different formulations, and in the way that certain formulations are argued for over others. The formulations which are preferred and argued for are those which accord positive value to the reminiscences of older people, as being relevant to the present, as offered to others, as socially valuable knowledge. They are preferred to, or privileged over, formulations which construct reminiscence in negative terms, as living in the past, as repetitive or self-indulgent, as irrelevant to others or to the concerns of the present. Thus, in the detail of the design of their talk, speakers show resistance to formulations which marginalise reminiscence, and through this resist the consequent marginalisation of older people as not worth listening to, as having no right to speak and be heard. As in Chapter 4, the very discursive practices which work to constitute reminiscence work as an arena of practice – through representing reminiscence as having positive value – work at the same time to advance an argument against the social marginalisation of older people.

In describing the formulations of 'reminiscence and ageing' documented here as 'common sense', it should be pointed out that there is also another, more

prosaic way in which they might deserve this description. This concerns the notable absence in the data of any reference to academic theories of reminiscence and its significance in later life. It might be said, then, that speakers are talking 'common sense' in that they do not appeal to scientific evidence to warrant their accounts. This is so even though some of the versions formulated by the interviewees are recognisable as versions of academic theories – for example, reminiscence as the transmission of socially valuable knowledge to younger generations, and this as the social 'role' of older people (McMahon and Rhudick, 1964), or reminiscence as a means of affirming identity in old age (Lewis, 1971). This can be seen as further evidence of the difference in perspective between practice and research discussed in Chapter 2. This debate gives the impression of 'scientific' and 'common sense' accounts of reminiscence and ageing passing one another by, an impression reinforced by the absence of explicit mention of scientific accounts in our own data.

Gubrium and Wallace (1990) have discussed some of these issues in relation to theories of ageing. They present data showing how care workers, older people and their relatives, invoke diverse 'theories' of ageing in discussing the appropriateness of a particular care regime. They draw attention to the parallels between this "ordinary theorising" and the theorising of age done by social scientists, and argue that the separation and the degree of differential status of these two modes of theorising are unwarranted. They observe that ordinary theorising shares many characteristics of its scientific counterpart, while scientific theories, like ordinary theories, bear the mark of lived experience, and of the values of those who formulate them. They suggest a rapprochement between the two, recommending that "scientific theory takes

serious consideration of ordinary theorising" and "science no longer has a corrective function with respect to ordinary theorising, but becomes... a professional source of insights for understanding experience..." (Gubrium and Wallace, 1990: 148).

The foregoing analysis can be seen as one attempt to bring such 'ordinary theorising' into serious consideration, and in doing so, can be seen as extending Gubrium and Wallace's discussion. Besides revealing some parallels between ordinary and scientific theories of reminiscence and ageing, and how the former are used as accounting resources, it also reveals the rhetorical organisation of 'ordinary theorising', and its operation as discursively-grounded common sense. To treat these formulations as mere 'lay theories', to be corrected or formalised, would be to miss their crucial role in understanding and accounting for practice, and in the shaping of practice itself.

The last two chapters have offered an account of the discursive construction of the association between 'reminiscence' and 'old age' as it is realised in the literature and talk about reminiscence work. This account was prompted by the argument, set out in Chapter 3, against research approaches which study reminiscence as a 'mechanism' or 'function' associated with a particular stage of lifespan development, and seek to decide empirically between different formulations of the significance of reminiscence in later life. These formulations can instead be seen as positions in an ongoing cultural argument about the significance of older people's reminiscences, and, beyond this, about the social position of older people.

The discursive resources mobilised this argument are an integral part of the practice of reminiscence work, and work to constitute it as an arena of practice. This constitutive work involves the continual reformulation of arguments for the value of reminiscence, in opposition to arguments which accord it negative value. In the talk of practitioners examined in this chapter, and in the writing of practitioners and proponents of reminiscence work examined in Chapter 4, certain formulations of reminiscence-and-ageing are regularly privileged over others. These preferred versions have positive implications for the social relations of ageing, and indeed are deployed specifically in arguments about the appropriate conduct of others towards older people, and the appropriate position of older people in society. In this way, the very discursive practices which constitute reminiscence work also work to argue for a change in the social relations of ageing.

The next chapter will move from a consideration of reminiscence-and-ageing to a consideration of discursive formulations of the nature of **reminiscence work** in the context of **therapy and care provision**. It will show how the implicit and explicit social relational concerns of reminiscence work in these contexts raise problems for the practice and status of this work. This discussion will further illuminate current debates about the status of reminiscence work, and the need for evidence of its value.

Chapter 6

Dilemmas of Professional Discourse: Reminiscence as Therapy

This chapter presents an analysis of the terms of the current debate about the status of reminiscence work as an arena of care practice. It will show this debate to be concerned, not simply with the status of reminiscence work, nor with the evidence of its value for older people, but rather with the kinds of social relations that are instantiated within care practices. In this respect, the analysis continues to address the social relational themes discussed in Chapters 4 and 5. In Chapter 4, it was argued that, in writing about reminiscence and later life, practitioners and researchers tend to favour different discursive formulations of reminiscence-and-ageing, which in turn have different implications for the social relations of ageing. It was further argued that the formulation favoured by practitioners and proponents (the 'sociological' repertoire) is congruent with an explicit concern with a 'repositioning' of older people in their relations with others, and is one means by which this concern is pursued. It was noted that this concern is not generally addressed in the research literature, which tends to favour the 'psychological' repertoire of reminiscence-and-ageing, which constructs the benefits of reminiscing in terms of psychological functionality, rather than social-relational change. This social relational theme was further explored in Chapter 5, where other examples of discursive practices which have positive implications for the social status of older people were identified in practitioners' talk.

The aim of the present chapter is to extend this argument. The analysis will identify discursive practices engaged in by practitioners and proponents which have a similar function to those previously identified,

in that they are orientated to the constitution of particular kinds of social relations. In this case, however, these discursive practices impinge on the social relations of reminiscence work itself. They can be understood as strategies for resisting the formulation of reminiscence work in the terms of 'professional' discourse. The analysis will show further how the professional critique of reminiscence work is orientated to preserving the social relations of professional practice. The 'evidence problem' discussed in Chapter 2 will in this way be recast as a consequence of the different agendas of proponents and critics of reminiscence work, of professional researchers and non-professional practitioners. This reformulation of the problem in turn suggests a need for an approach to research which can incorporate the practitioners' agenda, thus far marginalised by current approaches.

The data examined here are taken from a variety of sources: transcripts of interviews with proponents and critics of reminiscence work; recently published literature (journal articles, conference papers, and training materials); and transcripts of discussions and conversations recorded at a recent conference devoted to reminiscence work. The discussion will focus especially on text and talk related to the designation of reminiscence work as 'therapy'. This issue can be seen as central to the debate about the status of reminiscence work, for a number of reasons. First, the designation 'therapy' is one possible indicator of the status or legitimacy of practice. Second, the designation 'therapy' may be seen as requiring certain kinds of evidence to warrant it, thus bringing into question the status of reminiscence work should such evidence not be forthcoming. Given the status conferred on reminiscence work by such a designation, we might expect the debate to be characterised by claims from proponents that reminiscence work is therapy, with critics arguing it is not. However,

such is not the case. Rather, there is a marked degree of variability with which the designation is used, espoused, or disavowed by different parties to the debate. The analysis will locate this variability as part of a more general phenomenon, which is manifest in other ways in which people talk and write about reminiscence work as care practice, and which is orientated to social-relational concerns.

The designation of reminiscence work as 'therapy'

In the literature related to reminiscence work produced over the last ten years or so, it is common to find such work referred to as 'reminiscence therapy', particularly in the case of work involving reminiscence groups (eg: Lewis and Butler, 1974; Ebersole, 1976; Lesser, Lazarus, Frankel and Havasy, 1981; McRae, 1982; Norris and Abu El Eileh, 1982; Cook, 1984; Poulton and Strassberg, 1986). There are a number of possible explanations for the ubiquity of this description. There is a superficial similarity in form between group reminiscence and group therapy. In addition, it is likely that the term 'therapy' articulates the feeling that group reminiscence confers positive benefits on elderly participants, benefits more substantial perhaps than other 'group activities' engaged in with and by older people, such as a game of bingo or a sing song. Robert Butler's work must also be acknowledged as an influence here. Butler (1963) argued for relevance of reminiscence to psychotherapeutic practice within a psychodynamic framework. His paper is cited in the introductions to most of a steady stream of papers on reminiscence since then, published in gerontological, nursing, and social work journals, in this country and in the USA, written by gerontologists, social workers, care assistants, and others working with older people. Butler's work, then, provides further grounds for describing reminiscence work as 'therapy', whether or not

such work is informed by his particular theories about reminiscence and later life.

Given the prevalence of the term in the literature, it is not surprising that references to reminiscence work as 'therapy' can also be found in practitioners' talk. Extract 1 is taken from an interview with Jane, who runs reminiscence groups in a geriatric day hospital. It is part of an answer to the question "How do you feel about calling reminiscence therapy?".

Extract 1

Jane: [...] the amount of patients that have said to me quite spontaneously without me saying to them have you enjoyed the group/ have said/ oh I do enjoy your groups/ I'm on my own all weekend your groups/ although I'm/ on my own all week I think about the group all through the week and then I start looking forward to it/ I go over it in my mind y'know/ telling everybody about it/ then halfway through the week I start looking forward to the next group/ so obviously there's some valuable therapy involved

In most of this extract, Jane is reporting the words of a typical patient, saying how much they enjoy and look forward to her groups. This positive evaluation is then used by Jane as a self-evident justification for describing her work as 'therapy' ("*so obviously there's some valuable therapy involved*"). In Jane's terms, then, it is the enjoyment of the group, and the patients consequent engagement with it, that confirms the status of the activity as 'therapy'. This usage can be contrasted with the way the word is used in Extract 2. This extract is taken from the concluding section of a paper published in the *British Journal of Clinical Psychology*, which consisted of a review of empirical research on reminiscence and reminiscence work. This paper is one of the few in the literature which take a critical stance in relation to reminiscence work.

Extract 2

It is possible to make a case for reminiscence as an enjoyable pastime which may lead to positive changes in communication and social behaviour among both normal and confused elderly persons. The most positive effects on the elderly person may result from the greater knowledge and understanding of their individual experience on the part of staff members involved in reminiscence groups. These are important goals and Bender et al (1983) discuss reasons for the usefulness of such groups in residential settings. Nevertheless, the role of reminiscence as a therapeutic tool is doubtful, and it seems that at least as far as the normal and confused elderly are concerned, it is best regarded as a diversionary activity. (Thornton and Brotchie, 1987:101, emphasis in original).

This extract has a number of features relevant to the debate about the status of reminiscence work, some of which will be discussed later. For the present, attention will be given to its deployment of the word "*therapeutic*". Prior to the passage quoted here, the discussion in the paper has been concerned in part to assess the evidence that participants in reminiscence groups show change on various measures of 'psychological state'- self esteem, life satisfaction, depression, cognitive functioning and so on. The authors' conclusion is that there is no firm evidence of change on any of these measures. This lack of evidence is the basis for their statement "*the role of reminiscence as a therapeutic tool is doubtful*". In the terms of this extract, reminiscence work is not 'therapy'.

If we see the designation 'therapy' as a marker of the value or status of reminiscence work, then these two extracts might be seen simply as expressing two opposing positions in the debate, Extract 1 arguing that reminiscence work is (or at least involves) therapy, and Extract 2 arguing the opposite. However, things are not so simple, in that the extracts also invoke different criteria for applying the term 'therapy'. The authors of

Extract 2 conclude reminiscence work is not 'therapeutic', even though it may be "*enjoyable*", because it does not lead to changes in the objective measures discussed. On the other hand, Jane argues in Extract 1 that group reminiscence is therapeutic precisely because it is enjoyable.

To complicate things further, consider Extract 3. This is taken from a conversation with Lucy, a museum worker involved in conducting reminiscence groups for older people, recorded at a recent conference devoted to reminiscence work.

Extract 3

Lucy: I suppose the way it tends to be more in museums and art galleries now is that/ a lot of the work I'm doing is like for straight pleasure/ you know/ whereas- whereas it seems to me very often people in a social work setting have always a high agenda for therapeutic-/ sometimes pleasure and fun gets lost along the way

In some respects, the speaker in this extract takes a similar position to the authors of Extract 2, in that she draws a distinction between "*therapeutic*" and "*straight pleasure*". However, there is here the further suggestion that the two might be not just distinct, but also mutually exclusive ("*sometimes pleasure and fun gets lost along the way*"). This formulation can be contrasted with Extract 1, in which 'enjoyment' and 'therapy' are treated as entirely congruent.

The complication here is that although Lucy is a practitioner of reminiscence work, her position is closer to the critical position of Extract 2, and is potentially antithetical to that of the practitioner speaking in Extract 1. While Jane appears to have no problem with using the term 'therapy' to describe her work, Lucy appears to be resisting such a

description by means of a formulation which directly contradicts Jane's position, in which 'therapy' and 'pleasure' are potentially antithetical. This difference is more than a matter of personal preference. It can be seen as a consequence of the different ways in which the words 'therapy' and 'therapeutic' are commonly used.

Jane's use of the word 'therapy' in Extract 1 can be read as an 'everyday' usage of the term, by which any activity which has beneficial consequences for the physical or psychological well-being of the person engaging in it - a game of squash, perhaps, or a heart-to-heart talk with a friend - may be described as 'therapeutic'. In Extracts 2 and 3, on the other hand, "*therapeutic*" can be read as being used in a more 'technical' sense. In Extract 2, it is used to signify the presence of certain objectively measureable effects. In Extract 3, it is associated with "*a social work setting*". Both these examples locate the word as part of 'professional' discourse, as it might be used by people such as social workers and psychologists when going about their work.

Such different uses, then, belong to different spheres of activity. Whereas Jane's usage can be related to the doings of everyday life, the usage in Extracts 2 and 3 is part of, and invokes, a more specialised and circumscribed set of practices. The word 'therapy' has currency in both sets of practices. This dual currency leads to certain problems in describing reminiscence work as 'therapy', or 'therapeutic'. Such work is generally not considered to constitute professional practice. Practitioners are, for the most part, relatively unskilled and unqualified, at least in formal terms. However, the practice of reminiscence work in care settings brings it into close contact with professional practice and its associated discourse, with

the result that a particular description of reminiscence work as 'therapy' in the 'everyday' sense risks being reinterpreted in professional terms.

This reinterpretation has a number of potential consequences for reminiscence work. One possibility is that professionals will be moved to deny the validity of the description, as in Extract 2. Another possible consequence of this reinterpretation is that it opens up the possibility of the 'professionalisation' of reminiscence work. Both these consequences set up problems for reminiscence work, as will become apparent in the following discussion. The problem of the denial of 'therapeutic' status will be considered later. First, we will consider the potential professionalisation of reminiscence work implied by the term 'therapy', and the way this is orientated to in the discourse of proponents and practitioners of reminiscence work.

'Therapy' as a token of professional discourse

The implied resistance to using the term 'therapy' shown by Lucy in Extract 3 is much more explicit in other data. Extract 4 is taken from an interview with John, a regional administrator, whose tasks include supervising the provision of resources for reminiscence work, and lecturing on reminiscence to care workers.

Extract 4

John: certainly I find when I do talks to care assistants/ they get frightened when you say go and do reminiscence therapy/ but if you say to them well look/ there are a load of resources here which can encourage people to get talking about their past/ and these are some techniques you can use in setting a group up/ these are some things you need to look out for while you're running the group but you can actually do it/ if you put it into the er/ mystique of therapy then you're destroying it-/ people's potential confidence

It is clear that John is not primarily concerned in this extract with the validity of describing reminiscence work as therapy. Rather, he is concerned with the practical consequences of such a description. In his terms, if reminiscence work is described as 'therapy', potential practitioners *"get frightened"*, and *"you're destroying... people's potential confidence"*. *"Therapy"* here is treated as part of a professional discourse. The *"mystique of therapy"* can be interpreted as the expert knowledge and skill associated with the professional practice of therapy. Potential practitioners, who tend to occupy the lower levels of the institutional hierarchy, would not be party to such knowledge and skill, and are intimidated by the suggestion that they might have to engage in practices which require it. Thus (the argument goes) in order to ensure the involvement of these potential practitioners, it is important that reminiscence work be described in other terms, so that they feel they can *"actually do it"*.

A similar argument is advanced in Extract 5, taken from an interview with Anne, who runs reminiscence groups for older people attending a psychiatric day hospital. Anne is replying to the question 'Do you see reminiscence as a form of therapy?'

Extract 5

Anne: I think you've got to be careful with the word therapy because then it/ becomes something very special/ a:nd/ only qualified people can do it and you sort of get into that sort of/ area/ I think the most people with a short amount of training can run reminiscence groups/ erm to an extent you could argue you dont need any training at all/ I think you have- to an extent you have to know how to run groups how to get groups going/ erm/ but I think the- the danger is to make it a specialised- something very special only

certain people can do it/ you know I mean if part three's [care workers in homes for the elderly] - they can have- y'know do reminiscence anybody can in that sort of situation/ but I certainly think it's got a value as a/ as a form of therapy I just think you've gotta be careful when you start saying () its a therapy/ y'know/ sort of people back off and they become afraid of it/ and you know that's one thing that worries me

Here again we see a concern with practical consequences of using "*the word therapy*". Towards the end of the extract, Anne uses the same argument as John in Extract 4: that potential practitioners find the word 'therapy' intimidating ("*when you start saying (...) its a therapy/ y'know/ sort of people back off and they become afraid of it*"). However, earlier in the extract, she uses a slightly different argument, suggesting that if reminiscence work was called 'therapy', this in itself would make it "*something very special*" so that "*only qualified people can do it*".

In these extracts then, the issue is the consequences of different descriptive practices, rather than the nature of reminiscence work itself.

Reminiscence work may or may not be therapy - Anne suggests it may be ("*I certainly think it's got a value as a/ as a form of therapy*") - but the concern is with the detrimental consequences which might follow from such a description. A similar concern is evident in recent writing about reminiscence work. Extract 6 is taken from a recent conference paper by a prominent proponent of reminiscence work.

Extract 6

One of the strengths of reminiscence work with older people is its openness in terms of process and skill base [...] By avoiding the label therapy we can continue to enjoy the advantages of working flexibly and in a variety of settings. (Bornat, 1989b: 20).

Again, the 'therapy' label is presented as potentially restricting the practice of reminiscence work, of closing off its "*openness in terms of process and skill base*". The word "*openness*" here can be contrasted with the reference to the "*mystique of therapy*" in Extract 6. Whereas therapy is cloaked in a mystique impenetrable to potential practitioners, reminiscence work is 'open' to them, both in terms of its "*process*", and in terms of the variety of skills which it can accommodate. Moreover, here this "*openness*" is represented as an important characteristic of reminiscence work, as one of its "*strengths*".

In Extracts 4, 5 and 6, there is a contrast with the use of label 'therapy' noted in the previous section. Although the label has been used widely to describe reminiscence work, in these extracts its use is explicitly resisted. This resistance has its basis in reading 'therapy' as a token of professional discourse. Read this way, the label 'therapy' has the effect of locating reminiscence work as part of professional practice, with potentially undesirable consequences. These consequences are formulated here in terms of the exclusion of the very people (non-professional care workers) who are most likely to practice reminiscence work. But there is more to this than ensuring a supply of suitable practitioners. There is a more fundamental issue of **accessibility**, represented by the use of terms such as "*mystique*" and "*openness*". This aversion to using the 'therapy' label can be understood in terms of a resistance to formulating the nature of reminiscence work in terms of professional discourse, and thus preserving its accessibility. Considered in this way, it can be seen as one of a range of examples of such resistance to be found in practitioners' discourse.

Resisting professional discourse

Extract 7 is taken from the transcript of a workshop session at a recent conference devoted to reminiscence work. In the session, a group of conference participants (care workers, museum workers, myself and another academic, and others) were given the task of formulating a detailed plan for setting up and running a reminiscence group with a life span of six weeks. In the extract, the participants are suggesting possible aims or desired outcomes for the reminiscence sessions. Ruth and Kevin (myself) are university academics; the other speakers are care workers who work with older people. I had been assigned the job of recording the details of the plan for reporting to a plenary session. The discussion in the extract is focussed on exactly what I should write down as the aims of the group.

Extract 7

Ruth: how about identity/ how about identity erm/
identity erm/ raising something like that
[
Joy: getting to know everybody// better
[
Lynn: getting/ to know/ each other/ better
((said slowly and deliberately))
Liz: yeah
Sue: ()
[
Lynn: in plain english
Kevin: okay/ okay let's put increased self esteem
Jill: yeah but you also haven't got that bit help
them communicate (with each other better)
()
[
Kevin: okay I'll put that too/ okay/ helps=
[
Lynn: ()

Lynn: =talking/ to/ each other/ more ((said slowly and deliberately))

((some care workers laugh))

Kevin: okay

The extract begins with Ruth suggesting a possible aim of the sessions as *"identity... raising"*. Joy, a care worker, interrupts this suggestion with another: *"getting to know everybody better"*. This in turn is echoed and slightly reformulated by Lynn, another care worker: *"getting to know each other better"*. This last contribution is delivered slowly and emphatically. Liz, a third care worker agrees, and then Lynn follows up her suggestion with *"in plain english"*. Lynn's contributions up to this point are clearly oriented to Ruth's suggestion at the start of the extract. Lynn's formulation of her own suggestion as *"plain english"* accomplishes a number of things. It constructs Ruth's suggestion as being something other than *"plain english"*. In doing this, it serves as a negative evaluation of Ruth's suggestion, the implied contrast with 'plainness' being, at the very least, a lack of clarity, perhaps even deliberate obfuscation. In addition, it invokes a generic way of speaking (plain english), and by implication, locates Ruth's formulation within a different mode of discourse.

The slow and emphatic rendition of Lynn's first turn works to further construct its 'plainness', as a no-nonsense, truth-of-the-matter statement. She uses the same device later in the extract, in suggesting another objective of the reminiscence sessions: *"talking to each other more"*. This appears to be a response to (and reformulation of) the contribution from Jill, another care worker: *"help them communicate (with each other*

better)". In this latter case, Lynn's turn is followed by laughter from other care workers, which can be taken as signifying recognition of the work she is doing here.

The analytical point here is that Ruth's contribution "*identity... raising*" can be seen as an example of professional discourse. Such a description is warranted in part by the speaker's status as a university academic, and by the words themselves, as a plausible (if rather incoherent) example of the way the aims of a reminiscence group might be formulated in a professional context. However, a stronger warrant is provided in the extract itself, in the way Ruth's contribution is orientated to by Lynn as another 'way of speaking', and one which is not "*plain*". The formulation of a lack of 'plainness' can be related to the invocation of the 'mystique' of therapy in Extract 4, and both can be related to the inaccessibility to the layperson of professional knowledge, professional talk, and professional skills.

A similar orientation to professional discourse on the part of practitioners is apparent in Extract 8. This is taken from the same source as Extract 3, an incidental conversation with Lucy, a museum worker, which took place as the workshop discussion broke up. Immediately prior to the extract, I had mentioned that I was interested in how people talk about reminiscence.

Extract 8

Lucy: its a very new thing you see so in fact/ lots of people are doing things and they're all doing it differently too/ and its very interesting to me cos I'm from a different sort of background/ that a lot of the sort of social work jargon seems to creep in a lot of the time/ now you see to me I- I- to me its so unusual I-

Kevin: where are you from then/ what are you doing

Lucy: I'm from the sort of/ museums education that sort of background so/ things- when people start talking about increasing () awareness ()/ and my- the way that we- the phrases I would use are very very different

Again, in this extract, the speaker draws a distinction between different ways of speaking about reminiscence work. Here, the distinction is between *"sort of social work jargon"* and the way Lucy herself would talk about it (*"the phrases I would use are very very different"*). The term *"social work jargon"* can be read as a reference to professional discourse. Moreover, the derogatory term *"jargon"* reads as a negative evaluation of such discourse. In addition, Lucy's repetitive use of the word *"very"* serves to heighten the distinction being made, maximising the difference between her own *"phrases"* and those which are *"jargon"*. The work being done with the term *"jargon"* here is similar to that being done with *"plain english"* in Extract 7. Both work to construe professional discourse, not just as specialist language, but also as gratuitous mystification. By these means, Lucy is displaying her resistance to describing reminiscence work in terms of professional discourse.

These examples suggest that resistance to using the term 'therapy' in relation to reminiscence work is part of a more general resistance to formulating reminiscence work in terms of professional discourse. What exactly is being accomplished through these various instances of resistance? One way of accounting for this resistance is in terms of the **social relations** constituted by professional discourse.

A common theme in these examples is the mystification of non-professionals engendered by professional ways of speaking. Such ways of speaking signify the restricted and specialised knowledge of professional

practice, which non-professionals are not party to, hence the mystification. Along with this asymmetry of knowledge comes an asymmetry of status. To speak as a professional is to create the conditions for this asymmetry of status, to position other parties to the interaction as either 'fellow professionals', or 'non-professionals'. This is so even when the speaker has no other warrant for her professional status. Thus, a 'non-professional' speaking in this way might be regarded as invoking an asymmetry of social relations which is unwarranted, that is, as 'pretentious' or 'getting on his/her high horse'. Even when the speaker's professional status is taken as warranted, there is always the possibility of resisting the status and identity implications of such talk, by talking in such a way as to construct a different set of identity implications.

The actions of Lynn in Extract 5 can be seen as an example of such a move. The implicit formulation of Ruth's contribution as not being "*plain english*" invokes a different set of identity implications. Ruth's action is reconstructed as one of gratuitous mystification. Lynn's identity is constructed in positive terms, as straightforward and honest, while Ruth is recast as devious and pretentious. A further point here is that the invocation of "*plain english*" is specifically orientated to the construction of symmetrical social relations, as a discourse of equals, which is accessible to all. As such, its invocation is ideally suited to resist the asymmetry of social relations engendered by professional discourse.

The data examined show clearly the extent to which participants are oriented to the constitutive power of particular ways of speaking. In these data, what is at stake is not merely reaching a consensus on an appropriate description for reminiscence work. Different descriptions have different consequences; they work to constitute reminiscence work in different

ways, according to the interests and perspectives of the different parties to the debate. The descriptive practices of practitioners, particularly their resistance to formulating reminiscence work in terms of professional discourse, are oriented to the constitution of certain kinds of social relations. In this regard, they are congruent with explicit representations of the social relations of reminiscence work commonly encountered in the talk and writing of proponents and practitioners.

Representing the social relations of reminiscence work

That reminiscence work is centrally concerned with the social relations of ageing has already been argued in previous chapters. This concern also extends to the social relations of care practice and care provision. One way in which this concern is manifested is through formulations of reminiscence as an 'ordinary' activity. It is common in accounts of reminiscence work to find references to the 'ordinariness' of reminiscence, as an activity that we all engage in, know about, are familiar with, and so on. As an example of this, Extract 9 is taken from a conference paper written by Andrew Norris, a clinical psychologist and prominent supporter of reminiscence work.

Extract 9

Perhaps one of the most important features of reminiscence work is its immediate appeal. Unlike other techniques, approaches or models such as reality orientation, which are designed to facilitate communication with older people, reminiscence as a phenomenon is something which both elderly people and those who care for them can naturally and intuitively relate to from their own experience. (Norris, 1989: 26)

In this extract, reminiscence work is represented as having "*immediate appeal*", as something which both carers and cared-for alike can "*naturally*

and intuitively relate to". This "appeal" is accounted for in terms of practitioner's and participants' "own experience" of reminiscence, as a commonplace of everyday life; it arises from the fact that both are seen to have common knowledge and experience of the activity they are engaged in. This "appeal" is further represented as "one of the most important features of reminiscence work", and a contrast is made with other approaches which are not so easy to relate to.

This formulation of reminiscence as an ordinary, everyday activity, and this as one its important features, is echoed in a number of other accounts of reminiscence work (eg: Bornat, 1989b; Gibson, 1989). Indeed, this position is implicit in many of the data extracts discussed so far in this chapter. In Extracts 4 and 5, for example, part of the grounds offered for avoiding the term 'therapy' is that it leads potential practitioners assume they do not have the required knowledge and skill to do reminiscence work, whereas in fact they do (Extract 4: *"but you can actually do it"*; Extract 5: *"if part threes [care workers in homes for the elderly] - they can have- y'know do reminiscence anybody can"*).

Extract 9, like these earlier examples, is also produced in the context of discussing reminiscence work as 'therapy', in this case as a prelude to Norris's discussion of the pros and cons of using the term. In this case, however, reminiscence work is represented as being accessible, not only to potential practitioners, but also to the older people who participate in it. In terms of knowledge of the process they are engaged in, both practitioners and older participants are on an equal footing. This extract represents reminiscence work as being a fundamentally egalitarian activity, in virtue of this commonality of knowledge and experience.

The resistance to the forms of professional discourse noted earlier can be seen as one means by which the 'ordinariness' of reminiscence work is constituted, thus preserving its potentially egalitarian nature. To call reminiscence work 'therapy', or to formulate its nature or benefits in other terms of professional discourse, is to eclipse this ordinariness and so invoke a different set of social relations, those of professional practice. This not only alienates practitioners, but also potentially alienates the older people they work with, by threatening to fracture the link of shared knowledge and experience of the 'ordinary' activity they are engaged in together.

Further evidence for this argument can be found in accounts of reminiscence work which make explicit claims regarding its effect on the social relations of care. It is common to find accounts which stress the democratising potential of reminiscence work in care contexts; in which it is presented as involving, or indeed bringing about, an egalitarian relationship between care workers and 'clients', or even a reversal of status relations. Extracts 10, 11 and 12 present examples of this type of account.

Extract 10

REMINISCENCE REVERSES THE GIFT RELATIONSHIP.

Those who have lived history are its best teachers. Older people are its custodians and its authorities. Involvement in reminiscence along with younger people moves those authorities from the sidelines to the centre stage, giving them an importance and significance lacking in most 'care' institutions. Conventional relationships are turned upside down. The staff become the recipients. The older people the givers. (Gibson, 1989: 11)

Extract 11

Perhaps in 'Reminiscence Therapy' the therapists are really the old people themselves and so reminiscence truly becomes a new therapy for old therapists. (Norris, 1981: 5)

Extract 12

Linda: I suppose one of the other things about reminiscence that I haven't said is that/ for us as workers it's interesting I think it's interesting for us/ to encourage people to talk about things they used to remember cos that's something where we don't have the expertise we may have the expertise in getting it out of people/ but we don't know the information/ we don't- we didn't live then/ so we don't/ we're not erm/ well we may become aware of it because we may have heard it many times from people/ but that's n- it's always new when it comes from a new person/ there's a new slant on/ I don't know/ what somebody did as a job many years ago or how they organised their domestic life or what it was like to be one of thirteen kids those kind of things that people tell you/ then that is fascinating and I think that's good that you can show that you-/ something that you don't know/ and that gets you out of being in the role of the expert/ and the one who has to- who knows everything and is always telling people what to do next

Extract 10 presents a formulation of the value of reminiscence which is recognisable as the 'sociological' repertoire identified in Chapter 4. Older people are represented as "*teachers*", "*custodians*" and "*authorities*" of "*history*", and thus through reminiscence can move "*from the sidelines to the centre stage*". This formulation, however, is then related to the specific context of "'*care*' institutions". Reminiscence work is represented as reversing the "*conventional relationships*" of carer and cared-for, imbuing older people with "*importance and significance*" by allowing them to give rather than receive. Extract 11 is taken from a paper discussing the value of reminiscence, written by a prominent supporter of reminiscence work. His wordplay has the effect of blurring the roles of therapy, levelling status and expertise.

Extract 12 is taken from an interview with Linda, who runs reminiscence groups for confused older people. Here again, reminiscence is represented as involving a reversal of the social relations of care, in virtue of the knowledge older people have of the past. This reversal is represented as desirable for carers as well as for their charges: *"it's interesting for us/ to encourage people to talk about things they used to remember cos that's something where we don't have the expertise"; "I think that's good that you can show that you-/ something that you dont know/ and that gets you out of being in the role of the expert"*.

Extracts 10 and 12 represent existing care relationships as involving asymmetrical status relations, with the older person in an inferior position with respect to the carer (*"giving them an importance and significance lacking in most 'care' institutions"; "the role of the expert/ and the one who has to- who knows everything and is always telling people what to do next"*). All three extracts represent reminiscence as means of reversing these status relations. In these examples then, we see formulated a set of status relations opposite to those constituted by professional discourse. Reminiscence work as formulated here is characterised by the expertise of the older participants, rather than that of the care worker or therapist. These formulations of the nature of reminiscence work are in conflict with formulations of 'therapy' as professional practice, insofar as they represent a subversion of the conventional professional-client relationship. Resisting professional discourse is one way of preserving this claimed potential for transforming existing relationships, by distancing reminiscence work from claims to special knowledge or expertise. In this sense, the discursive practices through which this

resistance is done can be seen as an integral part of the enterprise to change the social relations of care provision for older people.

As a contrast to the previous three extracts, all produced by practitioners and proponents of reminiscence work, consider Extract 13, produced by a professional therapist. This extract is taken from an interview with Brian, a practising clinical psychologist. At the start of the extract, Brian is talking about the benefits of reminiscence work for older people in care.

Extract 13

Brian [...] it might be a way of actually instrumentally altering attitudes and perspectives of erm/ carers so it may have some use in that sense/ not necessarily erm/ beneficial in conveying like an expert or er an oracle or an old wise kind of perspective/ that kind of value I don't think is conveyed/ but the value that someone actually has a background a history and if they can actually enrich that history by discussing roles they have in work or animals pets and relationships and experiences might make them a different/ kind of person/ their memories may actually come alive and they become er/ biographised in a sense/ so I think its valuable from that point of view if that particular propensity for narrow stereotyping exists

This extract begins with Brian discussing the potential effect of reminiscence work on care relationships, formulated in terms of *"altering attitudes and perspectives of erm/ carers"*. However, following this, he explicitly rejects a formulation of such social-relational change in terms of a reversal of status relations (*"not necessarily erm/ beneficial in conveying like an expert or er an oracle or an old wise kind of perspective"*). Instead, he formulates the change in terms of becoming aware of someone's *"background"* and *"history"*, which is in turn encapsulated in the term *"biographised"*.

The use of the term "*biographised*" is of particular interest here. First, it works to individualise what is essentially a social-relational change. That is, rather than constructing this change in terms of other people's knowledge about the reminiscer's life, it works to construct it as a change in the person herself - she becomes "*biographised*". This formulation has the effect of de-emphasising the social-relational aspects of such a change. It is instructive to compare this formulation with P3s "*getting to know each other better*" in Extract 4, which could be seen as referring to a similar process, but which emphasises its relational aspects. In addition, it can be read as the 'plain english' equivalent of 'biographisation', with the latter serving as a prime example of 'jargon' (it is almost certainly a neologism).

There is a marked contrast between this extract and the previous three extracts. The consequence of this de-emphasis of social-relational change is to make this formulation much less subversive for 'conventional relationships', in that status differences between care worker and client are maintained. In this sense, the speaker's status as a professional therapist is also not subverted. Just as the examples of practitioners' discourse can be seen as being oriented to the constitution of egalitarian social relations, so can this extract be read as oriented to the constitution of the social relations of professional practice. In particular, Brian's neologistic formulation of 'biographisation' has the double function of both constituting his status and at the same time resisting its potential subversion.

The 'individualisation' of the potential benefits of reminiscence work, and its consequent de-emphasis of social-relational change, is also apparent in Extract 14. This is the same quote which was presented in Extract 2. The

authors are practising clinical psychologists, in this case writing in their professional journal.

Extract 14

It is possible to make a case for reminiscence as an enjoyable pastime which may lead to positive changes in communication and social behaviour among both normal and confused elderly persons. The most positive effects on the elderly person may result from the greater knowledge and understanding of their individual experience on the part of staff members involved in reminiscence groups. These are important goals and Bender et al (1983) discuss reasons for the usefulness of such groups in residential settings. Nevertheless, the role of reminiscence as a therapeutic tool is doubtful, and it seems that at least as far as the normal and confused elderly are concerned, it is best regarded as a diversionary activity. (Thornton and Brotchie, 1987:101, emphasis in original).

It was noted earlier that the criteria used for designating reminiscence work 'therapy' in the paper from which this extract is taken are measures of individual change. In this extract, potential changes in social relations, although construed as *"important goals"*, are nonetheless treated as secondary, in the sense that they do not raise the status of reminiscence work beyond that of a *"diversionary activity"*. Moreover, even these changes are formulated in individualistic terms, as changes in behaviour, and as effects on the individual: *"changes in communication and social behaviour"*; *"The most positive effects on the elderly person may result from the greater knowledge and understanding of their individual experience on the part of staff members"*.

Extracts 13 and 14 demonstrate that professionals (in this case clinical psychologists), in the course of going about their business, and in constituting their identity as 'professionals', produce formulations of the nature and benefits of reminiscence work whose social-relational

implications are at odds with those produced by practitioners and proponents of reminiscence work. This is not to say that professionals always produce one kind of formulation, and practitioners another. It is rather to point out that there is a tendency to produce one rather than the other, for the reason that these formulations are constitutive of the practices they describe, and constitutive of the identities of those who formulate them. A professional who does not talk and act like a professional is likely to be treated as deviant, eccentric, or even unprofessional by colleagues, and a whole range of sanctions exist, from informal conversational acts through to formal disciplinary measures, by which such behaviour is distinguished as non-professional, and by which the boundaries of professional practice are continually formulated.

The pattern of resistance to, and espousal of, particular discursive formulations of reminiscence work noted in the foregoing analysis can be related to the differential preference for the 'psychological' and 'sociological' repertoires of reminiscence-and-ageing discussed in Chapter 4. While the 'psychological' repertoire can be seen as working to preserve the social relations of professional practice, the 'sociological' repertoire can be seen as potentially subversive with respect to these relations, in that it is oriented to the possibilities of social relational change. Thus, the differential preference for formulations of reminiscence-and-ageing, and for formulations of the nature of reminiscence work, can be located as part of the same set of discursive practices, oriented to the constitution of particular kinds of social relations.

However, there is one aspect of the data which merits further consideration, in that it appears to contradict the above argument. This is the fact that, while practitioners can be seen to be resisting the use of the

term 'therapy' in describing their work, it is not always seen as problematic. Indeed, as was noted earlier, it can be seen as articulating a feeling that reminiscence work offers special benefits to older people, something more than other social or group activities. At the same time, it has the effect of conferring a certain status on reminiscence work, as an identifiable arena of practice. Both these consequences are desirable, and this points up a dilemma for practitioners and proponents of reminiscence work.

Dilemmas of professional discourse

The move to distance reminiscence work from the 'mystique' of therapy, and to constitute it as an 'ordinary' activity, can at the same time function to undermine its legitimacy as an arena of care practice. If reminiscence work involves merely an ordinary, everyday process, on what grounds can it justify its existence as an arena of practice? The consequences of this move can be seen in Extract 14, presented earlier. There, in denying reminiscence work the status of 'therapy', the authors represent it as a "*pastime*" and a "*diversionary activity*". Such descriptions imply a status similar to bingo, card games, sing songs and so on, and are hardly likely to attract scarce resources for materials, development and training. Extract 15, taken from an interview with a practising clinical psychologist, presents a similar argument.

Extract 15

Brian: got to see things for what they really are/ if
 reminiscence therapy is a device for entertaining
 people you might as well be explicit about it/ destroy
 the mysticism mystique surrounding it/ the exclusivity
 surrounding it/ or the arrogance surrounding it/ there
 may be other ways of entertaining people than er
 constantly looking at er pictures of er some city as it

was fifty years ago or what happened in the war maybe
other ways

This extract is interesting in that, like Extract 6 presented earlier, it expresses a reluctance to designate reminiscence as therapy, and also refers to the need to avoid the "*mystique*" associated with the term. However, the work being done is quite different. Whereas Extract 6 is presenting a strategy for the continuation of practice, this extract is implicitly arguing for its discontinuation. First, reminiscence work is represented as "*a device for entertaining people*", and thus a fairly low status activity, again on a par with card games or bingo. Following this, it is negatively evaluated even as entertainment, as "*constantly looking at er pictures of er some city as it was fifty years ago or what happened in the war*" – hardly an entertaining prospect, especially if done "*constantly*". The phrase "*there may be other ways*" carries the implication that there may be better ways of entertaining people, which might usefully displace reminiscence work. This extract, then, does more than simply deny reminiscence work therapeutic status; it appears to deny it has any value at all.

The critical position taken in Extracts 14 and 15 seems particularly extreme. Again, reminiscence work here seems to be the victim of rhetorical work orientated to marking the boundaries of professional practice. The extremity of this position may be a consequence of the threat that the designation of an 'ordinary' activity as 'therapy' poses to the speaker's/authors' own claims to therapeutic expertise. However, coming from a professional source, such critiques are also authoritative, and may have a substantial influence on decisions to allocate resources for the practice and development of reminiscence work.¹

¹In respect of this, it is worth noting the currently fragile status of reminiscence work as an arena of care practice. Little (1991) points out that, in the recently formulated

One way proponents and practitioners deal with this problem is to 'hedge their bets' when representing reminiscence work as 'therapy'. For example, in Extract 7 presented earlier, Anne manages to assert that reminiscence work "*has a value as a form of therapy*", while at the same time arguing it should not be designated a therapy. Other examples of this strategy are presented in Extracts 16 and 17, taken from a Help the Aged training manual, 'Using Reminiscence'.

Extract 16

Reminiscence can be pitched at different levels of sophistication depending on the competence and confidence of those involved.... What may begin for some workers as a largely nostalgic 'trip down memory lane' or 'good old days activity' may become a much more intense 'therapeutic' type of personal and group experience. (Gibson, 1989: 13)

Extract 17

When participation in reminiscence groups provides a release from boredom, a change of routine, a warm exchange with staff and peers, as well as an opportunity to view and talk about interesting pictures, artefacts and memorabilia, it is indeed therapeutic. To call it such in no way diminishes its importance to the participant nor undervalues their full and active contribution to this richly rewarding process. (Gibson, 1989: 1)

In Extract 16, the dilemma is handled by distinguishing between "*different levels of sophistication*" of reminiscence practice. This move acknowledges that reminiscence may be merely entertainment, but also allows it to be something "'therapeutic'". Even here though, the scare quotes, and the word "*type*" work to potentially distance reminiscence

National Vocational Qualifications related to the training of care workers, 'reminiscence skills' are not considered to be part of care workers' 'core skills'. He argues that as a result "reminiscence could disappear from the training and practice vocabulary of social carers".

from the status of a fully fledged therapy. Extract 17 claims unequivocally that reminiscence can be *"therapeutic"*, but then moves to deny the presence of inegalitarian social relations implied by this claim (*"To call it such in no way ... undervalues their full and active contribution to this richly rewarding process"*).

In these extracts, proponents and practitioners of reminiscence work can be seen to be grappling with a dilemma. One (perhaps the main) strategy available to them for representing reminiscence work as having special benefits for older people, and thus justifying the existence of reminiscence work as an arena of care practice, is to mobilise terms such as 'therapy' and 'therapeutic'. At the same time, their discourse shows an orientation to these terms as problematic, and this orientation can be seen as arising from their social relational implications. This dilemma, then, can be seen as arising from a conflicting orientation to professional discourse; in resisting professional discourse, they also risk eschewing the legitimisation afforded by that discourse.

It is the opposition between these two positions which structures the debate about the nature and status of reminiscence work. This debate is not simply a matter of evidence, but is a matter of discursive practices which close off or open up possibilities for social-relational change. The problem of the discrepancy between 'anecdotal' and 'hard' evidence can itself be understood in terms of the conflicts and oppositions between these different discursive practices. This problem can be cast as involving different criteria of evidence associated with professional and non-professional discourse. 'Hard' evidence is the product of professional expertise, and couched in professional discourse. 'Anecdotal' reports are the everyday observations of practitioners, who offer accounts of their

work in their own terms, based on their own experience. The resistance to professional discourse demonstrated above is in part a consequence of the authority invested in it. Ironically, however, it is this same authority which privileges hard evidence over anecdotal evidence, and which thus pronounces on the legitimacy of reminiscence work as an arena of practice. Just as claims for the ordinariness of reminiscence work threaten to undermine its legitimacy as an arena of practice, so too do the informal observations of practitioners fall short of conferring this legitimacy. Thus, practitioners find themselves beholden to an evaluative agenda which is not their own.

Concluding comments

The foregoing analysis demonstrates discursive practices similar to those discussed in Chapters 4 and 5. That is, it has shown how discursive formulations of reminiscence work produced by practitioners and proponents can be located as part of arguments concerning the position of older people in their relations with others, in care settings and in the wider community. These practices are one means by which the social-relational concerns of anti-ageism, and the empowerment of older people and other marginalised groups, central to community-based reminiscence work (eg: Lawrence and Mace, 1987; Bornat, 1989a, 1989b), are also pursued in care settings. In the context of care provision, however, reminiscence work comes into contact with professional practice, which is potentially incompatible with these egalitarian aims.

Thus, the debate about the value of reminiscence work can be seen as one about the social relations of ageing and of care practice. The problem of evidence is subordinate to this issue, in that it is itself based on the differential authority of different kinds of evidence, and is thus another

instance of the differential authority of professional and everyday discourse (eg: Mehan, 1983; Silverman, 1987). The risk in the present debate is that this authority will prevail, and reminiscence work (at least in care settings) will be marginalised and under-resourced. However, as the foregoing analysis has made clear, to simply dismiss reminiscence work as a 'diversionary activity' on the basis of a lack of 'hard evidence' is to ignore the different agendas of proponents and critics. The discourse analytic perspective taken here relativises this authoritative dismissal, locating it as part of an argument through which the nature and status of reminiscence work is constituted. Taking account of these different agendas must of necessity involve taking a different perspective on the question of evaluation and research. One consequence of this is to direct attention to the practitioners' perspective, and to consider how this might be incorporated into the research agenda.

Current research can be seen as failing to do this in a number of respects. First, particularly when concerned with 'therapeutic' benefits, it has tended to focus on individual change, rather than social-relational change. More fundamentally, as argued in Chapter 3, it has tended to rely on measures which are removed from the communicative context of reminiscence work, and which fail to address the talk in reminiscence groups as discursive action.

The necessity of a discourse analytic approach to studying reminiscence work has already been argued for in Chapter 3. We are now in a position to bolster this programmatic argument with insights derived from the above analyses. First, in enabling the study of the talk in reminiscence groups *in situ*, a discourse analytic approach comes closer to a 'practitioner's (and participant's) eye view' of what is going on. At the

same time, it is eminently suited to investigating the social relational issues highlighted in this chapter and in Chapters 4 and 5. This is so in that talk is a fundamental medium for the situated construction of identity and social relations (Goffman, 1981; Maynard and Zimmerman, 1984; Harré, 1986; Drew, 1987; Goodwin, 1987; Wetherell and Potter, 1989; Wooffitt, 1992). It is through talk that stereotypic identities are invoked or disconfirmed, such as those related to chronological age (eg: Coupland, Coupland and Grainger, 1991). It is in talk that the shifting dynamic of power and status relations unfolds, as interlocutors are positioned in relation to each other as 'care workers', 'friends', 'old/young people', 'patients', 'teachers', and so on.

The next two chapters will attempt to capture some of the richness of reminiscence work as an arena of discursive action, through an analysis of talk in reminiscence groups. The primary focus of this analysis will be on social relational issues such as identity, membership, and status relations. In adopting such a focus, it will consider the extent to which reminiscence groups function as arenas of social-relational change, and bring to light some of the benefits and problems associated with such attempts to transform the social relations of ageing and care practice.

Chapter 7

Talk, Identity and Membership in Reminiscence Groups

Many of the claims made regarding the benefits of reminiscence groups coalesce around issues of identity and social relationships. Participation in reminiscence groups is claimed to have positive consequences for the identity of older people who participate, and for relations between older participants, and between older participants and care workers (eg: Norris and Abu El Eileh, 1982; Bornat, 1989b; Gibson, 1989). This chapter is intended to address such claims. Talk from reminiscence groups in a variety of care settings will be examined. The principal analytic concern will be the ways in which talk about the past in such groups can serve as resource for the constitution of particular identities and social relations in the present.

As argued in Chapter 3, the discourse analytic approach adopted here offers resources which can be brought to bear in studying what goes on within reminiscence groups, rather than limiting investigation to consideration of changes in psychological measures as a result of participation. In addition, it offers a means of explicating the actions accomplished in and through talk itself, and thus takes us beyond relatively crude observational measures of behaviour or engagement used in other studies (Hobbs, 1983; McKiernan and Bender, 1990) into a detailed analysis of the rhetorical work being done as care workers and older people talk together.

The focus of this analysis will follow from the arguments developed in the preceding chapters. That is, it will address itself primarily to issues of

social relations and identity. The analytic orientation taken here takes 'identity' and 'social relations' as inevitably interdependent, as two sides of the same coin. Identity is seen as an interactional and discursive accomplishment, occasioned by and emerging within the pragmatics of communication and interaction (Goffman, 1981; Maynard and Zimmerman, 1984; Harré, 1986; Drew, 1987; Goodwin, 1987; Wetherell and Potter, 1989; Wooffitt, 1992). It is thus an essentially relational phenomenon. The interest here then is in how different identities and social relations are negotiated, constituted and displayed in the talk.

The groups

The data examined for this chapter consists of extracts from transcripts of audio-recordings of reminiscence sessions involving three different groups in three different care settings. Each of these groups is described briefly below (see Appendix I for information related to the selection of the groups).

The Hospital group

This group was based in a geriatric day hospital attached to a large general hospital in the Midlands. The participants attended the day hospital for various medical treatments and checkups, but also for a cooked lunch and social contact, as many were disabled by their medical problems and were considered to be experiencing some degree of social isolation as a result. Among the activities provided was a group discussion which was largely reminiscence based. This took place weekly in a 'group room'. The size of this group varied according to attendance at the hospital, but during the period of data collection, there was a core membership of six older people, with between eight and ten members in any one session. Ten sessions were recorded with this group.

The Daycentre group

This group was based in a day centre in an inner city area in the Midlands, run by a charity for older people. Here, the main concern was to provide some degree of social contact to physically frail older people, again with the provision of a cooked lunch. The care workers in the centre provided their clients with a range of group activities, including the occasional reminiscence session. In this case, the composition of the group was more static, with seven regular participants, plus the occasional visitor. Three sessions were recorded with this group.

The Residential group

This group was based in a residential home in County Antrim, Northern Ireland. They were not contacted directly. The transcripts were produced from videotapes of four reminiscence sessions conducted in the home under the guidance of Faith Gibson, with the purpose of producing an edited video to accompany a reminiscence training package (Gibson, 1989).¹ The same eight older people participated in all four sessions. All had been resident in the home for some years.

Reminiscence as 'experience narrative'

The analysis will focus initially on the production of stories about past events and experiences, what Schrager (1983) has termed 'experience narratives'. This focus can be justified as follows. First, these narratives are forms of talk which are most commonly described as 'reminiscence'. That is, when people are said to be 'reminiscing', this is the kind of talk we generally imagine them to be engaging in. It is this kind of talk which is

¹ I am grateful to Faith Gibson for providing me with copies of the original videotapes of these sessions.

variously represented in the reminiscence literature as 'psychological defence', as 'oral history', as revelation of personal identity, or as mediating new social relationships. Such representations, however, are almost always concerned with such talk in the abstract. Here, the interest is in how such narratives are produced in situ, and what they accomplish as part of unfolding sequences of interaction. Second, this focus means that the present analysis can be informed by other work on storytelling in conversation, in particular that of Sacks (1992). Third, these narratives are rich in a range of features pertinent to issues of identity and social relations. Having identified these features in a single experience narrative, the analysis will move on to consider other examples of talk in the groups which exhibit the same features. Extract 1, then, is an example of an experience narrative, produced during the first session of the Hospital group.

Extract 1 (H1/30)

Sue: I mean I've got nothing against drink/ if people enjoy drink
I- I think they're entitled to it/ but erm/ it's not for me/ apart
from er/ lemonade and/ shandy/ I don't mind that

((another conversation intrudes for some seconds at this
point, until Sue continues))

Sue: I remember when er/ my father was alive/ he used to like a
bottle of stout/ used to () bottle about like this/ and (&)

[
Rose: mm/ stout! oh yes/ stout

Sue: (&) er/ where we lived er/ we had a/ erm/ a/ firegrate with
erm/ hobs I think they called them () hobs/ and er/ my (&)

[
?f: eh

[
Meg?: yeah that's (yeah)

[
Ted: ah yeah

[
?f: ()

Sue: (&) dad used to/ drink it out the bottle/ and er/ he used to stand it on the hob/ an- and he used to say it was beautiful(&)

Ted: [warming

Sue: (&)/ and er ((laugh)) a- youll think () and er/ I used to go to church in those days/ and erm/ the parson/ we had a parson that used to visit/ and er/ I said to me dad/ the parson- / I said that the parsons coming/ (&)

Ted: [is that why he kept it on the hob

Sue: (&) I said that you won't drink your stout while he's here will you/ ooh my dad was disgusted he said I will (&)

Ted: [((laugh))

Sue: (&) drink me stout/ he said you ought to be ashamed of yourself/ and there it stood on the hob y'know (&)

?m: [()

Sue: (&) and in walked the parson with his/ dog collar on I didn't know what to do/ and ((cough)) to make (&)

Rose?: [((laugh))

Sue: (&) matters worse this erm/ stout was/ ch ch ch ch ((imitates noise of stout bubbling)) you could hear it/ bubbling like (&)

[((general laughter))

Sue: (&)/ yeah and er/ me father said to him er/ ooh and er/ this parsons name was a Mr Jackson he was a very very nice man/ and m- me father said er/ I don't/ I don't think going to church is doing my daughter much good/ he said er/ she asked me/ not to have my bottle of stout/ cos you were coming/ and Mr Jackson said well I've never such a thing in me life he said/ I like one meself occasionally/ I never (&)

[((general laughter))

Sue: (&) felt so bad after that ((laughing tone))

Prior to the extract, the drinking of alcohol has been a recurrent topic in the group, with the worker asking participants to name their favourite 'tipple', their favourite pub, and so on. A number of participants have responded, and Sue has been particularly vocal, telling a number of stories, all of which have marked in some way her aversion to alcohol. At the start of the extract, Sue moves topic to the morality of drinking, making it clear that her aversion to drink is merely a matter of taste and should not be read as a moral judgement: *"I mean I've got nothing against drink/ if people enjoy drink I- I think they're entitled to it/ but erm/ its not for me/ apart from er/ lemonade and/ shandy/ I dont mind that"*. Following this initial statement, Sue produces a narrative account of an event from her childhood/adolescence, which she claims caused her to change her attitude to drinking (*"I never felt so bad after that"*).

This story is typical of the kind of story that gets told in reminiscence groups. In the course of narrating a particular event from her past, Sue talks about herself in the past, about other people she was related to in various ways then (her father and the parson), and about various practices of the time (warming stout, parsons visiting). The analysis that follows will consider the how this story comes to be told, and the work it does in the present interaction, particularly in terms of the implications it has for the situated identities of Sue and of her fellow participants.

Situated identities

In talk previous to the extract, Sue has made it clear she dislikes drinking alcohol. One possible implication of her talk up to this point is that she is moralising about drinking. Sue's initial statement can be seen as attending to this possibility, and seeking to disclaim it. The work done by this disclaimer can be understood in terms of its orientation to the situated

identities of Sue and her fellow participants. Other people in the group have already identified themselves as drinkers. If Sue were moralising about drinking, this would have certain identity implications for these participants, implying that they were the kind of people who engage in morally reprehensible behaviour. At the same time, such a moralising position would also have identity implications for her, positioning her as someone who seeks to impose her moral standards on others, and who would deny them their right to the things they enjoy. Sue's initial statement, then, can be seen as attending to these identity implications, as working a particular situated identity for herself (as someone who 'lives and lets live') and for the drinkers in the group (as people who engage in a legitimately enjoyable activity).

The narrative account which follows this initial statement, in that it is an account of an event which caused her to change her attitude to drinking, can be seen as providing a warrant for Sue's stated position, and thus as continuing the identity work done by her initial statement.

One analytical question which might be asked at this point is why this further warranting of her position is necessary _ why is the statement itself not enough to deal with the negative identity implications of previous talk?. A further question which arises is: How does the story work to provide a stronger warrant for her position than the statement which precedes it?

Claiming and showing

Sacks (1992) has something to say which bears upon the first of these questions. He points out the different interactional consequences that ensue from claiming to have understood another's talk, as compared to

showing that one has understood it. There are various ways one might claim understanding. One might, for example, repeat what has been said, or say something like "I understand". However, it is generally recognised that, in the first case, one can repeat something without understanding it, and that, in the second case, one might be saying "I understand" , but not really mean it. A more effective conversational move would be to put what is said into different words, which would then constitute showing understanding. Sacks' discussion is concerned with the telling of 'second stories' in conversation, that is, stories which are produced as a response to a story told by a previous speaker. He argues that a particularly powerful way of demonstrating that you have understood a story is to produce a story which is similar to it, a move which occurs frequently in conversation.

The relevance of this to the production of Sue's story is as follows. She has stated a certain position with regard to drinking. This statement, however, constitutes a claim to, rather than a demonstration of, this position. Her subsequent story, then, can be seen as a demonstration of this position, and thus as having greater interactional currency than her preceding claim. This particular story, then, can be seen as being occasioned in the course of the identity work discussed earlier. Having established that, we can then ask: how does this story work to provide a stronger warrant for Sue's position?

Figures and voices

Sue's initial statement can be seen as topicalising two opposing positions on the morality of drinking alcohol: being "against drink", and seeing people as "entitled" to drink if they "enjoy" it. For the purpose of this analysis, these two positions will be characterised as the 'moralising'

position and the 'entitlement to enjoyment' position. The event described in Sue's narrative account is presented as causing her to change her position on drinking, from the 'moralising' position to the 'entitled to enjoyment' position with which she aligns herself in the current conversation.

In general terms, it seems clear that providing a causal account of one's position would constitute a stronger warrant than merely stating that position. However, we can also look at the way specific features of the account accomplish this warranting.

The account sets up a scenario in which the two positions are set against each other, and in which the 'moralising' position is rendered defeasible. It does this partly through the re-enactment of a sequence of interaction between three figures – Sue in the past, her father, and the parson – much of it in the form of reported dialogue. This reported dialogue can be seen as voicing the two opposing positions on drinking. Sue-in-the-past can be seen as voicing the 'moralising' position, in particular through the reported utterance *"you won't drink your stout while he's here will you"*. From Sue's utterance, we are able to infer that Sue-in-the-past considered it inappropriate to drink stout in the presence of the parson, and thus that it is in some way morally questionable.

Her father and the parson, on the other hand, can be seen as voicing the 'entitled to enjoyment' position. The father's utterances directed to Sue (*"he said I will drink me stout/ he said you ought to be ashamed of yourself"*) and to the parson (*"I don't think going to church is doing my daughter much good/ he said er/ she asked me/ not to have my bottle of stout/ cos you were coming"*) work to position her request as itself morally

questionable, as something to be “ashamed of”, and as inconsistent with “going to church”. The moral issue here then is the denial of ‘entitlement to enjoyment’. Similarly, the parson’s reported utterances (*“and Mr Jackson said well I’ve never such a thing in me life he said/ I like one meself occasionally”*) can be seen as representing drinking as a legitimate pleasure.

This reported dialogue works in a number of ways to warrant the position on drinking with which Sue aligns herself in the current interaction.

First, it recruits the voices of others to support her position. Second, these voices work to undermine, and indeed reverse, the moral status of Sue’s position in the past, and the position she disclaims in the present. As mentioned above, the father’s reported utterances formulate Sue’s position as a denial of entitlement, and thus as morally sanctionable. In the case of the parson, his reported words position him as someone who enjoys drinking, and his status as a moral authority is enough to render this position as morally acceptable, and thus by implication, position Sue-in-the-past as denying legitimate ‘entitlement to enjoyment’.

This sequence of reported interaction, then, is much more than a simple reporting of an event from the past. It is occasioned by previous talk, and can be seen as continuing, and indeed consolidating, the identity work done by the initial statement of the extract. The reported dialogue need not be considered as verbatim recall of what was said, but rather as being constructed to provide a warrant for Sue’s claimed attitude to drinking (cf Tannen, 1989; Wooffitt, 1993).

Not all of Sue's account consists of reported dialogue. The analysis will turn now to a consideration of other features of the account, and the way in which these too can be seen as doing identity work.

Working entitlement to experience

Prior to Sue's account of the interaction between herself, her father and the parson, she does a certain amount of what might be called 'scene-setting'. She begins this scene setting by introducing one of the characters and describing his drinking habits: *"I remember when er/ my father was alive he used to like a bottle of stout / used to () bottle about like this"* . She interrupts this description to provide a piece of information relevant to understanding it (*"where we lived er/ we had a/ erm/ a/ firegrate with erm/ hobs*) and then continues: *"and er/ my dad used to/ drink it out the bottle/ and er/ he used to stand it on the hob/ an- and he used to say it was beautiful"*. Following this, she adds another piece of information about Sue-in-the-past which turns out to be relevant to the story: *"and er ((laughs)) a- youll think () and er/ I used to go to church in those days"*. Finally, before launching into reported dialogue, she introduces the third character in the story, the parson: *"and erm/ the parson/ we had a parson that used to visit "*

In this part of the extract, then, Sue introduces the characters, and describes ongoing practices (what used to be done) within which the reported interaction can be located. This talk can be seen as providing information necessary for understanding the reported interaction - we need to know this stuff in order to make sense of what occurred between the three characters in the story.

However, it is important to note at this point that a particular kind of sense is to be made of the story. It is not told for others merely to make of it what they will. Sue is claiming that the reported events led her to change her feelings about drinking , a claim which can be seen as accomplishing a particular identity for her in the group. Thus, it is important not only that her audience understand what is going on when she describes the encounter between herself, her father and the parson, but also that they come to see her change of attitude as a reasonable consequence of the events described. In Sacks' (1992) terms, the experience she claims to have had in virtue of her participation in the narrated events must be one she is entitled to have.

Sacks argues that, when we tell a story and say what the events described made us feel, what we can say we felt is closely regulated in interactional terms. That is, recipients of the story will be oriented to whether we draw from it the experience or feeling we are entitled to draw from it – if we make too much of a little thing, or not enough of a big thing, we will be told we are doing so. Sacks suggests that this entitlement is accomplished through the way we place ourselves in the events of the story.

At first sight, this seems an obvious point: that it is by virtue of our place in events that we come to have the experience we have. However, what we are talking about here is the narrating of events, and the kinds of interactional business that are done in the course of such narrating. The point is that, in order to be entitled to the experience we draw from the story's events, we must place ourself in those events (as a character) in such a way as to accomplish that entitlement.

Sue, then, claims to have had an experience as a consequence of the event she describes, and both the event and the scene setting which precedes it can be seen as being oriented to accomplishing her entitlement to this experience, through the way the telling places her in relation to the described event. Some of this scene setting places Sue (as character) in relation to the other characters in the story. In introducing her father, she also places Sue-in-the-past in relation to him, as his daughter. She then moves into using the first person plural 'we', locating herself and her father as members of the household in which the reported event took place. This is done again in reference to the parson's regular visits. Her identification of Sue-in-the-past as a churchgoer can also be seen as placing her in relation to the parson.

Other work is done to place her in events as someone with particular kinds of knowledge and attitudes. Thus, her description of her father's drinking habits, as well as informing currently present interactants of these habits, also informs them of Sue's knowledge as a character in the story. Again, her identification of Sue-in-the-past as a churchgoer carries implications regarding her attitude to her father's drinking.²

The reported interaction can also be seen as working Sue's place in events. It does this in a more graphic way than the scene-setting talk which precedes it. Through the reported dialogue, the other participants in the group hear what she 'heard' at the time, even the stout bubbling on the hob: *"and ((cough)) to make matters worse this erm/ stou:t was/ ch ch ch*

² It is perhaps worth drawing attention here to the work being done through the way Sue informs the group that she was a churchgoer at the time of the reported events: *"and er ((laughs)) a- you'll think () and er (.) I used to go to church in those days"*. Both the laugh, and the *"you'll think ()"* can be seen as displaying an orientation to the identity implications referred to earlier, while at the same time deflecting them. *"In those days"* does similar work, distancing Sue-in-the-present from sue-in-the-past.

ch ((imitates noise of stout bubbling)) you could hear it/ bubbling like".

Thus, they vicariously experience events from her point of view.

Sue's narrative account then locates her in events as someone with particular relationships to the other characters, as someone with particular kinds of knowledge and attitudes, and as witness to particular events. In the narrative account, it is by virtue of her place in these events that she comes to have the experience she claims to have. This working of her entitlement to this experience can in turn be seen as oriented to the business of warranting her stated attitude towards drinking in the current interaction, and thus oriented to accomplishing a particular and local identity for herself and her fellow participants.

'Reminiscing' as situated action

Taking Extract 1 to be a typical example of the kind of talk that would be described as 'reminiscence', there are a number of points that can be made so far in relation to the above analysis. Sue's story about the past comes to be told as a consequence of interactional business being done in the present. Any account of the 'functions' of reminiscence has to deal with reminiscing in conversation, reminiscence as talk, and thus has to take into account this kind of interactional business. It is clear that many different kinds of business might be done, and that 'function' in this sense will vary according to circumstances. This is the case with all talk, and thus, in this sense at least, there is nothing special about talk which might be described as 'reminiscing'. The above analysis can be seen as further demonstration of the situatedness and action orientation of talk in general, demonstrated in many other studies.

However, there is a sense in which the talk in Extract 1, and other talk which occurs in reminiscence groups, might be seen as a special kind of talk. This specialness derives from both the circumstances in which it is produced (in a gathering of older people in a care setting) and the way in which it constructs an account of the 'remembered past', beyond the specific events being narrated. The next section will consider these issues, and their relevance for the discursive accomplishment of 'membership' – membership, that is, in the sense of an identity which locates speakers in networks of social relations and as participants, with others, in ongoing social practices.

Working membership

Membership in the past

If we see Sue's account as talk about 'the past', both her personal past, and the past in the more general sense, we come closer to the way such talk is usually represented in discussions of reminiscence work. In the account, she provides us with a glimpse of her personal life at that time, and through this, a glimpse of the culture in which that life was lived. The remembered past which she invokes is not the past in some abstract, merely temporal sense – it is a 'peopled' past, a past mapped out in terms of practices that people engaged in, and in terms of the social relations of those people. We have already seen how Sue's account works to accomplish situated identities for herself and other participants in relation to the morality of drinking. We will consider here the way in which her invocation of a 'peopled' past can be seen as having further identity implications for herself and the other members of the group.

For Sue, her account of the past accomplishes an elaboration of her identity in the present. She speaks as a member of a social group, using

the first person plural 'we'. Not only is she an elderly recipient of care provision, she is also a daughter, a one-time churchgoer, and beyond this, a participant in the practices of the remembered past. In the course of telling the story, these identities are made salient in the current interaction. The point here is that these identities are occasioned in the course of doing the identity work referred to earlier. They are used by Sue as resources to work her entitlement to the experience she narrates. Thus, it is her working of this entitlement which accomplishes, at the same time, an elaboration of her situated identity in the group.

Sacks' (1992) discusses this working of entitlement in relation to the telling of 'second stories' in conversation. In part, his argument relates to the distinction between 'claiming' and 'showing' understanding, as discussed earlier. That is, one way of showing that you have understood another's story is to produce one which is similar to it. He goes on to inquire into the precise nature of this similarity, and suggests that a common procedure which recipients of stories use to find a similar story is as follows: if the teller appears as a character, find a story in which you appear as the same character (eg. witness to a car accident). The teller's 'place' in events, then, is not only significant in terms of working entitlement to experience, but is also something which recipients attend to as a means of finding stories which they can tell. Sacks goes on to suggest that past experiences are 'stored' in terms of our place in the experienced events, and that this is the reason similar stories can be produced so readily in response to a 'first story'. Whether or not we adhere to the notion of 'storage', this discussion points up the general significance of 'place' in conversational remembering.

Of particular interest here is the way in which the working of place positions the teller in networks of social relationships. We can see Sue doing this in Extract 1, using the collective 'we', and introducing her father as a character in the narrative. Schrager (1983) takes a different angle from Sacks on this, and his insights can further illuminate the present discussion. He notes the way in which tellers of narratives move between different 'points of view' in the course of the telling for example speaking sometimes as 'I', sometimes as 'we'. In doing this, the teller expresses not only her own perspective on events, but also that of others, incorporating their experiences into her account. In moving between the use of 'I' and 'we', we identify ourselves as members of various social groupings, and presume to speak on their behalf. Schrager argues that we give our audience access to the experiences we narrate by means of the different points of view we present. He sees this phenomenon as providing useful historical data, in that it can provide an insight into the collective position taken by particular social groups towards particular historical events.

The work of both Sacks and Schrager, then, draws attention to the way in which talking about the past works to locate us, not only in the world in which those events occurred, but in the social world in which they occurred. This phenomenon is apparent in Extract 1, and is a ubiquitous feature of conversational remembering. However, an additional point can be made here, which pertains particularly to the reminiscence group transcripts. That is that it very often occurs during descriptions of social practices of the time being talked about. Thus, in Extract 1, Sue uses 'we' in speaking of the parson's regular visits, and the kind of firegrates that were common at the time. As noted in the above analysis, Sue's description is occasioned in the course of doing identity work related to the morality of drinking. Very often, however, it is these social practices, rather than

specific events in people's lives, which are the topic of conversation in the groups, with older participants being positioned as historical informants and being asked directly to give descriptions of such practices (see Chapter 8). Extract 2 is a typical example of this.

Extract 2 (D2/2)

Mary: how about you Enid/ how did you manage in those days

Enid: I used to do about the same you know/ you used to put em in a tub first/an er/ give em a good punch/ my mother made us count to a hundred ((laugh))

Mary: did she

Enid: yes ((laughing))/ we couldn't stop punching until we'd done a hundred/ and then we ad to get em out and rub em

Mary: [o::h

Mary: yeah

Enid: and er/ put em in a bath at the side of us/ and then we should get them out then/ and put em back in the tub/ give them another little punch/ and then we used to have to put em in the copper with some soda and sunlight

Here, the topic of discussion is washing clothes in "*those days*". In response to the care workers question, Enid begins by speaking as 'I', then mentions her mother, and moves into using 'we', continuing this in her next turn. At first she appears to be talking about her washday routine as a housewife, and then moves into an account of helping her mother with the washing. It is at this point that she begins to use 'we', the implication being that she was one of a number of children in the family, and that they all helped together.

The move to 'we' can be seen in Sacksian terms as providing a warrant for "*you used to put them in the tub first and give them a good punch*" – explaining just what constitutes a "*good punch*", and how she came to see it as important. Again then, as in Extract 1, we can see this as an occasioned description, which works to locate the speaker in relationship to others, as a participant in collective practices. Extract 3 shows how this use of 'we' can occur even in short responses to specific questions.

Extract 3 (H8/19)

Jane: did you have iodine put on any cuts

Rose: no

Jane: anybody ((quieter))

Rose: ()

[
Alf: oh we used to have iodine/ yes

Here, the care worker is asking for information about participant's use of 'old fashioned' remedies. Alf responds to her question by speaking as 'we' ("*oh we used to have iodine, yes*"), the implication being that the grouping on whose behalf he is speaking is a group of children in a family, or at least a family group. Extract 4 is taken from the same discussion as Extract 2. Here the speakers Jean and Doris use 'we' in a potentially more general sense. They may be heard here as speaking as a member of a family, but also as a member of a wider community who engaged in the practices they are talking about.

Extract 4 (D2/7)

Doris: but I think/ it's lovely to see them flying in the wind

Mary: washing

Doris: your clean sheets

Mary: that's me/ I love to see washing/ I don't like these rotary/
lines/ I like to see it actually bl- with a prop=

Jean: =on the line like we did

Mary: with a prop/ I like it on the line/ I think they get a good blow

Jean: [up on the line/ yes

Doris: because we had sheets then/ whereas you get nylon sheets
now/ so easy to wash/ but we had sheets to be ironed didn't
we/ and pillocases/ and the lot/ blankets

Jean: [everything

Mary: of course you had blankets then/ how did you go on with the
blankets then/ washing blankets

In talking about their past lives, and in particular past practices, speakers move readily into speaking as members of social groups, as participants in social relationships. Often, this seems unavoidable – sometimes it simply does not make sense to claim that 'I' did something, when others around me were regularly doing the same thing. However, even when it might be possible to speak as 'I', there is often a move to 'we', as in Extracts 2 and 3. Schragger writes about the openness of reference of 'we', and the way this enables an account to be at once personal and collective, and collective in varying degrees. Similarly, in these extracts, we can see how the 'you' in the questions can be interpreted as individual or collective, and that the 'we' in the responses can stand for different groupings of people, from family to 'the people' of that time.

So far then, we can see that some of the talk that is typical of reminiscence groups – the narrating of experiences, the description of cultural practices – involves speakers in elaborating their identity in certain ways. In

particular, they move into speaking, not just as an individual, but as a member of various social groupings – as a participant in collective practices of the past. On the basis of the above, then, we can say that reminiscence groups provide an arena in which participants are given the opportunity to speak as ‘members’ – that is, to display and accomplish identities which locate them in relation to other people, as participants in various orders of community life. Up to this point, however, the analysis has focussed on single speakers – Sue’s story in Extract 1, and the responses of individual participants to group worker’s talk in Extracts 2 to 4. In the next section, the analytical focus is broadened to consider how older participants engage with each others talk in the group sessions, and how this works to constitute ‘membership’ in a further sense, as an identity common to the older participants in the group.

Membership in the present

Turning again to Extract 1, it is apparent that a number of participants produce responses to Sue’s account as it unfolds. First, Rose responds to Sue’s mention of stout (“mm/ stout! oh yes/ stout”). Further on, four participants in all respond to the mention of hobs, and shortly after this, Ted says “warming” in response to Sue’s description of her father’s habit of standing the stout on the hob. These utterances can be seen as indices of the engagement. That is, the participants are displaying by means of these utterances that they are engaged in listening to Sue’s talk. A number of things can be said about the nature of this engagement.

First, these utterances are produced in response to the details of Sue’s description of past practices – to the names things used to be called at the time (stout, hobs), and to the description of the practice of warming stout. On this basis, then, it can be argued that Sue’s account of past practices,

which she uses as a conversational resource, works to support the engagement of other participants.

Second, the utterances we are concerned with here are typical of those produced when people are remembering together in conversation. They have been identified as resources through which interlocutors produce a joint account of shared experience (Edwards and Middleton, 1986). Thus, the contributions of Rose, Meg, and Ted (and possibly that of the second unidentified female participant) can be seen as ratifying Sue's account as it develops. Similarly, Ted's second contribution can be seen as providing elaboration of her account. One way of seeing this evidence of engagement, then, is as the co-construction of a joint account of shared experience.

Such sequences of 'joint remembering' are common throughout the reminiscence group transcripts. Extract 5, taken from the same session as Extract 1, is part of a discussion about the clothes people used to wear when holidaying at the seaside. It serves here as another example of the way in which the names used in the past occasion responses from other participants.

Extract 5 (H1/15)

Sue: I mean if you see er/ old photographs/ they've all got er/
what we used to call billycocks

?f: yes

[
Ted: yes

[
?f: bowler hat

[
Meg: a bowler hat

Sue: [a billycock/ they've all got a (&
 Meg: [yes
 Ted: [yes
 Sue: (&) billycock on their head ((laugh))

In this extract, Sue is referring to photographs taken while on holiday at the seaside. Her mention of "*billycocks*" as a term used at the time for 'bowler hats' gets responses similar to those produced in Extract 1 in response to her mention of "*hobs*" – ratification from Ted, Meg and an unidentified participant, and elaboration from Meg and another unidentified participant. Again, the name is a point at which other participants engage actively with the talk, and again this engagement can be seen in terms of co-constructing an account of shared experience.

The examples considered so far have involved one main speaker, with minimal contributions from others. These have been presented with the intention of showing the salience of 'names' and 'practices' to participants. Besides this class of instances, there are many occasions in the group discussions where the construction of an account of past practices is shared more equally. Extract 6 is taken from a session with the Daycentre group.

Extract 6 (D2/3)

Vera: my mother used to wear erm/ sack apron/ cos years ago they
 used to make the aprons out of a/ sack bag hadn't they
 Doris: ooh that's right
 Enid: [you could buy the sack bag ()
 [

Vera: can you remember/ I can remember
my mother/ and she used to-
[
Jean: yes/ yes/used to make aprons out the sack bags or a black one/
and you'd go and change after dinner and she'd put/ you
know/ a new pinafore and a clean dress or something like
that
Enid: we used to buy ours from the Beehive
Vera: ye:s/ I can see my mother/ she used () sack bag y'know/
of her back and her front-
[
Jean: yeah/ that's wash day

In this extract, we see again instances of requests for ratification (*"hadn't they"; "can you remember"*), ratification (*"oh that's right"; "yeah"; "yes/ yes/used to make aprons out the sack bags"*) and also of elaboration from Enid (*"you could buy the sack bag ()"; "we used to buy ours from the Beehive"*) and Jean (*"or a black one/ and you'd go and change after dinner and she'd put/ you know/ a new pinafore and a clean dress or something like that"*). Here, then, the work in constructing the account is shared among participants, with contributions building on previous contributions to produce a joint account of the use of sack aprons. Extract 7 is another example of this type of sequence, this time taken from the Residential group.

Extract 7 (R1/41)

BF³ we never/ we didn't have that many sheep/ at that time
[
BI wh-
BI wasn't there arrangements ()/ and a bath/ great big bath
and then the ()/ and they put the sheep down after (&)
[

³ Since extracts from the transcripts of the Residential group are in the public domain, published as part of the training pack *'Using Reminiscence'* (Gibson, 1989), the names of participants have not been changed. As in the published extracts, participants are identified here by their initials.

MM (aye that was)

BI (&) one another

MM ^I Hughes's had that in Ballycairn/ Hughes's had that in Ballycairn

BI m m

MM and they put them down () (the other side)=

BI =in there and out the other side/ ()

MM we used to go in school to watch-/ watch () ((laughing))

BF you tried to do it on a dry day so's that they'll dry out

BI? m m

In this extract, we see further phenomena associated with the construction of an account of shared experience: requests for ratification (*"wasn't there arrangements..."*), repetition of previous speakers' words in the course of elaborating on their contributions (*"put the sheep down"*; *"they put them down"*; *"(the other side)"*; *"in there and out the other side"*). Also notable is the 'latching' of BIs *"in there and out the other side"* onto MMs previous turn, as evidence of the close engagement of participants in collaboratively building the account.

In the sequences discussed so far, then, participants can be seen as being engaged in the negotiation and co-construction of accounts of shared experience. At this point it is apposite to unpack the notion of 'shared experience'. In Extracts 6 and 7, some of the participants have lived in the same locality, and thus share a familiarity with local places and people. Thus, Enid mentions a local shop (*"the Beehive"*) in Extract 6, while in Extract 7, MMs *"Hughes's had that in Ballycairn"* assumes that 'the Hughes's' are known to (at least some) other participants. In the main,

however, the kind of 'shared experience' constituted in these sequences is of a different order. It is the experience of participation in the collective practices of the time being talked about. It is important to note, however, that whatever the order of 'shared experience' at issue, its commonality, its 'sharedness', is something which is accomplished by means of the conversational resources identified in the preceding analysis. As Edwards and Middleton (1986) note, alluding to Bartlett (1932), conversational remembering involves an "effort after consensus". Requesting ratification of one's own contributions, offering ratification of others' contributions, overt agreement, and so on, are some of the means by which this consensus, and thus commonality, is achieved. It is not simply the case that speakers provide accounts of their individual experience, and that these coincide in some way as a consequence of a pre-existent 'similarity'. Rather, speakers have to work to constitute this commonality through the construction and placement of their utterances in the unfolding conversation. This is an inevitable consequence of the infinite possibilities inherent in linguistic description (Garfinkel, 1969; Heritage, 1984).

The argument being advanced here, on the basis of the preceding analysis, is as follows. Just as Sue's description of practices can be seen as locating her as a participant in the collective practices of the past, so can the other kinds of conversational resources identified above be seen as doing the same for those speakers deploying them. The talk produced in all the sequences discussed so far in this chapter can be seen as locating speakers as members of communities of practice. Sue's account of practices in Extract 1, speakers' frequent use of the collective 'we' in similar accounts, and speakers' engagement in the joint production of accounts, can all be seen as accomplishing this elaboration of their identities in the current

interaction. Moreover, their engagement together in constructing joint accounts of this participation has the effect of working a common identity in the group, positioning them as members in the past and members in the present.

Talk about past practices, then, turns out to be an important resource for the constitution of 'membership' in reminiscence groups. However, it is important to note that this talk is itself social practice. Thus, rather than construing this talk as talk about practices, we can see it as an integral part of these practices – as conversational forms through which the experiences and practices of the past were constituted and made accountable then, and are constituted and made accountable now. In an important sense, these speakers are not just talking about the way things used to be – they are engaging in the practices they engaged in then. If we see this talk as social practice, we can appreciate the extent to which it provides a basis for working membership - participants are not merely talking about doing the same things in the past, they are also doing the same things in the present.

It has been argued, then, that talk about past practices affords the working of a common identity for group members, as co-participants in such practices. It is in this sense that this talk can be seen as working to constitute membership. The next section will attempt to clarify further the nature of this membership, and in doing so will make some suggestions as to its significance for older people.

The cultural and moral order of the remembered past

The working of membership in reminiscence groups can be seen as beneficial to the extent that the older people who participate in them are seen as, or feel themselves to be, 'non-members' of the communities they

find themselves in. One might invoke here the social and economic marginality of older people (Shanas, Townsend, Wedderburn, Friis, Milhoj and Stehouwer, 1968; Butler, 1969; Cowgill and Holmes, 1972; Dowd, 1980; Walker, 1980; Bornat, Phillipson and Ward, 1985). More specifically, for older people in care settings, there are further possibilities of marginalisation, deriving from dislocation and depersonalisation (Miller and Gwynne, 1979; Norris and Abu El Eileh, 1982; Evers, 1985; Hockey and James, 1990). However, there is another sense in which older people today can be seen as 'outsiders' in relation to the mainstream of community life. That is, they can be seen as 'strangers' to the practices and mores of contemporary social life, as members of a 'different' culture, with a different set of practices and mores (Mead, 1978; Dowd, 1989). Indeed, this notion of 'cultural difference' serves as an argument for the potential benefits of reminiscence work – that older people have something to tell us about a world we have no first hand experience of, and are thus positioned as historical informants, with attendant benefits for their social status/self esteem.

Dowd (1989), in a chapter entitled 'The Old Person as Stranger', presents a particularly detailed working out of this notion of cultural difference. He argues that those "born and bred before the Second World War" have a different world-view, deriving from a different 'social character' extant at that time. The difference between their past and their present, then, is not merely temporal but cultural. In advancing this argument, Dowd is advocating a social gerontology which moves beyond its present individualistic and ahistorical focus to incorporate a consideration of the ways in which social structure contributes to the constitution of the individual personality or character.

Dowd's concern to address the relationship between the social and the individual, between the sociological and the psychological, is one which informs the analyses presented in this thesis. Here, however, this relationship is seen in terms of discursive practices which work to constitute 'social structure' and 'identity'. In respect of this, we can point to a number of ways in which talk about the past works to constitute a 'cultural difference' between older and younger people, through constituting discontinuity and difference between past and present.

One facet of this phenomenon is the way in which 'the past' that is spoken and written about in discussions of reminiscence work is rarely called 'the past'. Instead, one encounters phrases such as 'bygone days', 'times gone by', 'the old days', 'yesteryear', and so on. This practice can be seen as constituting a discontinuity between past and present, in a way that the term 'the past' does not. Similar work is done in representing the past as a time that 'belongs' to someone – as 'my time', 'our day', and so on. Here, however, the past is not only marked as discontinuous with the present, but also as something which is coterminous with people's lives.

Coterminous, that is, not with the mere fact of their existence, since the author of such words in the present is clearly still alive – rather, the past is here represented as coterminous with the way lives were lived, with the practices through which those lives were constituted. Here again then it is cultural rather than temporal difference that is being made salient. Older people speak of 'my day' in much the same way as a foreigner might speak of 'my country'.

As well as discourse which constructs a discontinuity between past and present in general, there is also discourse which works to constitute this discontinuity through drawing a contrast between specific practices and

mores of past and present. This kind of talk is very common in reminiscence groups, and probably just as common outside them. Extracts 8 and 9 are examples of this kind of talk, taken from the Daycentre group and the Residential group respectively.

Extract 8 (D2/15)

Doris: I remember it because/ wasn't there a saying if your front doorstep was clean your home was clean/ and anybody that didn't do their front doorstep -

Vera: never see anybody do their doorstep these days do you

Extract 9 (R4/30)

FG Mister Reid do you look with pleasure on school days

CR well I never had any unhappy moments/ I never was very clever/ so they didn't expect too much from me but/ er/ the education that I got was very little and I left school before er/ six and a half months before I was fourteen and worked ever since until retirement/ but/ er/ I was just saying to Mrs Coulter here/ that we weren't meek or mild and we were up to all the devilment of the day/ the discipline in class/ no one would ever think of interrupting your master or mistress as the case may be/ so it is very difficult for/ me at my old age to understand the thuggery that goes on in schools now and even masters attacked

MM if you wanted the teacher's attention you put up your hand ((laugh))

CR oh golly yes/ and if- if you had you couldn't do that too often because you weren't allowed out too often/ (&)

[
MM no

CR (&) you might do it once a day [...]

The short sequence in Extract 8 occurs after mention of cleaning the doorsteps of terraced houses as a regular household chore. Doris refers to the cultural significance of this practice, which was of such a degree as to be formulated as *"a saying"*. Vera then contrasts this with present practices (*"never see anybody do their doorstep these days do you"*), in such a way as to mark the disappearance of this practice, and at the same time to suggest the moral implications that follow from this disappearance – that people care less about cleanliness than they used to.

In Extract 9, one of the group workers asks CR about his schooldays. After a brief biographical account, he moves into an account of the discipline maintained when he was at school (*"the discipline in class no one would ever think of interrupting your master or mistress as the case may be"*), and goes on to compare this with *"the thuggery that goes on in schools now and even masters attacked"*. He makes it clear that this contrast is not due to a difference in the nature of children (*"we weren't meek or mild and we were up to all the devilment of the day"*), thus implying that it is due to a difference in practice. Moreover, the contrasting descriptions of past and present states of affairs work to construct this difference as one of morality as well as practice. While in the past *"interrupting"* was not even thought of, in the present *"thuggery"* and attacks on teachers are allowed to happen.

Both extracts, then, work to constitute a difference between the cultural and moral order of past and present. Speakers construct this difference in such a way as to express a preference for the past, as a time when things were better. In doing this, they can be seen as identifying themselves with the past, and distancing themselves from the present. This is particularly clear in Extract 9, where CR claims incomprehension of the present state of

school discipline (*"so it is very difficult for me at my old age to understand..."*) and invokes his *"old age"* in doing so. Here, age is used to account for cultural estrangement.

Moreover, the older people speaking here work together to construct a joint account of cultural difference. For example, in Extract 8, Doris and Vera request ratification from others in the group (*"wasn't there"; "do you"*), while in Extract 9, MM and CR build on and ratify each others contributions. These features, common in conversational remembering, not only work to constitute 'shared experience' in the sense discussed earlier, but also display a common orientation to the rhetorical work being done – constitution of cultural difference between past and present.

In the previous section, it was argued that accounts of past practices afford the working of identity and membership related to speakers' participation in the collective practices of the past. In the data examined in this section, these practices are located as part of a cultural and moral order different to that of the present. In these sequences, it is not merely that things were done differently, but that they were done for different reasons, had different meaning, were an expression of different values. The nature of the membership being constituted through this talk, then, is broader than that of co-participation in particular practices. Rather, it is membership of the cultural and moral order within which those practices are located. Although this cultural and moral order is 'of the past', it is constituted in the present through talk such as this.

Such discursive practices are commonly encountered in the talk of older people, commonly enough to figure prominently in representations of 'stereotypical' elderly conversation. Boden and Bielby (1986), in a

conversation analysis of 'getting acquainted' talk between dyads of older people in a 'laboratory' setting, show how the interweaving and contrasting of past and present serves as an important topical resource in these conversations, and suggest that such discursive practices may be 'age specific'. While the notion of 'age specificity' might be challenged, it is certainly true that the older people in their study not only frequently engaged in contrasting then and now, but also did this collaboratively and with great facility. Boden and Bielby point to the "close fitting interplay of overlapping turns" in such conversations as evidence both of speakers' understanding of the previous turn, and of the particular historical era being characterised. It might also be taken as evidence of speakers' familiarity with this kind of talk, as something they regularly engage in.

Such close collaboration is also apparent in the sequences discussed in this chapter. As Boden and Bielby argue, this close collaboration, and the facility and familiarity which it displays, works to achieve intimacy in the current conversation. However, intimacy is only one facet of what is being accomplished. It is not merely that speakers are engaging in familiar conversational routines, and achieving shared perspective. They are also locating themselves as co-participants in the social world constructed through these routines, and thus accomplishing a common identity for themselves as members of the cultural and moral order constituted through their talk.

However, as noted earlier, this accomplishment is double-edged. That is, in the act of accomplishing membership in this way, older people also position themselves as 'strangers' to the present. In this respect, there is a link here with Dowd's discussion of the old person as 'strangers' in contemporary culture. However, rather than seeing this estrangement as

a consequence of a 'social character' formed at some earlier time within a particular social and historical milieu, we can see it as an ongoing discursive accomplishment in the present. The talk in Extracts 8 and 9, in that it orients to differences between the practices and values of past and present, and in that it displays an alignment with the past in preference to the present, can be seen as instances of the discursive construction of this 'character', and of the situated identity of 'stranger'.

Concluding comments

One broad aim of the analyses presented in this chapter has been to demonstrate that talk which is produced in reminiscence groups, and which might be described as 'reminiscing' is, like all talk, situated social action. It can be seen as accomplishing a variety of actions, accomplishments which are local to the situation of its production. This was demonstrated through analysis of two related kinds of talk commonly encountered in reminiscence groups: experience narratives, and accounts of past practices.

With respect to experience narratives, it was shown how the story in Extract 1 could be seen as oriented to working particular situated identities for the speaker and other people in the group. It was shown further how a description of past practices was occasioned in the course of doing this identity work. This then led to consideration of the ways in which such descriptions, whether or not they are embedded in experience narratives, can be seen as affording for older speakers the working of an identity as a participant in the collective practices of the historical era being talked about. It was shown further how the collaboration of speakers in producing joint accounts of past practices can be seen as working a common identity in the present, as members of such communities of

practice, and beyond this, as participants in a particular cultural and moral order, different to that of the present.

This analysis has a number of implications. First, it shows that talk which might be described as 'reminiscence' cannot be seen simply as talk about the past. Rather, it is seen to be both practical and present oriented.

Second, the analysis shows that the consequences of such talk cannot be reduced to a determinate or determinable set of 'functions', ascribed to it without reference to the particular circumstances of its production.

Nevertheless, in the course of the preceding analysis, some generalisations have been made about the kinds of accomplishments made possible by this talk. These generalisations can be related to the other broad aim of this chapter – to address claims that reminiscence groups have positive consequences for the identities and social relationships of the older people who participate in them. In particular, it has been argued that talk about social practices of the past, a common topic of conversation in reminiscence groups, affords the discursive constitution of membership in the present.

Of course, reminiscence groups are not the only arena for this kind of talk, and the accomplishments it makes possible. Nevertheless, there are clearly circumstances in which such opportunities may be lost or at least reduced, due to the physical and social vicissitudes of old age. In these circumstances, reminiscence groups can be seen as providing more than the opportunity for social intercourse. They also provide an opportunity for working an identity of someone who 'belongs', as a member of the cultural and moral order constituted through talk about the practices of

the past. This opportunity may be even more important in care settings, which involve a further degree of social dislocation.

It is being argued here, then, that claims related to the benefits of reminiscence groups for social relations and identity derive, at least in part, from a recognition of the positive accomplishments made possible through the discursive practices identified in the foregoing analysis. However, this analysis can only be seen as an initial and partial attempt to address these issues – partial in the sense that it deals with only some of the talk which occurs in groups, and also in the sense that it has focussed deliberately on positive accomplishments. In respect of the latter, it is pertinent at this point to consider again the double-edged nature of the membership constituted in the talk examined here. That is, in working membership, it also works ‘cultural estrangement’. This then seems to be a less than positive consequence, in that it can be seen as positioning older people as marginal, as non-participants in the ‘culture of the present’. However, there is a way in which such an identity can be turned to positive advantage. That is, older people, in virtue of their membership of ‘another culture’, can be positioned as informants on that culture. The basis of their membership of the ‘culture of the present’ would then lie in their role as providers of valued knowledge of the ‘culture of the past’.

Here we encounter again the ‘sociological’ repertoire of ‘reminiscence-and-ageing’ discussed in Chapter 4. This time, however, the interest is not in the representation of reminiscence, but in the talk that takes place in reminiscence groups, and how this talk works an identity for older people as historical informants, teachers, bearers of cultural heritage. Working this identity depends on having someone to inform/teach, and in reminiscence groups, this would be the care workers running the group, as

representatives of another generation, of a different culture. An analysis of the way this identity is worked would thus demand attention to the talk of care workers as well as older participants. Such an analysis will form the substance of the next chapter.

Chapter 8

Talk, Knowledge and Status Relations in Reminiscence Groups

Previous chapters have demonstrated a central orientation to the 'social position' of older people in discourse about reminiscence work. Discursive formulations of the nature of reminiscence and reminiscence work have been shown to embody representations of ageing and of the demographic category 'the elderly' which have implications and consequences for the positioning (Davies and Harré, 1990) of older people in their relations with other (younger) people. With particular regard to care settings, these formulations often take the form of claims regarding the potential of reminiscence work to change status relations between older people and care workers. That is, care practices are seen as positioning older people as dependent and of lower status in relation to care workers; reminiscence work is seen as a means of democratising this relation, through joint participation in an 'ordinary' activity in which both workers and clients have equal expertise; or as reversing status relations, through positioning older people as bearers of 'cultural heritage' or historical knowledge. Such claims are the point of departure for the analyses of talk in reminiscence groups presented in this chapter. In particular, attention will be given to the ways in which talk about the historical past in reminiscence groups works to constitute different kinds of status relations between older participants and group workers.

Older people as historical informants

It has been noted in previous chapters that the reminiscences of older people are often represented as communicating useful historical knowledge. Indeed, some authors see reminiscence work itself as developing out of oral history and

community history projects, with a shift from a concern with the collection of oral testimony as historical data to a concern with the consequences for those older people of providing such data (Thompson, 1988; Bornat, 1989b). Much of the talk produced by care workers in the course of orchestrating reminiscence groups is oriented to the elicitation and marking of such knowledge. One might even say this is the standard format of such groups. Care workers will introduce a topic, perhaps with the aid of pictures or artefacts from a particular historical era, and ask questions designed to elicit talk related to it. Extract 1 is a typical example, taken from the first session with the Residential group.

Extract 1 (R1/28)

FG s:o would the/ the thresher be/ hired out/ not every farmer would have had his own thresher

AP no no/ hired/ hired out/ hired out=

CR? [(most people keep em)

?f [(oh no)

MC =((to HM)) did the farmers hire these/ machines=

AP [yes

HM oh aye/ they'd (hire them) out/ because there was machines around the country=

MC =and he went around the country and/ each farmer hired him for/ a certain time/ yes

HM [ar

?f [(aye)

This sequence is part of a discussion which began with the presentation to the group of an old photograph of a thresher, a type of farm machinery. This then led to discussion of activities and experiences associated with the harvest in the days when the picture was taken. At the start of the sequence, FG, one of the group workers, asks a question of the group (*"s:o would the/ the thresher be/ hired out"*), followed by a statement displaying the reasoning prompting the question – that, presumably due to limited resources, *"not every farmer would have had his own thresher"*. This then elicits responses from a number of participants. MC, the other group worker, then directs the same question to one participant, HM, who furnishes more information (*"because there was machines/ around the country"*). MC responds to this with a candidate elaboration of this information (*"and he went around the country and/ each farmer hired him for/ a certain time"*) which is ratified by HM and another participant, and then marked as ratified by MC herself (*"yes"*).

Positioning participants as experts

In the above sequence, both group workers ask questions related to the practices being discussed, and in doing so, they position themselves as ignorant with respect to these practices. At the same time, they position those questioned as potentially knowledgeable informants. In providing answers to these questions, the older participants in the group are afforded the opportunity of working such an identity for themselves. Most often, things proceed as in Extract 1, and such sequences are common in all three of the groups studied. However, this positioning work on the part of the group workers also manifests in other ways. For example, a particular participant might be explicitly positioned as an 'expert' on a particular topic. Extract 2 is an example of such a move, taken again from the Residential group.

Extract 2 (R1/17)

FG pass that round for you to= ((passes photograph))

MM =its not- it's it's not a plough it's not a pl-/ it's not a plough/ (it's not a)
(2)

MM don't know what that is
(2)

FG well shall we ask/ ask Hugh Mullen he'll know
what it is

HM ()

?f well what is it

MC what is the machine Hugh what a-/ what is it doing

HM () a cultivator
(1)

MC a rotavator/ cultivator

HM () tearing up the ground

MC oh/ mm hmm

At the start of this sequence, FG hands round a photograph of a farming implement, with the aim of identifying it, and presumably eliciting talk related to it. In the absence of any such identification, and after MM's explicit statement of ignorance, FG produces an utterance directed at the group: *"well shall we ask/ ask Hugh Mullen he'll know what it is"*. It has become apparent earlier in the discussion that HM spent his working life on farms, and he has already provided information related to farming practices. FG's utterance works to position him as something of an expert on these matters, and moreover someone who is known to

be an expert and can be relied on to enlighten the rest of the group.

Marking 'new' information

Similar work is done is through the explicit formulation of participants' responses as informative. Extract 3, taken from the Residential group, is a particularly explicit example of such a move.

Extract 3 (R4/26)

FG had you ever heard of sowans
KM no
FG Annie?
AP I heard about it but I never saw it
?m [()
FG and Hugh?/ Hu-/ Hugh?/ did you ever hear of sowans
MC [(our) neighbours
CR [() at all
HM no
FG no/ well youve taught us all something this afternoon
BF what
FG youve taught us all something new this afternoon/ you've never heard of it
MJ no I was erm/ I was from Portrush
BF [(ah well she was) () (town)
FG so/ these townies really didn't know about it at all

Prior to the sequence, BF has been telling the group about 'sowans', a kind of jelly made from oatmeal. At the start of the sequence, FG proceeds to ask a number of participants in turn if they are familiar with this dish. The negative responses she receives allow her to formulate BF's account as genuinely informative for the whole group (*"youve taught us all something this afternoon"; "you've taught us all something new this afternoon"*). This kind of explicit marking of new information is not as common as the phenomena illustrated in Extracts 1 and 2, and seems to occur mainly in the Residential group¹. However, transcripts from the other groups show some evidence of a similar concern with the novelty of information on the part of the older people in the groups. Extract 4 is an example of this, taken from the hospital group.

Extract 4 (H8/6)

Sue: this er/ it was gas tar they called it/ black stuff/ you could scoop
it up an-/ y'know/ make a ball with it/ and er/ we used to play
with it/ used to get it on our knees / when we got home/
we used to have to/ me mother used
to rub some lard on em
[
Rose: scrub
[
Dot: rub it with-/ lard on yes/ () lard/ yes
[
?f: yes/ yes
[
Kay?: lard yes

¹This difference may be a consequence of the fact that the Residential group sessions were to appear in a videotape showing examples of group reminiscence, forming part of the training package 'Using Reminiscence' (Gibson, 1989). The manual accompanying the package frequently represents older people as custodians of historical and cultural knowledge, and represents group reminiscence as a means of allowing them to impart this knowledge to others, thus changing the status relations between care workers and their older clients. It may be that the group workers, one of whom is the author of the package, were especially oriented to displaying this 'benefit' of reminiscence work.

Sue: lard spread on/ have you heard that
[used to have the
?f: [yes
Tina: no
((simplified transcript))

This sequence is part of discussion about games played as children. Sue describes playing with road tar, and how her mother used to use lard to remove the tar from her knees. Other participants join in at this point, ratifying Sue's account in the manner discussed in the previous chapter. Following this ratification, Sue repeats the point about lard, and then asks "*have you heard that*". Given that many participants have already displayed their knowledge of this practice, this utterance appears to be directed to the group workers, and one of the group workers (Tina) responds in the negative to Sue's question. Sue's question can thus be seen as displaying an orientation to providing group workers with information not previously known to them.

Personalising group workers' ignorance

Another move sometimes made by group workers is to ask questions about past practices in such a way as to locate them in relation to their own concerns, to personalise them as it were. Extract 5 is taken from a discussion about 'old fashioned remedies' which took place in one of the Hospital sessions.

Extract 5 (H8/20)

Tina: has anyone done anything with feverfew

Alf: pardon

Tina: did anybody do anything with a herb called feverfew/ only somebody's given me one the other day, and I wondered what that's used for

Meg: is it migraine

Tina: I don't know/ I thought it was something to do with headaches

Meg: yes

Tina: it's a herb that's/ quite a leafy one that somebody's given me to put in the garden

Rose: oh

(2)

Rose: well the flu was something that er/ happened/ in later years isn't it/ when you were young you never heard of flu

At the start of this sequence, Tina, one of the group workers, asks a question directed at the group as a whole, about the herb feverfew. Asked to repeat the question, she does so, and then goes on to provide a reason for asking it: *"only somebody's given me one the other day, and I wondered what that's used for"*. In providing this reason, she sets up a different agenda to that set by the question alone. An answer to the question would now not only have the value of providing information asked for, but would also be helping her with a problem, solving a puzzle that is personal to her. In this case, no solution is forthcoming, and Rose changes topic.

Nevertheless, this move on the part of Tina can be seen as a particularly effective means of positioning the potential respondent as providing desired knowledge, in that the information provided would not only remedy Tina's state of ignorance, but would be of practical help to her.

The sequences examined so far are similar in many respects to some of those examined in the previous chapter, in that they involve accounts of past practices. Here, however, we are concerned with the ways in which the group workers elicit and respond to such accounts. Their questions and responses can be seen as working to position the older people in the group, not just as participants in the collective practices of the past, but as informants on those practices, able to dispel the ignorance of group workers. Most commonly, this is accomplished through simple questions, with the other discursive practices identified being less common. Nevertheless, all show a common orientation to positioning older participants as historical informants.

The significance of these practices is that they can be seen as working to constitute situated identities and social relations which can be set in contrast to those commonly available in care settings. That is, it could be argued that, in care settings, clients will generally be positioned as subordinate to, and dependent on, care workers (Estes, 1979; Bowl, 1986; Phillipson, 1989; Hockey and James, 1990). Care workers will tell them where to go and what to do, when to do it, and so on. In contrast to this dependent and subordinate status, the practices identified above can be seen as placing older people in a position of superior status in relation to care workers. Outside the group, the care workers are in a position of authority; inside the group, it is the older clients who assume this position. The relation might be cast in a number of different ways – as expert and non-expert, perhaps, or as teacher and student. In this respect, these practices can be seen as instantiations of the ‘sociological’ repertoire of reminiscence-and-ageing discussed in Chapter 4, in which the reminiscences of older people are represented as imparting socially valuable knowledge (‘cultural heritage’, ‘oral history’) to younger people. The sequences examined so far in this chapter might thus be seen as providing evidence

of the 'validity' of such a representation, evidence that group reminiscence can indeed work to set up this kind of social relation.

However, there is a certain ambiguity about the social relations constituted in the above extracts. While the questions and responses of group workers can be seen as positioning older participants as authorities on the past, they can also work to constitute a quite different kind of social relation, one which can be seen as perpetuating the dependent and subordinate identity of older people as recipients of care provision. This phenomenon will be explored in the next section.

'Pedagogical' talk in reminiscence groups

In the previous section, it was noted that one common way in which older people are afforded the opportunity of working an identity as historical informant is through group workers questions about past practices. This accomplishment is predicated on the 'knowledge state' of those asking the questions – it depends on them displaying their ignorance, and displaying a change of knowledge state in their response to answers, as in Extracts 2 through 5. However, asking a question need not constitute a display of ignorance, and there are many occasions in the group sessions where workers ask questions about the past, the answers to which are already known to them. Extract 6 is one such example, taken from the Hospital group. Jane, the group worker, has started the session by presenting the names of two public houses to the group, and asking if anyone remembers them. At the start of the extract, she asks participants when and why these buildings were demolished.

Extract 6 (H1/3)

Jane: yeah=when were they demolished/ when when was the white hart
and what was it demolished for

Ted: oh few years ()

[
Meg: oh that/ oh I th- that was that (&)

[
Rose: that was

Meg: (&) was in er/ humberstone gate wasn't it

[
Rose: o- o- yes/ over twenty years ago

?f: yes

Meg: yep/ it was up an alleyway wasn't it

Rose: yes

Jane: and it was demolished to make way for the haymarket centre
wasn't it

[
Sue: yes that's right yes

[
Rose: yes=

Meg?: =mm

Jane: can anybody remember when the haymarket centre was built

Jane's questions in this extract are clearly not asked from a state of ignorance. They are 'quiz' questions, asked to test participants' knowledge, rather than add to her own. This 'quiz' style is encountered mainly in the Hospital group. It can be seen as one way of facilitating the engagement of participants in discussion, and indeed seems to work in this extract. Extract 7 shows another style of question asking involving prior knowledge, this time from the Daycentre group and occurring during a discussion about games played as children.

Extract 7 (D3/24)

Mary: and there's another one you used to play/ another game you used to play none of you've mentioned your very cheap game/ what about your chestnuts that fell off the trees

Jean: about what

Bill: [what conkers

Jim: ooh yes

Jean: [conkers/ ooh ar

Mary: [what did you do with those

Jean: used to play conkers yes

Mary: yeah but what did you do with them

Doris: put them on a string

Jean: put them on a string and hit one another

Bill: [conker yeah/ string it/ knot on the bottom

Mary: yeah but if you cheated what could you do to the conker

Doris: hit it

Bill: () split it

Mary: if you w- to cheat/ it was something you could do to your conker

Doris: that was a boy's game

Bill: [you baked it=

Vera: =burn it=

Bill: =you baked it/ we baked it/ that hardened it

Mary: hardened it

Here again, Mary's questions are not asked from a position of ignorance. Clearly, she knows the answers to them already. Her aim is not to find out things she does not know, but rather to remind participants of what they know, and get them to talk about it. Again, the object seems to be to elicit talk and keep participants engaged in the discussion. The questioning strategies in both extracts can be seen as oriented to managing the group discussion. They get people talking, and they get people talking together, which might be seen as one of the basic objectives of running a reminiscence group.

The interesting thing about these strategies is that they are similar to those encountered in educational settings. In classroom discourse, teachers tend to ask most of the questions, and one of the implicit 'ground rules' of this discourse is that the teacher already knows the answer to the questions she asks (Mercer and Edwards, 1981). These questions then are not asked to get information. Rather, they function to assess children's learning, check their attention, and direct their thought and action in the lesson. They are used to define and direct the agenda of classroom discussion (Edwards and Mercer, 1987). Moreover, since it is understood that the teacher already knows the answer, her response to answers offered by children is read as evaluative. When the required answer is offered, a simple affirmative evaluation may be given; where the answer is not the one required, the teacher may simply repeat the question, and this repetition will be read as a negative evaluation of the proffered answer. This gives rise to the frequent occurrence of what have been termed IRF (initiation-response-feedback) exchanges in classroom discourse, where the teacher initiates with a question, the pupil responds, and the teacher then gives feedback on that response (Sinclair and Coulthard, 1975).

Jane's questioning style in Extract 6 can clearly be read as pedagogical talk. Her questions are asking for information she already has, and can thus be seen as eliciting or even testing the knowledge of the older people in the group. Mary's style in Extract 7 is somewhat different. Her first question is asking about a game played by children which has not yet been mentioned by participants. Rather than simply reminding them of this game by naming it, she proceeds to give them cues to elicit the name from them (*"your very cheap game/ what about your chestnuts that fell off the trees"*). Having obtained a response, she asks another question (*"what did you do with those"*). Jean then says *"used to play conkers yes"*, which may or may not be produced as an answer to Mary's second question. Mary repeats her second question more emphatically (*"yeah but what did you do with them"*), acknowledging Jean's utterance, but marking it as the 'wrong' response at this point in the conversation. After participants respond to this question, she makes a similar move, giving a more precise cue as to the answer she requires (*"yeah but if you cheated what could you do to the conker"*). After further responses from participants, she repeats the question in a slightly different form (*"if you w- to cheat/ it was something you could do to your conker"*). Bill and Vera offer further candidate answers (*"burn it"*; *"you baked it/ we baked it/ hardened it"*). Mary responds by repeating part of Sid's answer (*"hardened it"*), thus implying that this was the information she was seeking in asking her earlier question *"what did you do with those"*. This sequence can be seen as being made up a number of IRF exchanges, with Mary's questions and responses closely controlling the trajectory of the conversation to the point where the 'right answer' is offered and acknowledged.

The above extracts show that group workers' discursive practices sometimes engender sequences of interaction which are recognisably pedagogical in character. The significance of these sequences inheres in the social relations constituted by

them, relations which are in some ways diametrically opposite to those discussed in the previous section. Whereas group workers' actions in Extracts 1 through 5 can be seen as enabling older participants to work a high status identity as historical informants, those in Extracts 6 and 7 work to position them as lower in status in relation to group workers. This latter relation is constituted through the way in which group workers' questioning and responses control the trajectory of the discussion, and the way these questions and responses work to display the status of group workers' knowledge of the topic being discussed. The questions display a state of knowledge rather than a state of ignorance, and older participants' responses to these questions, rather than being treated as informative, are treated in terms of their degree of correlation with the response the questioner has in mind. Thus, the group worker rather than the older person becomes the 'authority' in the discussion.

There is, then, a certain ambiguity about the group workers' position in the group, an ambiguity which turns on the status of their knowledge. This is graphically illustrated in Extract 8, taken from a session with the Hospital group.

Extract 8 (H1/11)

Jane: and what about gee nephews/ what was the difference between gee nephews/ and adderleys/ cos they were next door to each other weren't they=

Rose: =yes

[
Sue: well erm/ di- did gee nephews erm/ trade more in gentlemans

[
Rose: werent quite so up to date

Rose: yes

Jane: I don't know it's all before my time

Sue: [I think they did/ I'm not sure

Rose: [yes

Rose: yes

Sue: I think they did

This sequence is part of a discussion about local shops as they used to be. Previous to the sequence, Jane has been asking questions in the 'quiz' style illustrated in Extract 6. Her question at the start of Extract 8 is thus oriented to by Sue as a question to which Jane knows the answer, this orientation being displayed by the interrogative and hesitant form of her response (*"well erm/ di- did gee nephews erm/ trade more in gentlemans"*). In response to this, Jane makes a move which positions herself as ignorant of the answer to the question, and, moreover, ignorant on the basis of her age (*"I don't know its all before my time"*). Jane's utterance here can be seen as a succinct articulation of the position taken by group workers in the extracts discussed at the start of this chapter, a position which affords the opportunity for older participants to work an identity as historical informants. Here, however, such a move sits uneasily with, and is indeed contradicted by, what has gone before, where, even though it was all before Jane's time, she knew all about it. A more subtle example of this ambiguity is shown in Extract 9, taken from the same session.

Extract 9 (H1/14)

Jane: there's something else I want to ask you that I noticed/ I was looking at some old family photographs of our family on holiday at Mablethorpe/ in about nineteen sixties nineteen sixty five it was/ and there's a lovely photograph of my grandpa/ but he's in his everyday work clothes/

were there no/ holiday clothes as we a- as we know now/ I mean now
 when/ we go on holiday you take your jee- y- your shorts and yer-/ it's
 a it's a different wardrobe of clothing to what you wear/ every day

[absolutely [yes

Sue:

Meg: yes

Sue?: yes

[

Ted: well there was/ (several things) you could/ use or borrow/
 at these () shops (but)

[

Jane: mm

Jane: but thi- they show/ this photograph is of my grandfather/
 on the beach at Mablethorpe/ and it's nineteen sixty five and he's (&)

[

Ted: ah

[

?f: mm

[and he's-

Ted:

Jane: (&) got his bowler hat/ his overcoat his jacket his waistcoat his shirt
 and his trousers and his shoes and his socks

Sue: well I don't think they did have holiday clothes then did they

[

Kay: no

[

Jane: oh didn't they

Sue: they-

Ted: ()

[

Jane: that's what I wanted to find out

In some respects, this extract is similar to Extract 5 above. Jane sets up a puzzle or problem for participants to solve, and locates that problem in her personal life. The question being asked is: *"were there no/ holiday clothes as we a- as we know now"*.

After various responses from other participants, Sue says *"well I don't think they did have holiday clothes then did they"*. Jane's response to this displays ignorance of this fact (*"oh didn't they"*), and she then marks it as the solution to her personal puzzle (*"that's what I wanted to find out"*). On the face of it, then, we might say that Jane is positioning herself as ignorant, and Sue is thus positioned as an historical informant, capable of enlightening her. However, this reading is undermined by other features of the extract. Of interest here is the response offered by Ted to Jane's query: *"well there was/ (several things) you could/ use or borrow/ at these () shops (but)"*. Jane offers only minimal acknowledgement of this response, and follows this by repeating her question, prefaced with a *"but"*. This repetition is similar to that noted in Extract 7, and is a common feature of pedagogical talk. Appearing here, it can be seen as a rejection of Ted's answer as 'wrong'. This move gives the sequence a pedagogical character, giving the impression that Jane already knows what she wants to hear – it is difficult to see any other reason for such a response to Ted's utterance, since it is in itself just as informative as Sue's. Here again, then, the discourse reveals an ambiguity in the status of group workers knowledge, which in turn leads to an ambiguity with respect to the status relation between herself and older participants.

Topicalising pedagogy

The argument being advanced here is ^{that} the sequences of interaction discussed in the previous section are recognisably pedagogical in character, and that this kind of talk occurs regularly in reminiscence groups. Further support for this analytical argument is provided by instances in which group workers and participants themselves characterise the activity they are engaged in as pedagogical. Extract 10 is one example of this, taken from the Daycentre group.

Extract 10 (D1/31)

Bill: I ask I'll ask em what () when that girl jumped out of a plane (&)

Mary: [you ask em (you take over love)

Bill: (&) in Abbey Lane=

?: =yeah

Mary: listen to Bill/ he'll take the class

In this extract, Mary, the worker, characterises Bill's intention to "ask em" as a move to "take over" and to "take the class". In doing this, she can be seen as making humorous reference to her own questioning activity as potentially pedagogical. Similar explicit references to pedagogical activities and settings occur in talk between participants in the Hospital group, in this case recorded prior to the start of the reminiscence sessions. Extracts 11 and 12 present examples of this.

Extract 11 (G3/1)

((Myself and three or four older people are sitting in the group room waiting for others to arrive and for the session to start. Jane, the nurse who conducts the reminiscence sessions, comes in and then goes out again.))

Sue: we'll make whoopee while she's away

?f: ((laugh))

Ted: [yes

Sue: heh

Ted: get your cards out/ ((laugh))

((A few minutes later, Rose is brought in by Jane and helped into a seat. Jane leaves. People sit in silence for some seconds.))

Rose: what are we in here for/ a lecture

(2)

Ted: I think we're going back to school here

Rose: m m

Extract 12 (G9/PRE)

((Myself, Sue and Meg are sitting in the group room waiting for others to arrive and for the session to start. Sue and Meg are trying to remember what topic has been planned for the session))

Sue: I mean she usually tells us (don't she)/ she usually says next week we'll discuss ()=

Meg: =yeah

(3)

Sue: better be ready with the answers else I shall get chucked out

Meg: ((laugh))

[
Sue: ((laugh))

The talk of the older people in these extracts shows their awareness of the pedagogical overtones of the group discussions they are participating in. In Extract 11, 'making whoopee' and 'getting the cards out' are the kind of thing schoolchildren might be expected to do when left alone by their teacher. These humorous comments are followed by Ted's explicit reference to being at school. Similarly, in Extract 12, Sue's "*better be ready with the answers else I shall get chucked out*" can be read as constituting her position in the group discussion as akin

to that of a schoolgirl, who is expected to have answers ready for the teacher's questions.

It is notable that these sequences are characterised by humour. The representations of the group activity they contain can be seen as caricatures of the situation, overstating the authoritarian nature of the group workers' actions and position in the group. Clearly, Sue would not really be 'chucked out' if she failed to come up with the answers; neither is the group workers' presence so oppressive that the participants are moved to 'make whoopee' in her absence. On the part of group workers, such humorous overstatement can be seen as a device to distance themselves from an authoritarian role which would be inappropriate to the egalitarian ethos of reminiscence work.² In a similar fashion, the talk of the older participants can be seen as distancing their position in the group activity from the position of schoolchildren in class, and can thus be seen as an attempt to defuse the negative identity implications which go along with this. This topicalisation of pedagogy, then, at the same time as it acknowledges the possibility of reading the group activity as pedagogical, is oriented to defusing or undermining the implications of that reading for the identities and status relations of group workers and older participants.

²Middleton and Mackinlay (1987) identify a similar strategy in their study of talk in a multidisciplinary child development centre. The working relationships of the centre are informed by a democratic ethos, and talk between staff of different statuses is shown to be orientated to conforming to this ethos, avoiding as far as possible the authoritarianism of rank. The authors present an example in which a speech therapist makes a request of a nursery nurse which might be read as overly authoritarian, and then immediately proceeds to parody her own request by repeating it in the humorously exaggerated tone of a sergeant major, thus distancing her own request from such an overly authoritarian act.

Discussion: The dilemma of care

The broad aim of this chapter has been to address claims made regarding changes in social relations between care workers and the older people in their care which are said to occur as a result of participation in reminiscence groups. The foregoing analyses have shown the ways in which group workers' questions and responses work to position older participants as historical informants. Older participants are thus able to work a high status identity in relation to group workers, and this status relation can be contrasted with that which generally holds in care settings.

However, it was further demonstrated that group workers' actions also engender interaction which is recognisably 'pedagogical'. In this kind of interaction, older participants are positioned as lower in status in relation to group workers, who assume the discursive position of 'teacher', evaluating contributions to the discussion from a position of knowledge rather than ignorance.

These findings, then, both support and contradict the claims referred to above.

Some of the time, group workers' actions in reminiscence groups do indeed work to bring about a change in status relations. On other occasions, however, they produce relations which can be seen as a perpetuation of those commonly existing between care workers and their charges, with older participants being positioned as subordinate to the authority of group workers. Moreover, on such occasions, the association of the discursive actions of group workers with pedagogical settings means that older participants are positioned not merely as subordinates, but also as 'schoolchildren'. This consequence is particularly unfortunate, in that it aligns reminiscence work with other practices, both within and outside of care settings, which 'infantilise' older people and perpetuate their dependent and marginal status (Hockey and James, 1990). There is thus a particular resonance to these pedagogical sequences which is fundamentally at odds with the stated aims of reminiscence

work.

The possibility that reminiscence groups may not of necessity be arenas for transforming the social relations of care is alluded to by Bornat (1989b), a leading proponent of reminiscence work, who suggests that “reminiscence has occasionally been left to become just another panacea or passing time activity in some institutions” (Bornat, 1989b: 21). Hopkins and Harris, (1990) make a slightly different point, but one which has the same general implications:

[T]here is a tendency to base reminiscence on ‘scripts’ of a particular kind, utilising either a set of materials or artefacts to illustrate historical periods as a focus for the group’s central themes. The way in which such materials are then used is very much determined by the worker. Thus, reminiscence runs the risk of being or becoming a process in which the selection, deployment and evaluation of materials is very much in the hands of service providers, and very little in the hands of service users. This tendency is in conflict with the alleged change in power relations which reminiscence work is said to bring about. (Hopkins and Harris, 1990: 10)

These points are clearly related to the same issues of power relations in reminiscence groups which have been the focus of analysis in this chapter. One way of understanding the actions on the part of group workers which engender the pedagogical sequences identified is to see them as a strategy for managing the group discussion. Running a group is not just about getting people talking, it also involves exercising a certain degree of control, to ensure that the group discussion does not break down, either through the development of side conversations, or through a simple lack of things to say, whether on the part of group workers or older participants. To ask questions about that which one already knows, and to employ the forms of pedagogical discourse, are ways of making the ensuing talk more predictable and controllable.

One way of understanding this phenomenon, then, is to see it as poor group management, as 'bad practice'. This understanding might then inform the training of reminiscence group workers, with a view to maximising actions which afford the working of a high status identity for older participants, and minimising those which work to perpetuate the 'conventional' status relations of care provision. The points made by Bornat (1989b) and Hopkins and Harris (1990) can be interpreted as taking such a position, locating the problem at the level of the practices of particular institutions. However, to leave it at that would be to miss an important aspect of the activity which takes place in reminiscence groups. In the foregoing analysis, even in the sequences in which older participants are being positioned as historical informants, this accomplishment is made possible by the actions of group workers. Even when they ask questions from genuine ignorance, and allow the older people's contributions to dictate the agenda of discussion, they still remain in control of the group. Indeed, their control of the group is a necessary condition for the repositioning practices discussed earlier – it is they who create the conditions for the working of high status identities on the part of older participants.

In a sense, then, the ambiguity of status relations noted in Extracts 8 and 9 is only a particularly gross example of an ambiguity which is present throughout the sessions. The movement in and out of pedagogical sequences can be seen as a consequence of this ever-present ambiguity, rather than as a simple case of bad practice. In attempting to provide conditions for older participants to work high status identities, group workers find themselves caught in a dilemma, since in the very act of providing such conditions, they position older participants as subordinate to their status as managers of the group. It is oversimplifying matters, then, to say that in the extracts discussed at the start of this chapter, older people are

accomplishing a higher status identity in relation to group workers. Rather, there is a complex interplay of identities and status relations, arising from the dilemma in which group workers find themselves. It is this dilemma which underpins the movement between, on the one hand, interactions approaching the form of an oral history interview, and, on the other, interactions which approach the form of classroom discourse. Moreover, this dilemma is not peculiar to reminiscence work, but can be seen as an inherent feature of care provision, where such provision is oriented to changing the social relations between care workers and their clients.

The dilemma of care is that it is both serving and supervising. To take care of someone is to serve them by providing for their needs. At the same time, care involves management and supervision. To have someone 'in your charge' is to be 'in charge' of someone. In the process of providing for a person's needs, the provider assumes control, and this places the person provided for in a potentially dependent and subordinate position with regard to the provider. The dilemma is that, in the very act of giving, care provision potentially erodes autonomy and personal freedom. This can be seen as an 'ideological' dilemma, of the same kind as those identified by Billig et al (1988). In their analyses of talk in a variety of settings, they demonstrate that common-sense understandings of such social domains as education, health and illness, prejudice and gender are inherently contradictory. They show how peoples' talk related to these issues can be seen as wrestling with these contradictions, and argue that such contradictions are the very 'engine' of thinking and discourse – it is in virtue of the fact that there is not simply one way of understanding these things, that we are able or motivated to talk about them at all.

This problematic of care, and its embodiment in care practices involving older people, has also been noted by Atkinson and Coupland (1988). Working within the framework of speech accommodation theory, their concern is with the overaccommodative nature of some talk addressed to older people – that is, that the talk can be read as demeaning or patronising. They present an analysis of home help training materials, noting how these materials are explicit in stating the need for home helps to counteract stereotypical images of older people which position them as dependent, and to treat older people as individuals with autonomous rights, thus implying the advocacy of ‘overaccommodation avoidance’. However, in their analysis of a simulated interaction (forming part of a tape/slide package) between a prototypical home help and her older client, they show how the representations of the home help’s and the older person’s talk work both to display and legitimise overaccommodation.

The contradictory discursive practices of group workers identified in the foregoing analysis can be seen as an embodiment of the problematic of care. Such practices can be seen as working against the anti-ageist orientation of other discursive practices which constitute reminiscence work, identified in previous chapters. However, this need not be taken as cause for undue pessimism. The analyses presented in Chapters 4, 5 and 6 have shown how discursive formulations of the nature and value of reminiscence work embody an ongoing ‘cultural argument’ concerning the social position of older people, whether in care practices or in the wider community. The talk and texts of proponents and practitioners of reminiscence work are oriented to the privileging of formulations which work against the marginalisation of older people. These formulations are always moves in an argument. Moreover, this argument is always embodied in actual practices. We can see the same argument being played out in reminiscence groups, in the movement between

marginalising practices, and those which work against marginalisation.

This argument is never won in any final sense, or resolved once and for all. We cannot expect reminiscence groups to be unproblematically transformative of the social relations of care provision. Nevertheless, new moves develop in the course of this argument. The very emergence of reminiscence as an object of practice and research, in early papers reporting research on reminiscence (Butler, 1963; McMahon and Rhudick, 1964; Lewis, 1971), can be seen as such a move, involving as it does the mobilisation of the 'psychological' repertoire as a counter to the 'dysfunctional' repertoire in the service of an argument for change in the social relations of ageing. A similar move can be seen in the recruiting of the representation of ageing as involving the accretion of knowledge and experience, mobilised in the 'sociological' repertoire of reminiscence-and-ageing, formulated in opposition to the representation of ageing as a process of decrement, mobilised in the 'psychological' repertoire. In a similar way, although marginalising practices form part of reminiscence work, it seems likely that new practices will develop in opposition to them, developing out of the cultural dynamic through which reminiscence work is constituted. Some speculations as to what these might be will be offered next chapter, which discusses the implications of the research reported in this thesis.

Chapter 9

Discussion

The analyses presented in previous chapters represent an initial step towards an account of reminiscence work as an arena of discursive practice. This chapter presents a summary of that account, and considers its implications for reminiscence work and reminiscence research.

The discursive constitution of 'reminiscence' work as care practice

Reminiscence work as anti-ageist practice

In focussing on the ways in which the nature and value of 'reminiscence' and 'reminiscence work' are represented in the discourse of practitioners, researchers and proponents of reminiscence work, regularities of discursive practice have been identified. These practices can be seen as working to constitute particular kinds of social relations in which older people are inserted, both within and outside of care settings.

They can be seen as moves in an ongoing argument related to the appropriate social position of older people, and to the nature of ageing itself, formulated against moves which work to position older people as marginal to community life, and which construe ageing as a process of decrement.

In characterising these practices as moves in an argument, it is important to emphasise their status as practices. Talk and texts which formulate the nature of reminiscence work, or the significance of reminiscence for older people, are not to be seen merely as a descriptive commentary on these things. These discursive formulations are constitutive and thus have functional consequences. There are a variety of ways in which 'ageing',

'reminiscence' and 'reminiscence work' can be represented in discourse, and there is no objective arbiter of the 'truth' of these various representations. Whichever representation is to be taken as 'true' depends on the rhetorical resources which are mobilised on the actual occasions when these representations become the topic of discourse. In constituting the nature of 'ageing' and 'reminiscence', such representations have consequences. Implicitly or explicitly, they can be used to justify the ways in which older people are treated – whether they are listened to or ignored, whether they are respected or derogated. The concern with anti-ageism expressed by proponents and practitioners of reminiscence work is not just an aim or intention which informs their work, but is pursued through the ways in which this work is constituted in discourse.

Anecdote, evidence and therapy

This analysis has a number of implications for current debates regarding the value of reminiscence work for older people. In particular, it recasts the discrepancy between anecdote and 'hard' evidence as implicated in the cultural argument discussed above. Accounts of reminiscence work based on experimental studies can be seen as mobilising a different set of discursive resources to those mobilised in the 'anecdotal' accounts emanating mainly from practitioners and proponents of reminiscence work. In formulating the value of reminiscence in terms of 'psychological function', experimental accounts can be seen as working against the anti-ageist concerns of reminiscence work. This is so, not simply in that such accounts fail to engage with practitioners' claims for the social-relational benefits of reminiscence. It is so in that these accounts mobilise formulations of reminiscence which represent ageing in terms of decrement and disengagement. In addition, the authority of these accounts means that they take precedence over practitioners' accounts, and

thus work to undermine the legitimacy of reminiscence work as an arena of practice.

This problem is compounded when reminiscence work is represented as 'therapy'. Here, practitioners are caught in a dilemma. While formulations of reminiscence as 'therapy' can be used to argue for the 'special' benefits of reminiscence work as compared to other group activities, these formulations carry with them the social-relational implications of professional discourse. In doing this, they come into conflict with the common formulation of group reminiscence as an 'ordinary', egalitarian activity, through which the social-relational concerns of reminiscence work are pursued. Moreover, the representation of reminiscence work as 'therapy' serves to legitimate its evaluation in psychological rather than social-relational terms. However, the representation of reminiscence work as involving an 'ordinary' activity lays it open to trivialisation as a mere pastime, with no 'special' benefits, again undermining its legitimacy as an arena of practice.

The stated need for 'hard evidence' of the benefits of reminiscence work, then, is implicated in the cultural argument concerning the social relations of ageing and care provision through which reminiscence work is constituted, and is a consequence of the differential concerns of research and practice. The pursuit of 'hard evidence' will not resolve the problem, if this pursuit involves taking measures of 'psychological functioning' which are displaced from the actual terms of conversational engagement within reminiscence groups (see Chapter 2). 'Anecdotal' accounts are, in the main, focussed on descriptions of what goes on within reminiscence groups. What is needed is a research programme which addresses this conversational activity, and which offers the possibility of lending

authority to practitioners' accounts of reminiscence work. The analyses presented in Chapters 7 and 8 can be seen as first step in addressing this need.

Conversational activity in reminiscence groups

The analyses in Chapters 7 and 8 were, in a general sense, intended to address claims that participation in reminiscence groups has beneficial consequences for the 'identity' of older people, and for the social relations between older participants, and between older participants and group workers. Given the scope of this thesis, these analyses constitute little more than an illustrative argument concerning the accomplishments afforded within reminiscence groups. Nevertheless, they provide some indication of the nature of these accomplishments.

Membership

In particular, Chapter 7 showed how talk about the practices of the past can be seen as working to constitute situated identities for older people as members of the cultural and moral order of the past. In reminiscence groups, this talk can further be seen as constituting membership in the present, as older participants collaborate in producing accounts which constitute 'shared experience' of the practices and mores of the past. The results of this analysis can be related to claims regarding the beneficial effects of reminiscence on identities and social relations of older participants in the groups. However, it emphasises that the talk in the groups works to constitute these identities and social relations in situ, rather than being a causal agent operating on, and separate from, identity and social relationships. It is important to be clear here that no assumption is being made about feelings or mental states which might be a consequence of these ways of speaking. As argued in Chapter 3, such

things are not accessible as an object of study which can be definitively described or measured. What is accessible to analysis is talk which displays and constitutes identity and social relationships.

Strangers, informants and pedagogy

Also in Chapter 7, it was noted that talk about past practices, in working to constitute membership of the past, also worked to constitute 'cultural estrangement' from the present, which could be seen as problematic for a practice oriented working against the marginalisation of older people. Chapter 8 presented an analysis of one way in which this problem might be resolved, through the positioning of older people as historical informants with respect to group workers. A variety of discursive practices were identified through which group workers positioned themselves as ignorant, and through which older participants were afforded the opportunity to work a high status identity as informants for group workers or the group as a whole. Such positioning practices can be related to claims made regarding the potential of reminiscence work to transform the relations of care practice.

However, this analysis showed that group workers' actions also engender sequences of interaction similar to classroom discourse, which worked to position older people as lower in status to group workers, and which could be seen as working a negative age-identity for them, in a similar way to other 'infantilising' practices (Hockey and James, 1990). These practices, clearly antithetical to the stated anti-ageist orientation for reminiscence work, were identified as a consequence of the problematic of care provision, involving the potentially contradictory functions of service and supervision. It was suggested that the embodiment of this problematic in the contradictory practice of group workers might be a spur to the

development of new forms of reminiscence work. Some possible developments will be suggested below, in discussing the implications of this research for the practice of reminiscence work. First, a brief note on representativeness.

Representativeness

Given that only three groups provided data for this research, it is pertinent to question the representativeness of its findings. To what extent can we consider the groups studied here to be representative of reminiscence groups in general? This question can be answered as follows. The three groups differ in many respects: in terms of setting, membership, and also in terms of the group leaders' approach to practice. It is quite likely that further variation in practice would be found if data from other groups were added to the corpus. This variation could itself be usefully made the focus of analysis, and may well be in later work. For the present, however, this variation itself provides one basis for arguing for the representativeness of the analytical conclusions presented here regarding the talk in these groups. That is, features have been identified which are common to these three groups, despite the differences between them. This commonality serves as a warrant for arguing that these features are likely to be common to many reminiscence groups conducted with older people in care settings.

Implications for practice

One aim of this thesis has been to provide a systematic analysis of reminiscence work which addresses practitioners' claims regarding the value of their work. However, it is to be hoped that research of this kind will constitute more than just another reference to cite in making claims

regarding the benefits of reminiscence work for older people. In particular, the analytical insights provided by this research could be used reflexively by practitioners to inform their practice.

One issue of relevance here is the designation of reminiscence as 'therapy'. While some practitioners and proponents of reminiscence work are attuned to the problematic consequences of this label (eg: Gibson, 1992; Bornat, 1989b), some of the extracts presented in Chapter 6 suggest that others are happy to describe their work in this way. Gibson's and Bornat's arguments related to this issue will no doubt be taken up and acted on by others. However, the work presented here might be seen as contributing to these developments, in offering a systematic analysis of the problems involved in describing reminiscence work as 'therapy'.

With regard to how the analyses of talk in reminiscence groups might inform practice, perhaps the most obvious feature here is the identification of sequences of 'pedagogical' interaction in the groups. As implied in Chapter 8, this might be used to inform the training of group workers, who can be cautioned against engaging with participants in this way. However, as Atkinson and Coupland's (1988) study of home help training materials makes clear (see Chapter 8, p.25), this may not solve the problem. Another possibility is to develop new forms of practice. There are signs of this happening in commentaries on reminiscence work. For example, Hopkins and Harris (1990) suggest that, in contrast to the current tendency for group workers to determine the selection and use of materials used in reminiscence groups, older people might be "offered more opportunity to shape the content and process of their reminiscing" (p.10). Bornat (1989b) documents other developments which might be taken up more widely:

Amongst the best and most committed carers, interests lie in de-routinising reminiscence activities. In group sessions these workers are their best enthusiasts and resourcers. Some have become part-time researchers into memorabilia and local history.... In some homes and hospitals, knowledge of individual past lives has led to outings and visits, closer staff and relatives involvement and shared experiences from personal histories. (Bornat, 1989b: 21)

The 'routinisation' referred to by Bornat might be seen as another instance of assertion of the 'supervision' side of care problematic in the context of reminiscence work. In this quote, she documents responses to this 'routinisation' which might also work to counter the 'pedagogical' tendencies identified in Chapter 8.

Suggestions for further research

It has already been noted that the research reported here is only first step in applying discourse analysis to reminiscence work. There are many aspects of reminiscence work which could be addressed in future research. One possibility, conspicuously absent from the present account, is to undertake an analysis of older peoples' accounts of their experience of participating in reminiscence groups. Such an analysis is likely to offer insights which could inform current practice.

In addition to this, there are a number of issues that could be addressed in the analysis of conversational activity in reminiscence groups:

- 1) Changes in conversational activity in the groups over time could be studied, particularly with respect to the situated identities and social relationships displayed and constituted in the talk between older participants and care workers. This would improve on the analyses

presented here in being more directly addressed to claims that reminiscence groups are associated with changes in social relations and identity.

2) The formulation of situated 'age identities' could be examined in more detail, particularly in relation to discursive practices which work to constitute 'cultural difference' between past and present. Another possible focus, again related to age identity, would be the ways in which the association between 'ageing' and 'memory functioning' is topicalised in the group conversations, something that was noted in the course of this research, but not followed up.

3) As well as looking at how older participants collaborate in producing joint accounts of past practices, as in Chapter 7, analysis could also focus on disputes, in which older participants and group workers formulate contradictory versions of the past. Again, this phenomenon was noted in the data examined here. In particular, it appeared that there was a tendency on the part of group workers to encourage nostalgia, asking questions related to 'favourite things', 'pleasurable experiences' and so on. This construction of the past as 'the good old days' was resisted by some older participants. A related phenomenon is noted by Hopkins and Harris (1990), who argue that reminiscence practice tends to assume a homogeneity of older people's experiences, de-emphasising diversity and differences.

4) Innovative formats for reminiscence groups could be studied, particularly those in which older people are given more control over the content and process of group sessions. Such research could be carried out

in the form of an 'action research' project, and might be addressed to the problems with reminiscence practice noted in Chapter 8.

5) Finally, it would be interesting to consider how practitioners' formulations of the nature and value of reminiscence inform their practice. There was some indication in this study that differences between the three groups might be related to differences in group workers' orientations to their work, as noted in interviews. Such a study might be useful in offering a systematic account of variations in practice.

A reflexive note

This study demonstrates the value of discourse analysis as a means of researching reminiscence work. Its advantage over current approaches is that it deals with reminiscence work as a culturally-situated practice, and engages with the argument through which that practice is constituted, rather than claiming to stand apart from that argument as an arbiter of the true value of reminiscence work. In doing this, it renounces a certain authority. The account presented here cannot be taken as a definitive account of the value of reminiscence work. Like all discourse, it is constructive and action-orientated. However, it cannot be discounted on this basis. As Edwards and Potter (1992) argue, "there is no non-discursive discourse for doing proper, accurate, non-action-orientated description" (p. 173). This thesis is another move in an argument which is not just about reminiscence work, but which constitutes reminiscence work. I hope it is taken up in a way which serves to benefit the older people who participate in such work.

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Appendix I

Selection of Groups and Interviewees

This research began with inquiries into the nature and extent of reminiscence work in a large city in the Midlands. It was assumed that reminiscence practice in this city would be as representative as that to be found in any other area of the country. Besides this geographical criterion, the selection of the groups was informed by two aims: to study groups in a variety of care settings, and to limit the study to groups whose participants were not 'mentally impaired' in any way. Access was gained to two groups, identified here by the settings in which they were located: the Daycentre group and the Hospital group. It was intended to gain access to a third group in a residential setting in the same locality. However, when Faith Gibson offered to loan videotapes of the reminiscence group recorded for the "Using Reminiscence" training pack, it was decided that this group would serve as the third group in the study.

The care workers running the Daycentre and Hospital groups, named Mary and Jane respectively in this study, were obvious candidates for interviews. The other interviewees were selected according to the same geographical criterion as the groups. Efforts were made to contact as many reminiscence workers as possible through local networks, and a further six people were interviewed.

Appendix II

Interview Schedule

(Questions were not necessarily worded exactly as shown)

Objectives	What are they? Are they achieved? Examples? For you, what is most important benefit of reminiscence? Can reminiscing ever do any harm?
Evaluation	Is there any? What form does it take?
Training	Is it done? how? Is it necessary? What skills are needed?
Groups	What problems? How directive should one be in running a group? (eg. sanctioning sub-conversations) What skills are needed? What is a successful session?
Participants	Do some get more out of it than others? Why?
Therapy	Do you see reminiscence as a form of therapy? What do you mean by that? How do you feel about it being called a therapy?
Popularity	Why do you think reminiscence is so popular?
Literature	For you, who has made the most valuable contribution to the reminiscence practice/research literature?

Appendix III

Transcription Key

(This key is based in part on the system developed by Gail Jefferson – see Atkinson and Heritage, 1984)

/	pause of less than 1 second
[point of overlap between utterances
(&)	continuation of talk
=	no discernable gap between turns
(2)	pause of 2 seconds duration
o::h	stretching of vowel sound
<u>right</u>	added emphasis
Jane?	doubt about speaker's identity
?f	unidentifiable female speaker
(town)	doubt about accuracy of transcription
()	indecipherable speech
((cough))	non-speech sound, or contextual information
?	rising intonation

