LIFE HISTORIES: THE NEGOTIATION OF SELF

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ABSTRACT

This paper is about life histories and their significance for understanding how experience is interpreted, incorporated and integrated into our identities. Using three autobiographies and one autobiographical novel, I argue that there is an equivalence relation between 'I' and 'me', conscious and unconscious, and present and past. The life history genre as considered as an anthropological methodology is shown to also have non-anthropological benefits. Life histories are hermeneutical devices for the individuals who create them, and for those who read them. It is suggested that the benefits realized for individuals may be generalized to communities.

RÉSUME

Cet article analyse les histoires de vies et leurs significations pour comprendre comment l'expérience est interpretée, incorporée et integrée dans nos identités. Utilisant trois auto-biographies et un roman auto-biographique, j'établie une relation d'équivalence entre le 'je' et le, 'moi'; le conscient et l'inconscient; et le présent et le passé. Je démontre ensuite que le genre 'histoires de vies', considéré en tant que méthode anthropologique, comporte aussi des bénéfices non-anthropologiques. Les histoires de vies sont des outils herméneutiques pour les individus qui les construisent et pour ceux qui les lisent. Je suggère que les bénéfices réalisés pour les individus peuvent être généralisés aux communautés.

INTRODUCTION

Biographies have long been used in such diverse fields as medicine, sociology, psychology, psychiatry, history, political science and literature. A form of biography used in anthropology is known as the life history. The life history method emerged out of research on American Indians. This method has not been extensively used by anthropologists due to perceived problems with the method and the analysis; that is, problems in their creation and interpretation.[1] Kluckhohn (1945) concluded that one

of the contributing factors to the problem of analysis was that anthropologists did not systematically exploit the numerous biographical and autobiographical documents which existed (Langness and Frank 1981).

The study of life histories (which may take the form of biographies, narratives and autobiographies) is essential to understanding what is uniquely human, a symbolic existence; a symbolic existence in which the past and present juxtapose and interpenetrate through the conscious processes of the mind and through which existence is made meaningful. As Kundera (1988) suggests, we "can't face reality as concrete things because before our eyes everything turns into a symbol." In life histories, a symbolic existence as created, perceived and experienced by individuals, rather than by abstracted collectivities, is elucidated and objectified.

> Over the centuries, autobiography changed from being a narrative of the soul's relation with God to an enterprise far more like that of psychoanalysis. In recounting the circumstances of his [her] life from childhood onward, the autobiographer sought to define the influences which had shaped his [her] character, to portray the relationships which had most affected him [her], to reveal the motives which had impelled him [her]. In other words, the autobiographer became a writer who was attempting to make a coherent narrative out of his [her] life, and, in the process of doing so, hoping perhaps to discover its meaning (Storr 1988:80).

Life histories are vehicles through which we can discover the maturation and identification processes of individuals as they bear the burden of life; surviving the obstacles and creating the 'self'.

Using three autobiographies and one autobiographical novel I discuss the similarities or patterning in the author's perceptions and re-constructions of their experience(s) (or their character's), and from them generate some conclusions.[2] I first provide brief synopses of the texts, then I discuss my theoretical premise; then, through textual analysis, I give illustration of my theoretical premise, and through comparison I display the process of rediscovery through writing.

The three autobiographies which I use are: *My Father's House: A Memoir of Incest and Healing*, by Sylvia Fraser, *Don't: A Woman's Word*, by Elly Danica and *Halfbreed*, by Maria Campbell. The autobiographical novel is *Obasan*, by Jay Kogawa. These texts have several things in common; they are all written by women; they are about women who underwent struggles and buried them in their memories; and they are about individuals (in this case, of the female persuasion) who rediscover

strength through writing life histories. My theoretical premise throughout this paper is that memory equals history equals who one is. My contention is that the past, present and future are interpenetrating and continuous.

SYNOPSES OF TEXTS

Obasan, by Jay Kogawa, as aforementioned, is an autobiographical novel in which Kogawa tells about the Japanese internment in Canada during World War II, through the eyes of a child, Naomi. When her uncle dies and she looks through her Aunt Emily's files, which contained descriptive letters and clippings from the internment period, Naomi finds herself recalling forgotten memories from the past. A process of re-discovery and reconciliation begins. Naomi cautiously, yet courageously, treads through her past and discovers herself, a self which had been silenced at the age of four.

At the age of four Naomi was sexually abused by her elderly neighbour. At this time a mental 'rift' developed between her mother and herself.[3] When her mother was taken to Japan, the mental 'rift' also became a physical 'rift' between them, a 'rift' which was never to be mended, as she was never to see her mother again. Kogawa describes how the initial 'rift' developed between Naomi and her mother in Naomi's words:

> If I tell my mother about Mr. Gower, the alarm will send a tremor through our bodies and I will be torn from her. *But the secret has already separated us.* The secret is this: I go to seek Old Man Gower in his hideaway. I clamber unbidden onto his lap. His hands are frightening and pleasurable. In the centre of my body there is a rift .... My mother is on one side of the rift. I am on the other. We cannot reach each other. My legs are being sawn in half (Kogawa 1981:64-65, my emphasis).

Naomi later, in her moment of re-discovery, exclaims, "Gentle mother, we were lost together in our silences. Our wordlessness was our mutual destruction" (Kogawa 1981:243).

My Father's House: A Memoir of Incest and Healing, by Sylvia Fraser, is an autobiography. In it, Fraser breaks through her amnesia and, like Naomi, re-discovers herself; however, the processes of re-discovery are different. Fraser at the age of forty begins to write vivid stories, only to discover that she is writing about herself, a self of which she had no recognition.[4] At approximately seven years of age, Fraser created a 'twin' who shared her body, yet lived a life apart from hers, with separate

memoirs and experiences. For forty years the existence of that twin and her incestuous relationship with her father were unknown to her. Through this text, Fraser remembers and embraces the forgotten, tortured self against which she had been safe-guarded, and begins a life of greater self-awareness. Fraser states:

> In retrospect, I feel about my life the way some people feel about war. If you survive then it becomes a good war. Danger makes you active, it makes you alert, it forces you to expand and thus learn. I now know the cost of my life, the real price that has been paid. Contact with inner pain has immunized me against most petty hurts. Hopes I still have in abundance, but very few needs. My pride of intellect has been shattered. If I didn't know about my life, what other knowledge can I trust? Yet even here I see a gift, for in place of my narrow pragmatic world of cause and effect and matter moving to immutable laws, I have burst into a world of infinite wonder. The whole mystery of the universe has my reverence. *Nothing is sure* but nothing can be dismissed. I pay attention (1987:253, my emphasis).

Fraser, through the processes of writing and psychoanalysis, gains wisdom about herself and her reality. She recognizes that reality is transcendent and that nothing can ever be known for certain. She could be described as having 'courage', for as someone, somewhere once said, 'courage is the certainty about the uncertainty of life'.

Don't: A Woman's Word, by Elly Danica, is also an autobiography by a woman who was sexually abused by her father when she was a child. Danica, like Fraser, re-discovers, or gains entry into her soul through her writing.

> It is the story of a heroine who moves forward word by word, into her memory and into her story ... For, between the book and the writing -- that is to say between what is told and how it is told -- there is a woman who, with all her being, has chosen to tell the unbearable, has taken upon herself to break the silence (Brossard in Danica 1988: introduction).

Her vivid descriptions, many of which are written in the third person (as are many parts throughout Fraser's text), show us how she resists entire submission to her father and how she struggles internally to forget. But her memory pursues her. "The hell of the penis pushing. No. The hell of the four-year-old adult. *Who doesn't remember. Who never forgets*"

(Danica 1988:10, my emphasis). From her sanctuary within herself she finds the strength to go on, and through belief in herself, she succeeds.[5]

Halfbreed, by Maria Campbell, is an autobiography by a Métis woman. In it she tells about the difficulties faced by her people, and the difficulties that she too faced as one of them. She states early in her text:

> I am not bitter. I have passed that stage. I only want to say: this is what it was like; this is what it is still like. I know the poverty is not ours alone. Your people have it too, but in those earlier days you at least had dreams, you had a tomorrow (1973:9).

Campbell's story, like those previously described, displays strength in her ability to work through her difficult experiences and carry on.

The death of Maria's mother early in Campbell's life, and her desire to keep all her brothers and sisters together, forced her to grow up fast. At the age of fifteen, she was not only a mother to her own child but also a mother to several brothers and sisters. Blindly pursuing her dreams for the betterment of herself and her people, she came up against many obstacles; moneyless in Vancouver she prostituted; unable to cope she became addicted to heroine and almost died. However, with reflection and memories of her Cheechum (grandmother), who had always inspired her, she gained confidence in herself, remembered who she was and what her goals were. At the end of the text Maria is once again reunited with her Cheechum;

> Once inside the house again, Cheechum told me to come to her .... We sat there for a long time, just the two of us .... We didn't have to talk -- Cheechum understood my feelings .... She asked me then what had happened, and I told her everything that I could never have told my father. When I had finished, she said, '*It's over now.* Don't let it hurt you. Since you were a baby you've had to learn the hard way. You're like me'. When I replied, there's nobody I'd rather be like than you, she smiled and said, 'I wonder if that's so good' .... I explained that I didn't believe that I could help anyone solve their problems, but if I could give them a home and friendship, then *they would in turn find their own answers.* She said, 'I'm glad you believe that and hope you will never forget it. *Each of us has to find himself in his own way and no one can do it for us. If we try to do more we take away the very thing that makes us a living soul ...*' (Campbell 1973:175, my emphasis).

Maria, like the authors of these other texts, has the courage to discover herself on her own. No one, as Cheechum suggests, can do it for her.

THEORETICAL PREMISE

In the discussion that follows my theoretical premise is that memory equals history equals who one is. As Kundera claims, "history doesn't invent, it discovers. Through new situations, history reveals what man is, what has been in him 'for a long time' what his possibilities are" (1988:116). This is not only true at the macro-level of history, but also at the micro-level of personal history. Aunt Emily in *Obasan* makes this point; "You have to remember. You are your history. If you cut any of it off, you're an amputee. Don't deny the past. Remember everything. If you're bitter, be bitter. Cry it out. Scream! Denial is gangrene" (Kogawa 1981:49-50).

Life stories in general, and autobiographies in particular, are vehicles through which experience and thought are appropriated and integrated by the individual in an objectified form. Experience is defined here, not simply as the sum of events in one's life, but also the context and the feelings associated with those events, and their accumulation and incorporation over time. *Autobiographies can therefore be viewed as a means by which the conscious mind, which I call the 'I', imposes structure on the unconscious mind, which I call the 'me'.*

The 'I' is defined by the present in time, and the 'me' by the past. Unrecognizant to the conscious mind, however, is that it is to some degree guided by the unconscious mind, in which experience is stored, incorporated and transformed. It is a dialectic of sorts, whereby the conscious and unconscious interpenetrate, informing and reforming one another. Diagrammatically, this relationship can be presented as:

unconscious	:	me	:	past
conscious		I		present

Therefore, although autobiographies are *selected, reminiscent representations* of oneself and one's edited interpersonal relations with others (Preston 1988), they are not altogether 'lies' or constructions devoid of any reality. "Each version becomes a lie only when it masquerades as the only way of telling the truth" (Fraser 1987:190).

Insofar as reconstructing experience is to some degree an abstraction, removed from the actuality in time and space and perception,

autobiographies can be considered a hermeneutical device for the individual, in other words, a device to help understand experience and of the culminating self at a particular time. They constitute a convergence-making process for the conscious and the unconscious -- a personal hermeneutical circle.

Jung, in accordance, wrote;

> If the unconscious can be recognized as a co-determining factor along with the consciousness, and if we can live in such a way that conscious and unconscious demands are taken into account as far as possible, then the centre of gravity of the total personality shifts its position. It is then no longer in the ego, which is merely the centre of consciousness, but in the hypothetical point between conscious and unconscious. This new centre might be called the Self (1967:46).

Just as the cave painting in Lascaux by Cro-magnon man can be interpreted as an attempt by Cro-magnon man to reveal the world as he 'experienced it', and not as he literally saw it, so too can autobiographies.[6] Accordingly, the created compositions or texts, are not merely recollections, but rather, re-creations, reflections and reconstructions -- discoveries, as Kundera tells us -- that capture a sense of what was happening and how the individual felt about what was happening at a particular time. Needless to say, then, these texts would be created differently at different times in a life cycle. It is the very essence of our existence to construct reality differently at different times, since our own self-perceptions are changing and selective. The selectivity of our memories is exemplified in the following example in which Campbell's ability to remember one event is hindered, whereas for another event, her memory is sharp:

> I can recall little from that part of my life besides feeling lonely and frightened when I was left alone with the Sisters at school .... I remember the last day of school, and the sense of freedom when dad came for me. He promised me that I would never have to go back, as school was being built at home (1973:47).

She indicates that one case of forgetting is the repression of painful memories. A quote from Mary Catherine Bateson's recent book, *Composing a Life*, eloquently describes the changing and selective nature of our self-perceptions:

> Storytelling is fundamental to the human search for meaning, whether we tell tales of the creation of the earth or of our own early choices. Each one of these women[7] is engaged in inventing a new kind of story. Not only is it impossible to know what the future holds for them, it is impossible to know what their memories of the past will be when they bring them out again in the future, in some new and changed context.
>
> The process of improvisation that goes into composing a life is compounded in the process of remembering a life, like a patchwork quilt in a watercolour painting, rumpled and evocative. Yet it is this second process, composing a life through memory as well as through day-to-day choices, that seems to be most essential to creative living. The past empowers the present, the groping footsteps leading to this present mark the pathways to the future (Bateson 1989:34).

Clearly, life cannot be represented as a single absolute truth, but as a welter of partially contradictory truths. Truth is elusive, for experience is chaotic and order comes only after the experience of chaos. Therefore, in autobiographies and in everyday existence in general, form is imposed on that which, although not totally without form, takes on form only in the process of its re-construction and re-creation.

Olney (1972) states that "Man creates by the very act of seeking, that order he would have ... [Looking for] a oneness of self, an integrity or internal harmony that holds together the multiplicity and continual transformations of being ... " (1972:4-6). In accordance with this Langness and Frank point out that " ... a person's entire sense of self can be transformed because some symbolic element of his [her] identity has been change" (1981:88). That is, a change in one's conscious perception of self creates a change in the unconscious and results in a restructuring of experience, both at the conscious and unconscious level. Kundera further elucidates this point:

> With retrospective reflection comes reconstituted fictions of perception, *a perception which can vary depending on the time, place and interaction.* Furthermore, reflecting about experience is a transcending process. It not only includes a type of reconciliation with experience but also with a creation of something new. Just as novelists may make a life that which they want it to be, so too do actors of life (1988:89, my emphasis).

This is not however, to deny the existence of some prior template of personal identification which provides information about what is significant and what is not. Without this template our memories would not be selective.

This prior template is stored in one's memory, in one's unconscious, in the form of a world of symbols, as a cloud of witnesses to one's identity (see Robert J. Allen, 1984). These symbols are reconstituted, ordered and patterned forms which interpenetrate the past and the present and underlie one's thoughts and behaviours. Kogawa describes, in a poetic manner, the relationship between the unconscious and the conscious (recall, unconscious=past and conscious=present);

> All our ordinary stories are changed in time, altered as much by the present as the present is shaped by the past. Potent and pervasive as a prairie dust storm, memories and dreams seep and mingle through cracks, settling on furniture and into upholstery. Our attics and living rooms encroach on each other, deep into their invisible places (1981:25).

ILLUSTRATION OF PREMISE THROUGH TEXTUAL ANALYSIS AND COMPARISON

In this section of the paper I give evidence that lends support to my theoretical premise, which suggests that discovery or knowledge of self at some level requires confrontation and reconciliation with one's past, facilitated by the process of writing. Charlotte Vale Allen, in her autobiography *Daddy's Girl: A Very Personal Memoir*, which is also the story of a woman who had been sexually abused by her father, clearly illustrates how her self-discovery was facilitated by the writing process:

> ... Then -- I don't know why -- I decided to try and write it all down. I wasn't a writer, although I'd always written down my thoughts in order to know what I actually believed -- the process of putting words on paper seemed to lend order and clarity to my random reaction ... I sat down to write about it and pried the scab off my life. It was excruciating to have to go backward, in detail, and minutely examine what happened, and why, and how it had all conspired to see me into adulthood flawed, not really an adult but a frightened, hate-filled, angry child with strong antisocial tendencies, a head filled with dreams and fantasies, and a grinding

> determination to emerge at the far end of my life as a good person (Vale Allen 1980:93).

I also discuss the common characteristics in the process of self-discovery that are conveyed through these author's works: silence; reading about others; strength, endurance and a strong will to survive; accepting some of the responsibility for what had occurred and forgiving the abuser(s) and thereby coming to grips with the past; and, dreaming about the future.

Throughout their existence these individuals were trapped by their silence. Their silence was their sanctuary at the same time as it was their oppressor;

> Silence. The 6th Gate. Years of Silence. Silence wrapped around life like a cocoon. I learn to live in a world where nothing is as it seems. Nothing is as I think it ought to be. Silence. Fear. It is hopeless ... . there is something wrong with me. Everyone tells me. The world is not how you imagine it to be (Danica 1988:70).

Kogawa begins her book with a poem which accurately reveals the strength in silence, the danger in silence, and the possibilities if the silence is broken.[8]

> There is a silence that cannot speak.
> There is a silence that will not speak.
> Beneath the grass the speaking dreams and beneath the dreams is a sensate sea.The speech that frees comes forth from that amniotic deep. *To attend its voice, I can hear it say, is to embrace it's absence.* But I fail the task. The work is stone.
> I admit it.
> I hate the stillness. I hate the stone. I hate the sealed vault with its cold icon. I hate the staring into the night. The questions thinning into space. The sky swallowing the echoes.
> *Unless the stone bursts with telling, unless the seed flowers with speech, there is in my life no living word.* The sound I hear is only sound. White sound. Words, when they fall, are pock marks on earth. They are hailstones seeking and underground stream.
> *If I could follow the stream down and down to the hidden voice, would I come at last to the freeing world?* I ask the night sky but the silence is steadfast. There is no reply (Kogawa 1988: Introduction, my emphasis).

All these women are held prisoners by their silence. That which gave them security also impeded their growth. However, in their worlds of silence, reading about others became for them a form of sharing and learning through others' experiences. They realized that they were not alone and were thus able to reflect on their personal experiences.

They start their journeys on the road to self-discovery through reading. In at least two of the cases self-discovery was commenced and facilitated by reading about others' lives, particularly women's lives who had experiences similar to their own:

> Reading. A new world. Reading woman writers .... Beginning again. A journey to self begins at last. Only 25 -- lots of time. Beginning (Danica 1988:87).

> I feel like a burglar as I read, breaking into a private house only to discover it's my childhood house filled with corners and rooms I've never seen (Kogawa 1981:79).

Reading about others seems not only to trigger off memories and force a confrontation with the past; "When I least expect it, a memory comes skittering out of the dark, spinning and netting the airs ready to snap me up and ensnare me in old and complex puzzles" (Kogawa 1981:26); but also to break down the illusion of standing separate and apart from everybody. The capacity to relate one's experience with the experience of another helps to establish individual identity;

> The act of empathy that arises in attempting to understand the reality of people sometimes very different from ourselves can be a transformative process. Such acts of empathy ... help us to break down the barriers of ego and identity that give us the illusion of somehow standing separate and apart ... (Langness and Frank 1981:154).

Kim Chernin, in *The Hungry Self: Women, Eating and Identity*, similarly describes her experience with reading:

> Of course, it is never easy to say when exactly one first becomes aware of the real meaning in one's struggle ... But on reflection I find that there was a book, written by a woman, that helped me greatly during a difficult summer in my early twenties. As it happens this was not a book about women and food ... . [But] it scattered seeds, it turned my thinking into a particular direction, it

> set me dreaming and musing as I made my way through its pages. Reading it changed me in way I would not then have been able to specify. But that is the way with reading. It gets under the skin, and there, in darkness, it begins to prepare the work of fully conscious understanding. At the time, one reads and loses oneself in the reading and forgets to look up when the telephone rings, and one is transformed beyond one's widest hopes and imaginings by this act of slipping into the aching silences of oneself, brought there by another woman's words (1985:15).

Ostensibly, reading about others assists in the process of re-discovery as it enables one to make sense of one's own experiences. In the course of observing others in text, one has the opportunity to observe oneself and gain some objectivity.

Reading about others also develops for the reader a sense of community with those that s/he reads about. Campbell alludes to this potential in a letter of hers excerpted in the beginning of Beatrice Culleton's book, *In Search of April Raintree*, an autobiographical novel about two Métis sisters:

> ... it is a powerful story, because with gentleness it deals with sickness in our society and our people. It is a kind of writing that will bring the healing of our people (Campbell in Culleton 1983:Introduction).

Although Campbell may be referring more specifically to the presentation of the material, she still seems to be suggesting that the text itself would be inspirational. And this of course could only be achieved through reading it.

Having read about others, how then did these individuals break the grip of their silence? Their personal strength and an overwhelming desire for personal freedom gave them the key. Danica suggests that her strength came from within, from the confines of her soul; a part of her that was safe from her father.

> He beats me for stupidity. He beats me for resistance. He beats me for stubbornness. He beats me because I don't co-operate. He beats me for insubordination. *He beats me because I withhold as much as I can from him.* He beats me because he likes hitting me (1988:48 my emphasis).

Similarly, "Do this or I'll hurt you. I already hurt. Inside. *He can't see inside. Almost victory. There's something he can't touch.* (Danica 1988:8, my emphasis). Keeping that 'inside' strong is important for survival.

> ... Only Cheechum didn't change; she encouraged Dad and did all she could to help him. Momma loved Daddy but could not take what was being said about him. She begged him to quit. Then one night, he did just that. *Something inside him died, and he became another defeated man* (Campbell 1973:74, my emphasis).

However, unlike Campbell's father who becomes a 'defeated man' these women do not give up. They do not resign themselves, indefinitely, to their situation,

> 'Dear God,' I thought, 'this is how I've always wanted to look, but do women who look like this ever feel like I do inside?" I wanted to run away and yet I had to stay. I lost something that afternoon. *Something inside of me died.* Life had played such a joke. I had married to escape from what I'd thought was an ugly world, only to find a worse one. *Someday, for certain, I would leave. How, I didn't know, but until then I would do what I had to do* (Campbell 1973:134, my emphasis).

They do however, at some point in their lives partially accept the images that others have of them. This results from their feelings of defeat and acts also as an avoidance of pain:

> ... I started drinking and partying a lot. I figured 'what's the use?' -- people believed I was bad anyway, so I might as well give them real things to talk about (Campbell 1973:129).

Later, Campbell exclaims, "My home and my people were a part of my life that I wanted to forget, and if calling myself French or Spanish or anything else would help, I would do so" (1973:139). Although the character Naomi, in *Obasan*, does not deny her identity, others in her community anglicize the Japanese last names and reject their native language. Admittedly, they may do this in an attempt to alleviate the ostracism that they receive from the white community; however, it still results in a denial of self, and a denial of self, as this next quotation indicates, is not always possible or desirable:

> I knew that as long as I stayed away I would somehow always survive, because I didn't have to feel guilty about taking from the white people. With my own people I would have had to share. I couldn't survive if I worried about someone else. Then there was a part of me that hated them as well. The drunken Indian men I saw would fill me with blinding hatred; I blamed them for what had happened to me, ... If they had only fought back, instead of giving up, these things would never have happened. *It's hard to explain how I felt, I hated our men, and yet I loved them* (Campbell 1973:143, my emphasis).

One thing that clearly facilitates the survival of these women, as individuals, is that they do not perceive themselves as victims, but also to some degree as active participants in their situations. Taking on this responsibility enables them to take action. Sophie, a friend of Campbell's, explains to her how she wished she had done something to make her own situation better, instead of just believing that she was a 'no good half-breed' and thereby continuing a miserable existence (Campbell 1973:103).

But, where does one find *strength* to fight back, when self is pushed deep into the confines of the soul, where it is accessible to no one; often, not even to self? Fraser best articulates this process:

> Mine turns out to be a story about villains. Children who were in some way abused, abuse others; victims become villains. Thus, not to forgive only perpetuates the crime, creates more victims. Like Sleeping Beauty, I was both cursed and blessed at birth. I was given the poison and the antidote at the same time by the same people. The will that poisoned me also provided me with the ability to resist the poison. Specifically, I was of the first generation of my family to receive the education and social resources and the personal support to fight back (1987:252).

Forgiving requires an understanding of past events for, as Fraser states, the past holds both the poison and the antidote. This is comparable to the earlier excerpt from Campbell where she describes the predicament of her people and its roots. By working through and understanding their pasts, and accepting who they were in relation to themselves and to others, they could avoid consumption by the poison, thus finding and sustaining their identities. This understanding about themselves could mobilize them.

Positive figures in their pasts provide them with an openness for remembering some of the good, in light of all the pain, and give them the courage and will to go on,

> Many times in my life after I left them, when I was full of hate and bitterness, I'd try to think of Grandpa Sing and make myself remember that there were some good people like him in the world (Campbell 1973:129).

The best example of a positive figure in one's past is Cheechum, Campbell's grandmother, recurring memories of whom help Campbell rediscover herself. Cheechum had once advised Maria,

> Don't let anyone tell you that anything is impossible, because *if you believe honestly in your heart that there's something better for you, then it will all come true. Go out there and find out what you want and take it, but always remember who you are and why you want it* (Campbell 1973:98, my emphasis).

Campbell remembers this message when she is down and out, and with it is able to recall who she is (and take pride in this), and what her dreams are. Positive figures, like stories written by other survivors, provide them with inspiration and a glitter of hope for the future because these give them faith that they too can succeed. Their faith is best exemplified in their dreams for the future.

Dreams are a fundamental element, necessary for survival and self identity:[9]

> Dreams. Dreams of the future. A different future than they have all sentenced me to. My dreams. Dreams of Life. Free. No father, no husband, no man. Free to be who I am. Who am I? Dreams. I am entirely constructed of unlived dreams. Who did I see in those dreams? A woman strong, healthy, sane and happy. A woman healthy powerful and generous (Danica 1988:74).

Pursuing one's dreams and finally achieving some of them, gives one more confidence to carry on. Their attainment provides feedback for one's development. Examples from those who gave up their dreams lends support to this argument:

> So began a miserable life of poverty, which held no hope for the future. That generation of people was completely beaten. Their fathers had failed during the rebellion *to make a dream come true*; they failed as farmers; now there was nothing left ... they saw no place in the world around them; for they believed that they had

> nothing to offer. They felt shame, and with shame the loss of pride and the strength to live everyday (Campbell 1973:8, my emphasis).

However, Campbell's Cheechum had implored, 'if at first you don't succeed, try and try and try again'. Dreams don't just happen. You do not just wake up one day to find all the things in life which are important;

> Cheechum would get angry and tell Mother to leave Daddy alone. She said it was his duty as head of our family to do what had to be done, that we'd never get past our mud shacks if we just sat and waited. Even if nothing happened and he did go to jail, *he at least tried, and he could give his children no greater gift* (1973:72, my emphasis).

> ... Despite the hardships, they gave all they had for this one desperate chance to be free, but some of them said, 'I want good clothes and horses and you no good halfbreeds are ruining it for me' *they lost their dream.* They fought each other just as you are fighting your mother and father today. The white man saw that this was a more powerful weapon than anything else ... to beat the halfbreeds ... They try to make you hate your people. She stood up then and said, 'I will beat you each time I hear you talk as you did. *If you don't like what you have, then stop fighting your parents and do something about it'* (1973:51, my emphasis).

At a very young age Maria had shared her dreams with her Cheechum;

> I told her how desperately I wanted to finish school and take everyone away; how I longed for something different for us; how I didn't want to be like our women who had nothing but kids, black eyes and never enough of anything; that I didn't want my brothers to be like the men around us who just lived each day with nothing to look forward to except the weekend drunks (1973:98).

Her Cheechum encouraged her to follow her dreams, but Maria discovered that dreams when followed blindly can lead to the disintegration of one's soul (1973:133). Cheechum did not mean, however, that Maria should just go out into the world and seek her fortune, but that she should go out there and discover what was needed and to do this in light of reality and with respect for herself;

> Then one night I found myself thinking of Cheechum and of my childhood. I remembered her saying, 'You can have anything you want if you want it bad enough'. I got up and went for a walk and suddenly it was all so clear ... (Campbell 1973:144).

For the individual, dreams articulate the nexus of the past and the present, the unconscious and the conscious, the 'I' and the 'me'. Indeed they are an expression of the cumulative self.

Hence, working through symbols from the past enables one to resist their grip and at the same time to use them to better understand the present and strive towards a future; for the past, present and future are interpenetrating and continuous, and articulate themselves in the conscious and unconscious process of the mind. A painting that Campbell received from her ex-prison-mates is symbolic of this theme of the continuity of the past, present and future, and their interpenetration;

> In the centre was a burnt-out tree stump, and the roots were little shoots sprouting up. The forest was like our lives, and the shoots represented hope (1973:171).

Kogawa uses similar symbolism in her text,

> I am thinking that for a child there is no presence without flesh. But perhaps it is because I am no longer a child I can know your presence though you are not here. The letters tonight are skeletons. Bones only. *But the earth still stirs with dormant blooms. Love flows through the roots of the trees by our graves* (1981:243, my emphasis).

CONCLUSIONS

Works of life history elucidate the creation of a symbolic experience. The conceptualizations and constructions of the world as perceived by individuals, rather than by abstracted collectivities, are objectified and elucidated. From them we can learn useful information about the 'human condition' and the 'idiosyncrasies' which identify who a person is. As such, life histories are not only useful for anthropologists studying symbolic existence but also useful to non-anthropologists.

As evidenced in this paper, life histories serve useful purposes for both their writers and their readers. For the writers they are a means for self-discovery. Through their creation, the past, present and future are reconciled, and self is identified. For the readers they provide a means

for objectification and self-reflection. They also provide the initial impetus to break one's personal silence and give one the courage to discover. They provide a glitter of hope. As Glenna Perley states, in *Enough is Enough*, a book by and about Indian women, "A book really telling our story would offer different things to different people. Indian women would read it and see, 'Why if they could do that -- accomplish that, then we can too'" (Perley in Silman 1987:15). The texts discussed in this paper, and life histories in general, also provide guidance by example.

Some cultures rely on story telling as a means of cultural education. "Cree narratives have had the traditional purpose and function of offering guidance, through the experience of what others have done and what the consequences were, for living one's own life competently and wisely" (Preston and Preston 1988:3). Others' past experiences can be used to inform the present.

My theoretical premise (of history equals memory equals who one is) can easily be extrapolated to include broader discernible cultural patterns in groups. That is, the unconscious can be extrapolated not only to mean the immediate experience of the individual in his/her environment, but also, and at the same time, to include an increasing scale of the unconscious patterning of culture and the process of change and adaptation that occurs within it. Personal rediscovery can feed into community rediscovery (and healing). April Raintree, a character in Culleton's book, *In Search of April Raintree*, exemplifies the possibility for community rediscovery:

> It was tragic that it had taken Cheryl's [April's sister] death to bring me to accept my identity. But no, Cheryl had once said, 'All life dies to give one life'. Cheryl had died. But for Henry Lee [Cheryl's son] and me, there would be a tomorrow. And it would be better. I would strive for it. For my sister and her son. For my parents. For my people (Culleton 1983:228).

In addition, life histories serve to add to our limited life history data which show how individuals rather than collectivities experience change, and they are a means which not only perpetuate the individual but also culture, as culture and the individual are closely intertwined (see Sapir 1949 in 1985:507-614). Fei Xiatong, in an interview with Burton Pasternak, captures the essence of this last point:

> Now I want to use that objectivity to leave something of value for future generations to read and know. That is my job. I am a link. I won't die. No one dies. Physically we can disappear, but our social

influence continues to exist .... (I) want those who come after me to be true to facts. We must be conscious of ourselves as a group. Mankind becomes self-conscious. We want to know ourselves. Mankind is only a part of the cosmos, of nature. So nature becomes conscious through man. That is the whole movement of the universe -- from unknown to conscious ... So what can I do for the next generation? I can let them know what we, during this period in my generation ... what level of self-awareness, self-consciousness we have attained. Through my mind I will leave something for the coming mind. That is culture. It is in the mind of the individual, the biological mind disappears, but through society it continues, cumulatively. Each individual must contribute to culture. Therefore, I will not die (Fei Xiatong in Pasternak 1988:652-654).

NOTES

1. The life history method is presently experiencing a resurgence in anthropology.

2. The analysis of these texts could have taken many different forms; literary comparison, autobiographical works analyzed as a genre, etcetera; however, it is not within the scope of this paper to do this.

3. 'Rift' is in single quotations as it is the actual word used by the author in the text. Note the quotation that follows.

4. In 1972 Fraser published her first novel, *Pandora*. The character, Pandora Gothic, is a resilient heroine who mirrors the pleasures and agonies of children everywhere. Similarly her other novels, *The Candy Factory, A Casual Affair, The Emperor's Virgin and Berlin Solstice*, "study the remarkable ability of human beings to inflict harm on one another and their equally remarkable but rarer ability to heal and even to save one another (Staines in Fraser 1972: about the author). These fictions closely resemble her autobiography, which is also about the ability of human beings to inflict pain on one another and their ability to heal. In the Author's Note at the beginning of her autobiography, Fraser states "The story I have told in this book is autobiographical. As a result of amnesia, much of it was unknown to me until three years ago. For clarity, I have used

italics to indicate thoughts, feelings and experiences pieced together from recently recovered memoirs, and to indicate dreams ... To provide focus and structure, I have used many of the techniques of the novelist. I have also adopted fictional names and otherwise disguised persons who appear in the narrative .... " (Fraser, 1988).

Although Fraser's autobiography originally commenced as a fiction (insofar as she originally did not know that she was writing about herself) and has fictional techniques used throughout it, it is a story about herself as she has designated it as such. Likewise, the other texts that she designated as fictions are also to some degree about herself, as she created them at a time when she was unaware of her history. These two genres are therein interpenetrating. They are autofictions.

> Autofiction refers to a work which combines autobiographical and fictional elements. The point is that all autobiographical writing is fictional, since individual memory and perception do not produce objective truth, and that all fiction has personal or autobiographical elements. It is a deconstruction of the two previously distinct literary genres (Scheier 1988:32).

5. Since the publication of her autobiography in October of 1988, Danica has come a long way. On October 5th, 1989, I had the opportunity to hear her on "Morningside", CBC Radio, in an interview with Peter Gzowski. It was on October 8th in the previous year that she had talked with Peter Gzowski. At this time she very timidly shared some of her experiences and someone else read excerpts from her book, for at this time it was too painful for her to do so.

   Presently, Danica is travelling across Canada reading from her book and sharing her story with other women who have had similar experiences. Her book has been translated into several foreign languages and is enjoying much popularity throughout the world. During her recent interview Danica said that she felt much stronger than she did a year ago. And I think that this process of telling in environments where there are women with similar stories, that we share this, and we're both stronger. I figure this process is making me stronger. I've read perhaps now, I think I'm up to eighteen or twenty times in the last year, and that has been a profound experience for me. I didn't know that I was this kind of articulate ... cause I'd been silent for so long ... To grow into this role as this writer and now reader and sometime lecturer is quite an amazing experience" (Danica, October 5th, 1989, on CBC Radio).

6. Art in general would receive the same interpretation as the Lascaux paintings that is, they are representations of the artist's experience with the object(s) and not literal presentations of the object(s).

7. Here Bateson is talking about the women in her text, however, this is equally applicable to the women that are discussed in this paper.

8. I have presented the poem in the structure that it appeared in Kogawa's text; the only difference being that hers was double-spaced whereas, in this instance, it is single spaced.

9. Palombo suggests that the act of dreaming is biologically adaptive, as dreams are concerned with matching past and present experience. "The dream compares the representation of an emotionally significant event of the past with the representation of an emotionally significant aspect of the previous day's experience." This information processing function of the dream is concerned with allotting the new experience to the right slot in the permanent memory (Palombo in Storr 1988:25).

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